

**RECEPTION THEORY:  
PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS, LITERARY THEORY, AND  
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

**DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY**

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to explore the possibility of applying Hans Robert Jauss' hermeneutic of reception theory to biblical interpretation. The traditional methods employed in biblical interpretation involve a two-way dialogue between the text and the reader. Reception theory expands this into a three-way dialogue, with the third partner being the history of the text's interpretation and application. This third partner has been ignored by biblical interpreters but recently the need to include this has gained some attention. In the first part of the thesis, the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer will be examined in order to provide the philosophical hermeneutical framework for reception theory and its significance for biblical studies. In the second part, this framework will be fleshed out by Hans Robert Jauss' conception of reception theory. Jauss not only builds upon Gadamer's work but his literary hermeneutic provides a model which is applicable to the biblical text and its tradition of interpretation. In the final part, the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-14 and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* will be considered as a case study.



## INTRODUCTION

Reception theory offers hermeneutical resources and insights which, I believe, can serve the valuable role of providing a hermeneutical model which relates biblical exegesis, the history of biblical interpretation, and church history to each other. From an exegetical perspective, reception theory rescues the Bible from being approached like other ancient texts, as a relic from the past. At the corporate level, it provides a means for us to engage the heritage of biblical interpretation in the Christian tradition in a manner that not only allows us to grasp how our tradition has shaped who we are but also to realise that we are active participants in the ongoing process of that living tradition. The call for an approach along these lines is a rather recent development in church history and begins less than one hundred years ago.

### A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

Ernst von Dobschütz was a man ahead of his time. In 1909, he wrote an article entitled "The Bible in the Church" in which he asked the question: what effect has the Bible had upon the church?<sup>1</sup> Dobschütz found it rather incredulous that even though more has been written on the Bible than any other book "no one as yet has made a comprehensive investigation of the influence which it has exerted upon the Christian Church and the life of the Christian peoples as a whole."<sup>2</sup> While others before him had examined the exposition of the Bible and the history of texts and translations, Dobschütz attempted to examine the effect or influence of the Bible. Martin Kähler's, *Die Geschichte der Bibel in ihrer Wirkung auf die Kirche, ein Vorschlag* (1902), precipitated Dobschütz's work, but it was too general in nature and confined itself to demonstrating the significance of the Bible for the church. Dobschütz proposed to refine Kähler's idea

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<sup>1</sup> James Hastings ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), s.v., "Bible in the Church," by Ernst von Dobschütz, 579-615.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.579-80.

by working out the details through the application of a purely historical method.<sup>3</sup> Some of the most significant material in his article concerns the effect of the Bible on worship, public and private reading of the Bible, and the Bible's influence on language, art, and law.<sup>4</sup> A half century would pass before the questions which Dobschütz raised would be given serious consideration.

### Ebeling, "Church History as the History of the Exposition of Scripture"

It was not until 1964 that questions about the post-history of the biblical text or its *Wirkungsgeschichte* received any degree of meaningful discussion. The turning point came with the publication of Gerhard Ebeling's book, *Word of God and Tradition*. According to Ebeling, the most significant contribution to theology since the Enlightenment "has been the result of historical work, both in the field of exegesis and in the field of Church history and the history of doctrine."<sup>5</sup> This returned theology back to its real subject matter – Jesus Christ, and protected theology from sliding into Scholasticism or Gnosticism and from the intrusion of outside schools of philosophical thought.<sup>6</sup> However, the real significance of historical study is found in the concept of *Geschichte*, "the dialogue between the objective event in the past and the subjective understanding of the past event in the present."<sup>7</sup> This means that not only will church history always remain an unfinished exercise, but biblical exegesis will as well.

This idea should not be foreign to theology. The seed for such an approach dates back to the Reformation and is evidenced in the manner that the framers of the Augsburg Confession's made an explicit link between the Bible, the church, and history in Article VII.<sup>8</sup> The church is guided by its interpretation of the Bible, is actualised by

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.580.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 601-15.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: Collins, 1968), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14-5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>8</sup> "Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be



its obedience to the Word of God, and as a result, is an assembly which is constantly constituted anew in each historical horizon. "The communication of the Word of God is not a continuous process, but is only given in the constantly renewed interpretation of Holy Scripture. This interpretation is not to be separated from its relation to the actual assembly of those who hear it, and as hearers fulfill it."<sup>9</sup>

This welds church history to the Bible and biblical interpretation to the church. On the side of church history, the traditional approach which emphasises the history of dogma must "be corrected by a fresh attention to the history of hermeneutics and the exegesis of Scripture."<sup>10</sup> On the exegetical side, the interpretation of the Bible needs to be expanded from commentaries and doctrines to include church policies, organisational structures, politics, and the "doing and suffering" of the church. "The concept of interpretation has therefore a range whose extent cannot be grasped."<sup>11</sup>

Ebeling also realised that this view of history (*Geschichte*) raised the question of how we could posit any form of continuity to the Christian tradition since its history is characterised by elements of discontinuity. Models of church history or the history of interpretation based on a cumulative understanding of the Scriptures were no longer tenable. Evolutionary models of theological development are being replaced by views that take the situatedness of the interpreter more into account and which highlight aspects of historical discontinuity. Ormond Rush testifies to the implications of this shift and the need to address them,

Emerging out of a nineteenth century understanding of history, the evolutionary notion of development, with its emphasis on and confidence in *continuity, unity, clarity, and normativity*, breaks down when we read doctrinal history from our twentieth century, post-modern horizon. A more adequate model is required that enables us to face also the issues of *discontinuity, plurality, ambiguity, and relativity* that persist in our Christian past, present and future.<sup>12</sup>

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everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4,5.6." Augsburg Confession, Article VII, "Of the Church." trans. F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, in *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

<sup>9</sup> Ebeling, 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Ormond Rush, "Reception Hermeneutics and the "Development" of Doctrine: An Alternative Model," *Pacifica*, 6 (1993), 126.



For Ebeling, the continuity of Christianity is constituted by the self-same subject-matter of the tradition: Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. However, the church's understanding of Jesus will be characterised by manifold developments and diverse expressions in its history because the church will always understand Jesus from a particular historical perspective.<sup>13</sup>

From the theological point of view the remarkable thing about this course of events is that the church, although she remains one and the same, undergoes a manifold change of form; thus the witness to Jesus Christ in the history of the Church does not consist in the mere repetition of Holy Scripture and in the imitation of the way in which the disciples followed him; but in interpretation, that is, in ever new usages and forms, thoughts and decisions, sufferings and victories, and hence in an unfolding of the richness and power of the Word of God, and in ever new victories for the hidden kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

### Froehlich, "Church History and the Bible"

The same call for biblical exegesis and church history to include the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Bible was echoed in the Anglo-American tradition by Karlfried Froehlich in his article "Church History and the Bible".<sup>15</sup> Like Ebeling, Froehlich retrieves the Reformer's position that there could be no church without the Bible and that there could be "no Bible without the church — the church which received the apostolic witness, selected the canon, and gave the biblical witness unity by its interpretation."<sup>16</sup> According to Froehlich, Ebeling's revolutionary contribution to theological studies was his thesis that we need to grasp the normative power of the biblical language and its interaction with the different horizons of understanding. This should "encourage a style of history writing that would expose this normative power of the biblical language not only as past-factum reflection or rationalization but also as the historical start for thought and action."<sup>17</sup> As such, the Christian tradition is not a barrier

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<sup>13</sup> Friedrich De Boor, "Kirchengeschichte oder Auslegungsgeschichte?" *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (June 1972), 406.

<sup>14</sup> Ebeling, 31.

<sup>15</sup> Karlfried Froehlich, "Church History and the Bible," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1-15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

to Christ but serves to point to him. In order to realise this, church history and the history of biblical interpretation must be incorporated into biblical hermeneutics, and the biblical interpretation into church history.<sup>18</sup> While Froehlich speaks positively of Ebeling's proposal, he thinks the results of the research which Ebeling's work stimulated has been rather disappointing so far.<sup>19</sup> One of the weaknesses of Ebeling's approach is that the interpreter did not know what he or she should be looking for in the post-history of a text. As a result, the "tracing of random texts in their history of exposition yield at best interesting details and the impression of a bewildering zigzag course."<sup>20</sup> This problem is unavoidable. Because of the vast amount of material written on the Bible, there will be a disproportionate number of false starts and dead-ends as in any new field of research. At the same time, Froehlich argues that studies on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a text should attempt to illuminate the historical development of understanding the text. The degree of success of diachronic studies such as this will depend to a large extent on the careful selection of texts. "The success, it is maintained, depends entirely on the selection of a good passage, one which *has made* history rather than just *having* one."<sup>21</sup>

The rewards of this approach outweigh the difficulties inherent in attempting to study the effect of a particular biblical text for Froehlich. At the institutional level, it helps to overcome the artificial divisions between biblical studies and church history. At the corporate and personal levels, this type of research will hopefully help the contemporary church arrive at a deeper self-understanding and of its position in the

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- <sup>18</sup> See ch. 6, "Sola Scriptura' and Tradition," in Ebeling, *Word of God and Tradition*, 102-47. While the historical critical method may have made the most significant contribution to theology in the past two hundred years according to Ebeling, it is also responsible for the artificial division between church history and biblical exegesis. Froehlich, 8.
- <sup>19</sup> Froehlich, 9; de Boor, "Kirchengeschichte oder Auslegungsgeschichte?" 406-9.
- <sup>20</sup> Froehlich cites Childs' commentary on Exodus as an example and criticises it for the manner in which he thinks that Childs has contrived his sources and does not demonstrate from them any form of development in the exegetical understanding of the book. Froehlich, 10; Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1974).
- <sup>21</sup> Froehlich, 10. De Boor is more critical, claiming that if one attempted to pursue an approach which considers the history of the influence of the Bible in other fields besides the history of interpretation, one will "sink in the material." de Boor, 409.



Christian tradition. "For the understanding of the Christian tradition as a whole, the history of biblical interpretation is as important as the biblical texts themselves."<sup>22</sup> Incorporating the history of biblical interpretation into church history and our exegetical practices "holds out the promise of something really *new*, of seeing really *new* light, of becoming open to truly *new* horizons, of experiencing change in ourselves, precisely because we cannot change the past. History itself in its inexhaustible universal horizon is the given, and as such the best dialogue partner to help us discover that life never needs to be dull."<sup>23</sup>

### A Traditional Way to Write a Commentary

In the past few years there have been several very promising developments which would probably appease Froehlich's earlier disappointment with the research results. The most promising of these has been the publication of the *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* series in which the post-history of the text occupies a central element of the discussion of the text's meaning. Ulrich Luz's three volume commentary on the Gospel of Matthew has been more successful at achieving this goal than other volumes in the series.<sup>24</sup> Luz not only practices a *wirkungsgeschichtliche* approach but he is a strong advocate and apologist for it as well. Hermeneutically, Luz's model is based on Gadamer's work and at the same time stands within the trajectory of thought launched by Ebeling.

The Bible and the history of its effects are related in two ways according to Luz. First, the biblical texts are the products of the history of effects themselves. The New Testament is the result of the early church's interpretation and preaching of God's revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> And second, "the biblical

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<sup>22</sup> Idem, "Which Paul? Observations on the Image of the Apostle in the History of Biblical Exegesis," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 279.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, "Church History and the Bible," 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss, 3 vols., *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Joachim Gnllka, Norbert Brox, Ulrich Luz, and Jürgen Roloff eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989-).

<sup>25</sup> Ebeling made this same observation, especially in relation to the formation of the canon. Ebeling, *Word of God and Tradition*, 108, 110-21.



texts have a history of effects, namely, the history of the churches and their confessions after them and, through them, the history of the whole Christian world.”<sup>26</sup> Texts possess a potential for meaning which are disclosed or concretized in the history of their reception. As such, both the New Testament and the history of its effects are witnesses to the creative power of the transmission of the gospel message in new historical situations.

A biblical text is not a reservoir or cistern, with a fixed amount of water in it that can be clearly measured. Rather it resembles a source, where new water emerges from the same place. This means that the history of interpretation and effects that a text creates is nothing alien to the text itself, as if the text with its meaning existed at the beginning and then only afterward and secondarily had consequences and created a history of interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

The history of a text’s effects and interpretation should be an integral part of a commentary and should not be treated as material to be tucked away into an appendix or serve as occasional illustration to make the commentary more readable or interesting. The reception history of the text exposes the interpreter to the “great treasury of experience” which other Christians have found in the Bible.<sup>28</sup> This not only helps us to learn from previous interpretations but it also reveals to us why we approach the text the way we do. History reveals to us what we owe to those who preceded us. We are like “a person who must investigate the water of a river while sitting in a boat which is carried and driven by this same river.”<sup>29</sup> Or to cite another metaphor, one which has a long history of reception, we are like the far-sighted dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. At another point he explains the same idea in this manner. “I would propose to understand the meaning of a biblical text as an interaction of a ‘kernel of meaning,’ which corresponds to the given structure of a text, and a ‘directional meaning,’ which gives a present direction to the readers on their way to new lands.” *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> *Idem*, *Commentary*, 99.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> This metaphor can be traced all the way back to Bernard of Chartres in the 12th century. Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 2nd edition (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) 15-18.

## Where does this tradition go from here?

The need for improving or developing the work which Ebeling, Froehlich, and Luz have done in this area is important for two reasons. First, if the post-history of the text functions as a hermeneutical bridge between our contemporary understanding of the Bible and the text itself, then we ignore this historical dimension at our own peril. Markus Bockmuehl complains about the inattention given to the Christian tradition's rich history of biblical interpretation. "For the last century and a half, however, we have not been building and improving a road on which to travel back and forth, but have attempted to slash a wide swath through the woods with picks and machetes and, one suspects, often without much sense of direction or sensitivity to the terrain"<sup>31</sup> The history of the Bible's reception presents a challenge to biblical scholarship which is dominated by questions concerning the origin of the text. This is not to deny the value of such research, but asks why such a disproportionate amount of research in biblical studies is devoted to historical reconstruction while so little is given to the text's history of a text's interpretation and effects.<sup>32</sup>

Second, while Ebeling, Froehlich, and Luz's work is impressive, I think that it can be strengthened and advanced by incorporating recent work in philosophical hermeneutics and literary theory. Is it worth the effort to examine the history of the Bible's interpretation and influence in our exegetical practices? "If, ...the answer is yes, great care should be devoted to the construction of a proper theoretical framework for the pursuit."<sup>33</sup>

The goal of this study is to critically examine the hermeneutical resources of reception theory to see if it can provide an adequate theoretical framework. To facilitate this, I have divided the thesis into three parts. Part I will consist of an exploration of

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<sup>31</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, "A Commentator's Approach to the 'Effective History' of Philippians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 60 (1995), 58.

<sup>32</sup> "But the effective history also presents a challenge to biblical scholarship which is still mainly concerned with origins. . . . Of course, some people should always specialize in origins, but is it reasonable that thousands do it all the time?" Heikki Räisänen, "The Effective 'History' of the Bible: A Challenge to Biblical Scholarship?," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 45 (1992), 323-4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.



Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. The first chapter will focus on Gadamer's rehabilitation of tradition and, more specifically, how we actually engage tradition in a dialogue and what type of knowledge we can hope to learn from such a dialogue. The second chapter will build upon this and will probe three issues which involve roles which tradition plays in understanding a text. Because the range of Gadamer's hermeneutics is vast and has generated numerous studies on various aspects of his thought, it is not possible to discuss the entire breadth of his thought. Therefore, I have had to limit my discussion of his work to those aspects which are particularly relevant to reception theory. I have also attempted to select areas of Gadamer's work which have not received the same amount of attention as have other areas of his thought.

Part II will consider the contribution which Gadamer's student, Hans Robert Jauss, offers through his literary and hermeneutical theory of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*. Once again it is beyond the scope of this work to do justice to Jauss' entire hermeneutical theory. In the third chapter, I will attempt to present a critical introduction to the background of Jauss' work and an overview of the main themes behind his concept of reception theory. The relationship between Jauss' reception theory and Gadamer's hermeneutic will be examined in the second half of the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, I will look at the role of paradigm shifts and classic texts in reception theory and biblical interpretation. Special attention in both chapters will be given to those areas in which Jauss makes a unique contribution and which have a special relevance for biblical interpretation.

And finally, lest I become guilty of Jeffrey Stout's complaint that all too often modern theology has "been reduced to seemingly endless methodological foreplay", I shall attempt to demonstrate the relevance of reception theory for biblical studies. While the burden of my argument rests in the discussion of Gadamer and Jauss' hermeneutic in chapters one through four, the fifth chapter will attempt to serve as an extended exploration of the fecundity of reception theory. Chapter five will therefore be devoted



to considering the reception of Matthew 22:1-14, the parable of the Wedding Feast from the early church to the Reformation.<sup>34</sup>

I recognise that there are a number of major questions that the subject matter of my work raises which I do not address specifically. Criteria as to what counts as an appropriate or inappropriate interpretation is an example of one such question. While I do not discuss the issue of criteria directly, the sections on the subject matter of the text (*die Sache*), the logic of question and answer, and performance do touch on this question, but there is room for more work to be done in this area. Luz argues that there are two criteria by which we can judge an interpretation: (1) it must demonstrate a “correspondence with the essentials of the history of Jesus,” and (2) that the fruit of an interpretation should be an expression of love. His two criteria represent a promising starting point for further discussion concerning this question.<sup>35</sup> However, the goal of this work is to examine the hermeneutical contributions which reception theory can make to biblical studies.

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<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 147.

<sup>35</sup> Luz, *Matthew in History*, 82-97.

## PART I: GADAMER'S HERMENEUTIC

### CHAPTER 1: THE CULTIVATION OF TRADITION

Heracleitus was quoted by Socrates as saying, "all things move and nothing remains still, and he likens the universe to the current of a river, saying that you cannot step twice into the same stream."<sup>1</sup> Descartes, however, believed that he could climb out of the river and onto solid land. As such, he thought he found a place to stand outside and above the flow of history and tradition in reason and doubt. For Gadamer, there is no solid ground on which an observer can stand alongside this river; we are always captives of its current. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer has two goals. Negatively, he wants to demonstrate that there is no fixed shore or vantage point from which one could gain a fixed viewpoint to look down from and survey the flow of history. Positively, he attempts to construct a hermeneutic which is not only cognizant of our being carried along in the river, but also to show how this situation is actually constitutive of how we understand our world and what is handed down to us from the past.

To raise the question about Gadamer's significance for any hermeneutical theory may seem almost facile. Richard Bernstein writes, "Building on the work of Heidegger, or rather drawing on themes that are implicit in Heidegger and developing them in novel ways, Gadamer's book is one of the most comprehensive and subtle statements of meaning and the scope of hermeneutics to appear in our time."<sup>2</sup> However, Gadamer's work plays two extremely important roles in reception theory. First, Gadamer's work laid the foundational brickwork which all contemporary hermeneutical theories either build upon or engage in dialogue. Second, and even more significantly, he was Hans Robert Jauss' mentor. Thus, we must understand Gadamer as a prelude to Jauss whom we shall look to for the hermeneutical model of reception theory in the second part of the theoretical discussion, (chapters three and four). At the same time, it is the

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, 402b.

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 34. Even E. D. Hirsch confesses that "Hans-Georg Gadamer has published the most substantial treatise on hermeneutic theory that has come from Germany this century." E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1967), 245.



hermeneutical issues which Jausse focuses on which have determined to a large extent which aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutic I will focus on in the next two chapters.

The outline for this chapter is broken down into four sections. In the first section, I hope to show how Gadamer rehabilitates the concepts of tradition and the role of prejudices from the antithesis which the Enlightenment set up between tradition and reason. The second section will focus on Gadamer's appropriation of two of Hegel's ideas. He employs Hegel's concepts of experience and sublation to explain the process of understanding and how knowledge is historically transmitted. Hegel's thought on the open nature of dialogue is appropriated by Gadamer to illustrate how we should approach our tradition and the texts which are handed down in it. The relevance of Collingwood's logic of question and answer for hermeneutics is the subject of the third section. This plays a central role not only in Gadamer's hermeneutic, but as we shall see in subsequent chapters, it plays a central role in Jausse's work as well. The final section will examine the question, what form of knowledge does hermeneutical knowledge consist? The central theme of this chapter is: what does our knowledge of the past consist of and how is this shaped and handed down within a tradition according to Gadamer?

## I. THE REHABILITATION OF TRADITION

### A. An Ontological Approach to Tradition

Tradition has not enjoyed a very positive reception in philosophical thought since the dawn of the Enlightenment. For Descartes and other Enlightenment thinkers, errors in thought, irrational ideas and prejudices were the result of either the hastiness of thought or were handed down by authority and tradition.<sup>3</sup> Because these prejudices lacked methodological justification they were an unreliable and unfounded source of knowledge. Gadamer sums up their view toward tradition and the prejudices contained in it, "there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power."<sup>4</sup> This view is not limited to the period of the Enlightenment but continues to this day. "The category of tradition is essentially feudal

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<sup>3</sup> This idea is also found in Schleiermacher's work. Error comes about from the lasting prejudices of partiality and the momentary mistakes of overhastiness. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Second, revised ed. (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1989), 278.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.



.... Tradition is opposed to rationality, even though the one took shape in the other.”<sup>5</sup> The result of this line of thought has been that (1) we have lost the innocence by which we once appropriated traditional concepts and (2) we now view the Western philosophical tradition as fragmented tradition.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Gadamer views prejudices as a constitutive element of our “thrownness,” they are always part of human existence and, as such, the prejudices we inherit are neither negative or positive in nature. Gadamer took the German concept of *Vorurteil* (pre-judgement) and incorporated it into Heidegger’s fore-structure of understanding (*Vorhabe, Vorsicht* and *Vorgriff*). Gadamer’s use of the term prejudice, *Vorurteil*, “refers to certain conditions that are operative in our thinking already at a preconceptual level.”<sup>7</sup> And in a manner similar to Heidegger’s analysis of the fore-structure of understanding prejudice has a three-fold character in Gadamer’s work: (1) we inherit them from our tradition, (2) they constitute who we are now, and (3) they have an anticipatory nature in that they allow us to project possibilities for understanding.<sup>8</sup> Gadamer sees our belonging to a tradition as part of the ontology of our existence. “Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and the state in which we live.... The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, prejudice is the pre-conscious cumulative effect of all judgements we have made and inherited in our tradition which we may not be aware of but constitute our horizon. The important point for Gadamer is that we are aware of our dwelling within a tradition and our prejudices so that when we approach a text which has been handed down from the past it can present its own truth against our fore-meanings.<sup>10</sup> “The general structure of understanding is concretized in historical

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<sup>5</sup> Theodore W. Adorno, “On Tradition,” *Telos* 94 (Winter 1992-93), 75. Adorno views tradition as being conformist and decadent at best. “Adorno’s advice is to keep a distance from traditions, which must remain subterranean in order to remain viable.” Paul Piccone, “The Actuality of Traditions,” *Telos* 94 (Winter 1992-93 1992-83), 100.

<sup>6</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxiv.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Mitscherling, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and ‘The Tradition’,” *Man and World*, 22 (1989), 249.

<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, “From Hermeneutics to Praxis,” in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: SUNY, 1986), 90.

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 269-71.

understanding, in that the concrete bonds of custom and tradition and the corresponding possibilities of one's own future becomes effective in understanding itself."<sup>11</sup>

One of the major challenges which Gadamer seeks to address is that the traditional notion of historical consciousness views everything as historically conditioned and, as a result, historical knowledge is characterised by a relativity of opinions.<sup>12</sup> This is our inheritance from nineteenth century historicism. Historical positivism rejected Hegel's notion that there was a higher order of rationality governing history.<sup>13</sup> Instead it focused on the individual events or elements of history, not universal history. "Historical consciousness is interested in knowing, not how men, people, or states develop in general, but, quite on the contrary, how this man, this people, or this state became what it is; how each of these particulars could come to pass and end up specifically there."<sup>14</sup> The result is that we suffer from a historical self-estrangement from our own past and a fragmentation of the chain of tradition into a series of unrelated, broken segments.<sup>15</sup>

One of the more significant points of Heidegger's thought for Gadamer is not that he solved the problem of historicism, but the way in which he interpreted human existence and history by means of absolute temporality. He pushed the idea of our temporal existence to its logical conclusion. "What being is was to be determined from within the horizon of time .... But it was more than that. Heidegger's thesis was that being itself is time."<sup>16</sup> History is not something that we can transcend, rather we exist historically. Heidegger fully developed the historical nature of human existence and provided a phenomenological epistemology to justify such an approach. Our historical existence allows us to study the past and it is also the common ground between the knower and the known. This does not mean that there is some form of 'homogeneity'

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<sup>11</sup> Idem, 264; idem, "The Heritage of Hegel," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, ed. Thomas McCarthy, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992), 41. xx

<sup>12</sup> Idem, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," trans. Jeff L. Close, in *Interpretive Social Research: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 110.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, "Hegel's Philosophy and Its Aftereffects," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, 26; Dilthey also correctly rejected Hegel's concept of absolute spirit. Idem, *Truth and Method*, 198-201.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 116.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, "The Heritage of Hegel," 44. "Das heißt nicht nur, daß Distanznahme zu den Traditionen, in denen man aufgewachsen ist, in eine moderne Identität gleichsam eingebaut ist; es heißt auch, daß in der Moderne selbst durch existierende Traditionen Orientierungswissen nur in eigentümlich gebrochener Verbindlichkeit wiedergereicht wird." Bernd Auerchs, "Gadamer über Tradition," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 49 (2, 1995), 295.

<sup>16</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 257.



between the knower and the known, which would lead to a psychological hermeneutic along the lines of Schleiermacher or Dilthey. Instead it is based on the idea that both the knower and the known share a common mode of being, “they both have the *mode of being of historicity*.”<sup>17</sup> It is precisely because we ‘belong’ to history and a tradition that we have an interest in studying history.<sup>18</sup>

The tradition a person belongs to constitutes his or her self-understanding and, as a result, every interpretative act is performed in a certain historical horizon with prejudices that are related to that horizon.

In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and the state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*<sup>19</sup>

Tradition is part of our ‘thrownness’ and it is essential that we recognise our place in our tradition and cultivate it according to Gadamer. “Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated.”<sup>20</sup> To understand a text is to participate in an event of tradition, a process in which the past and the present are mediated. Following Heidegger, Gadamer shows how every act of understanding is projective by nature. The interpreter projects a meaning from the possibilities which he sees from within his horizon.<sup>21</sup> “The general structure of understanding is concretized in historical understanding, in that the concrete bonds of custom and tradition and the corresponding possibilities of one’s own future become effective in understanding itself.”<sup>22</sup>

## B. The Rehabilitation of Prejudice and Tradition

The conclusion which Gadamer reaches is that “*the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and the knowledge of it, must be*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>18</sup> “‘Belonging’ is a condition of the original meaning of historical interest not because the choice of theme and inquiry is subject to extrascientific, subjective motivations . . . , but because belonging to tradition belongs just as originally and essentially to the historical finitude of Dasein as does its projectedness toward future possibilities itself.” Ibid., 262.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 276-77.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 264; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 163-65.

*discarded.*"<sup>23</sup> The mistake made in the Enlightenment's doctrine of tradition and prejudice was to assume that it was an untrustworthy source of knowledge. They believed that mistakes in thought arose from two main sources: externally, our respect for others and their authority led us into error just as effectively as overhastiness in our thinking did internally. The field in which this was felt the most was biblical interpretation. The radical thrust of the Enlightenment movement was to "assert itself against the Bible and dogmatic interpretation of it." This movement was not primarily aimed against tradition but rather its goal was to understand the Bible "rationally and without prejudice."<sup>24</sup> As a result, reason became the ground for authority and the arbiter of the truth claims of a text or tradition. Tradition became an object to study and critique.

The influence of the Enlightenment in this area is still felt today even though it was transfigured by Romanticism. In contrast to the Enlightenment's striving to free itself from the dogma of tradition, Romanticism embraced the earlier ages of myth as reflecting Christian chivalry and a society closer to nature. "These romantic revaluations give rise to historical science in the nineteenth century. It no longer measures the past by the standards of the present, as if they were absolute, but it ascribes to past ages a value of their own and can even acknowledge their superiority in one respect or another."<sup>25</sup> However, in broad terms, Romanticism shared the same goal as the Enlightenment, the objective knowledge of the historical world which was 'on par' with the objective knowledge in the natural sciences. The result is the same for both movements, a break in the continuity of meaning passed down in tradition. What could not be accepted as true according to reason must be understood historically.<sup>26</sup>

Gadamer criticises Romanticism, and Herder in particular, for the manner in which it views a text as an expression of genius of the author. Herder reduced the text to that of an objectified residue left behind by the creative spirit, like footprints in the sand. "Texts, works of art and the like were thus no longer considered claims to truth but rather seen as the concrete embodiment of creative genius."<sup>27</sup> As a result the text was an objectified construct which was always less than the creative thought which produced it.

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<sup>23</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 282.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 272. This criticism of the Enlightenment can be traced as far back as Hegel. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, with analysis of the text and forward by J. N. Findlay, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 329-334.

<sup>25</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 275.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 275-76.

<sup>27</sup> Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 73.



Understanding a text was a matter of retracing the path from the text back to the creative thought of the author.<sup>28</sup> Schleiermacher is an excellent example of this approach to a text in Gadamer's opinion. "Schleiermacher's particular contribution is psychological interpretation. It is ultimately a divinatory process, a placing of oneself within the whole framework of the author, an apprehension of the 'inner origin' of the composition of a work, a re-creation of the creative act."<sup>29</sup>

There is an underlying Cartesian program in Romantic hermeneutics. By objectifying what ought to confront you, the text, you emasculate it. The text is detached from the creative act by defining it as a deposit of genius. On the one hand, Gadamer praises the Romantic tradition's stress on creativity. On the other hand, he criticises Romanticism, because in the end, it is only left with the traces or relics of the creative mind, like the vapour trails of a jet in the sky. This objectification of the elements which are handed down in tradition was picked up by nineteenth-century historiography. The result was the same for both Romanticism and historicism when it came to interpreting a text. "The individual text has no value in itself but only serves as a source — i.e., only as material conveying knowledge of the past historical context, just like other silent *relics* of the past."<sup>30</sup> The legacy of Romanticism and historicism's objectification of the text is still felt today in biblical studies. "The best modern commentary series continue to produce technical studies of biblical books as ancient texts and as objects of detached critical analysis."<sup>31</sup>

The Enlightenment movement saw a "mutually exclusive antithesis between authority and reason."<sup>32</sup> This assumption was justified if authority displaced one's use of reason. But it overlooked the fact that truth can be found in authority. This was the

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<sup>28</sup> Warnke makes the observation that this hermeneutic concept can still be seen exercising an influence in the works of critics like E. D. Hirsch. *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 187. This criticism is valid of Schleiermacher's later work, but Kimmerle's edition of Schleiermacher's notes on hermeneutics from 1805-1819 reveal that his earlier work was more concerned with the identity of thought and language. Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts by F. D. Schleiermacher*, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman, *American Academy of Religion: Text and Translation Series*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977); Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics. Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 92-94. Warnke observes that Gadamer's emphasis on divination in Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is based on the influence of this on those who followed Schleiermacher, especially Dilthey. Warnke, *Gadamer*, 13-14.

<sup>30</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 198 italics mine.

<sup>31</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, "A Commentator's Approach to the 'Effective History' of Philippians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 60 (1995), 57.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

mistake of the Enlightenment, it understood authority as blind obedience. While it is true that distortions and false prejudices may be handed down through a tradition, a tradition also passes on truth. Therefore, the acceptance of the authority of tradition is not blind obedience but the acknowledgement that those who precede us may have had better insights and judgements than we do. It is an acknowledgement of our finitude and that the knowledge passed down in tradition may contain a wider perspective or be better informed about the subject-matter.<sup>33</sup>

It [authority] rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

Underpinning this concept of authority and tradition is the idea that what is passed down is not irrational or arbitrary but contains truth which can be discovered as true.<sup>35</sup> In this manner, Gadamer presents an apology for tradition based on epistemological considerations.

If the Enlightenment represents one extreme in respect to tradition, Romanticism represents the opposite. Romanticism defended the authority which tradition has over our behaviour and attitudes. For example, morality was not based on reason but was handed down in tradition and received by us. Tradition was the antithesis to the Enlightenment's concept of the freedom which reason delivered. In this respect, tradition was a constitutive element of human life, much like nature was. "And in fact it is to romanticism that we owe this correction of the Enlightenment: that tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes."<sup>36</sup>

However, once again, there is an underlying antithesis between reason and tradition which makes this position untenable.<sup>37</sup> Romanticism held to a faith in the growth and development of tradition which was independent and superior to reason. In reply to this, Gadamer argues that reason operates within a tradition and that tradition is not as dominant as Romanticism believed. "Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. *It needs to be affirmed,*

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 278-80.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>37</sup> Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of "Truth and Method"* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 169.



*embraced, cultivated* .... But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one."<sup>38</sup> Tradition does not exist simply because it is part of the past, it needs to be preserved and this requires that reason and freedom are operative in the transmission of a tradition.<sup>39</sup>

There is a great deal of debate over how to understand Gadamer at this point. Habermas criticises Gadamer for subordinating the power of reason and reflection to tradition. For Habermas, prejudices are often shackles on our mind which need to be submitted to critical scrutiny.<sup>40</sup> Thus, there needs to be a separation between reason and tradition if we are going to have any possibility of criticising our tradition.<sup>41</sup> Richard Rorty basically agrees with Habermas' point but celebrates it. Because of the temporal and cultural conditioning of all knowledge, he argues that there is no common ground on which rationality can operate. Therefore, philosophical discourse is reduced to talking about what looks like a reason from our perspective.<sup>42</sup> Both of these views miss Gadamer's position concerning the operation of reason in tradition. I will discuss this area in greater depth later in this chapter in the section on Gadamer's appropriation of Hegel's dialectic. But for now, it is enough to say that Gadamer rejects any form of polarisation between reason and tradition. This can be seen in the way he defends tradition with an epistemological argument. Tradition is a valid form of knowledge because it is reasonable to accept that someone may possess more and better information than we do.<sup>43</sup> Our relationship to tradition is not one of passive obedience by active dialogue, which requires the use of reason. However, as opposed to Descartes or Habermas, the goal of reflection is not the undermining of tradition's influence but to connect us with it in a more appropriate manner according to Gadamer.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 281.

<sup>39</sup> Gadamer adds the qualification that he does not think that the pre-reflective effect of tradition is diminished as a result of the operation of reason within tradition or as a result of historical study. *Ibid.*, 283 note 208.

<sup>40</sup> Graeme Nicholson, "Answers to Critical Theory," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, 156.

<sup>41</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," in *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy eds. (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 358-63.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 364-65.

<sup>43</sup> Theodore Kisiel, "Ideology Critique and Phenomenology: The Current Debate in German Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, 14 (1970), 152-57.

<sup>44</sup> Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 111; *Idem*, "Truth in the Human Sciences," trans. Brice R. Wachterhauser, in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 29.

After assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Enlightenment and Romanticism's views of tradition, Gadamer searches for a more adequate approach. One which does justice to both tradition and reason. There must be a unity between the "effect (*Wirkung*) of a living tradition and the effect of historical study."<sup>45</sup> In order to do justice to this concept, we cannot conceive of tradition as a radically new element being added to the hermeneutical sciences. Rather we must regard it as "a new element in what has always constituted the human relation to the past. *In other words, we have to recognize the element of tradition in historical research and inquire into its hermeneutic productivity.*"<sup>46</sup> Historical research is not some abstract discipline but is intimately connected with the object of its study. In order to solve this question, Gadamer turned to Hegel.

## II. GADAMER'S APPROPRIATION OF HEGEL'S DIALECTIC

### A. Hegel's Dialectic: Experience and Sublation

One of the problems which Gadamer faced was how to overcome the view that the subject is a detached, neutral interpreter who approaches tradition as an object and reinstate a living relationship between interpreter and tradition? "And so it remained for me to decide — between the alternatives of the 'psychological reconstruction of past thought' — against the 'integration of past thought into one's own thought' — against Schleiermacher and in favor of Hegel."<sup>47</sup> While Schleiermacher and Hegel were both concerned with the problem of estrangement from tradition which resulted from the Enlightenment and Romanticism, they proposed two very different solutions. Schleiermacher argued that we must reconstruct the original context in which the work was originally understood. If the original context was removed from consideration in interpretation then the work lost some of its significance because the intelligibility of the work was tied to its original context. If we accept the idea that a text or work of art is not a timeless aesthetic object but its significance is grounded in its belonging to a 'world' then this would appear to imply that we must reconstruct the original context in order to reveal the true meaning of the text or work. "According to Schleiermacher, historical knowledge opens the possibility of replacing what is lost and reconstructing tradition,

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<sup>45</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 282.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 283, italics mine. This is important since Gadamer defines hermeneutics in the following manner: "Hermeneutics may be precisely defined as the art of bringing what is said or written to speech again." Idem, "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Idem, "The Heritage of Hegel," 40.



inasmuch as it restores the original occasion and circumstances.”<sup>48</sup> The problem with this approach for Gadamer is that the historicity of our existence makes the goal of this approach an illusion. What we end up with is a second creation — we do not end up with the original meaning of the text but rather “it acquires only a derivative, cultural existence.” It is like taking a painting out of a museum and placing it back in the medieval church from which it was taken. What is reconstructed is not what once was but a tourist attraction.<sup>49</sup> The reconstruction of the original context will always be a reconstruction from within the horizon of the interpreter and will not be the same as the original context of understanding.

Hegel, in contrast to Schleiermacher, takes the perspective that our relationship to works from the past is analogous to fruit picked from a tree. Fate presents these works to us like “beautiful fruit already picked from the tree, ... as a girl might set the fruit before us.” They are no longer connected to the “tree which bore them” but are handed to us through “the veiled recollection of that actual world.”<sup>50</sup> Historical research as a reconstruction of the past will always remain an external activity and does not allow us to put the work back into its original context nor does it create a living relationship with the past. “They remain fruit torn from the tree.” This does not mean that Hegel denies the value of historical research which give us an idea of the original in our imagination. What Hegel is claiming is that tradition is not handed down to us through the process of historical reconstruction — it does not allow us to “enter into their very life.”<sup>51</sup> Gadamer follows Hegel in this area. Historical reconstruction of the original context of a text is important to understand the text but it should not be taken as the ground or primary aspect for understanding. “Integration, not restoration, is the true task of hermeneutics.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 166.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>50</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 455.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 456.

<sup>52</sup> Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 186.

The manner in which works of art and texts are passed down is analogous to the maid servant who serves us fruit. Just as she is “more and higher” than nature which produced the fruit, so also “the spirit of destiny which gives us these works of art is greater than the ethical life and reality of a particular people, for it is the *interiorizing recollection (Er-innerung)* of the still *externalized* spirit manifest in them.”<sup>53</sup> Gadamer understands Hegel to be claiming that the problem of understanding is not located at the level of reconstruction as Schleiermacher thought. That was a manifestation of what Hegel termed the Unhappy Consciousness. Unhappy Consciousness is the result of the loss of the meaningfulness of past art, culture, and religion which is exemplified in historicism which studies the past in an external, lifeless way and builds up pictorial images of the past.<sup>54</sup> According to Hegel, what is alive cannot be known by objective methods and that self-understanding arises from our involvement in life.

Hegel quite rightly derives self-consciousness from life. What is alive is not such that a person could ever grasp it from outside, in its living quality. The only way to grasp life is, rather, to become inwardly aware of it.... Life is experienced only in the awareness of oneself, the inner consciousness of one’s own living.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to the objective goals of historicism, our connection with the past is constituted by our remembering and internalising it. For Hegel, this remembering and internalising took place at the philosophical level of absolute mind or knowledge. The self-consciousness of the spirit grasps the truth of a text or work of art in a “higher way” than the contextual relationships in which it originally stood. And it is the self-penetration of the spirit through history which performs the process of passing on this understanding.<sup>56</sup> Thus, our interpretation of the past is more significant than the past itself. This is an important point for Gadamer.

In it [Hegel’s dialectic] the historical approach of ideative reconstruction is transformed into a thinking relation to the past. Here Hegel states a definite

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<sup>53</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 168. Miller translates this section which Gadamer is citing from Hegel in a slightly different manner. Between the two translations it is easier to grasp Hegel’s point here. “[T]he Spirit of Fate that presents us with those works of art is more than the ethical life and the actual world of that nation, for it is the *inwardizing* in us of the Spirit which in them was still [only] *outwardly* manifested.” Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 456.

<sup>54</sup> Hegel, 454-56; J. N. Findlay, “Analysis of the Text,” in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 585.

<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 253. For a fuller explication of Hegel’s thought here in relation to the concept of self-consciousness see Gadamer’s article “Hegel’s Dialectic of Self-consciousness” in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 54-74.

<sup>56</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 167-68.



truth, inasmuch as the essential nature of the historical spirit consists not in the restoration of the past but in *thoughtful mediation with contemporary life*.<sup>57</sup>

### 1. Hegel's Dialectic

The means by which this is achieved is through Hegel's dialectic. "For Hegel the point of dialectic is that precisely by pushing a position to the point of self-contradiction it makes possible the transition to a higher truth which unites the sides of that contradiction: the power of spirit lies in synthesis as the mediation of all contradictions."<sup>58</sup> Beginning with concept *A*, we find that it contains the contradictory concept *B* when we conceptually analyse *A*. And in the same manner concept *B* contains concept *A*. The dialectical result of this form of analysis is concept *C* which unites concepts *A* and *B*.<sup>59</sup> Both *A* and *B* are sublated into the higher concept *C*. The strength of Hegel's dialectic is its "reflexive and integrating power" which solves the problems inherent in hermeneutics of reconstructing the original meaning of a text.<sup>60</sup>

For Gadamer, Hegel's concept of sublation, *Aufhebung*, provides an explanation for the continuity we experience in history.<sup>61</sup> Hegel realised that this term possessed the broad semantic range of meaning from "negating" to "preserving". However, his primary use of the term focused on how concepts, ideas, or truth were preserved through this process of negation.<sup>62</sup> "For Hegel, however, the meaning shifts and comes to imply

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 168-69.

<sup>58</sup> Gadamer, "Hegel and Heidegger," in, *Hegel's Dialectic*, 105.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Forster, "Hegel's Dialectical Method," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser, *Cambridge Companions*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 131-2. "In a wide sense Hegel's dialectic involves three steps: (1) one or more concepts or categories are taken as fixed, sharply defined and distinct from each other. This is the stage of UNDERSTANDING. (2) When we reflect on such categories, one or more contradictions emerge in them. This is the stage of dialectic proper, or of dialectical or NEGATIVE REASON. (3) The result of this dialectic is a new, higher category, which embraces the earlier categories and resolves the contradiction involved in them. This is the stage of SPECULATION or positive reason." Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, *The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries*, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), s.v. "Dialectic," 81-2.

<sup>60</sup> Manfred Frank, "Limits of the Human Control of Language," trans. Richard Palmer, in *Destruktion and Deconstruction*, eds. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 157.

<sup>61</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 98. Hegel was attempting to address the "confusion of human affairs, in this up and down of inconsistency, nothing lasting could maintain itself was familiar to the eighteenth century." Gadamer, "Hegel's Philosophy and Its Aftereffects," 35.

<sup>62</sup> We must be careful to note that Hegel does employ both uses of the term, to "negate, cancel, suspend" and also "to keep, save, preserve." However, Hegel understands both meanings are implied in the second meaning. "What results from the sublation of something, e.g. the whole in which both it and its opposite survive as moments, is invariably higher than, or the TRUTH of, the item(s) sublated." *A Hegel Dictionary*, s.v.

preservation of all the elements of truth, which assert themselves within the contradictions and even an elevation of these elements to a truth encompassing and uniting everything true.”<sup>63</sup> Contradictions and oppositions in thought and the real world are capable of being mediated and sublimated through the power of synthesis in reason. The process of sublation, *Aufhebung* results in a modification to the original meaning or sense of the original categories (*A* and *B*). It is this modification in meaning which allows the original categories or ideas to no longer be contradictory and also allows the new category (*C*) to contain them.<sup>64</sup> Hegel’s dialectic provides an explanation for diversity (and contradictions) in history while, at the same time, it provides an impulse through the dialectical process toward the creation of unity. There is a continuity to history because reason is capable of reconciling “the most alien, inscrutable, and inimical forces of history”.<sup>65</sup> Hegel’s dialectic also escapes the problem of Romanticism which reduces the text to an externalised, objectified construct from the past of the creative genius of the author, a relic. By contrast, Hegel’s dialectical method is always moving forward. An idea or thought is overtaken in sublation before it is objectified, before a decision can be made about it. In his system, a text is never reduced to a relic but is part of the ongoing dialectical process of history.

The relevance of the concept of sublation can be seen in the way that parallel ideas are picked up and developed by others such as in Heidegger’s conception of Dasein. Dasein does not have a fixed nature. “Dasein is constantly ‘more’ than it factually is, ... Dasein is never anything less; that is to say, it *is* existentially that which, in its potentiality-for-Being, it is *not yet*.”<sup>66</sup> In the process of projective understanding, Dasein develops itself (*sich auszubilden*) through interpretation. In the projection of possibilities there is a counter thrust upon Dasein which requires a reconciliation of these possibilities with our pre-understanding (*Vorhabe, Vorsicht, and Vorgriff*). “This development of understanding we call ‘interpretation’. In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it. In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself.”<sup>67</sup>

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“Sublation,” 284. For an example of how Hegel uses this term in different manners see: G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), 106-8.

<sup>63</sup> Gadamer, “Hegel and Heidegger,” 105.

<sup>64</sup> Forster, “Hegel’s Dialectical Method,” 132-3

<sup>65</sup> Gadamer, “Hegel and Heidegger,” 105.

<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 185-86.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.



## 2. Gadamer's Sublation of Hegel

In his appropriation of Hegel, Gadamer is not interested in reinstating Hegel's philosophy but in attempting to learn something from him.<sup>68</sup> This can be seen by the manner that Gadamer adapts Hegel's ideas in all three parts of *Truth and Method*. In the first part, Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung* is incorporated in Gadamer's concept of *Bildung*, the term Gadamer chose to best express the type of understanding involved in the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The concept of the hermeneutic circle, which includes an outward and returning movement, is employed to explain how understanding takes place. In the outward movement, we recognise ourselves in what is alien, we find a place to be at home in it. In the returning movement, we realise that we have changed in the process of understanding and are no longer the same, our horizon has shifted or expanded.

Life is defined by the fact that what is alive differentiates itself from the world in which it lives and with which it remains connected, and preserves itself in this differentiation. What is alive preserves itself by drawing into itself everything that is outside it. Everything that is alive nourishes itself on what is alien to it. The fundamental fact of being alive is assimilation. Differentiation, then, is at the same time non-differentiation. The alien is appropriated.<sup>69</sup>

Like Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung*, *Bildung* is not fixed but involves a movement of alienation (negation) and reversal in which it expands or is transfigured.<sup>70</sup> All life is characterised by the hermeneutical circle of excursion and return, differentiation and assimilation. Thus, experience is dialectical in nature. When we assimilate the alien, our preconceptions are negated, restructured, or expanded. In the spiral of the hermeneutical circle our awareness, understanding of the world, and self-understanding are constantly restructured.<sup>71</sup>

Gadamer repeats many of these themes in part two of *Truth and Method* in the concept of the fusion of horizons. The basic movement of understanding is the hermeneutical circle, a constant movement from whole to the part and then back to the whole again. We construct a provisional understanding of a sentence or text before we

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<sup>68</sup> Gadamer, "Hegel's Philosophy and its Aftereffects until Today," 27. The approach that Gadamer takes toward Hegel is exemplary of Gadamer's approach toward every author and text. For example, when he is referring to Hegel it is often difficult to determine where he ends his review of Hegel's work and begins to advance his own ideas. This follows his view that all historical knowledge is not just knowledge of the past, or the observer's understanding, but is a mediation between the two in which both participate in an event of disclosure.

<sup>69</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 252.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 10-18.

<sup>71</sup> Gadamer, "Hegel's Dialectic of Self-consciousness," 54-74.

read it. This expectation is open to correction as we read the text and a new expectation of the text is shaped in the interaction between the reading process and our prior expectations.<sup>72</sup> Since every interpreter 'belongs' to a tradition, the meaning of a text is co-determined by the historical situation of the interpreter and the text and the hermeneutic circle takes on a temporal dimension. It takes place in the mediation between the claims of the text and the interpreter's horizon. "That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive activity but always a productive activity as well."<sup>73</sup> In our encounter with a text, our prejudices may be called into question and we encounter a tension between our present and the past of the text. Understanding occurs when we are able to experience a fusion of horizons which involves our rising to a wider horizon, one in which we are able to encompass both horizons. "In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for the old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other."<sup>74</sup>

Part three of *Truth and Method* centres on Gadamer's philosophy of language. For Gadamer, language is not only the locus of our belonging in the world, language is also "*the universal medium in which understanding occurs.*"<sup>75</sup> While our experience of the world is bound to our language, this does not mean that our language prescribes a circumference to the limits of what or how we can understand. Instead, language is what gives us the "capacity to embrace the most varied relationships of life."<sup>76</sup> Gadamer uses the analogy of what occurs in translation to explain the linguistic nature of understanding. Understanding always involves the coming to an agreement about the subject-matter in the medium of language. For the translator, this task is complicated by the fact that she must bring into her language the subject-matter which the text is pointing to in its language. In doing this, the translator must make a choice since she realises that she is not able to express all the features contained in the original text in her

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<sup>72</sup> Gadamer, "*Vom Zirkel des Verstehens*," in *Martin Heidegger zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Günther Neske Pfullingen, 1959), 24, 28.

<sup>73</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 296.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 306. "To *think historically* means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think in them. To think historically always involves mediating between those ideas and one's own thinking." Ibid., 397.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 389; idem, "The Language of Metaphysics," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 239. "Language completely surrounds us like the voice of home which prior to our every thought of it breathes a familiarity from time out of mind. Heidegger refers to language as the 'house of being,' in which we dwell with such ease." Idem, "The Idea of Hegel's Logic," in *Hegel's Dialectic*, 97.

<sup>76</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 448.



language. She must decide which elements to highlight, flatten out, or clarify.<sup>77</sup> In this process of translation, or interpretation, understanding “takes place in the medium of language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter’s own language.”<sup>78</sup> In this process, the language of the interpreter is transposed, or mediated, with the subject-matter which is expressed in the text’s original language. The words and terms which the interpreter possessed before the act of translation undergo an expansion of meaning as they are used in the translation to express the subject-matter of the text. Thus, “understanding always includes an element of application and thus *produces an ongoing process of concept formation.*”<sup>79</sup>

However, there are several conceptual problems in Hegel’s system which Gadamer seeks to resolve. For Hegel, the dialectical process of history is a dialectical movement of the Spirit (*Geist*) in history. The problem is that this dialectical process leads to the self-objectification of consciousness and is, therefore, subjective in nature. In our experience of the world, we continually undergo a reversal of consciousness as part of the dialectical process. For Hegel, this experience of consciousness naturally leads to a higher form of knowledge in which there eventually will be nothing other or alien to itself. “That is why the dialectic of experience must end in that overcoming of all experience which is attained in absolute knowledge — i.e., in the complete identity of consciousness and the object.”<sup>80</sup> Gadamer appeals to Heidegger to correct Hegel at this point. Heidegger opposed the seductive appeal of dialectic which domesticated conflicting concepts into its own thinking.<sup>81</sup> Against Hegel’s concept of absolute knowledge, Heidegger juxtaposed the finitude of human knowledge and existence.<sup>82</sup>

While there is a great deal of insight in Hegel’s concept of experience, Gadamer contends that the dialectical process should be seen in terms of “the linguisticity of human being in the world,” not in terms of self-consciousness.<sup>83</sup> Once again, Gadamer

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 385-87.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 403 italics mine. “Words are the tradition of their application: they preserve the occasion and subject matter of specific occasions of utterance. The historical world leaves an indelible mark on the word, so that language cannot be understood if divorced from what it says.” Joel Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 113-14.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>81</sup> Gadamer sees this as part of the background to Heidegger’s concept of the levelling power of tradition. Gadamer, “Destruktion and *Deconstruction*,” in *Destruktion and Deconstruction*, 108-9.

<sup>82</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 79-80, 385-7.

<sup>83</sup> Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 165-66.

appeals to Heidegger to modify Hegel. According to Heidegger, the history of reason, *logos*, in the western metaphysical tradition from Plato to Hegel represents a forgetting or obviousness to the question of Being. "In this light Heidegger's historical self-consciousness appears as the most extreme counterthrust possible against the project of absolute knowledge and the complete attainment of free self-consciousness — the project which Hegel makes basic to his philosophy."<sup>84</sup> For Gadamer, the result of experience is not that "someone knows everything or knows better than anyone else."<sup>85</sup> Instead, experience should teach us to be open to new experiences and equip us to learn from them. "The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself."<sup>86</sup> Experience is part of the historical nature of human existence and, as such, it is part of the finite nature of human existence and should reveal this finitude to us.

According to Gadamer, the historical nature of human existence is characterised by experiences which negate our expectations. "Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason.... Genuine experience is experience of one's historicity."<sup>87</sup> In this way, we gain the insight that the future is open to us (since our expectations and plans are limited) and that we should be open to the past as well. Again, Gadamer transposes Hegel's dialectic into the encounter we have with tradition, between our horizon and that which is passed down to us. "Hermeneutical experience is concerned with tradition."<sup>88</sup>

Collingwood's view of how knowledge and tradition are handed down helps to illustrate Gadamer and Heidegger's point about the finitude of human knowledge in relation to sublation. Collingwood develops his concept from the point of view that the historian is primarily concerned with 'processes' of history and not events or ideas. 'Traces' from the past are part of our present reality because they live on in the form of historical processes. Unlike an event, a process does not have a clear beginning or end.

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<sup>84</sup> Gadamer, "Hegel and Heidegger," 107. For Heidegger, there is always an element of concealment in every revealing. Thus, truth (*aletheia*) of something is always characterised by some degree of concealment. Therefore, Hegel's project of absolute knowledge is doomed from the start. Gadamer, "Heidegger's Later Philosophy," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 226-7.

<sup>85</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 355.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 359.



Rather processes are transformed and transfigured into new processes. As process  $P_1$  is transfigured into process  $P_2$  there is no point at which we can divide them.

If  $P_1$  has left traces of itself in  $P_2$  so that an historian living in  $P_2$  can discover by the interpretation of evidence that what is now  $P_2$  was once  $P_1$ , it follows that the 'traces' of  $P_1$  in the present are not, so to speak, the corpse of a dead  $P_1$  but rather the real  $P_1$  itself, living and active though incapsulated within the other form of itself  $P_2$ .<sup>89</sup>

Thus, the history is constantly moving and carrying along with it the reality of the past in the present according to Collingwood. When taken in conjunction with what I said earlier about sublation and the negative character of experience, we can see that tradition (and the knowledge it passes down) is not a cumulative process for Gadamer. It is not a steady march towards a more correct or 'true' understanding of a text or the past. The knowledge tradition passes down takes a serpentine path, with twists and turns taking place as a result of the interaction between the past and present. "It is enough to say that we understand in a *different way, if we understand at all.*"<sup>90</sup>

### B. I/Thou and Slave/Master

We do not experience tradition as we experience an object or process which we can learn to govern. A better analogy to explain our experience of tradition is that of a dialogue with another person. Just as we come to know the otherness of our dialogue partner through conversation, so we realise the historical distance between us and the past when we engage our tradition in dialogue. "In the hermeneutical sphere the parallel to this experience of the Thou is what we generally call *historical consciousness.*"<sup>91</sup>

Weinsheimer summarises Gadamer's argument in the following manner:

Tradition is not simply a series of events that one comes to know; it is expression that one comes to understand. Historical tradition is language and expresses itself like a Thou who is the other that self-knowledge requires for self-understanding. Hermeneutic experience consists in dialogue with tradition ...<sup>92</sup>

In order to clearly explicate his position, Gadamer discusses three different kinds of experience of the Thou. The first kind is where we learn to make predictions about the other's character based on our experiences of them. The problem with this is that we

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<sup>89</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 98.

<sup>90</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 297.

<sup>91</sup> "Historical consciousness knows about the otherness of the other, about the past in its otherness, just as the understanding of the Thou knows the Thou as a person." Ibid., 360.

<sup>92</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 205.

reduce the other to a means to reach our ends. This runs into Kant's categorical imperative that the other should never be treated as a means to an end.<sup>93</sup> We objectify tradition if we approach it in this manner. Since this approach can only recognise what is typical or regular, it limits what we can learn from tradition. The result is that it flattens out and constrains what is possible in hermeneutical experience. The second kind of experience of the Thou is where we claim to know what the other is saying from their point of view or even claiming to understand the conversation partner better than they understand themselves. However, this robs the other of his individuality and is a reflection of our effort to dominate others. "The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance."<sup>94</sup> This takes place when we approach tradition by trying to understand it according to general laws and not as something which is historically unique.

The third kind of experience of the Thou is that which characterises effective-historical consciousness. In this kind of experience, we recognise the Thou by letting the other truly say something to us. This involves a two way openness. Experience of this type is based on Hegel's argument concerning the independence and dependence of self-consciousness on others. According to Hegel, self-consciousness is independent and dependent on its relationships with others, inasmuch as, the other is acknowledged. This takes place in the dialectical (or hermeneutical) movements of (1) recognising the other or the outward movement by which we find ourselves at home in the other, and (2) then superseding this outward movement when self-consciousness returns to itself and cancels out the otherness of the other and its own 'other self-consciousness'. Thus, the final movement sublates (cancels out and yet still preserves) the outward and returning movements of self-consciousness in relation to the other person.<sup>95</sup> In coming to know the other, the self comes to a greater realisation and more complete self-understanding.

In the transmission of this concept from Hegel to Gadamer, we can see that the importance of this was not lost on Heidegger.

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<sup>93</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1981), 36.

<sup>94</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 360.

<sup>95</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111-12. A people, nature, and history unfold or develop according to three movements. The analogy Hegel uses is that of a rose plant. In the development of a plant from seed to rose plant, it proceeds from the simple state of its inner potentiality (as a seed) to its explicit actuality (as a mature plant). The final state it reaches, 'in and for itself' takes place when it reproduces seeds (a return to its original simplicity). In a similar manner, people develop from their simple potentiality (in itself) to their explicit actuality (for itself) and finally return to a "being at home with itself", a state of self-consciousness and freedom. *A Hegel Dictionary*, s.v. "Development," 79.



Hearing is constitutive for discourse .... Listening to ... is Dasein's existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others. Indeed, hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being — as in hearing the voice of a friend whom every Dasein carries with it .... Being-with develops in listening to one another [Aufeinander-hören], which can be done in several possible ways: following, going along with, and the privative modes of not-hearing, resisting, defying, and turning away.<sup>96</sup>

According to Gadamer, we should engage tradition in a manner similar to the way in which we genuinely engage someone in dialogue. The result is that the interpreter in reading or studying a text (or any other element of tradition) comes to a greater realisation and more complete understanding of himself and his horizon.

However, an individual cannot carry out this process by him or herself. It requires two participants.<sup>97</sup> The lord/bondsman or master/slave relationship exemplifies what happens if this dialectical relationship between two people is unbalanced.<sup>98</sup> One of them is reduced to that of a thing, or servant. The lord's self-consciousness is related to the things he or she consumes which are produced by the servant.<sup>99</sup> The servant, on the other hand, is held in subjection by the power of the lord over the thing and over himself. While Hegel was interested in providing a sociological critique of human interaction (a person is fully self-conscious only when they recognise the consciousness and freedom of the other) Gadamer picks up these ideas to illustrate the relationship between us and tradition.<sup>100</sup> The reduction of the other person to thinghood, Hegel's lord/servant relationship, is illustrative of the first two kinds of the I/Thou experience. This reduction takes place through the imposition of the methods, such as the principles of historicism. Gadamer comments, "When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person 'understands' the other. Similarly, 'to hear and obey' (auf jemanden hören) does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such people slavish (hörig)."<sup>101</sup> A

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<sup>96</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 206.

<sup>97</sup> "Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both. . . . They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 112.

<sup>98</sup> "But for the recognition proper the moment is lacking, that what the lord does to the other he also does to himself, and what the bondsman does to himself he should also do to the other. The outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal." *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>100</sup> Kisiel, "Ideology Critique and Phenomenology," 154.

<sup>101</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 361. The reduction to the slave/master relationship is a criticism Gadamer levels against method, especially in the sciences. "Each science, as a



methodological approach to history and blind obedience to tradition are forms of the slavish attitude according to Gadamer.

By contrast, the third form of experience is characterised by a mutual openness and interaction between each of the partners. It means that we must be open to the claims which the other makes. "I must allow tradition's claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me."<sup>102</sup> In contrast to the methods of historicism, Gadamer argues that:

Historically effected consciousness rises above such naive comparisons and assimilations by letting itself experience tradition and by keeping itself open to the truth claim encountered in it. The hermeneutical consciousness culminates not in methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma.<sup>103</sup>

It is interesting to note how both Habermas and Gadamer develop Hegel's thought on the lord/servant relationship in different directions. For Habermas, the idea that 'A man is not free until all men are free' is the utopian impulse to his critique of ideology.<sup>104</sup> Gadamer uses this same concept in Hegel to illustrate our relationship to tradition. We must be open to the claims of tradition and must be wary of method since it constrains the possibilities for understanding. Habermas starts from a position which views tradition negatively, as dominating and distorting our understanding.<sup>105</sup> Gadamer rejects this because it is a form of slavishness. Rather he grants tradition its position based on an epistemological argument: we recognise that someone may possess knowledge that is superior to our own. "Authority is rooted in acceptance as a hermeneutical process."<sup>106</sup> While Habermas criticises Gadamer for not possessing an

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science, has in advance projected a field of objects such that to know them *is to govern them*. . . . Once a scientist has discovered the law of a natural process, *he has it in his power*." Ibid., 452-53 italics mine.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 361-62. Gadamer cites Friedrich Schlegel's 25th "Lyceum Fragment" as an example of the imposition of the historiographical principles of correlation and analogy which restricts our understanding of texts before we even read them. Ibid., 452-3.

<sup>104</sup> For Habermas, the critique of ideology is primarily oriented towards the "emancipation from the quasi-natural forces of history and society." Jürgen Habermas, "Knowledge and Interest," trans. Guttorm Florstad, *Inquiry*, IX (1966): 295. Michael Forster presents a concise survey of the different ways in which Hegel has been interpreted. According to his classification, Habermas follows the Marxist reading of Hegel, while Gadamer takes a much more balanced approach to Hegel's work. Forster, "Hegel's Dialectical Method," 168-70.

<sup>105</sup> Nicholson, "Answers to Critical Theory," 156.

<sup>106</sup> Kisiel, "Ideology Critique and Phenomenology," 152-57, quote on page 156. For Habermas' and Gadamer's views on the other's position: Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," trans. Josef Bleicher, in *Contemporary*



ideological critique in his hermeneutic, we can see the seeds of such a critique in Gadamer's appropriation of Hegel at this point. In our dialogue with tradition, we must be sensitive to instances in which this dialogue may have degraded into a pseudo-dialogue in which we are no longer experiencing the third kind of I/Thou encounter.<sup>107</sup>

In summary, the hermeneutical approach to tradition which Gadamer is positing is distinguished by its fundamental openness to the truth claim of tradition which is illustrated in the third kind of experience of the Thou. While Habermas criticises Gadamer for not including any form of ideological critique we can see that Gadamer's adoption of the I/Thou relationship to illustrate our relationship to tradition does contain the seeds for such a critique. The ideal of the authentic I/Thou experience functions as a regulative principle in Gadamer's hermeneutic; an ideal which the interpreter should always be hoping to achieve. Before I turn to Gadamer's appropriation of Collingwood's logic of question and answer, I would like to probe the problem of universal history while I am still discussing Gadamer's appropriation of Hegel.

### C. Gadamer's rejection of Universal History

Gadamer found a model which explained our connection to and understanding of the past in a living and active manner which took place in "thoughtful mediation with contemporary life" in Hegel's dialectic.<sup>108</sup> However, he does not adopt Hegel's teleological program or his idea that historical knowledge is grounded in the idea of a complete system — universal history. Rather than a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, Gadamer bases the mediation of the past and present in the dialogical process that is historically and linguistically finite.<sup>109</sup> Experience does not culminate in absolute knowledge but in openness to the other which results in an infinite dialogue between ourselves and tradition. "If anything does characterise human thought, it is this infinite dialogue with ourselves which never leads anywhere definitely and which differentiates us

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*Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 181-211; Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 26-42.

<sup>107</sup> A similar point is brought out by Ricœur in his essay, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser, (Albany: SUNY, 1986), 300-39. However, Ricœur make a stronger argument than I am at this point.

<sup>108</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 168.

<sup>109</sup> James DiCenso, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study in the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricœur* (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 94-5.

from that ideal of an infinite spirit for which all that exists and all truth lies open in a single moment's vision."<sup>110</sup>

The problem with universal history stems from Hegel's development of the concept in Gadamer's estimation. According to Hegel, a historian did not study the particulars of history but universal world history. Dilthey and others rejected Hegel's *a priori* universal history but maintained the idea that historical understanding of the parts should lead to some form of universal history.<sup>111</sup> There are two main problems with Hegel's view in Gadamer's estimation. First, the concept of absolute spirit which draws every position into itself through dialectical sublation, is not justified.<sup>112</sup> Second, the finitude of human existence places limitations on human knowledge and contradicts Hegel's concept of absolute spirit.<sup>113</sup> Hegel was caught in the contradiction between open progress in history and a "conclusive apprehension of its meaning."<sup>114</sup>

At the same time, Gadamer acknowledges that an essential aspect of our temporal existence is the need for some form of universal history. Both Christians and non-Christians have this need. Even in our finitude, we are constantly moved to questions that are beyond us.<sup>115</sup> However, our concept of universal history must be provisional and open to constant revision since it is a concept which we project from within our historical horizon. "Each projection of universal history has a validity that does not last much longer than the appearance of a flash momentarily cutting across the darkness of the future as well as of the past as it gets lost in the ensuing twilight."<sup>116</sup> This is what he terms the "bad infinite" in "which the end keeps delaying its arrival" in the ceaseless dialogue which we have with tradition.<sup>117</sup> "Gadamer does justice to our urge for unity,

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<sup>110</sup> Gadamer, "Supplement II: To What Extent does Language Perform Thought?" in *Truth and Method*, 543. "Yet no less important than Gadamer's rehabilitation of the Hegelian concept of objective spirit is his repudiation of the possibility of absolute spirit." Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 38.

<sup>111</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 197-8.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 344-45.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 356-57; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," in *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*, vol. 1, trans. Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 121.

<sup>114</sup> Gadamer, "Heritage of Hegel," 40. The teleological dimension to Hegel's thought is not open to the novel and "unfinished character of history." Peter C. Hodgson, "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, vol. 1, ed. John Clayton, Ninian Smart, Patrick Sherry and Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 110.

<sup>115</sup> Gadamer, "Heritage of Hegel," 51.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



but also to the frustration of not achieving it. There is in the bad infinite at once infinite hope and infinite deferral.”<sup>118</sup>

#### D. Pannenberg’s Defence of Universal History

Pannenberg believes that the logical conclusion of Gadamer’s view should lead to a form of universal history. “I myself, induced by H. G. Gadamer’s hermeneutic, have tried to show that the task of interpretation as an attempt to fuse the horizons of the author and the interpreter presupposes the totality of history [*Geschichte*] as its ultimate frame of reference.”<sup>119</sup> The essence and structure of all knowledge is historical. Therefore, it only makes sense that the fusion of horizons should take place in the same context, in history.<sup>120</sup> This continuity does not stop with the present, for the present is only understood in light of the future. Hermeneutical understanding shares the same basic structure of all human understanding. Just as a person only understands the wholeness of his/her life in relation to the whole of reality and his/her effort to be conscious of it, we also need to have a provisional understanding of reality as a whole in order to understand the particulars of history.<sup>121</sup> “Only a conception of the actual course of history linking the past with the present situation and its horizon of the future can form the comprehensive horizon within which the interpreter’s limited horizon of the present and the historical horizon of the text fuse together.”<sup>122</sup>

While Gadamer was correct to reject Hegel’s concept of the future because it ignored the finitude of human existence, he was wrong to dismiss the idea of universal history just because Hegel formulated it incorrectly.<sup>123</sup> According to Pannenberg, we are justified to use the concept of universal history as long as it is provisional and anticipatory in nature.<sup>124</sup> But this raises the theological question of how we can keep the

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<sup>118</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutic*, 37.

<sup>119</sup> Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 284; idem, “Hermeneutics and Universal History,” 115 ff.

<sup>120</sup> Idem, “Hermeneutics and Universal History,” 130-31.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 134-35.

<sup>124</sup> Pannenberg attempts to synthesise two apparently contradictory ideas: universal truth and historically contingent knowledge. First, the subjective, or experiential nature of truth requires a unity between man’s thoughts and the world. The modern understanding of truth in this respect is inherited from our culture’s Christian heritage. “The truth, which is originally God’s truth must become perceptible in the world through man, in the sense of a responsible structuring of the world that measures itself by God.” Second, truth is not timeless and unchanging but is manifest in the contingencies of historical processes and yet “maintains itself through change.” Hegel’s conception of the historicity of truth is the most significant contribution to this concept in Pannenberg’s

future open while at the same time affirming the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? Pannenberg's answer to this question lies in the proleptic nature of the Christ event.

But the Hegelian conception of history is not in fact the only possible one, because the end of history can also be understood as something which is itself only *provisionally* known, and in reflecting upon this provisional character of our knowledge of the end of history, the horizon of the future could be held open and the finitude of human experience preserved. It is precisely this understanding of history as something whose totality is given by the fact that its end has become accessible in a provisional and anticipatory way that is to be gathered today from the history of Jesus in its relationship to the Israelite-Jewish tradition. Hegel was unable to see this because the eschatological character of the message of Jesus remained hidden to him, as was the case with New Testament exegesis of his time.<sup>125</sup>

The end of history occurred in a preliminary way in the resurrection of Jesus. But at the same time, it opened up the possibility of our sharing in it someday based on our relationship with Jesus. In the resurrection, we see the historically conditioned nature of truth and also an anticipatory, proleptic, understanding of universal history, which is still open.<sup>126</sup>

Gadamer felt that Pannenberg's discussion on this point was very useful and admitted that every act of interpretation requires some reference to the future, "and a universal-historical conception is unavoidably one of the dimensions of today's historical consciousness."<sup>127</sup> He does not see any basic difference between his position and Pannenberg's at this point except that "for the Christian theologian the 'practical purpose' of all universal historical conceptions has its fixed point in the absolute history of the Incarnation."<sup>128</sup> However, Pannenberg's point is much stronger than this. The Christ event is the only feasible formulation of universal history available to us, and hermeneutical understanding requires a provisional universal history to function. The incarnation is not just a 'practical purpose' for the theologian. Pannenberg attempts to

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opinion and is very close to the biblical position. The primary modification that Hegel's position requires is to keep the future open to revision. Idem, "What is Truth," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, 2.531.

<sup>125</sup> Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," 135.

<sup>126</sup> Idem, "What is Truth?" 24-25.

<sup>127</sup> Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. David E. Linge (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 36-37. "There is indeed no disputing that the Christian and non-Christian histories of salvation . . . are a legitimate need of the human reason explicitly conscious of its historical character." Idem, "The Heritage of Hegel," 60.

<sup>128</sup> Idem, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," 37.



present a convergence of philosophical and theological hermeneutics in the concept of universal history which is best fulfilled in the Christ event.

This solution satisfactorily meets the legitimate objections against Hegel, since it protects the openness of the future and the contingency of events, and still holds fast to the ultimacy of what appeared in Jesus, which makes possible the unity of truth. *That it alone founds the unity of truth means, however, the demonstration of the truth of the Christian message itself.* This is the sole possible proof of its truth.<sup>129</sup>

The difference between Gadamer and Pannenberg is more than just a matter of degree of emphasis. If Pannenberg's argument is correct, it means that any hermeneutical theory must place more emphasis on the future; it must consider three horizons: the past, the present, and the future.<sup>130</sup> This is especially important for biblical hermeneutics. "Interpretation in the New Testament, however, clearly includes, perhaps even stresses, the horizon of the future and its influence upon interpretation."<sup>131</sup> But this idea is not just limited to theological hermeneutics as Pannenberg claims, "the whole of reality can be understood more deeply and more convincingly through Jesus than without him."<sup>132</sup> This means that Christianity cannot be considered in isolation from wider questions but must be understood in relation to the whole of history.<sup>133</sup> The revelation of God in Jesus Christ also gives us a historical perspective from which we can make better projections, though still provisional, about the universal horizon. "However, if Jesus rose from the dead, and if he is in fact the self-revelation of God, then we will be looking through the *right* prism, our interpretations will have a *focus*, and the hermeneutical circle we experience will truly be 'already' a *spiral* toward that definitive meaning and truth which has 'not yet' arrived."<sup>134</sup>

In conclusion, Gadamer appropriates Hegel's dialectical approach and the I/Thou relationship to explain our living and active relationship to the past. At the same time, he rejects Hegel's absolute spirit and universal history in favour of the bad infinite. Theologically, this position does not do justice to the incarnation. While Pannenberg's proleptic view of universal history is provisional, it is much less transitory than

<sup>129</sup> Pannenberg, "What is Truth?" 26.

<sup>130</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 337.

<sup>131</sup> James Clark McHann Jr., *The Three Horizons: A Study in Biblical Hermeneutics with Special Reference to Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Ph. D. Thesis: University of Aberdeen, 1987), 14.

<sup>132</sup> Pannenberg, "Focal Essay: The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," in *Theology as History*, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, vol. 3 (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1967), 133.

<sup>133</sup> Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 296, McHann, 388.

<sup>134</sup> McHann, 392.

Gadamer's "flash momentarily cutting across the darkness of the future."<sup>135</sup>

Pannenberg's appeal to the Christ event as a proleptic eschatological event which necessarily introduces the question of universal history serves as a needed modification to Gadamer's hermeneutic.

### III. THE EXPANSION OF COLLINGWOOD'S LOGIC OF QUESTION AND ANSWER

#### A. The Return of the Question in Experience

Hegel's philosophy provides one of the starting points for Gadamer's hermeneutic. However, it soon becomes apparent that his hermeneutical approach differs from Hegel's in several significant aspects. In the last section, I tried to show how Gadamer abandoned Hegel's concepts of universal history in favour of his 'bad infinite' and how this was not incompatible with Pannenberg's concept of a provisional view of universal history constructed on the eschatological character of Jesus' life and death. In the section before that, I examined Gadamer's adoption of Hegel's dialectical approach and the I/Thou relationship. What I propose to investigate in the present section is how Gadamer uses Collingwood's logic of question and answer to explain the interrogative nature of our encounter with tradition. Because Collingwood's approach plays a central role not only in Gadamer's hermeneutic but is one of the leading elements of Jauss' reception theory as we shall see in chapters three and four, it is essential that we have an accurate understanding of the logic of question and answer.

We build up generalisations of our knowledge of the world through our experiences (*Erfahrung*). However, this process tends to produce false generalisations which are continually being negated by new experiences. Hegel explained this through the dialectical process that consciousness performs.<sup>136</sup> "According to Hegel, experience has the structure of a reversal of consciousness and hence, it is a dialectical movement."<sup>137</sup> Experience is characterised by negation. Our original fore-conceptions of what the object will be are negated through our experience. What we learn through such an experience transforms our understanding (both in the sense of *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, *Vorgriff*, and conscious understanding). Therefore, it is no longer possible for us to undergo that experience in the same manner again, we cannot experience the *same* thing twice, we cannot re-experience that same experience of negation. As a result, we say that we know better after the experience and in the process both our knowledge and its object

<sup>135</sup> Gadamer, "Heritage of Hegel," 61.

<sup>136</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 49-57.

<sup>137</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 354.



have changed.<sup>138</sup> As we saw above, the mistake Hegel made was to argue that conscious experience of what was different should eventually lead to universal knowledge in which nothing was experienced as alien.<sup>139</sup>

In the pressing forward to its true existence, consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of 'other', at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit. And finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself.<sup>140</sup>

In German there are two words that can convey the English term for 'experience': *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. Dilthey's hermeneutic was built on the term *Erlebnis* which referred to lived, personal experiences which we organise our lives around. They serve to either define or transform how we understand the whole of our lives and they revise the way we understand our past and how we anticipate the future. Dilthey encountered a problem when he tried to move from understanding based on personal experience, *Erlebnis*, to how we understand the experiences of other people in history. He tried to argue that the manner in which we understand ourselves through experience is related to and parallel to historical understanding.<sup>141</sup> But can we move from the coherence of understanding which *Erlebnis* gives to the individual life to historical coherence which is not experienced on an individual level? Can a historian start from smaller units of history and build up to a knowledge of universal history? This was the problem Dilthey never successfully solved.<sup>142</sup>

In contrast to Dilthey, Gadamer uses the term *Erlebnis* in a negative manner in his criticism of aesthetic experience.<sup>143</sup> The term he prefers to describe our encounter with tradition is *Erfahrung*, as Hegel did. *Erfahrung* can be taken in one of two ways. First, it can refer to the scientific meaning of the term, an experience which is repeatable. This is the way Schleiermacher, Ranke, and Droysen understood the term.<sup>144</sup> For them,

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 354, 356; Warnke, *Gadamer*, 26

<sup>139</sup> Bernstein, "From Hermeneutics to Praxis," 97.

<sup>140</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 56-57.

<sup>141</sup> Warnke, *Gadamer*, 30-31

<sup>142</sup> Dilthey attempted to arrive at universal history in order to guard against the threat of relativism. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 224-42.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 55-80.

<sup>144</sup> Warnke, 27 The concept of *Erlebnis* also seems to stand behind one of Troeltsch's three principles of history. According to the principle of analogy Troeltsch claimed we were only able to make judgments of probability if we assumed that our own present experience was not different to the experiences of other people in history. Ernst Troeltsch, "Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1913), 2.729-753; James Hastings ed., *Encyclopedia*



history was an empirical discipline because it could be repeated through the reconstruction of the original context. By contrast, Gadamer is interested in the second meaning of the term *Erfahrung* as a learning experience which negates and reverses our previous understanding. This results in a person who is more open to other experiences and capable of learning from them.<sup>145</sup> As a result, we can say that not every experience is an experience (*Erfahrung*) in the manner in which Gadamer uses the term. Negation, the 'reversal of consciousness,' and expansion of our horizon are some of the crucial elements which characterise a true experience, *Erfahrung*. Another crucial difference between the two terms is that *Erlebnis* is first-hand experience while *Erfahrung* is a form of knowledge that can be learned vicariously.<sup>146</sup> Weinsheimer and Marshall provide an excellent summary of Gadamer's use of the term *Erfahrung*.

This kind of 'experience' is not the residue of isolated moments, but an ongoing integrative process in which what we encounter widens our horizons but only by overturning an existing perspective, which we can then perceive was erroneous or at least narrow. Its effect, therefore, is not simply to make us 'knowing,' to add to our stock of information, but to give us that implicit sense of broad perspectives, of the range of human life and culture, and of our own limits, that constitutes a non-dogmatic wisdom.<sup>147</sup>

Gadamer does not stop at Hegel but incorporates Plato's dialectic and the Socratic dialogue in his formulation of the hermeneutical role of experience.<sup>148</sup> Whenever we experience something, we experience it as either this or that. It is because we don't know what our experience will be that we need to ask questions. "We cannot have experiences without asking questions."<sup>149</sup>

There are three aspects to the questioning nature of experience which are crucial for Gadamer's hermeneutic. The first is that we must recognise our ignorance in order to

*of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), s.v. "Historiography," by Ernst Troeltsch, 6.718.

<sup>145</sup> For Gadamer "experience finds its fulfillment not in knowledge per se, but in a knowledge that opens onto ever new experiences. Hence Gadamer replaces the Hegelian conception of absolute knowledge with the phenomenological conception of experience which is finite through and through, whereby philosophy becomes an unending hermeneutical exposition rather than the drive toward a consummated system." Kisiel, "Ideology Critique and Phenomenology," 159.

<sup>146</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 87.

<sup>147</sup> Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, "Translator's Preface," in *Truth and Method*, xiii.

<sup>148</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 464; Frederick G. Lawrence, "Translator's Introduction," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, xxi; Sullivan documents how these concepts were formulated by Gadamer during the very early stages of his academic career from his research on Aristotle and Plato. Robert R. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics: The Early Thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989).

<sup>149</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.



ask a question which reveals something about the object. There must be an openness to the questions we ask because the answer has not yet been settled. In contrast to assertions and propositions which flatten and reduce meaning, questions allow meaning to emerge through our dialogical experience in a conversation with a partner or text.<sup>150</sup> Second, an open question contains both positive and negative judgements. This is similar to Hegel's thesis and antithesis. However, instead of the sublation of both the positive and negative judgements (thesis and antithesis) into a higher synthesis, Gadamer argues that knowledge results when we judge something correct and exclude what is wrong.<sup>151</sup> "What decides a question is the preponderance of reasons for the one and against the other possibility."<sup>152</sup> The process of gaining knowledge in this way requires that we are able to consider and project possibilities for the subject-matter, of its "being like this and being like that" which results in the exclusion of other possibilities.<sup>153</sup>

The third aspect to the questioning nature of experience concerns two elements or areas from which questions arise. The first area from which questions arise is the subject-matter, *die Sache*. "To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject-matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented."<sup>154</sup> Genuine questioning requires openness for the claims of the other to be considered. This creates the hermeneutical space for all the other possibilities of meaning to come into play. It does not mean that we leave the subject-matter undecided, but that we ask questions about it until the truth emerges. A question must be directed *at* the subject-matter.<sup>155</sup> The advantage to the logic of question and answer is that it is directed toward what we can learn from the subject-matter of a text. The second area from which questions arise is the horizon of the questioner. Our questions arise from our present concerns. This means that our horizon limits the possibilities or openness of the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 469. "Thus Gadamer concludes: 'In the assertion, the horizon of meaning of what actually wants to be said is concealed with methodical exactitude,' — precisely by its abstraction from the background of what is unsaid." Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," 124.

<sup>151</sup> Sullivan, 85.

<sup>152</sup> Gadamer, 365.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>155</sup> Gadamer develops this concept from Aristotle and Hegel. From Aristotle, Gadamer argues that the appropriate form of knowledge and questioning is conditioned by the subject matter which it is addressing. And from Hegel he takes the idea that the dialectical movement of consciousness is always directed at *die Sache*. Bernstein, 107 note 33. "I repeat again what I have often insisted upon: every hermeneutical understanding begins and ends with the thing itself." Gadamer, "Problem of Historical Consciousness," 159.

questions which can be asked.<sup>156</sup> Thus, there is a double hermeneutic to the structure of question and answer. On the one hand, we have an object or text which is the product of a historical situation and on the other hand, we have a questioner who is situated in a different historical horizon. Gadamer is taking a very balanced approach here. While he argues that our historical horizon definitely determines the perspective from which we question the text and as a result reveals certain aspects of the subject-matter, which other horizons may not, he also maintains that we can get at what *die Sache* truly is.

The important point about effective-historical consciousness, then, is not only that inquiry is always oriented by our concerns; although Gadamer makes this point, his argument is also that inquiry is always inquiry into a subject-matter and that the consensus reached about this subject-matter can reveal something 'true' about it.<sup>157</sup>

### B. Collingwood's Logic of Question and Answer

In order to fully explicate the value of the logic of question and answer for history and hermeneutics, Gadamer turned to the person he called the 'English Hegelian,' R. G. Collingwood.<sup>158</sup> As Collingwood walked through Kensington Gardens day by day on his way to work during World War I, the Alfred Memorial began to obsess him. He began to ask himself what the architect had been attempting to accomplish when he designed this memorial. "What relation was there, I began to ask myself, between what he had done and what he had tried to do? Had he tried to produce a beautiful thing; a thing, I meant, which we should have thought beautiful? If so, he had of course failed."<sup>159</sup> From this experience and his archaeological background he derived the premise that knowledge arose through asking the right questions. Statements and judgements about the past do not constitute historical knowledge by themselves. They

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<sup>156</sup> "That an open question is not infinitely open means that it too is a leading question and gives direction, but its openness consists in its leading in several possible directions to several possible answers." Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 207.

<sup>157</sup> Warnke, *Gadamer*, 146. The mistake that Richard Rorty makes in his appropriation of Gadamer is that he reduces the double hermeneutic to a single hermeneutic. He ignores Gadamer's concern for the subject-matter and as a result "All descriptions rather reflect 'ways of coping' that refer simply to the purpose of those who forge them." *Ibid.*, 145; Bernstein, 97. See Rorty's arguments on this point in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 357-359; *idem*, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4-9.

<sup>158</sup> While Collingwood does not use the term hermeneutics, his program of history as an imaginative reconstruction of the past is hermeneutical. This is done through evidence found in the present and a re-enactment of the past thoughts. The goal is to know oneself, not to know the past as the past. John P. Hogan, "Hermeneutics and the Logic of Question and Answer: Collingwood and Gadamer," *Heythrop Journal* 28 (1987), 264.

<sup>159</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 29.



must be understood in relation to the questions which they sought to answer. "I began by observing that you cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must know what the question was ... to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer."<sup>160</sup>

Collingwood's logic of question and answer has a three part structure. First, each question and answer must be relevant and appropriate to the context in which it occurs.<sup>161</sup> The second and third elements of the logic of question and answer concern the 'rightness' of the relationship between the question and the answer.<sup>162</sup> The idea that each question and answer must be relevant and appropriate to the context in which it occurs follows the hermeneutical circle between the part and the whole. As a 'part', the question or answer belongs to a 'whole' context. Gadamer comments, "What convinced me about Collingwood's logic of question and answer was not its methodological usefulness, which is ultimately trivial, but its validity (that transcends all methodological usage) according to which question and answer are utterly entangled with one another."<sup>163</sup> As such, the question and answer must be fitting to its position within a particular context. The interpreter's problem is that the original question, to which the text is an answer, is often left unstated in the text and is forgotten over time. In order to find out what the original question was, requires the use of historical methods since it is a historical problem.<sup>164</sup> Collingwood also recognises that the interpreter's understanding of the question which the text originally sought to answer always arises from within the horizon of the interpreter and will not be identical to the original question.<sup>165</sup>

It is not a passive surrender to the spell of another's mind; it is a labour of active and therefore critical thinking. The historian not only re-enacts past thought, he re-enacts it in the context of his own knowledge and therefore, in re-enacting it,

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>162</sup> See the following section, "The Rightness of the Question," for a discussion of the second and third parts to the logic of question and answer.

<sup>163</sup> Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel," 46. Question and answer is dialectical by nature. "The logic of question and answer proved itself a dialectic of question and answer in which question and answer are constantly exchanged and are dissolved in the movement of understanding." Ibid., 47.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>165</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 29.

criticizes it, forms his own judgement of its value, corrects whatever errors he can discern in it.<sup>166</sup>

This is seen in his third axiom concerning the reenactment of past thought by the historian. “Historical knowledge is the re-enactment of past thought incapsulated in a context of present thoughts which, by contradicting it, confine it to a plane different from theirs.”<sup>167</sup> At this point, there is a subtle but significant difference between Collingwood and Gadamer. Gadamer criticises Collingwood for attempting to reconstruct the original question according to the intentions of the author or agent.<sup>168</sup> Instead, Gadamer argues that just as the meaning of the text goes beyond what the author intended, the interpreter’s understanding of the text should be concerned with the meaning of the text itself.<sup>169</sup> However, Collingwood’s position is not that far from Gadamer’s on this point. For Collingwood, the historian re-enacts past thought in the present by interpreting the evidence available to him — a process that is close to Gadamer’s interpretation of a text.<sup>170</sup>

### *1. Substantive and Genetic Understanding*

John Hogan suggests that we can, in a very general way, differentiate their approaches by labelling Collingwood’s approach ‘contextualist’ and Gadamer’s ‘textualist’.<sup>171</sup> Gadamer makes a distinction between two forms of knowledge of truth: substantive and genetic. Substantive knowledge occurs when we understand the ‘truth’ of something, we understand *die Sache* of the text. When we see the ‘truth’ of Euclid’s theorem that the sum of the square of the sides of a right triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse we have achieved a form of substantive understanding. This is what Hogan would term as a textualist form of understanding. Genetic understanding is needed when we cannot attain substantive understanding, “when one cannot see the point of what someone else is saying or doing that one is forced to explore the conditions under which that person says or does it.”<sup>172</sup> We must investigate the background

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<sup>166</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History: With Lectures 1926-1928*, revised ed., Jan van der Dussen ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 215.

<sup>167</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 114.

<sup>168</sup> Gadamer cites Collingwood’s approach to the Battle of Trafalgar as an example of this in, *Truth and Method*, 371-73.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>170</sup> Hogan, “Hermeneutics and the Logic of Question and Answer,” 273.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 273-274. In a footnote to this section Hogan points out that neither should be tagged as a contextualist or textualist. *Ibid.*, 283, note 51.

<sup>172</sup> Warnke, *Gadamer*, 8. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 180-81; idem, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 45-46.



conditions as to why someone wrote something, what was the historical situation which occasioned their writing what they did, so that we can understand why the author wrote what they did. A problem arises in Gadamer's hermeneutic in that he stresses substantive form of understanding and reduces the genetic understanding into the former.

Gadamer fails adequately to distinguish these two senses of agreement, one of which entails a concrete unity of judgment and the other reflective and critical integration. In reducing the second sense of agreement to the first, moreover, he slips from investigation of the conditions of understanding to the basically conservative thesis according to which we are not only members of a tradition but also its ideological supporters.<sup>173</sup>

Georgia Warnke brings out the point that an interpreter can still be interested in genetic questions (background and context) even if he already understands *die Sache*. For example, we may want to understand how the Greeks came to discover geometry even after we understand Euclidean theorems. "To this extent Gadamer seems to have overstated his case in claiming that genetic questions arise only when understanding in its strongest sense has failed."<sup>174</sup>

If this reading of Gadamer is correct, then we must maintain both substantive and genetic forms of understanding as playing different yet essential roles in hermeneutic understanding. This is one area in which the work of Hans Robert Jauss strengthens the hermeneutical tradition he inherits from Gadamer. For Jauss, both forms of understanding are crucial; we not only need to pay careful attention to the subject-matter of the text, but we must also investigate the conditions in which the text was produced and first received if we are to have an adequate understanding of it.<sup>175</sup>

## 2. *Matthew 28: Substantive and Genetic Understanding*

The contrast between Barth, Bultmann, and Jeremias' comments on Matthew 28:18-20 provide an illustration into the differences, problems, and values of substantive and genetic forms of understanding.<sup>176</sup> Barth's exegesis of the Great Commission provides an excellent example of a substantive approach to Matthew 28:18-20.<sup>177</sup> "Barth's concern was not limited to a detailed historical and exegetical study of the

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<sup>173</sup> Warnke, 106.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>175</sup> See my discussion of this point in chapter 3, theses 2-4.

<sup>176</sup> The contrast between Barth's and Bultmann's hermeneutics was brought to my attention in: Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1991), 129-45.

<sup>177</sup> Karl Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Mt. 28:18-20," in *The Theology of Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961): 55-71.

words, sentences or concepts. Rather *he aimed at bringing to light the subject-matter of the text.*"<sup>178</sup> According to Barth, this passage must be understood in light of the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>179</sup> The resurrection and affirmation of Jesus' authority in 28:18 is the basis for the commission. Jesus has the right and power to command the disciples the way he does and those who submit to the commission in Matthew 28:18-20 fall under Jesus' authority in a more intimate manner.<sup>180</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples" not only founded the apostolic church, but it is a commission which was designed to be renewed with each successive generation.

In the same manner Jesus 'made' apostles from the first disciples (Mark 3:14-15), the apostles are called to make apostolic Christians of all others. . . . It is constantly renewed as listeners themselves become 'apostolic' and, as new disciples, begin to proclaim the good news."<sup>181</sup>

Barth defined the scope of the commission, "to all nations," according to two principles. First, it referred to people from every nation who were "received into discipleship." These people then bring their respective nations within the reach of Jesus' teachings.<sup>182</sup> Second, it referred to people from the Gentile lands along with Israel. Jesus' grace was offered to the Gentiles because Israel had rejected it. The result was the recapitulation of the old Israel and the birth of the new eschatological community which was gathered from Jews and Gentiles.<sup>183</sup> "Baptising" and "teaching" described the manner in which disciples were to be made. Baptism was "the priestly function of objectively introducing others into the realm of God's reign." This "messianic power" was originally exercised by Jesus; but now it has been delegated to his disciples. The baptism phrase was not a liturgical formula but spoke of the particular type of baptism that was to be administered.<sup>184</sup> "Teaching" was the transferral of Jesus' prophetic office

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<sup>178</sup> Jeanrond, 130.

<sup>179</sup> This was a unique event in history, it was "the presence of the eschaton." It was the "recapitulation of the history of Israel" and the inauguration of Jesus' reign in the church and the whole world. Barth., 57.

<sup>180</sup> "As the holder of this *exousia* Jesus stands behind the command of verse 19; he is the authority to those whom he sends out, and as such guarantees the implementation of the command to the disciples as well as against interference of third parties. Those who accept the command fall under this *exousia*; they are responsible to and covered by this authority." Ibid., 61.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>183</sup> "As recapitulation and anticipation, revealing the hidden reality of the eschatological community, the Great Commission is truly the most genuine utterance of the risen Jesus." Ibid., 67; 64.

<sup>184</sup> "Baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit means to give to someone the cleansing bath which certifies to him and to others that he belongs to this God." Ibid., 67.



to nurture and guide others in the ways and works of disciples. They were to teach without omission the entirety of what Christ had commanded them. Therefore, teaching in the church could “only be repetitive of apostolic teaching.”<sup>185</sup> In this manner, Barth explicates Matthew 28:18-20 in a substantive manner by discussing the subject-matter of the text and the claims which he believes it makes upon the contemporary reader.<sup>186</sup>

In order to illustrate genetic understanding, I would like to make use of two different examples. First, Bultmann approached Matthew 28:18-20 by means of the historical-critical method and form criticism.<sup>187</sup> This passage met two needs within the early church according to Bultmann. First, it gave them the assurance there was life after death. As such, it fell within the category of “Passion” stories, which were developed to teach that Jesus was victorious over death.<sup>188</sup>

To this class most particularly belong the Easter stories. It was only natural for belief in the resurrection of Jesus to find immediate expression in such stories; and doubtless such stories were already in circulation in the Palestinian Church. They then grew rapidly and were developed in various ways, and the Easter stories which we now read in the Synoptics have all received their form in the Hellenistic Church.<sup>189</sup>

Second, as the rite of baptism became more important the early church developed ‘legends’ about this ritual. According to Bultmann, Matthew’s record of the last appearance of Jesus was a legend which provided an authoritative basis for the ritual of baptism and was appended to the story of the empty tomb in the second century.<sup>190</sup>

If we compare Bultmann with Barth on this passage, we see that Bultmann’s genetic approach weakens the claim of the text as expressed in Barth’s interpretation. It

<sup>185</sup> “They need to be nurtured in this service in order that their works may become those of disciples and a Christian community may exist in the world. It exists only where the things commanded by Jesus are ‘observed.’ This nurturing of the Gentiles who, by baptism, become servants of the Triune God, is the task of the apostles. As the witnesses to Jesus’ life and resurrection, they are entrusted with the task for all times and in all places. All others receive it only from them secondhand.” *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>186</sup> The goal of exegesis for Barth was that God might reveal himself through the words of the scriptures. “God’s revelation in the human word of Holy Scripture not only wants but can make itself said and heard.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1969), I/2. 502.

<sup>187</sup> The presupposition which the interpreter can never dismiss is the historical-critical method for studying the Bible. Rudolf Bultmann, “Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?,” trans. Schubert M. Ogden, in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 291.

<sup>188</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (N.Y.: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 288.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>190</sup> “We have indicated how the story of Baptism quickly became a cult legend in the Hellenistic Church. We must in the same way also recognize the command to baptize in Matt. 28:16-20 as a cult legend.” *Ibid.*, 306; 151, 157, 286.

also seems to fall prey to Gadamer's criticism that method can constrain the possibilities of the text. In this instance, the claim of the Great Commission is not heard because the method closed off that possibility in advance.

Jeremias provides us with the second example of someone seeking a genetic understanding of the text when he compares Matthew 28:18-20 with the cultural background of coronation rituals in the ancient East. These rituals consisted of three actions: (1) the elevation, (2) the presentation or proclamation, and (3) the enthronement of the new king. Jeremias tries to show how these elements are contained Matthew 28:18-20.<sup>191</sup> Jeremias saw this coronation of Jesus as a literary device used by Matthew to signify that the Kingdom of God had come as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection. While his conclusions are similar to Barth's, he arrived at it by investigating the historical background in which the text arose, through genetic understanding.<sup>192</sup> In this example, substantive and genetic understanding complement one another. Not only that, but Jeremias' results strengthen Barth's interpretation by helping the modern reader to grasp the expression of the claim to royal authority which the original readers and hearers would have experienced in this passage. However, as the example from Bultmann demonstrated, we must be careful which methods we employ in genetic studies because of the manner in which a method has the possibility of closing off our openness to the claims of the text.

### 3. *The Rightness of the Question*

If the first part of structure of the logic of question and answer is that the question and the answers it receives must be relevant and appropriate to the context in which it occurs, the second and third parts concern the 'rightness' of the question. The second part concerns the rightness of the question to the subject-matter under study. "Each question had to 'arise'."<sup>193</sup> By this Collingwood means that the question must be related to and appropriate to the subject-matter of the text. If this dimension of the question is missing, then we tend to classify it as a bad question and possibly refuse to

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<sup>191</sup> Jeremias is indebted to Otto Michel for recognizing this in Matt. 28:18-20. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1958; reprint Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 39.

<sup>192</sup> "Hence the implication of Matt. 28:18-20 is that with the death and resurrection of Jesus the eschatological hour has arrived. God no longer limits his saving grace to Israel, but turns in mercy to the whole Gentile world. Henceforth the eschatological people of God are to announce to all nations that they too belong to the kingdom of the Son of Man." *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>193</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 37.



answer it, “there must be that about it whose absence we condemn when we refuse to answer a question that it ‘doesn’t arise’.”<sup>194</sup>

Third, the answer must be the ‘right’ answer for the question. Collingwood is very careful in his choice of the term ‘right’ to describe the relation between question and answer. By ‘right’ he does not mean ‘true’. Rather, “The ‘right’ answer to a question is the answer which enables us to get ahead with the process of questioning and answering.”<sup>195</sup> Collingwood uses the example of a question which Socrates asked, “would you rather play draughts with a just person or a person who knows how to play the game?” The true answer, based on logic, would be the just person since it assumes that justice and playing a game of draughts are compatible. However, the right answer is the second person since it forms a link with the chain of questioning in that they move the process forward through correlation or clarification.<sup>196</sup> Collingwood’s logic of question and answer redefines how we view terms such as truth and meaning. “Whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, depends on what question it was meant to answer; and anyone who wishes to know whether a given proposition is true or false, significant or meaningless, must find out what question it was meant to answer.”<sup>197</sup>

The basis for this is found in Collingwood’s criticism of propositional logic. The mistake propositional forms of logic make is that they link truth and meaning with grammar. And grammar is further reduced to the unit of thought found in the indicative sentence. Instead, Collingwood argues that every proposition is an answer to a question and you cannot understand the truth value or meaning of a proposition unless you know the question which it answers.<sup>198</sup> “It seemed to me that truth, if that meant the kind of thing which I was accustomed to pursue in my ordinary work as a philosopher or historian ... something that belonged not to any single proposition, nor even, as the coherence theorists maintained, to a complex of propositions taken together; but to a

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<sup>194</sup> A question which is related to or appropriate for the subject matter “is what we ordinarily call a sensible or intelligent question, not a silly one, or in my terminology it ‘arises’.” Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 33-37. For Collingwood the meaning of a statement is not a constant, “but is a variable which depends on the question it comes to answer. Even the truth value of a statement, he was bold enough to assert, can vary from question to question.” Joseph Agassi, “Questions of Science and Metaphysics,” *The Philosophical Forum*, 5 (1974), 536.

complex consisting of questions and answers.”<sup>199</sup> Collingwood gives the following two statements as an example: “The contents of this box are one thing” and “The contents of this box are many things”. According to propositional theories of truth and logic, these statements appear to be contradictory. However, if we look at them from the logic of question and answer the contradiction disappears because they may have been the answer to the following two questions: “Are the contents of the box one chess set or many?” and “Are the contents of the box one chess piece or many?” The contradiction which a critic may have accused the person of making in their statements was never part of the person’s thought or answers. Rather, the contradiction was “foisted upon it by the critic.”<sup>200</sup>

This is a significant point for the history of a text’s interpretation or influence. The logic of question and answer helps to explain how we may have different interpretations of a passage of scripture through a tradition without being contradictory or being reduced to incommensurable paradigms of interpretation. *If interpretations are judged on the basis of their rightness, then there can be more than one ‘right’ interpretation. This stands in opposition to the traditional view that the interpretation should be ‘true’, implying that there is only one correct interpretation. However, just because there can be more than one right interpretation it does not mean that there are no wrong interpretations.*

While Collingwood does not explicitly define his view of history as hermeneutical, his logic of question and answer is very hermeneutical. For Collingwood, the past has no value until it is interpreted by someone in the present. “The questioning process, under the influence of history, goes on, forming a spiral gradually replacing error with truth, but remaining essentially open.”<sup>201</sup> This is very compatible with Gadamer’s concept of the process of the transmission of a tradition and our interpretations of the texts within that tradition. In this process, our prejudices undergo a filtering process as inappropriate prejudices or questions are replaced with appropriate ones. The questioning process possesses the characteristics of Gadamer’s ‘bad infinite’ also. “Each generation and each individual raises new questions and gains a different perspective on history. For that reason the questioning process goes on, and *history must be re-written by each generation.*”<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 37.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>201</sup> Hogan, “Hermeneutics and the Logic of Question and Answer,” 269.

<sup>202</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 86 emphasis mine.



### C. Gadamer's Dialogical Question and Answer

Like Heidegger and Hegel, Collingwood's influence on Gadamer is difficult to underestimate. "Gadamer's enthusiasm for Collingwood's logic of question and answer is almost total."<sup>203</sup> However, Gadamer moves beyond Collingwood in two particular lines of thought. The first concerns the dialogical nature of understanding and the second concerns the expansion of horizons which the logic of question and answer enables.

#### 1. Gadamer's Devaluation of Answers

As we saw above, Gadamer attempts to seek a balance between the subject-matter, *die Sache*, and the interpreter and her horizon. This involves a double hermeneutic. This is the first adaptation Gadamer makes to Collingwood's logic of question and answer. Gadamer agrees with Collingwood's axiom that we can only understand a text or statement when we have understood it as a question. However, for Gadamer, not only does the historian ask questions about the text but at the same time he or she is questioned by the text. "I have moved a step beyond the logic of question and answer as Collingwood had developed it, in that not only does one's world orientation, as he held, find expression in what develops between the speaking of question and answer; it also happens to us from the side of the things [*Dingen*] that are the topic of conversation. That is to say, the subject-matter [*Sache*] 'raises questions' [*'gibt Fragen auf*]." <sup>204</sup> He adopts Collingwood's argument that we must understand the question to which the text is a response. But then he goes beyond Collingwood — to understand a text as a question we must see it as a real question for us also.<sup>205</sup>

For Collingwood, the questioning process is initiated from the interpreter's side, questions only arise from 'real' life situations of the interpreter.<sup>206</sup> However, at the same time we can see that the seeds of Gadamer's dialogical approach are inherent in Collingwood. The question which arises from the practical life situations of the

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<sup>203</sup> Hogan, 270. Gadamer considered Collingwood's *Autobiography* so significant he is responsible for its translation and publication in German. Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel," 64-65, note 14; *Truth and Method*, 370, note 315.

<sup>204</sup> Gadamer, "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey," trans. Richard E. Palmer, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, *Library of Living Philosophers*, vol. 24, Paul Arthur Schilipp and Lewis Edwin Hahn eds. (Chicago and London: Open Court, 1997), 43.

<sup>205</sup> Georgia Warnke, "Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences: A Gadamerian Critique of Rorty," *Inquiry*, 28 (1985), 349.

<sup>206</sup> "Every historical problem ultimately arises out of 'real' life." Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 114.

interpreter may lead to the questions which the text originally sought to answer or may raise new questions which the interpreter must answer. As the interpreter asks questions of the text, new questions arise in response to the answers he receives. Collingwood touches on this in his discussion of Lord Nelson's asking whether he should remove his military decorations in the midst of a battle. "No question that arises in this primary series, the series constituting my 'real' life, ever requires the answer 'in honour I won them, in honour I will die with them.'" However, a question from the primary series of 'real' life situation of the interpreter may lead to questions of another dimension, "and there live a life in which I not merely think about Nelson but am Nelson, and thus in thinking about Nelson think about myself."

Such secondary questions are 'incapsulated' according to Collingwood. By incapsulation, he means that such questions or thoughts are "perfectly alive" but are not part of the real life of the interpreter. There is a distance between the interpreter and the text or historical event of the past, a distance of which the interpreter remains conscious. At the same time, the processes and elements of our tradition which are passed down to us are incapsulated in the present.<sup>207</sup> This is summarised in Collingwood's third axiom about history, "Historical knowledge is the re-enactment of past thought *incapsulated* in a context of present thoughts which, by *contradicting it, confine it to a plane different from theirs.*"<sup>208</sup> Incapsulation can be seen as the means by which the text of the past contradicts, negates, challenges, or questions the horizon of the interpreter in a certain sense. In my discussion of Hegel's concept of sublation, I mentioned that Collingwood makes a parallel argument in that history is constituted by processes which are constantly being transformed and re-configured into new processes. In this way, the 'traces' of the past are truly present in the contemporary world. The past lives on in the present by being incapsulated in it. One of the tasks of the historian or interpreter of a text from the past is to raise to consciousness how the past is incapsulated in the present.

But suppose the past lives on in the present; though incapsulated in it, and at first sight it is hidden beneath the present's contradictory and more prominent features, it is still alive and active; then the historian may very well be related to the non-historian as the trained woodsman is to the ignorant traveller. 'Nothing

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 113, 141-42. Collingwood makes the analogy to a person who stops smoking but the desire to smoke remains incapsulated in him. The same phenomenon happens within cultures. We may think that once a society denounces something like warfare the residue of such thoughts will be gone within a generation or two. However, while the first generation may give it up, it is still incapsulated in what is passed down to future generations in the shape of stories about heroism or the glories of a just war. Ibid., 142.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 114 italics mine.



here but trees and grass', thinks the traveller, and marches on. 'Look', says the woodsman, 'there is a tiger in the grass.' The historian's business is to reveal the less obvious features hidden from a careless eye in the present situation. What history can bring to moral and political life is a trained eye for the situation in which one has to act.<sup>209</sup>

In pointing out the tiger in the grass, the way in which the traveller looks upon the forest is changed. His previous understanding has been negated and this situation will never appear the same way to him again. Thus, Gadamer's work can be seen to be a genuine development or expansion of Collingwood's thought in this particular area.

Is Gadamer's idea that the logic of question and answer is dialogical by nature — not only does the interpreter ask questions of the text but the text asks questions of the interpreter — valid? Pannenberg thinks that while Gadamer is basically correct in his thought on this point, his argument needs to be slightly modified. He argues that Gadamer has underestimated the value and role which assertions play in any act of communication, especially those involving the study of texts from the past. Gadamer denies the value of assertions because they disguise the fact that as a statement they are an answer to a question and in doing so it "conceals the priority of the question and so also its past, the process of conversation by which it arose."<sup>210</sup> Assertions also sever what one is attempting to communicate from the totality of its unexpressed horizon of meaning. "Thus Gadamer concludes: 'In the assertion, the horizon of meaning of what actually wants to be said is concealed with methodical exactitude,' — precisely by its abstraction from the background of what is unsaid."<sup>211</sup>

The problem with assertions and statements for Gadamer is how they are employed by 'method' to achieve exactness. Giving a statement while under interrogation is an example of this. "In a statement the horizon of meaning of what is to be said is concealed by methodical exactness; what remains is the 'pure' sense of the statements."<sup>212</sup> This always results in a flattening and reduction of meaning. However,

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>210</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 206. A question also limits the truth claims of an assertion. "For what then is a question? Surely something that one has to understand and that one does understand only when one understands the question itself in terms of something, that is, as an answer; and in doing so one limits the dogmatic claim of any proposition." Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel," 46-47.

<sup>211</sup> Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," 124.

<sup>212</sup> Gadamer, 469. Gadamer is drawing on Heidegger's concept that assertions are a mode of Being-in-the-world but at the same time they restrict the range of understanding. In making an assertion we reveal or bring attention to a definite aspect of something. For example, we may point out that the hammer is too heavy or broken. At the same time, while communicating an aspect of how something shows itself, we also restrict our view

Pannenberg is much more positive about the role of assertions and argues that communication would not be possible without assertions.<sup>213</sup> In order to restore a text to its original context requires the use of assertions to explicate what was written and its background. Gadamer's hermeneutic requires the use of assertions if there is to be a fusion of horizons according to Pannenberg. Coming to an understanding about a subject-matter of a conversation (or fusion of horizons) involves the predicative sense of language. But the predicative character of language is always proportional: it always involves a degree of objectivity and subjectivity.<sup>214</sup> This is not the same type of positivistic or methodological use of statements that restrict language to which Gadamer objected.<sup>215</sup> Thus, Pannenberg's defence of the role of assertions seems to be a valid criticism and correction which helps to modify Gadamer's hermeneutic and restore a balance between questions *and* answers from Gadamer's polemical argument in favor of the question.<sup>216</sup>

## 2. Gadamer: Questions and Horizons

The second manner in which Gadamer expands Collingwood's logic of question and answer concerns the potential of questions to expand the horizon of the interpreter. While this concept can be easily found in Collingwood's work (for example, in his illustration of the woodsman and the tiger in the grass), Gadamer elaborates how this expansion of horizons occurs.<sup>217</sup> In order to understand how questions function in this manner, we need to understand his view of the Socratic dialectic. Socrates based his philosophical method on the art of asking questions. In order for two people to have conversation with the possibility of reaching a mutual understanding about a subject-matter, both partners in the dialogue must realise that they do not possess all the answers

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of it. This restriction of view closes down the possibilities of understanding something. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 197-99.

For Heidegger, "assertions modify rather than annihilate the significance-structure of interpretation — it dwindles or is simplified rather than being negated." Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, in *Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks*, ed. Tim Crane and Jonathan Wolff (London and N.Y.: Routledge, 1996), 91.

<sup>213</sup> Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," 125.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>215</sup> Sullivan brings this out very clearly in his discussion of *Bildung* and *Altertumswissenschaft* as the background to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics*, 20-52.

<sup>216</sup> Gadamer privileges the quest and question over knowledge and method which seek exactness. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.

<sup>217</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 100.



but are concerned with finding the answers.<sup>218</sup> If assertions flatten and reduce the content of meaning, they also close off the possibility for further conversation and questioning.<sup>219</sup> Whereas the openness in the form of the question preserves the possibility for further disclosures of truth. In fact, the openness of the question comes from the fact that the answer is not yet settled. "Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing. That is why we cannot understand the questionableness of something without asking real questions .... To understand the questionableness of something is already to be questioning."<sup>220</sup>

Questions by nature are restricted and at the same time uncontrolled. They are restricted in the sense that they arise from within the horizon of the interpreter. They arise from our preconceptions and prejudices. "They [questions] are bounded by a horizon. Within this horizon, openness consists in the possibility of the thing's being this way or that; but each of these possibilities must have been determined beforehand, and their determinacy marks the limits of a question's horizon."<sup>221</sup> The question is also restricted by the subject-matter of the text, it must be appropriate to the subject-matter. At the same time, the question is not determined or under the control of a subject who questions the text. Questions come upon us like a sudden idea, *ein Einfall*. It is the sudden revelation of *the question* that advances the openness and possibilities of understanding and makes an answer possible.

The real nature of the sudden idea is perhaps less that a solution occurs to us like an answer to a riddle than that a question occurs to us that breaks through into the open and thereby makes an answer possible. Every sudden idea has the structure of a question. But the sudden occurrence of the question is already a breach in the smooth front of popular opinion. Hence we say that a question too 'occurs' to us, that it 'arises' or 'presents itself' more than that we raise it or present it.<sup>222</sup>

The interpreter is struck with questions from two directions, they come upon him like a sudden idea and they arise from the subject-matter of the text.

However, Gadamer wants to avoid any dichotomy between subject and object and therefore argues that these questions merge with one another in the "play" of reading

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<sup>218</sup> Socrates would question his opponents to reveal that their arguments were not as secure or sound as they assumed. In this way he placed them on an equal footing with him so that they could engage in an open discussion starting from a position of ignorance. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics*, 80-83; 104-7.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-84.

<sup>220</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 375.

<sup>221</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 207.

<sup>222</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 366.

or interpretation.<sup>223</sup> The interpreter is also the interpreted, in the play of interpretation the interpreter questions the text and the text places questions to the interpreter for which he/she does not already possess an answer. The question which the text addresses to us is related to the question which the text originally answered in such a way that we cannot understand the one without the other. “With Collingwood, we can say that we understand only when we understand the question to which something is the answer, but the intention of what is understood in this way does not remain foregrounded against our own intention. Rather, reconstructing the question to which the meaning of a text is understood as an answer merges with our own questioning. For the text must be understood as an answer to a real question.”<sup>224</sup>

This merging or mediation of the question raised by the text and the interpreter is part of what Gadamer terms the fusion of horizons. It is important to remember that for Gadamer the fusion of horizons involves a double hermeneutic, both the text and the interpreter contribute to the fusion of horizons. In this process, not only are new possibilities for understanding the subject-matter of the text disclosed but at the same time the prejudices of the interpreter’s horizon are put at risk by the question of the text. “Thus disclosing new possibilities for questions and extending his own horizon by fusing it with that of the text .... being cognizant of his finitude, and realizing that he does not have the first word or the last, the interpreter holds himself open to history — that is, to the continuing event of truth.”<sup>225</sup> Our engagement with the texts which have been handed down in a tradition will take the form of a hermeneutical spiral based on the double hermeneutic involved in question and answer, and the manner in which the logic of question and answer constantly remould the interpretive horizon in which we stand.

#### IV. HERMENEUTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND TRADITION

##### A. *Bildung*

In the next chapter, I plan to discuss how Gadamer conceptualises the encounter between an interpreter and a text in tradition. Before I move on to discuss those topics, there is one final topic I should address in this chapter. What type of knowledge does hermeneutical understanding consist of or produce?

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutic*, 211.



The term which Gadamer uses to describe hermeneutical knowledge is '*Bildung*'. Richard Rorty translates this as 'edification.'<sup>226</sup> By this, Rorty refers to the way in which we redescribe our world and thus 'remake' ourselves in the process. He sees Gadamer shifting from "knowledge as the goal of thinking" to that of edification. In doing so, Rorty makes a strong distinction between two forms of thought: that of knowledge of things (or the real world) and how we use language to continually describe our world.<sup>227</sup>

Is this a fair reading of Gadamer's work? Jeff Mitscherling claims that Rorty is taking a very one-sided and superficial reading of Gadamer's work, especially concerning the term '*Bildung*'. This term has a rich heritage in the German philosophical tradition which Gadamer specifically attempts to engage and to advance.<sup>228</sup> The importance which Gadamer attributes to the concept of *Bildung* can be clearly seen in how he devotes the opening argument of *Truth and Method* to a discussion of the history and relevance of *Bildung*.<sup>229</sup>

In the German tradition, *Bildung* was seen primarily in reference to the development of a person in relation to the image of God previous to Herder. "*Bildwerden ist hier reines Anwesen und Empfangen Gottes, die Geburt des Sohnes in der Seele, ein transzendenter Vorgang ohne Mittel*."<sup>230</sup> After the introduction of Shaftesbury's work into German, *Bildung* took on a much more humanistic tone, the development of the human potential. It referred to the formation and development of the individual within the new and open society developing in Germany during that time. This can be seen in the works of Herder, Hegel, Humboldt, and Heidegger.<sup>231</sup>

For Hegel, the classical texts of antiquity played a crucial role in this formation of the individual. As we saw in his dialectic, there is a movement from the self to self-

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226 "Since 'education' sounds a bit too flat, and *Bildung* a bit too foreign, I shall use 'edification' to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 360.

227 Ibid., 358-60. Warnke, *Gadamer*, 157-59.

228 Jeff Mitscherling, "Resuming the Dialogue," in *Anti-Foundationalism and Practical Reasoning: Conversations between Hermeneutics and Analysis*, ed. Evan Simpson (Edmonton: Academic Printing & Publishing, 1987), 132; Karsten R. Stueber, "Understanding and Objectivity: A Dialogue between Donald Davidson and Hans Georg Gadamer," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, 183; Warnke, *Gadamer*, 159.

229 See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 3-41.

230 "Being formation is here the pure property and possession of God, the birth of the Son in the soul, a transcendental process without means." Joachim Ritter ed., *Historisches Wortbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Basel: Scwabe, 1971-1995), s.v. "Bildung," by E. Lichtenstein, 922.

231 "*Der wahren Moral erstes Gesetz' ist für Humboldt: 'bilde Dich selbst und nur ihre zweites: wirke auf ander durch das, was Du bist'*" Ibid., 926. This idea is echoed in Heidegger's axiom, "Become what you are." *Being and Time*, 186.



alienation and finally a return to the self which characterises the process of *Bildung*.<sup>232</sup> In this instance, self-consciousness “has *actuality* only in so far as it alienates itself from itself; by so doing, it gives itself the character of authentication and actuality.”<sup>233</sup> In the development of self-consciousness, a person must raise his consciousness above his particularity to the level of universality. This takes place within the realm of culture.<sup>234</sup> In raising above our individuality, we encounter the universal (our culture or tradition) which changes us. “This individual *moulds* itself by culture into what it intrinsically is, and only by doing so is it an intrinsic being that has an actual existence; the measure of culture is the measure of its actuality and power.”<sup>235</sup> Hegel found the texts and ideas of antiquity especially suited for the development of the individual since they are “remote and alien enough to effect the necessary separation” and they possess ‘actuality and power.’<sup>236</sup> Gadamer sums up the significance of Hegel’s view of *Bildung* when he writes:

Every single individual who raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs, and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own....Historically, *Bildung* is not to be understood only as the process of raising the mind to the universal; it is at the same time the element within which the educated man (*Gebildete*) moves.<sup>237</sup>

While historical and philological methods may help us to study the past they are derivative or specialised forms of understanding. *Bildung* is the universal form of understanding or knowledge which underlies all other forms of understanding, especially in history and the *Geisteswissenschaften*.

It is not enough to observe more closely, to study a tradition more thoroughly, if there is not already a receptivity to the “otherness” of the work of art or of the past. That is what, following Hegel, we emphasized as the general characteristic of *Bildung*: keeping oneself open to what is other — to other, more universal

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<sup>232</sup> See the discussion of Hegel’s slave/master relationship above. Paul Ricœur also brings out how our understanding the other results in the growth of the interpreter’s “own understanding of himself.” Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 17.

<sup>233</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, 297.

<sup>234</sup> “What, in relation to the single *individual*, appears as his culture, is the essential moment of the *substance* itself, viz. the immediate passage of the [mere] thought-form of its universality into actuality; of culture as the simple soul of the substance by means of which what is *implicit* in the substance, acquires an *acknowledged, real existence*” Ibid., 298-99.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>236</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 14

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.



points of view. It embraces a sense of proportion and distance in relation to itself, and hence consists in rising above itself to universality.<sup>238</sup>

*Bildung* is the cultivation of consciousness to be open, to learn from experiences, and tradition. It is a sense which enables the interpreter to perceive in concrete situations the possibilities open to him or her.<sup>239</sup> It does not refer to the type of education which involves factual knowledge or technical expertise. Instead it refers to the type of education which teaches a person to think for him or herself, to make judgements and to realise the possibilities and limitations in a situation. *Bildung* is not just an awareness that there are different ways of understanding something or seeing the world, but it also involves the ability to discriminate and make judgements. In this sense, it is a “universal and common sense” which arises within “an extensive historical context.”<sup>240</sup> “Hence, we do not simply adopt the views of our object or the tradition; rather, the way we understand their truth already involves application to our situation and hence modification in line with our circumstances.”<sup>241</sup> Gadamer’s goal is not to elevate the “bygone days regarding the value of a well-rounded education.” Rather his concept of *Bildung* concerns the manner “in which an individual grows to become an active, responsible member of society which is determined by intersubjective values and which also develops through the contributions which each member makes.”<sup>242</sup>

## B. Vico and Sensus Communis

However, because of the manner in which Hegel’s dialectic leads to absolute knowledge Gadamer turns to other thinkers to define this term more clearly.<sup>243</sup>

Continuing in his archaeology of the concept of *Bildung*, Gadamer turns to Vico for the

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 17. For Collingwood, the application of historical rules (no matter how carefully they are followed) is not what constitutes true historical knowledge. Historical methods inherently have a “low potential because they involve a certain blindness to the realities of the situation.” *Autobiography*, 106. What is required is that the historian possess insight or intuition so that they may grasp the uniqueness of the historical situation or text and be able to apply it to their situation. “It was precisely because history offered us something altogether different from rules, namely insight, that it could afford us the help we needed in diagnosing our moral and political problems.” Ibid., 101.

<sup>239</sup> Mitscherling defines Gadamer’s use of *Bildung* in the following manner. “*Bildung* is that process whereby the individual becomes critically self-conscious both of the role played by these ‘handed-down’ prejudices in his or her thought and of the practical value of these prejudices in the preservation or the attainment of the well-being of the individual and society as a whole.” Jeff Mitscherling, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and ‘The Tradition’,” *Man and World*, 22 (1989), 249.

<sup>240</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 17. Warnke, *Gadamer*, 160.

<sup>241</sup> Warnke, 96.

<sup>242</sup> Mitscherling, “Resuming the Dialogue,” 132.

<sup>243</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 15.



notion of *sensus communis* in order to show the relation between the individual and culture. *Sensus communis* is not an abstract form of universal reason but is instantiated in particular communities or nations at particular times. It allows one to judge what is right or wrong and gives the "human will its direction". As a result, it is also what founds a community or culture. Not only is the individual developed within his or her community's *sensus communis*, but as the individual is formed the *sensus communis* is also reshaped and developed.<sup>244</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the German philosophical tradition evacuated the richness of meaning which was previously contained in the concepts of *sensus communis* and *Bildung*.<sup>245</sup> Instead of following Vico, Hegel, and Shaftesbury who incorporated *sensus communis* into their philosophical systems, the German philosophical tradition pursued the direction set by Kant and Goethe. The philosophical consequences of this can be seen in the manner in which Kant reduced *sensus communis* to taste. In doing so, *sensus communis* was reduced to subjectivism and denied its role in imparting knowledge.<sup>246</sup> This is the reason why Gadamer devotes so much attention to these concepts, he is attempting to swim against the current of his philosophical tradition.

The primary work of Vico's which Gadamer cites is *On the Study Methods of our Time* in which Vico attacked the Cartesian method and attempted to defend the role and primacy of *sensus communis*.<sup>247</sup> Vico argued that Descartes pursued a single method for truth and in doing he so rejected all other forms of truth. The danger that Vico saw in this was that the 'old truths' of tradition would be lost. He argued that the classical ideals of *sapientia*, *eloquentia*, and *prudencia* were required for social life and these, in turn, presupposed some form of *sensus communis*. A person schooled under the Cartesian method would become an expert or scholar, but someone trained in *sensus communis* would be a wise man and, according to Vico, the scholar will always depend on the wise man. "Thinking well, speaking well, and acting well are crucial to life in the civil world."<sup>248</sup> As such, Vico offers a corrective to the methodological approach of the

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 21-23.

<sup>245</sup> The exception to this was the Pietist movement which maintained the concept of *sensus communis*, especially in the works of Christoph Oetinger. Ibid., 27-30.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 26, 33-34, 42-44.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 19 note 25; Donald Phillip Verene, "Gadamer and Vico on *Sensus Communis* and the Tradition of Humane Knowledge," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 139.

<sup>248</sup> Verene, 140. For Gadamer, *Bildung* is connected with tact, judgment and taste. Natural science excludes these categories, "But Gadamer's argument is that this is a mistake, that tact, taste and judgment instance a practical knowledge of how to discriminate between good and bad, right and wrong, important and unimportant and so on. In other words, they reflect a capacity for recognizing truth which perhaps cannot be reduced to method



humanities of which Gadamer is so critical. He offers a model in which the old truths of tradition play an important role in the development of not only the individual, but also the continuing formation of the community in which they live.

### C. The Hermeneutical Relevance of Aristotle's *Phronesis*

The reduction of the meaning of *sensus communis* and *Bildung* in the German tradition played a formative role in Gadamer's early work, a role which continued throughout his entire career. During the nineteenth century a struggle erupted in the *Geisteswissenschaften* in German universities. The concept of *Bildung*, as the cultivation of great ideas, was exchanged for the methodological approach of the *Altertumswissenschaft*, the accumulation of facts from history based on method. The idea of the formation of the soul in German education was decimated with the rise of *Altertumswissenschaft*.<sup>249</sup> As a result, "Modern universities ... tend to be populated by savants rather than thinkers."<sup>250</sup> In one of Gadamer's earliest works, "Aristotle's *Protrepticos* and the Historical Mode of Looking at Aristotle's Ethics," the manner in which he interpreted Aristotle and Plato was in part an attempt to address this problem in German higher education.

Gadamer uses *Bildung* and *sensus communis* to outline the relationship between the individual and the universal, culture or tradition. The task of application is "central problem of hermeneutics" and shares a similar structure between the part and the whole.<sup>251</sup> In order to explain how universal forms of knowledge (such as rules or goals) are related to the particular situations or problems in the movement of application, Gadamer incorporates Aristotle's formulation of *phronesis*. In the essay "*Praktisches Wissen*," Gadamer demonstrates how Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* is the capacity which enables someone to think on-the-spot.<sup>252</sup> Practical knowledge, *phronesis*, is a historical form of knowledge since it is always employed in concrete situations.<sup>253</sup> Through it "one

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and for which there are no clear rules but which remains a form of knowledge equal to modern science itself." Warnke, *Gadamer*, 159.

<sup>249</sup> Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics*, 20-24, 165. Gadamer is not the first to react against this trend but stands in the line of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>251</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 315.

<sup>252</sup> This early unpublished essay has recently been included in Gadamer's *Gesammelte Werke* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993), 5:230-48. Heidegger's seminar on Aristotle's were the stimulus for Gadamer's interest in Aristotle's ethics. Sullivan, 122; Gadamer, "Reflections," 9.

<sup>253</sup> Gadamer, "*Praktisches Wissen*," 241.

can accumulate life experience and thus gain a sense of how to act in a unique situation.”<sup>254</sup>

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses three different forms of knowledge, *episteme*, *techne* and *phronesis*.<sup>255</sup> *Episteme* is an exact form of knowledge of unchanging truths which can be tested by coherence or correspondence. Because *techne* and *phronesis* are both intellectual habits which are concerned with application according to Aristotle, Gadamer is very interested in the subtle distinctions between the them.<sup>256</sup> *Techne* is an exact form of knowledge but it differs from *episteme* in that its *telos* is the application of knowledge to a concrete situation. The mastery of a craft or skill, such as throwing pottery, is a good illustration of the type of knowledge involved in *techne*. As such, it can be learned through both experience and teaching. The distinction between *techne* and *phronesis* is not as clear cut. While they are similar, in that both are concerned with the question of the application of knowledge to concrete situations, there are several significant differences between them. First, while we can learn *techne*, we can also forget it. If we don't practice a craft for a few years we can forget those skills. However, *phronesis* is not a form of knowledge which we possess in advance (like the blueprint a craftsman may have for his project). Nor is it something we can leave behind or forget since we are always involved in applying it to the concrete situation in which we find ourselves.<sup>257</sup> Second, *techne* is teleological in nature, it is oriented towards the finished product or goal. *Phronesis* on the other hand cannot know the right means or ends in advance of the situation. Rather, in the situation *phronesis* involves the deliberation of finding the right means to the end of 'well being.'<sup>258</sup> And finally, *phronesis* involves self-knowledge, it is determined by and determines the moral well-being of man. It is bound to *arete* and oriented toward it.<sup>259</sup> "All of these examples throw into relief the final point of divergence between *phronêsis* and *technê*: technical knowledge has not intrinsic,

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<sup>254</sup> Sullivan continues by showing how this contrasts with *techne*, "But this prior knowledge (*Vorwissen*) is really a kind of 'prejudice,' for the simple reason that there is no final guarantee that it will work. Technical knowledge, viewed as advance knowledge, is not really 'prejudice' because it is guaranteed by the exactness of the scientific knowledge. . . . In its accumulated, historical form, it is always, at best, approximate, and that is why it is a matter of 'prejudice.'" Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics*, 132; Gadamer, "*Praktisches Wissen*," 239, 241-42.

<sup>255</sup> Sullivan, 122-35; Paul Schuchman, "Aristotle's *Phronêsis* and Gadamer's Hermeneutic," *Philosophy Today*, 23 (1979), 44-48; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 314-24.

<sup>256</sup> Rod Coltman, *The Language of Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Heidegger in Dialogue*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 4, 19.

<sup>257</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 313.

<sup>258</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.2; Coltman, 19-24.

<sup>259</sup> Gadamer, "*Praktisches Wissen*," 241-42.



existential relationship to the being of the craftsman; one can have *technê* and yet deliberately do a bad job, but if a man deliberately and habitually does what is wrong, he does not possess *phronêsis*.”<sup>260</sup> In the same manner, Gadamer argues that hermeneutical understanding and knowledge is not an abstract form of knowledge (*episteme*) or the result of the application of technical rules and methods (*techne*). Hermeneutical understanding and knowledge is tied to the concrete situations we find ourselves in and is bound up with the virtue and character of the interpreter.

While I agree with most of what Gadamer’s says about *phronesis*, I think his distinction between *techne* and *phronesis* is too strong and needs to be softened. *Techne* and *phronesis* are not competing forms of knowledge but *techne* is part and parcel of *phronesis*. While *techne* provides the type of knowledge which a craftsman may need to decide which methods to employ to reach a certain end, *phronesis* allows the interpreter to decide which skill, craft, or practice to employ in a situation. As such, *phronesis* not only functions after methods come to an end, but it also functions before one has decided how one is going to proceed in the situation, before the application of a method. *Techne* and *phronesis* should be seen as forms of knowledge which are in constant dialogue with and inform one another. In any practice, such as music, professionals must develop their skills, *techne*, through instruction, and rehearse the score to be performed. Pianists need to practice scales. Singers need voice coaches. The orchestra adheres to the conductor. In sports, the more professional one becomes, the more one must submit to regulations. In short, the ‘objective’ and *techne* is inextricably intertwined in the performance. At the same time, the athlete in the game and the musician in the performance will enter into situations where the rules which they have learned break down, or come to an end. The ability to improvise is a highly valued ability in both music and sports and is a form of *phronesis*, to go beyond where the rules leave off. This involves the ability to make judgements about what is the best way to proceed in the present situation. It is not so much an intellectual judgement, but what is right in a practical and intersubjective frame of reference.

The significance of the relationship between *techne* and *phronesis* can be seen when we must judge between different interpretative models or theories. The interpretive method we choose is not simply related to the aims of interpretation as Morgan and Barton argue.<sup>261</sup> Rather, we exercise *phronesis* before we decide which

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<sup>260</sup> Schuchman, 46.

<sup>261</sup> Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7, 287.

method to employ, before we move to *techne*. At the same time, *phronesis* complements *techne* in that it enables the interpreter to go on when he or she encounters an exegetical problem for which they have not been trained to solve. The exercise of *phronesis* is not solipsistic, but is related to social institutions which determine the standards of excellence appropriate to the practice of biblical interpretation. These standards appear to operate in a manner similar to Wittgenstein's shared forms of life in the exercise of judgement.<sup>262</sup> There is a criss-crossing and overlapping between institutions, traditions, and cultures which allow others to examine someone else's work and say, "That is truly exceptional work," or "They applied the wrong exegetical tools in this instance."

The relevance of *phronesis* for Gadamer's hermeneutic is grounded in the problem of application. The heart of the problem is how the same tradition is understood in different ways in different horizons. It involves the application of the universal (tradition or a text from that tradition) to the particular (the horizon of the interpreter).<sup>263</sup> The strength of Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* is that it incorporates all the elements involved in the movement of application. "The knowledge of which Aristotle speaks is characterised by the fact that it includes perfect application and employs its knowledge in the immediacy of a given situation."<sup>264</sup> As a form of knowledge, *phronesis* includes experience within itself. Unlike *techne*, we cannot separate moral knowledge from the particular situation. "In fact we shall see that this is perhaps the fundamental form of experience (*Erfahrung*)."<sup>265</sup> *Phronesis* also includes *synesis*, the sympathetic understanding of the other which is required if we are going to be truly open to the other.<sup>266</sup> "Once again we discover that the person who is understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected but rather he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected."<sup>267</sup>

#### D. Farley and the Practice of Theology

In a manner which is very similar to Gadamer's criticism of the dominance of the method in the humanities and the loss of *Bildung*, Edward Farley argues that a parallel movement has taken place in theology. Before the Enlightenment, theology was a

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<sup>262</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 241.

<sup>263</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 312.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> This is related to our need for openness to the Other in a dialogue.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.



unified field of study which focused on the knowledge of God, a knowledge which was not abstract or impersonal. The medieval church understood theological knowledge to be wisdom, or *habitus*. With the rise of critical principles and methods in the Enlightenment, the idea of theology as *habitus* was replaced by theology as theological sciences. The encyclopaedic approach to theology brought about a fracturing of what used to be a unified discipline into numerous sciences (biblical studies, systematic theology, practical theology, etc.) which are at best indirectly connected.<sup>268</sup> As a result, the various theological disciplines are often related closer to their satellite disciplines than they are with other theological disciplines. A clear example of this is how pastoral counselling is often more closely aligned with psychology than with biblical studies.<sup>269</sup>

Schleiermacher attempted to solve this problem by organising theology around the training of the clergy, much like a medical or law school was organised. "Their unity in other words is teleological and practical."<sup>270</sup> However, his proposal divided theology and practice into separate disciplines for educational purposes. It reduced practical theology to criteria gleaned from theological studies which were applied to church leadership. "In sum, theory and practice are related in this post-Schleiermacher solution as academic and applied aspects of training for clergy."<sup>271</sup> Farley seeks to address this fracturing of theology and the separation between theology and practice. "Our thesis in other words is that the very structure of theological studies alienates the whole enterprise from praxis."<sup>272</sup>

Farley sees two solutions to this problem. For the past three hundred years the church has tried the first solution, to organise theology around the training of the clergy. In contrast, Farley suggests that we consider taking a regional approach. The ideal, eschatological, and historical presence of the church, or the kingdom of God, is the region of theology.<sup>273</sup> Under this approach, theology as *habitus* must be restored. "I

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<sup>268</sup> Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 22-5. A similar argument was made in a lecture delivered by John Webster, "Theological Theology," 6 March 1998, University of Nottingham, Nottingham.

<sup>269</sup> Both Capps and Gerkin address this issue in their work. David Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 11; Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counselling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 11-22; Farley, 14, 33-4.

<sup>270</sup> Farley, 28.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>273</sup> See Pannenberg's argument that theology needs to take a history of religions approach in chapters 4-6 of *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*.

would submit that theological understanding is the *telos*, the aim of any course of theological study, whenever it occurs.”<sup>274</sup> The unity of theology would be restored. And it must also include social and political praxis.<sup>275</sup> This would protect theology from becoming an institution which merely supports the status quo and also recognise the world transforming nature of this ecclesial presence. “Perhaps the central and perennial problem of grasping ecclesial presence lies here, how it can be redemptively persuasive of any and all social, political, and cultural spaces without itself becoming identical with any of them and developing official and timeless ecclesial-political institutions.”<sup>276</sup>

Theology as *habitus* raises the question of how do we decide which cognitive interest is most appropriate for the phenomena at hand. It introduces the question of judgement as a controlling principle. As such, judgement demonstrates a type of moral knowledge that is not known in advance like *techne* because you cannot know the right means to an end in advance.<sup>277</sup> Thus, *habitus* is very similar to Gadamer’s conception of *phronesis* which involves the development of the theologian rather than the teaching of technical methods, *techne*. It is, as Gadamer would say, dependent on *Bildung* or cultivation, not professional training. The biblical interpreter’s *habitus* must be formed by serious dialogue with the Christian tradition which takes place through the fusion of horizons in the process of biblical interpretation and results in the enlarging of his/her horizon — not just individually but collectively as well.<sup>278</sup> Farley’s idea of theology as *habitus* both demonstrates the relevance of Gadamer’s hermeneutic not only for Biblical interpretation but also for theological education.

#### SUMMARY

Now that we have looked at Gadamer, we can see that there are points of resonance with Heidegger but at the same time he goes beyond his teacher. Gadamer’s thought resolves the tension which Heidegger had between tradition and truth or knowledge. In his defence of tradition, Gadamer provides an epistemological basis for the importance which tradition plays in our understanding of the world, and in

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<sup>274</sup> Farley, 37.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 36-38.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 39. Farley’s proposal is supported by the works of Gerkin and Capps who try to restore the relationship of pastoral counselling to the other theological disciplines by appropriating a hermeneutical rather than a psychoanalytical model.

<sup>277</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 321-2.

<sup>278</sup> The relation of *habitus* to pastoral counseling is one example of this. Both Capps and Gerkin realise that the prejudices and self-understanding of the pastoral counsellor is a crucial aspect of counseling. Gerkin, 57, Capps, 31-3, 50.



particular for texts. He wants to raise to consciousness not just the fact that tradition plays a role in historical research but also explore its productive role in hermeneutical understanding. Hegel's concept of sublation, Collingwood's logic of question and answer, and the model of Socratic dialogue are all used by Gadamer to illustrate how we should approach tradition and the texts handed down through it to us. Sublation and the logic of question and answer explain how there can be both continuity and discontinuity within a tradition of interpretation. Through sublation he showed that each interpretation sublates the previous ones to which it is related and in the process transforms how we understand the text. *Not only is our understanding of the text reconfigured but our view of previous interpretations have changed as well.* The logic of question and answer demonstrates that the manner in which we interpret a text is tied to the horizon in which our questions arise and also to the subject-matter of the text. Therefore, on the one hand, we should not expect the history of a text's interpretation to exemplify a gradual linear accumulation of knowledge about that text. Rather, we should expect it to take a twisted route, with unexpected twists and turns, new starts, and possible backtracking at points. On the other hand, since the subject-matter of the text is one of the partners in his double hermeneutic, the history of a text's interpretation will be characterised by elements of both convolution and continuity.

Perhaps one of the more significant points in the chapter, is that what we learn through our encounter with tradition is greater than our individuality. When someone interprets a text, what is gained is not just an incremental increase in his or her personal knowledge. Rather, the interpreter has participated in a process of tradition. This can best be characterised under the concept of *Bildung*. This is not a solipsistic form of knowledge but through his encounter with the text, he has been educated or formed (*gebildete*). At the same time the *sensus communis* of that tradition or community is reshaped and developed because of his encounter with the text. In other words, for Gadamer the biblical interpreter is a corporately rational being who cannot be separated from humanity's past or future.

The knowledge which is passed down in tradition is not cumulative, as Hegel thought. Instead it is dynamic and constantly on the move. Through the processes of sublation, question and answer, and the movement of application the elements of tradition and our knowledge of texts such as the Bible are ceaselessly being translated, transformed, and expanded. This is not to say, as Rorty does, that philosophy (and other disciplines) boils down to an endless conversation. "Still, if others have used the insight

into historicity to jettison the idea of reason itself, Gadamer does not. Our historical situatedness does not only limit what we can know with certainty; it can also teach us how to remember and integrate what we must not forget."<sup>288</sup> Gadamer argues, by means of his double hermeneutic, that we are truly concerned with understanding *die Sache*, the subject-matter of the text, from within the horizon in which we stand. The possibility for diversity in understanding through time and across cultures is not evidence that we are never arriving at better understandings of the subject-matter, or that our interpretations are not appropriate or right interpretations. Instead, Gadamer's point is that when we understand, we will always understand differently and this new understanding will contribute to the formation of future horizons of understanding. In this manner, Gadamer is able to find a middle position which explains the diversity in interpretations which can be true to the text and stand in a relationship to each other (in their tradition) without being reduced to an anarchy of competing views.

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<sup>288</sup> Warnke, *Gadamer*, 174.



## PART I: GADAMER'S HERMENEUTIC:

### CHAPTER 2: PLAY, PERFORMANCE, AND PROVOCATION

#### INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I examined what could be considered the epistemological side to Gadamer's hermeneutic. What role does experience play in understanding, the logic of question and answer, and what type of knowledge best characterises hermeneutical understanding? In this chapter, I would like to shift to a different, yet complementary, aspect of his hermeneutic: the eventful character of understanding. In this respect, I will look at two metaphors which play a central role in Gadamer's hermeneutic: play and performance. Play is perhaps second only to the concept of the fusion of horizons in *Truth and Method*. Gadamer uses this concept not only to overcome some of the conceptual weaknesses in other hermeneutical theories but also as an apologetic for the universality of hermeneutics and to keep the role of method in its proper place.

#### I. THE ENLIGHTENMENT: PUSHING PLAY TO ONE SIDE OF THE PLAYING FIELD

Gadamer rejects the idea of an individual reading an isolated text alone in a room as an illusion which originated in the Enlightenment.

At once Gadamer is involved in an argument against a view of aesthetic experience which has haunted us for nearly two hundred years: the isolated self reading the isolated text: the isolated self looking at the isolated painting. But there is no such thing as the text apart from its interpretation, and no reading or seeing self which does not bring its interpretative schematism to the text or painting.<sup>1</sup>

In order to achieve this, Gadamer retraces the development of several aesthetic concepts in order to reveal the conceptual opposition which he faces. One of the most important metaphors which he employs in his investigation and argumentation is 'play'. In Part I of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer devotes much of his effort in an attempt to develop a concept of play which is beyond subjectivity but at the same time recognises the finitude

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<sup>1</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "Contexts of Interpretation: Reflections on Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," *Boston University Journal*, 27 (1, 1976), 43.

of human existence in order to explain the mode of being of a work of art.<sup>2</sup> In Part II, he shows how play is the “in-between” or middle ground between the text and the interpreter which is the locus of hermeneutics.<sup>3</sup> And in the final Part he argues that language is characterised by play.<sup>4</sup>

In order to understand the relevance of Gadamer’s concept of play we need to see it in light of the history of this concept. This is not just an exercise in historical background, but the form of my argument follows one of the central themes of Gadamer’s hermeneutic: our understanding is conditioned by what has been handed down to us in our tradition. Therefore, it is essential that we raise to consciousness, as much as possible, those elements of our tradition which have shaped our present understanding. This is why Gadamer retraces the conceptual development of play in philosophical thought. Not only does he want to show how this concept developed but also to reveal the points of resistance to his conception of play.

#### A. Kant’s Determinative and Reflective Judgement

The person whom Gadamer views as leading us astray in regard to a subjectivity of play is Kant.<sup>5</sup> The fork in the road, in respect to the concept of play, occurred when Kant differentiated determinate judgement from reflective judgement. Determinate judgement concerns those instances in which we can subsume a particular under a universal. If we already possess the universal then such a judgement is considered determinate. If we have a particular but the universal must be found, then that

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<sup>2</sup> Gadamer, 101-29.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>4</sup> “The question, then, is how the playing of the language-game, which is for each person also the playing of the world-game, goes together with playing the artwork-game.” Idem, “Reflections on my Philosophical Journey,” trans. Richard E. Palmer, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, *Library of Living Philosophers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilipp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, vol. 24 (Chicago and London: Open Court, 1997), 43.

<sup>5</sup> The background to Kant’s thought is found in Rousseau who argued that human existence was characterised by a “disenchantment of the world.” The starting point for human development was located in the state of nature. Property, government, division of labour, and tradition have “alienated mankind in the modern from its true nature.” He developed three means of reform in *Emile*, *the Social Contract*, and *Nouvell Heloise*, but his views were inconsistent and only raised more questions. It was not until Kant “thought Rousseau’s thoughts through to their end” in the dialectical opposition of nature and civilisation, reason and feeling that a more systematic solution was offered. Hans Robert Jauss, “The Literary Process of Modernism from Rousseau to Adorno,” *Cultural Critique*, trans. Lisa C. Roetzel (Winter 1988-1989), 39-41.



judgement is reflective.<sup>6</sup> Determinate judgements involve empirical phenomena, while reflective judgements do not. “Determinate judgement possesses its concept and faces the difficulty of applying it properly to the multiplicity of spatio-temporal appearances, while reflective judgement is in search of its concept through its multiplicity. It obeys a peculiar principle — related to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure ...”<sup>7</sup> The result of this distinction and separation in forms of judgement is that real knowledge is restricted to those areas in which we can exercise rational and empirical thought (determinate judgement) and the sensuous and aesthetic (reflective judgement) became autonomous.<sup>8</sup> “The taste of the observer can no more be comprehended as the application of concepts, norms, or rules than the genius of the artist can ... What we experience in beauty — in nature as well as in art — is the total animation and free interplay of all our spiritual powers. The judgment of taste is not knowledge, yet it is not arbitrary.”<sup>9</sup>

If we now examine the importance of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* for the history of the human species, we must say that his giving aesthetics a transcendental philosophical basis had major consequences and constituted a turning point. It was the end of a tradition but also the beginning of a new development. It restricted the idea of taste to an area in which, as a special principle of judgement, it could claim independent validity — and, by so doing, limited the concept of knowledge to the theoretical and practical use of reason. The limited phenomenon of judgement, restricted to the beautiful (and sublime), was sufficient for his transcendental purpose; but it shifted the more general concept of the experience of taste, and the activity of aesthetic judgement in law and morality, out of the center of philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge which results from aesthetic judgement is different from that which comes through empirical studies or from the exercise of practical reason and at the same time it is characterised by its ability to make universal claims that are able to be communicated to others. An example of this is when someone says, “Psalm 23 is not only very moving

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), § IV.

<sup>7</sup> Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, in *The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), s.v. “Aesthetic,” 54. See also: Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>8</sup> “In der ‘Kritik der reinen Vernunft’ unterstreicht Kant die Unzulänglichkeit des bloßen Spiel mit Vorstellungen im Gegensatz zur Erkenntnis: Das ‘Spiel der Einbildung ist ohne die mindeste Beziehung auf Wahrheit.’ Ohne die ‘data der möglichen Erfahrung’ sind die Begriffe für Kant ‘ein bloße Spiel, sei es der Einbildungskraft oder des Verstandes.’” Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe & Co., 1995), s.v. “Spiel,” A. Corbineau-Hoffmann, 9.1384.

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, “Heidegger’s Later Philosophy,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 219.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 40-41.



but it speaks to the needs of the human soul." This is a claim with universal scope and is clearly communicable, but it does not arise from determinate judgement.

When we say that something is beautiful we employ a form of taste which is non-conceptual. We do not appeal to an ideal form of art or literature in our judgement of a particular work of art. How then are we able to make a judgement concerning the value of a work of art or a text? Kant's answer is that the work of art facilitates the free play of imagination and understanding. "Kant claims that this free play of cognitive faculties, this animation of our feeling for life occasioned by the sight of the beautiful, implies no conceptual grasp of an objective content and intends no ideal of an object."<sup>11</sup> While reflective judgement is not rule-governed, it does possess an intersubjective dimension.<sup>12</sup> Or as Richard Bernstein says, "Taste is communal, not idiosyncratic."<sup>13</sup>

This presents a dilemma for Gadamer. On the one hand, he argues that we cannot approach history or texts as instances of a universal but must see them as particulars, "to understand *this* man, *this* people, or *this* state."<sup>14</sup> We must use a reflective form of judgement in which the particular is not subsumed under a universal. On the other hand, if we accept Kant's reduction of reflective or aesthetic judgement as the mode for hermeneutical knowledge we run into the problem that there are no objective rules for determining what is beautiful. For Kant, the feeling of the subject, not the concept of the object, was what was important. As a result, historical knowledge based on Kant's idea of reflective judgement reduces to solipsistic preferences.<sup>15</sup> For Kant, this pleasure is best experienced in the detached spectator. When the Germans observed the French Revolution, it was their feelings as spectators, their reflective judgements, which were

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<sup>11</sup> Idem, "Art and Imitation," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 96.

<sup>12</sup> "This state of free play of the cognitive faculties in representation by which an object is given must be universally communicable." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (N.Y.: Hafner Press, 1951), 52. "The judgment of taste itself does not postulate the agreement of everyone (for it is only competent for a logically universal judgment to do this, in that it is able to bring forward reasons); it only imputes the agreement to everyone, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation, not from concepts, but from the concurrences of others." Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw, *Theory and History of Literature*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xxxix. See also *ibid.*, 115-16.

<sup>13</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 119.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Joel Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 48.



significant for Kant. As spectators, the Germans had a speculative sympathy with the French, a sentimental attitude of “well-wishing participation.”<sup>16</sup>

Kant’s ideas in this area resulted in a paradigm shift for the humanities. On the one hand, the humanities were now subjected to the method of the natural sciences in order to exercise determinate forms of judgement in their field so that they could lay claim to some degree or form of theoretical knowledge. On the other hand, the autonomy and free play of reflective judgement justified the use of empathy, genius, and feeling as “subsidiary elements” to the humanities.<sup>17</sup>

The French Revolution also demonstrates a major difference between Kant and Hegel. The French Revolution, with its concept of freedom for all, was an underlying theme in Hegel’s work.<sup>18</sup> Because the Spirit was objectified in social institutions according to Hegel, he argued that we cannot hold to a form of inner morality which was detached from the “objective structures of life that hold human beings together.”<sup>19</sup> In contrast to Kant, who claimed that morality was independent from contextual conditions, Hegel asserted that there was a “common and normative reality that surpasses the awareness of the individual” that was the basis for our social reality.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the significance of the French Revolution did not lie in the sympathetic feelings of the observers, but in the fact that the Spirit was objectified in and through human institutions in history. In this way, Hegel was able to reconcile the two forms of knowledge which Kant had separated. For Hegel, the *Geisteswissenschaften* possess a form of knowledge that is similar to that found in the natural sciences. “That in history a reasonableness should perdure and make itself manifest similar to that in nature was the bold thesis.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Conflict of Faculties*, trans. M. Gregor and Robert E. Anchor (N.Y.: Abaris Press, 1979), 153. This sympathetic response which the French Revolution evoked in the German observers revealed the hope for moral progress according to Kant. It demonstrated a vicarious participation in the Good which points to moral inclinations which can inspire revolutions. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*, 148-51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 41; Robert H. Paslick, “The Ontological Context of Gadamer’s ‘Fusion’: Boehme, Heidegger, and Non-Duality,” *Man and World*, 18 (1985), 406-8.

<sup>18</sup> See the section “I/Thou and Slave/Master” in chapter 1.

<sup>19</sup> Gadamer, “Hegel’s Philosophy and Its Aftereffects,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, ed. Thomas McCarthy, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1981), 30.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 36.

## B. Schiller: Free-Play and Aesthetic Differentiation

Schiller embraced Kant's dichotomy between determinative and reflective judgement and widened the gap between them.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, he separated art from the realm of reality to that of beautiful appearances. At the same time, he changed Kant's concepts of taste and morality to an aesthetic imperative. For Kant, taste was the transitional bridge from sensual pleasure to moral feelings. But for Schiller, the autonomy of reflective judgement and taste was the basis for the freedom of play.<sup>23</sup> Schiller grafted Fichte's theory of impulses onto this concept of play with the result that "the play impulse was to harmonize the form impulse and matter impulse. Cultivating the play impulse is the end of aesthetic education."<sup>24</sup> Play was not only an instinct or impulse which characterised human nature, but it was also what educated and enhanced our humanity. The goal of the play impulse, according to Schiller, was the formation of "a cultured society (*Bildungsgesellschaft*) that takes an interest in art."<sup>25</sup>

Under this concept of play, art is now understood in terms of its contrast and separation from the real world. Nature is no longer a comprehensive domain because art constitutes an autonomous realm above or beyond nature. The implications of this are two fold. First, determinate knowledge and the universality of the scientific method of approaching the thing-in-itself is undermined. And second, the experience of an artwork takes place in the free play of an aesthetic state which possesses no direct relation to

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- 22 Schiller's work was also partially a response to the French Revolution. Only instead of viewing it positively as Hegel did, Schiller saw the French Revolution as a failure and posited a turn to aesthetics as a corrective to the French Revolution. Picking up on Rousseau's split between nature and civilisation, Schiller tried to find a solution in the aesthetic realm — to look for the lost naiveté of the natural perfection in the classics. Ibid., 30; Jauss, "The Literary Processes of Modernism," 42-45; Corbineau-Hoffmann, "Spiel," 9.1385.
- 23 "Da das Spiel weder unterworfen ist, gilt es als frei: 'Die Erkenntniskräfte, die durch diese Vorstellung ins Spiel gesetzt werden, sind herbei in einem freien Spiele, weil kein bestimmter Begriff sie auf besondere Erkenntnisregel einschränkt.'" Corbineau-Hoffmann, 1385.
- 24 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 82. The material and formal impulses correspond to Kant's determinative and reflective judgments. The aesthetic impulse mediated between them and reconciled them. "The play impulse avoids these extremes of explaining the world exclusively in terms of sense or reason, not by addressing itself to an extrinsic reality by which we are wholly determined but by taking as its object a semblance (*Schein*) of reality which we freely construct ourselves." Paul Edward, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (N.Y. and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), s.v. "Schiller, Friedrich," by Julius Elias, 7.313.
- 25 Ibid., 83; Richard Detsch, "A Non-Subjectivist Concept of Play — Gadamer and Heidegger Versus Rilke and Nietzsche," *Philosophy Today*, 29 (2 1985), 157; Paul de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1984), 264, 270.



reality.<sup>26</sup> Play is understood now only in terms of subjective categories.<sup>27</sup> The play involved in understanding an artwork or text consists in the double abstraction of both the individual and the text or artwork from their world or any contextual relationships outside of them.<sup>28</sup>

What we call a work of art and experience (*erleben*) aesthetically depends on a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function that gave it significance), it becomes visible as the "pure work of art." In performing this abstraction, aesthetic consciousness performs a task that is positive in itself. It shows what a pure work of art is, and allows it to exist in its own right.<sup>29</sup>

What is considered aesthetic is differentiated from everything outside of the aesthetic realm. There are two consequences to this line of thought. First, aesthetic consciousness attains the level of universality since it is capable of viewing everything aesthetically. And second, there is a simultaneity to aesthetic consciousness in that works from the past are cut free from their contextual relationships and are able to be experienced directly by a contemporary viewer.<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche's categories of 'unhistorical' and 'supra-historical' exemplify this point. He rejected a purely historical interest in the past because that was like a gravedigger or mad collector digging through the rubbish heaps.<sup>31</sup> What was significant for Nietzsche was how the past was experienced contemporaneously through the categories of the unhistorical and the supra-historical.

The impact of aesthetic differentiation can also be seen in the manner in which museums changed during this period. Before Schiller, museums reflected a particular taste or school. However, the impact of aesthetic simultaneity and universality resulted in museums attempting to expand or rearrange their exhibitions in order to appear as comprehensive as possible.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This conclusion was reached by Schiller towards the end of his career in what is termed the fourth stage of the development of his thought (see the last 11 of his "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man). Elias, "Schiller, Friedrich," 7.313.

<sup>27</sup> Gadamer, "Man and Language," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 82-85.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>30</sup> This simultaneity is not based on a monolithic concept of aesthetic taste but recognises that taste differs so that there can be "a hundred different treatments of the same subject, to find a thousand different forms of expression for the thoughts and feelings common to all men." Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), cxxxii.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins, 2nd rev. ed. ed., *Library of Liberal Arts* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1985), 20, 51.

<sup>32</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 87.

Schiller is mistaken according to Gadamer, because aesthetic judgement and taste depend on what is preferred by a society at any point in time; it is part of our social fabric. "Even its artistic interests are not arbitrary or in principle universal, but what artists create and what the society values belong together in the unity of a style of life and an ideal of taste."<sup>33</sup> Thus, play is never unbounded and free as Schiller claims. If Gadamer is correct, then the concept of play, which determines how we perceive art, and more importantly, how we approach a text, needs to be reworked.

### C. Nietzsche and the Play of an Absurd World

While Gadamer does not discuss Nietzsche's concept of play, he is significant to my discussion for three reasons. First, Nietzsche applied the concept of play to tradition and history. Second, he is often used by Heidegger as the foil to his ideas. And third, Nietzsche reflects the logical conclusion to Kant and Schiller's arguments and as such he plays an important role in the development of modern literary theory and hermeneutics.

Nietzsche, however, did not approach this position from the avenue of aesthetics, as Schiller did, but from history. In *The Use and Abuse of History*, Nietzsche attacked the nineteenth century's historical-critical approach to history. Instead of proposing an alternative model of history he pushed their conclusions to their logical end. "History must solve the problem of history, science must turn its sting against itself."<sup>34</sup> In doing so he reduced the world and all that can be known to history, but not a Hegelian form of history which possesses a higher order of Spirit or rationality behind it. For Nietzsche, the reason why things were the way they were was because of sheer chance and the principle of correlation.<sup>35</sup> "Even after suprahistorical essences or necessities are forgotten, things cohere, *q* follows *p* and is as it is partly because *p* was as it was. 'History' is simply this temporal coherence, this connectedness of things from one moment to the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> The principle of correlation is not unique to Nietzsche, but is a widely recognised principle of historiography. It emphasises the continuous web of cause and effect which governs the natural world. "Since we discern . . . the various historical cycles of human life influencing and intersecting one another, we gain at length the idea of continuity." James Hastings ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913; reprint 1953), s.v. "Historiography," by Ernst Troeltsch, 6.718. Almost two hundred years before Nietzsche and Troeltsch, Spinoza had argued that the world was governed by the correlation of cause and effect evidenced by the natural laws and that "nothing comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws . . . she keeps a fixed and immutable order." Benedict De Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologica-Politicus*, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (London: George Bell & Sons, 1883; reprint N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1951), 1.83.



next.”<sup>36</sup> While his argument denies the possibility for metaphysics (based on what occurs in history), it also asserts the continuity of history.<sup>37</sup> This connectedness is both a curse and a blessing. History and tradition are the unbearable weight of an unwilled past pressing down us.<sup>38</sup> In *The Gay Science*, he describes this as the ‘Greatest Weight’:<sup>39</sup>

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence — even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!”<sup>40</sup>

Eternal Recurrence precludes any form of freedom or variation from what has happened or will happen again.<sup>41</sup> Once we come to terms with the idea of Eternal Recurrence we realise that history is a closed system in which each moment affects those that follow it. History has no goal or God. Human beings are forever confined to the particular horizon of world history in which they find themselves. Redemption from this burden comes from how we embrace this unwilled past. “Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him [the demon of Eternal Recurrence]: ‘You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>36</sup> David D. Roberts, *Nothing but History: Reconstruction and Extremity after Metaphysics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 65.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Heller, “Multiplicity and Unity in Nietzsche’s Works and Thoughts on Thought,” *The German Quarterly*, 52 (1978), 322.

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> The title for this section in the German is *Das grösste Schwergewicht*, which conveys not only the idea of the main emphasis but in the context of his discussion of eternal recurrence can also be translated as ‘the greatest heavy weight’. The ambiguity in the German is seen in Nietzsche’s idea that eternal recurrence is a weight which presses down and threatens to crush us unless we embrace it, in which case it is a liberating idea.

<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (N.Y.: Random House, 1974), § 341, p. 273.

<sup>41</sup> Copleston believes that Nietzsche developed the concept of Eternal Recurrence on his own whereas Kaufmann appears to have proof that Nietzsche first encountered this idea in the works of Heine. However, in contrast to Nietzsche, Heine allowed for a certain degree of human freedom and variation in his view of Eternal Recurrence. Frederick Copleston, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Philosopher of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Search Press, 1975), 16; Walter Kaufmann, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *The Gay Science*, 17; Heller, 325.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, § 341, p. 273-74. Corbineau-Hoffmann, 1386. This raises a possible conceptual inconsistency in Nietzsche’s thought. How is it possible to hold to both the closed continuum of Eternal Recurrence and the creative freedom of the Will to Power? I do not think Nietzsche successfully resolved this tension.



This is a large topic and I need to restrict the discussion to Nietzsche's ideas regarding Eternal Recurrence and play which are relevant to Gadamer's hermeneutic and reception theory. Play enters Nietzsche's philosophical system in two ways. First, Eternal Recurrence suggests that there is no purpose to history. Therefore, all human actions must not be seen as purposive but as innocent play. Once we realise this the values we inherit from the past are no longer real but are only the trace or symptom of someone else's exercise of the Will to Power. This brings us to an extreme form of nihilism. Second, his program of deconstruction "frees human creativity by showing the historical contingency of what had to come to seem suprahistorical and natural."<sup>43</sup> We are able, through our exercise of the Will to Power, to deconstruct and reassemble the past because the past is absurd and there is a freedom to the will once we embrace Eternal Recurrence. "The will to power operates in a vacuum, so to speak. It creates its own values and sustains them in a world without a logical basis."<sup>44</sup> In this way, play functions as a hermeneutical tool to undermine and destabilise cultural ideologies and morality which Nietzsche opposed. "Play as transgressive unreason and absurdity serves to correct the imbalance in culture and thought, and art, like play, standing apart from privileged modes of reason in culture, works to promote the spirit of unrest and misrule, challenging and directing its audience to new conceptions of reality."<sup>45</sup> Play arises from the conflict between the meaningless visible world and the "absolute subject who grants value to the meaningless by his affirmation."<sup>46</sup>

The split which Kant opened between determinative and reflective judgement not only reaches its zenith in Nietzsche, but is completely reversed.<sup>47</sup> The objective world of history is utterly meaningless and oblivious to human agency. We are ignorant of the play of the world and history until we grasp the true nature and significance of the world through Eternal Recurrence and by an act of the will enter into play with it. "Human nature stands, in other words, outside the totality of the world and must seek admittance

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<sup>43</sup> Roberts, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Detsch, 165; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *Trinity Journal*, 8 (1987): 40.

<sup>45</sup> Irena R. Mayaryk, ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), s.v. "Play/freeplay, theories of," by Gordon E. Slethaug, 146.

<sup>46</sup> Detsch, "A Non-Subjectivist Concept of Play," 169.

<sup>47</sup> Heller, 330-31; Corbineau-Hoffmann, 1386. "If Kant and Schiller redefined play in such a way as to make it a useful concept for moderns, it was Friedrich Nietzsche who freed it from the constraints of reason." Slethaug, 145.



to it.”<sup>48</sup> In this way his concepts of the Superman and Eternal Recurrence are brought together. “Man must practice a heroic yea-saying to life, must live so that he will desire and affirm the eternal repetition of his actions.”<sup>49</sup> On both sides, the concept of play is central to understanding Nietzsche’s arguments. The absurdity of the world is compared to a child who endlessly builds and demolishes sand piles on a deserted, desolate beach.<sup>50</sup> When we enter the play of history we are not creating any transcendental values, we are merely entering into the unending play of the world.<sup>51</sup> Detsch comments, “human play corresponding to the play of the world in which all standards and distinctions are meaningless.”<sup>52</sup> In this way, Nietzsche carried the Romantic tradition’s concept of play through to its most extreme conclusion.

#### D. Heidegger: the Play of Truth

Heidegger views Nietzsche as the conclusion to the western philosophical tradition. The distinction and separation between the visible and the invisible is one of the main trajectories in which this tradition has developed according to Heidegger. In the development of this tradition, those things which were visible and transitory lost their value and were reduced to the status of mere objects. Until finally, the visible world was viewed as totally senseless and absurd by Nietzsche. Heidegger’s concepts of truth as disclosure, thrownness, and play reverse many of the trajectories of thought concerning the topic of play which started with Kant. While ‘play’ is not a central idea in Heidegger’s thought, it and his conception of truth form the background to Gadamer’s hermeneutic in this area.

Heidegger’s clearest discussion of play is found in *The Principle of Reason*. Because human beings have a desire to control, we attempt to find a reason for everything. This desire is reflected in scientific methods which attempt (through objectivity) to detach from the movement of play. However, this is an impossible ideal

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 168

<sup>49</sup> Copleston, 19. “It is the ‘final, cheerfullist, exuberantly mad-and-merriest Yea to life.’” Ibid., 61.

<sup>50</sup> Heller, 321. Nietzsche derived this from 52 fragment of Heraclitus. “*Wie das Kind im Spiel bald das Spielzeug fortwirft, bald aber die Ordnungen des Spiel wieder aufgreift, schaue der ästhetische Mensch die Welt an.*” Corbineau-Hoffmann, 1386-87.

<sup>51</sup> “The Will to Power is expressed in temporal terms in the theorem of Eternal Recurrence which posits the endlessly self-creative, self-destructive play that is the cosmos, as one which must repeat itself endlessly throughout eternity.” Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 324-5; also, 336. See Camus’ work for a similar treatment concerning the meaning of the human condition. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

<sup>52</sup> Detsch, 167.



to achieve because there is an opposing movement of play which impoverishes our ability for “building and dwelling in the realm of what is essential. There is an enigmatic interconnection [*Wiederspiel*, counter-play] between the demand to render reasons [*Grund*] and the withdrawal of roots [*Bodens*, foundation, footing]. It is important to see the form of the movement occurring in this lofty play [*Spieles*] between rendering and withdraw.”<sup>53</sup> Play occupies the place between the opposing movements of giving or delivering reasons and the pulling back or withdrawing of the foundational answers of what is essential.

This concept of play can also be seen in Heidegger’s concept of truth. According to Heidegger, ἀλήθεια means ‘unconcealment’ or ‘disclosure’. Truth as disclosure is related to its opposite: concealment or hiddenness.<sup>54</sup> Truth is an event of disclosure that takes place within the referential contexts in which we live.<sup>55</sup> Because truth as disclosure takes place in finite, temporal human existence, it is never final, closed, or determinate. There is always a degree of concealment in every event of disclosure.<sup>56</sup> “The conflict between revealment and concealment is not the truth of the work of art alone, but the truth of every being, for as unhiddenness, truth is always such an opposition of revealment and concealment. The two necessarily belong together.”<sup>57</sup> Truth is

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<sup>53</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly, *Studies in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 31; idem, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), 60. Alternate translations are mine. While I agree with Lilly’s translation most of the time, I feel that the metaphorical use of Heidegger’s terms is often missed in his translation, so I have tried to incorporate that into the text.

<sup>54</sup> Ernst Tugendhat, “Heidegger’s Idea of Truth,” trans. Christopher Macann, in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 88 ff.

<sup>55</sup> “Being-true as Being-uncovering, is in turn ontologically possible only on the basis of Being-in-the-world.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, reprint 1992)], 261; Tugendhat, 91; James DiCenso, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study in the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricœur*, in *Studies in Religion and Culture*, ed. Nathan A. Scott Jr. (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 62. One of the most important existential categories associated with the play of concealment and disclosure is Being-towards-death. Death presents us with a tension between Being and non-Being which is part of the play structure of the cosmos. Death presents being *qua* abyss (*Ab-Grund*), “which as the most radical possibility of existence is capable of bringing what is most elevated to the clearing and lightening of being and its truth.” Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 112.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 265. “Truth, in its nature, is un-truth.” Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, Martin Heidegger Works, ed. J. Glenn Gray (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1971), 54.

<sup>57</sup> Gadamer, “Heidegger’s Later Philosophy,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 226. Hiddenness is not error or ignorance but belongs to being itself. In fact, it is hiddenness which makes the disclosure possible. 223-26.



characterised by the play between concealment and unconcealment which means that truth is never definitive but will always remain continual and provisional.<sup>58</sup>

Thanks to this clearing [between disclosure and concealment], beings are unconcealed in certain changing degrees. And yet a being can be concealed, too, only within the sphere of what is lighted. Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presence in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealedness.<sup>59</sup>

We can never fully grasp something in the totality of its being because this would mean that no further perspectives or referential contexts would remain which could evoke new possibilities of disclosure which are concealed from us in our interpretive horizon.<sup>60</sup>

However, this does not allow one to conclude that all disclosures are equally true or valid. False understanding or interpretations are not a disclosure but a covering up according to Heidegger. This takes place when we uncover the entity in a way that is not itself.<sup>61</sup> “To say that an assertion “*is true*” signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is itself. Such an assertion asserts, points out, ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’ (ἀπόφανσις) in its uncoveredness. The *Being-true (truth)* of the assertion must be understood as *Being-uncovering*.” To say that something is true means there is some degree of conformity of our knowledge with the facts which have been disclosed in the event of understanding.<sup>62</sup> In this respect, Heidegger takes a middle position concerning the meaning of a text.

If we return to *Der Satz vom Grund*, we find that play is simply part of the fabric of existence and, as such, it has no explanation. “The ‘because’ withers away in play. The play is without ‘why.’ It plays since it plays. It simply remains a play: the most elevated and the most profound.”<sup>63</sup> Play is a to-and-fro movement without aim or purpose that constantly renews itself in repetition. On the one hand, the nature of play is

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58 “Truth, in Heidegger’s understanding, will never establish itself irrevocably and definitively, with a plenitude of reality. It is a process which can never be completed because the hidden will never relinquish its hold on that which emerges from it” Detsch, 169; DiCenso 64.

59 Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 53.

60 Ibid., 53. See the following for a very clear discussion of referential contexts in Heidegger: Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, in *Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks*, ed. Tim Crane and Jonathan Wolff (London and N.Y.: Routledge, 1996), 99-104.

61 Tugendhat’s article has an excellent critique of Heidegger’s concept of truth as disclosure. He demonstrates how Heidegger adopts a very narrow definition of uncovering or disclosure as ‘pointing out’. This raises two problems: (1) how do we differentiate truth from pointing out, and (2) false assertions are disclosive also (there is an element of unconcealment in their concealment). While Heidegger does not address these problems, they raise questions about how we are to judge between falsehood and truth in his system. “Heidegger’s Idea of Truth,” 86-92.

62 Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 51-55.

63 Idem, *The Principle of Reason*, 113; *Satz*, 188.



determined by the thrownness of Being. As such, play has a playing field with boundaries, “of rules, of rules of play, of calculus.”<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, play is characterised by freedom. Rules may restrict play but at the same time play is erratic and open to new possibilities of disclosure.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the transmission of a tradition will not be a smooth process but will often appear broken or erratic because of the playful manner in which the new or unexpected break into a tradition.<sup>66</sup> Kisiel sums up Heidegger’s position when he states that Heidegger “insists that there is a final leap through the normal conversation with the tradition to the creative event, which does not abide by previously established laws, but creates its own norms that bestow a unique bearing on the original thinker and changes the normal course of history fundamentally.”<sup>67</sup>

Heidegger’s notion of play, and the playful structure of truth as disclosure reverses many of the ideas found in the trajectory from Kant to Nietzsche. Play is not separated from or differentiated from other forms of knowledge. All truth, whether it is scientific or aesthetic, is characterised by the play of concealment and disclosure. Truth, as an original occurrence, takes place in the space created in the play between disclosure and concealing and, in this sense, is a historical happening. Truth occurs in many different manners: from that found in a work of art, to the founding of a political state, a religious ceremony, or the questioning of a thinker.<sup>68</sup> This means that we cannot differentiate the aesthetic from everyday life because all disclosures of truth are

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 112/186.

<sup>65</sup> Kisiel, “Happening of Tradition,” 372. For Heidegger, the danger of taking a conservative approach to tradition is that it erects restrictive rules which stifle play.

<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 90-91; *Satz*, 154. In this way, Heidegger’s concept of play shares a common thread with Nietzsche’s. Like Nietzsche, he cites the Heraclitus’ 52nd Fragment to demonstrate the playful nature of the cosmos. “Αἰὼν παῖς ἔστι παιζῶν, πεσσεύων ἢ παιδός ἢ βασιλήτη.” The ἀρκή that governs the nature of being is that of a “child that plays.” Ibid., 113/188.

<sup>67</sup> Theodore Kisiel, “The Happening of Tradition: The Hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger,” *Man and World*, 2 (3, 1969): 377. Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen, Neimeyer, 1954) 39.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 62. It is worth noting that “science is not an original happening of truth, but always the cultivation of a domain of truth already open, specifically by apprehending and confirming that which shows itself to be possibly and necessarily correct within that field.” This helps to explain Thomas Kuhn’s theory of the history of science as paradigm shifts. The creative thought required to conceptualise the field of research in a new paradigm would be an original event of truth. The period of normal science that would follow once the new paradigm is adopted would not fall under the category of truth as play but would be the “cultivation of the domain of truth already opened up.” See: Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd enlarged ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); idem, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977).



constituted by Dasein's thrownness.<sup>69</sup> In this way, Heidegger overcomes the subjectivity inherent in the previous conceptions of play.

## II. GADAMER'S CONCEPT OF PLAY

As I mentioned in the introduction to part I of this chapter, play is one of the fundamental concepts in *Truth and Method*. Gadamer criticises both historicism and aesthetic consciousness for the same reason; they are both alienated forms of true historical being and, as a result, we cannot truly experience art or history through them. It is through his development of the concept of *Spiel*, (play or game) that he seeks to solve the problems located in historicism and aesthetic consciousness. However, he must first correct the subjectivity inherent in previous conceptions of play.<sup>70</sup>

Gadamer does not want to evacuate subjectivity from the concept of play but to transcend it. "Play is more than the consciousness of the player, and so it is more than a subjective act."<sup>71</sup> The truth claim of a work of art raises a hermeneutical question which reveals the limits of method. We cannot provide an adequate explanation of art from a methodological perspective. In order to answer the question of how we understand an artwork Gadamer insists we must look at the "*mode of being of the work of art itself.*"<sup>72</sup>

Play does not refer to the subjective state of mind of the observer or creator but, play refers to the mode of Being itself, and especially to the "mode of being of art itself."<sup>73</sup> Play is best understood as the medium through which understanding takes place and not in terms of subject/object, player/game, or psychological categories. Play is a primordial mode of Being characterised by a "to-and-fro movement" that is not oriented towards a telos, but renews itself with each and every movement.<sup>74</sup> Human existence is characterised by and experiences the playful nature of Being. Play exists independently of the consciousness of the players and, as such, play takes primacy "*over the consciousness of the player.*"<sup>75</sup> Richard Detsch points out how both Heidegger and

<sup>69</sup> "To Dasein's state belongs thrownness; indeed it is constitutive for Dasein's disclosedness." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 264.

<sup>70</sup> Gadamer, "Reflections," 27.

<sup>71</sup> Idem, "Forward to the Second Edition," in *Truth and Method*, xxxvi.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 100. Gadamer's argument parallels the central thrust of Heidegger's essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art."

<sup>73</sup> Gadamer, 101.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 101-4. Gadamer follows Heidegger's definition of play at this and many other points. See: Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 112-13; *Satz*, 186-88.

<sup>75</sup> Gadamer, 102. In German, the term play, *spielen*, carries a semantic range of meaning which is not as clearly seen in the English. Gadamer cites this semantic range to show how one can play (*spielt*) a game, or to refer to that fact that something is happening (*sich abspielt*

Gadamer share the same paradoxical assumption when it comes to play. “The both posit a dimension which, unlike modern existential philosophy, transcends human subjectivity; but unlike the older metaphysical-theological speculation, they both hold fast to human finiteness.”<sup>76</sup>

There is one fundamental point at which Gadamer and Heidegger’s concept of play differ. For Heidegger, tradition restricted the room for play and, as a result, he argued that we needed to include the freedom of poetic release in the concept of play. Gadamer, in contrast, takes a much more positive approach toward tradition. The playing field is the temporal room of tradition.<sup>77</sup> The playful event of understanding is possible only because of what is handed down to us in our tradition (in Part III of *Truth and Method*, he makes the same argument in reference to language), and how what is handed down addresses and strikes us. In this way, tradition is constantly playing itself out in new possibilities.<sup>78</sup> This point becomes very clear if we contrast Gadamer’s idea of play with Nietzsche’s. For Nietzsche, because we dwell in an absurd world, play knows no bounds. Whereas for Gadamer, tradition is not absurd nor an oppressive weight pressing down on us but it is the soil from which productive understanding arises. It is the playing field in which we play out every act of understanding.<sup>79</sup>

While play is not teleological, it is purposeful. “Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.”<sup>80</sup> By this, Gadamer means that there is a seriousness to play which gives it a purpose. This can be seen in the way we call a person who holds himself back and does not enter into the spirit of the game a spoil sport.<sup>81</sup> The player must approach play seriously. Not by approaching play in an objective manner (as if it were an object to be studied) but by becoming involved in the play of a game.<sup>82</sup> This is a significant aspect to play for Gadamer. To be seriously involved in play means that we are part of the game which is taking place. The distinction between subject and object (player and game) is not appropriate since there would be no game without the players.

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or *im Spiele ist*). His point is that in German the same *spielen*, ‘play,’ is not primarily something someone does, but conveys the idea that the subject of play is play itself. *Ibid.*, 104; “Man and Language,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> Detsch, “A Non-Subjectivist Concept of Play,” 160.

<sup>77</sup> Kisiel, “Happening of Tradition,” 371-72.

<sup>78</sup> Detsch, 162.

<sup>79</sup> Gadamer “establishes a reciprocity between the human being and tradition by which each continually conditions the other irrespective of any specific awareness of or desire for such conditioning.” *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>80</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102.

<sup>81</sup> David Linge, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, xxiii.

<sup>82</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102.



When a player distances herself from the play she was involved in (in order to critically reflect on it), play breaks down and she is no longer in the game.<sup>83</sup> When applied to textual interpretation, play as the hermeneutical medium for understanding reveals the weaknesses of approaching a text from the perspective of the subjectivity of the author (Schleiermacher) or the interpreter (Schiller).

Play as a fundamental hermeneutical category allows Gadamer to go beyond the dominance of method in the humanities, while at the same time not denying the validity of method at different points (the performing of the tasks in the game).

The real subject of playing is the game itself. This observation does not contradict the fact that one must know the rules of the game and stick to them, or by the fact that the players undergo training and excel in the requisite physical methods of the game. All these things are valuable and 'come into play' only for the one who enters the game and gives herself to it.<sup>84</sup>

As such, method falls under, or into, the medium of play. Play, as part of the primordial nature of being, is the medium in which understanding takes place. The application of method in interpretation is a derivative form of understanding. In our quest for objectivity we employ methods so that we may obtain a degree of certitude in our interpretations. However, the concept of play reveals that this is not only a false ideal, but the concept of play also stands in active opposition to this. One of the significant aspects of art is that this is the area in which we experience this opposition to method most clearly. How does one objectively approach Van Gogh's painting of the peasant's shoes in a manner which does justice to it as a work of art?

#### A. Play as the Being of Artwork

While play, as a fundamental aspect of Being, is non-teleological, it can open the possibility for other forms of activity which do have structures and purposes such as games, artworks, and musical performances. For Gadamer, the highest form by which play can be experienced is that of art. "My thesis, then, is that the being of art .... is part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*, and belongs essentially to play as play."<sup>85</sup>

The fact that play requires someone to play seems obvious. But in Gadamer's phenomenological examination of play, the players and that which is played are essential. It is only when a player is seriously involved in play that what is being played presents itself; it comes into being. An artwork does not exist in and of itself, as a self-sufficient

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>84</sup> Linge, xxiii; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxix.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 116.

object. Rather, the artwork comes into being only in the playful interaction between it and the viewer. This concept of art is based on Heidegger's analysis of art found in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art."

In order to illustrate the nature of what an artwork is, Heidegger considers Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes. As one looks at this picture he or she notices all sorts of things: "the toilsome tread of the worker ... the dampness and richness of the soil ... the quiet gift of grain ... This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and is protected in the world of the peasant woman."<sup>86</sup> But how does one discover such things in a work of art? Certainly not by the application of a method, "but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh's painting. This painting spoke."<sup>87</sup> In the event of experiencing the picture a disclosure of truth takes place concerning this pair of peasant shoes. An unconcealment takes place. "If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work."<sup>88</sup> The term 'art-work' is illustrative of the being of art for Heidegger. For in the interaction with the viewer a 'work' happens in the disclosure of the truth of the painting.

Gadamer describes this as the consummation of play. In viewing the painting, we are caught up into the play of understanding in which a world is projected by the work of art. Play as presentation is realised in the re-presentation which we experience in viewing the painting. There is a unity of truth (the subject/object split is transcended) which we experience in the work of art. To step back and ask questions about the origin or technical aspects of the painting severs us from the true experience of the work of art. We are no longer caught up in play, and cannot grasp the truth claim of the work of art which comes into existence when we are involved in the play of the artwork. This type of reflection also implies a form of aesthetic differentiation between "the work itself from its representation" for Gadamer. At the same time, he does not wish to "deny that here there is a starting point for aesthetic reflection."<sup>89</sup> The various presentations of a work are not free but are restrained by the structure and contingencies that are part of the world of the artwork. The presentation of a work is subject to criteria so that it is a correctness to representation. The danger, which Gadamer takes great pains to avoid, in this type of reflection, is that we might fall back into Kant's two forms of judgement and an aesthetic concept of play. Therefore, Gadamer is highly critical of all attempts to

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<sup>86</sup> Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 34.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>89</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 118.



reintroduce critical reflection back into hermeneutics. This is one of the major points over which Gadamer disagrees with Jauss. However, we shall have to wait until the next chapter to see if Jauss is successful in his attempt to include some form of reflection and methodology in his hermeneutic.

## B. Presentation and the Transformation into Structure

The fact that play involves players reveals that human play always plays something. First, the player chooses to play this rather than that. This means that human play is not characterised by an unrestricted freedom but it takes place in a space specifically marked out and reserved for the play in which we have chosen to engage. "Human play requires a playing field."<sup>90</sup> Second, play involves performing tasks (i.e., a child's game may involve the task of playing with a ball). Human involvement in play is possible only because it involves tasks. However, it is important to note that the purpose of play is not accomplished in the performance of the tasks involved in the game but in "the ordering and shaping of the movement of the game itself."<sup>91</sup>

An essential trait of art as play is that "all play is potentially a representation for someone."<sup>92</sup> In performing the tasks of a game, presentation takes place. As the players perform the tasks of the game, they are also involved in a self-presentation.<sup>93</sup> On the one hand, there is a difference between a child playing and that of a musical performance. On the other hand, all forms of play are characterised by an openness toward a potential audience which moves play beyond self-presentation to "representing for someone." The *Schauspiel*, or theatrical performance, is a clear illustration of this principle. As the actors (players) perform the play, a presentation occurs. This involves their self-presentation as they play themselves out in the tasks they perform. "Only because play is presentation, is human play able to make representation the task of a game."<sup>94</sup> The *Schauspiel* takes its mode of existence in its performance in that this form of play (the drama) is written by an author for its performance by players to an audience. The potential nature of presentation is completed by the audience, spectators, viewer, or reader.<sup>95</sup> Play is realised not just in the players but also those who watch the play. "In fact, it is experienced properly by and presents itself (as it is 'meant') to, one who is not acting in the play but

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>93</sup> "Play is really limited to presenting itself. Thus its mode of being is self-presentation." Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 108-9,

watching it. In him the game is raised, as it were, to its ideality.”<sup>96</sup> Therefore, play is best defined as the “process that takes place ‘in between’ the player and the game.”<sup>97</sup>

Just as we saw above, play in this sense, cannot be approached objectively, by means of a neutral subject who employs methods in his reflecting on the origin of the play or its presentation. Critical reflection creates a distance between the player and play which drops the player out of play. Most of us are familiar with this type of experience when a critic’s comment breaks the ‘spell’ of the play (I have a drama or movie in mind) in which we are involved.

In this ‘world’ of the film, we have been lowered into a lifeboat, and are battered by the roaring wind. Our stomachs turn as the boat rises high, then drops twenty feet into a trough between the waves. We hear the sound of the spray, and as lightning breaks across the sky we catch a glimpse of the ship we have just left ... An awestruck voice whispers besides us “No one would ever think that the Director had used a two-foot model in a six-foot tank.” The spell has been broken by the comment of a *critic*, who necessarily speaks on the basis of a *critical* approach.<sup>98</sup>

Nor can it be apprehended through the free-play of the viewers’ aesthetic consciousness. Rather, play is the ‘in between’ which involves the participation of the players and audience in the presentation of the play.<sup>99</sup>

Because artistic presentation, as play, exists for an audience, play is transformed into structure. While play is without purpose or intention, it can lead to activities which possess purpose and structure. By transformation into structure, Gadamer “means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison with which its earlier being is nil.”<sup>100</sup> The author of the drama, the script, and the players no longer exist in themselves. Instead, what they are playing comes to appearance. “Thus transformation into structure means that what existed previously exists no longer. But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is the lasting and true.”<sup>101</sup> Play transforms the author’s script and the player’s performance into what they are playing.<sup>102</sup> This same transformation takes place in reading literature. Just as the being of the work of art is play and must be viewed by the spectator in order for it to be actualised “so also it is

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96 Ibid., 109.

97 Ibid., 109, 117.

98 Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 315-6.

99 Gadamer, 117.

100 Ibid., 111.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., 112.



universally true of texts that only in the process of understanding them is the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning.”<sup>103</sup>

In respect to the audience, *play transforms into a world* (structure) *in which the audience dwells*. Gadamer’s argument at this point rests on Heidegger’s idea that the work of art projects a ‘world.’ In his explanation of what one experiences in Van Gogh’s painting of the peasant shoes, Heidegger talks about how we experience the world present in the artwork. This does not occur through description or explanation “but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh’s painting. This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be.”<sup>104</sup> This projected ‘world’ exists in a playful relationship through conflict with the ‘earth’. Earth refers not only to the physical and historical environment in which we live, but it also consists in our thrownness. As such, earth is the intersubjective life-world from which all human understanding takes place and from which we are able to project a world. The truth of the work of art, is that the work of art opens up a world. Or to put it another way, “its world is present in it.”<sup>105</sup> In the artwork a world arises and as a result, there is a disclosure of truth. In our experience of Van Gogh’s painting of the peasant’s shoes something new is revealed or disclosed which “is not simply the manifestation of a truth, it is itself an event.”<sup>106</sup> The viewer actively participates in this disclosure of the world of the work of art by “opening of oneself to the event of encounter and standing in it in such a way that the being of the work of art shows itself, steps forth, *appears*.”<sup>107</sup> In this way, Gadamer writes that play is a transformation into truth, “it produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn.”<sup>108</sup> Play reconciles the subject and the object since both participate in the ‘in-between’ of play. It also holds the intersubjective horizon of ‘earth’ in tension with the projected understanding of the work of art, its ‘world.’

What does this mean in relation to the history of a text’s interpretation? When we apply Gadamer’s concept of the transformation of play into structure to history of a

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103 Ibid., 164.

104 Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 35.

105 Gadamer, “Heidegger’s Later Philosophy,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 222. “Towering up within itself, the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force.” Heidegger, 44.

106 Ibid., 224.

107 The experience of art is not something that we do, but is something we are absorbed into, it is the ‘work’ of art. Richard E. Palmer, “Ritual, Rightness, and Truth in Two Later Works of Hans-Georg Gadamer,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 540.

108 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 112.

text's reception we realise that there can be no 'single meaning' for the text. Meaning can never be the identical. While the task of interpreting a text can be repeated (we are performing the same text), it cannot be re-enacted in exactly the same manner because the conditions under which the performance is performed cannot be identical. In order to understand this phenomena, Gadamer examines what takes place in the celebration of a ritual or festival. A religious festival, such as Easter, displays affinities with textual interpretation because it only exists in its celebration (or performance) just as the meaning of a text only exists in its reading.<sup>109</sup>

The celebration of a festival possesses two distinct but related forms of temporality. First, a festival is historically temporal. Originally it was celebrated in one manner but with the passing of time it comes to be celebrated differently, and our present observance will be slightly different yet. The festival changes from one year, or celebration, to the next.<sup>110</sup> A festival is not one and the same, but it is historical in that "it exists by always being something different."<sup>111</sup> Like a text, it displays this curious temporality of celebration, disappearance, and then returning in the next celebration. No two celebrations are replicated in the same manner, but the festival is open to unlimited re-enactments. At the same time, a ritual's celebration must be appropriate to what is being observed. The 'rightness' of the celebration is related to both the festival being observed (similar to the manner in which a musical performance is related to the score being performed) and to the customs and tradition of those who are observing it.<sup>112</sup>

The second aspect of a festival's temporality is that it is contemporaneous. This occurs in the same manner that a musical piece only exists in its performance and involves the participation of the audience.<sup>113</sup> "Contemporaneity' means that in its presentation this particular thing that presents itself to us achieves full presence, however, remote its origin may be."<sup>114</sup> When we celebrate Christ's resurrection on Easter we do not compare this celebration with the original one, or past celebrations, but we fully

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109 While textual interpretation and the celebration of a festival are similar it is important to note that they are not identical for Gadamer. Palmer, 534.

110 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 123.

111 Ibid., 123-4 note 225 Gadamer is arguing against the Platonic idea that a festival could be an 'ideal' which remains unchanged while its manifestation in history will always be different. For Gadamer, there is no Platonic ideal behind the festival, just as there is not ideal 'meaning' behind the text.

112 Palmer, "Ritual, Rightness, and Truth," 531-33.

113 "A festival only exists in being celebrated." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 124.

114 Ibid., 127. Gadamer learned of contemporaneity from Kierkegaard who claimed that in the preaching of the word a mediation between our present and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus took place so that we experience the later as a present reality.



participate in this celebration, "all mediation [of historical distance] is superseded by total presence..."<sup>115</sup> This is not the same thing as simultaneity, which sees every point in time as equally present and is based on the free-play of aesthetic consciousness by which texts, or festivals, from the past are cut off from their contextual relationships so that we are able to experience them directly.<sup>116</sup> Contemporaneity, by contrast, involves the recognition that there is a historical distance between what is being celebrated and the present celebration: between Easter morning and this Easter celebration. The distance between the past horizon and the present is not ignored but is what makes participation in the festival possible. We recognise the alterity of what is being celebrated and in doing so we return to the present. This is a hermeneutical movement which must be performed. "The past must be *made* manifest to the present because its presence and immediacy are not given."<sup>117</sup>

### C. Presentation, Imitation, and Recognition

Whereas Heidegger speaks of the conflict between world and earth, or disclosure and concealment to explain the event of truth in the work of art, Gadamer employs the concepts of imitation (or mimesis) and recognition.<sup>118</sup> Once again, Gadamer is attempting to defend concepts which have fallen into disrepute. Mimesis, or imitation, used to serve as one of the underlying hermeneutical and literary concepts. However, since the early 1960's, it has come under increasing criticism, especially from French theorists such as Barthes, Genette, Derrida, and Foucault.<sup>119</sup> If mimesis, or imitation, is denied then understanding texts falls into the unending play of signs to be interpreted; this is an untenable point as we saw in the first half of this chapter. Robert Alter claims that good literature presupposes and makes use of the vehicle of mimesis in order to present to us "lives that might seem like our lives, minds like our minds, and desires like our own desires."<sup>120</sup>

Imitation plays an important cognitive role in that it is related to preunderstanding. When we imitate someone we are not trying to hide ourselves behind

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>116</sup> See above, "Schiller: Free-Play and Aesthetic Differentiation."

<sup>117</sup> Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of "Truth and Method"* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 115.

<sup>118</sup> Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 46-50, 63.

<sup>119</sup> See the following article for an excellent discussion of concerning the fall of mimesis: Robert Alter, "Mimesis and the Motive for Fiction," *Tri Quarterly*, 42 (Spring 1978): 228-32.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 248.

a disguise but to represent that person.<sup>121</sup> This imitation is related to our knowledge of the person and our audience's knowledge of them also. Heidegger wrote about the mimetic quality of a sculpture of a Greek god in a temple. "It is not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realise how the god looks; rather, it is a work that lets the god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself."<sup>122</sup> For Gadamer, this is an example of how play is transformed into structure. In the mimetic presentation of the Greek god in the statue, a figure or shape of that god is projected in the world of that work of art.<sup>123</sup> This is not some form of an atemporal truth which is realised but it is an event which occurs when we bring ourselves before that sculpture. It is a historical happening in that it is an event which happens and arises in a historical situation.<sup>124</sup>

The correctness of the presentation of a work of art is realised through the cognitive function of recognition. Umberto Eco employs a similar notion of recognition in his semiotic theory. "Recognition occurs when a given object or event ... comes to be viewed by an addressee as the expression of a given content, *either through a pre-existing and coded correlation or through the positing of a possible correlation by its addressee.*"<sup>125</sup> There must be some form of agreement or conformity between what we already know of the thing and what is presented in the artwork.<sup>126</sup> This is what allows us to say, "Yes, that's the way it really is."<sup>127</sup> The cognitive value of recognition does not end with realising this conformity or agreement for Gadamer. "The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar."<sup>128</sup> In representation there is a 'bringing forth' of the thing represented. This may involve isolating the subject-matter of the artwork from its original context, or highlighting certain facets of it while passing over

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121 Gadamer, 113. This concept is difficult to grasp in English because of our use of two related hermeneutical terms: imitation and mimesis. While both convey the idea of correspondence and resemblance, imitation denotes the idea that it is a static or exact copy whereas mimesis leans more to the side that there is a dynamic and active relationship between the representation and the thing represented. Gadamer's concepts at this point are much more in line with the term mimesis. Irena R. Mayaryk, ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), s.v. "Mimesis," by John Baxter.

122 Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 43.

123 Ibid., 64, 66.

124 Ibid., 61.

125 Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 221.

126 Ibid., 51-52.

127 For Gadamer, the expression, "It is so," is related to the experience of "it comes forth." "*So ist es' — so ist es 'richtig'* [It is so — it is 'right' so!]" The way we sense the rightness of something is related to disclosure. Palmer, "Ritual, Rightness, and Truth," 108.

128 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 114; Alter, "Mimesis and the Motive for Fiction," 245-46.



others.<sup>129</sup> "All true imitation is a transformation that does not simply present again something that is already there. It is a kind of transformed reality in which the transformation points back to what has been transformed in and through it. It is a transformed reality because it brings before us intensified possibilities never seen before."<sup>130</sup> There will never be any 'last word' about the meaning of a work of art or a text. Every encounter with an artwork is part of the still unfinished happening of the work itself because of the way we recognise 'more' than we knew previously.<sup>131</sup> Imitation and recognition are not restricted to the mere copying of the subject-matter but also involve a disclosure of its essence.<sup>132</sup>

The interpretation of Jesus' parables are illustrative of the functions of mimesis and recognition. The characters and narrative situation found in the parables would have been easily recognised by Jesus' audience in relation to the people and situations of their daily lives and the themes contained in the parable would have been recognised in relation to their theology and overall understanding of the scriptures.<sup>133</sup> The intersubjective world which the audience shares with the parable draws them into the parable's projected narrative world and allows them to make judgements concerning its correctness.<sup>134</sup> At the same time, by the time the parable has reached its conclusion it has questioned, challenged, or reversed the preunderstanding of the hearer's theological framework.<sup>135</sup> While hearers are caught up in the play of the presentation of the parable

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<sup>129</sup> The four gospels illustrate this idea. Each one is a mimetic representation of the life of Jesus which differs from the other three by the way they emphasise certain aspects of his ministry and teaching, and ignore other elements.

<sup>130</sup> Gadamer, "The Festive Character of the Theater," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 64.

<sup>131</sup> Detsch, "Gadamer, Heidegger, Rilke, Nietzsche on Play," 159.

<sup>132</sup> Gadamer, 114. "The work, therefore, is not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be present at any given time; it is, on the contrary, the reproduction of the thing's general essence." Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 37.

<sup>133</sup> Baird presents a very strong case that Jesus actually adapted his parables to match the particular background of the specific audience he was addressing at that time. J. Arthur Baird, *Audience Criticism and the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 103. Via extends the shared world of the parables beyond the original audience to generations of future readers, including the present one. For example, the parable of the Prodigal Son would relate to anyone who has experienced family life. Dan Otto Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 126.

<sup>134</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutics and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1966), 138-40, 179; Alter, "Mimesis and the Motive for Fiction," 234-35.

<sup>135</sup> Thiselton, "The Parables as Language-Event: Some Comments on Fuchs' Hermeneutics in the Light of Linguistic Philosophy," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 23 (1970), 440-2; Eta Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*, trans. John Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1966), 18-23.

they are confronted by its truth claim. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the hearer is challenged to reconsider her definition not only of who her neighbour is but also what it means to obey the greatest commandment. The intersubjective world shared by the hearer and the parable evoke the hearer's expectations which are then revised or expanded in relation to the truth claim presented in the parable. This is not a one time revision. If this were so, then once the parable was understood for the first time we would end up with a fixed or determinate meaning. But one of the generally accepted traits of parables is that we recognise 'more' than we previously recognised in successive readings of the parables. The possibility of there being any static or determinate meaning is undermined.

Jauss develops Gadamer's idea of mimesis farther by showing how it is one aspect of what allows a tradition of interpretation to form. With the recognition of 'more', which mimesis allows, a tradition begins to take shape. In the first reading of a text, recognition is based on the relation of the text to the intersubjective world of the readers. However, future readers will incorporate what previous readers recognised in the text. Thus, the 'more' which is recognised contributes to the expansion and transformation of successive horizons or reader's expectations. "Only as the horizon changes and expands with each subsequent historical materialization, do responses to the work legitimize particular possibilities of understanding, imitation, transformation, and continuation -- in short, structures of exemplary character that condition the process of the formation of literary tradition."<sup>136</sup>

Let me attempt to illustrate the role of recognition in the formation of the tradition of biblical interpretation. John 11:33 records that when Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus he was "ἐνεβριμήσατο" in his spirit. The German and English commentators follow two different historical trajectories of thought on how this verb should be interpreted. The English commentators prefer to translate this verb as referring to Jesus being "deeply moved" or "groaning" in his spirit, while the Germans prefer the more active meaning of Jesus becoming "angry". On the English side, this tradition of interpretation dates back to the King James translation and is reflected in

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<sup>136</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, "Art History as Pragmatic History," in *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, *Theory and History of Literature*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 64. See also Paul de Man's comments on mimesis. "Introduction," in *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, xxii.



many of the most recent translations.<sup>137</sup> Beasley-Murray mentions these traditions of interpretation in his commentary on John.

This understanding of ἐμβριμᾶσθαι has controlled the expositions of Bernard, Temple, Strachan, Sanders, Morris, Marsh, Lindars, Bruce, as also of Lagrange and F. M. Braun. By contrast Luther's rendering, "*Er ergrimmete im Geist und empörte sich*," i.e., "He was *angry* in the spirit and distressed," has controlled German interpretations to the present day, which generally departs from it only by way of stronger expression .... Such is the interpretation followed by Bultmann, Büchsel, Strathmann, Schnackenburg, Schulz, Haenchen, and Becker in their commentaries.<sup>138</sup>

This example illustrates the manner in which what previous readers or interpreters recognise in the text contributes to the horizon of expectations of future readers. In this way, the correctness of what is recognised as being represented in the text is partially determined by what the previous readers recognised.

#### D. Internal and External Representation

Alasdair MacIntyre offers a helpful clarification of Gadamer's concept of representation and recognition. MacIntyre makes a differentiation between external and internal representations.<sup>139</sup> An external representation is what we would classify as occurring in a copy. It is the type of representation which occurs in a passport photograph of a person. You can inspect the picture and the person independently and inquire about the degree of resemblance. In contrast, internal representation discloses or reveals features which can only be grasped in the representation. Rembrandt's portraits reveal to us aspects or features of the human face which we did not recognise before.<sup>140</sup> The key features of the person represented can only be found in the representation and it

<sup>137</sup> The following are just two examples. The recently revised (1995) New American Standard Bible translates this passage as, "he was deeply moved in spirit," and the New Revised Standard version has, "he was greatly disturbed in spirit."

<sup>138</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 192. There are a few exceptions, in the English, Westcott, Hoskyns, Barrett, Brown interpret this verb as being angry. *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>139</sup> Alter makes a parallel argument when he claims that we can categorise literature along the following two poles. At one end are the more poetical and literary texts which systematically project "the illusion of reality and shatters it." At the other end is "the realist novel" which tries to maintain a close affinity with reality. Alter, "Mimesis and the Motive for Fiction," 238-39.

<sup>140</sup> "It turns out that we are not, in asserting truth or falsity, asserting or denying some relationship between part of language and a non-linguistic feature of the world; we are always comparing one linguistic characterisation with another. Truth is a property of internal as much or more than of external representation, elsewhere just as in art." MacIntyre, "Contexts of Interpretation: Reflections on Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," 44-45.



is through the representation that “we learn to see what is represented.” It is not a copy of the thing in the world, but it is a disclosure of its heightened being.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, all art is not equal. The playful nature of understanding will be more fully realised in art forms and texts which are more externally representative. This is a point which I believe that Gadamer is in agreement with when he writes that in the work of art, play is raised to its ideality.<sup>142</sup>

If we apply this idea of internal and external representation to texts then we can see that there is a spectrum of different types of texts. Eco realises that there is a wide spectrum to the nature of texts. At the one end of the spectrum are closed texts which are designed to arouse “a precise response on the part” of the reader. At the other end are open texts which function primarily by generating meaning through the play which the reader enters into with the text, or as Roland Barthes writes, the “*jouissance du texte*.”<sup>143</sup> Paul’s request for Timothy to bring him his cloak, books (βιβλία) and parchments (μεμβράνας) in II Timothy 4:13 is an example of a closed text while Jesus’ parables are good examples of open texts designed to project a world in which the reader enters.<sup>144</sup> “Different genres within scripture will call forth different kinds of correlation, because of their different types of mimêsis.”<sup>145</sup>

However, there is no such thing as a pure closed or open text. Even the most closed texts “are in fact open to any possible ‘aberrant’ decoding” when readers from different horizons read the text.<sup>146</sup> The most open text is also not open to any

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>142</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 109. Also see his discussion of a scale of translatability between lyrical poetry at one end and novels at the other. Idem, “The Eminent Text and Its Truth,” *Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, trans. Geoffrey Waite, 13 (1980), 8.

<sup>143</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, in *Advances in Semiotics*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 3-10. Eco appears to have developed these concepts from Lotman’s theory of grammar-oriented and text-oriented cultures. Idem, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 136-38.

<sup>144</sup> However, even the parables are characterised by a high degree of external representation, or as Via would term, ‘low mimetic.’ While the parables are fictional they remind of everyday people and situation, there is nothing mythical or romantic about them. Dan Otto Via Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 96-100.

<sup>145</sup> Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 154. Italics hers.

<sup>146</sup> Searle shows that even a simple statement such as “the cat is on the mat” is open to numerous interpretations. These depend on the kinds of assumptions we make about the presence of gravity, the possibility of there being wires suspending the cat over the mat, or that the mat is stiffened and propped up at an angle. John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 121-124.



interpretation. In writing an open text, the author has structured it in such a manner that it is not open to accidental interpretations, but it outlines or projects a 'closed project' for the reader to realise.<sup>147</sup> "A text can succeed in being more or less open or closed."<sup>148</sup> Therefore, play will characterise, to a certain extent, the act of understanding a closed text. At the same time, the playing field opened up by a particular text will vary according to the nature of that text.<sup>149</sup>

In the application of Gadamer and Jauss' hermeneutics to biblical studies this point must be kept in mind because Gadamer uses literary texts as an example of the ideal form of play in a text and Jauss is primarily interested in the study of literary texts which we would classify as being more eternally representative.<sup>150</sup> However, the Bible contains a wide range of literary genres with a wide diversity when it comes to whether they are internally or externally representative. The danger lies in thinking that we can apply one concept of representation to all texts. This is especially true if we were to follow Gadamer and Jauss in adopting literary texts as the primary example since some the biblical texts, such as the Gospels are characterised by a higher degree of internal representation. "The implied reader of these texts understands them not as an enclosed fictional world but as an imaginative rendering of prior reality."<sup>151</sup>

In summary, Gadamer's ideas on play, imitation, and recognition overcome the problems associated with play which date back to Kant's separation of determinate from reflective judgement which eliminated the classical role mimesis played and attributed genuine knowledge to the sciences only. In recognising what is already known, but in a deeper or more authentic manner, the representation of play reinstates the position of cognitive knowledge in the arts.<sup>152</sup> It also presents a resolution to the problems which

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<sup>147</sup> Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 8-9. Gadamer takes a parallel argument when he argues that "The aesthetic object is not constituted by the aesthetic experience of grasping it, but the work of art itself is experienced in its aesthetic quality through the process of its concretization and creation." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 118 note 219.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>149</sup> Thiselton points out the danger of not making this distinction between different types of texts and the space for play which they open up. If all texts are subsumed under the model of the open text, then texts can no longer function as a basis for rational action. We cannot limit interpretation to one single model, to do so we get trapped in a philosophical tradition. Biblical texts transcend one category of texts and must have a theory broad enough to encompass the variety of functions which they perform. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 129-32.

<sup>150</sup> See Gadamer's "The Eminent Text and Its Truth," 3-10 for his view of literary, and especially poetical, texts.

<sup>151</sup> Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 34.

<sup>152</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 115.

we have inherited from Kant. On the one hand, there are those who argue for the determinate meaning of a text. E. D. Hirsch is perhaps the best known contemporary literary theorist who claims that through the application of method one can “achieve ‘true’ or ‘highly probable’ interpretations.”<sup>153</sup> In order to accomplish this, Hirsch bases his hermeneutic on a concept of meaning which is distinct from significance and relies on a split between the subject and the object.<sup>154</sup> The result of taking such a positivistic approach toward textual interpretation is that the productive possibilities for play are restricted from the start. On the opposing side are those that would agree with Schiller and Nietzsche’s concept of the unending and total freedom of play. Derrida argues that deconstruction is a never ending mode of play of the text. The idea that there is a fixed textual meaning is only an illusion. “Every meaning which is presumed to stand by the commentator is shown to be no more than a play between simulation and dissimulation. The true nature of every text therefore is to be in a state of flux as long as it is engaged by the reader and is reduced to a mere trace when the engagement is over because the text has no determinate essence.”<sup>155</sup>

Weinsheimer warns us of the danger of both of these opposing views. “What philosophical hermeneutics reminds us, however, is that both extremes, *homogeneity and heterogeneity alike, deaden mental activity*. For understanding lives in the play of equivalence and difference.”<sup>156</sup> Gadamer’s concept of play avoids the problems of the anarchy of unrestricted heterogeneous interpretations and the intellectual confinement of determinate meaning which kills the possibility for play. However, if the truth of a work of art arises or is instantiated in its performance or representation, then how do we differentiate between the different truth claims realised in different performances?

### E. Playful Truth

What is truth in relation to the play of interpretation? This is a difficult question to answer because Gadamer does not explicate his theory of truth at any one point, but

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<sup>153</sup> Christopher E. Arthur, “Gadamer and Hirsch: The Canonical Work and the Interpreter’s Intention,” *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 4 (1977), 183.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 184, 194. See James DiCenso, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth*, 85-90, for an incisive analysis of Hirsch’s hermeneutic on this point.

<sup>155</sup> Mario J. Valdés, “Conclusion: Concepts of Fixed and Variable Identity,” in *Identity of the Literary Text*, Mario J. Valdés and Owen Miller, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 303;

<sup>156</sup> Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, xiii, emphasis mine.



rather it is one of the main themes which he weaves throughout *Truth and Method*.<sup>157</sup> However, I believe it is possible to pull together several of the strands which Gadamer uses in weaving his tapestry so that we can arrive at a fairly clear picture of what truth involves in regard to play and interpretation.

First, truth occurs in the meaningful happening of play, it is something in which we participate, like a player in a game. The truth of an artwork is something which strikes us as meaningful. "What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition really has something of the truth of play about it. In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe."<sup>158</sup> For Heidegger, this happening of truth takes place in the disclosure of Being. Gadamer, makes his mentor's concept more historical in that he is primarily concerned with showing how the event of truth occurs in our conversation with tradition; through the works of art and texts which are handed down to us in it.<sup>159</sup> The disclosive character to the happening of truth means that truth will always be provisional. There will always be some degree of un-truth with the truth. Or to put it negatively, our finitude and historical thrownness means "that there are many things that are true that we are not capable of recognising because we are, without being cognizant of it, limited by prejudices."<sup>160</sup>

Secondly, truth is related to the subject matter of the text. It involves our ability to recognise some degree of conformity or correctness between what is represented and the representation. This is not based on a correspondence theory of truth, in which the work of art or the text are mainly descriptive of the subject matter they are portraying. But is more in line with a coherence model in which our interpretive context and preunderstanding inform our experience of the text or work of art. As such, to ask questions about the truth involves asking questions "about the structures that inform our modes of being-in-the-world."<sup>161</sup> Perhaps the most important element which comes

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157 Or as Bernstein says, truth is "one of the most elusive concepts in Gadamer." Bernstein, "From Hermeneutics to Praxis," 96; Riser, "The Remembrance of Truth," 123; Groundin, "Hermeneutic Truth," 50.

158 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490. "It is worth emphasizing that for Gadamer truth appears neither at the beginning nor at the end but in the interim, in the process of representation." Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 119.

159 Gadamer, "What is Truth?," trans. Brice R. Wachterhauser, in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 36, 45-46; Walter Lammi, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'Correction' of Heidegger," *Journal of History of Ideas*, 52 (3, 1991), 496.

160 Gadamer, "What is Truth?" 40.

161 DiCenso, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth*, 147.

into play here is the language which we inherit from our tradition. For Gadamer, “a judgment is true when it lets something be presented together that is presented together in the thing [*die Sache*]; a judgment is false when it lets something be presented together that is not presented together in the thing [*die Sache*]. The truth of speech is determined by the adequation of speech to the thing.” Or as the formula states “*adaequatio intellectus ad rem.*”<sup>162</sup>

But truth in interpretation does not stop there. Truth also includes the disclosive potential involved in mimesis and play. Truth is not limited to repeating what is already known; it also includes the possibility for aspects of the subject matter to be understood in ways never seen before. “The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar.”<sup>163</sup> Once again, this brings out the provisional aspect of truth. Future horizons of understanding will always contain the possibility for the “joy of knowing *more*.” Truth is provisional because the conditions from which it arises — language, history, and tradition — are never a universal whole which will allow for all that is possible in the text to be recognised. Because there will never be any last word concerning the meaning of a text each and every generation has the responsibility to interpret the text for themselves.

Finally, truth is not only characterised by its eventfulness, but it is also a process which takes place over time in our dialogue with tradition. There are two aspects to this which I discussed in the previous chapter which should be kept in mind. The manner in which we enter into dialogue with our tradition is by means of the logic of question and answer which involves a double hermeneutic. Not only does the interpreter need to ask questions which are appropriate for the text but at the same time he or she is questioned by the text.<sup>164</sup> This dialogue with tradition is also characterised by the I/Thou relationship. We must allow tradition to truly say something to us, to exercise its truth claim on our lives. We must be open to tradition in such a way that it can say something to us.<sup>165</sup> Truth is realised through dialogue. In the process of a conversation our ideas are questioned and tested which results in the revision and correction of our previous understanding.<sup>166</sup> “Gadamer seeks to show that there is a truth that is revealed in the process of experience (*Erfahrung*) and that emerges in the dialogical encounter with the

<sup>162</sup> Gadamer, “What is Truth?”, 36.

<sup>163</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 116.

<sup>164</sup> Idem, “Reflections on my Philosophical Journey,” 43.

<sup>165</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 452-53; Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 205.

<sup>166</sup> Grondin, 56.



very tradition that has shaped us.”<sup>167</sup> The question now becomes, how does this actually take place in respect to the practice of interpreting texts?

### III. PERFORMANCE AND TRADITION FORMATION

Gadamer’s conception of play and performance explains three problems related to any tradition of interpretation. The concept of play provides a basis for the fact that there can be multiple interpretations for a text. Not only that, but it also provides a philosophical explanation for the possibility that there can be more than one right, or correct interpretation. “The work can be multiply interpreted, multiply true, without disintegrating into fragments or denigrating into empty form.”<sup>168</sup> This takes place not only synchronically, but even more significant for Gadamer, diachronically in the formation of a tradition.

Certain forms of play are capable of repetition. A game, such as England vs. Germany in the last Eurocup semifinal was a one time form of play; it can never be repeated. However, other forms of play, such as music, drama, literature, and artworks, are all repeatable forms of play. This is part of what transformation into structure (*Gebilde*) involves. A dramatic play (*Schauspiel*) is characterised by the fact that it is a form of play that has been transformed into structure which is capable of being presented more than one time. In successive performances of a play, such as Hamlet, a tradition of performances or interpretations begins to take shape.<sup>169</sup> Structure allows play to be repeated and its significance to be understood; yet play is transformed into structure only when it is played.<sup>170</sup>

Gadamer illustrates this with the idea of a musical performance. Every performance of a musical composition is the same because of the structure of the score, yet the music’s full being is realised only in the presentation. This is related to his concept of the double hermeneutic which we examined in the last chapter. We are truly concerned with understanding *die Sache*, the subject matter, from within the horizon in which we stand. Since play is structure, there must be a “meaningful whole” to that form or instance of play which allows for repeated presentations of the work. The score of the

<sup>167</sup> Bernstein, “From Hermeneutics to Praxis,” 97.

<sup>168</sup> Weinsheimer, 100.

<sup>169</sup> “For instance, whether we are familiar with the literature on Shakespeare’s work or not we approach his work in a way influenced by a tradition of Shakespeare interpretation so that we assume its excellence, importance and so on.” Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 96.

<sup>170</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 117.

music, the text of a book, or the painting by Van Gogh are examples of structure. At the same time, the play's full being, and structure, are only realised in each presentation.

The playing field which mimesis opens up creates the potential for an endless possibility of performances but at the same time it is not an unbounded, endless playing field. While a musical score or text may have more than one right interpretation, it does not mean that there are no wrong interpretations.<sup>171</sup> This is a point which Jauss, as we shall see in the next chapter, is in full agreement with, "the text itself is thus able to limit the arbitrariness of interpretation, guaranteeing the continuity of its experience beyond the present act of reception."<sup>172</sup> A performance must be faithful to the structure, or score, just as a reading must be faithful to the subject matter of the text.<sup>173</sup>

This constitutes the obligation of every presentation: that it contain a relation to the structure itself and submit itself to the criterion of correctness that derives from it. Even the extreme of a completely distortive presentation confirms this. It is known as a distortion inasmuch as the presentation is intended and judged to be the presentation of the structure.<sup>174</sup>

The interpretation of texts shares this same structure of play and presentation. "Just as we were able to show that the being of the work of art is play and that it must be perceived by the spectator in order to be actualised (*vollendet*), so also it is universally true of texts that only in the process of understanding them is the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning."<sup>175</sup> Differences in the historical horizon in which the music is performed or the text read will bring out different aspects in their respective presentation. "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well."<sup>176</sup>

The performance of a play, the presentation of an artwork, the interpretation of a text are not secondary additions to the work of art or text. They are part of the being of

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171 For Gadamer, "the mimetic field, although endless by its practical performances, is not a house of mirrors without referent, an endless play of copy copying a copy. Rather, to be caught with the mimetic field is to be caught in a play of truth." This is one of the differences between Gadamer and Derrida. Riser, "The Remembrance of Truth," 131.

172 Hans Robert Jauss, "The Theory of Reception: A Retrospective of its Unrecognized Prehistory," in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helge Geyer-Ryan (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), 60.

173 "The important point about effective-historical consciousness, then, is not only that inquiry is always oriented by our concerns; although Gadamer makes this point, his argument is also that inquiry is always inquiry into a subject-matter and that the consensus reached about this subject-matter can reveal something 'true' about it." Warnke, *Gadamer*, 146.

174 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 122.

175 *Ibid.*, 164.

176 *Ibid.*, 296.



the work, "as possibilities that flow from it and are included in it as facets of its own disclosure."<sup>177</sup> The dependence of Ulrich Luz's *wirkungsgeschichtliche* approach to the New Testament on Gadamer's hermeneutic is clearly seen at this point.

A biblical text is not a reservoir or cistern, with a fixed amount of water in it that can be clearly measured. Rather it resembles a source, where new water emerges from the same place. This means that the history of interpretation and effects that a text creates is nothing alien to the text itself, as if the text with its meaning existed at the beginning and then only afterward and secondarily had consequences and created a history of interpretation.<sup>178</sup>

The ontological nature of play is not an either-or situation but a both-and involving identification and difference. As a result, with each presentation there is an overflow or emanation of being.<sup>179</sup> Anthony Thiselton clearly conveys the relationship between the poles of continuity and variability in interpretations which the metaphor of musical performance helps us to reconcile in relationship to biblical interpretation.

The Bible may be compared to a musical score. What 'controls' or sets limits to the scope of, the present performance is the notation of this composition as it was composed at some time in the past. If it is not based on the score, the present performance is not a performance of this composition. Nevertheless, what the current audience experiences in the present is the actual performance, and no two performances will be quite the same. Wooden repetition may turn out to be less faithful to the score than the use of creative imagination. Yet the creativity of the performer still takes place within clear limits. For without faithfulness to the score, the performance would not be a faithful interpretation of that work.<sup>180</sup>

Ebeling reiterates Thiselton's point when he argues that the process of interpretation involves saying the same thing differently. "If, by way of pure repetition, we were to say today the same thing that was said 2,000 years ago, we would only be imagining that we

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<sup>177</sup> Linge, xxvi.

<sup>178</sup> While I have already quoted Luz in the introduction, it is worth restating it here. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss, *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Joachim Gnilka, Norbert Brox, Ulrich Luz, and Jürgen Roloff eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 1.19.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 117, 126, 140, 148. "This occurrence means the coming into play, the playing out, of the content of tradition in its constantly widening possibilities of significance and resonance, extended by the different people receiving it. Inasmuch as the tradition is newly expressed in language, something comes into being that had not existed before, and that exists from now on. We can illustrate this with any historical example. Whether a given traditional text is a poem or tells us of a great event, in each case what is transmitted re-emerges into existence just as it presents itself. There is no being-in-itself that is increasingly revealed when Homer's *Iliad* or Alexander's *Indian Campaign* speaks to us in the new appropriations of tradition; but, as in genuine dialogue, something emerges that is contained in neither of the partners by himself." *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>180</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, "Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory," in *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith, A Report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England* (London: SPCK, 1981), 74.



were saying the same thing, while actually we would be saying something quite different.”<sup>181</sup>

Successive performances form a tradition with which later performances must come to terms. Both the audience and the performers will be affected by past performances which will serve as either conscious models to be followed or constitute part of the audience’s background understanding.<sup>182</sup> This is tied in with the cognitive importance of recognition. Classic performances or interpretations are incorporated into the history of the text’s influence and become part of the future readers’ horizons of expectations. In this way, previous interpretations serve as markers which determine the field of play by which future readers will judge the correctness of their readings. Thus, we have two regulative norms to determine the validity of any interpretation according to Gadamer: the subject matter of the text and those interpretations which are recognised by tradition (consciously and/or part of our pre-understanding) as authoritative.

The text that is handed down to us is a fusion of previous opinions about it, a harmony of voices, as Gadamer often puts it, to which we add our own. *But this means that object of hermeneutic understanding is already a fusion of the interpretations of a tradition and our encounter with it is an encounter with the tradition.*<sup>183</sup>

While some performances and interpretations are more influential than others, none should reach the level where they are recognised as being definitive or canonical. Past performances are not something which are to be blindly imitated. As part of our tradition they make up the playing field for our understanding the musical piece, drama, or text. “Although the tradition created by a great actor, director, or musician remains effective as a model, it is not a brake on free creation, but has become so fused with the work that concern with this model stimulates an artist’s creative interpretative powers no less than does concern with the work itself.”<sup>184</sup> Instead of the two poles usually associated with interpretation, the interpreter and the text, we now have three poles: the text, its *Wirkungsgeschichte* or tradition of interpretation, and the interpreter located within his historical horizon.

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<sup>181</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *The Problem of Historicity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 26.

Francis Young observes that an authentic and faithful performance of a classical piece of music does not involve going back to the earliest version of the score, playing it on medieval musical instruments, or making use of obsolete techniques. Young, *The Art of Performance*, 24.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>183</sup> Warnke, *Gadamer*, 90, emphasis mine.

<sup>184</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 119; Warnke, 90.



## IV. PUTTING OUR PREJUDICES AT RISK: THE PLAY OF INTERPRETATION

## A. Familiar and Foreign

The claims of the text primarily strike us in two ways. The first involves the hermeneutical circle of part to whole. We begin every act of reading for understanding by projecting an anticipation of completeness (*Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit*) by which we try to grasp the unity of the text's meaning.<sup>185</sup> In the process of reading, our projected meaning is open to correction; it is constantly placed at risk while we read the text. This gives the reading process direction and is constantly revised as we move through the parts of the text.<sup>186</sup> The second is the presupposition that what the author says in the text is true, which is based on a hermeneutic of charity — that the author knows the subject matter better than we do.<sup>187</sup> Hermeneutically, this requires that we are conscious of the otherness of the text and be responsive to the truth claims which it makes against our fore-conceptions.<sup>188</sup>

The hermeneutical principle of the anticipation of completeness and the openness to the truth claims of the text rest on the assumption that we are related to the subject matter of the text in some manner.<sup>189</sup> "Just as the recipient of a letter understands the news that it contains and first sees things with the eyes of the person who wrote the letter — i.e., considers what he writes as true, and is not trying to understand the writer's peculiar opinions as such — so also do we understand traditionary texts on the basis of expectations of meaning drawn from our own prior relation to the subject matter."<sup>190</sup> A text which is totally foreign to us would never be comprehensible.<sup>191</sup> At the same time, our relationship with a text or tradition is never complete or universal. There is always

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185 Gadamer, "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens," in *Martin Heidegger zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Günther Neske Pfullingen, 1959), 28.

186 *Ibid.*, 31.

187 This point is identical to his epistemological defence of tradition. We must realise that our knowledge is finite and others know more than we do about some topics. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 280.

188 See chapter 1 for my discussion of the I/Thou relationship; Gadamer, "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens," 29.

189 *Idem*, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 147; *Truth and Method*, 295.

190 *Idem*, *Truth and Method*, 294. "Die Hermeneutik muß davon ausgehen, daß wer verstehen will, mit der Sache, die mit der Überlieferung zur Sprache kommt, verbunden ist und an die Tradition Anschluß hat oder Anschluß gewinnt, aus der die Überlieferung spricht." *Idem*, "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens," 31-2.

191 Wittgenstein makes a parallel point in his aphorism, "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1958), 223e.

an element of brokenness in the transmission of a tradition.<sup>192</sup> There is a polarity between the familiarity we have with a text and its foreignness which is not psychological in nature, but is part of the ontological nature of tradition.<sup>193</sup>

One of the explanations for this is found in the idea of forgetfulness which Nietzsche and Heidegger employed in their views of history and tradition. Forgetfulness is part of the human condition, we have finite minds which are capable of only retaining so much.<sup>194</sup> It is also linked to the manner in which we selectively appropriate the past. For Nietzsche, the monumental approach to history selectively looks back over the significant achievements of the past not as something to be repeated but as testimony to human creativity. As such, the achievements of the past form a bond of opportunity with the present and reveal possibilities for our lives.<sup>195</sup> Because we selectively appropriate the past, most of what is handed down to us in tradition is forgotten. The interpreter is interested in those achievements or failures in the past which will provide a model or an example which he can apply to his present situation. Most of the past is passed over and forgotten in Nietzsche's monumental approach to history.

Forgetfulness plays a more complex role in Heidegger. Historical existence is characterised by an element of forgetfulness in which the truths we currently possess are levelled down and covered over by tradition.<sup>196</sup> This is one of the reasons why he pursues his etymological studies; he wants to recover a fresher, more original meaning of the word by peeling away the layers of meaning by which these concepts had been

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192 This concept is not new, but played a central role in Petrarch's rhetorical theories. For him, "what tradition preserves or rather entails, is not a deposit of familiar meanings but something strange and refractory to interpretation, resistant to the present, uncontainable in the given world in which we find ourselves at home." Gerald L. Bruns, "What is Tradition?" *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 8.

193 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

194 Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 6-7, idem, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (N.Y.: Penguin, 1968), 45-47.

195 Ibid., 12-17.

196 One of the central problems which Heidegger addresses in *Being and Time* concerns this very problem. "This question [of Being] has today been forgotten" *Being and Time*, 21, 46-48. The central question of philosophy was shifted from the question of Being (*das Sein*) to beings (*das Seiende*) by Plato and Aristotle. The result is that western philosophy is dominated by a technical objectifying use of language and has lost its understanding of Being. "Its beginnings reach back to Plato and Aristotle. For them, thought is of value because it is a *τεχνή*, a reflective process in the service of doing and making." Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Edgar Lohner, in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, William Barrett and Henry Aiken eds. (N.Y., 1962) 271-2. For a fuller discussion see: Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes" in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1963); 69-105.



levelled down through the transmission of a tradition.<sup>197</sup> Perhaps the most important issue for Heidegger, is how the western philosophical tradition has forgotten the question of Being.<sup>198</sup>

Gadamer thinks that this reveals an important dimension to our historical reality; the past is not part of our present horizon because we remember it but also because it has been forgotten. In fact, one of the reasons why understanding is possible at all is because tradition and language are forgetful. "The transitory sinks into a forgetting and it is this forgetting which makes it possible to hold fast and to preserve those things which have faded and fallen into forgottenness."<sup>199</sup> The past would present itself to us as a complete totality with which we would be totally familiar if we didn't forget.<sup>200</sup> Since tradition is forgetful it allows certain ideas, events, and texts to stand out as more significant or meaningful. This also implies that tradition is not a homogeneous whole, but is characterised by diverse and possibly conflicting ideas. As such, tradition is subversive of any form of totalisation. This idea is not new to Gadamer, but was a point raised by Petrarch also.<sup>201</sup>

Alongside forgetting, Gadamer places remembering or recollection. Recollection is different from the forgetting or levelling down power of tradition. In recollection, there is a halting of the passing away and being covered over processes by which ideas become part of our pre-understanding.

Recollection is always what comes to one, and comes over one, so that something that is again made present to us offers, for the space of a moment, a halt to all passing away and forgetting. But recollection of being is not a recollection of something previously known and now present once again; rather, it is recollection of something previously asked, the reclaiming of a lost question. And a question

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197 "Because language was the vehicle for coming to be, Heidegger's deconstructive inquiry was heavily etymological in thrust. He sought to peel away the subsequent encrustations to recover what he took to be the original meaning of such key terms as *aletheia*, *logos*, and *physis*, then to show how that original meaning, embodying a fresher, more desirable experience, had gradually been forgotten as changes in their meaning entailed a certain loss of resonance or connotation." Roberts, *Nothing but History*, 129.

198 Gadamer, "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey," 34.

199 Idem, "The Continuity of History," 239-40.

200 The example Danto uses to illustrate this point is a supercomputer which can record every event as it occurs. This computer would only be able to chronicle the past, it would not be able to bring out its significance or meaning of the past events. Arthur C. Danto, *Analytic Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1965), 112-42. See also Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, 6-7.

201 For Petrarch tradition was by nature diverse, "what tradition preserves or rather entails, is not a deposit of familiar meanings but something strange and refractory to interpretation, resistant to the present, uncontainable in the given world in which we find ourselves at home." Bruns, "What is Tradition?" 8.

which is asked again is no longer recollected; it becomes a question again and is now asked anew. It is no longer a recollection of something that was once asked — it is posed anew. In this way, questioning reconceptualizes [*aufhebt*, to destroy but also to preserve in a higher form] the historicity of our thinking and knowing.<sup>202</sup>

By remembering our history, we do not turn the past into a historical object, but *re-collect* it so that it becomes a living reality for us. As such, recollection is built on the ideas of the logic of question and answer, sublation, and recognition. The forgetting side of tradition means that much of what we know becomes transitory, it is levelled down, while memory serves to preserve something in the midst of this sinking away. This means that tradition is not a passive process but is something which must continually be reappropriated and renewed. This reveals one of the differences between Heidegger and Gadamer; “where Heidegger seeks direct insight into the truth of Being (of Being of truth), Gadamer looks for help in conversation with the tradition.” *Therefore the task of hermeneutics is concerned with “the art of bringing what is said or written to speech again.”*<sup>203</sup>

## B. The Productive Function of Temporal Distance

This brings temporal distance into the centre of hermeneutics. Historicism conceived of temporal distance as a hurdle to understanding which must be overcome because it creates a separation between the historian and her object. By contrast, for Gadamer, understanding is grounded in temporal distance. Temporal distance stands at the centre of contemporary hermeneutical theories because of the manner in which it functions as the medium through which understanding takes place.<sup>204</sup> Temporal distance plays a productive and positive role in understanding. This is because temporal distance is not an empty chasm between us and the text, but it is filled with the conventions of tradition. It is a living continuity of elements. “Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is

<sup>202</sup> Gadamer, “Reflections on my Philosophical Journey,” 35.

<sup>203</sup> Lammi, “Gadamer’s Correction of Heidegger,” 506, 501; Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, 119

<sup>204</sup> “Aus dieser Zwischenstellung, in der sie ihren Stand nimmt, folgt, daß ihr Zentrum bildet, was in der bisherigen Hermeneutik ganz am Rande blieb: der Zeitenabstand und seine Bedeutung für das Verstehen. Die Zeit ist nicht primär ein Abgrund, der überbrückt werden muß, weil er trennt und fernhält, sondern sie ist in Wahrheit der tragende Grund des Geschehens, in dem das gegenwärtige Verstehen wurzelt. Der Zeitenabstand ist daher nicht etwas, was überwunden werden muß.” Gadamer, “Vom Zirkel des Verstehens,” 32. Idem, *Truth and Method*, 297.



heard. It is present only in the multifariousness of such voices: this constitutes the nature of tradition in which we want to share and have a part.”<sup>205</sup>

Not only does temporal distance play a productive role in understanding but it also serves a critical purpose. As a tradition progresses we are constantly remembering and forgetting various elements of our tradition. Not everything that we possess at any point in time is productive, helpful, or beneficial. Therefore, the prejudices which we inherit from our tradition are not a nice neat package but they contain elements which have been forgotten or levelled down but still operate in our background network of beliefs. A tradition is constituted with prejudices which have the potential to distort communication and prejudices which have the possibility to allow for a better understanding of the text or subject at hand.

Gadamer affirms the need to distinguish true prejudices, which lead to understanding, from false prejudices, which produce misunderstanding. In order to make this distinction our prejudices must be raised to consciousness. However, as long as our prejudices continue to operate unnoticed we cannot foreground (*abheben*) or make ourselves aware of them. This would be easy to accomplish if prejudices were something of which we were consciously aware. The problem is that most of our tradition is invisible to us, it operates prereflectively as the background, *Vorhabe*, which enables understanding.<sup>206</sup> “It is precisely our experience of history that we are located so completely within it that we can in a certain sense always say, We don’t know what is happening to us.”<sup>207</sup>

In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and the state in which we live. The focuses of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*<sup>208</sup>

As long as a prejudice functions in the play of understanding in an unnoticed or invisible manner it will not be open to any form of judgement or confirmation. Once we bring a prejudice up to reflection it loses its hold on us. “Reflection on a given

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<sup>205</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284.

<sup>206</sup> “History is always invisible to the participants in it; and for this reason methodological prophylactics, however, necessary, always ultimately fail.” Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 38.

<sup>207</sup> Gadamer, “Hegel’s Philosophy and Its Aftereffects,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, 36.

<sup>208</sup> Idem, *Truth and Method*, 276-77. Weinsheimer, 170.

preunderstanding brings before me something that otherwise happens *behind my back*.”<sup>209</sup> In order for this to happen, something about this particular element of tradition must strike us as odd, out of place, or foreign; or as Gadamer says, “it must be provoked.”<sup>210</sup> Gadamer’s idea is grounded in Heidegger’s thought on what happens when a tool is misplaced or broken. We do not take much notice of a tool as long as it is working properly and is in the proper place. But when this referential context is violated, we not only take greater notice of the tool but also what it was related to and the purposes it served. “The more urgently [*Je dringlicher*] we need what is missing, and the more authentically it is encountered in its un-readiness-to-hand” the more it stands out.<sup>211</sup> For Gadamer, temporal distance, or the Otherness of that element of tradition, violates the pre-reflective referential contexts of our prejudices and causes us to not only take notice about that object but also to ask questions about it. The distance between the past and present creates a tension which is needed for that element of our tradition to be raised to consciousness and for us to be able to critically reflect on it.<sup>212</sup>

There are two primary ways in which our prejudices are placed at risk when we are interpreting a text. The first involves the manner in which we always construct an anticipated completeness or unity for the text we are reading. We project this off our preunderstanding of what the text is about, or if we know very little about the text, from our experience of other texts which may be related to it by genre, historical period, or subject matter. Hirsch illuminates the significance of this point when he argues that even if a person does not read the classical texts of their tradition they will still meet them through second or third hand sources. The foundational texts of our tradition and the literary canon are not self contained books sitting on the shelf, but help shape and form the tradition to which we belong.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, we are familiar with these texts before

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209 Gadamer, “Scope and Function of Reflection,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 38.

210 Idem, “The Problem of Historical Consciousness,” 157.

211 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 103-5. A parallel concept developed in literary theory, particularly Russian Formalism; the power of literature to break our habituated, referential contexts by presenting things in new and unexpected ways is known as ‘defamiliarization.’ Robert C. Holub, “Reception Theory and Russian Formalism,” *Germano-Slavica*, 3 (4, 1980), 277-78. This is a concept which Jauss will integrate into Gadamer’s hermeneutic.

212 “The point is that rational judgments develop and function within pre-disclosed interpretive frameworks derived from cultural-historical existence. Judgments have been ‘anticipated’ by a series of cultural developments that are not of a purely rational order, and in this sense judgments have a secondary quality.” DiCenso, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth*, 97.

213 E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), xiv.



we read them. This is one reason why we can approach a classical text with an “assumption of familiarity.”<sup>214</sup> When the text violates this familiarity, our prejudices are provoked. This negative experience opens our prejudices to questioning. Weinsheimer describes this movement in understanding as implying “that we are willing to integrate the meaning of the text with our previous preconceptions by making them conscious, bringing them into view, and assimilating them to what the text reveals.”<sup>215</sup> In this sense, reading the classic biblical commentaries and theological works introduces us to what we already have with us, our pre-understanding. It brings our prejudices and preunderstanding to the forefront and makes them explicit.<sup>216</sup>

The second way in which our prejudices are provoked is through the logic of question and answer and keeping ourselves open to the truth claims of the text. Because we do not hold to all things at all times, the truth claims of historically distant text will confront us as being partially or blatantly untrue. “We also realise that sometimes a work that grips us when it confronts us in historical distance would seem untruthful to us if it were a contemporary creation.”<sup>217</sup> The classic example of someone who wrestled with this tension which historical distance raises is Rudolf Bultmann.

All of our thinking today is shaped, irrevocably, by modern science. Blind acceptance of the New Testament mythology would be arbitrary ... Man's knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology, that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold to the New Testament view of the world. In fact, there is no one who does. The miracles of the New Testament have ceased to be miraculous, and to defend their historicity by recourse to nervous disorders or hypnotic effects only serves to underline the fact. *It is impossible to use an electric light and the radio, to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.*<sup>218</sup>

However, if we read the Bible, or any other text, in a manner in which we try to find answers which agree with our assumptions then we are not truly engaging in dialogue with that text and genuine understanding is foreclosed according to Gadamer. We must

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214 Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 166.

215 *Ibid.*, 167.

216 “In either case, teaching the classics functions to acquaint students for the first time with what they have always known, to bring that foreknowledge to explicit consciousness and thus make it available for denial and affirmation.” Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 142.

217 Gadamer, “The Eminent Text and Its Truth,” 9.

218 Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Debate*, vol. 1., trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953), 5, emphasis mine.

approach the text with questions which are appropriate and at the same time remain open to the questions which the text may ask us.<sup>219</sup>

The essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open. If a prejudice becomes questionable in view of what another person or text says to us, this does not mean that it is simply set aside and the text or the other person accepted as valid in its place.... In fact our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk. Only by being given full play is it able to experience the other's claim to truth and make it possible for him to have full play himself.<sup>220</sup>

In both instances, temporal distance is what creates the space or tension for the otherness of the text to provoke our prejudices.

### C. Time is the Best Teacher

Because meaning arises in the play of dialogue between a reader and a text, the meaning of a text will always exceed what the author intended. "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well."<sup>221</sup> This is not based on a psychological subjectivism of the reader nor in the relativism which arises from historicism, but is grounded in Gadamer's ontological concept of play as the 'in-between' that involves both text and reader, game and player, in the event of understanding. Therefore, the meaning of a text is not limited to the horizon in which it first appeared, but involves the successive performances of the text which involve various readers in different horizons. In fact, if we follow Gadamer's argument fully, then the concretizations of meaning which occur in successive interpretations are part of the text, they are not extrinsic to the text but are ontologically part of it in the play of understanding.<sup>222</sup>

Contrary to what may seem like common sense, the original horizon, or the original audience, is not the best position from which to fully appreciate the meaning of a text. This is a common problem which we experience with contemporary works of art

219 Gadamer, "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens," 30.

220 Idem, *Truth and Method*, 299.

221 Ibid., 296. This point is backed up by Paul Ricœur: "The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say, and every exegesis unfolds its procedures within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its moorings to the psychology of its author." Paul Ricœur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *Interpretive Social Research: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 78.

222 Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 121-24, 135; Luz, *Matthew*, 1.19, 117, 126, 140, 148.



and sometimes with recently published books. We experience a “curious impotence of our judgment” because our prejudices and cultural background are too closely aligned with the work of art or the book. Our comprehension is constrained because our prejudices continue to operate unnoticed.

We recall the ancient principle that the true value of a work of art cannot be understood before the deaths of the author and the generation whom he addressed. The initial audience, then, is no more the criterion of correct understanding than the author, because that audience is disposed toward or against a work by special prejudices of which it is not aware and over which it has no control.<sup>223</sup>

As a result, our projected pre-understanding may not be negated and the questions the text places to us may be the same ones we are asking. In both cases, we are not struck by the text and our prejudices are not provoked. On the other side of the same coin, the text may resonate with our prejudices because the two are so closely aligned. In both instances, what the contemporary readers experience “does not conform to their [the art works’] true content and significance. Only when all their relations to the present time have faded away can their real nature appear, so that the understanding of what is said in them can claim to be authoritative and universal.”<sup>224</sup> As a result, we enthusiastically receive this text as a significant work. But then, once our horizon has shifted and our tastes and prejudices are reconfigured, we question what it was about that text that excited us so much in the first place.<sup>225</sup>

We should see two processes operating in relation to each other as a tradition moves forward and temporal distance between the text and the reader opens up. The first is that as the readers’ horizons shift, new possibilities of meaning will be disclosed. At the same time, temporal distance will filter our prejudices and by doing so will exclude different sources of error from this tradition of interpretation.<sup>226</sup> “Moreover he [the reader] needs the text in order to place his own prejudices at risk and to point out the dubiousness of what he himself takes for granted, thus disclosing new possibilities for questioning and extending his own horizon by fusing it with that of the text.”<sup>227</sup> If we

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223 Ibid., 179.

224 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 297. See also, Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 184-85, Watson, *Text and Truth*, 51-2.

225 See the section on Jaus’s third thesis in chapter 3 for Jaus’s development of this idea.

226 Gadamer, 298-99. Thus, temporal distance is essential to understanding an event’s true meaning and significance which will emerge “through subsequent events and in the manifold discourse in which various interrelated social groupings negotiate a range of interpretative options which structure the ways in which that significance comes to speech.” Watson, *Text and Truth*, 52.

227 Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutic*, 211.

adopt Gadamer's view, then we should wait and allow the meaning and significance of a work to emerge slowly, over time. But in our instantaneous age (where computer speeds are measured in nanoseconds) this appears to be an almost unrealistic goal. Reviews are published before a commentary or theological book arrives at the bookstore.

Hegel expressed this in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right* when he stated, "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational."<sup>228</sup> For Hegel, an idea or concept enters human history "with an infinite wealth of forms, shapes, and appearances." Some of these are transient and irrational, while others are eternal and rational. In the dialectical process of history, this "motley covering" is penetrated so that as we progress through the movements of thesis, antithesis, and sublation into a synthesis of what is actual or real (*wirklich*) becomes rationally embedded in the tradition.<sup>229</sup> Gadamer concurs with Hegel's argument "that in the long run the irrational is not capable of really lasting."<sup>230</sup> Rational, appropriate interpretations will prove themselves in history.

This is why temporal distance is filled with a "variety of voices."<sup>231</sup> In the process of realising new possibilities of meaning our prejudices are also filtered. Some interpretations will prove themselves stable and productive and will receive a certain normative status until the questions we ask are no longer those answered by that interpretation. "In this respect the history of biblical interpretation is the history of both false trails to be avoided and of insights to be developed further."<sup>232</sup>

In relationship to biblical interpretation, we need to expand our definition of what the historicalness of the text refers. It does not refer exclusively to the immediate horizon in which the text was written. Nor does Gadamer's hermeneutic raise a division between the original horizon and successive horizons of interpretation. "The two poles of the past 'givenness' of the Bible and its present interpretation do not (or at least should

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<sup>228</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 10. Lawrence translates this as "What is rational is real and what is real is rational," in "Hegel's Philosophy and Its Aftereffects," 36. The difference between them is based on Knox's desire to reflect the difference Hegel makes between *wirklich* (actual) and *real* (real) in *Philosophy of Right* even though there is a high degree of semantic overlap in how these terms can be translated into English. Knox, "Translator's Foreword," vi.

<sup>229</sup> Hegel, 10-12.

<sup>230</sup> Gadamer, "Hegel's Philosophy and Its Aftereffects," 36.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>232</sup> Thiselton, "Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory," 73. "What understanding produces is knowledge, and temporal difference assists knowledge in ways that are negative and positive." Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 179.



not) stand in opposition to each other.”<sup>233</sup> On the one hand, Gadamer would claim that the original horizon does not possess the temporal distance to grasp the meaning of the text. On the other hand, we have tradition which has explored “the false trails” and has confirmed the insights or trajectories which have proven fruitful. “What distinguishes the true from the false interpretation is not a principle but a process, for to historical beings truth is disclosed in the historical process of interpreting. Insight, in brief, is not fundamentally the subject’s doing, but an effect of history on those who belong to and participate in it.”<sup>234</sup>

This should not give one the impression that we are only passive participants in our tradition. On the contrary, Gadamer argues that this should call us to an active engagement with our tradition. “*Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests that age and in which it seeks to understand itself.*”<sup>235</sup> When Gadamer says that we “belong” to a tradition he is making use of the semantic range of the German word “*gehören*” (to belong to) and its root word “*hören*” (to hear). Not only do we belong, *gehören*, to a tradition, but we must engage in genuine open conversation and listen, *hören*, to the claims of the text and the meanings passed down in the tradition to which we belong so that we can gain insights about the text’s subject matter which would not have been visible from our horizon alone.<sup>236</sup> Thus, we are both passively belong to and must actively listen to our tradition and what it hands down to us.

Gadamer’s work provides the hermeneutical justification for Ebeling and Froehlich’s challenge that we must incorporate *Wirkungsgeschichte* into biblical studies. Not only do we belong (*gehören*) to this history of interpretations and influences but we also need to learn how to listen (*hören*) to the ‘variety of voices’ of past commentators who fill the temporal distance between us and the biblical texts.

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233 Thiselton, 73. “The object of history, then, is not what once was, but rather what once was in relation to what now is.” Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutic*, 173

234 Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 40. As such, understanding is not primarily conceived as the result of method, but “*as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.*” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 290.

235 Gadamer, 296, emphasis mine.

236 Weinsheimer and Marshall, “Translator’s Preface,” xvi. This is related to Gadamer’s comment on what it means to be slavish. “Similarly, ‘to hear and obey someone’ (*auf jemanden hören*) does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person slavish (*hörig*).” *Ibid.*, 361.

#### D. Historically Effective Consciousness

Our belonging to and conversing with tradition is what Gadamer terms *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*. Marshall and Weinsheimer translate this as “historically effected consciousness” in order to try and capture the ambiguity and double relation to tradition which Gadamer wants us to understand in his use of this phrase.<sup>237</sup> On the one hand, this term expresses the idea that our consciousness is effected by and brought into being by our tradition.<sup>238</sup> On the other hand, our being consciousness of belonging to and being conditioned by history is also contained in the term. “This ambiguity is that it is used to mean at once the consciousness effected in the course of history and determined by history, and the very consciousness of being thus effected and determined.”<sup>239</sup> The recognition and adoption of historically effected consciousness as a universal element in understanding that should be elevated to the centre of our hermeneutic is the main thrust of Gadamer’s argument in *Truth and Method*.<sup>240</sup>

Historically effected consciousness is characterised by the hermeneutical elements which I have developed in this and the previous chapter. The structure of historically effected consciousness is that of “*experience* that experiences reality and is real itself.”<sup>241</sup> It functions in a manner similar to self-understanding by which we come to understand ourselves when we recognise ourselves in the other. This involves a reconciliation between the outward and returning movements of the hermeneutical circle. In studying a text from our tradition, such as the Bible, we learn how to make ourselves at home in the historically distant world of the text. But then we must reconcile this alienated self in a returning movement when we make the questions of the Bible our questions and apply it to our horizon; allowing the Bible to say something to us.<sup>242</sup> The hermeneutical experience of tradition is also characterised by the negation of our expectations which

<sup>237</sup> Marshall and Weinsheimer, “Translator’s Preface,” in *Truth and Method*, xv.

<sup>238</sup> For Gadamer this involves the realisation of the limits of our self-understanding in relation to the thrownness and finitude of our existence, “that is, as the ‘historically affected consciousness’ which is ‘more being than consciousness’ — *mehr Sein als Bewußtsein*.” Idem, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 27. This can be seen in Gadamer’s choice of the words to express the idea. *Sein* is part of consciousness, *Bewußtsein*. “The emphasis should be on the ‘*sein*’ that contains historically conditioned structures and not on an empty, flickering awareness.” Ibid., 60 note 30, see also *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 38.

<sup>239</sup> He continues, “Obviously the burden of my argument is that effective history still determines modern historical and scientific consciousness; and it does so beyond any possible knowledge of this domination.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxxiv.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., xxxiii.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 346, 361.



then leads to a more appropriate understanding of the subject matter. As opposed to the certainty which a methodological approach toward the Bible may promise us, the negative nature of experience does not destroy this security so much as it develops and cultivates our openness to the other and our ability to learn from experience. "The hermeneutical consciousness culminates not in methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma."<sup>243</sup>

The biblical interpreter who is experienced in this sense has gained not only objectifiable knowledge but, even more significantly, they have undergone a development (*gebildet*) which has enabled them to grow in *phronesis*.<sup>244</sup> *Bildung* or *phronesis* gives the interpreter the ability to not only apply the text to his situation but also enables him to perceive his bond to tradition. It not only raises the interpreter's mind to an awareness of his tradition but enables the "educated man (*Gebildete*)" to move in it, not just to develop his own virtues but also the ability to acquire new ones.<sup>245</sup> This overcomes the division between reason and authority which the Enlightenment raised.<sup>246</sup> Through historically effected consciousness, Gadamer is able to present a reconciliation between the study of history and its effects (*Wirkungen*) in such a manner that there is a unity between them. This is not a new element which Gadamer thinks should be included in hermeneutical theory, but as I pointed out above, it is something that has always been the part of the nature of our historical existence and which needs to be elevated to the centre of our hermeneutic.<sup>247</sup>

Tradition, and the texts that it passes down, is not a closed book. The playful nature of understanding and the disclosive character of imitation/mimesis which allows us to recognise more than we knew before means that tradition is an open book which is still being written. The history of the interpretation of the Bible also presents us with a partially constructed historical map of abuses of the text which should be avoided and legitimate insights and responses which disclose new possibilities for the life of the church.<sup>248</sup> "What hermeneutical reflection dictates is that we be aware of this self-critical moment present in all such criticism, for only in such awareness will we be able to

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>244</sup> Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 193.

<sup>245</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 14, Warnke, *Gadamer*, 174.

<sup>246</sup> Warnke, 166, Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 327, Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitation*, 34.

<sup>247</sup> Gadamer, 282-83.

<sup>248</sup> Thiselton, "Knowledge, Myth, and Corporate Memory," 73; Jauss, *Towards*, 59.

recognise those moments of the past that we wish to creatively move beyond.”<sup>249</sup> It is also a transformative form of learning in that our prejudices are brought into play when we enter into dialogue with our tradition. Thus, Gadamer’s hermeneutic, and *wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewußtsein* in particular, not only presents the philosophical hermeneutical grounds and rational for a *Wirkungsgeschichte* approach to biblical interpretation, it also provides it an apologetic for this approach.

### CONCLUSION: TWO PROBLEMS WHICH PUSH US BEYOND GADAMER

There are two points at which Gadamer’s hermeneutic receives most of its criticism. These same two points I think open the door for us to move beyond Gadamer’s argument. They are: (A) the question of the legitimacy of our prejudices and (B) the problem of how does one apply his hermeneutic in practice.

#### A. The Legitimacy of Prejudices

##### 1. *Reflection on Prejudices: Habermas*

Habermas’ main criticism of Gadamer is that he denies the power of reflection.<sup>250</sup> Habermas argues that our ‘thrownness’ in a tradition is not as binding as Gadamer and Heidegger claim. According to Habermas, there must be an element of brokenness or non-obligation in our relation to tradition in order for us to be able to interpret and mediate our tradition and other cultures.<sup>251</sup> This allows the interpreter to perform a controlled distanciation in the interpretative act and raise our prejudices and preunderstanding to reflected procedure.<sup>252</sup>

One of the problems with Habermas’ criticism is that his concept of distanciation is very different from Gadamer’s. Tradition, prejudice, and language cannot be subjected to reflection or critique since they operate at a pre-cognitive level of human existence. They are part of our being, or thrownness, and as such, they lie below or behind our conscious reflection.<sup>253</sup> In order for us to become aware of an element of our tradition, one of our prejudices must be made to stand out for us to take notice of it. The manner

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<sup>249</sup> Jeff Mitscherling, “The Historical Consciousness of Man,” *History of European Ideas*, 11 (1989), 738.

<sup>250</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “A Review of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*,” in *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, eds. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 358.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>253</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276-77.



in which this occurs is through the realisation of the historical distance between the horizon of the interpreter and the text's from which one's prejudices are provoked.

Reflection on a given preunderstanding brings before me something that otherwise happens *behind my back*. Something — but not everything, for what I have called the *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* is inescapably more *being* than consciousness and being is never fully manifest. Certainly I do not mean that such reflection could escape from ideological ossification if it does not engage in constant self-reflection and attempts at self-awareness. Thus only through hermeneutical reflection am I no longer unfree over against myself but rather can deem freely what in my preunderstanding may be justified and what unjustified.<sup>254</sup>

By contrast, Habermas claims that we need to be able to distance ourselves from our current horizon of understanding as well, a claim which Gadamer rejects.

Habermas' argument centres around his claim that Gadamer is naive in his approach to prejudices.<sup>255</sup> Tradition is not neutral but needs to be socially critiqued for distortions in communication. Reflection is by nature retrospective and looks back on the prejudices of a tradition and makes them transparent. As such, reflection has the power to confirm or break up our prejudices. "In this process the element of authority that was simple domination can be stripped away and dissolved into the less coercive constraint of insight and rational decision."<sup>256</sup> But in order for reflection to operate in this manner it needs a reference system outside of tradition, or language, which is the ontological ground of tradition.<sup>257</sup> As such, tradition is not an all encompassing reality but is related to other aspects of life. In particular, tradition is relative to the systems of labour and domination, which in turn give us a reference point outside of tradition for reflection.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Idem, "Scope and Function of Reflection," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 38.

<sup>255</sup> Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 186; Graeme Nicholson, "Answers to Critical Theory," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (N.Y. and London: Routledge, 1991), 155-56.

<sup>256</sup> Habermas, 358. However, the conceptual form of Habermas' frame of reference, universal history, is a point of agreement between himself and Pannenberg. For Habermas, this frame of universal history is hypothetically created from the fragments of emancipatory and utopian interests in a tradition. This anticipated whole can then be used in reflection to expose and eliminate distortions in communication so that truth can emerge. But Habermas' concepts of the hermeneutical whole (which is provisional) and the dialectical totality (which is marked by precision) are not always easily distinguished in his thought. The dialectical totality of universal history runs into the same problem we saw above, by constructing a category of universal history which complements and is distinct from the hermeneutical whole, Habermas has gone outside of the bounds of tradition once again.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., Pannenberg, 186.

<sup>258</sup> Habermas tries to prove this point in relation to language which he sees as being shaped by the forces of social labour and changes in production. In contrast to Gadamer who



Pannenberg comes to Gadamer's defence when he criticises Habermas in his attempt to ground reflection in a frame of reference outside of tradition.<sup>259</sup> The problem with Habermas' critique is that it presupposes ideological contents and instinctual energies which shape a nation's identity and goals prior to tradition. These prior instinctual interests serve as the foundation for the basic orientation which people express in work, interaction, and thought.<sup>260</sup> These interests are transcendental in nature and serve as the basis for Habermas' concepts of reflection and objective knowledge. The result is that "epistemology can be elaborated only as a social theory."<sup>261</sup> Contrary to Habermas, Pannenberg contends that you cannot derive transcendental concepts such as these from material or empirical research. Secondly, it is not legitimate to claim that cultural systems are reflections of these instinctual energies.<sup>262</sup> And finally, even Habermas admits that such reflection is not outside the scope of tradition but is still conditioned by it. Thus, Gadamer's approach to tradition is not as naive or conservative in its approach as Habermas claims it is.

Gadamer does not think we should give in to the power of tradition and just accept what it hands down to us as Habermas implies. Gadamer does not defend a particular set of historical values, but argues for the power of tradition itself.

His concern, in short, is not to demonstrate that ours is the best of all possible traditions, but that all traditions, all 'histories,' are possessed of a force that cannot simply be denied.... In sum, he has attempted to lay the groundwork for a philosophical critique of society — not a mere critique of ideology, which itself remains bound to values that are inherited from a particular tradition, but a critique of such critiques itself, a thoroughly self-conscious critique, pursued through dialogue, of those intersubjectively-constituted values in which the conversation of our tradition so greatly consists.... It is a call to recognize our responsibility, as individuals, to enter into that creative dialogue by means of which alone can the 'conversation,' the tradition, of the present be preserved, altered, and passed on.<sup>263</sup>

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argues that language determines our world, Habermas claims that language is constrained outwardly by labour and inwardly by social power relationships. Habermas, 360-61, c.f. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 450.

259 Pannenberg, 186.

260 Ibid., 90-91.

261 Ibid., 92.

262 Ibid., 93.

263 Jeff Mitscherling, "Resuming the Dialogue," in *Anti-Foundationalism and Practical Reasoning: Conversations between Hermeneutics and Analysis*, ed. Evan Simpson (Edmonton: Academic Printing & Publishing, 1987), 132. See also, Jean Grondin, "Gadamer on Humanism," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 157-70.



Thus, Gadamer does not claim that we should approach tradition from a conservative perspective but that tradition is open to revision and criticism.<sup>264</sup>

## 2. *The Legitimation of Prejudices: Warnke*

While Habermas criticises Gadamer from outside his system, Warnke presents a more balanced reading and critique of Gadamer from within his hermeneutic. Warnke asks whether Gadamer is too optimistic in regard to the capacity for our prejudices to be legitimated or corrected in Gadamer's hermeneutic.<sup>265</sup> In particular, she asks if Gadamer's idea of the anticipation of completeness is an adequate hermeneutical concept to determine if our prejudices are legitimate or not. Arising from illegitimate prejudices, is it possible to project a unity to a text which is capable of yielding an interpretation that can explain the relationships between the parts and the whole but at the same time is an inappropriate unity for the text? Hypothetically, we would have to answer yes. Warnke asks us to imagine a situation in which a man propositions a woman for sex. The problem is that the man enters this situation with the prejudice that when a woman says, "No," she really means, "Yes." If she resists, then he will read her actions as "a recognition of the customs under which women pretend not to want sex in order to make their ultimate surrender more romantic."<sup>266</sup> Even though the man misinterprets the entire situation, his prejudices continue to operate unprovoked. In fact, they are confirmed by the situation, because the projected anticipation of completeness is reinforced by each step in this encounter. Therefore, Warnke is correct when she argues that what counts as a legitimate prejudice cannot simply be determined by what allows for the unity of the parts and whole to emerge.

The weakness in Warnke's argument comes in the example which she has chosen. Instead, of supporting her argument, I think it confirms Gadamer's position concerning the filtering process of historically effective consciousness. It is hard to imagine an educated (not in the sense of possessing a university education but in Gadamer's concept of *Bildung*) person today who would defend the man's prejudices or interpretation of this hypothetical situation. It would seem that, in this instance, tradition has served a filtering process in which that which is real has been shown to be historical. Also, Warnke does not adequately take into consideration the need for our being open to the

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<sup>264</sup> Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel" 51

<sup>265</sup> "Gadamer seems to place his hopes for reason in this sort of mutual learning and accommodation." Georgia Warnke, "Legitimate Prejudices," *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 53 (1, 1997), 101.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

claims of the other according to the third type of the I/Thou relationship. The man was never open to the claims of the woman in this situation and we would have to say that he never understood what she was saying but reduced her to the level of a thing to achieve his ends. And finally, her example is based on two individuals in isolation. But neither our prejudices, nor our interpretations are solipsistic for Gadamer. We are always linked to others through tradition, language, and dialogue. Thus, while this individual may have read the situation the way he did, if it were brought into public dialogue then the possibility of his prejudices remaining unprovoked would be greatly diminished.<sup>267</sup>

### B. Does Method Still Play a Role?

Having arrived at the conclusion to my discussion of Gadamer's hermeneutic, the question remains, "How do we put this into practice?" The absence of any form of methodological direction or guidance is one of the most frequent criticisms levelled at Gadamer.<sup>268</sup> However, we must remember that Gadamer's project was descriptive not prescriptive as he stated in his introduction to *Truth and Method*. "My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing."<sup>269</sup> In one sense then, it would not be appropriate to criticise him for failing to answer a question which he never intended to answer, one which he felt was not only outside the bounds of his hermeneutic but was also antithetical to it in his opinion.

Gadamer's reluctance to even hint at some form of method or criteria is based on his criticism of the historical-critical method which we inherited from the nineteenth

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<sup>267</sup> Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics*, 184-86. I believe Sullivan raises a better example than Warnke's when he discusses Gadamer's refusal to become involved in Nazism during World War II because of the manner in which Gadamer saw the communicative situation was being distorted by the government. *Ibid.*, 178-81.

<sup>268</sup> For one of the most incisive critiques of Gadamer's hermeneutic concerning the question of criteria for determining legitimate interpretations see: Lawrence M. Hinman, "Quid Facti or Quid Juris? The Fundamental Ambiguity of Gadamer's Understanding of Hermeneutics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 40 (1980), 512-535. His criticism of Gadamer centres around what he perceives as internal contradiction concerning truth in Gadamer's thought. If truth is identified as part of the hermeneutical process itself then we are reduced to a position in which we cannot critique the truthfulness of any interpretation. If on the other hand, we can make some form of judgment concerning the truth of an interpretation then truth cannot be identified as part of the hermeneutical process. Hinman thinks that Gadamer never succeeds in solving the apparent contradiction in his work. However, I think that Hinman misses several of the points which Gadamer raises concerning the rightness of the question, *phronesis*, and intersubjective elements that are involved in hermeneutical understanding and allow us to make judgments concerning the truth of an interpretation.

<sup>269</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxviii.



century and the imposition of the methodology of the natural sciences into the human sciences. Behind this lays his argument that method is something which someone throws over an object in order to determine a specified result.<sup>270</sup> This restricts the disclosive possibilities which one could learn from the text. In the humanities, this restriction is even more severe for it reduces the possible communication between the interpreter and tradition to a one way dialogue. The subject ends up asserting him or herself as a master over his or her tradition. As a result, history becomes facts and tradition is no longer our conversation partner and teacher.

However, Apel claims that Gadamer's negation of the role of method in hermeneutics is based on an outmoded and mistaken view of method. In Apel's opinion, "Gadamer remains guilty of the 'scientistic fallacy': like those he attacks, he supposes that the natural sciences possess a monopoly on the meaning of 'science' and 'objectivity,' and that social scientific or historical understanding must therefore, dispense with both the claim to science and the search for objectivity."<sup>271</sup> Apel agrees with Gadamer that the methodological approach of the natural sciences cannot be hermeneutically defended because it misses the intersubjective dimension of human knowledge and the role which language plays in understanding. However, he also argues that rules and methods play an important role in hermeneutical understanding. It is not an 'either or' but a 'both and' situation according to Apel.<sup>272</sup> His position is very similar to the argument which I made in regard to the relationship between *techne* and *phronesis*. One form of knowledge does not exclude the other, but actually requires it for its proper functioning.<sup>273</sup> In the same manner, method can play an important role in understanding.

At the same time, Gadamer does give some partial recognition to the role and need for methods in the humanities.<sup>274</sup> However, the only point at which I have found Gadamer advocating the use of method concerns the need to employ genetic research

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270 Robert Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London and N.Y.: Methuen, 1984), 36.

271 Georgia Warnke, "Translator's Introduction," in Karl-Otto Apel, *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective*, trans. Georgia Warnke, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, ed. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1984), xvi.

272 Karl-Otto Apel, "The A Priori of Communication and the Foundation of the Humanities," *Man and World*, 5 (1, 1972), 3-37; idem, "Types of Rationality: the Continuum of Reason between Science and Ethics," *International Symposium on "Rationality To-day,"* ed. Theodore F. Geraets, vol. 13 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), 307-50; and idem, *Understanding and Explanation*, 50-68.

273 See the section entitled "Hermeneutical Knowledge and Tradition," in chapter 1.

274 "Therefore I did not remotely intend to deny the necessity of methodical work within the human science (Geisteswissenschaften)." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxix.

when substantial understanding is not possible.<sup>275</sup> More than this is needed if we are going to successively apply Gadamer's hermeneutic to biblical interpretation. We really need some form of methodological framework to incorporate all the different approaches to the Bible which have developed over the years and are in practice today.

Pannenberg argues in *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* that some form of criteria is needed if theology is not going to be reduced to mere emotive statements.<sup>276</sup> Methods and theories do not operate primarily by describing reality (a Cartesian form of positivism which Gadamer correctly opposes) but are provisional explanatory devices which are revised in light of the object to which they are applied. They are often retrospective by nature which is why the lessons learned from tradition point forward to new insights and discoveries.<sup>277</sup> The question becomes, is it possible to find some model which can fit within or complement Gadamer's hermeneutic that we can apply to the practice of biblical interpretation? In order to answer this, I would like to turn to one of the most logical places to look for an answer, Gadamer's student; Hans Robert Jauss.

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<sup>275</sup> See the section entitled "Substantive and Genetic Understanding" in chapter 1. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 180-81; idem, "On the Problem of Self-Understanding," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 45-46.

<sup>276</sup> Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 34-35. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 334-35.

<sup>277</sup> Pannenberg, 138-39, 156-57.



## PART II: JAUSS' RECEPTION THEORY

### CHAPTER 3: THE CHALLENGE OF LITERARY HISTORY

#### INTRODUCTION

Since 1967, when Hans Robert Jauss delivered his lecture "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" at Konstanz, Germany, he has been the leading figure in what has come to be known as reception theory. However, reception theory is not as widely known in the Anglo-American culture as it is in Germany. As Jauss has noted, "to the foreign ear questions of 'reception' may seem more appropriate to hotel management than to literature."<sup>1</sup>

Why has reception theory and Jauss' work not been more widely read and studied in the Anglo-American tradition? Robert Holub thinks that the primary reason for this is that we have tended to be more heavily influenced by the French tradition than the German. The work of Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, and Paul Ricoeur have been very influential in our hermeneutics. Among the many German scholars who work in reception theory, only Wolfgang Iser's works are widely read in English.<sup>2</sup> However, Iser's work does not serve as an adequate introduction to reception theory for the Anglo-American reader for two reasons. First, Iser makes very few references to Jauss in his work, thus giving the false impression that these two colleagues at Konstanz University do not work that closely together.<sup>3</sup> And secondly, he does not fully develop the role of history as Jauss does.<sup>4</sup> As a result, his work is often associated with reader response theorists, such as Stanley Fish, in hermeneutical discussions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*, New Accents Series, ed. Terence Hawkes (London and N.Y.: Methuen, 1984), ix.

<sup>2</sup> In particular Wolfgang Iser's two books: *The Implied Readers: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in *The Act of Reading*, Iser only mentions Jauss briefly in a few footnotes.

<sup>4</sup> In his book *Die Appellstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1970), Iser developed a preliminary idea of literary history. He followed this concept in *The Implied Reader*, but by the time he wrote *The Act of Reading* the history of reading had almost been entirely replaced by an ahistorical phenomenology of reading. Robert C. Holub, "Trends in Literary Theory: The American Reception of Reception Theory," *German Quarterly*, 55 (1 1982), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Holub, 80-96.

This situation improved slightly in the late 1980's with the publication of three of Jauss' books by the University of Minnesota Press and the journal *New Literary History* printing several articles on reception theory. However, while his work is now more familiar to the English reader, it is still viewed as a peripheral hermeneutical or literary theory. "Although most major theorists and many coming into the field are now familiar with the general precepts of reception theory, to my knowledge there are no endeavours to extend or refine a position based on these precepts; nor are there any major studies in English -- again outside of American Germanistik -- which put this theory into practice."<sup>6</sup>

It is hoped that this thesis can help to resolve this deficiency, at least in the field of biblical hermeneutics. The goal of the next two chapters can briefly be outlined along the following lines. In the first half of the present chapter, I plan to critically examine the basic hermeneutic which Jauss develops for reception theory. There are two reasons for this: first, to introduce the English reader to Jauss' work, and second, to critically examine those points which are significant for biblical studies. The second half of this chapter will explore some of the wider hermeneutical concepts which both Jauss and Gadamer share. Is Jauss' hermeneutic a deviation from or a logical extension and development of Gadamer's hermeneutic? The following chapter shall be devoted to exploring several of the more significant points of reception theory for this thesis, such as the role of the classic text and the question of plurality and continuity in a tradition of interpretation.

One final point needs to be mentioned before I discuss Jauss' work, and that concerns the fact that the use of the title 'reception theory' immediately runs into problems because of a complex of German terms and concepts which are related to this idea. These concepts include *Wirkungsgeschichte* (the history of the impact of a text), *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (the history of reception), *Wirkungsästhetik* (the aesthetics of effect or response), and *Rezeptionsästhetik* (aesthetics of reception). Robert Holub offers the following strategy in order to help us navigate amongst this complex of German hermeneutical terms. "I have adopted the following policy: 'reception theory' refers throughout to a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader. It is used, therefore, as an umbrella term and encompasses both Jauss' and Iser's projects as well as empirical research and the traditional occupation with influences."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Idem, *Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, *Reception Theory*, xi-xii.



Reception theory differs from the history of interpretation in that the later is primarily concerned with examining commentaries and other theological works while the former covers a much wider territory. In respect to biblical studies, not only is reception theory concerned with commentaries but it is also interested in sermons, canonical law, hymns, artworks, and in the practices of the church<sup>8</sup>

## I BACKGROUND TO JAUSS' THOUGHT

There were several major shifts that took place in Germany prior to and during the 1960's which help to explain the rise of reception theory, and in particular Jauss' theories. Alongside a public discontent with economic problems, there was a growing discontentment in the academic realm. The "Memorandum for the Reform of the Study of Linguistics and Literature" which Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, and others wrote arguing for methodological and institutional change in the universities is a good example of this. Specifically, there were growing doubts within the German academic community about the methods and values for teaching literary studies at that time.<sup>9</sup> German literary studies had come to a point of crisis within the current paradigms by which it was being practised.<sup>10</sup> The problem with the historical-critical and the aesthetic formalist approaches was that they suppressed and concealed the role of the reader. While the reader is an indispensable element to any act of interpretation, the function of the reader was rarely discussed. It is only through the experiences of those who read, interpret, and apply the message of the texts that literary traditions are formed. As a result, Jauss sought to find theory which did justice to the "dynamic process of production and reception from author, work, and public" that would hopefully "lead the study of literature out of the dead ends of literary history which were bogged down in positivism."<sup>11</sup> The revival in the interest in literary hermeneutics during the 1960's and his studies under Gadamer raised one particular question to the forefront for Jauss. "The concept in question is that of the horizon insofar as it — as historical marker and, at the same time, the necessary

<sup>8</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition*, (London: Collins, 1968), 28; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss, *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Joachim Gnllka, Norbert Brox, Ulrich Luz, and Jürgen Roloff eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 1.95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-12; Raman Selden and Peter Widowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 3rd ed. (London and N.Y.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 52, 54; Rien T. Segers, "An Interview with Hans Robert Jauss," *New Literary History*, 11.1 (1979), 90-95.

<sup>10</sup> This idea shall be discussed in greater depth in later in the section on Jauss' adoption of Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, "Der Leser als Instanz einer neuen Geschichte der Literatur," *Poetica* (7, 1975), 325-6.

condition for the possibility of experiential knowledge — constitutes all structures of meaning related to human action and primary modes of comprehending the world.”<sup>12</sup>

On the practical side, Jauss’ interest in these issues arose from his study of medieval literature. His study of these texts raised questions for him concerning the possibility of direct aesthetic understanding through the text alone, the role which the original horizon of the text first played in understanding, and the possibility of historical mediation through background information.<sup>13</sup> In an effort to address what he saw as the weaknesses of the prevailing literary theories and to introduce the conclusions he had reached, he delivered “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory.”

I tried to imagine a new literary history, one that opened the closed circuit of author and work in the direction of the receiver, and was meant to make of this receiver, whether a reader or the public, the intermediary between the past and the present, the work and its effects. Such a history would have to stand up against the ideal of objectivity espoused by the old, discredited literary history, and also the demands for exactness laid down by those sociologists and structuralists who scoffed at historical understanding.<sup>14</sup>

#### A. The Fall of Literary History

Jauss’ main area of concern is the relationship between literature and history. One of the greatest challenges he faced was to reformulate and revive the concept of literary history since literary history had fallen from the position it once enjoyed 150 years ago. During the crisis in literary studies in the 1960’s, literary history was seen as an outdated form of knowledge that was too historically oriented and did not approach literature aesthetically. This was a valid criticism that had to be overcome if reception theory was going to succeed.

This crisis in literary history had its roots in nineteenth century positivistic history. Positivistic history’s appropriation of scientific methodology removed a unique framework from literary history. The result was that literary history was swallowed up by general history. This approach did not do justice to the history of literature in two ways. First, it did not consider the categorical distinction between literary effects and positivistic history. In literature, there is a connection between the author who creates the meaning and readers who realise it over and over. Positivistic history misses this

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, vol. 68, trans. Michael Hays. *Theory and History of Literature*, eds. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 197.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 218; idem, “The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature,” *New Literary History*, 10 (1979), 184 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Question and Answer*, 224.



connection because it compares works with other works and authors with other authors. And second, it severed the communication process between author, text, and receiver.<sup>15</sup> This follows the same criticism which Gadamer made concerning a positivistic approach to history: by objectifying what ought to confront you, the text, you have emasculated it.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the text is detached from the creative act and you are only left with the traces or relics of the creative mind. "The individual text has no value in itself but only serves as a source — i.e., only as material conveying knowledge of the past historical context, just like other silent *relics* of the past."<sup>17</sup>

The two traditional solutions which were put forward to meet the invasion of positivistic history in literary studies were either to study literary history by (1) genres or (2) according to the "life and works" of authors. The first solution approaches literary history by arranging the material according to general patterns, such as genre, in order to consider the individual works within the framework of a chronological series. The significance of the author, or the interpretation of his or her work is reduced to an occasional aside. In the end, literary history is swallowed up by a history of culture. The second approach arranged literary history according to the history of great authors and evaluated different literary texts according to a rubric of "life and work" essays. In this approach, the less known authors and works are ignored and the development of elements such as literary genres is overlooked. Both, also, suffer the loss of the aesthetic dimension of qualitative judgements and the results of such studies are "put aside as mere antiquarian knowledge."<sup>18</sup> There is a good reason for hesitancy to include any form of judgement about the quality and significance of past works within literary theory. "For the quality and rank of a literary work result neither from the biographical or historical conditions of its origin [*Entstehung*], nor from its place in the sequence of the development of a genre alone, but rather from the criteria of influence, reception, and posthumous fame, *criteria that are more difficult to grasp*."<sup>19</sup>

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15 Jauss, "History of Art and Pragmatic History," in *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, vol. 2, trans. Timothy Bahti, *Theory and History of Literature*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 51-52.

16 See the section on "The Rehabilitation of Prejudice and Tradition" in chapter 1.

17 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Second, revised ed. (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1989), 198, italics mine, also 275

18 Jauss, "Literary History as Challenge to Literary Theory," in *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, 4; Holub, *Reception Theory*, 55-6.

19 *Ibid.*, 5, emphasis mine.

## B. Marxism

In Jauss' mind, the two most promising schools of thought to offer solutions to this crisis in literary history in this century are Marxism and Formalism. The strength of Marxism is its emphasis on the idea that art and literature are not independent activities but are part of the life-processes, and only when this is considered does history cease to be a collection of lifeless facts. Marxism sees literature as part of the human appropriation of the world.<sup>20</sup> A second strength of Marxism is that it does not have a relativistic or an uncritical attitude towards tradition as many theories do.<sup>21</sup>

Jauss' critique of Marxism focuses primarily on East German Marxist literary theory. The reason for this arises from their criticism of reception theory during the 1970's.<sup>22</sup> Robert Holub summarises their criticisms under three points. First, they saw the turn to reception theory as a sign of the emptiness of formalism and other bourgeois methods. As such, Jauss' theory was seen as an example of a consumer oriented society with the emphasis on reception and not production. This reflects Marx and Engels' thinking that "production is the 'starting-point of realisation' and therefore, the 'predominating factor' in the entire process."<sup>23</sup> Thus, effect and reception, while important, remain secondary in most Marxist forms of literary theory. Second, they thought that Jauss' theory makes literary phenomena relative since his work "does not include any mechanism for evaluating past judgements and hence for excluding them as valid for consideration of the work."<sup>24</sup> And finally, they thought Jauss' work lacked the proper sociological grounding. Jauss and Iser's response to these criticisms was not to defend their reception theory, but to reply in kind with a criticism of Marxist theory. However, I think that Jauss benefited from their criticisms by clarifying his position on these points in his later work.

There are several areas of Marxist thought which are unacceptable to Jauss. The main point of contention between Jauss and Marxist critical theorists concerns the role which production plays.<sup>25</sup> As we saw above, the Marxists criticised Jauss for not giving

<sup>20</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 11.

<sup>21</sup> Holub, *Reception Theory*, 123.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 121-34; Rien T. Segers, "An Interview with Hans Robert Jauss," *New Literary History* 11.1 (1979), 88. For an example of a Marxist critic who appropriates reception theory, *mutatis mutandis*, see Manfred Naumann, "Literary Production and Reception," *New Literary History*, 8.1 (1976), 107-26; idem, "Das Dilemma der 'Rezeptionsästhetik,'" *Poetica*, 8.3-4 (1976), 451-66.

<sup>23</sup> Holub, *Reception Theory*, 126.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 126; Jauss, "The Idealist Embarrassment: Observations on Marxist Aesthetics," *New Literary History*, 7 (1975), 202; Segers, 88; see also Naumann, 107-115.



more weight to the productive side of the study of literature. Jauss, on the other hand, berates them for making literary effects and reception secondary to issues concerning the production of texts.<sup>26</sup> And even then, literary production is secondary and always in harmony with the given economic processes; it gives a 'coherent expression' to the objective social structures in which the text is produced. Literature is reduced to mankind's appropriation of nature and the control of economic processes. This reveals a Platonic unity of idea and form, essences and appearance, in Marxist theory. Marxism replaced the concept of the ideal with economic factors. "This has the consequence that the social dimension of literature and art with respect to their reception is likewise limited to the secondary function of only allowing an already previously known (or ostensibly known) reality to be *once again recognized*."<sup>27</sup> The play of interpretation is restricted to what is *already known* and *mimesis* is likewise restricted, you cannot recognise *more* in the text or work of art.<sup>28</sup> Jauss questions how literature can serve a revolutionary function then if one can only recognise what is *already known*, "the stabilized images and prejudices of their historical situation," and not allow for the disclosure of *more* which can create new perspectives on the world.<sup>29</sup>

In order to overcome the weaknesses inherent in Marxist literary theory, one must recognise the double character of literature, it not only expresses reality but it also creates reality.<sup>30</sup> The influence of Heidegger's concept of the work of art, through Gadamer, on Jauss is seen here. In the act of reading a text, a disclosure of truth takes place, much like Heidegger's illustration concerning Van Gogh's painting of the

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<sup>26</sup> At another point, Jauss accuses Marx of reversing Aristotle's relation between *praxis* and *poiesis* by making *poiesis* the primary factor. Marx placed objective doing before and above communicative action. In contrast to all the other animals, it is the human capacity of labour, not consciousness, which separates humanity from the lower animals. Thus, the concept of imagination and reflection were replaced by man's "appropriation of Nature." Jauss, "The Idealist Embarrassment," 195-7.

<sup>27</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 14. In particular, Jauss is attacking Georg Lukács, *Probleme des Realismus* (Berlin, 1955), 13 ff. This is related to the question of how the idea of 'beauty' can reside in the concept of production. Marx admitted that Greek classical art can give enjoyment to modern viewers independent of the material conditions of its production. Marcuse felt that art provided enjoyment because "it appeals to repressed qualities of human sensibility through its aesthetic form. It appeals to the liberation which the utopian future gives." Idem, "The Idealist Embarrassment," 193. Both Marx and Marcuse are examples of how Marxist literary theory relies on idealistic categories such as beauty, but also deny that such categories exist. Jauss' conclusion is that Marxist theories cannot escape idealism if they want to explain the effects of past works of art on present viewers or how art can transcend class and social conditions. Ibid., 206-7.

<sup>28</sup> See "Play as the Being of Artwork," in Chapter 2.

<sup>29</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 14.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 14-15.



peasant's shoes. This disclosure is not prior to, or alongside the text, but occurs in the reader's interaction with the text. There is an essential unity to the text between its expression of reality and the reality that it forms.<sup>31</sup> *Literature not only is a product of social influences and serves as a repository of culture, it also performs a socially formative function.* Literature in Marxist theory "is a product of social forces, and not an agent of social change."<sup>32</sup> Jauss wants to go beyond Marxist theory to also include the effect and reception of the literary work. "Put another way: literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject — through the interaction of author and public."<sup>33</sup>

The norm-building function of literature is very significant for the history of biblical interpretation. There are many instances in church history where the interpretation of a biblical passage has resulted in practices which one would not be proud to embrace today. In the next chapter, I shall examine how the interpretation of Matthew 22:1-14 has resulted in consequential practices and doctrines which cover a wide moral spectrum. Ulrich Luz argues that because texts possess a socially formative power, and in particular theological texts in relation to the church, we must have a 'hermeneutic of consequences.' "For this kind of hermeneutic, the study of the history of effects is essential, because it shows what the consequences of biblical texts in history were."<sup>34</sup>

### C. Formalism

In *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, Anthony C. Thiselton sees the turn toward literary theory in biblical studies as one of the most significant developments in biblical hermeneutics in the past 25 years. However, many of the different movements which literary studies experienced in this century have only been appropriated by biblical studies within the past 25 years. Formalism was a phase which both biblical and literary studies passed through, but the time lag in biblical studies has been much greater than in literary studies. As a movement, Formalism was primarily a Russian linguistic and

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<sup>31</sup> See the "Play as the Being of Artwork," in Chapter 2.

<sup>32</sup> Holub, 122.

<sup>33</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 16. "The work lives to the extent that it has influence. Included within the influence of a work is that which is accomplished in the consumption of the work as well as in the work itself." *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 92-3; Heikki Räisänen, "The Effective 'History' of the Bible: A Challenge to Biblical Scholarship?," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 45 (1992), 309.



literary movement which originated with Roman Jakobson's work *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* [*Studies on the Theory of Poetic Language*] which was published between 1916 and 1919. As a school, it died out by the end of the 1920's when many of the formalists were forced to abandon their views due to constant criticism from Marxist critics. Formalism's influence was much longer lived though. It exercised a considerable impact on the Prague School, largely due to the fact that Roman Jakobson moved there in 1921. In the West, Formalism had little direct impact except on French structuralism, particularly in the works of Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette. It was not until the publication of Viktor Elrich's book, *Russian Formalism: History and Doctrine* in 1955 and the republication and translation of some of the original Formalist works that it became widely known in German and Anglo-American literary and biblical studies.<sup>35</sup> It is through the structuralist approaches of Barthes, Dan Otto Via, and Daniel Patte that Formalism was indirectly appropriated in biblical studies.<sup>36</sup> One of Jauss' objectives is to retrieve the useful concepts of Formalism, which were lost when literary studies rejected Formalism, and reincorporate them into literary theory. In this sense, Jauss' use of Formalism and his moving beyond it presents a promising avenue of research for biblical hermeneutics.

Dissatisfaction in literary studies which were dominated by the historical-positivistic approach of the 19th century was the seedbed from which Formalism arose. Jakobson criticised the tendency he saw in literary studies to exchange the study of literature for something else, namely the examination of the historical conditions external to the text in order to gain an understanding of the intentions of the author and aid in the interpretation of the text which the historical-positivist paradigm practised. The two strands which bound the various Formalists together was: (1) their attempt to redefine the study of literature and place it on equal footing with other 'scientific' methods, and (2) the idea that a text was an aesthetic entity which reflected reality through its own internal structures. Formalists employed the following tools to achieve these goals: the difference between poetic and practical language in texts, defamiliarization, the relationship between story and plot, and literary evolution.<sup>37</sup> The shift to an

<sup>35</sup> Erlich Viktor, *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955); Irena R. Makaryk, ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), s.v. "Formalism, Russian," by Nina Kolesnikoff, 53-60.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 486-94.

<sup>37</sup> Yuri N. Tynianov, *The Problem of Verse Language*, trans. Michael Sosa and Brent Harvey (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981; from *Problema stikhotvornogo iazyka* [Leningrad, 1924]); and



autonomous text, stylistics, and the immanent effect of the aesthetics of the text represent a move away from the historical-positivist paradigm of the 19th century. "*Der Protestcharakter der neuen Methodik ist charakterisierbar durch ihre herausfordernde Prämisse, daß die historische Erklärung eines Werkes nicht mehr, sondern weniger beibringen könne, als aus dem Werk selbst als einem Ausdruckssystem von Sprache, Stil und Komposition zu erkennen die.*"<sup>38</sup> As such, Formalism represents a turning from the external conditions of historical and causal explanation for studying texts to the strategic priority of the internal organisation of the literary text.<sup>39</sup> This is both the strength and weakness of Formalism. Its focus on aesthetic perception and the relationships between the text and its recipients are its strong points. However, its focus on the sum total of literary devices in the text to the exclusion of historical and social factors is its weakness.<sup>40</sup>

Jauss agrees with the assessment by Formalisms of the ability of literature to break open everyday language and understanding through the devices of defamiliarization and the difference between poetic and practical (or everyday) language. Practical language was concerned with clear communication through reference to objects or accepted concepts while the goal of poetical language was the experience of the sounds or textures of the text.<sup>41</sup> Paul Ricoeur agrees with this assessment of the distinction between poetical and practical language. "What binds poetic discourse, then, is the need to bring to language modes of being that ordinary vision obscures or even represses."<sup>42</sup>

idem, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1978), 68-78.

<sup>38</sup> Jauss, "Paradigmawechsel in der Literaturwissenschaft," *Linguistische Berichte*, 3 (1969), 50.

<sup>39</sup> For more on this shift in literary paradigms see the next chapter. Jauss, "Paradigmawechsel," 50; Holub, 2; Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 58-9.

<sup>40</sup> Idem, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 16; Holub, *Reception Theory*, 30-31, Nina Kolesnikoff, "Formalism, Russian," 58-59. Jauss mainly considers the works of Roman Ingarden, Jan Mukarovsky, and Felix Vodicka.

<sup>41</sup> Practical language uses sound to communicate ideas, while the goal of poetic language is the experience of the sounds themselves. Since Jakobson and some of his early colleagues were linguists, it is easy to understand why they were attracted to the question of the difference between poetical and practical language use. Nina Kolesnikoff, "Formalism, Russian," 53-54. This distinction appears to have been inherited from positivism which viewed the explicit meaning of a text as cognitive and the implicit meaning as a form of emotive language. Practical language would be cognitive, of the semantic order, because it refers to the actual world. Poetical would be extra-semantic in that it consists of the weaving together of emotive evocations, which lack cognitive value. Cf. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 46. Vanhoozer is mistaken in his argument that Jauss picked up this dualism between poetic and practical language from Romanticism, and misses the more direct and significant influence of Formalism. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *Trinity Journal*, 8 (1978), 34.

<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 60.



Literary texts achieve this by 'defamiliarizing' objects by presenting them in new and unexpected ways. This opposition between the world presented in the text (poetical language) and reality (practical language) gives the reader a basis for comparing the claims or perspectives of the text with their horizon of expectations.<sup>43</sup> According to Formalism, one of the primary goals of literature is to present something in an unexpected or novel manner and thus, disrupt our habitual patterns of recognition.<sup>44</sup>

While they viewed defamiliarization primarily as a characteristic of literature or art, it is similar to Heidegger's point about the power of everyday language and conventional norms to conceal our understanding of things. For example, as long as a hammer is in its proper contextual relationships, the manner in which we understand the hammer *as* a hammer and its significance is "inconspicuous" to us because it lies hidden in the common language we share.<sup>45</sup> But when the contextual relationships which govern our use and expectations of the hammer are disrupted, our understanding of the hammer becomes explicit. It is when the hammer is missing, or broken, that we realise what the hammer was "ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*."<sup>46</sup> Both Heidegger and Gadamer develop this line of thought to show that the power or effect of art involves a push (*Stoß*) which disrupts or breaks "complacent meaning expectations."<sup>47</sup> Reading always involves how the text strikes the reader and how the meaning of the text is then related back to the reader's preunderstanding.<sup>48</sup> For Jauss, the processes of defamiliarization and the tension between poetical and practical language allow the text

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<sup>43</sup> Jan Mukarovsky, "Standard Language and Poetic Language," trans. Paul L. Garvin, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Adam Hazard (N.Y. and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1971), 1050-57. Robert C. Holub, *Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>44</sup> Defamiliarization takes place at three levels. At the linguistic level, it makes language difficult through the use of difficult sounds and words. It disrupts at the content level by challenging accepted ideas. And at the literary level, it deviates from the accepted literary norms and genres. Viktor Shklovskii, "Art as Device," in *Russian Formalism: Four Essays*, eds. L. Lemon and M. J. Reis (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

<sup>45</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 1992 reprint ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 199.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>47</sup> Fred R. Dallmayr, "Prelude: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue," in *Deonstruktion and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds., *The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter: Texts and Comments*, ed. Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1988), 85.

<sup>48</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey," trans. Richard E. Palmer, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, *Library of Living Philosophers*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilipp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, vol. 24 (Chicago and London: Open Court, 1997), 55.



to disclose new perspectives for the reader to view the world by disrupting the reader's expectations and everyday understanding.

While the opposition between poetical and practical language may serve as a helpful tool for the study of particular genres, poetical or literary texts, its applicability to other forms of literature is limited. For instance, in the Bible, this opposition may prove fruitful in the investigation of poetical texts such as Psalms or Ecclesiastes but its value for a text which is more historical is questionable. Gadamer questions Jauss' hermeneutic over this very issue. We cannot restrict the manner in which we experience art or texts to reflective aesthetic pleasure, which is built upon the differentiation between poetic and practical language.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, Gadamer's concepts of play, presentation, and the transformation into structure, which I examined in the last chapter, present a much broader hermeneutical model which is able to incorporate all the different genres and literary devices employed in such a diverse book as the Bible. I think it is possible to retain the concept of poetical versus practical language, and especially its use of defamiliarization, as long as it is seen within a larger hermeneutical framework of play which allows for a much wider range of literature than poetical or literary texts.

The Formalists brought out the relationship between texts, both synchronically in the tension between poetic and practical language, and diachronically in the tension between work, genres, and past works.<sup>50</sup> Jauss thinks that the introduction of the diachronic perspective into literary studies through the concept of the evolution of literary forms, functions, and genres is one of the most significant contributions of Formalism. This corrects the positivistic view of seeing the study of literary works as a closed system that is connected at best by a general sketch of history, the works of an author, a style, or a particular genre. Formalism seeks to relate one text to others in order to discover their evolutionary relationships. An author has a certain amount of genres and linguistic styles from which to select in composing her text. It is through the creativity of the author, and her use of the literary conventions that genres are modified or new ones are created through her works. However, once a text is written it becomes a literary fact and is incorporated into the literary tradition which then shapes the possibilities for future authors.<sup>51</sup> The elements of defamiliarization which were new and unexpected for the original audience have been 'levelled down' and become part of the horizon of expectations for successive generations of readers and no longer function to

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<sup>49</sup> Gadamer, "Forward to the Second Edition," in *Truth and Method*, xxxi.

<sup>50</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 16-17.

<sup>51</sup> Tynianov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, 68-78.



disrupt their expectations.<sup>52</sup> The decisive feature of a work's evolutionary significance is its innovative character which is perceived against the background of other works of literature. "The works that thereby stand out from, correspond to, or replace one another would appear as moments of a process that no longer needs to be construed as tending toward some end point, since as the *dialectical self-production of new forms* it requires no teleology."<sup>53</sup> Literary evolution is not a linear process, like Darwinianism, but is punctuated by struggle and breaks.<sup>54</sup> *This is perhaps the most important feature of Formalism that Jauss appropriates, the idea of change and development in literature with its focus on innovation that allows for a combination of history and artistic significance.*

If Marxism failed because it did not consider the aesthetic dimension of reception, Formalism suffered from a lack of historical and social perspective.<sup>55</sup> Jauss criticises Formalism for viewing the text as autonomous and only examining that which is internal to the text and intertextual systems.<sup>56</sup> Formalism's program of explaining a work's place in history by examining its change in literary forms is not an adequate basis from which to construct literary history. According to Jauss, Formalism must be opened up so that the relation of the text to the questions left by preceding works, (the text as an answer to those questions), and the questions that the text in turn leaves behind must be considered.<sup>57</sup> Thus, like Marxism, Formalism misses how literature informs culture and the progress of history.<sup>58</sup> In order to solve this shortcoming, Jauss proposes that Formalism should be modified to include an aesthetics of reception which involves examining the original horizon of expectations in which the text first appeared, the horizon of the reader, as well as those elements which are internal to the text.

Jauss' solution to the crisis in literary history is to combine Marxism's demand for historical mediation and Formalism's advances in the realm of aesthetic perception with his concept of the horizon of expectation of the reader to construct a new model of

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<sup>52</sup> Mukarovsky, "Standard Language and Poetic Language," 1052-3.

<sup>53</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 33. The sole criterion of this evolution, according to Formalism, is the appearance of new literary forms and "not the self-reproduction of worn-out forms, artistic devices, and genres, which pass into the background until at a moment in the evolution they are made 'perceptible' once again." Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>54</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 105.

<sup>55</sup> Nina Kolesnikoff, "Formalism, Russian," 58-59.

<sup>56</sup> Holub, 30-31.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>58</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 40.

literary history.<sup>59</sup> One of the main issues that must be corrected in both Marxism and Formalism is the limited role they assign to the reader.

Reader, listener, and spectator — in short, the factor of the audience — play and extremely limited role in both literary theories. Orthodox Marxist aesthetics treats the reader — if at all — no differently from the author; it inquires about his social position or seeks to recognize him in the structure of a represented society. The Formalist school needs the reader only as a perceiving subject who follows the directions in the text in order to distinguish the [literary] form or discover the [literary] procedure.<sup>60</sup>

Because the reader is not just a passive agent but also plays a formative role in shaping literary history, the reader must play an active role in literary theory.

The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees. For it is only through the process of its mediation that the work enters into the changing horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them.<sup>61</sup>

## II. JAUSS' PROVOCATION: "LITERARY HISTORY AS A CHALLENGE TO LITERARY THEORY"

The most logical point to start any discussion of Jauss' works is with his essay, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" for which he is best known and has been the most widely discussed paper on literary theory in Germany in the past twenty to thirty years.<sup>62</sup>

This essay is provocative by nature and presents not only a challenge to the inadequacy of the literary theories at that time but also offers a solution in the form of a proposal for a new paradigm in literary studies. His appeal to Friedrich Schiller's inaugural lecture of 1789, "What Is and Toward What End Does One Study Universal History," is a clear indication of this. Schiller called for a new approach to history and literature because the answers to the questions which the classical-humanist paradigm asked were no longer satisfactory. This paradigm developed during the Renaissance and formulated guidelines from classical texts which served as norms to evaluate all other literature.<sup>63</sup> Schiller realised that, with the rise of historicism, classical literature could no

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<sup>59</sup> "The task for a new literary history, therefore, becomes to merge successfully the best qualities of Marxism and Formalism." Holub, 57.

<sup>60</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 18-19.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>62</sup> Holub, 69.

<sup>63</sup> See the section on "Paradigm Shifts" in the next chapter for a discussion of how the concept of paradigms functions heuristically and apologetically in Jauss' work.



longer be held as embodying atemporal norms and thus, this approach was in crisis. Not only did Schiller explain why they were facing a crisis in literary studies at that time but he also established the expectations of nineteenth century literary history.<sup>64</sup> Jauss prepares the reader to receive his work in a similar manner by referring to Schiller's essay in the introduction to his lecture.

Jauss' essay is divided into two sections. In the first section, he discusses much of the background material I discussed in the previous section in order to set the stage for his proposal. This proposal is laid out in seven theses that constitute the second half of his essay. Since this is such a significant work to understand Jauss' thought I will devote a large portion of this chapter in order to summarise each of these theses.

*Thesis 1. Literary history must move from historical objectivism which is based on the aesthetics of production and representation to an aesthetics of reception and influence.*

Collingwood's axiom that "History is nothing but the reenactment of past thought in the historian's mind" is even more significant for the history of literature.<sup>65</sup> Literary history is not based on facts but on the experience of texts by readers. In this respect, Jauss develops Gadamer's metaphor of a musical score and repeated performances to define literary history. "A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and offers the same view to each reader in each period. . . . It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, literary history is a continual process of aesthetic reception. The endless collection of objective facts which some literary histories produce misses the eventful character of the text as well as the manner in which the concretization of the meaning of the text can play a historically constitutive role. Texts are not like historical events. On the one hand, they only become an event with a reader who reads them in light of other works which in turn shapes his reception of future works. On the other hand, they lack effect or influence if they are not appropriated by a reader.<sup>67</sup> It is only through reception, through the interrelationship between the literary work and the reading public, that a work of literature reveals its structure and meaning in an open series of historical events.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 6.

<sup>65</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (N.Y. and Oxford, 1956), 228; Jauss, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 21.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-22.

<sup>68</sup> *Idem*, *Towards*, 73.

*Thesis 2. The aesthetic of reception can avoid psychologising by looking at the influence of work in the period of its appearance, from pre-understanding of genres, and from themes already familiar in other works.*

A text does not appear in a vacuum but makes use of signals, genres, and other familiar characteristics. This means that the event of aesthetic experience is not an arbitrary subjective experience, "but rather the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggering signals, and which can also be described by a textual linguistics."<sup>69</sup> There is an intersubjective horizon that determines the effects or influences of a text. Because texts employ conventions, which the reader inherits from other texts and which become part of the forms of life or the reader's language game(s), the effect of the text is not an event that is purely private, but it has an intersubjective character.<sup>70</sup> Jauss' point is not to reduce literary history to a sociology of knowledge but he is arguing that there is historical data available to the literary historian in this area.<sup>71</sup>

In order for a reader to comprehend a text it requires that he possess the foreknowledge to make that text understandable. The expectations that the reader brings to the text are inherited from his tradition and rules which he has learned from reading other texts. These expectations are "then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced" as he/she reads the text.<sup>72</sup> This results in a semiotic expansion and correction of the reader's system. The various horizon of expectations (in which the work first appeared and the successive horizons in which it is read) are by nature intersubjective and are therefore open to investigation. One could determine if the author was writing in a manner with which the readers would have been familiar or if the

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<sup>69</sup> Idem, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 23.

<sup>70</sup> I realise that the concept of 'language-games' is interpreted in a variety of manners by different authors. George Pitcher and Norman Malcom employ this concept in a manner which is much less pluralistic than D. Z. Phillips and Peter Winch. While Richard Rorty is even more pluralistic, verging on the notion of language-games being quasi-autonomous 'free-floating islands.' Jauss' argument is closest to that of Pitcher and Malcom.

Jauss' thought offers parallels with the later Wittgenstein here, in as far as, an utterance or text gains its currency from the intersubjective world of shared co-operation and training. For Wittgenstein, this intersubjective world is primarily discussed in terms of training, while Jauss prefers to discuss it in terms of tradition. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1958), § 240-44, and esp. 293.

<sup>71</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 22-24.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 23.



author was being innovative in the manner she was structuring the text by studying the genres familiar to the author and the original readers.

The intersubjective dimension for studying the horizon of expectations also includes the intertextual relationships between texts. The work of Umberto Eco and Jonathan Culler help us to understand the concept of intertextuality and the role which it plays in hermeneutics. According to Eco, the process by which the characters on a page becomes a 'sign-function' involves the production of the sign (word or meaning) which arises in the act of recognition.<sup>73</sup> A code must pre-exist to enable the person to see the relation between the action and the content in order for a human action to be recognised as an expression of some content.<sup>74</sup> Culler develops these ideas in relation to the practice of reading texts and the inter-subjectivity of understanding. In a statement very similar to Eco, Culler affirms, "When a speaker of a language hears a phonetic sequence, he is able to give it meaning because he brings to the act of communication an amazing repertoire of conscious and unconscious knowledge." Reading is no exception to this rule. "To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for."<sup>75</sup>

Anyone who lacks this knowledge will be baffled when presented with a text such as a parable. "He would be unable to read it as literature . . . *because he lacks the complex 'literary competence' which enables him and others to proceed.* He has not internalised the 'grammar' of literature which would permit him to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings."<sup>76</sup> In a manner similar to Wittgenstein, Culler argues that we need training in the rules, conventions, and forms of literature in order to understand literature. A general experience of the world and society is not enough to make a reader competent to understand literary works.<sup>77</sup>

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73 "Recognition occurs when a given object or event, produced by nature or human action (intentionally or unintentionally), and existing in a world of facts among facts, comes to be viewed by an addressee as the expression of a given content, either through a pre-existing and coded correlation or through the positing of a possible correlation by its addressee." Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 221.

74 "I am speaking to you; you understand me because my messages are emitted following rules of a communally shared code." Umberto Eco, "Social Life as a Sign System," in *Structuralism: An Introduction*, ed. David Robey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 61.

75 Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 113-14.

76 *Ibid.*, 114, emphasis mine.

77 Culler, 114-20.



But it is clear that the study of one poem or novel facilitates the study of the next: one gains not only points of comparison but a sense of how to read. One develops a set of questions which experience shows to be appropriate and productive and criteria for determining whether they are in a given case, production; one acquires a sense of the possibilities of literature and how these possibilities may be distinguished. We may speak, if we like, of extrapolating from one work to another, so long as we do not thereby obscure the fact that the process of extrapolation is precisely what requires explanation.<sup>78</sup>

In the interpretive or reading process, Culler is interested in how conventions and intertextuality enable, but also limit, the possible readings of a text. He is not concerned with, nor does he believe, that there is one correct interpretation for a text. Just as *langue* and *parole* are dialectically related to each other, so are texts and intertextual systems.

Culler defines intertextuality as:

'Intertextuality' thus has a double focus. *On the one hand, it calls our attention to the importance of prior texts, insisting that the autonomy of texts is a misleading notion and that a work has the meaning it does only because certain things have previously been written.* Yet in so far as it focuses on intelligibility, on meaning, *'intertextuality' leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification.* Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. The study of intertextuality is thus not the investigation of sources and influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider to include anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make possible the signifying practices of later texts.<sup>79</sup>

Jauss emphasises both the diachronic and synchronic aspects to intertextuality. For example, when we read a detective story we understand it in a synchronic relationship to other detective stories we have read. At the same time, a detective story may be a reworking of a previous novel, or it may be picking up themes and ideas from classical literature. The reader's pleasure and interest in the text arises from the manner in which our expectations are generated between works. Intertextuality functions like a "well-known game with familiar rules but unknown surprises."<sup>80</sup>

And finally, the intersubjective dimension to the horizon of expectations may be seen in the opposition between poetic and practical functions of language. What may have been a new and innovative literary style or manner of communicating an idea when

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 121, emphasis mine.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>80</sup> Jauss, "Theses on the Transition from the Aesthetics of Literary Works to a Theory of Aesthetics of Experience," in *Interpretation of Narrative*, eds. Mario Valdes and Owen Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 144.



the text was first written becomes part of the literary competence of successive generations of readers. As a result, later readers do not experience the same tension or the disruptive power of the text which the original readers would have.<sup>81</sup>

The relevance of this for biblical studies can be seen in the history of parable studies. Christian Bugge and Paul Fiebig criticised Adolf Jülicher's work, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, for interpreting Jesus' parables from the perspective of classical Greek literature and ignoring the Jewish and rabbinical genre of *mashal* which serves as a better model for understanding the form and content of Jesus' parables. The result is that Jülicher perceived Jesus as a 19th century German who was versed in the Greek classics.<sup>82</sup> The meaning of a parable was reduced to expressing one clear moral point which should be explicated by the exegete in as general a term as possible.

*Thesis 3. The artistic character of a work can be determined by the influence or effect of a text on its audience. The change in horizons that the text brings about through the negation of the familiar or opening up of new perspectives is a result of the aesthetic distance between the text and its audience, which can be objectified through the audiences' reactions and the critics' judgements.*

If a work is closely aligned with the audience's horizon of expectations then no horizontal change is produced. Jauss classifies this as 'culinary art'.<sup>83</sup> For Gadamer, the point Jauss is making concerning 'culinary art' is vitally important. If we experience no provocation, negation, or push (*Stoß*) from the work of art, then we have not had an experience, *Erfahrung*. Without this provocation, we will never learn to recognise what

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<sup>81</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 16, 24; idem, "Thesis on the Transition," 141.

<sup>82</sup> Warren S. Kissinger, *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*, ATLA Bibliography Series, ed. Kenneth E. Rowe (Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1979), 72-74, 77-83; Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 52-115; Christian A. Bugge, *Die Haupt-Parablen Jesu* (Giessen: J. Rickerische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903), 15-35; Paul Fiebig, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu im Lichte der rabbinischen Gleichnisse des neutestamentlichen Zeitalters* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1912), 6-118.

<sup>83</sup> He appears to have adopted this term from Heidegger who complained that art had been reduced to a "matter for pastry cooks." Art is deprived of its ability to make a truth disclosure if it is either relegated to the lower realm of material objects or elevated to aesthetic consciousness. The threat to modern art which Heidegger saw was that such a reduction had already taken place, "the beautiful is what reposes and relaxes; it is intended for enjoyment and art is a matter for pastry cooks." Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 131-32. Heidegger makes this point in his argument against the reduction of thinking to calculation, language being pressed into the service of trivia, and art to aesthetics. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 330-35.



we do not know, learn to ask questions, or mature and develop (*Bildung*) as individuals, communities, and traditions.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, tradition has a levelling, or homogenising power on even the most innovative works; the aesthetic distance between the text and the original audience diminishes for later readers "to the extent that the original negativity of the work has become self evident and has itself entered into the horizon of future aesthetic experience, as a henceforth familiar-expectation."<sup>85</sup> Classical texts and masterworks suffer from this form of horizontal change. To protect and/or rescue great literary works from being reduced to culinary art "requires a special effort to read them 'against the grain' of the accustomed experience to catch sight of their artistic character once again."<sup>86</sup> In biblical hermeneutics, the classical example of this is the removal of the negation or subversive character of the parables. The negation in the parable of the Good Samaritan is no longer recognised in our horizon of expectations. Even the title we apply to this parable (the "good" Samaritan) betrays this fact. The shock which the original audience experienced as the parable reversed their expectations of who the good person was is almost the exact opposite of our horizon of expectations.<sup>87</sup>

There is a dialectical relationship between texts and horizons of expectations. Some works violate or break the audiences' expectations to such an extent that the audience is only able to gradually appreciate the text with the passage of time. This takes place as the horizon of expectations develops or alters so that the aspects of the literary work in question can be appreciated. The reception of the novels *Fanny* and *Madame Bovary* in the nineteenth century illustrates this. Both books were written at the same time, on a similar subject matter, adultery, and to the same audience. *Fanny* was immediately received and enjoyed several reprintings while *Madame Bovary*, which

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<sup>84</sup> See my discussion of these topics in Chapter 2; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 354-56; Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, "Translator's Preface," in *Truth and Method*, xiii; Theodore Kisiel, "Ideology Critique and Phenomenology: The Current Debate in German Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, 14 (1970), 159.

<sup>85</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 25; Idem, *Question and Answer*, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Idem, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 26. Umberto Eco makes an important contribution to this discussion by showing that even classical or provocative texts can be consumed by the naive reader in a manner which is equivalent to Jauss' argument about 'culinary art.' A naive reader will not appreciate or enjoy the text in the manner that a critical reader will. This is not just the result of being a poor reader but involves the relationship between the structures or strategies in the text and the competence of the reader. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Thomas Sebeok (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 9-10, 204-16.

<sup>87</sup> Jauss, 25-28.



violated many of the literary expectations and norms of the original audience, gained acceptance gradually. As the horizon of expectations shifted the fortune of the two books was reversed. "As *Madame Bovary*, however, became a world-wide success, when at first it was understood and appreciated as a turning-point in the history of the novel by only a small circle of connoisseurs, the audience of novel-readers that was formed by it came to sanction the new cannon of expectations; this canon made Feydeau's weaknesses — his flowery style, his modish effects, his lyrical-confessional clichés — unbearable, and allowed *Fanny* to fade into yesterday's bestseller."<sup>88</sup> The reception of a particular text, in turn, shapes and alters the aesthetic norms of that tradition and, as a result, those works which were formerly accepted as successful books are now seen as outmoded; our appreciation of them has been withdrawn.

This same phenomena occurs in biblical studies. A prime example of this is, once again, Jülicher's, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*. While the historical-critical method was recognised for determining the original meaning of the gospels during the nineteenth century it was not until the publication of Jülicher's book that this method was accepted as being applicable to the parables. Geraint Jones sees Jülicher's work as so significant that he organises the history of parable research according to the scheme of pre- and post-Jülicher.<sup>89</sup> Until Jülicher, the parables were still interpreted allegorically and classified as allegories. Jülicher's work dispelled both of these ideas: the parables are not allegories nor should they be interpreted allegorically despite the fact that this had been the accepted

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 28. The reception of *Moby Dick* is another excellent example of this phenomena. "Moby Dick received mixed reviews when it was published, and proved to be a popular disaster. Not until Raymond Weaver began reviving Melville some seventy years later did the book attract much attention. For a few years, critics debated its value and eventually advocates won, and the great ungainly book was enshrined in the hall of fame: it was tacitly deemed canonical by something approaching a general consensus. Since then, it has been treated as scripture by most people working in American literature: that is to say, its genre has been examined like the biblical midrashim; numerous hypotheses of its overall meaning have been constructed; exegeses of individual chapters or symbols have been performed; the book has become required reading in thousands of schools; most educated people claim to be conversant with it. Only rarely does one see a negative evaluation of it any more; it has passed beyond that stage." Christopher E. Arthur, "Gadamer and Hirsch: The Canonical Work and the Interpreter's Intention," *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 4 (1977), 186.

<sup>89</sup> See chapter 1 of Geraint Vaughan Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables: A Study in Their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1964). Little acknowledges the significance of Jülicher's work but prefers to see Jeremias as the figure around whom the past century of parable research has revolved. James C. Little, "Parable Research in the Twentieth Century I. The Predecessors of J. Jeremias," *Expository Times*, 87 (1976) 356-60; "Parable Research in the Twentieth Century II. The Contribution of J. Jeremias," 88 (1977): 40-43; and "Parable Research in the Twentieth Century III. Developments since J. Jeremias," 88 (1977): 71-75.



practice since the earliest days of the church. The impact of Jülicher's work is such that if a modern scholar wishes to introduce an allegorical dimension into his reading of the parables he must fight against what has been accepted as exegetical conventions since Jülicher.<sup>90</sup> It is interesting to note that Jülicher credits Alexander Bruce as the person who broke the allegorical method of interpretation. However, Bruce's use of the historical-critical method to the parables resulted in his being severely criticised, almost a formal censure, by the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, while Bruce's work was not received it helped to alter the horizon of expectations which prepared the way for the reception of Jülicher's work.<sup>92</sup>

In Jauss' earlier work, the most important criteria for determining the influence of a text concerned the manner by which the text negated the preunderstanding of its audience. This was based on Adorno's hermeneutic principle of negativity. In his later work, Jauss softened this position dramatically.<sup>93</sup> No longer does he consider negation the primary means by which a work provokes its reader, nor does he limit the reception value of a text to its provocation. The reception of a text may take a wide spectrum of reactions from the different horizons of readers, including the manner in which a text may affirm the accepted norms and conventions of the readers. This is one area in which Jauss corrects Gadamer's thought. For Gadamer, the provocation of our prejudices by a text is achieved primarily through the concept of negation.<sup>94</sup> Jauss gives two primary reasons for this modification in his hermeneutic. First, if tradition levels-down the provocative power of a text, then how do we explain a text's continued reception and significance within a tradition? The exemplary and normative character of classic texts clearly demonstrates the limited role which negation can play in the transmission of a tradition of literature.<sup>95</sup> Second, you cannot reduce the historical reception of a text to one factor such as negation. Rather we must also include other communicative functions

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<sup>90</sup> Blomberg's attempt to recapture allegory is a recent illustration of the continuing influence of Jülicher's work. Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 30-38. See also: James Barr, *Old and New In Interpretation: A Study on the Two Testaments* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 103-4; Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 96-7.

<sup>91</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 37-38.

<sup>92</sup> Jülicher at the same time criticised Bruce's work for developing a three-story model of parables which weakened his ability to define what a parable was. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 1.300.

<sup>93</sup> Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience*, 12-15; idem, "Der Leser" 331.

<sup>94</sup> For one example of this see: Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," trans. Jeff L. Close, in *Interpretive Social Research: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 156.

<sup>95</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 64.



of literature such as role identification, the extension of ideas, and literature's socially formative and affirming function.<sup>96</sup> *Literature fulfils both an anticipatory and archaeological function.* In the latter, texts do not merely negate existing norms and prejudices but mediate norms and values from the past by allowing the reader to rediscover them, and as such, literature serves the purpose of mediating such norms with various spheres of life within the present horizon.<sup>97</sup> This dual function is theologically significant. Not only does the Bible speak to us most sharply when it "addresses us as adversary, to correct and to change our prior wishes and expectations," as Calvin and Luther claimed.<sup>98</sup> But it also fulfils an archaeological role in that through the reading of the Bible we are called upon to remember and preserve what has been handed down to us. There is a third reason why this shift is important in relation to this thesis. If the concept of negation stands at the centre of reception theory, then we will end up with a view of tradition which is characterised by novelty, rupture, and discontinuity. If reception theory is broadened to include other elements, along with negation, then we return to a middle position which includes both continuity and plurality within a tradition.

If we return to the example of the parable of the Good Samaritan, the widening of reception theory to other communicative functions beside negation become obvious. While we may not experience the negation of the parable that the original Jewish audience would have identified with the Samaritan, the socially-formative function of the parable is still experienced to this day. We are to show mercy and compassion as the Samaritan did.

***Thesis 4. The reconstruction of the original horizon of expectations allows us to compare past and present understanding and forces us to become aware of the text's history of reception which mediates the two horizons.***

There is no 'timelessly true' meaning for a text that is available to the reader. This would require that the reader could step outside history and the errors of his predecessors. Instead, Jauss adopts Gadamer's conception of the fusion of horizons

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<sup>96</sup> This is especially true if we consider the role which question and answer plays in Jauss' thought. "The coherence of question and answer in this history of an interpretation is primarily determined by categories of the enrichment of understanding (be they supplementation or development, a reaccenting or a new elucidation), and only secondarily by the logic of falsifiability." Idem, *Towards*, 185; idem, *Aesthetic Experience*, 15; idem, *Question and Answer*, 148, 224-5; Holub, *Reception Theory*, 79.

<sup>97</sup> John Neubauer, "Trends in Literary Reception: Die neuen Leiden der Wertherwirkung," *German Quarterly*, 52.1 (January, 1979), 74-5.

<sup>98</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 9.

which takes place through dialogue. Once again Jaus and Gadamer follow Collingwood's philosophy of history, "We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer."<sup>99</sup> But the reconstructed question is never identical with the original question the text sought to answer because any reconstruction of a past horizon is always enveloped in the present horizon of the interpreter.

The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past, enables one on the other hand to pose questions that the text gave an answer to, and thereby to discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work.... It brings to view the hermeneutic difference between the former and the current understanding of a work; it raises to consciousness the history of its reception ...<sup>100</sup>

This means that the history of a text's reception results from the unfolding of the potential meaning of the text. *Meaning does not solely reside in the original horizon but to an 'equal degree' comes from the interpreter's horizon.*<sup>101</sup> One of the traits of a text is that, in the words of Paul Ricœur, it possess a 'surplus of meaning'.<sup>102</sup> For Jaus, this surplus of meaning opens the possibility for new interpretations to bring to light perspectives or elements of the text which previous ones did not. This is based on Heidegger and Gadamer's argument that the meaning or truth claims of a text will never be fully realised in any single act of understanding.<sup>103</sup> Meaning does not solely reside in the original horizon but arises from the text's interaction with successive generations of readers.

Since such folds [possible meaning unnoticed by author or original audience] can first be discovered only through the interpreter's later horizon, and can be expounded on only by assimilating them in a new interpretation, this horizon ought not simply be erased by aligning it with the earlier horizon when an anticipatory assumption proves unfounded. Instead, the content of the horizon of one's own expectation must be brought into play, and mediated through the alien horizon in order to arrive at the new horizon of another interpretation.<sup>104</sup>

The two horizons must be brought into play which results in an ongoing process of constituting the meaning of a text. In order for the fusion of horizons to take place, the

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<sup>99</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 370; Jaus, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 29.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>101</sup> *Idem.*, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," 184.

<sup>102</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 29-36.

<sup>103</sup> See "Heidegger: the Play of Truth," and "Performance and Tradition Formation," in the previous chapter.

<sup>104</sup> Jaus, *Question and Answer*, 206-7.



interpreter must pose the question that draws the text “back out of its seclusion” so that the text can answer and “say something”. “This also means that ‘while a right elucidation never understands the text better than the author understood it,’ it does surely understand differently. Yet this difference must be of such a kind as to touch upon the same toward which the elucidated text is thinking.”<sup>105</sup> The ‘surplus of meaning’ which unfolds in the history of texts interpretation does not imply that any subjective interpretation is a valid unfolding of that meaning. The idea that there may be more than one right interpretation does not, in this case, imply that there are no wrong interpretations. The ‘score’ of the text, the tradition of the text’s interpretation, and the reconstruction of the horizon in which the text appeared are all intersubjective elements which separate Jauss’ hermeneutic from the more subjective approaches of Richard Rorty or Stanley Fish.<sup>106</sup> As a result, it follows that our interpretations of classical texts, such as the Bible, are always provisional by nature and open to review while at the same time faithfully addressing the text and its subject matter. If we slide off to one side or the other of this position, the writing of new commentaries is a futile exercise.

*Thesis 5. A text must be seen in its position in its ‘literary series’ in order for someone to recognise its historical significance.*

“Put in another way, the next work can solve formal and moral problems left behind by the last work, and present new problems in turn.”<sup>107</sup> Formalism’s concept of literary evolution was a step in this direction. However, its criterion of innovation in the process of literary evolution is one-sided and cannot adequately explain the growth and development of literature. One must also consider the horizon of the reader and the aesthetics of reception. Literary history is not just concerned with a chronological series of literary facts. It must seek the questions left behind by the text and the solutions the text offered to the questions that were posed to the author. In order to recognise these questions, the interpreter must bring their experiences into play, “since the past horizon of old and new forms, problems and solutions is only recognizable in its further mediation, within the present horizon of the received work.”<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 207, quoting Martin Heidegger, *The Question concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, William Lovitt trans. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1977), 58.

<sup>106</sup> Paul de Man notes that Jauss has always viewed such subjective hermeneutical models “with a measure of suspicion.” “Introduction,” in *Towards*, xix.

<sup>107</sup> Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” 32.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 34. “Its [historical knowledge] object is therefore not a mere object, something outside the mind which knows it; it is an activity of thought, which can be known only in so far as the knowing mind re-enacts it and knows itself as so doing. To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but



Every literary work is seen as offering possible solutions to the questions that were posed by previous texts and also presenting new questions. This means that the 'new' is not merely literary innovation but is a historical category. This takes place when an author wilfully reappropriates the past in his work or provides an unexpected or new perspective on past literature, "allowing something to be found that one previously could not have sought in it."<sup>109</sup>

The new also becomes a historical category when the diachronic analysis of literature is pushed further to ask which historical moments are really the ones that first make new that which is new in a literary phenomenon; to what degree this new element is already perceptible in the historical instant of its emergence; which distance, path, or detour of understanding were required for its realization in content' and whether the moment of its full actualization was so influential that it could alter the perspective on the old, and thereby the canonization of the literary past.<sup>110</sup>

The implications for this thesis upon biblical studies are immediately apparent. In New Testament studies, the area where this fifth thesis has been practised the most concerns the question of the historical and intertextual relationships between the synoptic gospels. Which gospel came first, how did the subsequent authors edit or expand upon the previous text's rendition of one of the events in Jesus' life, and so on?<sup>111</sup> At the same time, we need to also consider the position which different commentaries hold within the 'literary series' of biblical interpretation. Commentaries and interpretations are not just answers to questions about the meaning of the text, but also present questions for future commentators. This means that the history of biblical interpretation should be seen as a tradition constituted by question and answer in which the meaning of the biblical texts unfold. "The two poles of the past 'givenness' of the Bible and its present interpretation do not (or at least should not) stand in opposition to each other. In this respect, the history of biblical interpretation presents us with a history of legitimate responses to the text which shape the formation of the Christian tradition

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experiences to be lived through in his mind; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own." Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 218.

<sup>109</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 35. This is one of the main theses in his essay, Hans Robert Jauss, "The Dialogical and the Dialectical *Neveu de Rameau*: How Diderot Adopted Socrates and Hegel Adopted Diderot," trans. Sara Brewer Berlowitz, *Protocol of the Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture*, ed. William R. Herzog II (Berkeley: The Graduate Theological Union and the University of California, 1983).

<sup>110</sup> Idem., "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 35.

<sup>111</sup> The most significant text in this field, even though it is now dated, is: Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1963).



because of their exemplary character and illegitimate responses which hopefully will be avoided by future interpreters.<sup>112</sup> The Holy Spirit guides the Church by clarifying the truth, "the on-going communal life of the Church yields ever new and richer insight into the significance of the life, death and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>113</sup> If this corporate and tradition constituted form of knowledge constitutes our understanding of the Bible in such a dynamic fashion, then Jauss' hermeneutic offers a very important resource to not only interpret the Bible but also to cultivate and correct this corporate form of knowledge.

*Thesis 6. Advances in the field of linguistics allow us to overcome the dominance of diachronic methods in literary history.*

One of the effects of Hegel's philosophy was the acceptance of a diachronic view of history. This view presupposed that every event that occurred at a similar point in time was equally informed by the significance of that moment. However, different contemporaneous events cannot be understood this way. Different events are conditioned by their own particular history or time curves. Any moment in history is therefore a mixture of these historically heterogeneous events. The significance of this for literary history is that texts that appear contemporaneously are, in reality, a heterogeneous collection of texts, each shaped and informed by different time curves. Therefore, the literary historian needs to incorporate synchronic, 'cross-section,' studies into her work in order to be able to grasp the differences between texts which appear close to the same time period, especially if there is a cultural proximity between the texts. This is especially important when one considers works which are written during epochal changes, or what Kuhn would call 'paradigm shifts.' Synchronic studies allow us to see how the competing values and structures are realised in different texts which appear contemporary with each other during such changes. This enables us to formulate some form of heuristic framework to examine and explain the questions which are being asked, the answers which were received, and the significance of the changes in the "system of relationships in the literature of a historical moment."<sup>114</sup> "The history of literature comes to light at the intersection of diachrony and synchrony."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, "Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory," in *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith, A Report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England* (London: SPCK, 1981), 73; Jauss, *Towards*, 59.

<sup>113</sup> Michael J. Himes, "The Ecclesiological Significance of the Reception of Doctrine," *Heythrop Journal*, 33 (1992), 152.

<sup>114</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 36. Jauss' work corrects Hegel's idea that differences between beliefs and ideas occurred between different historical



If we expand Jauss' argument at this point, we could say that different texts that appear contemporaneously are answering different questions. If this is the case, then it is not a big step to incorporate MacIntyre into Jauss' program. Jauss' 'time curves' are a simplified form of rival traditions found in MacIntyre's tradition-constituted form of epistemology and the two systems appear to complement each other well: Jauss on the aesthetic and literary side and MacIntyre on the tradition and epistemological side.<sup>116</sup>

The heterogeneous mixture of texts in a tradition or literary horizon is also subject to the levelling power of tradition just as masterworks are. "This multiplicity of literary phenomena nonetheless, when seen from the point of view of an aesthetics of reception, coalesces again for the audience that perceives them and relates them to one another as works of its present, in the unity of a common horizon of literary expectations, memories, and anticipations that establishes their significance."<sup>117</sup> If this is so, then literary history is not relegated to following either a program of great books or the sum total of all texts, but the synchronic perspective helps us determine which texts are significant in shaping our literary tradition. Literary evolution can be established through the changes in the different horizons of expectation. Successive synchronic cross sections should produce points of intersection with diachronic studies. As the literary scholar finds these points of intersection, they will reveal the "literary evolution in its moments formative of history as well as its caesurae between periods."<sup>118</sup>

This raises an interesting question concerning the plurality and continuity in biblical interpretation. On the one hand, it affirms the possibility of different interpretations of a passage based on the idea of different 'time curves' which shape those interpretations or approaches to the Bible. On the other hand, it would seem to indicate that the continuity we see in the history of biblical interpretation is the result of the

epochs, not within them. An idea which is still found in the work of Gadamer. Charles Larmore, "Tradition, Objectivity, and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 154. Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience*, 269-70.

115 Idem, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 37.

116 The clearest explication of MacIntyre's position is found in: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

117 Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 38. The levelling power of tradition is also seen in Kuhn's work. After a scientific revolution has taken place, the texts books which are written level out scientific history by presenting it as the steady accumulation of facts and gradual development of theories until the reader arrives at current research program. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 136-43.

118 Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 36-39.



levelling power of tradition. What were considered heterogeneous understandings of the biblical text when they appeared are now considered homogeneous elements of our tradition. A tradition does not preserve all the questions which contributed to its formation, some are forgotten, some erased by a definitive answer, and others renewed.<sup>119</sup> The levelling power of tradition is both a selective process filtering which literary expectations will constitute future expectations and, at the same time, it is a forgetful process. As Heidegger claimed, tradition enables us not only to recover the past by making the foreign familiar, but it also “blocks our access to those primordial sources” by “making us forget” the significance of the sources.<sup>120</sup> Forgetting is as much a part of historically effective consciousness as is remembering.

One of the critical contributions which this sixth thesis makes to biblical studies is that it provides us with a method to recover some of the questions and answers which have been forgotten within our tradition. We gain invaluable resources which provide us with a wider field of play to approach a text as we recover the questions and answers which constitute our tradition of interpretation. At the same time, this mode of study should contribute to the development of our *phronetic* knowledge, what Gadamer would term *Bildung*. We should become more sensitive to wider perspectives on a text's possible interpretations and wiser in determining which of these are most appropriate for the present horizon.<sup>121</sup> From an ecumenical perspective, the recovery of lost questions and answers reveal the diversity of questions that our tradition has homogenised and allows us to not only see the validity of other traditions of interpretation but also enables us to better engage them in dialogue. “Reception entails the respectful hearing of the other's statement of faith and the discernment that the statement is coherent with the apostolic tradition and perhaps further illuminates one's own experience of the Christian life.”<sup>122</sup>

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119 Idem, *Question and Answer*, 70; 219.

120 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43. Heidegger's philosophy served as a corrective to Hegel's program of absolute knowledge of history and at the same time the cumulative or evolutionary approach to historical knowledge. There is always an element of concealment or forgetfulness in every act of disclosure or remembering. Thus, the truth (*aletheia*) of something is always characterised by some degree of concealment. Gadamer, “Hegel and Heidegger,” 107; idem, “Heidegger's Later Philosophy,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 226-27.

121 See the section “Hermeneutical Knowledge and Tradition,” in Chapter 1.

122 Himes, “The Ecclesiological Significance of the Reception of Doctrine,” 155.

*Thesis 7. Literary history is a special history with a unique relationship to general history.*

Marxism, Formalism, and Structuralism failed to see how literature informed society and shaped history. The social function of literature occurs when “the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, performs his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior.”<sup>123</sup> Jauss expands the role of negative experience found in Gadamer’s hermeneutic by incorporating Karl Popper’s thought on the productive role of negative experience in the sciences.<sup>124</sup> Each hypothesis and observation presupposes a horizon of expectations. The disappointment or falsification of these expectations are what enables the researcher to make contact with reality. While Jauss does not fully agree with Popper’s theory, it does illustrate the “productive meaning of negative experience.”<sup>125</sup> However, unlike real life, the reader does not bump into reality when his or her expectations are negated. The experience of reading creates a freedom from the constraints of daily life and has the possibility to disclose new perspectives to the reader. “Thus a literary work with an unfamiliar aesthetic form can break through the expectations of its readers and at the same time confront them with a question, the solution to which remains lacking for them in the religiously or officially sanctioned morals.”<sup>126</sup>

At this point, Jauss integrates literary-historical and sociological research into the horizon of expectations. Synchronic studies reveal the horizon of expectations at a certain period which arise from the audience’s experience with other works of art and the sociological background of everyday life.<sup>127</sup> Literary history must study the social conditions and background that affect the author’s and audience’s expectations. These “entanglements are indispensable.” However, this is not to reduce literary hermeneutics to a theory of production like Marxism, for once a text is formed it achieves a life of its own which extends beyond the original horizon and plays a socially formative function for succeeding horizons of expectations.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Idem, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” 39.

<sup>124</sup> For my discussion of Gadamer on this topic see Chapter 1, “Hegel’s Dialectic: Experience and Sublation.”

<sup>125</sup> Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” 41.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>128</sup> Idem, Hans Robert Jauss, “*Der Leser*,” 338-39; idem, *Towards*, 91. See also: Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 25-44.



The gap between literature and history, between aesthetic and historical knowledge, can be bridged if literary history does not simply describe the process of general history in the reflection of its works one more time, but rather when it discovers in the course of 'literary evolution' that properly socially formative function that belongs to literature as it competes with other arts and social forces in the emancipation of mankind from its natural, religious, and social bonds.<sup>129</sup>

Jauss is concerned with the relationship between literary history and general history in this essay. In particular, he wants to overcome the model in which the interpretation of a text is accomplished by placing the text in its proper historical context. This misses the fact that the history of a text's interpretation is an essential element for our ability to understand it. Therefore, he had to rethink the relationship between literary and general history. His conclusion is that literary history had to include the "eventful (*ereignischafter*) nature of the literary work as well as its constitutive historical role."<sup>130</sup> The history of literature is a historical process which occurs in the experiences and interpretations of those who "absorb their message, enjoy or judge them, acknowledge or refute them, select and forget them, and to such an extent form traditions, and those who finally assume an active role by answering a tradition and producing new works."<sup>131</sup>

This last thesis parallels and reinforces the argument Ebeling and Froehlich make concerning the need to integrate biblical exegesis and church history. According to Jauss, the reception history of a biblical text is related to church history through the socially formative function which literature performs. In particular, Jauss emphasises in this thesis the way in which the reception of a text can disclose new perspectives and possibilities for living in the world and thus, emancipate the church from traditional, cultural, or religious bonds. Martin Luther's interpretation of Romans 1:17 is the paradigmatic example of this in the Protestant tradition. However, Luz stresses that the socially formative function is not always emancipatory. The history the interpretation of Matthew 27:25, "His blood be on us and our children," demonstrates the manner in which a text may be abused or misinterpreted. The interpretation verse has often been used to support the persecution of the Jews. "The history of effects shows that texts have power and therefore cannot be separated from their consequences. Interpreting a text is not simply playing with words but an act with historical consequences."<sup>132</sup> While both Jauss and Gadamer would agree that this is not a genuine example of dialogue with the

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129 Idem, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 45.

130 Holub, "German Theory in the United States," in *Colloquy*, 43.

131 Jauss, "Der Leser," 325.

132 Luz, *Matthew in History*, 33.

text, it is nevertheless an effect produced by the reception of the text which has shaped the history of the Christian tradition and needs to be included in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

### III. HERMENEUTICS OF RECEPTION

The influence of Gadamer on the field of hermeneutics cannot be overstated, and this is particularly true for Jauss who was a student of Gadamer's. While Jauss builds on Gadamer's thought he also makes distinctive contributions of his own. These include the horizon of expectations, the three levels of reading, and aesthetic experience. What I propose to accomplish in the second half of this chapter is to consider several of the broader hermeneutical aspects of Jauss' work in which he builds upon and modifies or extends Gadamer's hermeneutic in these areas.

#### A. The Horizon of Expectations

The concept of the horizon of expectations stands at the centre of Jauss' theory.<sup>133</sup> The positivistic-historical model recognised that every interpreter is bound to his historical horizon but at the same time it tried to overcome this restriction by bracketing the interpreter's horizon. Influenced by science, nineteenth century history ignored Kant's question concerning intersubjective validity in knowledge.<sup>134</sup> Instead, it followed a one-sided approach from Kant which adopted his restriction of science to the "scope and constitution of objects of experience."<sup>135</sup> What positivistic history lost in this process was Kant's concept that we study phenomena to answer questions which our reason determines.<sup>136</sup> The only *a priori* which this view recognised was logic and facts, or empirical data, which exist independent of observation and could be objectively and intersubjectively validated.<sup>137</sup> The positivists thought were able to stand above the influence of their historical situation by objectively observing the facts of history, like a biologist objectively observing the specimen under the microscope.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Idem, *Question and Answer*, 224.

<sup>134</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, "The Communication Community as the Transcendental Presupposition for the Social Sciences," in *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 43, 47.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 50, 55.

<sup>137</sup> This corresponds to Leibniz's two principles: the truths of reason and the truths of facts. Apel, "The A Priori of Communication and the Foundation of the Humanities," *Man and World* 5 (1 1972), 5.

<sup>138</sup> Jauss, "The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding," in *Identity of the Literary Text*, ed. Mario J. Valdés and Owen Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 146-7.



The result was that in their attempt to objectively reconstruct the past, they were still unwitting captives of their own horizon. "Whoever believes that it is possible to arrive at the other horizon, that of some prior time, by simply disregarding one's own inevitably introduces subjective criteria concerning selection, perspective, and evaluation into his supposedly objective reconstruction of the past."<sup>139</sup> Albert Schweitzer is famous for his comment about the results of such a naive historical practice in the quest for the historical Jesus. This quest only succeeded in producing "a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb."<sup>140</sup> It is naive to think that it is possible to understand another horizon by disregarding one's own horizon. The pervasiveness of the ideal of historical objectivity is still felt today in biblical studies. Some of the most highly respected commentary series continue to approach the Bible as an ancient text, a relic from the past which is subjected to objective technical analysis.<sup>141</sup>

As a response to this paradigm of historiography, Gadamer developed Heidegger and Husserl's concept of the horizon which moves with the interpreter as they move and live.

Every experience has its horizon of expectation: all consciousness exists as a consciousness of something, and thus, always also exists within the horizon of already formulated and still forthcoming experiences ... Experience is formed in the functional swing from anticipation (preconception) to the fulfillment or disappointment of the anticipation. Even the new that is unexpected is "new in the context of a certain knowledge"; within the horizon of disappointed expectation, it becomes something that can be experienced, something that opens a new horizon, and thus demonstrates that "every actual horizon ... [has] within it a system of potential horizons."<sup>142</sup>

The implication of this concept for hermeneutics involves a shift from understanding as the interpretation of a text as some "professed or revealed truth on the one hand, and understanding as the search for or investigation into possible meaning on the other."<sup>143</sup> Understanding was taken for granted by historical-positivism, historical distance did not alienate. What was required for an interpreter to understand a text was historical, grammatical, and philological interpretation. Thus, understanding was reduced to a form of translation.

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<sup>139</sup> Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 198.

<sup>140</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1950), 62, 398.

<sup>141</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, "A Commentator's Approach to the 'Effective History' of Philippians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 60 (1995), 57.

<sup>142</sup> Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 203-4.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

Understanding is no longer guaranteed for Gadamer or Jauss. Historical distance between the horizons alienates the reader from the text and creates a need for reflective mediation between the horizons of the text and the reader. In opposition to the historical-positivist school which sought to overcome or bracket historical distance between the two horizons, Gadamer bases the fusion of horizons on the need for historical distance.<sup>144</sup> The possibility for productive understanding lies in the temporal distance between the horizons which is not to be overcome, but allows the interpreter to see the foreignness of the text before the two horizons are fused. This allows the otherness of the text to appraise the interpreter's prejudices and for interpretation to be an experience which changes the interpreter.<sup>145</sup>

One of the essential characteristics of the concept of horizon for Jauss is the relationship between experience and expectation. "Whereas experience can organize the past into spatial and perspectival whole, expectation is directed at the open horizon of individual, not yet realised possibilities, and is thus open to the incursion of unexpected events that break through the closed horizon of earlier experience and found new expectations that will themselves be corrected through experience and are themselves able to engender new perspectives." Jauss is building on Heidegger's hermeneutical circle between the projection of "Being-towards-possibilities" and "potential-for-Being" which is disclosed in the projective act and Gadamer's appropriation of Hegel's dialectic of experience, negation, and sublation.<sup>146</sup> According to Jauss, "If 'experience and expectation' are so entwined in one another as a conceptual pair — both in the apprehension of history and in the horizon of aesthetic experience — that 'no expectation [can exist] without experience, and no experience without expectation.'"<sup>147</sup> Everything, even the innovative, and that which negates the past, is understood from the perspective of what we inherit from the past.

History and aesthetics are integrated in the concept of *Erwartungshorizont*, or horizon of expectations by Jauss. As I mentioned previously, Jauss adopts this notion from Gadamer's concept of the horizon (*Horizont*) which refers primarily to the

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<sup>144</sup> The naiveté of the historicism consists in its trust in methodology which it mistakenly believed allowed it to escape the need for reflection and forget its own historical relevance. Gadamer, "Vom Zirkel des Verstehens," in *Martin Heidegger zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Günther Neske Pfullingen, 1959), 34.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.; idem, *Truth and Method*, 300-7; Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 205; see Chapter 2, "Time is the Best Teacher."

<sup>146</sup> See "The Rehabilitation of Tradition," and "Hegel's Dialectic: Experience and Sublation," in chapter 1. Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 203-5.

<sup>147</sup> Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 202-3.



historical world in which we live and is constituted by the prejudices which we inherit from our tradition. What is surprising to note is that Jauss does not rely primarily on Gadamer for the definition of this concept but rather turned to the art historian, E. H. Gombrich. For Gombrich, the "horizon of expectations" is the "mental set, which registers deviations and modifications with exaggerated sensitivity" which allow the viewer to decipher a work of art.<sup>148</sup> Robert Holub provides a helpful definition for Jauss' use of this term. "Horizon of expectations' would appear to refer to an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a 'system of references' or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text."<sup>149</sup> *Erwartungshorizont* refers primarily, but not exclusively, to the expectations which a reader brings to a text, or as Gombrich would say, "We come to their work with our receivers already attuned."<sup>150</sup> One example of this is the manner by which our (direct or indirect) exposure to a certain type of genre will shape how we approach other texts which we would consider to be part of that genre.

Jauss' interest in the productive role which the original horizon of expectations plays in understanding arose while he was working on medieval texts.<sup>151</sup> His work in this area revealed to him the problems inherent in direct aesthetic understanding through the text alone or historical mediation through background information. In order to remedy the shortcomings of other literary methods, he argued that it is possible to partially reconstruct the original horizon of expectations of the original audience through historical study. The goal of this reconstruction is not an empathetic understanding of the original readers' experience but to examine the preconceptions of the original addressees.<sup>152</sup> This allows the critic to gain some degree of appreciation for how the text either appealed to, affirmed, or negated the expectations of the reader. There are two benefits from this type of study. First, it allows the critic to determine the literary merit of the work as it appeared in its first horizon based on how the text negated or affirmed the norms of that horizon, and how the reception of the text shifted over time. Second,

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148 E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1959), 53. See also: Eco, *Theory of Semiotics*, 204-8.

149 Holub, *Reception Theory*, 59.

150 Gombrich, 53.

151 Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 218.

152 *Ibid.*, 222.

it also allows the reader to experience the 'alterity' of the text, its historical distance from their horizon of expectations.<sup>153</sup>

### 1. *Gadamer and the Passive Fusion of Horizons?*

Some have criticised Gadamer because his concept of the fusion of horizons is perceived as a metaphor which refers to the passive merging of two image fields into one field of vision.<sup>154</sup> Jauss feels that this negates Gadamer's thrust, which is to discover the historical difference and alienation created by temporal distance and bring the text into the present through conversation.<sup>155</sup> The tension between the two horizons not only allows us to recognise what is foreign in the text, it also challenges or questions our prejudices. We are struck or provoked by the text which results in either an affirmation or denial of our prejudices.<sup>156</sup> For this reason, Jauss prefers to speak of a mediation of horizons, which implies a more active and reflective participation on the reader's part, than Gadamer's fusion of horizons, which connotes a more passive stance in that "Gadamer sometimes does not give an active role to interpreters."<sup>157</sup>

For me, it is an active synthesis, which maintains the tension between the text of the past and my present experience. All hermeneutical reflection must consciously develop this tension.... Only in this mediating of two different horizons, you arrive at a new experience, which changes the interpreter him/herself.<sup>158</sup>

According to Jauss, the mediation between the horizons of expectations takes place in two different movements which are interrelated. It must mediate between (1) the original inception and the public reception of the text and (2) between past and present experiences or understandings of the text. At the same time, it must also mediate

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<sup>153</sup> 'Alterity' is defined as "the recognition of the contrast with modern experience". Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," 187.

<sup>154</sup> Dietrich Böhler, "Philosophische Hermeneutik und hermeneutische Methode," in *Poetik und Hermeneutik IX* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1981), 500-10.

<sup>155</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 363-77 for his discussion on conversation and the logic of question and answer.

<sup>156</sup> Jauss, "Der Leser," 339; idem, *Question and Answer*, 202-3. The background for these ideas can be found in Heidegger's work. "In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 190-1.

<sup>157</sup> Jauss, "Minutes of the Colloquy," summarised by Brigid Merriman, in *Colloquy*, 60.

<sup>158</sup> Jauss' opening statements in "Minutes of the Colloquy," 52-53.



between “the horizon of expectations, which a work of art evokes, confirms or even transcends, and the horizon of experience which the recipient brings to bear.”<sup>159</sup>

Reception theory, as developed by Jauss, does an excellent job explaining and examining these two movements involved in the mediation of horizons. Since he is concerned primarily with literary texts these two movements appear to be fairly comprehensive. However, for some biblical texts there appears to be a third horizon which must be brought into play. The third horizon which needs to be considered is that of the audience which is implicit in the text. J. Arthur Baird has demonstrated the significance the audience which Jesus addressed plays in the gospel accounts. In contrast to Jeremias, who claims that the narrated audience is one of the least stable elements in the gospels, Baird’s careful analysis shows that it is one of the most consistent elements, especially when the evangelists are narrating Jesus’ parables.<sup>160</sup>

It would seem highly probable that the audience was of great importance to those who recorded the tradition because they believed the message of the *logia* was audience-centered. They believed the Jesus of the *logia* taught selectively, accommodating his message to his audience to such a degree that the nature of the audience became an important part of the message of the *logion* itself. This was then preserved with unique fidelity, for anyone knowing about Jesus would have realized that the audience was needed for correct and meaningful reproduction of his teaching. This means to us that the audience has become a hermeneutic factor of first importance.<sup>161</sup>

It would seem, then, that for certain biblical texts we need to incorporate a third movement into the mediation of the horizon of expectations. That is, between the horizon of the audience addressed within the text and our present horizon of expectations.

## 2. *Jauss and an Authoritarian Mediation of Horizons?*

If Gadamer has been criticised for presenting a passive fusion of horizons, others have attacked Jauss for introducing a new form of authoritarianism to hermeneutics. Instead of claiming that there is only one correct meaning for a text, Jauss has introduced “a grain of relativism by making ‘correct interpretation’ — dialogically depend on the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 52. In his essay, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” Jauss focused primarily on the first form of this mediation of horizons. In his later work, the second movement came to play an equal role. Idem, “*Der Leser*,” 338.

<sup>160</sup> J. Arthur Baird, *Audience Criticism and the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 16-18, 61-2.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 134.

relation between the text and the reader's changing situations."<sup>162</sup> They perceive the language which Jauss uses when he describes his efforts to historically reconstruct the original questions which the text sought to answer as being too exact. They think that he claims to have uncovered 'the' question to which the literary work was a response.<sup>163</sup> When asked if he thought that there are 'true' questions which need to be asked or if there is a true meaning to the text, Jauss responded. "Your question poses, in my sense a false alternative: it is just the new question which permits me to uncover something which, till now, had not yet been seen in the text. Were it not as an implied meaning in the text, my question would not find a new answer and would have to be abandoned."<sup>164</sup> Jauss' answer illustrates his adoption of Collingwood's position concerning the 'rightness' of the question.<sup>165</sup> New questions uncover something new in the text only when they are answered by the text; they must be appropriate to the text. Question and answer stand in a dialogical relationship to each other which cannot be divided or set in opposition to each other. Thus, even our understanding of past horizons and genres are the result of questions which we ask within our horizon and will be different from the questions asked in other horizons of interpretation.

These criticisms appear to flow primarily from the manner in which they perceive Jauss' appropriation of history to reconstruct the horizons of expectations. Jauss' attempt to introduce the reconstruction of the original horizon of expectations is seen as a return to either a positivistic approach to literary history based on objective facts or as an essentialist view of the text. However, these criticisms do not give due weight to Jauss' agreement with Gadamer on this point. All understanding, even historical reconstruction, takes place within a horizon of expectations. Even the reconstruction of the original audiences horizon will be perceived differently at different times. Jauss' hermeneutic is historical, not in the sense that it refers to the employment of the historical-critical methods to determine the original meaning of the text, but rather in the much wider sense of the term. His hermeneutic is historical, *wirkungsgeschichtlich*, in that it includes not only the original horizon in which the text appeared, but also the

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<sup>162</sup> Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Dialectics, or Authoritative Monologue in Dialogue Disguise," in *Colloquy*, 35; John H. Smith, "Response," in *Colloquy*, 46.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Wicks, "Review of *Question and Answer*," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49.3 (Summer, 1991), 276-77; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Dialectics, or Authoritative Monologue in Dialogue Disguise," in *Colloquy*, 34-35.

<sup>164</sup> Jauss "Minutes of the Colloquy," 55.

<sup>165</sup> See the section on this in chapter 1.



tradition of interpretation of the text from that time till the present, and the present readers' horizon of expectations.

While Jauss holds to the possibility of reconstructing the original horizon of expectations from historical data and literary genres, he does not hold to an essentialist view of the text or its meaning. There is no timeless, correct interpretation for a text. Rather, he follows Heidegger's concept of the work of art and Gadamer's play as presentation and the transformation into structure.<sup>166</sup> In this way, Jauss follows Gadamer's middle road between the unlimited play of meaning and an authoritarian, or essentialist, view of meaning. In every act of interpretation there is some degree of identity which arises from what is given in the text and at the same time "the non-identity which is arrived at by interpretation."<sup>167</sup> It is similar to the manner in which each performance of a musical score is different (non-identical), but at the same time it is a performance of the same score (element of identity). The act of interpretation involves the mediation of the different horizons which results in the meaning of the text being concretized.

Interpretation and literary history must be performed by each and every generation since every act of understanding takes place in a historical horizon. "This is not a defect of the theory but its most liberating feature, for it ensures that no fixed view ever prevails and that each generation must read the texts anew and interrogate them from its own perspective and find itself concerned, in its own fashion, by the work's question."<sup>168</sup> A decade before Jauss wrote his inaugural address, Bultmann realised almost the same conclusion in this area. "Since the exegete exists historically and must hear the word of Scripture as spoken in his special historical situation, he will always understand the old word anew."<sup>169</sup>

### B. Three Levels of Reading and the Logic of Question and Answer

The goal of Gadamer's hermeneutic is for the interpreter to consciously enter into the living process of transmitting a tradition. The basic thrust of his hermeneutic is

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<sup>166</sup> See the previous chapter, "Play as the Being of Artwork."

<sup>167</sup> Jauss, "Minutes of the Colloquy," 60; Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 197.

<sup>168</sup> Wlad Godzich, "Introduction," in *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, xii-xiii.

<sup>169</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?" trans. Schubert M. Ogden, in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 296. Ebeling also commented on this, "This peculiarity of historical interpretation enables us to understand the essential unfinished nature of historical research and the necessity of constant renewal ..." Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition*, 18.

the historical and dialogical nature of understanding which takes place through the alienation created by temporal distance and then entering into a conversation with this text through the logic of question and answer. However, Jauss asks if there is not an internal conceptual contradiction in Gadamer's hermeneutic. While he agrees with most of Gadamer's thought, he questions whether Gadamer's concepts of historical distanciation and the fusion of horizons implies a contradiction between active and passive forms of understanding.<sup>170</sup> This is why Jauss prefers to speak of 'mediation' rather than 'fusion' since it implies that understanding is an active process in both movements of understanding.

The area of Gadamer's hermeneutic in which Jauss attempts to move from 'fusion' to 'mediation' pertains primarily to the logic of question and answer. Following Collingwood and Gadamer, Jauss bases the dialogical interaction between text and reader in the dialogue of question and answer. For Gadamer, the capacity of the question "to open up and hold open possibilities" serves as the grounds for the hermeneutic priority of the question.<sup>171</sup> "To understand something therefore means to understand something as an answer, and more precisely, to test one's own view against that of the other, through question and answer."<sup>172</sup>

Jauss tries to be more specific than Gadamer in his use of the metaphor of a 'conversation' with the text through question and answer. In order for the fusion of horizons to take place, the interpreter must pose the question that draws the text "back out of its seclusion" so that the text can answer and "say something". This is very similar to Pannenberg's criticism of Gadamer's metaphor of a conversation. Pannenberg argues that the text cannot protect itself from premature agreement (misunderstanding) as a conversation partner can and a text must be empowered by the interpreter to assert itself.<sup>173</sup> The priority which Gadamer gives to the question, which strikes the reader, must be balanced to include the role of assertions, or answers.<sup>174</sup> Not only does Jauss agree with Pannenberg's critique but he also thinks that Gadamer's mediation of the past

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<sup>170</sup> Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 205.

<sup>171</sup> See: Robert R. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics: The Early Thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989); Gadamer, "The Model of Platonic Dialectic," in *Truth and Method*, 362-68.

<sup>172</sup> Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 213.

<sup>173</sup> Jauss, "Limits and Tasks," 108; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. I, ed. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 177, 121.

<sup>174</sup> Idem, "Limits and Tasks," 108; Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," 122-24; see "Gadamer's Dialogical Question and Answer," in chapter 1.



and the present in a tradition sells understanding short since it does not include a critique of the tradition as well.<sup>175</sup>

Gadamer's idea that "to understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question"<sup>176</sup> is also limited in its application according to Jauss. Poetical texts exemplify this limitation. A poem yields a mode of perception that stands in contrast to everyday perceptions and which creates the possibility to discern new perspectives on the world. The logic of question and answer is temporarily suspended during this primary perceptual understanding or aesthetic experience in which the reader experiences the linguistic power or artistry of the text, and "thereby, the world in its fullness of significance."<sup>177</sup> Question and answer enters in the secondary act of interpretive understanding. When we read a poem our first reading of the poem becomes the horizon for our second reading, "what the reader received in the progressive horizon of aesthetic perception can be articulated as a theme in the retrospective horizon of interpretation."

This shifting of question and answer to the second level of reading resulted from the criticism he received from his inaugural essay "*Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*". Marxist literary critics in East Germany considered his essay a defence of the traditional status quo, while in West Germany it was seen as subverting the literary tradition. Jauss' work which followed this essay can be seen in large part as a response to these criticisms, especially in regards to the important role which negativity played in his earlier hermeneutical theory. In his second book, *Aesthetic Experience*, Jauss clarified and corrected his position in response to these criticisms.<sup>178</sup> He attempts to achieve this by modifying his position in three different ways. First, as we saw in the discussion of his third thesis, he reduces the role which negativity plays in his hermeneutic. Second, in its place he elevates the role of aesthetic experience. And third, he develops the three different levels of reading as a heuristic device to explain the overall structure of his hermeneutic. The first reading is an aesthetically perceptive reading, the second is an exegetical reading, and the third is a historical reading. The three successive readings of a text are compared with the movements of comprehension, interpretation and application. "The steps might be described phenomenologically as three successive

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<sup>175</sup> Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 28-32; Idem, *Question and Answer*, 66, 226.

<sup>176</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 375.

<sup>177</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 142.

<sup>178</sup> Godzich, "Introduction," in *Aesthetic Experience*, xiv-xv. See also the discussion on Jauss' third thesis above.

readings.”<sup>179</sup> While these three movements cannot be separated from each other in practise, we can make distinctions between them that help us to examine them.

### *1. First Reading — Aesthetic Perception*

In his essay “The Poetic Text within the Changes of Horizons of Reading,” Jauss examines the viability of Gadamer’s assertion that understanding, interpretation, and application form a unity which is to be realised in practice. Jauss agrees with Gadamer that these three movements form a triadic unity and that any division between them is artificial to a certain degree. At the same time, he maintains that we can, and should, examine and explicate each of these movements. It is by examining each of the three movements that Jauss attempts to “demonstrate what kind of understanding, interpretation, and application might be proper to a text of aesthetic character.”<sup>180</sup>

In *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* Jauss explains the difference between understanding and interpretation according to pre-reflective and reflective aesthetic experience. Pre-reflective aesthetic experience is directed toward something which is constituted by the reader in the process of performing the text, it points beyond everyday experience. In reflective aesthetic experience, the reader adopts the role of an observer. However, this does not mean that he/she ceases to enjoy the text but rather that they recognise the real-life situations that concern them in the aesthetic object. For Thiselton the relationship between “pre-critical” reading and interpretation is analogous to the relation between the reader and the critic. “As readers we allow ourselves to be mastered by the text. The text has its way with us. Our expectations are aroused and even at times manipulated. We feel what we are meant to feel; we live out the story. But the role of the critic reverses the relationship. The critic scrutinises the text as his or her object of enquiry.”<sup>181</sup> Jauss’ first level of reading is very similar to what Gadamer claims should be the experience of the audience (or anyone who participates in play). Our attention does not extend beyond the boundary of what is presented in the play, poem or performance. To reflect upon what is being presented results in our dropping out of the presentation of play.<sup>182</sup> According to Jauss, this occurs in the first level of reading in which understanding takes place through the reader’s aesthetic perception or experience

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<sup>179</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 140.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 316

<sup>182</sup> See “Play as the Being of Artwork,” in chapter 2.



of the text. Aesthetic perception occurs through the process of reading in which the text “like a ‘score’ indicates for the reader” its significance.<sup>183</sup>

Murray Krieger’s metaphor of window — mirror — window helps to explain the manner in which the reader’s aesthetic perception of the text is related to the real world and how this aesthetic perception serves as the basis for reflective interpretation, or the second level of reading. First, the text is like a window through which we see the world. This window then becomes a set of mirrors which reflect internally, within the various elements and relationships in the narrative world of the text. At this level, the familiar and the previously unrecognised are organised into new patterns of relationships which create new existential possibilities for understanding. Finally, the mirrors transform back into a window once again which discloses new perspectives on the world.<sup>184</sup> Thus, reflective aesthetic experience permits the reader to see anew, to explore other worlds of the imagination, and realise possible future actions.<sup>185</sup>

This first perceptual reading can also be described as an experience of collecting evidence about the text. As the reader moves through the text in the first reading he/she builds up a comprehension of the text’s whole from the parts. This then serves as the presupposed horizon for the second step, an interpretive reading. “The interpretation of a poetic text always presupposes aesthetic perception as its pre-understanding; it may only concretize significances that appeared or could have appeared possible to the interpreter within the horizon of his preceding reading.”<sup>186</sup> As such, it both “opens up and delimits the space for possible concretizations.”<sup>187</sup> The differentiation between the first and second levels of reading is not an artificial distinction. It is analogous to rereading a poem. The first reading forms the horizon for the second reading.

## 2. *Second Reading — Interpretation and the Logic of Question and Answer*

Each reading becomes the horizon for the preliminary understanding of the next reading. What the reader grasps in the first aesthetically perceptive reading is reflected upon in the second reading. In this way, he moves Gadamer’s logic of question and answer from the first reading to the second and grounds the primary or logically first

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>184</sup> Murray Krieger, *A Window to Criticism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964), 30-6, 59-65

<sup>185</sup> Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience*, 5-10.

<sup>186</sup> Idem, *Towards*, 142-43.

<sup>187</sup> Gadamer’s axiom “To understand means to understand something as an answer” is restricted by Jauss to this secondary act of interpretation and not to the primary act of perceptual understanding which produces the aesthetic experience. Jauss, *Towards*, 145.

form of understanding on aesthetic pleasure, not on question and answer.<sup>188</sup> Thus, Gadamer's idea that to understand is to understand something as an answer is limited to the second, interpretative, reading. "It can here apply only to the secondary act of interpretative comprehension, in so far as the latter concretizes a definite meaning as an answer to a question, and not the primary act of perceptive comprehension, which alone can introduce and constitute the aesthetical experience of a poetical text."<sup>189</sup> In the second reading, this conversation with a text must consciously mediate between the two horizons in order to avoid the dominance of the interpreter's horizon in this process. It is through the hermeneutics of question and answer that allows the interpreter to go "beyond his own horizon in order to examine the horizon of the other, and reengage in the dialogue with the text, a text that can only answer when it has been asked again."<sup>190</sup> To put it another way, in the first reading a 'fusion' of horizons takes place through the reader's aesthetic experience of the text. In the second reading, a 'mediation' of the horizons of the text and the interpreter occurs through the logic of question and answer.

The second reading is a movement from the whole, which is inherited from the first reading, to an examination of the parts.<sup>191</sup> Perceptual understanding becomes the horizon for reflective interpretation, which becomes the horizon for application.

The explicit interpretation in the second and in each further reading also remains related to the horizon of expectation of the first, i.e., perceptual reading — as long as the interpreter claims to make concrete a specific coherence of significance from out of the horizon of meaning of this text, and would not for example, exercise the license of allegories to translate the meaning of the text into a foreign context, that is to give it a significance transcending the horizon of meaning and thereby the intentionality of the text.<sup>192</sup>

Therefore, the meaning of a text is not a pre-given timeless commodity. Instead, the meaning of a text is defined according to the performance of the text by a reader. The reader concretizes one among many possibilities of significance in the second interpretative reading.

When one recognizes the hermeneutical premise that the whole meaning of a lyrical work must be understood not as a substance, as a timeless predetermined

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<sup>188</sup> If we extend Jauss' metaphor of the three successive readings to Gadamer's hermeneutic we see that the logic of question and answer would fall within the first reading. "Thus the dialectic of question and answer always precedes the dialectic of interpretation. It is what determines understanding as an event." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 472.

<sup>189</sup> Jauss, "Limits and Tasks," 112-3.

<sup>190</sup> Idem, *Aesthetic Experience*, 217.

<sup>191</sup> In this way, the hermeneutical circle of part/whole is incorporated in Jauss' theory. Idem, "Limits and Tasks," 115-6.

<sup>192</sup> Idem, *Towards*, 142.



meaning, but as a proposal of a meaning, one can expect from the reader enough discernment to see that in the act of interpretive comprehension he can concretize only one of the poem's meanings, and that its pertinence for himself must not exclude its debatability for others.<sup>193</sup>

It is a fundamental hermeneutical principle that the questions which are asked arise from the horizon of the interpreter and, as a result, not every question can be posed in each horizon. Rather, the text under investigation should correct and determine which questions are to be asked and in what order.<sup>194</sup> But this does not mean that the relevance of other concretizations of the meaning of the text are excluded from consideration in the process of interpretation. Every interpretation falls under the hermeneutic of partiality since understanding and interpretation are not achieved through objective means of description but are characterised by the selective taking of perspectives from within an interpreter's horizon of expectations.

### *3a. Third Reading — Historical Distance, "What did the Text Say?"*

The third level is the one most familiar to traditional historical-grammatical hermeneutics, but is usually practised as the first level.<sup>195</sup> This is because the historical method overlooks the fact that aesthetic perceptual understanding is what takes place first.<sup>196</sup> This third level of reading involves the historical-reconstructive reading of the text.<sup>197</sup> Just as the second interpretive reading is dialectically related to the first aesthetically perceptive reading so also is the third historical reading related to the other two levels. The aesthetic character of a text serves as the means to bridge the historical distance between the text and the present. But aesthetic comprehension is also dependent on the reconstruction of history which "prevents the text of the past from being naively identified with the prejudices of the present and its expectations and therefore renders possible through the definite separation of the past and present horizons, the demonstration of the text's otherness."<sup>198</sup> Historical research is required to locate or protect the 'otherness' of the text. This reconstructive investigation enables us

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<sup>193</sup> Idem, "Limits and Tasks," 115-6.

<sup>194</sup> Idem, *Towards*, 113, 139.

<sup>195</sup> Idem, "Limits and Tasks," 116.

<sup>196</sup> "Literary hermeneutics has remained for the longest time under the influence of the paradigms of history and of the interpretation immanent in the text; and that explains its present laggardness. The scholars limited their work to exegesis, left their concept of comprehension inarticulate, and neglected the problem of application so completely that the turn to reception aesthetics, which in the sixties began to close the development gap, reached an unexpected success as a 'change of paradigms'." Ibid., 96.

<sup>197</sup> Idem, *Towards*, 146.

<sup>198</sup> Idem, "Limits and Tasks," 116-7; "Minutes of the Colloquy," 53.

to seek "out the questions (most often unexplicit ones) to which the text was the response in its time."<sup>199</sup> Every bit of detail that can be found should be questioned as a possible source. There are two things such a quest should look for: (1) the text's response to expectations of a formal kind, such as those raised by its literary tradition, and (2) the text's response to questions concerning meaning raised in the life-world horizon in which the text was produced.

One of the hermeneutical implications of question and answer is that the recipient of a text is now *actively involved as a mediator of the text*. This places the text and the reader on almost equal footing. The reader must adopt a posture which is open and oriented to the concerns of the text and address the question which the text originally sought to answer and the questions which the text left behind. The historical-reconstructive methods serve a controlling function by protecting the temporal distance of the text from the reader's horizon and thereby allowing the text to be seen in its alterity. The questions we ask must lead to a knowledge of the author's questions as he/she sought to answer them in their horizon. But this does not mean that reflection over this issue should deny the "horizon of contemporary interests that continually conditions the kind and manner of questioning." "Conversation allows question and answer to confirm for themselves whether the other has understood in the same way, has understood differently, or has misunderstood altogether."<sup>200</sup>

Historical investigation is also required because literary transmission does not always unfold freely. What is passed down in a tradition may have been restrained through domination or distortion. Jauss considers "the ideological-critical suspicion that literary transmission may not unfold in absolute freedom; it may be pseudocommunicatively constrained" a critical insight which requires vigilance on the part of the interpreter. In this case, literary communication between the horizons is not transparent but must be retrieved from the power of tradition to incorporate what is heterogeneous into it.<sup>201</sup> In this way, Jauss is able to overcome one of the major

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<sup>199</sup> Idem, *Towards*, 146.

<sup>200</sup> Idem, *Question and Answer*, 62. Stephen Fowl strongly opposes this approach, the literary approach to the scriptures does not require historical research. Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 1-61. However, in the last two chapters of his book Fowl seems to negate the argument in the first half of the book when he engages in historical and philological studies in the book of Ephesians.

<sup>201</sup> Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 226; Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 190; Theodore Kisiel, "Ideology Critique and Phenomenology: The Current Debate in German Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, 14 (1970), 155-8; Dieter Misgeld, "Modernity and Hermeneutics: A Critical-Theoretical Rejoinder," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed.



criticisms which have been persistently made against Gadamer by Habermas, the need for some form of critique of ideology within hermeneutics.<sup>202</sup> The inclusion of a 'hermeneutics of consequences' is extremely important aspect of reception theory's possible contribution to the fields of biblical interpretation and church history. "Biblical texts whose consequences have been hatred, exclusiveness, and injustice call for critical questioning, even if they correspond superficially to the history of Jesus or even if they are his own words."<sup>203</sup>

### *3b. Third Reading — Application, "What does the Text Say to Me?"*

This transforms the questioning stance of the reader from "What did the text say?" to "What does the text say to me, and what do I say to it?"<sup>204</sup> The interpreter must "allow the self to be cross-examined by the text while examining it, listen to the claims its makes."<sup>205</sup> The move from understanding through interpretation to application is needed lest the attempt to reconstruct the original question the text sought to answer slides back into the lifeless facts of historicism. "To determine this [function], that is, to recognize the problem left behind to which the new work in the historical series is the answer, the interpreter must bring his own experience into play, since the past horizon of old and new forms, problems and solutions, is only recognisable in its further mediation within the present horizon of the received work."<sup>206</sup>

The transformation of the question "What does the text say?" to "What does the text say to me, and what do I say to it?" demonstrates that hermeneutics is concerned with the entire process, from understanding, through interpretation, to application.<sup>207</sup> This is not to say that application is limited to some form of practical action, but that it

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Hugh J. Silverman (N.Y. and London: Routledge, 1991), 164-75; Graeme Nicholson, "Answers to Critical Theory," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, 51.

<sup>202</sup> See the section "Reflection on Prejudices: Habermas," in chapter 2.

<sup>203</sup> Luz, *Matthew in History*, 92.

<sup>204</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 146.

<sup>205</sup> Idem, *Question and Answer*, 65.

<sup>206</sup> Idem, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 34.

<sup>207</sup> Jauss does not see the unity of these three movements as something new to him or Gadamer, but rather has always been an integral part of every hermeneutical theory (whether this was recognised or not). "I only wish to emphasize the fact that an implicit understanding of the unity of comprehension, interpretation and application has formed the basis of hermeneutics now only since the period of the Enlightenment, but since the very ancient practice of the *ars interpretandi*, and that the new pattern of various methods of interpretation did not simply substitute the old paradigm of various meanings of the text, but refined and developed its forms." Ibid., 97-8.

is equally, if not more so, the broadening “of the horizon of one’s own experience vis-à-vis the experience of the other.”<sup>208</sup>

In his interview with Rien Segers, Jauss summarised these three movements and their relationship to each other as the following:

Interpretation as the concretization of a specific significance (among other possible significances which earlier interpreters have concretized or later interpreters can still concretize) always remains bound to the horizon of the first reading, perceiving aesthetically and understanding with pleasure; it next has the task of illuminating the verbal and poetic conditions which, from the construction of the text, orient the primary act of understanding. Application includes both acts of understanding and interpretation insofar as it represents the interest in transporting the text out of its past or foreignness and into the interpreter’s present, in finding the question to which the text has an answer ready for the interpreter, in forming the aesthetic judgement of the text which could also persuade other interpreters.<sup>209</sup>

These three movements are rooted in the priority of the horizon of the first aesthetic reading. This is part of Jauss’ desire to make the aesthetic reading, the aesthetic character of the text the “definite and provable premise of its interpretation.”<sup>210</sup> However, this is not a temporal priority, nor are these three steps always performed in the same order. “The priority of aesthetic perception in the triad of literary hermeneutics requires the horizon, but not the temporary priority of the first reading; this horizon of perceptive comprehension can also only be acquired by repeated reading or by means of a historical comprehension.”<sup>211</sup> An example of this is Jauss’ case study on the “Myth of the Fall” (Genesis 3). In this study, his first step is to examine the horizon of the first reading, then the original horizon, and finally he turns to the history of reception.<sup>212</sup> Thus, while it is possible to speak of the distinctions between understanding, interpretation, and application one must keep in mind the fundamental unity of these three movements.

### C. The Hermeneutic Validity of Aesthetic Experience

Gadamer is very suspicious of Jauss’ attempt to introduce aesthetic experience as one of the foundations for hermeneutics, and for good reason. Aesthetic experience involves a double differentiation according to Gadamer.<sup>213</sup> It involves an abstraction of

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<sup>208</sup> Idem, *Towards*, 147.

<sup>209</sup> Segers, “An Interview with Hans Robert Jauss,” 85

<sup>210</sup> Jauss, “Limits and Tasks,” 112.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>212</sup> Idem, *Question and Answer*, 95-100.

<sup>213</sup> Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutic*, 93.



the text from the world in which it originated and the reader from his horizon. As a result, aesthetic experience does not allow for knowledge or for the text's truth claims. It is strictly aesthetic pleasure. "Pure seeing and pure hearing are dogmatic abstractions that artificially reduce phenomena. Perception always includes meaning."<sup>214</sup> This criticism is related also to the problems inherent in the concepts of unlimited play and poetical versus practical language which I have already discussed. If Gadamer had been directing his criticism toward Jan Mukarovsky or Paul Valéry, then his criticism would have been exactly on target. For Mukarovsky, the question of truthfulness does not apply to the enjoyment of poetic texts. Paul Valéry provides a clear illustration of aesthetic differentiation of which Gadamer is critical.

Walking, like prose has a definite aim. It is an act directed at something we wish to reach. ... The dance is another matter. It is of course a system of actions; but of actions whose end is in themselves. It goes nowhere. If it pursues an object, it is only an ideal object, a state, an enchantment, the phantom of a flower, an extreme life, a smile — which forms on the face of the one who summoned it from empty space.<sup>215</sup>

If aesthetic experience is pure perception, as Mukarovsky, Valéry, and others claim, then each reading of a text is a new creation. There is no correct reading, meaning, or criteria to determine what would count as a correct reading. This leads to a form of hermeneutical nihilism.<sup>216</sup> We end up with a radical discontinuity, a collection of unrelated, individual experiences which shatters any possible identity for the text or the possibility for a tradition of a text's transmission to form.<sup>217</sup>

Gadamer correctly argues, in my opinion, that our experience of any text must allow for knowledge and truth claims. Every aesthetic perception involves relationships. We understand something *as* something.<sup>218</sup> It is only when we understand these relationships that we can appreciate the artistic qualities of the text.<sup>219</sup> This experience of a text is best understood if we compare it with the phenomena of self-understanding. In order to understand ourselves we must experience others. Continuity among all our

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<sup>214</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 92.

<sup>215</sup> Paul Valéry, "Poetry and Abstract Thought," trans. Denise Folliot, in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Adam Hazard (N.Y. and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1971), 921-2.

<sup>216</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 94-5.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*; Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutic*, 97. Or as Gombrich noted, "If art were only, or mainly, an expression of personal vision, there could be no history of art." Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 3.

<sup>218</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 19.

<sup>219</sup> "Only if we 'recognize' what is represented are we able to 'read' a picture; in fact, that is what ultimately makes it a picture. Seeing means articulating." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 91.

different experiences comes from the manner in which we sublimate what appear to be a discontinuity of experiences into the continuity and identity of our self-understanding. In the same manner, Gadamer argues, we sublimate these experiences of art and literature into our human existence, and this corresponds to the historical nature of human life.<sup>220</sup> A tradition of interpretation comes into being in this way; through the continual encounters with the text, which by nature never exhaust the potential of the text but are unfinished events, which are sublated into the prejudices, *phronesis*, and communal knowledge within that tradition.

Jauss is aware of Gadamer's criticism, but is still adamant that "The primary experience of a work of art takes place in the orientation to its aesthetic effect, in an understanding that is pleasure, and a pleasure that is cognitive."<sup>221</sup> He agrees with Gadamer's criticism, but only to the degree that aesthetic experience is related to abstract aesthetic pleasure. The problem with Gadamer's criticism, while valid, is that it is directed at the abstraction of aesthetic consciousness that emerged in the nineteenth century.<sup>222</sup> By contrast, Jauss has attempted to reformulate the hermeneutic role of aesthetic experience.<sup>223</sup>

There are three classical functions or modes of aesthetic experience which Jauss considers important for understanding the nature of aesthetic experience. *Poiesis* involves the active participation of the reader in constructing the aesthetic object, or as Heidegger would say, the world projected by the text. *Aesthesis* is the pleasure which comes from seeing and recognising. It is the knowledge we learn from the possibilities which we realise in reading the text. In this way, *aesthesis* is similar to the recognition of mimesis. The way in which the disclosure and the recognition of these possibilities transforms the reader's self-understanding, changes her beliefs, and liberates her mind to consider new perspectives on the world is the function of *catharsis*. These three functions are not arranged hierarchically, but form "a nexus of independent functions."<sup>224</sup>

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220 Ibid., 96-100.

221 Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience*, xxiv.

222 Ibid., 26-8, 91-2.

223 Jauss attempts this rehabilitation in order to overcome the problems which he saw in the role which negativity played in his (and Gadamer's) hermeneutic. Roland Barthes also attempted a similar rehabilitation of aesthetic pleasure. However, he still falls prey to Gadamer's criticism since he denies the possibilities of any form of dialogue between the reader and the text. Reading is a passive act of experiencing the pleasure of the language in the text. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

224 Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience*, 35; 46-95.



Aesthetic experience is pre-reflective in that it is directed at the reference, or world projected by the text and extends beyond everyday experience. At the same time, aesthetic experience is reflective since the reader is able to adopt the role of an observer who recognises the relationships between the elements in the text and his situation.<sup>225</sup> As such, aesthetic experience is not pure perception or abstracted pleasure, but it requires that the reader understand the original horizon of the text in order to protect the otherness of the text from being naively assimilated into his horizon.<sup>226</sup> It also requires a certain level of literary competence on the part of the reader which comes from his familiarity with the genre of the text and previous interpretations or understandings of the text. Instead of a discontinuity of individual experiences which results from abstracted aesthetic pleasure, Jauss' model of aesthetic experience contributes to, and takes place, within the continuity of a tradition of interpretation.<sup>227</sup>

Aesthetic experience includes cognitive knowledge and the truth claims of the text as Gadamer argues. One of the strengths of Jauss' position is that the interpretation of a text is not restricted to experts but is open to the average, educated reader. Reception theory is not based on an ideal form of reader, but rather a contemporary reader who has an average level of education. Alongside the average reader, Jauss places the "commentator with scholarly competence, who deepens the aesthetic impressions of the reader" through historical, philological, literary and other forms of research and criticism.<sup>228</sup> Reception theory protects a text such as the Bible from being taken captive by the trained scholars and opens its interpretation and the history of its effects to a much wider community than a theory such as the historical-critical method does. Interpretation that bypasses this primary aesthetic experience is the arrogance of a philologist who subscribes to the error that the text was not created for readers but for him, to be interpreted by such as he."<sup>229</sup>

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225 Ibid., 5-10.

226 Idem, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," 185.

227 "Significance which is unlocked through aesthetic experience, arises from the convergence of effect [*Wirkung*] and reception. It is not an atemporal, basic element which is already given; rather, it is the never-completed result of a process of progressive and enriching interpretation, which concretizes -- in an ever new and different manner -- the textually immanent potential for meaning in the change of horizons of historical life-worlds." Ibid., 183.

228 Jauss, *Towards*, 144. For an article which explains how to apply this to the teaching situation see: Michael Eckert, "Hermeneutics in the Classroom: An Application of Reception Theory," *College English Association Critic*, 46 (3-4, 1984), 5-16.

229 Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience*, xxix.

## PART II: JAUSS' RECEPTION THEORY

### CHAPTER 4: PARADIGMS AND CLASSICS

#### I. INTRODUCTION: RECEPTION THEORY AND THE HISTORY OF RECEPTION

One of the problems confronting contemporary hermeneutics is the tension between plurality and continuity of interpretations. Under the historical-critical model, the truth or meaning of a text is sought through the historical reconstruction, philological, grammatical, and sociological studies and is grounded in the relationship between the author and the text. Thus, the nature of the text guarantees that there should be continuity in interpretation since the goal is to move closer to the original meaning intended by the author. Plurality then becomes a matter of misunderstanding or the application of the wrong method.<sup>1</sup> Or it can be explained by making a distinction between the meaning of the text as intended by the author and the significance of the text as it realised in history.<sup>2</sup> There are two problems with this view. First, understanding becomes a subjective process which takes place between the creative mind of the author and reproductive mind of the interpreter. And second, the distinction between meaning and significance is not that straightforward.

The distinction between meaning and significance is at best difficult to apply to the history of interpretation, for it is indisputably the case that interpreters of Plato, Aristotle, or Scripture in different historical eras differed in what they thought they saw in the text and not just in their views of the significance of the 'same' textual meaning for themselves. Interpreters of Paul, for instance, have

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<sup>1</sup> E. D. Hirsch is associated with the attempt to ground the meaning of a text in the author's intention. The possibility for determining a definitive interpretation is based on a methodological approach toward the text. Just as we can repeat a scientific experiment to achieve the same results, so we can discover the author's meaning through the correct procedures of interpretation. Hirsch's argument is more nuanced than many of his critics recognise, he is not arguing that we will always arrive at the author's intentions but that there is nothing to prohibit a valid understanding of the text. E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1967), 17, 31.

<sup>2</sup> "Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable." Hirsch, 8; 49-57.



not been arguing all these centuries only over what Paul 'means' *pro nobis*, but also over the claim Paul makes regarding the subject matter.<sup>3</sup>

If Gadamer and Jauss are correct in arguing that this approach is no longer valid since it overlooks or downplays the significance of the horizon of the interpreter and the alienation created by historical distance then correct understanding can no longer be guaranteed and the challenge of historical distance presents the need for some other form of mediation.

For Jauss, the truth of the meaning of a text can "be recovered only when it is sought in the change in the horizon of historical experience — and comprehended as an on moving, and always partial concretization of meaning."<sup>4</sup> Each and every act of understanding involves a fusion of horizons which results in a concretization of the meaning of the text. The meaning of a historically distant text does not solely reside in its original horizon, but arises in the fusion between the two horizons. The meaning of a text is performed in the "unfolding" of its meaning through the concretization of possible meanings in history. "The meaning of a work of art as well is extracted only during the progressive process of its reception; it is not a mystic whole that can reveal itself totally on its first showing."<sup>5</sup> This event or experience of something past, as recognisable in the present, is one manner in which tradition is transmitted, "a movement that begins with the recipient, takes up and brings along what is past, and translates or 'transmits' it into the present, thus setting it in the new light of present meaning."<sup>6</sup> Subsequent concretizations of the text change and expand the horizon of expectations as history progresses. In this process, "*responses to the work legitimize particular possibilities of understanding*, imitation, transformation, and continuation — in short, structures of exemplary character that condition the process of the formation of literary tradition."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Linge, "Editor's Introduction," in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, trans. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 201.

<sup>5</sup> Jauss, "History of Art and Pragmatic History," in *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 59.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, emphasis mine; *idem*, *Question and Answer*, 201-4. Even the interpretation of the most open-structured fictional or lyrical text, which is designed to stimulate the imagination of the reader, displays a continuity which shows how new responses to a text are related to the reader's expectations. The second *Poetic und Hermeutik* colloquium examined different interpretations of Apollinaire's poem *L'Arbre*. While they recognised the validity of different interpretations of this work by the people who attended the colloquium they also realised that these different interpretations did not contradict each other. The conclusion they reached was that even with a highly poetic

The transmission of a literary tradition cannot be reduced to the sum total of the prejudices which a tradition passes on, it requires a receiving consciousness without whose participation this process would not take place. This receiving mind is required to ask a question of the text so that it may answer. The questions which the reader asks of the text are "decided first and foremost by an interest that arises out of the present situation, critically opposes it, or maintains it."<sup>8</sup> The fulfilment or disappointment of these questions set up the change in horizon for the next reader. Evidence of the change that takes place from one horizon to the next is seen in the fact that the understanding of the text that satisfied the expectations of one horizon are no longer seen as acceptable in a succeeding horizon. "The open, indeterminate structure [*of the text*] makes a new interpretation possible, whereas on the other hand the historical communication of question and answer limits the mere arbitrariness of interpretation."<sup>9</sup> In the process of a literary tradition, there is a continual testing and evaluating of questions and answers.<sup>10</sup>

Continuity and plurality are not opposing poles in Jauss' theory but are related to each other. Perhaps the clearest indication of this comes in the way these two elements interact with each other in the history of a tradition. The history of art consists of both tradition and innovation, archaeology and anticipation, and we need to preserve both sides of this coin. Literature which follows the norms of past works is only imitative. While works that attempt to express only what is new are merely an expression of "dilettantism (or the tedium of science fiction)."<sup>11</sup> In order to understand the phenomena of literature and the history of its reception we need both tradition and innovation, continuity and plurality. "In the realm of the arts tradition realizes itself neither in epic continuity nor in a *creatio perpetua*, but in a process of mutual production and reception, determining and redetermining canons, selecting the old and integrating the new."<sup>12</sup>

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text the first reading can give a "unifying aesthetical orientation." Idem, "Limits and Tasks of Literary Hermeneutics," *Diogenes*, 109 (1980), 118-19.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, *Towards*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> "In the historical tradition of art, a past work survives not through eternal questions, nor through permanent answers, but through the more or less dynamic interrelationship between question and answer, between problem and solution, which can stimulate new understanding and can allow the resumption of the dialogue between the past and present." Ibid., 70.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, "Tradition, Innovation and Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46.3 (1988), 376.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



In this chapter, I intend to consider two aspects of reception theory which address the issues of continuity and plurality within a tradition of interpretation. The first is Jauss' adoption of Thomas Kuhn's model of paradigm shifts. The second element concerns the questions of what constitutes a classic text and what role the classic performs within a tradition. These two aspects, paradigms and classic texts, touch on several of the most important questions about plurality and continuity within a tradition of interpretation in reception theory.

## II. PARADIGM SHIFTS

Thomas Kuhn's model for the history of science serves two purposes in Jauss' hermeneutic. First, Kuhn's work serves as a complement to the concept of punctuated evolution which Jauss borrowed from Formalism. And second, Jauss argues that literary studies are in a state of crisis requiring a paradigm shift to resolve this crisis, namely to a literary theory which incorporates the history of the text's reception. Thus, Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts serves an apologetic function in Jauss' hermeneutic. In the first half of this chapter, I propose to explore the role and implications of paradigm shifts within reception theory. The goal of this exploration is hopefully to understand better some of the issues surrounding continuity and plurality within the transmission of a text's interpretation.<sup>13</sup> As such, Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm shifts' provides a useful heuristic device which for reception theory.

The shift from an evolutionary or cumulative models to explain the history and development of knowledge to a model which incorporates paradigm shifts and/or revolutions in thought is one of the most important conceptual shifts in historical methodology in the past fifty years. Until recently, the evolutionary or cumulative model was the dominant model used to explain the history and development of knowledge. This model viewed the development of knowledge as being a more or less linear accumulation of knowledge, discoveries and insights. This was widely accepted either implicitly or explicitly in theology as well as the other disciplines. Nicholas Lash comments, "Almost all theories of doctrinal development tend to assume that the history of Christian doctrine is a more or less unified process of continual, if erratic, growth and expansion."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Because Thomas Kuhn's works are so well known and influential and because his concepts are explicitly appropriated by Jauss, I shall attempt to limit my discussion to Kuhn's works.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Lash, *Change in Focus: A Study of Doctrinal Change and Continuity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973), 145. To cite another example, John Baker speaks of doctrinal



With the shift to theories of history which take the situatedness of the historian and their subject more into account, questions concerning historical discontinuity have come to the foreground. The foregrounding of change and discontinuity in the revolutionary or paradigm-shift model enables us to pay greater attention to the historical situatedness of the historian, his/her subject, and to examine problems of historical discontinuity in thought. However, this in turn raises a whole new set of questions and problems. "The immediate difficulty facing someone who decides to write on the problem of change and continuity is that there is no aspect of Christian belief, doctrine and activity which does not form part of, and is not increasingly felt to form part of, the problem."<sup>15</sup>

The text most cited for discrediting the evolutionary model of historical knowledge is Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.<sup>16</sup> "This important book is a sustained attack on the prevailing image of scientific change as a linear process

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development taking place according to two principles. The first is an organic growth or unfolding of what is logically implicit in the origins of the Christian faith accompanied by a second principle of rational correction and criticism. "In short, doctrinal development may be described as the community working out a fuller understanding of its inheritance of faith and submitting this to the test of time, that is, of the life and thought of the Christian people in future generations." John Baker, "Carried about by Every Wind?: The Development of Doctrine," in *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith*, report by The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England (London: SPCK, 1981), 265-6.

<sup>15</sup> Lash, vii.

<sup>16</sup> In his obituary in the *New York Times*, Kuhn's work is described being a "profoundly influential landmark of 20-century intellectual history." Lawrence Van Gelder, "Thomas Kuhn, 73; Devised Science of Paradigm," *The New York Times* (June 19, 1996), B7. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was translated into over 16 languages and sold over 1 million copies. Gary Gutting makes the very bold claim that Kuhn's book "has had a wider academic influence than any other single book of the last twenty years." "Preface" in Gary Gutting, ed. *Paradigms and Revolutions: Appraisals and Applications of Thomas Kuhn's Philosophy of Science* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), v. It is not that the ideas that Kuhn exposed were radically new, for even he admits that the idea that the development of knowledge in science "as a succession of tradition-bound periods punctuated by non-cumulative breaks" was borrowed from other fields. Art, literary, and political history have long employed similar concepts to describe their fields. Rather it was the way in which he employed these concepts on the history of science, the strongest domain for logical, positivistic approaches to the history of the development of knowledge, and his liberal use of examples to illustrate his concepts of the relation between tradition and innovation which attracted so much attention to his work. This is rather ironic since *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published as part of the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, "the *summa* of logical positivism, the movement that viewed the nature of science as the most strictly synonymous with its logic." David Hollinger, "T. S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and its Implications for History," in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 214, 195-9. While others such as Karl Popper also denied the view that science progressed by a steady accumulation of knowledge it is Kuhn's work which appears to be cited more widely in regard to this area. Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge, 1992).



of ever-increasing knowledge, and an attempt to make us see that process of change in a different and, Kuhn suggests, more enlightening way.”<sup>17</sup> While Kuhn accepted that the cumulative model could explain the growth of knowledge during certain periods of history, it was not appropriate for explaining long term development of knowledge, changes in theories, or shifts in research paradigms.<sup>18</sup>

While Kuhn attempted to distance his concepts for the history of science from the humanities, his work is important for two reasons. First, similar twists, turns, and changes in the direction of research and the world view of the community occur in biblical studies as well. However, Kuhn is right in arguing that these shifts are not as clearly defined as they are in the sciences. Second, if the paradigms are as significant for the sciences as Kuhn argues, then the questions he raises present an exaggerated form of what we could expect to see in the humanities. Thus, if the problems that arise in relation to paradigm shifts in the sciences can be resolved, we are in a stronger position to claim that they can be resolved in biblical studies as well.

#### A. Incommensurability and Discontinuity in Paradigm Shifts

*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* has generated a great deal of discussion and debate over the manner in which knowledge is accumulated and passed down within a tradition of inquiry. Some, such as Richard Rorty and Israel Scheffler read Kuhn as supporting the view that the shift from an old paradigm to a new one preserves very little if any continuity between the two paradigms. Communication between researchers operating in the two different paradigms is incommensurable and for a researcher to switch paradigms amounts to an irrational act of conversion.<sup>19</sup> Others, including Kuhn himself, claim that Kuhn’s earlier work suffered from rhetorical exaggeration which Kuhn softened and corrected in his later works. According to this view, Kuhn’s use of incommensurability involves a matter of degree, it is not total incommensurability.<sup>20</sup> In

<sup>17</sup> Dudley Shapere, “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,” in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Kuhn defines normal science in the following manner, “In this essay, ‘normal science’ means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice.” Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Israel Scheffler, *Science and Subjectivity* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); also Ian Barbour, “Paradigms in Science and Religion,” in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 223-45.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Blaug, “Kuhn versus Lakatos, or Paradigms versus research Programmes in the History of Economics” in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 141-2; Gerald Doppelt, “Kuhn’s Epistemological Relativism: An Interpretation and Defense,” *Inquiry*, 21 (1978), 34-6. Kuhn’s corrections of his earlier views can be seen in the revisions which he made to the



order for paradigms to serve a legitimate function in reception theory then we must resolve the question of whether Kuhn's view supports a strong or weak view of incommensurability.

Kuhn's view of the history of science is based on two concepts: normal science and paradigm shifts or revolutions. During periods of normal science, research takes place within a paradigm which is shared by the members of a research community or scientific field.<sup>21</sup> A paradigm provides a communally shared body of "intertwined theoretical and methodological belief" which allows for selection and evaluation in scientific research.<sup>22</sup> If paradigms are primarily understood in terms of the theories, it is hard to explain the dominance of a paradigm on a research community. Paradigms represent much more than theories, they also include the constellation of a group's commitments and beliefs according to Kuhn. This involves symbolic generalisations which are employed by the group (such as  $f=ma$ ), models which are appealed to provide metaphors and analogies for explanations, and exemplars of concrete problems and solutions which are often used to teach students.<sup>23</sup> The role of shared examples cannot be understated for they often provide the context in which researchers learn the rules of their discipline and how to apply them.<sup>24</sup>

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1962 edition of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the "Postscript" he included in the second edition, and his essays in *The Essential Tension*. In this respect, it is worth noting that Richard Rorty seems to cite primarily from the 1962 edition of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and does not engage with Kuhn's second edition or his later works.

- <sup>21</sup> One of the sources for conceptual confusion and misunderstanding in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is the wide manner of ways in which he used the term "paradigm." In the "Postscript" Kuhn attempted to address the potential for misunderstanding in his use of this term. He claims that he primarily uses the term "paradigm" in two ways. "On the one hand, it stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community. On the other, it denotes one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science." The first use is sociological understanding of the term "paradigm," the second is to understand it in terms of exemplary past achievements which govern present research. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 175; idem "Second Thoughts on Paradigms," in *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977), 294. Margret Masterman lists twenty-one different ways in which Kuhn uses this term in his book. "The Nature of a Paradigm," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 59-89. Shapere argues that Kuhn's lack of clarification and qualification of 'paradigm' results in a theory that is too vague and ambiguous to be useful. Shapere, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," 38.
- <sup>22</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 10-17.
- <sup>23</sup> Alan E. Musgrave, "Kuhn's Second Thoughts," in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 39.
- <sup>24</sup> Exemplars provide ways of seeing problems and solutions which form the basis for 'tacit knowledge' which does not follow rules or techniques. Rather it is an educational process by which the members of a research community learn to see things in a certain way 'naturally.' This is very close to Gadamer and MacIntyre's conception of *phronesis*.



At the same time, a paradigm restricts the questions that can be asked and the range of solutions or results to research problems that the community will accept.<sup>25</sup> This is an essential dimension to any form of knowledge, "in order for us to perceive or talk or communicate, we have to ignore. In order for us to understand anything, we have to fail to perceive a great deal that is there. Knowledge is always purchased at the expense of what might have been seen and learned but was not."<sup>26</sup> The range and scope of the questions which can be asked within a paradigm will "always be very small compared with the range that imagination can conceive."<sup>27</sup>

It is at this point that parallel ideas in Heidegger's conception of preunderstanding can help us to explicate some aspects of Kuhn's notion of paradigms. Heidegger uses three terms to explain how preunderstanding operates. *Vorhabe* is what we possess in advance, the network of our cultural background which makes us who we are and is translated as fore-having. *Vorsicht* is something we see in advance, our conceptual vocabulary and schemes, or fore-sight. And *Vorgriff* is something we grasp in advance or the fore-conception of the object. Heidegger's "point is that even before I begin consciously to interpret a text or grasp the meaning of an object, I have already placed it within a certain context (*Vorhabe*), approached it from a certain perspective (*Vorsicht*) and conceived of it in a certain way (*Vorgriff*).... The meaning of any object, then, is co-determined by one's own circumstances or 'life-relations' (Dilthey) and expectations."<sup>28</sup> These fore-structures or fore-projections are absolutely necessary for our being able to understand anything. This takes place by the way in which they enable us to place the text, event, person, or thing within a familiar context. Even the 'pure' science of mathematics is grounded in the fore-structure of preunderstanding.

What is decisive for its development does not lie in its rather high esteem for the observation of 'facts', nor in its 'application' of mathematics in determining the character of the natural processes; it lies rather in *the way in which Nature herself*

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"One of the fundamental techniques by which the members of a group . . . learn to see the same things when confronted with the same stimuli is by being shown examples of situations that their predecessors in the group have already learned to see as like each other and as different from other sorts of situations." Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 193-4; 43-48, 181-91.

<sup>25</sup> "Paradigm procedures and applications are as necessary to science as paradigm laws and theories, and they have the same effects. Inevitably they restrict the phenomenological field accessible for scientific investigation at any given time." Kuhn, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Oppenheimer, "Tradition and Discovery," *American Council of Learned Societies* (Rochester, NY: American Council of Learned Societies, 1959), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 77.



*is mathematically projected.* In this projection something constantly present-at-hand (matter) is uncovered beforehand, and the horizon is opened so that one may be guided by looking at those constitutive items in it which are quantitatively determinable (motion, force, location, and time). Only 'in the light' of a Nature which has been projected in this fashion can anything like a 'fact' be found and set up for an experiment regulated and delimited in terms of this projection.<sup>29</sup>

Kuhn's concept of paradigms is related to all three aspects of preunderstanding.<sup>30</sup>

The way in which we look at science is determined by our world — what we count as science. *Vorhabe* corresponds to Kuhn's sociological use of the term paradigm, the disciplinary matrix-skill and tacit knowledge which a scientist or interpreter acquires in order to enable them to perform their research. *Vorsicht* parallels Kuhn's use of exemplars and past achievements to define what counts as a problem and a solution and in particular how they 'project' their research. And Heidegger's concept of *Vorgriff*, corresponds to the anticipations, hypotheses and theories which can be confirmed.<sup>31</sup> The activity of forming and confirming interpretations makes use of assumptions and a "background of practices (*Vorhabe*) which need not — and indeed cannot — be included as specific presuppositions of the theory, yet already define what could count as confirmation."<sup>32</sup>

Those who see Kuhn's text presenting a strong case for the incommensurability between paradigms and as an argument for the relativity between paradigms claim that *there is no data in itself*, since all data is theory laden. "In verifying a theory we move in a circle from hypothesis to data, and data to hypothesis, without ever encountering any bare facts which could call our whole theory into question."<sup>33</sup> In literary theory, Stanley Fish is perhaps one of the better known exponents of this view. According to him, there are no determinate components in literary theory, every component is the product of interpretation, nothing is independent for the interpretive process. Thus, there can be no "given' [in reference to the text] if by given one means what is there before

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 413-14.

<sup>30</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 10, 41-42; Shapere, "Scientific Revolutions," 29. This reading of Kuhn can also be backed up by noticing the similarities between his thought and Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Anthony C. Thiselton, "Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory," in *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith, A Report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England* (London: SPCK, 1981), 58.

<sup>31</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Holism and Hermeneutics," (*Review of Metaphysics* 34 1980), 8-10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. "But the important point for the natural sciences is that natural science is successful precisely to the extent that *these background practices which make science possible can be taken for granted and ignored by the science.*" *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 11. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*; Barbour, "Paradigms in Science and Religion," 223-45; Scheffler, *Science and Subjectivity*, 84.



interpretation begins.”<sup>34</sup> If Fish, Rorty, Feyerabend and others are right in pressing Kuhn for incommensurability and relativism, then all we are left with is a plurality of interpretative communities or strategies.<sup>35</sup> As a result, communication between paradigms is achieved only through the rhetoric of persuasion, not through rational argumentation. However, if Kuhn’s views are not this strong, then we can learn from other views, there is the possibility for continuity in the midst of diversity, and progress in what we learn from the past.

The manner in which anomalies function in paradigm shifts demonstrates that Kuhn does not support a strong form of relativism and incommensurability. For Heidegger, when something violates our preunderstanding, an anomaly, it opens the possibility for a new disclosure of understanding for that object.<sup>36</sup> This same idea is picked up by Kuhn, but employed at the level of a system or paradigm.<sup>37</sup> The domination of a paradigm is weakened or questioned only when a paradigm enters into a period of epistemological crisis. This occurs when a persistent anomaly becomes generally recognised and is given more attention because it is seen to be in explicit conflict with some core beliefs of the scientific community. During this phase, the solutions proposed for the anomaly will move from those which are closely aligned with the presuppositions of the research community to those which diverge from, or even challenge, the accepted conceptual scheme. In this process, the rules for normal science begin to get blurred. Copernicus provided a good illustration of this when he complained about the blurring of rules which resulted in astronomers being so “inconsistent in these [astronomical] investigations . . . that they cannot even explain or observe the constant length of the seasonal year.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Stanley Fish, “Why No One’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,” *Diacritics*, 11 (March, 1981), 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London and N.Y.: Verso, 1987), 34, 69; Wolfgang Stegmüller, “Accidental Theory of Change,” in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 86-7.

<sup>36</sup> Because we exist with others we share conventions and norms about the appropriate use of hammers and which hammers are appropriate for which uses. The way in which we understand a hammer *as* a hammer and its significance is “inconspicuous” to us because it lies hidden in our *Vorhabe, Vorsicht, and Vorgriff*. It is only when the contextual relationship of these conventional norms are disrupted that our understanding of something, such as the hammer, becomes explicit. It is when the hammer is missing, or broken, that we realise what the hammer was “ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 105; 195, 199-200, 411-412.

<sup>37</sup> The result of trying to resolve the questions which an anomaly raises is that “it conceptualizes its phenomena in ways that automatically bring new and previously unnoticed (or uninteresting) dimensions of these phenomena into the center of scientific attention and inquiry.” Doppelt, 45-6.

<sup>38</sup> Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1957), 138.



There are three ways to resolve such a crisis in Kuhn's opinion. In some instances, the paradigm may eventually be able to provide a solution. The anomaly may be labelled as unsolvable and set aside with the hope that later developments may provide a solution to it. Or in the final instance, a new paradigm which proposes a solution may emerge from the crisis.<sup>39</sup> In any case a paradigm is not rejected just because it has bumped into nature in some way that challenges its views. The rejection of a theory always involves more than just comparison of a theory with nature. A paradigm is only rejected when there is a rival to take its place.<sup>40</sup> When adjudicating between competing theories, scientists place the highest value on the ability to raise and solve puzzles. In this way, Newton's mechanics surpassed Aristotle's, and Einstein's improved upon Newton's "as instruments of puzzle-solving."<sup>41</sup> This seems to imply that in Kuhn's system there are theory independent values and standards by which to judge the progress of a new theory over an older one. "The decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgment leading to that decision involves the comparison of both paradigms *with nature* and *with each other*."<sup>42</sup> "Thus Kuhn is far from relativism."<sup>43</sup>

If this reading of Kuhn in terms of Heidegger's concepts of *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff* is correct, it explains why Kuhn's work is read by some as an argument for incommensurability and not by others, depending on which level the interpreter sees paradigms operating. It also allows us to try and remain faithful to Kuhn's claims to incommensurability, but understanding it as a weak form of incommensurability. While Kuhn is denying that long-term progress in science proceeds by a steady linear

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<sup>39</sup> Idem, *Scientific Revolutions*, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Kuhn, "The Essential Tension: Tradition and Innovation in Scientific Research," in *The Essential Tension*, 234. Kuhn is not arguing that the sudden emergence or recognition of an anomaly invalidates a paradigm. While Kuhn is in fundamental agreement with much of Popper's work, he disagrees with Popper's criteria of "falsification by direct comparison with nature." Kuhn claims that it is possible for anomalies to exist for some time without challenging a paradigm's theories because they could be considered either solved by *ad hoc* hypotheses or they could be considered irrelevant. Idem, *Scientific Revolutions*, 67-78, 77. Kuhn criticised Popper for overlooking periods of normal science and focusing on paradigm shifts and also for applying the standards of evaluation found in logic to science and as a result ignoring the social dimension to science. Idem, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research," in *Essential Tension*, 266-92. To be fair, Kuhn overlooked what Popper terms the "principle of tenacity," or the way in which scientists protect a theory with *ad hoc* secondary hypotheses. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 50, 82-3; Blaug, "Kuhn versus Lakatos," 139.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 205-6.

<sup>42</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 77, emphasis mine. To reject a paradigm while not embracing a competing one is tantamount to rejecting science itself in Kuhn's view. Ibid., 79.

<sup>43</sup> Musgrave, "Kuhn's Second Thoughts," in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 48.



accumulation of facts and revision of theories, he is not advocating the position that opponents like Scheffler attribute to him, that the acceptance or switching of paradigms is an irrational process. "In fact, however, Kuhn is trying to express a third alternative: an account of scientific authority in terms of the informed *judgment* of the community of trained scientists."<sup>44</sup>

The two movements of normal science and paradigm shifts which Kuhn employs to characterise science produce what he calls an 'essential tension' in the researcher. Normal science is characterised by what he calls "convergent" thinking, while periods of paradigm shifts are characterised by "divergent" thinking. Paul Ricoeur uses the terms "sedimentation" and "innovation" to describe these two poles which constitute a tradition.<sup>45</sup> The ability to support a tension between these two forms of thought is a "prime requisite" for scientific research. "Very often the successful scientist must simultaneously display the characteristics of the traditionalist and of the iconoclast."<sup>46</sup> Or to use our terms, during periods of normal science we would expect to see continuity in a discipline's research and paradigm shifts would produce a plurality of results and methods until a new paradigm was accepted which would be discontinuous from the previous paradigm to varying degrees. However, this does not mean that iconoclastic research or interpretations are supported during periods of paradigm shifts, and definitely not during periods of normal research. During periods of normal research, there will be large number of areas of possible research for which the paradigm will not be asking questions. To wander off and research them from an open-minded perspective would be counter-productive and, in Kuhn's opinion, would be a move back to a pre-consensus stage of research. At the same time, during periods of crisis and paradigm shifts, the new theories or novel discoveries which emerge always do so from the context of old theories and beliefs which determine what "the world does *and does not* contain."<sup>47</sup> Kuhn's theory presents a model by which we can see a balance and role for both plurality and continuity, tradition and innovation. "I hope to have made meaningful the view that the productive scientist must be a traditionalist who enjoys playing intricate games by preestablished rules in order to be a successful innovator who discovers new rules and new pieces with which to play them."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gutting, "Introduction" in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "The Text as Dynamic Identity," in Mario J. Valdés and Owen Miller, eds., *Identity of the Literary Text* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 181-2.

<sup>46</sup> Kuhn, "The Essential Tension," 227.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-37, especially 234.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

## B. Paradigms in Reception Theory

### 1. *Literary History and Paradigms*

Jauss employs Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts to outline the modern history of literature under the rubric of four paradigm shifts. The first paradigm, the classical-humanist, developed during the Renaissance. This paradigm formulated rules and guidelines from classical texts which served as norms to evaluate other works of literature. During this period, history as a modern discipline was developing. Initially, history was seen as a method which could help raise the standards of appreciation but it also introduced ideas on the historicity of the author and the text. The classical-humanist paradigm collapsed when classical literature was no longer seen to be unique or incomparable, embodying atemporal norms by which to judge other works. This situation arose because historical studies had shown how these works were products of their own time. This brought about the shift to the historical-positivist paradigm which dominated literary studies in the 19th century. During this period, philological and source studies, critical editions, and the reconstruction of the pre-history of the text took centre stage. To give their research a sense of direction, they often made use of national ideology. The highest aspirations of a nation were embodied in its classical works which brought to speech what was latent in the nation's culture and history. During the first half of the twentieth century (1900 to the 1950's), the aesthetic-formalist paradigm rose, in large part, as a reaction against the historical-positivist paradigm because its attempt to explain literature solely on the basis of historical conditions was no longer seen as adequate. Russian Formalism, New Criticism in America, and the work of Oscar Walzels in Germany are all examples of this paradigm shift. One of the dominant traits of the third paradigm was the elevating of the literary work to an autonomous, independent object of research.<sup>49</sup>

Jauss believes that we are in the midst of a fourth paradigm shift. During the 1960's, the inadequacies of the different methods which attempted to reconstruct the past or to approach the text in-itself resulted in the suppression of the question

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<sup>49</sup> Jauss, "Paradigmawechsel in der Literaturwissenschaft," *Linguistische Berichte* 3 (1969), 47-51; idem, "The Literary Process of Modernism from Rousseau to Adorno," *Cultural Critique*, Lisa C. Roetzel trans. (Winter, 1988-89), 27-32, 54-57; Rien T. Segers, "Readers, Text and Author: Some Implications of *Rezeptionsästhetik*," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 24 (1975), 16; Holub 1-3. Eagleton follows almost the same taxonomy as Jauss for these paradigm shifts. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 74.



concerning application, which was “the real content of the turn toward aesthetics of reception which occurs in the mid-sixties and which evidently, was successful.”<sup>50</sup> The renewed interest in hermeneutics, the rise of alternative methods, and problems concerning the teaching and content of the literary canon in a society permeated by mass media are all evidence for the need of a new paradigm. While the shape of the new paradigm has not been fixed yet, it must integrate the three movements of understanding, interpretation, and application if it is to succeed. Thus, Jauss’ adoption of Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shifts in his literary theory also serves the apologetical function for the relevance of his ideas.<sup>51</sup>

## 2. *Parables and Paradigms*

As I mentioned in the “Introduction,” the need for a new paradigm which includes the effective history of the Bible is also felt by some in biblical studies. Whereas Jauss organises the history of literary theory under four paradigms, the same type of generalisation cannot be made in biblical studies. Instead one must speak of paradigm shifts in very localised terms. Even within New Testament studies different shifts have occurred at different times. The study of parables is a good illustration of this. If the shift to the historical quest for Jesus took place between 1774, with Lessing’s anonymous publication of Reimarus’ *Fragments*, to Strauss’ *Life of Jesus* in 1835, then we can see how the application of the historical-critical method to the parables lagged behind the study of other aspects Jesus’ life. It was not until 1886, when Adolf Jülicher published *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, that parable studies shifted from the age old allegorical approach to a non-allegorical, historical paradigm.<sup>52</sup> “So thoroughly did Jülicher do his work that for a time it almost seemed that as if he had spoken the last word on the parables.”<sup>53</sup> This is perhaps the most significant paradigm shift in the history of parable studies.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Segers, “An Interview with Hans Robert Jauss,” 84.

<sup>51</sup> Holub, 12, 154. Others are sympathetic to Jauss’ call for a new paradigm in literary studies. Peter J. Rabinowitz, “Whirl without End: Audience-Oriented Criticism,” in *Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 81-95, especially 82

<sup>52</sup> While A. B. Bruce’s work preceded Jülicher’s, it was not widely received and therefore did not serve as the stimulus for the paradigm shift as Jülicher’s did. See my discussion of this point in the discussion of Jauss’ third thesis in chapter 3. Alexander B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ: A Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of Our Lord*, 3rd revised ed. (N.Y.: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908).

<sup>53</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 38; Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1886).

<sup>54</sup> James C. Little, “Parable Research in the Twentieth Century I. The Predecessors of J. Jeremias,” *Expository Times*, 87 (1976), 356-7. “It was, however, Adolf Jülicher who imparted a definitively new direction in their study...” Geraint Vaughan Jones, *The Art*



The second paradigm shift followed and was based on Bultmann's form-critical approach.<sup>55</sup> C. H. Dodd tried to show that we must examine the parables in relation to how Jesus understood his ministry and the Old Testament motifs which Jesus employed in the parables.<sup>56</sup> Dodd and Jeremias' work was based on a form-critical analysis of the parables. Using this approach they differentiated the different *Sitz im Leben* in which the parable operated. Jeremias' contribution came from the manner in which he attempted to find the earliest form and context of each parable by examining ten different means by which the parables were transmitted in the primitive church. When the parables were recontextualised to these different *Sitz im Leben* they were seen to generate new and different meanings.<sup>57</sup> Both Jeremias' and Dodd's work represents one of the definitive turning points in the study of the parables. "There can be no going back from this work of Jeremias. It is perhaps the greatest single contribution to the historical understanding of the parables."<sup>58</sup>

What separates the present paradigm from the second paradigm involves the manner in which one understands the message of the parable. For both Dodd and Jeremias understanding is primarily a reflective, conscious operation on the part of the interpreter. With the shift to the present paradigm, the reader's understanding is transformed at a deeper or pre-reflective level. This is partially based on concepts such as Heidegger's idea that a parable 'projects a world' or Ricœur's work on how symbols and parables 'give rise to thought.'<sup>59</sup> The shift to this paradigm was instigated by the New Hermeneutic's view that understanding was an existential *event* or *process*. Ernst Fuchs

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*and Truth of the Parables: A Study in Their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1964), 3. Jones organises the history of parable interpretation according to pre- and post-Jülicher. *Ibid.*, 3-40.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of Bultmann's contribution in this area see: Jones, *The Art and Truth*, 42-51.

<sup>56</sup> Cadoux's work, while it preceded and prepared the way for Dodd and Jeremias, was not as influential as their work. James C. Little, "Parable Research in the Twentieth Century I. The Predecessors of J. Jeremias," *Expository Times*, 87 (1976), 360.

<sup>57</sup> According to Dodd, Jesus uttered the parables in the midst of a period of intense eschatological crisis. By the time the gospels were written the church had experienced a prolonged period of growth and the eschatological crisis was now understood to be distant future event. This led to the church reinterpreting Jesus' parables in light of their situation. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet and Co., 1935), 34-5, 102-5. These multiple meanings are not the result of a theory of meaning but arise from a theory of multiple settings.

<sup>58</sup> Norman Perrin, "The Parables of Jesus, as Metaphors, and as Aesthetic Objects: A Review Article," *Journal of Religion*, 47 (1967), 340. However, Hunter thinks that all Jeremias did was "to dot the i's and stroke the t's of Dodd's exposition." Hunter, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Thiselton, "Reader Response Hermeneutics," in *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 98-102.



claims that the parables are language-events in which Jesus communicated his self-understanding of the world and his relationship to God. The parables, as language-events, offer the possibility for the reader to share in this understanding. The readers are not observers who reflect on the parable but are active participants in the parable and find themselves being questioned in it.<sup>60</sup> Eta Linnemann is another example of the existential approach in this paradigm. The role of the parable is to get the hearer to make a decision which is in line with Jesus' view of the world, this brings the hearer into a new understanding of their situation. In order for the reader to make this decision, she must understand the ideas and images in the parable so that she can make a correspondence between the narrated world projected in the parable, Jesus historical situation, and her historical situation.<sup>61</sup> The stronger the opposition between the hearer and the narrator, or the narrated story world in the parable, the more significant will be the hearer's decision.

As this paradigm progressed, the manner by which the reader experienced the parable shifted from existential theories of language to literary theories of reading. Parables were now seen as aesthetic objects which possess an existential-theological dimension.<sup>62</sup> Geraint V. Jones, Dan Otto Via, and John Dominic Crossan are some of the more prominent members of this paradigm.<sup>63</sup> This fourth paradigm was more heavily influenced by literary theories, in particular reader-response theories, than by other fields of thought in biblical studies. As such, it represents a unique turn or paradigm shift in relation to the rest of New Testament or biblical studies. The primary point that I want to bring out in this discussion is that when we speak of paradigm shifts in biblical interpretation, we must qualify that by specifying which particular aspect or area of biblical interpretation to which we are referring.

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<sup>60</sup> Idem, "The Parables as Language-Event: Some Comments on Fuchs' Hermeneutics in the Light of Linguistic Philosophy," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 23 (1970), 440-2; Kissinger, *Parables*, 182-4.

<sup>61</sup> Eta Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*, trans. John Sturdy (London: SPCK, 1966), 18-23.

<sup>62</sup> Dan Otto Via Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 70-1.

<sup>63</sup> This paradigm overlaps with many of the concerns of the existential paradigm, especially in the work of Via and Crossan. However, their approach is marked by a distinctive turn to literary and hermeneutical theories. Jones, *The Art and Truth*; John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1973); idem, "Parables as Religious and Poetic Experience," *Journal of Religion*, 53 (1973); idem, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1975); Via, *Parables*; Thiselton, "Reader-Response Hermeneutics," 101-6.

### C. Paradigms and the Logic of Question and Answer

While Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts serve a fruitful function in Jauss' thought, Jauss does not appropriate them with modifying Kuhn's ideas. An important modification Jauss makes in Kuhn's theory concerns what raises a paradigm shift in literary theory. According to Kuhn, a research community is open to change when an anomaly persists and penetrates deeply into its research paradigm.<sup>64</sup> Jauss asks what makes an anomaly become more significant at a certain time if it is there all along? For example, what led to the scientific breakthrough in the double helix structure of DNA? This did not take place because of X-ray photography but it came about by asking the question, "what atoms like to lie next to each other?" Because Kuhn overlooked the logic of question and answer he missed the continuity this can bring to paradigm shifts.<sup>65</sup>

The criteria by which a new paradigm is judged to be successful and the degree to which it replaces the old paradigm is based on its ability to answer questions which the old paradigm could not. A new paradigm "can only be accepted and developed in significance to the degree that it is able to solve, or promise to solve, a problem that is acutely felt in, or first intrudes on, the synchronic system of canonized questions and answers of a given life-world."<sup>66</sup> Questions from previous paradigms' are part of the new paradigm's content and the new paradigm must show how it answers those questions. To do this it must "occupy all the positions, and all the 'empty spaces' in the former model."<sup>67</sup> In this way Jauss synthesises Collingwood's logic of question and answer with the concept of paradigm shifts. "The paradigm of a history of problems replaces the old history of events, and, at the same time, deessentializes the so-called history of reception, making it possible to reconstruct the historical processes involved in terms of the relation between question and answer."<sup>68</sup>

This is one of the crucial areas in which MacIntyre's and Jauss' theories overlap and one in which MacIntyre is able to offer a more constructive and useful model for

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<sup>64</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 67; 52-76.

<sup>65</sup> Jauss, *Question and Answer*, 69-70. Jauss does not take this example from Kuhn's work but from James D. Watson, *The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA*, Gunther Stent ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 34.

<sup>66</sup> *Idem*, *Question and Answer*, 70.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* The challenge of mass-media is an example of a question which Jauss feels needs to be addressed in order for a new paradigm to be successful. The influence of mass media which has not been addressed in previous paradigms but because of its pervasiveness in contemporary society it must be included in any new literary theories. *Idem*, "Paradigmawechsel," 55.

<sup>68</sup> *Idem*, *Question and Answer*, 70.



reception theory than Kuhn. Like Jauss, MacIntyre emphasises continuity between paradigm shifts in a tradition, not everything is thrown into question at one time. MacIntyre also develops the role of question and answer within paradigm shifts. This is seen in his concept that what helps to define a particular tradition is its 'core problematic.' When a tradition is no longer able to address the questions in its core problematic in a manner that satisfies its members that tradition is said to enter into an epistemological crisis.

Each tradition, to some significant degree, stands or falls as a mode of enquiry and has within itself at each stage a more or less well-defined problematic, that set of issues, difficulties, and problems which have emerged from its previous achievements in enquiry. Characteristically, therefore, such traditions possess measures to evaluate their own progress or lack of it, even if such measures necessarily are framed in terms of and presuppose the truth of those central theses to which the tradition gives it allegiance.<sup>69</sup>

This is one area in which we see a difference between paradigm shifts as Kuhn envisioned them taking place in the natural sciences and how they occur in literary studies according to Jauss. *The impulse for literary paradigm shifts is found in the demand that faces every paradigm of literary studies, the challenge of snatching a work out of the past through new interpretations and translating them into the present which makes the text's experience available again.* A literary paradigm falls into crisis when it is no longer able to engage texts in a manner that allows them to speak to the present through new interpretations or translations. "Or to say it another way, each generation places new questions to the work of art from the past which is made to speak and to give us answers again."<sup>70</sup> Paradigms do not shift in literary studies because of anomalies since there is no comparable field of empirical observations like there are in the natural sciences, as Kuhn argued. Rather, these shifts take place because the previous paradigm had fallen into crisis because it could not bring the text to speech again in that horizon. The ability for any literary or biblical hermeneutical theory to rescue a text from the past and enable it to address the contemporary reader is an essential element of what MacIntyre would define as part of the core problematic for any hermeneutical theory.

I will briefly mention three areas in which MacIntyre's work complements and advances Jauss' ideas. First, MacIntyre's use of epistemological crisis allows one to determine if a tradition is progressing, is static, or is deteriorating. This is seen in the

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<sup>69</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 166.

<sup>70</sup> Jauss, "Paradigmawechsel," 55.

success or failure a tradition has in overcoming an epistemological crisis. This would provide a meta-critical standard for evaluating the proposals of various different, and often competing, literary theories in their attempts to resolve the current crisis in literary studies. Second, a successful resolution to an epistemological crisis will result in a new paradigm which will not only answer the question they were confronted with, but it should also be able to explain why the old paradigm could not solve it. It will possess retrospective justification by providing an answer which the previous paradigm could not provide. Third, truth is defined as unsurpassability. Or to put it negatively, members at one stage in a tradition are able to look back on their predecessor's rational inadequacies and claim that these inadequacies or incoherencies "will never appear in any possible future situation, no matter how searching the enquiry, no matter how much evidence is provided, no matter what developments in rational enquiry may occur."<sup>71</sup>

There is one final area in which MacIntyre's work can serve as a correction or expansion of Jauss' theory. This concerns Jauss' appropriation of Kuhn's theory as a whole. Kuhn does not see his theory of paradigm shifts applying to disciplines other than science. There are several reasons for this. These involve how Kuhn defines the concept of 'progress' in research (which he limits to the natural sciences), the concern that other disciplines have with wider the lay audiences' reception of their work, the isolation of the scientific community from society, and the manner in which textbooks portray the history of science and the role they play in the education (or indoctrination) of the student into the scientific community. In contrast to the sciences, Kuhn sees even the "most abstract of theologians" as far more concerned with a wider audience than the theological guild, actively involved in social issues, and exposed to the history of different problems and solutions which theologians have wrestled with as part of his/her education.<sup>72</sup> Since MacIntyre addresses paradigm shifts and epistemological questions specifically within the humanities (philosophy and ethics) his approach is to be more amenable to Jauss' literary hermeneutic than Kuhn's work.

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<sup>71</sup> MacIntyre, 358. "At this point we can see the wisdom of MacIntyre's definition of truth. The criterion (unsurpassed so far) provides the best possible evidence for truth (will remain unsurpassed), and, furthermore, the criterion has a reasonable (conceptual) connection with the meaning of truth. The criterion falls short of a necessary and sufficient condition for truth--truth claims are fallible, as are all other claims." Nancey Murphy, unpublished manuscript, "Philosophical Resources for Postmodern Evangelical Theology," 25.

<sup>72</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 160-8.



#### D. Paradigms and Semiotic Shifts

If normal science represents a cumulative growth in knowledge, paradigm shifts, in large part, do not. In the change from one paradigm to the next, not only are theories replaced but so are the shared rules and standards of research. At an even more fundamental level, these changes involve semiotic transformations in the use and definition of concepts. This is why Copernicus was ridiculed when he claimed the earth moved.

Part of what they [Copernicus' Ptolemaic critics] meant by 'earth' was fixed position. Their earth, at least, could not be moved. Correspondingly, Copernicus' innovation was not simply to move the earth. Rather, it was a whole new way of regarding the problems of physics and astronomy, once that necessarily changed the meaning of both 'earth' and 'motion.' Without those changes the concept of a moving earth was mad.<sup>73</sup>

Copernicus did not simply say the earth moved, but introduced a whole new set of problems in physics which required new meanings for 'earth' and 'motion'. Since new paradigms arise from old ones and make use of the previous paradigm's vocabulary, the semiotic shifts in one area require other terms and concepts to fall into new relationships with each other, a ripple effect of semiotic transformations depending on how closely they are related to the primary terms which are transformed.<sup>74</sup> It is on the basis of this that Kuhn makes one of his most famous statements, "when paradigms change, the

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<sup>73</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 149-50; idem, *The Copernican Revolution*, chapters 3-7. The Ptolemaic theory had as part of their language an 'earth' which could not be moved, it was a fixed position. Doppelt, 46; Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 405. Another excellent illustration which Kuhn provides is how when Aristotle and Galileo looked at a heavy body swinging back and forth on a string they saw different things. Aristotle taught that a body will move from a higher position to a lower position of natural rest by its very own nature. Therefore, "the swinging body was simply falling with difficulty," reaching its lower position of rest through the long process of oscillatory motions. By contrast Galileo saw new relationships between weight, height and velocity. This was made possible by the "late medieval paradigm" theory of impetus in which Galileo was trained. "When Aristotle and Galileo looked at swinging stones, the first saw constrained fall, the second a pendulum." Idem, *Scientific Revolutions*, 121.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 149. As a result the term 'planet' had to be redefined "so that it could continue to make useful distinctions in a world where all celestial bodies, not just the sun, were seen differently from the way they had been seen before." Ibid., 128-9. Doppelt points out that many of those who claim that paradigms are incommensurable confuse the manner in which sense and reference function. They argue that in the shift from Ptolemaic to Copernican cosmology the reference of the term 'planet' changed, not its sense which remained stable. In contrast, Kuhn is claiming that even though the connotation of the concept changed there is still a stability of reference which allows for commensurability. This is partly based on the manner in which rival paradigms share 'their everyday and most of their scientific world and language.' Competing paradigms are not isolated floating islands imprisoned by their own languages. Doppelt, 37-8; Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 201. See Gadamer's discussion of the relationship between language and world in: *Truth and Method*, 383-491, esp. 447.



world itself changes with them.”<sup>75</sup> The changes in definitions and concepts from the older paradigm to the new one transforms the “reactions, expectations, and beliefs” of those who share that paradigm. “The scientist who embraces a new paradigm is like a man wearing inverting lenses. Confronting the same constellation of objects as before and knowing that he does so, he nevertheless finds them transformed through and through in many of their details.”<sup>76</sup>

While he does not cite Wittgenstein directly at this point, Kuhn does make use of Wittgenstein’s duck/rabbit illustration.<sup>77</sup> “What were ducks in the scientist’s world before the revolution are rabbits afterwards.”<sup>78</sup> As we saw above, at the level of *Vorsicht*, the paradigm which a person accepts shapes their beliefs and expectations, or whether they see a duck or rabbit when looking at the line drawing. “What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see.”<sup>79</sup> Wittgenstein’s remarks concerning how the language and tradition in which we are trained frame the questions we ask and our perceptions provide further support for Kuhn’s argument. “One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it. A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.”<sup>80</sup>

The semiotic transformations which occur in paradigm shifts are not restricted to the natural sciences. The interpretation of what the child is suffering from in Matthew 17:15 (‘Lord have mercy on my boy for he is a *lunatic*, σεληνιαζαται, and is very ill’) is an example of how our understanding of the Bible is linked with semiotic shifts in other domains of our culture. In the original horizon of expectations in which this story took place, the rural Palestinian Jewish audience would have understood this child’s

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<sup>75</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 111. Kuhn qualifies this statement with others to show that “though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world.” *Ibid.*, 121; Gutting, “Introduction,” 20. Those who hold to a strong view of incommensurability love to cite passages like this from Kuhn to show that there is no neutral language to which one can appeal. Musgrave does not find this argument convincing. For example, a Copernican defines the earth as a planet while the Aristotelians did not. Musgrave fails to see why the two sides could not explain their respective positions to each other in a manner they could understand, without resorting to some form of a “theoretically neutral observation language”. Musgrave, “Kuhn’s Second Thoughts,” in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 49, 52 note 9.

<sup>76</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 121.

<sup>77</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 114-5.

<sup>78</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 111.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 113, 121.

<sup>80</sup> Wittgenstein, § 114-15.



condition in relation to a complex of ideas including evil influences of the moon and/or his parents bringing it on their child because they had intercourse by the light of the lamp or in a mirror.<sup>81</sup> The early church perceived *σεληνιαζαται* from the wider perspective of the Greek and Roman cultures. Along with the evil influences of the moon were added demonic possession or the idea that this was possibly a divine disease. At the same time, we find a counter-voice to this in the medical writings of Galen and Hippocrates who taught that this illness was the result of natural causes and could be cured by natural means.<sup>82</sup> Apuleius (second century A.D.) is perhaps a classic example of the varied explanations surrounding epilepsy in the Roman world. At one point he seems to prefer a naturalistic view of the disease like Hippocrates and in another instance he reverted to the classical Greek view of it as the 'divine sickness'.<sup>83</sup> Apuleius also

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<sup>81</sup> The evil influence of the moon is perhaps reflected in Psalm 121:6, "The sun will not smite you by day, Nor the moon by night," where the power of the moon to affect one's health was compared with that of sunstroke. The notion that the moon beamed harmful influences was widespread in ancient near east. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150*, in *The Anchor Bible*, eds., William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 17a (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 218; Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 21 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 152. "And do not stand naked in front of a lamp," for it was taught: He who stands naked in front of a lamp will be an epileptic, and he who cohabits by the light of a lamp will have epileptic children. Our Rabbis taught: If one cohabits in a bed where an infant is sleeping, that infant will be an epileptic." *Tractate Pesahim*, in *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, trans. H. Freedman, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1990), 112b. In the Babylonian Talmud it appears that epilepsy was taken as seriously as leprosy in some instances. "Raba said: Now that it has been stated that sisters also establish a presumption, a man should not take a wife either from a family of epileptics, or from a family of lepers." *Tractate Yebamoth*, 64b.

<sup>82</sup> Hippocrates, *Breaths*, in *Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 2, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1923; reprint, 1952), XIV.1-64, seqq. passim 248-252; IV 118, 126, 128, 130, 132; idem, *Air, Water, Places*, vol. 2, *Loeb*, III.22-23. W. H. S. Jones, "Introduction to The Sacred Disease," in *Hippocrates, Loeb*, vol. 2, 133. James Collier, "Epilepsy," in *A Short History of Some Common Diseases*, ed. W. R. Bett (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 120-121. Galen's *Consilium de Puero Epileptico*, which is extant in tenth-century Arabic. "He followed the Hippocratic School of Cos in counseling hygienic measures, careful feeding and occupation in treatment, and states that he had often seen the disease arrested by the occurrence of an attack of quartan fever." The effects of epilepsy were weak at half moon and much stronger during the full moon. Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*, 2d. ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971), 26.

<sup>83</sup> When Apuleius was charged with placing a boy under a spell he defends himself by arguing that the boy was epileptic. He offers the traditional Greco-Roman medical explanation: epilepsy is caused by "the overflowing of . . . pestilential humour into the head" (Ch. 51). Or again, "When the flesh is so melted by the noxious influence of fire as to form a thick and floating humor, this generates a vapor, which when 'compressed within the body causes a white and eruptive ferment.'" (Ch. 50) Later he seems to be closer in line with the classical Greek view of it as the 'divine sickness.' "It is his 'own personal opinion that the human soul, especially when it is young and unsophisticated, may by



recorded the ostracism of epileptics from society because of the repulsiveness of the fits and fear of contamination.<sup>84</sup>

It is against this background that Origen's comments on this passage must be situated. In his interpretation, Origen attempts to reverse what he sees as a heretical idea embedded in the widely held view that epilepsy was caused by the phases of the moon. To attribute the cause of this disease, which was semiotically linked to demonic influences in his linguistic world, to the moon's influence on the moist humours in the head was equivalent to blasphemy.<sup>85</sup> It slandered the good creation and the Creator. Instead, he argued that the impure spirit which caused the seizures observed the cycles of the moon in order to make it appear as if this illness was a result of the moon's phases.<sup>86</sup> By the time of Calvin, Galen's views were widely accepted in medieval medicine which attributed epilepsy to the lunar phases. The explanation that this boy's illness was influenced by the moon was a fact proven by experience for Calvin.<sup>87</sup> As a result, he

the allurements of music or the soothing influence of sweet smells be lulled into slumber and banished into oblivion of its surroundings so that, as all consciousness of the body fades from memory, it returns and is reduced to its primal nature, which is in truth immortal and divine; and thus, as it were in a kind of slumber, it may predict the future." He then goes on to say that the boy must be "fair and unblemished in body, shrewd of wit and ready of speech, so that a worthy and fair shrine may be provided for the divine indwelling power" which will manifest itself in the divination which occurs. (Ch. 43) Apuleius, *Apologia*; Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series, ed. G. N. Stanton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 98.

- <sup>84</sup> Apuleius recorded the treatment Thallus, an epileptic slave, received, "nobody dares to eat with him from the same dish or to drink from the same cup, and it is even suspected that he has been sent away lest he contaminate the family." Apuleius, *Apologia*, 43; Temkin, *The Falling Sickness*, 8-9.
- <sup>85</sup> Origen's argument that this is a demonic problem, not an illness influenced by the moon, is based on his opposition to Gnostic teachings, especially Celsus, which taught that the planets influenced human life on earth and were connected with the soul's ascent in the next life. Ideas which originate in Persian and Mithraic sources, not the Christian Scriptures. Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI.19-23, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1986), 331-7.
- <sup>86</sup> Origen *In Mattheum* XIII.6 in *Matthäuserklärung*, ed. Erich Klostermann, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, ed. Ernst Benz, vol. 10 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1935), 194-5; *Commentary on Matthew*, XIII.6, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, additional vol., ed., Alan Menzies (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 2.778. Chrysostom followed Origen's teaching in this area. "For the evil spirit, to bring a reproach upon nature, both attacks them that are seized, and lets them go, according to the courses of the moon; not as though that were the worker of it;--away with the thought;--but himself craftily doing this to bring a reproach on nature. And an erroneous opinion hath gotten ground among the simple, and by this name do they call such evil spirits, being deceived; for this is no means true." Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LVII.3 in *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844), 2.778.
- <sup>87</sup> Vivian Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander, Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers: Symposium on Byzantine Medicine*, ed. John



explicitly rejects Chrysostom's (and Origen's) argument and bases his interpretation on the prevailing medical paradigm of his day.<sup>88</sup> Modern commentators find these interpretations superstitious. While they will discuss the historical background behind the Greek term which Matthew uses (σεληνιαζαται) as part of their philological study or historical reconstruction, their understanding of what the boy is suffering from is almost unanimously in favour of our contemporary medical understanding of epilepsy.<sup>89</sup>

Where the early church saw the demonic and the baleful influence of the moon, Origen and Chrysostom saw the demonic. By the time of Calvin, medical science had attributed the ailment to the influences of the moon on the weakness of the nervous system. Today we see a neurological condition which is not related to the lunar phases or demonic influence. Language determines, to a large extent, what we will actually see in the text.<sup>90</sup>

This demonstrates two benefits from examining the history of a text's reception. First, in doing so, the twists and turns in the semiotic code provoke our prejudices (or linguistic background) which cause us to question the validity of our present understanding and semiotic code. And second, past interpretations present us with different perspectives on the text (new ways to look at the picture as Wittgenstein would say), they present us with hermeneutical resources which allow us to grasp more possibilities for the disclosive potential of the text. To interpret the healing of the boy in Matthew 17 from a medical perspective negates many of the nuances in the passage

Scarborough, vol. 38 (Washington D.C.: Meriden-Stinehour, 1984), 1-14; Owsei Temkin, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

<sup>88</sup> "Nor do I accept the imagination of Chrysostom that Satan invented this name (*lunaticus* or *comitiali morbo*) as a trick to spray (throw) disgrace on the good creation: for we are taught by the sureness of experience (*docet enim certa experientia*) that the course of the moon increases or decreases these diseases." John Calvin, *In Harmoniam Matthaeo, Marco et Luca Compositam Commentarii, Ad Editionem Amstelodamensem* ed. (Berolini: Apud Gustavum Eichler, 1833), 2.124; 1.127; *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 2.322; 1.245, translation mine.

<sup>89</sup> Perhaps one of the best examples of this is Pringle's translator's notes in Calvin's *Harmony*. He refers to views, such as those held by Calvin, as no longer held except "by the unlearned, and countenances of exploded theory," no more than we hold that the sun revolves around the earth. Pringle, *Harmony*, 1.245, translator's note 1. Others include: John Wilkinson, "The Case of the Epileptic Boy" *Expository Times* 79 (November 1967), 40-2; Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*, 50; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 88.

<sup>90</sup> This is not to argue as Foucault does that there are no objects prior to discourse. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965).



concerning Jesus' authority, his redeeming a fallen race, and the story's relationship with the previous pericope concerning Jesus' transformation.

The hermeneutical resources which we may uncover from the past by examining the reception of a text and the semiotic shifts which are revealed in this process are not merely for the sake of history. The resources which are recovered may offer insights or possible solutions to the questions we currently face, such as the debate over homosexuality. This debate, in particular, demonstrates that paradigm shifts are not something relegated to historical study, but demonstrate that they occur in the present and require the church to formulate new answers to new questions based on how we define and understand a topic such as homosexuality.<sup>91</sup>

### III. THE QUESTION AND RELEVANCE OF THE "CLASSIC"

Classic texts play an important role in reception theory. However, before we can discuss that role we must first define what we mean when we label a text as a 'classic.' Traditionally this term has been applied in three different ways. First, it is used to designate works from a specific period of literary history, most often in reference to the classics of Greek and Latin literature. Second, the term 'classic' is used to designate the greatest works of literature or what is accepted as being the best representative works from a particular period. And finally, it refers to those texts which are considered part of the reading curriculum in an educational system; texts chosen for their value to teach morality, good taste, and the values of a tradition.<sup>92</sup>

#### A. Classic Gadamer

As a student, Gadamer was educated in the study of the classics and his hermeneutic is, to a large extent, concerned with the relevance of classical texts as bearers of truth claims.<sup>93</sup> The study and relevance of classic texts betrayed the weakness of the

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<sup>91</sup> Even among those who research homosexuality there does not appear to be a consensus yet. Michael Ruse, *Homosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1988), 265-7; D. Cappon, *Toward an Understanding of Homosexuality* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), vii.

<sup>92</sup> Wolfgang Bernard Fleischmann, "Classicism," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Frank J. Warnke Alexander Preminger and O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 136-41; René Wellek, "The Term and Concept of 'Classicism' in Literary History," in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century: Papers Presented at the John Hopkins University Humanities Seminar, 1963*, ed. Earl R. Wasserman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965), 105-28. For an excellent reader on the classic see: W. J. Bate, ed. *Criticism: The Major Texts* (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).

<sup>93</sup> Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 45; Robert R. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics: The Early Thinking of Hans-Georg*



“naive scheme of history-as-research” for Gadamer. Under this scheme, the normative and pedagogical value of the classic was destroyed as the historical critical approach reduced the classic to a mere ‘relic’ from the past. Nietzsche registered a similar complaint. The problem with the historical critical method was not that it raised to consciousness the reader’s historical distance from the classic text, but that it immobilised the classic.<sup>94</sup> We may consider Augustine’s works great classics but historical study only subjects them to “answer a thousand impertinent questions.”<sup>95</sup>

After World War I, various scholars began to recognise the normative value of the classic alongside its historicity.<sup>96</sup> One of Gadamer’s concerns is that hermeneutics does justice to both of the classic’s dimensions: its historicity and its normativity. The normative element of a classic text is its most important trait according to Gadamer. Its authority cannot be exhausted through historical study because it is primarily not a statement about the past but it is an address to the present. “The classical represents an ideal of excellence that remains compelling to us in spite of critical reflection upon certain aspects of it.”<sup>97</sup> The traditional definitions of the classic are inadequate because they failed to address the manner in which the classic addresses the present.

How then does Gadamer define the ‘classic’? “It does not refer to a quality that we ascribe to a particular historical phenomena but to a mode of being historical: the historical process of preservation (*Bewahrung*) that, through constantly proving itself (*Bewährung*), allows something true (*ein Wahres*) to come into being.”<sup>98</sup> This appears to be a development of Hegel’s maxim that “What is rational is real and what is real is rational.”<sup>99</sup> What is revealed in history is filtered and tested through the rational process of thesis, antithesis, and sublation. What is rational, real, or true will prove itself in history and become embedded in the tradition. In the case of the classic though, it is not

*Gadamer* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 20 ff; Frederick G. Lawrence, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1981), xiii.

<sup>94</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins, 2nd rev. ed., *Library of Liberal Arts* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1985), 97. Jauss agrees with Nietzsche’s assessment and feels that the dominance of the historical method was largely responsible for creating the dissatisfaction with literary studies in the 1960’s. Jauss, “Limits and Tasks of Literary Hermeneutics,” 96.

<sup>95</sup> Watson, *Text and Truth*, 49.

<sup>96</sup> Sullivan, 18-64; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 286-7.

<sup>97</sup> Georgia Warnke, “Legitimate Prejudices,” *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 53 (1, 1997), 98.

<sup>98</sup> Gadamer, 287.

<sup>99</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 10. See my discussion of this topic in “Time is the Best Teacher,” in chapter 2.

so much the preservation of what is real or actual that is significant but the manner in which that enduring element of the classic continues to address successive historical horizons. The classic possesses a surplus of meaning which is preserved and constantly proves itself by the way it addresses new generations of readers. Classical texts are those which retain their normative hold in their interpretation and reinterpretation. "This is just what the word 'classical' means: that the duration of a work's power to speak directly is fundamentally unlimited."<sup>100</sup>

While the classical is historical, it stands above the changes in taste and culture that restrict other works to the horizon in which they originated. The truth which the classic conveys is accessible to every generation. "When we call something classical, there is a consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and that is independent of all circumstances of time — a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present."<sup>101</sup> Gadamer attempts to walk a fine line here. On the one hand, the classic is more than a text from a certain period or historical style. On the other hand, it does not possess some supra-historical value but is still a historically constituted and understood cultural artifact.<sup>102</sup>

This aspect of the classic reveals something significant about the transmission of knowledge through tradition. First, the normative value of the classic is based on the manner in which it is able to address each horizon with its truth claims. The normative claim of a classic text is not monological but is plurivocal. As a result, the meaning of a classical text will never be exhausted. Second, the manner by which the classic overcomes historical distance and addresses the present directly (not as an artifact from the past that requires interpretation) is an ideal case of effective historical consciousness in which the past and present horizons are fused. "*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.*"<sup>103</sup> And third, the classical exemplifies how tradition preserves the past. Tradition does not preserve or remember everything. Rather it preserves those elements of the past which have relevance for successive generations. "Thus the classical epitomizes a general character of historical being: preservation amid the ruins of time."<sup>104</sup> The classic's claim to truth are constantly

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<sup>100</sup> Gadamer, 290; Georgia Warnke, "Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences: A Gadamerian Critique of Rorty," *Inquiry*, 28 (1985), 355.

<sup>101</sup> Gadamer, 288.

<sup>102</sup> Gadamer, 286-8.

<sup>103</sup> Gadamer, 290.

<sup>104</sup> Gadamer, 289.



proven and preserved as they are passed down in the tradition in a manner that not only forms connections between the past and present but does so in a way that it addresses the present in a relevant and compelling manner. Thus, classical texts operate like threads which preserve and give continuity to the tapestry of a tradition's corporate knowledge.

### B. David Tracy: A Classic Gadamerian

David Tracy has, perhaps more than anyone else, adopted and applied Gadamer's concept of the classic in his work, *The Analogical Imagination*.<sup>105</sup> On the whole, Tracy faithfully follows Gadamer's thought and clearly demonstrates the relevance of the classic for theological study. In fact, one of the elements which Tracy thinks constitutes a theological text's future reception as a classic involves the manner in which it enters into conversation with the classics of the Christian tradition. "Barth's retrieval of Calvin; Lonergan and Rahner of Aquinas; Reinhold Niebuhr of Augustine; H. Richard Niebuhr of Jonathan Edwards; Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann of Luther" are all contemporary examples of how theologians have entered into dialogue with the classics of the Christian tradition.<sup>106</sup>

There are two aspects to Gadamer's thought which Tracy develops in particular. The classic (1) possesses an excess of meaning and (2) possesses a form of timelessness that while rooted in its own historicity, it addresses the contemporary reader.<sup>107</sup> The excess of meaning which a classic text possesses means that the truth of the classic is open for possible disclosure in every reader's horizon. The classic not only possesses an excess of meaning, but it actually encourages this through its interpretations.<sup>108</sup> The ability of the classic to disclose its truth claims in a relevant manner to each horizon is the basis for its timelessness. This is what gives the classic its normative status. "Thus do we name in these experiences, and these alone, 'classics.' Thus do we recognise, whether we name it so or not, a normative element in our cultural experience, experienced as a realized truth."<sup>109</sup> The experience of readers for the past two thousand years of realising new

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<sup>105</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981), especially chapter 3, "The Classic," 99-153.

<sup>106</sup> This is one of the main traits by which Tracy considers them as candidates for being recognised in the future as theological classics. Ibid., 104.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 113, 133. For Stout, the classic is the ideal example of how texts promote a diversity of interpretations. "The more interesting the text, the more readings we shall be able to give without simply repeating ourselves and our predecessors, and the more readings we shall want to give." Jeffrey Stout, "What is the Meaning of a Text?," *New Literary History*, 14 (1982), 9.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 108, also 113.

possibilities for existence which have arisen from their reading of the Bible would, according to the criteria of disclosive potential, firmly categorise the Bible as a classic.<sup>110</sup>

If the timelessness of the classic is grounded in the manner by which it addresses successive generations of readers, then the endurance of the classic is dependent upon its reception by its readers.<sup>111</sup> On the one hand, each generation must enter anew into direct dialogue with the classic text. "I can never repeat the classic to understand them. I must interpret them."<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, the classic addresses us indirectly through our tradition. The classic's disclosure of truth is so compelling that it becomes normative the moment it is experienced and as a result, it enters into the memory and prejudices of our tradition through its readers. "Its memory enters as a catalyst into all our other memories and, now subtly, now compellingly, transforms our perceptions of the real."<sup>113</sup> The classic is handed down to us directly as a text and indirectly through its effect on our tradition. "Every classic text, moreover, comes to any reader through the history of its effects (conscious and unconscious, enriching and ambiguous, emancipatory, and distorted) upon the present horizon of the reader."<sup>114</sup> "The classical legacy is a bequest the heirs cannot reject, for they have always inherited the classic even before having read them."<sup>115</sup> In this sense, our encounters with the classic will often be indirect, through second and third hand sources or references. They contribute to the formation of our prejudices. Classical commentaries and theological works partially constitute our preunderstanding of the Bible and will determine to a certain degree what we will recognise in the text and, hence, serve as pre-reflective criteria for the 'correctness' of an interpretation.<sup>116</sup> The normative status of the classic operates at both the reflective level, through the reader's experience of the text's truth claim, and at the pre-reflective level, through the prejudices of the tradition which have been partially constituted and defined by the classic texts.

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110 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *Trinity Journal*, 8 (1987), 50-51.

111 "The position defended here emphasizes, above all, the *reception* by the reader of the classical text." *Ibid.*, 118. Stendahl makes a very similar point, "For it is recognition that makes a classic a classic, not its inner qualities." Krister Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 103 (1984), 4.

112 *Ibid.*, 103.

113 *Ibid.*, 115.

114 *Ibid.*, 105.

115 E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), xiv.

116 See the section on "Performance and Tradition Formation" in chapter 2 for more on this.



If Tracy and Gadamer are correct, then the interpretation of a classic will involve a dual dialogue. The interpreter must engage the text in an open dialogue and allow the truth claims of the classic to exert themselves upon the reader. At the same time, the interpreter must expand this dialogue to include the history of the text's reception, its *Wirkungsgeschichte*.<sup>117</sup> There are two reasons why this second aspect of the dialogue is hermeneutically valuable. First, at the contemporary or synchronic level it allows the reader to check her understanding of the text against the wider perspective of her community. Second, at the historical or diachronic level it allows us to verify or correct our understanding against those of our tradition.<sup>118</sup> "If one's own experience has been verified by other readers, especially by the community of capable readers over the centuries, the reflective judgement should prove that much more secure."<sup>119</sup>

This is not an exercise in the kind of historical knowledge which Gadamer and Jauss criticise. Rather, the goal is to develop the interpreter's effective-historical consciousness, *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*. The compelling disclosure of truth of the classic text occurs at the first, or aesthetic experience, level of reading, according to Jauss' three levels of reading. At the second and third levels of reading, the interpreter must attempt to bring to consciousness their preunderstanding of the text so that they may be brought into play with the text. As the interpreter engages the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the classic text it opens the possibilities for him to realise his place within the history of this text's transmission, for verifying his interpretation, for uncovering ideological and theological distortions in the transmission of the classic, and for intersubjective 'boundaries' to determine what counts as a valid interpretation to be introduced. "This application is historically grounded in contemporary conditions of reception ... for it binds meaning with significance, suggesting that the text's current meaning is a reorientation of its historical significance."<sup>120</sup>

The manner in which this type of study opens the reader to the provocative and transformational power of the classic text is an important idea which cannot be overlooked. This provocation takes place when we realise the historical distance between

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<sup>117</sup> Tracy, 131.

<sup>118</sup> At the historical level the interpreter should attempt to "render explicit the history of the influences, effects, and interpretations as well as the history — partly traditional, partly personal — of the interpreter's own preunderstanding of the tradition." Ibid., 120.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Eckert, "Hermeneutics in the Classroom: An Application of Reception Theory," *College English Association Critic*, 46 (3-4, 1984), 15, emphasis mine.

the classic and our horizon which raises our prejudices to consciousness and brings them into play with the claims of the text.<sup>121</sup>

As a single interpreter, for example, I may recognize the challenge to my present preunderstanding of a text of Ignatius of Loyola which Roland Barthes' vitalizing reading now allows — even when I do not accept Barthes' reading of this text as the most adequate one. I may recognize as a second example, the challenge to my preunderstanding which T. S. Eliot's readings of Shelley, Milton or Vergil provide — even when I do not finally accept his rejection of Shelley, his ambivalence towards Milton, his astonishing awe in front of Vergil. ... Yet in their interpretations of these texts at once challenge mine and, by that challenge, they inevitably transform, however subtly, my own interpretations of the same texts.<sup>122</sup>

### C. Jauss: When is Classic a Classic?

Like Gadamer, Jauss' hermeneutical theory arose from his work on classical texts and, in a large part, is developed for their interpretation. Gadamer was primarily interested in classical Greek texts, especially Aristotle and Plato's work. Jauss, on the other hand, tends to have a much wider field of interest, but it was his work on the literature of medieval animal epics, the *Songs of Roland*, which raised hermeneutical questions for him. In particular, he was concerned with how the modern reader should approach medieval texts, which were once widely received but are so distant from the modern reader's horizon of expectations that they present the challenge of the "forgotten horizon of a closed past."<sup>123</sup>

The question of 'timelessness' is the greatest point of difference between Jauss and Gadamer on the subject of the classic. The timelessness of the classic is problematic at best according to Jauss.<sup>124</sup> For Gadamer, the classic text continues to speak to each horizon "as if it were saying something to me in particular."<sup>125</sup> The classical tragedies of Greece are an example of this. While they were originally performed for certain festivals, their power to endure meant they were performed in new and different situations, until they are no longer experienced as performances today but are primarily read as texts. The reason they have endured as classics is because the original question which they sought to

<sup>121</sup> Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 142.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-1.

<sup>123</sup> Jauss, "The Identity of the Poetic Text," in *Identity of the Literary Text*, 159; 159-65. The following illustrate Jauss' concern in this area. *Idem*, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," *New Literary History*, 10 (Winter, 1979), 181-229; *idem*, "Thesis on the Transition," 144-7.

<sup>124</sup> Wlad Godzich, "Introduction," in *Aesthetic Experience*, xxxii; Holub, *Reception Theory*, 44.

<sup>125</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 577.



answer possesses a “superiority to and freedom from its origins.”<sup>126</sup> The classic overcomes historical distance because the question which the classic sought to answer addresses itself to each horizon directly. Tracy adapts this concept to a theological framework. Questions concerning human finitude, mortality, estrangement, and sinfulness are examples of questions which possess this “superiority” and address everyone.<sup>127</sup> While Gadamer denies that this implies any type of ‘supra-historical’ character to the classic or to its question, Jauss thinks that Gadamer has not adequately defended against this and, as a result, is liable of it. If Tracy’s work is a faithful extension of Gadamer’s, then we can easily see how this view slides into a form of supra-historicalism.<sup>128</sup> “It becomes a classic: *always* retrievable, *always* in need of appreciative appropriation and critical evaluation, *always* disclosive and transformative with its truth of importance, *always* open to new applications and thereby new interpretations.”<sup>129</sup>

The classic is more historical than Gadamer and Tracy realise according to Jauss. Classics come and go with the passing of time. “Jauss refuses to see in the enduring character of great works anything other than a temporary stabilization of the dynamic of reception.”<sup>130</sup> A good example of this is the reception of *Fanny* and *Madame Bovary* which I discussed in chapter three. Even though many recognise *Madame Bovary* as a literary classic today, it took years before the reading public could appreciate Flaubert’s narrative style and the manner in which his novel challenged the morals at that time.<sup>131</sup> This demonstrates one of the more important features concerning the classic: historical distance is required in order to recognise a text as a classic. “If ‘it is only by hindsight,’ as

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. Jauss claims that the superiority of the question over its origin is based on Gadamer’s concept of *mimesis* as ‘recognition.’ In the classic, we recognise a question which resonates with our experience of the world. Jauss, *Towards*, 30-1; Godzich, “Introduction,” in *Aesthetic Experience*, xxxvi.

<sup>127</sup> Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 164.

<sup>128</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.172. Georgia Warnke recognises this problem in Gadamer’s work but still attempts to defend his view against this charge. Warnke, *Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 105. In his latest work, Gadamer appears to modify his view and suggests that historical distance is required for the reception of the classic. Gadamer, “Reflections on my Philosophical Journey,” trans. Richard E. Palmer, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago and London: Open Court, 1997), 45.

<sup>129</sup> Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 115. “When we read a classic ...we find that our present horizon is *always* provoked, sometimes challenged, *always* transformed by the power extended by the classic’s claim.” Ibid., 134, emphasis mine in both quotes.

<sup>130</sup> Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 3.172.

<sup>131</sup> See chapter 3, “Thesis 3.” Jauss documents the various reactions of critics when *Fanny* and *Madame Bovary* were published in: “*Die beiden Fassungen von Flauberts Education sentimentale*,” *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, 2 (1958), 96-7.



Eliot says, 'that a classic can be known as such' . . . that is because the classic has not distinguishing characteristics that enable one to recognize it in the contemporary."<sup>132</sup> If a work is immediately and widely recognised then it risks being too closely aligned with the expectation of the horizon in which it appeared. As time passes, and the horizons of expectations shift, such a work may quickly become irrelevant, or being classified as 'culinary art,' as was the case with *Fanny*.

The passing of time allows the norm forming potential of the text to shape the expectations so that of succeeding generations of readers are able to appreciate the text more fully, and even recognise it as a classic. In the instance of *Madame Bovary*, it was through a small group of connoisseurs that this novel was first received and the norms of how to read this book were introduced and spread to ever wider circles of readers creating new literary norms and expectations in the process.<sup>133</sup> "The 'verdict of the ages' on a literary work is more than merely 'the accumulated judgment of other readers, critics, viewers, and even professors'; it is the successive unfolding of the potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualized in the stages of its historical reception as it discloses itself to understanding judgment, so long as this faculty achieves in a controlled fashion the 'fusion of horizons' in the encounter with tradition."<sup>134</sup> The various concretizations of meaning of the text present the interpreter with both adequate and inappropriate understandings of the text, fruitful questions for further dialogue, or deadends to be avoided. "Only as the horizon changes and expands with each subsequent historical materialization, do responses to the work legitimize particular possibilities of understanding, imitation, transformation, and continuation -- in short, structures of exemplary character that condition the process of the formation of literary tradition."<sup>135</sup> It is through the reception of a text through history that we recognise the normative status of a particular text, confer on it the status of 'classic,' and realise what constitutes an appropriate understanding of its meaning as this unfolds in different horizons of expectations.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Joel Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 135. Tracy also implicitly realises this when he discusses which modern theological works are candidates for becoming classics in the future. Tracy, 104-5.

<sup>133</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 28.

<sup>134</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 30 quoting, René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 17.

<sup>135</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 64.

<sup>136</sup> See "Performance and Tradition Formation," in chapter 2. "This logic manifests itself in the formation and transformation of the aesthetical canons and, changing horizons of interpretations, renders possible the distinction between the arbitrary and consenting,



The passing of time is also a double-edged sword. Not only is it needed to recognise and appreciate a classic, but it can also reduce a classic to an obscure corner of a tradition's literature. As Heidegger pointed out, tradition possesses a levelling down power which can remove the provocative or normative status from any text.<sup>137</sup>

Collingwood also realised this when he wrote that the original question which the classic sought to answer can be forgotten over time.<sup>138</sup> *One of the goals of reception theory is to provide a means by which classic texts which have fallen from their classical status may be rescued from the dust of history.* Through the historical reconstruction of the original horizon of expectations we can grasp to some degree the manner in which the text provoked, denied or challenged its original audience's expectations. Also, the recovery of the alterity of the classic text raises the 'otherness' of the text to consciousness for the reader and opens the possibility for the reader to engage in a more meaningful, or appropriate aesthetic experience of the text (as opposed to a naive assimilation of the text to his horizon or running into the closed horizon of a historically distant text).

The classical character of the so-called masterworks especially belongs to this character of the second horizontal change; their beautiful form that has become self-evident, and their seemingly unquestionable "eternal meaning" bring them, according to an aesthetics of reception, dangerously close to the irresistibly convincing and enjoyable "culinary" art, so that *it requires a special effort to read them "against the grain" of the accustomed experience* to catch sight of their artistic character once again.<sup>139</sup>

#### D. Classic and Reception Theory

So far we have examined how Gadamer rescued the classical text from historical positivism which was correct in locating the text in its past horizon but missed how the classic addresses later horizons of readers. Gadamer attempted to reconcile the historicity and its ability to address future horizons directly of the classic in his hermeneutic. David Tracy's work, not only demonstrates the strengths of Gadamer's position but also betrays its weaknesses, especially in relation to the question of the classic becoming a supra-historical category.

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between the merely 'original', and the normative interpretations." Jauss, "Limits and Tasks of Literary Hermeneutics," 118.

<sup>137</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 165; Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience*, 16; Dorothea Frede, "The Question of Being: Heidegger's Project," in *The Cambridge Companion of Heidegger*, Charles B. Guignon ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 60.

<sup>138</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 39.

<sup>139</sup> Jauss, *Towards*, 25-6, emphasis mine. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 142.

Hans Robert Jauss' work, I argued, represents a needed correction to Gadamer's hermeneutic in this area. In particular, he is able to retain the normative element of the classic while at the same time conceiving it as a thoroughly historical concept. Classics come, classics go, and sometimes they need to be retrieved from the levelling power of tradition. The dialogical relationship between the reader's horizon and the text represents a positive contribution to this topic by Jauss and helps to explain how classics are recognised, and why they lose their provocative and normative status. What I hope to accomplish in following section is to examine the relevance of the classic in relation to the practice of reception theory and biblical interpretation.

### 1. *What is a Classic?*

The question of "What counts as a classic?" needs to be differentiated more than we have done so far. On the one hand, I agree with the main traits of what classifies as a classic which I have discussed so far. A classic text is one which possesses some degree of normativity and has proven itself over time. On the other hand, such broad strokes are not very useful for the practice of reception theory in relation to biblical interpretation, rather we need to consider how different types of classics function within a tradition.

For example, Stendahl considers the Bible a classic in that it is a work that has been "considered worth attention beyond its time,... beyond its space."<sup>140</sup> I doubt that many theologians would disagree with this. However, is this use of the classic comparable with classifying Calvin's commentaries as classics? While they have both proven themselves through history, the degree of normativity between the two cannot be compared. Wittgenstein's question of "What is a game?" provides a helpful direction to pursue in relation to the question of "What is a classic?" For Wittgenstein a term such as "game" is a blurred concept, there is no one definition for what counts as a game. Rather there are similarities which games share that "crop up and disappear" depending on which instances of games you are considering. These similarities are best described as "family resemblances."<sup>141</sup> In the same manner, there are many different forms which the classic may take and to look for one definition would, by necessity, restrict our investigation from the start. Rather we should "look and see" what is recognised as a

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<sup>140</sup> Stendahl qualifies this classification of the classic by saying that there is probably no "truly global classic" which is valid across all cultures. Krister Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 103 (1984): 4-6. The New Testament also qualifies as a classic for Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 259.

<sup>141</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 65-72.



classic and then consider why it is a classic, how it functions within its place in the tradition, and what it shares in common with other classics.

If we return to the Bible as a classic, MacIntyre's concept of 'foundational texts' helps us to grasp this use of the term classic. Traditions (religious as well as national) are often founded on authoritative texts and the interpretive debate which partially constitutes that tradition will involve an extended argument over the meaning and significance of that tradition's authoritative texts. The shape and direction a tradition takes will be determined to a certain degree by the critical interpretations and application of those foundational texts.

For such a tradition, if it is to flourish at all, as we have already learned, has to be embodied in a set of texts which function as the authoritative point of departure for tradition-constituted enquiry and which remain as essential points of reference for enquiry and activity, for argument, debate, and conflict within that tradition. Those texts to which this canonical status is assigned are treated both as having a fixed meaning embodied in them and also as always open to rereading, so that every tradition becomes to some degree a tradition of critical reinterpretation in which one and the same body of texts, with of course some addition and subtraction, is put to the question, and to successively different sets of questions, as a tradition unfolds.<sup>142</sup>

A tradition is constituted by the critical reinterpretation of its authoritative body of texts which is put to successively different sets of questions as a tradition unfolds. With each change in the readers' horizon new questions and debates about the meaning and role of the authoritative text will be raised. "Thus a major source of disagreement and debate within a tradition will be 'interpretative' in the older, narrow sense of textual exposition."<sup>143</sup> The constant reinterpretation of the tradition's foundational texts and the application of these interpretations to the tradition's practices are what constitute the ongoing life of the tradition. Powell applies MacIntyre's ideas to the history of the interpretation of the American Constitution. While the U. S. Constitution serves as the foundational text for what Powell terms the tradition of 'Constitutionalism,' the decisions rendered by the courts and the scholarly commentaries on the Constitution also serve a normative role.<sup>144</sup> In particular, legal interpretations and decisions (adjudications) do not serve merely as precedents for the practice of constitutional law in

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<sup>142</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 383.

<sup>143</sup> H. Jefferson Powell, *The Moral Tradition of American Constitutionalism: A Theological Interpretation* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 28-9; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 263.

<sup>144</sup> Powell, 29-30, 49.

the future, but they are related to the internal goods of the tradition.<sup>145</sup> Within this tradition, Powell identifies a handful of significant legal decisions which played an authoritative role in future decisions or which changed the course of the tradition of Constitutional interpretation.<sup>146</sup> It is because these decisions are constantly referred to in legal debate, the normative status they serve, and the manner in which they have become part of the dramatic narrative which defines the tradition of Constitutionalism, I would argue that they serve as classic texts. In this sense, we can label the Bible as the foundational text for the Christian tradition and commentaries such as Calvin's or Karl Barth's commentary on Romans as classic texts of the interpretive dialogue of the tradition.

If the Bible functions as the foundational classic which serves to shape and define the Christian tradition, then how do classic commentaries and theological texts function within the tradition? First, as Thomas Kuhn brought out, they are used within the educational and professional institutions. Kuhn makes this point in relation to the authority which textbooks possess within scientific paradigms. They introduce the students and members of a research community to what counts as data, theories, and the body of articulated problems, "to which the scientific community is committed at the time they are written."<sup>147</sup> At the same time the educational and technical literature of the scientific community equips its members with a vocabulary to express their research and thought and provides them with examples of what counts as problems and solutions.<sup>148</sup> If this is the case in the sciences, then the role of classic texts within the humanities and theology is perhaps even more important. The pedagogical value of the classic operates in a manner similar as textbooks do in Kuhn's model in that they are used within seminaries and universities to introduce the students to what counts as a theological question and what is considered an adequate answer. Classic commentaries serve to illustrate the bounds of what is considered appropriate performance of the score of the biblical text. Theological classics serve an archaeological function in the way they are employed within the institutions and educational processes to introduce the history

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<sup>145</sup> These internal goods include the respect for past interpretations, logical coherence, and adherence to the norms of legal argument. Powell, 117-8.

<sup>146</sup> Such cases include the Dred Scott case in which a slave attempted to sue his master for freedom when they moved to the free state of Illinois, *Lochner v. N.Y.* which examined the issue of how long an employer may demand its employees work per week, and *Brown v. The Board of Education* which struck down the segregation laws. Powell, 120-32, 139-43, 165-72.

<sup>147</sup> Kuhn, *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*, 136; *idem*, *Essential Tension*, 230.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 177, 187.



of the Christian tradition and its thought. While the institutional textbooks in the sciences are rewritten after a paradigm shift, in the humanities classical texts continue to be employed after paradigm shifts. This not only introduces an element of continuity in the tradition, but is also familiarises those who read them with alternative “problems [and] solutions which he must ultimately evaluate for himself.”<sup>149</sup> If textbooks develop the technical reasoning within the scientific community, classics should develop the *phronesis* and historically-effective consciousness in theology and the other humanities.<sup>150</sup>

Second, classics often play a central role in defining and shaping the direction of a tradition. They serve as forks in the road, either by inducing a shift in thought or by indicating that such a shift has taken place. When a tradition enters a period of epistemological crisis, Jauss argues that this is often first experienced and expressed in the arts and literature.<sup>151</sup> Perhaps the best known example of how an interpretation sparked a theological paradigm shift occurs in Luther’s understanding of Romans 1:17. At the personal level, this transformed Luther’s entire understanding of the Bible, and at the corporate level, its norm forming function is dramatically displayed in the Protestant understanding of the Scriptures and doctrine of salvation.<sup>152</sup>

In other instances, the classics follows the horizontal shifts which has already occurred. William Carey’s “An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens” is an example of a commentary on Matthew 28:18-20 following such a shift, the ramifications of which had not been clearly articulated until his work was published. When Carey wrote his essay, the Protestant church as a whole had already taken its first steps in various missionary ventures. By contrast, William Carey came from a hyper-Calvinistic dissenting Baptist church background which believed the command of Matthew 28:18-20 was no longer binding on the church because there were no successors to the apostles.<sup>153</sup> At a pastors’ conference in 1786,

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>150</sup> For an extended discussion on the nature and role of *phronesis* see the section entitled, “Hermeneutical Knowledge and Tradition,” in chapter 1.

<sup>151</sup> Jauss, “The Literary Process of Modernism from Rousseau to Adorno,” *Cultural Critique*, trans. Lisa C. Roetzel (Winter, 1988-1989), 34-6; idem, “1912: Threshold to an Epoch. Apollinaire’s *Zone* and *Lundi Rue Christine*,” *Yale French Studies*, trans. Roger Blood, 74 (1988), 56-8.

<sup>152</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 35; MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” in *Paradigms and Revolutions*, 61.

<sup>153</sup> J. Van Den Berg, *Constrained By Jesus’ Love: An Inquiry into the Motives of the Missionary Awakening in Great Britain in the Period Between 1698 and 1815* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1956), 165. This also demonstrates Jauss’ point that any synchronic time frame will be made up of different ‘time curves’ of literature and its reception. In Carey’s instance, his particular denominational background represents a ‘time curve’ of the reception of



Carey raised the question as to whether the Great Commission may still be binding upon the church. The president of the denomination, Dr. Ryland, reacted very strongly to Carey's question. "You are a miserable enthusiast, to propose such a question. Nothing certainly can come to pass in this matter before a new Pentecost accompanied by a new gift of miracles and tongues promises success to the commission of Christ as in the beginning."<sup>154</sup> In order to counter the hyper-Calvinistic presuppositions of his particular denomination, Carey had to present a very articulate and much stronger argument than if he had been addressing the larger Protestant movement rather than his local dissenting church community. His argument was not based on new insights but rather involved a summary of previous positions concerning the nature of the church and knowledge about the various ethnic groups around the world which had come from British colonisation. While various Protestant leaders had argued that Matthew 28:18-20 was a mandate for missions and was still binding on the church, it was not until Carey published his essay that this interpretation was widely accepted and the debate over the applicability of the Great Commission on the contemporary church was ended.<sup>155</sup> Because of the "Enquiry in the Obligation" William Carey is known as the father of modern missions. "Since the time of William Carey it has been customary to take the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel as the fundamental mandate for mission."<sup>156</sup> Both of these aspects of the classic interpretation, inducing and indicating a shift in horizons, are what we expect if the

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Matthew 28:18-20 which was quite different from the larger Christian community. Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 36-7; idem, *Aesthetic Experience*, 269-70.

<sup>154</sup> Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time*, 3d ed., trans. George Robson (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1901; reprint, New York: Fleming Revell Company, 1906), 75.

<sup>155</sup> "The Moravians' challenge to mission went unheeded, for the Herrnhutters addressed the Enlightenment's spiritual coldness. But sixty-five years later, when Carey summoned Christians to missionary obedience, he spoke to hearts stirred by the Evangelical Awakening. The response that issued then has continued to grow." William Richey Hogg, "The Rise of Protestant Missionary Concern, 1517-1914," in *The Theology of Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961.), 106-7. George Smith, writing in 1885, called it "the first and still the greatest missionary treatise in the English language." This small book reflected his theological and geographical insights. Almost one fourth of its 87 pages were charts on the statistics of various nations. While his theological argument was not elaborate, he carefully set out a Biblical and historical argument for missions. "Introduction to 'An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens,'" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carry Library, 1981), 228.

<sup>156</sup> Leslie Newbigin, "Cross-currents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6 (October, 1982), 146; Donald McGavran, *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 20



meaning of the text is something that is concretized when the horizon of the text is mediated with the horizon of the reader.

## 2. *Classics and Continuity*

One of the strengths of Gadamer's position concerns the way in which classics are proven and preserved as they are passed down through history. The classic creates connections between the past and the present in a manner which is relevant and compelling for the contemporary reader. In this section, I would like to examine how they perform this role at both the synchronic and diachronic levels.

On a broadly synchronic axis, the classic gathers and defines the literature of its period. The heterogeneous collection of texts from a particular period coalesce into a fairly homogeneous family of texts as successive generations of readers relate them to their horizon of expectations and in this process these texts become part of the prejudices of a common horizon of expectations.<sup>157</sup> Certain works are recognised as being the high point, or 'classic' expression of that period or style of literature or art. As such, these texts gather the other texts of that period under them, even those which were originally alternatives or rivals to the text which was eventually recognised as a classic.<sup>158</sup> A classic can also create and define the norms for a genre by which successive works are judged, the "classic is also the seed that generates a line of successors and thus initiates a history."<sup>159</sup>

In either case, in retrospect or prospect, the advent of the classic is not just historical but is a historic event. It gathers a history to it, organizes and unifies history. The classic makes history and thus is not merely the object of historical research but also its condition. The locus of unity in diversity, the classic is the still point of sameness and continuity in the succession of generations.<sup>160</sup>

Calvin's commentaries demonstrate how classic texts contribute to continuity at the synchronic level. During the early phases of the Reformation, various Reformers experimented with different genres or styles for biblical commentaries. Philip Melancthon approached the exposition of the Scriptures in order to expound

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<sup>157</sup> Jauss; "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," 38. See my discussion of Jauss' sixth thesis in chapter 3.

<sup>158</sup> My argument at this point is built on the levelling down effect of tradition which Heidegger argued was one of the dominant elements which gave tradition continuity. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 164-5; Frede, "The Question of Being: Heidegger's Project," 60. The classic represents a unity in diversity in the manner that it gathers and organises history. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 139; Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 3.173.

<sup>159</sup> Weinsheimer, 138.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.



theological *loci*. This meant that the issues discussed were not primarily related to the subject matter of the text but were organised around and determined theological *loci*. The result is that the commentary uses the text in order to reach the concepts which Melanchthon thought they taught. Martin Bucer perceived the weakness of Melanchthon's approach and attempted to synthesise it with a running commentary which followed the text more closely. While his commentary follows the text more closely, it jumps to a theological discussion when relevant issues are mentioned in the text. "The result, however, was two books in one.... The reader was not made to enter into an engagement with the document and its words, for the very length and difficulty of the work erected a formidable barrier between the apostle and his readers."<sup>161</sup> Calvin, by contrast, adopted the same model he used for his earlier commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*. His biblical commentaries are characterised by a structure which is immediately familiar to most reader's today: the original text opens each section of the commentary followed by his comments on the passage which follows the order of the text. The combination of Calvin's exegetical style and his emphasis on clarity and brevity are three of the distinctive features which continue to function as norms for how commentaries are written today.<sup>162</sup> As classics, Calvin's commentaries 'gather and define' our view of Reformation commentaries, that is until one actually reads other commentaries from that period and realises the diversity of commentary genre which was practised among the Reformers.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Thomas H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 88.

<sup>162</sup> Karl Barth is a vivid illustration of this when he pleads for a return to Calvin's style of commentary. "For example, place the works of Jülicher side by side with that of Calvin: how energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent! ... If a man persuades himself that Calvin's method can be dismissed ... he betrays himself as one who has never worked upon the interpretation of Scripture." Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, translated for the sixth edition ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968; from *Der Romanbrief*, 1918), 7. The two most important virtues for the commentator according to Calvin are: clarity and brevity. Parker, 85-93. Even the genre of a Harmony, which Calvin adopted and modified from Osiander, functioned as a norm for future commentators. Bugenhagen's *Monotessaron historiae evangelicae lationogermanicum* (1566) and Martin Chemnitz' *Harmoniae* (1641-45) are two examples of later commentaries which were patterned on Calvin's work. Seán Kealy, *Matthew's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation*, Mellen Biblical Press Series, vol. 55a (Lewiston, N.Y. and Lampeter Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 226, 238.

<sup>163</sup> For examples of the different commentaries from that period see "Reception During the Reformation," in the following chapter. A similar case could be made for other commentaries such as Peter Abelard's work on Romans. Abelard's commentary under the pseudonym of Hugh of St. Victor, "*Allegoriae in Novum Testamentum*" Migne *PL*,



Classics preserve and bind a tradition together on the diachronic axis also. Our dialogue with classical texts occurs at three different levels according to Jauss. First, the classic shapes our prejudices at a pre-reflective level. The classic's compelling disclosure of truth has entered into the memory and prejudices of our tradition through previous readers and interpreters. At the same time, we are already familiar with the classic through secondary and tertiary sources, references, and allusions in other works.<sup>164</sup> Second, at the institutional level, the classic often plays an important role in the educational curriculum. This is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the classic text can be used to develop the *phronesis* and historically-effective consciousness of the individual and community as Hegel and Gadamer argue. On the other hand, if the classic is not presented in a manner which is open to the 'otherness' of the text, then it is in danger of being assimilated into the present horizon of expectations. We naively "reproject our present horizon" onto the classic and as a result, our horizon of expectations is not enlarged, provoked, or changed from this type of interaction with the classic.<sup>165</sup> In such cases, one must ask if this text can be considered a classic in that context.<sup>166</sup> This is why the fusion or mediation of horizons must remain an active synthesis by raising to consciousness the historical distance, and the tension this creates, between the classic and the present horizon of the reader.<sup>167</sup>

175. 879-904; Rolf Peppermüller, *Abaelards Auslegung des Römerbriefs, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Philosophie des Mittelalters, Texte und Untersuchungen*, vol. 10 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972).

<sup>164</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Continuity of History and the Existential Movement," *Philosophy Today*, trans. Thomas Wren, 16 (1972), 238. "The corpus of classic texts constitutes an iterable linguistic praxis; and the so-called intertextuality of literature thus appears to be, at least in part, a recourse for overcoming chronic change and localism in the connotations of the vocabulary." Félix Martínez Bonati, "The Stability of Literary Meaning," in *Identity of the Literary Text*, 240.

<sup>165</sup> Jauss, "Minutes of the Colloquy," 53. The ideological criticism that classics can function as tools for suppression or domination reveals the danger of assimilating such texts naively into our present horizon. However, a classical text can still function even within such distorted conditions of communication. Warnke, "Legitimate Prejudices," 98.

<sup>166</sup> One of the dangers here is that the classic will be reduced to the level of the 'textbook' as Kuhn uses the term. In this case, the classic's assimilation to the present horizon will only confirm the prejudices, methods, and practices of the current community. The diversity of questions and answers embodied within the tradition will be homogenised and the reader will most likely view his tradition as a linear accumulation of knowledge or progress from the earliest period until the present. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 165-7, 177; idem, *Essential Tension*, 228-31; Ormond Rush, "Reception Hermeneutics and the "Development" of Doctrine: An Alternative Model," *Pacifica*, 6 (1993), 128. Gadamer also raised this point, that the naive assimilation of a text is one element which gives rise to continuity within a tradition. Gadamer, "The Continuity of History," 238.

<sup>167</sup> Jauss, "Minutes of the Colloquy," 52; idem, *Towards*, 25-6; Gadamer, "The Continuity of History," 239.



Third, the classic contributes to the continuity of a tradition through what Jauss terms the 'summit dialogue' of authors.<sup>168</sup> If the lowest level is pre-reflective, and the second level can operate either through a naive assimilation or active mediation between the horizons, the highest level takes place through the reflective dialogue between authors who are often considered part of a tradition's literary canon.

Pascal as a reader of Montaigne, Rousseau as a reader of Augustine, Lévi-Strauss as a reader of Rousseau are examples for the summit level of dialogue between authors. The dialogue between authors becomes significant (*Epoche-machen*) in a literary-historical sense through the appropriation and reassessment of the predecessor, who was recognized as being significant.<sup>169</sup>

This is the level at which the open and active conversation with our tradition takes place.<sup>170</sup>

The summit dialogue between authors is both archaeological and anticipatory in nature. The way in which an author revives a concept or question from an earlier author is an example of the archaeological function of the classic.<sup>171</sup> The biblical commentary fulfils this function not only in the manner that it seeks to explicate the biblical text but also when it revives or enters into dialogue with a previous interpreter's commentary.<sup>172</sup> In the next chapter, I hope to demonstrate this point by examining how Aquinas and Calvin revive aspects of Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast.

Not everyone accepts the archaeological function of the classic. Michel Foucault claims that any idea of a relationship we may think we possess with a classic is mistaken. When cultural paradigm shifts take place, our relationship with the classical texts is broken.<sup>173</sup> The main example he employs is how our relationship with the classics of Rome and Greece was severed during the cultural shifts of the Enlightenment. For Foucault, history is not continuous but is a chain of broken epochs which are transitioned by wholesale transformations in the discursive practices which constituted

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<sup>168</sup> Jauss uses two German metaphorical terms to describe this level. The first is "*die Gipfeleben*," the highest level, or better, the peak level. The second is "*Hohenkamm*," or ridge of high peaks. The image is that of the silhouette of ridge line of a mountain range. See: Jauss, "*Der Leser*," 336-7.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>170</sup> Gadamer, "The Continuity of History," 238-9.

<sup>171</sup> Jauss, "Tradition, Innovation and Aesthetic Experience," 383.

<sup>172</sup> Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 104-5.

<sup>173</sup> Instead of paradigm shifts, Foucault coined the term '*episteme*' which referred to "the total set of relations that unite at a given period the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems." Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (N.Y.: Pantheon, 1972), 191. See also: *idem*, *The Order of Things* (N.Y.: Random House, 1970).



our culture.<sup>174</sup> The texts which are recognised as classics are the result of political decisions to legitimate the existing social order. Their role is to ideologically condition the people.<sup>175</sup> There are two problems with Foucault's position. First, as Cornel West points out, this position is based on the concept of the unending play of interpretation which I argued was not valid in chapter two.<sup>176</sup> If we accept Foucault's position, then no one can claim that their view is better than the accepted one.

In a world where there is only the unending play of difference nothing can rightly be evaluated to a place of continuing validity, not even the equal entitlement of the conflicting *differentia* — their right to be heard, their right to equal participation in the field of discourse, and so forth. Nothing can claim permanent entitlement, nothing superiority, not even justice. The allowable result is what Fox-Genovese calls the 'worst forms of political domination,' namely, the rule of power.<sup>177</sup>

Second, this position misses the fact that in the humanities classics cross paradigm boundaries.<sup>178</sup> Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the summit dialogue between authors.

Since every act of interpretation is provisional, classical texts anticipate successive acts of interpretation.<sup>179</sup> The socially formative power of classics can be seen in the way they can serve as historical markers which define a period or induce paradigm shifts. As such, the classic anticipates the future effects it will have upon its tradition. The enduring nature of the classic and its normative status combine so that the anticipatory and archaeological functions of the classic fulfil an important cohesive role within a tradition.

The summit dialogue level is the most significant level for researching the reception of a text for two reasons. The first is obvious, this is the level which defines the shape of a tradition the most. It is at this level that new, or authoritative interpretations

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<sup>174</sup> Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 146.

<sup>175</sup> Brown, *Boundaries of our Habitation*, 68; Mary O'Brien "Feminism and the Politics of Education," *Interchange*, 17 (1986), 93.

<sup>176</sup> Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 226; also see my discussion in chapter 2, "The Enlightenment: Pushing Play to One Side of the Field."

<sup>177</sup> Brown, 71.

<sup>178</sup> Félix Martínez Bonati, "The Stability of Literary Meaning," in *The Identity of the Literary Text*, 240-1; Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 165-7.

<sup>179</sup> See chapter 1, "Pannenberg's Defense of Universal History." According to Pannenberg, we can understand our present only in light of the future which is open to revision thus, every text and interpretation anticipates future texts. Weinsheimer makes a similar point to mine when he argues that classics are 'prophetic' in that they project a history of successive texts and interpretations which will engage the classic. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 138.



of a classic are concretized.<sup>180</sup> This is especially true for the post-history of biblical texts which have played a significant role in shaping the Christian tradition. Luther's interpretation of Romans 1:17 is a good example of an interpretation which has been recognised as a classic interpretation and serves as one of the key defining points in the tradition. The reception of this newly disclosed fold in the potential meaning of a text will then undergo the historical process of reception itself whereby the "innovative understanding of the individual reader has been publicly acknowledged, accepted by the academic canon of exemplary authors, or sanctioned by cultural institutions."<sup>181</sup>

Theological classics reveal to us the twists and turns of the Christian tradition and at the same time, supply it with continuity. They present us with accepted questions and answers which serve as boundaries of our hermeneutical playing field.<sup>182</sup> The second reason why this level is important is that a lot of our best textual evidence is often located at this level. This is a lamentable effect of history, we preserve the "events and developments on the grand scale ...and ignoring what has sometimes been called the history of 'ordinary life'."<sup>183</sup> At the same time, we cannot overlook the sheer quantity of material which the Christian tradition has accumulated over two thousand years; much of this at the institutional level in the form of homilies, theological treatises, commentaries. There is also a rich diversity of sources at the institutional level which includes paintings, sculpture (especially in churches and cathedrals), music (Handel's *Messiah*), and other forms of literature (such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*).

This concludes my discussion of the philosophical and hermeneutical aspects of reception theory. In the next chapter, my emphasis shall turn to the application of

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<sup>180</sup> Jauss' essay, "The Dialogical and the Dialectical *Neveu de Rameau*: How Diderot Adopted Socrates and Hegel Adopted Diderot," is an example of this. The thrust of the essay is that Diderot revived the openness of the Socratic dialogue in contrast to the philosophical monologism of his day. Hegel adopts Diderot's use of *moi* and *lui* to show how through the alienation of the self and sublation the individual develops. At the same time, Hegel corrects a latent Platonic impulse in Diderot's thought. Hegel's interpretation of Diderot would not have been "adequate" in France before 1774, but it was appropriate in the context of German idealism around 1805.

<sup>181</sup> Idem, "Theses on the Transition," 139. When confronted with the overwhelming amount of material the primary consideration "historical consideration must surely be the major criterion: the most common and the most influential interpretations must be given priority...." John F. A. Sawyer, "The Ethics of Comparative Interpretation," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*, 3 (1995), 158, 161-2

<sup>182</sup> Brown, *Boundary of our Habitation*, 75-8.

<sup>183</sup> As a result much of the effect and influence of the biblical texts and their commentaries on the church and society "is probably beyond recovery, and what little I can offer in this regard must remain anecdotal, at best suggestive of a vast iceberg submerged beneath the waves of history." Markus Bockmuehl, "A Commentator's Approach to the 'Effective History' of Philipians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 60 (1995), 66.



reception theory to the interpretation of Matthew 22:1-14, the parable of the Wedding Feast, from the early church to the Reformation. My research will focus primarily on the relationship between commentaries for two reasons. First, in order to limit the scope of research, and second because, in this case, no relevant sources from other fields for this passage could be found. Until now, I have included examples from the history of interpretation to illustrate the significance or application of a particular aspect of reception theory or hermeneutics to biblical interpretation. The next chapter will primarily consist of an extended example through which I hope to be able to illustrate the some of the distinctive contributions of reception theory.

### PART III: CASE STUDY

#### CHAPTER 5; THE RECEPTION OF THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST: ORIGEN, AUGUSTINE, AQUINAS AND CALVIN

The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Matthew 22:1-14, the parable of the Wedding Feast, I believe presents an illustrative and illuminative case study for the practice of reception theory in biblical studies. This chapter is not intended to serve as a definitive or exhaustive history of the interpretation of the parable of the 'Wedding Feast' in Matthew 22, nor is it intended to function as a proof for reception theory. Rather, what I hope to accomplish is to demonstrate the relevance of reception theory by examining certain facets of this text's history of interpretation from the Patristic period up to and including Calvin's commentary on the parable.

This parable was chosen for several reasons. First, because parables are largely fictional or internally representative by nature, they are closer to Jauss' concern with literary or poetical forms of texts. Second, the fictional or internally representative nature of parables offer a greater polyvalency of interpretation than a text which is more strictly didactic, historical, or more externally representative. Because a parable possesses a greater potential for a wider range of interpretations, hopefully it will demonstrate the usefulness of reception theory in a more transparent manner. However, there is also the possibility that the history of this text's interpretation may reveal the limits or weaknesses of reception theory because of the higher degree of play of interpretation inherent in a parable. And third, I have selected this particular parable because there is not a large amount of literature written on it compared to some of the other parables such as the 'Good Samaritan.'<sup>1</sup> At the same time, this parable touches on several important

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the more detailed studies on this parable can be found in: Francis W. Beare, "The Parable of the Guests at the Banquet: A Sketch of the History of its Interpretation," in *The Joy of Study: Papers in Honor of F. C. Grant* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1951), 1-14; Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutics and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1966), 163-98; Eta Linnemann, "Überlegungen zur Parabel vom grossen Abendmahl," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 51 (1960): 246-55; Wolfgang Trilling, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des Gleichnisses vom Hochzeitsmahl Mt 22,1-15," *Biblische Zeitschrift*, 4 (1960): 251-65; and Richard Chenevix Trench, *Notes on the Parables of our Lord*, 13th revised ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), 219-47.



theological issues such as the Gentile mission, the eschatological judgement, and invitation to salvation. As such, the norm forming potential for this parable appears to be considerable.

### I. LIMITATIONS IN THE FIELD OF PLAY: EARLY TRAJECTORIES OF INTERPRETATION

Even though the allegorical method was the most widely used method to interpret the parables in church history, it is held in derision by many today.<sup>2</sup> Ever since Adolf Jülicher, modern exegetes have mercilessly criticised it for producing misunderstandings of the text.<sup>3</sup> Jülicher's book, *Die Gleichnissreden Jesu*, is credited with making the shift to the historical-critical method in order to determine the "original and proper meaning of the parables."<sup>4</sup> One of the common complaints which modern theologians raise against the allegorical method concerns the way they perceive that the biblical text was reduced to a pre-text into which the allegorist read his or her preconceptions during the Patristic period.

It is Patristic allegorization that sticks in the gullet of modern theology ... at all levels this allegorization is something deplored ... Why is this? Basically, I think because we feel that there is something dishonest about allegory. If you interpret a text by allegorizing it, you seem to be saying that it means something which it patently does not. It is irrelevant, arbitrary: by allegory, it is said, you can make the text mean anything you like.<sup>5</sup>

Ambrose and Augustine's detailed interpretations of the parable of the 'Prodigal Son' (Luke 15:11-32) would seem to support such charges.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 15-19.

<sup>3</sup> James Barr ascribes this prejudice against allegorical method of interpretation to the widely held view that allegorical correspondences are by nature non-historical and thus as a method it is held "to be entirely or almost entirely invalid." James Barr, *Old and New In Interpretation: A Study on the Two Testaments* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 103-4. The idea that the parables were not originally allegories when Jesus taught them is a view which has been widely adopted as a result of Jülicher's work and has been debated in recent times.

<sup>4</sup> Warren S. Kissinger, *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*, ATLA Bibliography Series, ed. Kenneth E. Rowe (Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press, 1979), xiii; A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 38; James C. Little, "Parable Research in the Twentieth Century I: The Predecessors of J. Jeremias," *Expository Times*, 87 (1976): 357.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 96-7. Following Gadamer, Louth attributes the modern attitude towards allegory to the prejudices which theology has inherited from the Enlightenment. These prejudices include the search for an objective meaning in a text through the use of methods, the Romantic concept of meaning located in the reconstruction of the author's intentions, and the attempt to break free from tradition. *Ibid.*, 98-107.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, VII. 212-44 (S.C. 52. 88-98); Augustine, *Quaestronum Evangeliorum*, II.19 (C.C.S.L. 44B.62-3). Even modern exegetical



More recently, allegory has come under criticism from a more sophisticated biblical hermeneutic. The question no longer concerns whether a parable contains one point or moral, as Jülicher argued, or is open to multiple meanings which the allegorists tended to find. Rather, the problem now revolves around the manner by which a parable projects a 'narrative world'. Allegory is chastised for breaking this projected world up into a series of cognitive truths which results in the fracturing of this world into a collection of theological truths. It approaches a parable as a source of propositional truths and misses the projected world into which the reader or hearer is meant to enter.<sup>7</sup>

From the perspective of reception theory, the allegorical method of interpretation is significant for that fact that the interpreter is concerned with applying the text to his audience's situation. In this sense, the competing schools of Alexandria, which focused on the *sensus allegoricus*, and Antioch, with its emphasis on the *sensus litteralis*, shared a common goal, "the transposition of the canonical text ... out of its historical past and into the present; rendering it not only understandable, but also, so to speak, up-to-date."<sup>8</sup> The school at Antioch tried to save the past literal meaning encoded in the text by translating it into a form which was understandable in the present. While in Alexandria, they did not set aside the literal meaning, but sought "to interpret the text for the recipient's changed situation in such a way that the new spiritual meaning is still justified as an adaptation of the old, literal meaning."<sup>9</sup> Jauss views both of these positions as two sides of the same coin. They both attempt to form the same link with the text: one is more reconstructive by nature and the other more applied. The unity of interpretation, explanation, and application in the allegorical method will contribute to the manner by which the various interpretations and receptions of the parable and its interpretations will actively shape the Christian tradition; it will, hopefully, demonstrate the norm forming function of interpretations.<sup>10</sup>

The diversity of interpretations offered during the Patristic period tests the applicability of reception theory to this form of biblical genre. However, this diversity

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practices do not escape this same criticism. "Norman Perrin has pointed out that there is perhaps no plainer example of the exegete's presuppositions affecting his exegesis than in parable interpretation." Kissinger, xvii-xviii.

<sup>7</sup> Dan Otto Via Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 4, 25-42, 79-87.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, "Limits and Tasks of Literary Hermeneutics," *Diogenes*, 109 (1980), 98.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, "The Theory of Reception: A Retrospective of its Unrecognized Prehistory," in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helge Geyer-Ryan (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), 55.

<sup>10</sup> This decision has another advantage in that we have an extended period in church history in which one particular method was practised.



begins to coalesce into a few distinct trajectories or traditions of interpretation after researching many of the homilies and commentaries written on this parable during the Patristic period. While it is not possible to label a particular interpretation according to only one particular trajectory because these trajectories often overlap with each other, the following three trajectories of interpretation are offered as a means of classification and in order to help facilitate the discussion in the first section of this chapter.

- A. *Polemical-theological interpretation: does the father who invites the guests to the feast in the parable represent a God who is both gracious and judgmental?*
- B. *Kerygmatic or Ethnic-Ethical interpretation: how do the invited guests and their responses to the invitation represent different types of people and their relationship to salvation?*
- C. *Soteriological interpretation: what is the significance of the wedding garment for the life and salvation of the Christian?*

#### A. Polemical-Theological Interpretation

Various Gnostic interpreters, the Valentinians in particular, appealed to the parables in order to substantiate their doctrines.<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus clearly realised that the various parables and metaphors in the New Testament were open to the “crafty manipulations” of the Gnostic teachers who forced the meaning of the text to reflect their theological position.<sup>12</sup> In response to this, Irenaeus and Origen argue that this parable should be understood as teaching the orthodox doctrine that there was one god who both saved and exercised judgement. Thus, when interpreted correctly, the parable of the Wedding Feast conflicts with the Valentinian teaching that the Old Testament and the New Testament spoke of two different gods. While Irenaeus does not mention the Valentinians directly, his concern to refute their teachings is clearly seen in the first lines of his exposition of this parable. “For he makes known through these his words, the

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the Valentinians interpreted the symbolism of the numbers 1, 3, 6, 9 and 11 in the parable of the ‘Workers in the Vineyard’ (Matthew 20:1-16) as symbolising the thirty aeons of the Pleroma since the sum of these numbers totalled thirty. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I.1.3 (P.G. 7.467-70; *Libros quinque adversus haereses*, ed. W. W. Harvey [Cambridge: Typis Academicis, 1852] 1.16-20). See also Tertullian, *Liber de Anima*, XVIII (P.L. 2.719-22; English trans.: *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, 15.449-54) for his refutation of the Valentinian interpretation of the parable of the ‘Ten Virgins’ (Matthew 25:1-13) to show that the intellect is not above or higher than the bodily senses and what we learn through them.

<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I.3.6 (P.G. 7.467-70; Harvey, I.16-20); Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of the Christian Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 19-20. Bertrand de Margerie S. J., *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis: The Greek Fathers*, trans. Leonard Maluf (Petersham, MA: Saint Bede’s Publications, 1993), 1.52-3.



Lord clearly declared all, that there is one king and Lord of all, the Father.”<sup>13</sup> This theme runs through his explanation of the parable in the character of the father who prepared the wedding feast for his son, invited everyone, burnt the city of those who killed his messengers, and cast the guest without the wedding garment into the outer darkness. In particular, the action of the father casting the guest without the wedding garment into the outer darkness demonstrated that the same Lord that invites us to salvation also exercises judgement.<sup>14</sup>

Origen specifically addresses the heretical teachings of the Valentinians that the God who is portrayed as judgmental in the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were two different beings.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the king is portrayed as good (he invites all to the feast he has prepared) and just (he destroys the cities of those who killed his servants) in the parable confirms that God possesses both of these traits (mercy and righteousness) without contradiction according to Origen. Thus, God is the same God in both Old and New Testaments. In his comments on Matthew 22:1-14, Origen picks up this line of argument at several points<sup>16</sup>. He asks, “What does it this mean to you? Is the one who gets angry the same as the one preparing the feast for his son, the father of Christ, or is the one who gets angry different from his father?”<sup>17</sup> For Origen, the answer lies in the manner in which God accommodates himself to our understanding through

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<sup>13</sup> “*Manifeste enim et per haec verba sua ostendit Dominus omnia, et quoniam unus rex et Dominus omnium Pater.*” Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* IV. lviii. 5 (P.G. 7.1095; Harvey, 2. 281; Eng. trans. in: *Five Books of S. Irenaeus Against Heresies*, trans. John Keble, in *A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* [Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1872], 426). This is one of the distinctive elements of Irenaeus’ exegesis, to show that the same God is at work in both Testaments. Margerie, 1.53; 56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Origen, *De principiis*, 5.2 (*On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth [Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973; originally London: S.P.C.K., 1936], 101-3). According to Valentinian teachings, the God of the Old Testament was a demiurge while in the New Testament, we see redemption accomplished through the ‘aeon’ of Christ who united himself with the man Jesus to bring the knowledge (*gnosis*) of salvation to mankind. The best Christian sources on Valentinianism are found in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I and III.4 (P.G. 7.438-706, 855-57) and Tertullian, *Adversus Valentianos*, (P.L. 2.559-632). These and other documents on the Valentinians are collected in Werner Förster, ed. *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, trans. R. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972; from *Die Gnosis*, Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1969-71), especially pages 121-243.

<sup>16</sup> Like Irenaeus, he does not mention the Valentinians by name in this section of his commentary but his attack on their theology corresponds with the same criticism he makes against them in book X.12 of his commentary on Matthew and in *De principiis*.

<sup>17</sup> Origen, *In Mattheium*, XVII.18 (*Matthäuserklärung*, ed. Erich Klostermann, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, ed. Ernst Benz, vol. 10 [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1935], 637. A partial English translation of this parable is available in Harold Smith, *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*, vol. 5, *Translations of Christian Literature — Series VI* [London: S.P.C.K., 1928], 21-25).



anthropomorphisms and anthropopathism. While we will never be able to fully understand God apart from such human analogies until our sins and weaknesses have been done away with at the resurrection of the dead, we can still understand the deeper truths of God which are taught through these anthropomorphisms. The father's action of sending his army to burn the city of those who reject the invitation should not be taken as teaching that God is a vindictive judge. Rather, it is an analogy to help us to understand something of God's righteousness and judgement and, therefore, the literal (fleshly) meaning of these anthropomorphisms was not the goal of biblical interpretation, but they were the starting point to reveal deeper spiritual truths about God.<sup>18</sup>

The polemical-theological trajectory of interpretation, in particular its anti-Gnostic polemical interpretation, died off once the questions which the Valentinians raised were no longer being asked. These were not questions or issues picked up by later exegetes. In other words, Irenaeus and Origen's interpretations were, in part, answers to questions which arose through confrontations with Valentinian teachings. Once these questions were no longer being asked, we no longer see answers along this line being found by later commentators in the text.

## B. Kerygmatic or Ethnic-Ethical Interpretation

The main questions addressed in this trajectory of interpretation are (1) the issue of the kingdom of God being taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles, and (2) the interpretation of what the different characters response to the invitation might signify. These may appear as separate categories but the degree to which these two issues overlap in the exegesis of the parable makes such a distinction difficult and possibly pointless.

The first point to be noticed in this trajectory of interpretation is that it arises from the answers which were given in the polemical-theological trajectory. When Irenaeus argued that the parable taught that God was the same God in both Testaments, part of his argument was based on the idea that the first servants sent by the king to invite the guests to the feast referred to the prophets in the Old Testament and the servants who were sent later were the apostles.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, he employed a typological form of interpretation which was practised in the early church. This allowed Irenaeus to

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<sup>18</sup> Origen, XVII.18-19 (*G.C.S.* 10.635-40). One of the errors of the Valentinians was that they interpreted these anthropomorphisms at a literal level. Idem, *De principiis*, IV.II.1-2 (Butterworth, 267-73); Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes, eds. Anders Bergquist and Markus Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1994), 42.

<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV.lviii.6 (*P.G.* 7.1095-6; Harvey, 2.281).



recognise that there was a continuity between the two Testaments implicit within the parable. Jesus was taught about in the Law, spoken of by the prophets, but now has been clearly proclaimed by the apostles.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Collingwood's logic of question and answer provides us with a model by which to understand the continuity and divergence in the history of this parable's interpretation. The questions which Valentinianism raised were answered by Irenaeus and Origen arguing that this parable demonstrated, at an inferential level, that God was the same in both Testaments. This answer then leads on to questions concerning the relationship between the Jewish nation in the Old Testament and the Gentiles in the New Testament within the context of this parable. These are not totally new issues being raised but are genetically related by the logic of question and answer to the previous interpretations.

The area of greatest consensus in the history of this parable's interpretation is the view that this parable teaches the replacement of the Jewish nation with the Gentiles as the recipients of the Kingdom of God. In fact, this opinion is almost universally held throughout the history of the church. Even today it is difficult to find a reader who would not understand the parable in this manner. This is all the more surprising when we consider that there is nothing within the parable that explicitly makes this point.<sup>21</sup> The dominant impetus for this view arises from the manner in which the intertextual relationships within the Gospel of Matthew function to enable or restrict the range of play of understanding.<sup>22</sup> A quote from Jonathan Culler on the role of intertextuality helps us to understand this process and as a result why the concept of replacement is consistently recognised by the various interpreters in the parable of the Wedding Feast.

'Intertextuality' thus has a double focus. On the one hand, it calls our attention to the importance of prior texts, insisting that the autonomy of texts is a misleading notion and that a work has the meaning it does only because certain things have previously been written. Yet in so far as it focuses on intelligibility, on meaning, 'intertextuality' leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., IV.14.2-3; IV.26.1 (*P.G.* 7.1011-12; Harvey, 2.185-6); Simonetti, 19-22.

<sup>21</sup> "Contrary to what one is often led to believe, one discovers that, even when the so-called 'criterion of dissimilarity' is applied to these parables (Mt. 22, Lk. 14), they are remarkably free of what is otherwise clearly known of an evangelist's or the early church's christology, soteriology (*together*, the kerygma), ecclesiology or view of missions." Eugene E. Lemcio, "The Parables of the Great Supper and the Wedding Feast: History, Redaction and Canon," *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 8 (1, 1986), 8, 14.

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller discussion of intertextuality see "Thesis 2" in chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 104. See my discussion of intertextuality in relation to Jauss' second thesis in chapter 3.



The significance of the relationship between the parable of the 'Wedding Feast' and the preceding parable of the 'Wicked Tenants' (Matthew 21:33-41) is brought by the manner in which *the successive reading of the parables within one of the Gospels shapes the competency of the reader to understand the later parables in the Gospel*. Between the two parables, Matthew records the following statement, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom." (RSV, Matthew 21:43) This is an important intertextual reference which causes the reader to recognise the replacement theme not only in the parable of the Wicked Tenants but in the Wedding Feast also.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the manner in which Matthew has arranged and redacted his material shapes the competency of the reader to understand the parables through their successive relationship within the text. This is especially important if we consider that texts were experienced in a linear fashion in the ancient world. As they were read aloud, the meaning of the text developed in the linear succession of its elements.<sup>25</sup> What is interesting to note though, is that none of the commentaries prior to the Reformation referred to Matthew 21:43 in order to defend the replacement concept. I think this is not only because of this verse's proximity to the parable but also because the same concept is taught at several other locations in the New Testament and was a widely held doctrine in the history of the church. Therefore, such a reading would seem obvious and natural and would not need justification.

This would seem to indicate that *aspects of the reader's horizon of expectation which arise from 'intertextuality' are more stable over time than those aspects of the reader's horizon that arise from the prejudices which are handed down through the effective history of a tradition*.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, we must admit that in a purely semantic manner the text

<sup>24</sup> This is especially important if we consider the 'linear' nature by which texts were read during that period as opposed to the manner by which we approach the Bible according to the individual sections today. "A text was a 'linear' reality, like a piece of music, its secrets gradually unveiled through time, as the performance unfolds, depending for the communication of shape on conventional forms, on repetition and allusion, on *mimêsis* (imitation) and on the consequent *anamêsis* (recollection) of themes, phrases, narratives, that have gone before." Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 108. Trilling makes the case even stronger by attempting to show that the two parables are structurally parallel to each other at several points such as Lord/King, rejection of servants, the transferral of the vineyard/invitation, destruction of the unworthy. Trilling, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des Gleichnisses vom Hochzeitsmahl Mt 22,1-15," 254-7.

<sup>25</sup> The practice of reading aloud extended to reading in private also. George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the manner in which a text is inscribed and fixed as opposed to spoken discourse see: Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 25-44.



is fixed and thus, stable in one sense, in that its message is inscribed and can be passed on to countless generations with little change. On the other hand, we must remember that Gadamer and others have shown that every time we understand a text, we understand it within our horizon and thus, understand it differently. What this particular instance indicates is that 'intertextuality' can in certain instances play a very strong role in stabilising the meaning of the text across successive horizons of understanding.

When other passages are cited to justify or explain the replacement theme they tend to be either Matthew 8:11-13 or Romans 2:13-16. Irenaeus appealed to Matthew 8:11-13 to show that "through the preaching of the apostles many from the east and the west shall believe in him and recline in the kingdom of heaven with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, participating with them in the banquet. In this regard, we see one and the same God who first chose the patriarchs, visited his people, and then called the Gentiles."<sup>27</sup>

Not only is the theme of replacement recognised in the parable, but some of the commentators also perceive a reason why this took place. This line of interpretation most likely sprang from the early church's confrontation with Judaism and served as an apologetical argument not only for God's rejection of Israel but also for his election of a new people, the Gentile church. According to Origen, the different reactions to the invitation represent the different divisions between human souls. Those who were first invited represent the noble Jerusalemites whom God fed with strong teachings in the Old Testament and desired to come to the feast.<sup>28</sup> However, they were not willing to accept the invitation and as a result are guilty of rejecting the food God has to offer.<sup>29</sup> Chrysostom takes a similar line of thought but pushes the point much further. Both before and after the crucifixion, God has tried to persuade the people of Israel and to win

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<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV.lviii.10 (Harvey, 2.284-5). Jerome is one of the few who defended the replacement interpretation. For him, Romans 2:13-16 provides the reference to explain why the Jews were rejected at this point in the parable. "When the Gentiles do the law by nature, they condemn the Jews who do not follow the written law." Jerome, *Commentariorum in Mattheum*, III lines 1694-1704 (C.C.S.L. 77.201).

<sup>28</sup> I have translated "εὐγενῶν τινῶν ψυχῶν Ἰσραηλιτικῶν" as "noble souls of the Jerusalemites." This phrase appears to point to their special relationship with God as the children of his covenant in the Old Testament. Origen, *In Mattheum*, XVII.22 (G.C.S. 10.644).

<sup>29</sup> "τὸ ἐτοιμαζόμενον ἄριστον ἐκ στρεᾶς ἐν πνευματικοῖς λόγοις τροφῆς." Origen, *In Mattheum*, XVII.22 (G.C.S. 10.643). In the context of his discussion of the parable, "the meal" refers to the "strong and eloquent teachings" found in the Bible. Jerome follows Origen when he understands the "bulls and the fattened ones" carnal metaphors which refer to the spiritual; the doctrines of God's law. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Mattheum* III lines 1664-75 (C.C.S.L. 77.200). "αἱ στερεαὶ ἦσαν καὶ λογικαὶ τῶν μυστηριῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τροφαί." Origen, XVII.15 (G.C.S. 10.629).



them over. Their unwillingness to accept the invitation demonstrates an ungrateful attitude towards God's providential care for them. "What then could be more ungrateful than they, when being bidden to a marriage, and that of a King's marriage, and of a King making a marriage for his son?"<sup>30</sup> Not only that, but he interprets the parable as teaching that they are guilty of having killed the prophets, then the son (making an intertextual connection between this parable and the Wicked Tenants), and then they refused the invitation. Thus, according to Chrysostom, their response to the invitation reveals an escalation from the lesser crime of negligence to the greater crime of murder.

The responses of those who reject the invitation and abuse the servants leads to a prophetic statement concerning the destruction of the nation of Israel which Chrysostom perceived as having been historically fulfilled. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans was the fulfilment of the King sending his army to burn the city in Matthew 22:7.<sup>31</sup> This historical-prophetic interpretation appears to have its roots in Irenaeus who understood this section of the parable in light of the sovereignty of the Lord as taught in the Old Testament. All men, armies, and nations belong to God and are his instruments for judgement.<sup>32</sup> In the eastern Greek tradition, Theophylact continued Chrysostom's interpretation of this point some seven hundred years later when he cites Josephus' narration of the destruction of Jerusalem as proof of the fulfilment of the prophetic element of this parable.<sup>33</sup> This shift from a salvation-history to a historical-prophetic interpretation illustrates a common element between prophetic and allegorical interpretation: both require that the reader possess a code in order to determine the relationships between the text and its referent. In this instance, the two main elements in the replacement theme, the guilt of the nation of Israel and the city referring to Jerusalem, provides the common ground where the prophetic and the salvation-history codes overlap.

In contrast to the historical-prophetic view, Origen read this section according to a framework of pure spiritual teaching. Those who have rejected the invitation are destroyed by God, not through human agency but through the host of God's angels. In this way the burning of the city in the parable represents the destruction of not only the

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<sup>30</sup> Chrysostom, *Commentariorum in Matthaeum*, LXIX.1 (P.G. 58.647; N.P.-N.F. X.421).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.; also Eusebius, *Psalmos*, XLIV.4 (P.G. 86.I.19-24).

<sup>32</sup> Quoting Psalm 24.1, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV.lviii.8 (P.G. 7.1066; Harvey, 2.282).

<sup>33</sup> Theophylacti, *Enarratio in Evangelium Matthaei*, XXII.117 (P.G. 123.387, 386). For Theophylact, one of the reasons why the Jews rejected the invitation is that they were not willing to listen to what the prophets had to teach them, the prophets were not able to persuade them.



ruler of this age but also of the false teachers and “what is falsely called knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> In the Western Latin church, Origen’s more spiritual or doctrinal interpretation of the judgement by the king in the parable was received by Jerome<sup>35</sup>, Gregory the Great<sup>36</sup>, Leo the Great<sup>37</sup>, and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>38</sup>

Once the reasons for the transfer of the kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles was recognised, it was an understandable step to proceed to ask questions about the other characters in the parable. If those who ignore and kill the messengers represent the Jewish nation, then who are those who return to their farms and businesses, or those found on the outer roads? For Origen, the excuses offered by these characters teach that some people are entangled in the affairs of this world and as a result, place the concerns of this world before the kingdom of God.<sup>39</sup> Because they have their hearts set on gaining wealth, they miss out on the meal that God has to offer them.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Origen introduces an ascetic dimension into the interpretation of this parable which gains almost universal acceptance by those who follow him.<sup>41</sup>

It is worth noting that the early commentators are fairly restrained in drawing out the allegorical significance of the excuses of those who turn away and return to their farms or businesses. This restraint is most clearly seen if we compare the interpretation of this parable with Augustine’s interpretation of the parable of the Great Feast in Luke 14. There, each of the excuses is allegorically explained. The man who goes to check on

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<sup>34</sup> Origen, *In Matthaeum*, XVII.23 (G.C.S. 10.648). While he does mention the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in his commentary it plays a secondary role to what he sees as the more important teaching of the parable at this point.

<sup>35</sup> Jerome admits that this judgment may also refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Vespian and Tatian. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Mattheum*, III lines 1688-93 (C.C.S.L. 77.200-1).

<sup>36</sup> Joannis Maldonati, *Commentarii in Quatuor Evangelistas* (London and Paris: Moguntiae, 1853-54: originally in 1596), 2.303-4; *A Commentary on the Holy Gospels*, trans. George J. Davie, *Catholic Standard Library* (London: John Hodges, 1888), 2.230.

<sup>37</sup> Leo the Great, *Sermon*, L (P.L. 54.305-8; *The Fathers of the Church*, 93.214-17).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: In Matthaeum*, I.II.22.7. Aquinas mentions Chrysostom’s prophetic view and Jerome’s possibility that it could be read both ways. However, in citing the fathers he places Gregory the Great and Origen’s views after Chrysostom and Jerome. Thus, when reading the *Catena Aurea*, one is lead to the conclusion that Origen’s view is the preferred interpretation as it comes at the conclusion to his discussion of this verse.

<sup>39</sup> Origen, *In Matthaeum*, XVII.15 (G.C.S. 10.629).

<sup>40</sup> The parable of the Pearl of Great Price illustrates this point for Origen. He believes that parable demonstrates the correct disposition one should have: a person should be willing to forsake all in order to possess what God has to offer. Origen, *In Matthaeum*, XVII.23 (G.C.S. 10.646).

<sup>41</sup> Almost half of Chrysostom’s discussion of this parable is dedicated to praising the virtues of the ascetic lifestyle. Chrysostom, *Commentariorum in Matthaeum*, LXIX.2-4 (P.G. 78.651-54; N.P.-N.F. X.423-26).



a farm he has purchased represents the spirit of domination. The five pair of oxen signify the five senses and this, in turn, speaks about the things of this world and the seeking of physical proof for the gospel as Thomas did. And the one who has married a wife is guilty of the lusts of the flesh.<sup>42</sup> When we return to the history of the interpretation of Matthew 22:1-14, Theophylact offers one of the more fanciful interpretations but in contrast to Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Great Feast in Luke 14, he is very restrained. According to Theophylact, the one returning to his field denotes those who love the flesh, for the field functions as a symbol for the body. The one who returns to his business is a person who loves profits. "This parable shows those who fail in the spiritual wedding, and those who fail to have a friendship or relationship with Christ. If you fail in these two, you fail in all others either because of carnal hedonism or because of their desire for gain."<sup>43</sup> Hilary of Poitiers presents a good example of how most of the commentators understood the excuses of those who turned away from the invitation when he states that this section of the parable represents "those who are caught in the ambitions of this age ... and many on account of the longing for wealth in business are held back."<sup>44</sup> This ascetic perspective persisted through the Medieval period also.<sup>45</sup> And finally, some draw out the ethical point that those who turn back to their farms or businesses are guilty of the lesser crime than those who mistreat and kill the servants.<sup>46</sup>

If the polemical-theological trajectory of interpretation died out because those questions were no longer being asked, then the kerygmatic or ethnic-ethical trajectory demonstrates just the opposite. One of the conclusions which this trajectory reveals is the manner in which Origen's interpretation of this passage was so widely received up until the fifth century. It appears that each commentator is dialoguing with Origen. In the eastern Greek tradition, Chrysostom's historical-prophetic reading of the king sending his army to burn the city represents a divergence from Origen's comments. The Latin church to a large extent agreed with Origen's spiritual understanding that this

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<sup>42</sup> Augustine summarises his discussion of the excuses with: "The lust of the flesh, I have married a wife. The lust of the eyes, I have bought five pairs of oxen. The ambition of life, I have bought a farm." Augustine, *Sermo*, CXII.6 (P.L. 38.646; *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, vol. 1, S. Matthew, S. Mark, S. Luke [London: John Henry Parker, J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1844], 1.463)

<sup>43</sup> Theophylacti, *Enarratio in Evangelium Matthaei*, XXII.117 (P.G. 123.383, 384)

<sup>44</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *In Matthaeum*, 22.5 (S.C. 258.148)

<sup>45</sup> Walafriid Strabo, *Glossa Ordinaria, Evangelium Matthaeum*, XXII.5 (P.L. CXVI.156); Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: In Matthaeum*, 22.5.

<sup>46</sup> Origen, *In Matthaeum*, XVII.15 (G.C.S. 10.629); Jerome, *Commentariorum in Mattheum*, III lines 1674-88 (C.C.S.L. 77.200); Hilary *In Matthaeum*, 22.5 (S.C. 258.148)



referred to God's judgement against false doctrines which is exercised through his host of angels.

### C. Soteriological Interpretation

The parable of the Wedding Feast concludes with the incident of the king entering the feast to inspect the guests and having the guest not wearing the wedding garment cast into the 'outer darkness.' The severity of this action and its eschatological overtones quite naturally raised questions about the nature of this guest's transgression. In order to discuss the interpretation this action, I think it is best if we take a step back and consider the overall context of the wedding feast as it would have been understood within the horizon of Jesus' and Matthew's audiences. In the Old Testament, marriage was often used as a sign for the covenant relationship between God and Israel (Hosea 2:19; Isaiah 54:6; and Ezekiel 16:7). The Rabbis often spoke of the covenant at Mount Sinai in terms of a marriage contract, with Moses serving as the friend of the groom and Israel as the bride.<sup>47</sup> In the prophetic books of the Old Testament, this theme was given an eschatological dimension, with the arrival of the Messiah, the wedding bond would be renewed.<sup>48</sup> This appears to have been an active element in the background to both Jesus' and the New Testament author's use of this term.<sup>49</sup> However, as we saw in the replacement theme, it is not Israel who shall be the bride but those who are members of the new covenant community.<sup>50</sup>

Origen's commentary demonstrates that these concepts are part of his horizon of expectations. As he initiates his discussion of this passage, he writes "In this parable we can clearly see the idea that the human king is God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the wedding feast for the king's son signifies the restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) of the bride, the church of Christ to Christ, her bridegroom."<sup>51</sup> The term, ἀποκατάστασις, 'restoration' is a very theologically significant term in Origen's

<sup>47</sup> H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1922 - 1961), 1.969, 2.393. See the article by Harald Riesenfeld for the allegorical references in this and other parables to certain Old Testament themes, "The Parables in the Synoptic and Johannine Traditions," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok*, 25 (1960): 37-61.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1.517; Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), s.v. "γαμέω," by Ethelbert Stauffer, 1.654-55.

<sup>49</sup> "In the symbolic language of the East, the wedding is the symbol of the day of salvation, as the language of the Apocalypse bears witness: 'The marriage of the Lamb is come.'" Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 117.

<sup>50</sup> Stauffer, "γαμέω," 1.655.

<sup>51</sup> Origen, *In Matthaeum*, XVII.15 (G.C.S. 10.628).



vocabulary. He uses it to refer to restoration of creation at the eschaton and also the present nature of the believer's restored relationship to Christ.<sup>52</sup> It possesses a dual temporal reference which plays an important role in how an interpreter approaches the question of the wedding garment. Given the dual temporal framework within which the 'wedding' is understood we can see how the interpretation of the significance of the wedding garment in the parable could be open to a wide range of speculation. Does the wedding garment relate to one's admission to the present church (Ephesians 5:32)? Or is it something which one needs for admission to the eschatological marriage (Revelation 19)?

Normally with an image or symbol, such as the 'wedding garment' there are multiple resonances as to how this symbol is understood. Symbols contain a surplus of meaning as Paul Ricœur argues. This surplus is the result of a tension between the literal interpretation of the symbol and its metaphorical interpretation. In this instance, the "wedding garment" is not a literally a material piece of cloth but metaphorically speaks of something else which concerns this person's relationship to God. It is through the assimilation or mediation of these conflicting interpretations (the literal and the metaphorical) that an extension of meaning takes place. This "tension is not translatable because they [metaphors and symbols] create meaning. This is not to say that they cannot be paraphrased, just that such a paraphrase is infinite and incapable of exhausting the innovative meaning."<sup>53</sup> The relevance of this for *Wirkungsgeschichte* concerns how different interpreters perceive the different referential dimensions or possibilities of a symbol. "There is no need to deny the concept in order to admit that *symbols give rise to an endless exegesis*. If no concept can exhaust the requirement of further thinking borne by symbols, this idea signifies only that *no given categorization can embrace all the semantic possibilities of a symbol*."<sup>54</sup> At the same time, a symbol's interpretations may extend the symbol into something which is more than was previously recognised or collapse it into something which is less through the attempt to clearly explicate the meaning of the symbol.

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<sup>52</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), s.v. "ἀποκατάστασις," 195; for the Jewish background to this term see Strack-Billerbeck, IV. 799-976. This term ultimately will play a decisive role in Origen's downfall, in both the Origenist controversy in the fourth century and especially the anathema published against Origen in 532 A.D. he is criticised for teaching that everything, including the demons, will be restored to the position they occupied before the fall. Margerie, *History of Exegesis*, 1.96, 226; Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation*, 51, note 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 57 emphasis mine.



In the case of the symbol of the wedding garment, there are already certain pre-established understandings concerning the meaning of this symbol which were inherited from the Old Testament, Jewish, and early Christian interpretive traditions. The interesting issue is which of the various interpretative choices are adopted and why. Very early in the Patristic period the concept of the 'garment' or 'robe' was understood as a reference to the rite of baptism. Because the early interpreters approached the New Testament with this functioning as part of their preunderstanding, it is not surprising to find "that the sacramental theology attested in the patristic catecheses was refracted in the exegesis" at various points.<sup>55</sup> Post-baptismal reinvestment conveyed the idea of the restoration of the individual to their proper relationship with God and inclusion in the new covenant community.<sup>56</sup> Tertullian spoke of this in the following manner, "He [the baptism candidate] receives the former garment, this clearly points to that which Adam by transgressing had lost."<sup>57</sup> Baptism is the rite by which one receives the garment of forgiveness which restores a person to his or her original relationship with God which Adam had forfeited. This is what allowed one to enter the wedding feast, the church.<sup>58</sup> However, this view was not widely received and fell out of use by the end of the third century with Cyril of Jerusalem being one of the last to expound this interpretation.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Yves Tissot, "Patristic Allegories of the Lukan Parable of the Two Sons (Luke 15:11-32)," trans. Donald G. Miller, in *Exegesis: Problems of Method and Exercises in Reading (Genesis 22 and Luke 15)*, ed. François Bovon and Grégoire Rouiller, *Pittsburg Theological Monograph Series*, ed. Dikran Y. Hadidian, vol. 21 (Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1978), 377.

<sup>56</sup> See also Jeremias' discussion that "investiture with a new garment is therefore a symbol of the New Age." Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130; 188-89.

<sup>57</sup> While Tertullian is addressing the issue of the rebaptism of those who had fallen, away his views at this point are similar to his view of baptism. Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, 9.16 (P.L. 2.1051). S. Thelwall translated this difficult sentence as "He receives again the pristine garment — the condition, to wit, which Adam by transgression had lost." "On Modesty," in *The Writings of Tertullian*, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1880), 79. In this chapter, Tertullian focuses primarily on the parable of the prodigal son, and his discussion of the garment/robe is that which the father commands to be placed on the younger son when he returns. However, Tertullian explicitly links this with the wedding garment in our parable in 9.11. Thus, the intertextual connection between the robe (στολήν τὴν πρώτην in Luke 15:22) and the wedding garment (ἔνδυμα γάμου) forms a connection between his understanding of the two parables.

<sup>58</sup> *Clementine Homilies*, VIII.22, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, ed. Allan Menzies, vol. 17 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870), 147.

<sup>59</sup> In his "Lectures on Baptism," he cites this parable to teach that the wedding garment denotes baptism and even more significantly, it is the eschatological garment of salvation. The garment speaks of the remission of sins by which our souls are cleansed and we are adorned with salvation as Isaiah prophesied. "Let my soul rejoice in the Lord: for He hath clothed me with a garment of salvation, and a robe of gladness: He hath crowned me with a garland as a bridegroom, and decked me with ornaments as a bride." (quoting



Origen's commentary provides an alternative interpretation of the wedding garment, one which is difficult to summarise because he recognises several New Testament teachings or referential possibilities in the wedding garment. His commentary also provides the seed bed for his successors to develop and clarify the meaning of this garment. From our perspective, Origen's multiplicity in references and meaning for the symbol of the wedding garment stands in contrast to modern exegetical practices which search for a clear or stable meaning to the text. However, I think one of the reasons why his work was so widely received in the Patristic church was for this very reason; his polyphonic interpretations provided a rich seed bed for subsequent interpreters' theological reflection on the passage.

Origen's discussion of the parable is divided into two sections. In the first section, he explains the interpretation of the parable in a fairly straightforward, yet allegorical, manner. When the guests enter the wedding feast, they remove their old clothes, which represents their evil lives and what is foreign to the wedding feast, and put on the proper garment. This garment is a heart of compassion (quoting Colossians 3:12), "For this is the wedding garment."<sup>60</sup> The image does not end there, for he writes that the one not wearing the garment represents the person who has not had his character transformed, been renewed, or put on the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>61</sup> Origen attempts to bring together several New Testament metaphors relating to salvation in his interpretation of the wedding garment. On the one hand, he establishes cross references to other New Testament metaphors in order to reinforce his point that the wedding garment speaks about the transformed life of the believer. On the other hand, he does not harmonise these different metaphors into one image, but rather preserves their distinctive contributions and thus, his interpretation of the wedding garment is polyphonic by nature.<sup>62</sup> Origen did not reject the historical nature of the biblical accounts but rather searched for a meaning that was richer and fuller than a literal or historical approach would allow. The polyvalent nature of the Bible and the allegorical method allowed for this. "Origen declares the whole Scriptural record to be God's symphony, wherein the inexpert listener may think he perceives jarring notes whilst the man whose ear has been

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Isaiah 61:10) Cyril of Jerusalem, "On Baptism" § 2 *The Catechetical Lectures*, 3 (N.P.-N.F. 7.14). Jeremias argues that Isaiah 61:10 functions as the contextual background to the wedding garment but does not mention Cyril's earlier recognition of this same intertextual connection. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 188-89.

<sup>60</sup> Origen, XVII.16 (G.C.S. 10.632).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., XVII.16 (G.C.S. 10.632-34).

<sup>62</sup> Young makes the point that Origen's use of cross references often bring out multiple referents for a passage. Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 135-37.



well trained realises the fitness and grace with which the various notes are worked up into one harmonious composition.”<sup>63</sup>

In the second section of his discussion of the parable of the Wedding Feast, he attempts to “draw out the deeper meaning of the parable according to the wisdom of the Spirit.”<sup>64</sup> Origen goes to great lengths to explain how God condescends to employ anthropomorphisms so that he may reveal himself to us.<sup>65</sup> This self-revelation of God means that in both Old and New Testaments we possess “strong, spiritually rational food” which nourishes and strengthens our lives. And because of the incarnation we can partake in fellowship with Christ which transforms us.<sup>66</sup> It is through this process of sanctification that we grow in faith, godliness, and good works which constitutes “the garment of virtue, the wedding garment made with radiant material.”<sup>67</sup> The guest who is not wearing the wedding garment in the parable signifies those in the church who have not taken off their old life or partaken in this process of spiritual growth and transformation. The father’s judgement of the guest without the proper attire serves as a warning to all in the church that we should not be satisfied with where we are at spiritually but should constantly press on to the more “mature and sweet fruit (grapes) of excellence (ἀρετῆς).”<sup>68</sup> Origen’s interpretation of the wedding garment is varied and rich, but at the same time the multiplicity of New Testament metaphors and references which he cites are clustered around the transformation which takes place in a believer’s

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<sup>63</sup> R. L. P. Milburn, *Early Christian Interpretation* (London: Black, 1954), 50; Karen Jo Tørjensen, “Body’, ‘Soul’ and ‘Spirit’ in Origen’s Theory of Exegesis,” *Anglican Theological Review* 67 (1985), 17-30.

<sup>64</sup> Origen, XVII.17 ff. (*G.C.S.* 10.634 ff.). Origen follows the Rule of Faith which taught that the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit and possessed an obvious meaning and one that was deeper and hidden from most readers. Idem, *De principiis*, I. Preface; IV.III.14 (*On First Principles*, Butterworth, 1-6; 310-12); Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 23-24.

<sup>65</sup> The idea of condescension serves to explain why the Gnostic sects misunderstood these figures of speech in the Bible, but more importantly it serves the hermeneutical function of explaining how the transcendent God can communicate with mankind. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, IV.15 (*P.G.* 11.1045); idem, *Sermon*, XVII (*P.G.* 12.703).

<sup>66</sup> Origen, XVII.21-22 (*G.C.S.* 10.642-46). Part of Origen’s argument in this section is to counter the Gnostic views that God could be identified with human emotions or suffering as we saw in the section on anti-Gnostic trajectories of interpretation.

<sup>67</sup> Origen, XVII.23-24 (*G.C.S.* 10.646-52), especially the start to § 24. This same process of spiritual transformation performs an important role in Origen’s hermeneutic. “The more the soul conforms, through the reception of grace and the practice of virtues, to the resurrection of Christ, the more it surrenders itself to the Logos growing within it, allowing the Word to transform it into his likeness, the more the divinity begins to show through the glorified humanity of Christ and the letter of the Scripture and the mysteries begin to be perceived beneath their clothing as image.” Margerie, *The History of Exegesis*, 1.104.

<sup>68</sup> Origen, XVII.24 (*G.C.S.* 10.651).



life.<sup>69</sup> As such, Origen preserves, as Ricœur would say, the metaphorical surplus of meaning in his interpretation of the symbol of the wedding garment.

Perhaps the greatest contrast between Origen's work and those who follow him is the manner in which they risk undo closure of the disclosive potential of the symbols within the parable for the sake of clarity or precision of interpretation. Jerome follows Origen's general view of the wedding garment but in a more legalistic manner. Through obedience to the laws and commands of the Lord, the new garment is woven or completed. The garment represents our taking off our old defiled self at conversion and putting on the new man in Christ. The one entering the feast without the new garment is guilty of defiling the wedding feast by wearing sordid clothing (their old life).<sup>70</sup> The application Jerome draws from the parable is similar to Origen's, it teaches us that it is not the entrance, or beginning the new life that is important, but how the believer finishes it.<sup>71</sup>

Hilary of Poitiers narrows Origen's interpretation down also, but takes an approach which is more textually controlled compared to Jerome's. Hilary recognises the tension between the literal and metaphorical meanings behind the symbol of the wedding garment. He attempts to resolve this tension by asking a series of very literal questions concerning how the guest entered the feast without the proper garment in order to show that the garment could not refer to something external to a person's life which would have been visible to others. It can not refer to a special type of garment worn on festive occasions since everyone, including the poor, was invited. The fact the servants did not notice the impropriety guest, he argues, also demonstrates that it could not have been a physical garment. Therefore, it must refer to something inside the person, which allowed the guest to deceive the servants but could not escape the notice of God.<sup>72</sup> This points to an interpretation of the wedding garment which denotes the forgiveness of our sins by grace and the efficacious nature of God's invitation to the wedding feast which transforms our lives.<sup>73</sup> Hilary concludes that, "the wedding garment is the glory of the

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<sup>69</sup> That a passage or idea in the Bible would have a multiplicity in meaning is not a problem for Origen. Rather for him, "the Word of God is inexhaustibly rich and the human reader cannot exhaust its meaning ..." Simonetti, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Jerome, *Commentariorum in Mattheum*, III lines 1705-26 (C.C.S.L. 77.201-2).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., lines 1736-39 (C.C.S.L. 77.202).

<sup>72</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *In Matthaicum*, 22.7 (S.C. 258.148-50). Hilary's commentary is an excellent illustration of Ricœur's thought on the manner in which the tension between the literal and metaphorical meaning of a symbol or metaphor creates a surplus of meaning. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 52.

<sup>73</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *In Matthaicum*, 22.6 (S.C. 258. 148).

Holy Spirit and the radiance of the heavenly garment ... which is reserved in immaculate condition until the feast in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>74</sup>

In both Hilary and Jerome, we see a narrowing down of Origen's polyphonic understanding of the wedding garment to much more specific interpretations. This demonstrates two important hermeneutical points. First, as Ricœur pointed out that the explication of a metaphor or symbol always results in an expansion and reduction in the possible meaning of that symbol or metaphor. The different trajectories which the later commentators took from Origen represent an expansion of meaning at the collective level, but at the individual level there is a reduction in the signification of symbol. Second, according to the logic of question and answer, not all questions can be asked within each horizon. The different answers which these commentators find in the symbol of the wedding garment are the result of different questions which were being asked within their respective horizons, within the contexts in which they ministered.

The collapse, reduction, or clarification of the meaning of the wedding garment reaches its most forceful argument in the work of Augustine. In reading Augustine's fortieth sermon, one is struck by the parallels it has with Hilary's commentary, and it raises the question of how familiar he was with Hilary's work. For Augustine, the garment must be worn on the heart or else the servants would have stopped this guest from entering the feast improperly attired. Like Hilary, Augustine does not see the responsibility for inspecting the guests resting with the servants but is God's prerogative alone. "The Master of the house saw him, the Master of the house inspected, the Master of the house separated him out."<sup>75</sup> The meaning of the wedding garment is an important question since it entails such a serious punishment and separates the good from the evil.<sup>76</sup> According to Augustine, it cannot refer to baptism or faith since both good and evil have access to these and are what allow one to enter the feast (the present church).<sup>77</sup> In a similar manner it cannot refer to the sacraments, fasting, church leadership, or the working of miracles.<sup>78</sup> Love is the only indispensable thing Augustine can conceive of which could differentiate the guests in this manner. Love is the greatest

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 22.7 (S.C. 258. 150). Once again this dual temporal reference of the wedding comes through.

<sup>75</sup> Augustine, *Sermo*, XC.4 (P.L. 38.566; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.336).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., XCV.5-6 (P.L. 38.583; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.337-9).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., XCV.7 (P.L. 38.583-4; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.369-70).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., XC.5 (P.L. 38.561-2; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.338).



command and without it we are nothing.<sup>79</sup> It is related to faith since true faith works by love and we cannot love without faith. This love is two fold, it must be exercised toward God and man. It is also dynamic in that it must be constantly cultivated and extended.<sup>80</sup> “So let charity be advanced, so be it nourished, that being nourished it may be perfected; so be *the wedding garment* put on; so be the image of God, after which we were created, by this our advancing, engraven anew in us. For by sin it was bruised, and worn away.”<sup>81</sup>

Augustine’s interpretation of the wedding garment clearly defined the meaning of the wedding garment and seems to have become the received meaning for this symbol until the Reformation.<sup>82</sup> Gregory the Great is a good example of the reception of Augustine’s interpretation when he argues that the garment could not be faith or baptism but must be love. In the eastern Greek tradition, Theophylact’s’ commentary demonstrates Augustine’s influence, whether consciously or unconsciously, in a tradition which had largely rejected Augustine’s theology. The clearest indication of Augustine’s influence here is seen Theophylact’s interpretation that the wedding garment is not faith or good works but is love in our hearts.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the most important exception to this is Thomas Aquinas who balances Augustine’s view by attempting to bring out some of the other resonances of meaning which Origen raised.<sup>84</sup>

### Summary

The aim of this section has been to demonstrate something of the character of interpretations during the Patristic period in terms of three trajectories of interpretation of the parable of the wedding feast. Before I move on to the next section in this chapter, I propose to summarise some of the conclusions so far. First, I have tried to show that the impression of many modern writers that the exegetical practices of this period were

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., XC.6 (P.L. 38.562; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.338), citing Matthew 22:37-39 and I Corinthians 13.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., XC.8, 10 (P.L. 38.564, 566; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.341, 344).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., XC.10 (P.L. 38.566; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.334).

<sup>82</sup> Leo the Great appears to be one of the few who reject Augustine’s interpretation. He argues that the garment is the new self which conforms to the resurrection and is put on by obeying God’s commands and partaking in the spiritual feasts (the sacraments?). *Sermon*, 50 (P.L. 54.305-8; *The Fathers of the Church*, 93.214-17).

<sup>83</sup> “Ὁ μὴ ἐνδυσάμενος σπλάγχθα οἰκτιρῶν, χρηστότητα, φιλαδελφίαν.” Theophylact, *Enarratio in Evangelium Matthaei*, XXII.118 (P.G. 123. 387, 388). This may have come to Theophylact through Maximus, for whom charity was an important theme.

<sup>84</sup> It is interesting to note that Aquinas attempts this by appealing to Hilary and Jerome’s works in relation to citations from Origen’s commentary. Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 22.11-12.

unrestrained is mistaken. Origen, in particular, is often charged with taking an arbitrary allegorical approach which possessed no working criteria, and it resulted in his reading all sorts of meanings into the text. "But this is to see only part of the picture. Origenist allegory was controlled by a view of scripture's unity and consistency which allowed the exploitation of texts from all over scripture to throw light on one another and build up a working-model of a spiritual world to which biblical images consistently referred."<sup>85</sup> The interpreters from this period were fairly restrained in their approach within the terms of their exegetical goals and tended to follow distinct trajectories of interpretation which resulted from the prejudices which they inherited and from the influence of previous interpretations.<sup>86</sup> This also allowed for a diversity in their interpretations of the parable since each of these trajectories contained two or three views and the trajectories overlapped creating the possibility for a number of different permutations and combinations. Their interpretations were not wooden replications of previous interpretations nor were they the result of the free play of an unrestrained allegorical approach.

Second, the prejudices which the Patristic exegetes brought to the text are what shaped the field of play for their exegetical activities. For example, the intertextual reference to Matthew 21:43 directs the reader's expectations in relation to this parable and thus, the replacement theme figures so strongly in their interpretations. Also, the theology of the interpreter functions in the background as a guide which gives meaning to the individual parts of the Bible, such as this parable, and even to the individual items and characters within the parable. Their interpretations were genuine attempts to interpret the parable in light of the questions of their particular horizon and were shaped by their historical situation within the Christian tradition.

Third, we see that not all interpretations are of equal validity, priority, or weight in relation to the text. Among those I have discussed so far, Origen's commentary was the most widely received or influential commentary on the parable up to the fifth century.<sup>87</sup> The interpretation he offered and the future questions which his commentary

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<sup>85</sup> Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 152.

<sup>86</sup> In the doctrinal development of the church, a set of agreed upon symbols arose which became "the basis for a refined allegorical treatment of scripture, so that dogma and spirituality were not divorced and spirituality was 'disciplined' by the 'orthodox' understanding of key texts." Young, *The Art of Performance*, 123. Metaphors and symbols are bounded by the world in which they occur, they are not open to unlimited play of interpretation. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 58-61.

<sup>87</sup> This study substantiates Margerie's point that all of the great exegetes of the early church were dependent on Origen's exegetical works. "He is the first great master of exegesis.



raised (such as his successors attempts to clarify and define the wedding garment) demonstrates the importance of his work. The theological and referential richness of Origen's commentary facilitated future commentaries by allowing later interpreters to 'recognise more' in the parable. In this sense, his commentary functioned as a classic interpretive text on this parable (and may have for the entire gospel as well). *This stands in contrast to the movement of certain trajectories of interpretation into a cul-de-sac which were not picked up by future interpreters.* The abandonment of certain trajectories resulted from the fact that the questions which those interpretations originally attempted to answer were no longer being asked. The prime example is the anti-Gnostic trajectory of interpretation.

The play of interpretation which the early interpreters realised within these trajectories of interpretation provokes our modern theological prejudices because one of the prejudices which Gadamer argues that we have inherited from the Enlightenment is the search for an objective or stable meaning to the text. However, for the Patristic fathers the text had multiple levels of signification or reference. But this did not lead to an unlimited field of play in their interpretations. Rather, because they were at home in their tradition they were able to discern which interpretations resonated with the text. This ability came from their participation in their tradition, specifically within the orthodox faith, their interaction with the biblical text, the situation in which they ministered, and the concepts and interpretations passed down to them from previous concretizations of the parable's meaning.

## II. THE RECEPTION OF AUGUSTINE'S ECCLESIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

In the previous section, I focused on the broader diachronic trajectories in the history of a the parable's interpretation which led up to Origen, and how Origen's polyphonic interpretation preserved an openness to the meaning of the parable and which, in turn, became the seedbed for future commentators. In this section, what I propose is to examine one particular interpretation's reception: Augustine's ecclesiological interpretation of the parable. This will then lead into Aquinas' and Calvin's appropriation of Augustine's interpretation in part three of this chapter.

Augustine makes several very interesting and innovative exegetical moves in his interpretation of the parable.<sup>88</sup> Not only does he understand this parable as a paradigm for the church but also as a justification for the use of force against heretics. In order to clarify the exegetical shifts he makes, it is necessary to explore the background which shaped his and his audiences horizon of expectations.

When Augustine inherited the bishop's seat at Hippo, he stepped into the midst of a long standing and difficult conflict with the Donatist schism.<sup>89</sup> Far from being an old problem, the Donatist schism was a wide spread movement and possibly the dominant church in Augustine's see.<sup>90</sup> Without going into great detail on Donatism, there were two main questions that this situation raised for Augustine. First, what was the nature of the church? And second, how should the church respond to schismatics such as the Donatists?

#### A. What is the Nature of the Church?

The question concerning the nature of the church arose from the inability of Cyprian's teachings in the *Unity of the Catholic Church* to answer new questions which the Donatist situation raised about the nature of the church. Both Donatists and orthodox theologians appealed to Cyprian to defend their position, each with a defensible cause. The inability to find a resolution to this debate sprang from two doctrines which Cyprian taught. First, he taught that schisms were never justified. This is based on his doctrine that if a person were to step outside the church, they also stepped outside the possibility of salvation. Therefore, the church could never be divided, since there could only be one true church at any time. Second, Cyprian held that a bishop

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All who came after him, even those who reacted against him, such as Saint Jerome, owe nearly everything to him in every domain." Margerie, *The History of Exegesis*, 1.112-13.

<sup>88</sup> In discussing Augustine's interpretation of this parable, we must keep in mind that he often harmonises the accounts in Matthew 22:1-14 with the parable of the Great Feast in Luke 14. See: Augustine, *De Consensu Evangelistarum* (C.S.E.L. 43; *The Harmony of the Gospels*, in *N.P.-N.F.* 6.65-236). At the same time, he differentiates between the two parables at other points.

<sup>89</sup> Prior to Augustine's ascension to bishop, the Roman government had tried both force and toleration in its attempt to control the Donatist movement. However, neither approach was successful. This was most likely due to the fact that "it was an African movement and its members were determined to assert their own independence, not only of the Catholic church but, also in more subtle ways, of the power of imperial Rome." Frederick W. Dillistone, "The Anti-Donatist Writings," in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1956), 178; 179; Willis, 346-61.

<sup>90</sup> For the most widely cited discussion on this issue see: Geoffrey Grinshaw Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), especially 49, 176-9, 346-61.



who lapsed under persecution was no longer worthy to administer the sacraments or hold church office since he had stepped outside the church and thus, forfeited his office.

The event that ignited the debate over Cyprian's teachings was the election of Caecilianus as the bishop of Carthage in 312 A.D.<sup>91</sup> The rigorists opposed his appointment since he received his orders from Felix of Aptunga who was alleged to have been a traitor during the Diocletianic persecution.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, Caecilianus' appointment was not valid, and the rigorist party appointed Majorinus as a rival bishop, who was quickly succeeded by Donatus. This resulted in a series of appeals and counter-appeals all the way up to the Emperor and the Bishop of Rome. In every case, Caecilianus was vindicated. The debate raged over a question Cyprian never addressed, 'What happens if the bishop repents?' As a result it was possible to read Cyprian as teaching that once a person betrayed the church they could never hold office in the church again and that once a person repented, they were restored by grace and could once again administer the sacraments and hold office. The Catholic church held the latter position and the Donatists the former.<sup>93</sup> At a deeper level, the problem revolved around the concept of holiness. The Donatists believed that the church was contaminated by traitors, such as Felix, and they wanted to protect or restore the purity of the church.<sup>94</sup>

Augustine attempted to resolve the question the Donatist schism had raised over this ambiguity in Cyprian's teachings. In his solution, Augustine relied heavily on the parables, especially the parable of the Wedding Feast and the parables of the Dragnet and the Tares in Matthew 13. Augustine interprets these three parables according to a realised eschatological (he gives more weight to the present realisation of the wedding as the church) but at the same time he still maintains an eschatological dimension in God's judgement.<sup>95</sup>

The parables of the Dragnet and the Tares teach that the present church has both good and evil members just as "good and evil" were invited to the wedding feast. This is

<sup>91</sup> Augustine, *Epistle*, CLXXXV.4 (C.S.E.L. 57.3-4; *The Fathers of the Church*, IV.144-45).

<sup>92</sup> Such an appointment was intolerable since Cyprian taught that once a member of the clergy had lapsed they could no longer hold a church office. Dillistone, 178.

<sup>93</sup> In this section, I will use "Catholic church" according to Augustine's definition of the term as the "universal" or "world-wide" church. Augustine, *Epistle*, CLXXXV.2 and 4 (C.S.E.L. 57.2-4; *The Fathers of the Church*, IV.142-45).

<sup>94</sup> "In other words, every 'quisling,' every collaborator, everyone tainted with pro-traitor sympathies must ruthlessly be exposed and excluded from membership or office in the Church." Dillistone, 188.

<sup>95</sup> For him, "the kingdom of heaven is the church now." Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975: originally 1937)), 230.



seen in the fact that both the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest and the dragnet captures both good and bad fish.<sup>96</sup> In taking this position, Augustine followed Cyprian's view that the church is a mixed community. There will always be tares among the wheat.<sup>97</sup> This is not a criticism of the church but rather should serve as an incentive to make sure that we are of the wheat.<sup>98</sup> For in the future, God will harvest the wheat from the tares, separate the good fish from the bad, and expel the guest who does not have the wedding garment on.<sup>99</sup> This act of winnowing or judgement is reserved for God alone, it is not something which his servants in the church can perform. Thus, Jesus' command of "*sinite utraque crescere usque ad messem*" (Matthew 13:30) is the grounds for tolerance concerning heretics and sinners within the church. This is a meaningful theological contribution which Augustine makes to ecclesiology.

"Augustine's wider and more patient view of the nature of the Church's holiness, never condoning sin yet recognizing that *men* could not act as final judges, has commended itself to the conscience of the vast majority in the Church of subsequent generations."<sup>100</sup>

While the tares cannot be excluded because of some outward manifestation, they are separated from the wheat on the inside according to Augustine. The fact that the servants did not notice the guest without the wedding garment illustrates this point.<sup>101</sup> It is in light of Augustine's confrontation with the Donatist schism that his argument that the wedding garment cannot refer to baptism, faith, the sacraments, or church offices takes on a greater significance. The true traits of the church and salvation do not consist in the proper administration of church offices and sacraments but whether you have been cleansed by God and put on the garment of love. In this way, Augustine makes a distinction between those who are formally members of the church and those

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<sup>96</sup> According to Augustine, the Donatist position was unrealistic since they understood the church to be composed only of wheat and criticised the Catholic church for being infested with tares. Augustine attacked both of these points. On the one hand, the Donatists were not as pure as they claimed. "Look at the hordes of Circumcellions, look at the convivial drunkards, look at the lewd teachers. Do you call these wheat?" On the other hand, the Catholic church was being blamed for the sins of the few tares. Augustine, *Epistle*, LXXVI.2-3 (C.S.E.L. 34.326-27); idem, *Epistle*, XLIII.14-15 (C.S.E.L. 34.96-7).

<sup>97</sup> Jerome may provide a link between Augustine and Cyprian when he had to deal with a similar problem concerning those who wanted to exclude clergy who were once associated with Arian teachings. Jerome, *Dialogus Adversus Luciferianos* (P.L. 23.177).

<sup>98</sup> Augustine, *Epistle*, LI (C.S.E.L. 34.143-49); idem, *Sermo*, XC.1 (P.L. 38.599; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.333-4)

<sup>99</sup> Augustine, *Sermo*, XC.4 (P.L. 38.560-1; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.336-7); also *Epistle*, LIII.21; LXXVI.2-3; XCIII.15; *Contra litteras Petilianas*, III.II.3.

<sup>100</sup> Dillistone, 189.

<sup>101</sup> Augustine, *Sermo*, XC.4 (P.L. 38.566; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.336).



who have cloaked their hearts with love and are true members of the Body of Christ.<sup>102</sup> Thus, we can see how Augustine “finds material ready to hand” in the parable of the Wedding Feast.<sup>103</sup>

### B. How to Handle the Schismatics?

It is difficult to succinctly summarise Augustine’s position on how to deal with the Donatists because his position developed over time and also because he did not exercise a blanket policy towards them but examined many cases on an individual basis.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, I believe we can summarise his approach as follows.<sup>105</sup> First, the Donatists were to be approached with love and through dialogue in an attempt to win them over.<sup>106</sup> If persuasion failed, coercion could be applied. But this raised a theological question about the use of force to bring about conversion. The traditional view held that freedom of choice (*voluntas*) was an essential aspect of true religious conversion and that any religion which resorted to force only constructed a man-made artifice. By contrast, Augustine realised that God used discipline and the impingement of divine and human laws to make a person wise. Examples of this could be seen in God’s disciplining and chastising Israel in the Old Testament, the function of the Law as a *paedagogus*, the apostle Paul’s being afflicted with blindness, or our own personal fear of death and pain. These things can be used by God to either shape or break the force of habit in a person. Thus, Augustine saw two poles at work in a person’s moral and spiritual life: external pressure and internal freedom.<sup>107</sup>

When we examine his interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast, we see how Augustine “finds material ready to hand” for dealing with the Donatists. The sending of the servants by the king to invite the guests shows the first approach: to reach out in love and persuasion. Then, he sees the external, coercive element introduced in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., XC.6-10 (*P.L.* 38.562-6; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.338-44).

<sup>103</sup> Willis, 134.

<sup>104</sup> See the following for an excellent discussion of the development of Augustine’s positions on the use of coercion: P. R. L. Brown, “St. Augustine’s Attitude to Religious Coercion,” in *Augustine*, ed. John Dunn and Ian Harris, *Great Political Thinkers*, vol. I (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1997 [originally given at the Fourth International Congress on Patristic Studies: 1963]), 382-91.

<sup>105</sup> Both Willis and Brown show how Augustine’s approach developed over time and how he carefully applied it to different situations as they arose.

<sup>106</sup> This would fit with his Manichean background, for they practiced public debate in order to spread their teachings. Brown, 384.

<sup>107</sup> Brown, 386-87.



the phrase "*compelle intrare*" (Luke 14:23).<sup>108</sup> His understanding of this phrase reveals the polarity which operates in a person's inner life. "Compel them, saith he, to come in. Let compulsion be found outside, the will arise within."<sup>109</sup> This compulsion is directed at the heretics and schismatics who are represented by those who are found along the hedges by the servants (Luke 14:23). However, even this compulsion should be undertaken from a position of love in a manner similar to the way a father disciplines his child or a physician treats his patients.<sup>110</sup> It is for the good of the one being treated and should be withdrawn once it has achieved its beneficial effect. "The *compelle intrare* of the parable thus becomes the classic text of Saint Augustine at this time against the Donatists."<sup>111</sup>

How then does Augustine harmonise his interpretation of "*compelle intrare*" with the tolerance he saw in his interpretation of the parable of the Tares, "*sinite utraque crescere ad messem*"? First, compulsion may be used by civil authorities to break the force of habit so that a person may freely embrace the truth.<sup>112</sup> The co-operation between the church and the civil government on issues such as the Donatist schism represents a shift in church state relations which took place with Constantine. Irenaeus, who wrote before this cultural shift, viewed the civil government as an agent of God's judgement. If a person does good, they should have nothing to fear, but if they do evil they should be

<sup>108</sup> Augustine's comment "*compelle intrare*" occurs in his synthesis of the two parables in his *Harmony of the Gospels*. However, at another point he takes the position that Matthew and Luke recorded two different parables spoken by Jesus. Augustine, *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, II.LXII (C.S.E.L. 43.242-3). While the *Harmony of the Gospels* is dated around 399 Congar notes that Augustine was already involved with the Donatist controversy and that his comments on this passage are specifically addressed to this problem. Yves Congar, "Introduction," in *Traité anti-Donatistes in Bibliothéque Augustinienne, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, vol. 28 (n.p.: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 24ff.

<sup>109</sup> Brown quotes this passage from Augustine's *Sermo*, CXII.8 in the Latin as follows: "*Compelle eos intrare, foris inveniatur necessitas, nascitur intus voluntus.*" However, he does not give the source for which text he is quoting this from. The Migne edition contains a slightly different textual variation on this important sentence: "*Coge, inquit intrare, foris inveniatur necessitas, nascitur intus voluntus.*" Augustine, *Sermo*, CXII.8 (P.L. 38.647-8; *Sermons on Selected Lessons*, I.465). Since both verbs, *cogo* and *compella*, convey the ideas of to gather together, collect, and to compel by force, there is not much difference between the meaning of these two variants.

<sup>110</sup> Augustine, *Epistle*, CLXXXV.7 (C.S.E.L. 57.6; *The Fathers of the Church*, IV.147-48). Brown observes that Augustine's usual term for coercion is not *cohercitio* from which we derive our term with its negative overtones. But rather Augustine uses *correptio* which means "rebuke" — defined by its aim, *correctio*, 'setting straight'. Even in his choice of terms Augustine wanted his audience to understand that coercion was not a punishment but a corrective process. Brown, 114.

<sup>111</sup> Willis, 134; cf. Congar, 22-48.

<sup>112</sup> Augustine gives examples of former Donatists whom he believes this policy has truly liberated. Augustine, *Epistle*, CLXXXV.7, 13 (C.S.E.L. 57.6,12; *The Fathers of the Church*, IV.147-48, 154).



afraid, "For he does not bear the sword in vain."<sup>113</sup> For him, civil government was an agent under God's sovereign control much as the storm clouds were. By the time Augustine writes, he can appeal to Christians who hold office in the civil government to enact Godly legislation.<sup>114</sup> Thus, Augustine's interpretation also involves answering new questions in the relation between church and state. Questions which will arise again in the late Medieval period. Second, and perhaps even more significantly in the history of the effect of his interpretation, he makes a fine point in his discussion of the parable of the Tares. As long as there is the possibility that some of the wheat may be injured the tares should not be rooted out. But once the wheat is firmly rooted, universally accepted, and there is no danger of schism, then severe discipline may be exercised against the schismatics.<sup>115</sup> But even in this extreme instance, the first approach should be to reach out in love and bear with patience their errors.

### III. AQUINAS AND THE MEDIEVAL RECEPTION OF AUGUSTINE'S VIEW

One to the first things which one notices during the Medieval period is that, as a whole, the impact of Augustine's work during this period is hard to overstate. "The influence of Augustine on the later biblical exegesis of the Latin Middle Ages was enormous. With Jerome, Gregory the Great and the Venerable Bede he was one of four great authorities, and would probably have been reckoned the greatest of the four."<sup>116</sup> However, when we examine the reception of Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast, we notice that the medieval scholars are very selective in their appropriation of his exegesis. In respect to the understanding of "*compelle intrare*", none of the early medieval exegetes viewed Augustine's interpretation as being normative.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV. lviii.8 (Harvey, 2. 282-3; P.G. 7.1096-7)

<sup>114</sup> His letter to tribune and count Boniface is an example of this. Augustine, *Epistle*, CLXXXV.1 (C.S.E.L. 57.1; *The Fathers of the Church*, IV.141)

<sup>115</sup> Literally, "severe discipline should not sleep," "*non dormiat seueritas disciplinae*" Augustine, *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani*, III.2.13 (C.S.E.L. 51.116-18).

<sup>116</sup> Gerald Bonner, "Augustine as Biblical Scholar," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, vol. 1 (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 561.

<sup>117</sup> Bede is a good example in that he follows Gregory's interpretation rather than Augustine's. Bede, *In Matthaevi Evangelium exposito*, XIII (P.L. 92.68-69); Beare, "The Parable of the Guest at the Banquet," 10. Christian Druthmarus (also known as Christian of Stavelot) follows Augustine in recognizing the wedding garment as love, but on the whole is closer to Jerome's commentary, although he is fairly original as an exegete. Christiani Druthmari, *Expositio in Mattheum Evangelistam, caput LII* (P.L. 106.1438-1441, esp. 1440). In his commentary on this parable, Sedulius Scottus refers to Jerome on almost every verse and Gregory the Great almost as much but only makes a passing reference to Augustine's comment that these parables are similar (Sedulius disagrees and sees them as different parables). Sedulius Scottus, *In Mattheum*, CCXXI-CCXXII (*Kommentar zum*



Gregory the Great's interpretation of the 'wedding feast' is a good example. He interprets the "wedding" as a reference to the incarnation, the wedding of the divine being with human flesh which took place in the virgin's womb.<sup>118</sup> Gregory's concept that the wedding took place in the incarnation was widely received during the Medieval period and can be seen in the manner in which it is one of the first points mentioned in both the *Glossa Ordinaria* and in Aquinas' *Catena Aurea*. At the same time, Gregory agrees with Augustine that the invitation of the "good and the bad" to the feast represents the present mixed nature of the church.<sup>119</sup> However, he disagreed with Augustine's interpretation of "*compelle intrare*". According to Gregory, some people understand the invitation but are held back from accepting the invitation by their desires for satisfaction and success in the world. The phrase "*compelle intrare*" did not refer to the use of human force against such people but spoke of the manner in which their desires are constantly frustrated in this life, and as a result, they turn in brokenness to their Maker.<sup>120</sup> Thus, there is a shift from human (Augustine's view) to divine agency in the fulfilment of this injunction in Luke 14:23.

#### A. Horizontal Shifts

In order to understand the reception of Augustine's interpretation of the parables of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22) and the Great Feast (Luke 14) during the late Medieval period, there are two factors which we need to consider. The first concerns the historical changes in the nature of the church during this period. Europe was politically fragmented after the fall of the Western Empire in the fifth century. This meant that the church was faced with the larger challenges of maintaining some form of episcopal continuity and converting the pagans than confronting the challenge presented by diverse theological positions. Also, during this period, the threat from heretics was fairly

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*Evangelium nach Matthäus*, Bengt Löfstedt, ed., [Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1991], 495-501).

<sup>118</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Evangelia*, II.XXXVIII.3 (P.L. 76.1283; Nora Burke, *Pope Saint Gregory the Great: Parables of the Gospel*, [Dublin: Scepter, 1960], 35).

<sup>119</sup> "*Ecce jam ipsa qualitate convivantium aperte ostenditur quia per has regis nuptias praesen Ecclesia designatur, in qua cum bonis et malis conveniunt*" Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Evangelia*, II.XXXVIII.7 (P.L. 76.1285; Burke, 38). Gregory expands on this theme by comparing the church to the structure of a pyramid. The wide base represents those who are carnally minded in the church while the narrow top represents those who are spiritual.

<sup>120</sup> "[W]hile they try to navigate the high seas in pursuit of important affairs, they are continually driven back by contrary currents towards the shores of humiliation." Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Evangelia* II.XXXVIII.9 (P.L. 76.1271; Burke 115).



sporadic and was never a serious threat. Thus, the church dealt with heresies as they arose rather than formulate a consistent policy to deal with them.

Several important cultural shifts took place in the eleventh century which dramatically changed all this. Monastic reforms, for example at Cluny, introduced a renewed spiritual vigour in the church. At the same time, the papacy underwent institutional and doctrinal reform. A sense of spiritual unity grew both inside and outside the church during this century.<sup>121</sup> The consensus behind the First Crusade of 1095 is one manifestation of this sense of spiritual unity. As a result of this new sense of Christendom which unified society, heretics were now viewed as a threat to society.<sup>122</sup> The rapid spread of Catharism in the twelfth century presented one of the first real heretical challenges to the medieval church and was perceived as a threat which would rupture the Christian foundation to society in southern France. At first, the secular authorities attempted to stem the spread of Catharism through legislation. But it was not long before the church recognised this as a secular intrusion into what it considered to be an essentially ecclesiastical domain.<sup>123</sup>

The second factor which needs to be considered is shifts in the semiotic code by which medieval exegetes recognised unbelievers, heretics, and schismatics within the biblical texts. The background to the medieval semiotic code is found in the teachings of the church fathers. According to Augustine, Chrysostom, and Jerome, the parable of the Tares taught that the heretics should be left alone because some of the wheat may be killed if an attempt was made to remove the tares.<sup>124</sup> Jerome appealed to the fact that a

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<sup>121</sup> For a detailed study on the cultural and religious shifts which took place during this period see: Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 3-104,

<sup>122</sup> An example of this is seen in the manner in which Aquinas compares heresy with that of a counterfeiting money. However, heresy is much more dangerous since money only supports temporal life. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Q. 11, art. 3. (*Summa Theologiae*, Latin text with English translation edition, Thomas Gilby, trans. [London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975] 32.88-89). Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (N.Y. and London: Macmillan, 1987) s.v., "Inquisition, The," R. C. Finucane, 7.251.

<sup>123</sup> In 1215, Innocent III called for episcopal councils to enforce the antiheretical canons of the Fourth Lateran Council. However, it was the emperor Frederick II who incorporated these policies into official imperial legislation at his coronation in 1220. Heresy was now officially classified as treason, which could be punished with having the tongue cut out to burning at the stake for the more serious offenders. The Inquisition is recognised as having come into being either with the adoption of Frederick's imperial laws into ecclesial law in Rome in 1231, by Gregory the IX or with Innocent's bull *Ad extirpanda* (1252). Bernard Hamilton, *The Medieval Inquisition* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1982); Charles G. Herbermann, Edward Pace, Condé Pallen, et al. eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (London: Caxton, 1910) s.v., "Inquisition," Joseph Blötzer, 8.26-38.

<sup>124</sup> Chrysostom, *Commentariorum in Matthaeum*, XLVI.1-2 (P.G. 58.477-78).



heretic may become a defender of the faith.<sup>125</sup> In the East, Theophylact followed this line of thought. If Matthew had been killed before he was converted he would never have written his Gospel.<sup>126</sup> In the West, Bede almost copied Jerome's interpretation of this passage.<sup>127</sup> The result was that up until the twelfth century, the "*sinite utraque crescere*" of Matthew 13:30 was interpreted in such a manner that allowed a certain amount of toleration within the church concerning the treatment of heretics.<sup>128</sup>

The widely received interpretation of the parable of the Tares helps us to understand their interpretations of the parable of the Wedding Feast. This is especially evident in relation to the third invitation issued by the father in the parable to the people on the 'highways.' Medieval scholars recognised this as a reference to the roads outside the city of Jerusalem. This was understood to signify not only that these people were Gentiles (outside the city of God) but also that they are poor, sick, and down trodden. Gregory the Great set the pattern for many to follow when he explicates this section as teaching that the third group of people refers to the poor and sick Gentile sinners who accept the invitation to the feast because they have nothing left in this world.<sup>129</sup> Thus, compulsion is conceived as rescuing the weak and sick souls so that they may enter the kingdom.<sup>130</sup>

This raised the question of why those invited in the third invitation were living in such a mean condition. The fact that they were distant from the king indicated that their lives were characterised by flawed morals or behaviour.<sup>131</sup> The reason why the Gentiles are in this state is because of errors of their teachings, the religious and

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<sup>125</sup> Jerome, *Commentariorum in Mattheum*, II.815-34 (C.C.S.L. 77.106-7).

<sup>126</sup> Theophylacti, *Enarratio in Evangelium Matthaei*, XIII.30 (P.G. 123.283-286)

<sup>127</sup> Bede *In Matthaei Evangeilium exposito*, XIII (P.L. 92.68-69). However, it is debated whether this commentary is the work of Bede or that of Rabanus; Roland H. Bainton, "Religious Liberty and the Parable of the Tares," in *Early and Medieval Christianity, The Collected Papers in Church History of Roland Bainton*, vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), 101-4.

<sup>128</sup> The persistence of this interpretation can be seen as late as the twelfth century when the Bishop of Liège, Wazo, was questioned about the forceful coercion of heretics. In his reply, he appealed to the fathers (most likely Chrysostom in particular) that the tares should be allowed to grow with the wheat since one who is a tare today may in the future become one of the wheat. *Leodiensis Vita Vasonis*, 25B-C (P.L. 142.752). In stating this, I realise that such a generalised statement does not express every view from this period, but a full discussion of this would go beyond the confines of this chapter.

<sup>129</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Evangelia*, II.XXXVIII.7-8 (P.L. 76.1269-70; Burke 112).

<sup>130</sup> Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica: Historia Evangelica*, cap. CXXVIII (P.L. 198.1605)

<sup>131</sup> "*Exitus autem uiarum defectus actionum intelligimus, quia illi plerunque facile ad Deum ueniunt...*" Sedulius Scottus, *In Mattheum*, 22.8 (Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Matthäus, Bengt Löfstedt ed. [Freiburg: Herder, 1991], 2.498).



philosophical doctrines which they have been taught.<sup>132</sup> Thus, the invitation to the wedding feast is a call to convert to Christianity and its teachings. Peter Comestor's comments on this passage in the *Historia Scholastica* summarises this view well. "The weak and the crippled, good and evil were induced/persuaded. For no one is excluded from the kingdom due to weakness in body, rather they are (as it were) frequently compelled."<sup>133</sup>

### B. Aquinas' Reception of Augustine's Position

It is against this background that Aquinas' interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast stands out so dramatically. Before I discuss his comments on that parable, let us return to the parable of the Tares briefly. In the *Catena Aurea*, Aquinas identified the tares as heretics. He begins his discussion of the "*sinite utraque crescere*" clause in Matthew 13:30 by citing Augustine that the tares and the wheat should grow together so that the wheat will not be harmed in an attempt to remove the tares.<sup>134</sup> He followed this with similar quotations from Jerome and Chrysostom. The manner by which Aquinas places six different citations from these three authors in succession leads one to the premature conclusion that Aquinas is arguing for a position of "toleration". But then he introduces an abrupt turn of thought by returning to an extended series of citations from Augustine which begins with "This was at first my own opinion, that no man was to be driven by force into the unity of Christ."<sup>135</sup> And concludes with "And it is wonderful to see him [referring to Paul's conversion] who entered into the gospel by the force of bodily affliction laboring therein more than all those who are called by word only."<sup>136</sup> The conclusion which Aquinas wants the reader to draw is clear, when there is no danger of harming the wheat, the tares should be rooted out.

This thought is developed further in the *Summa Theologiae* in questions 10 and 11 under the topic of "Consequences of the Faith." Here Aquinas prescribes the guidelines for how compulsion is to be practised by the church. One of the principles for

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<sup>132</sup> Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Evangelium Matthaei*, X.XXII.911 (P.L. 120.746); Anselm, *Enarrationes in Evangelium Matthaei*, cap. 22.8-10 (P.L. 162.1437).

<sup>133</sup> The way in which he parallels "*induxerunt bonos et malos*" with "*compellit*" indicates that he is using these verbs in a manner in which their semantic domain overlap each other. They are both referring to compelling people to accept the invitation by inducing or persuading them, not by force. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, cap. CXXVIII (P.L. 198.1605)

<sup>134</sup> Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 13.30, citing Augustine, *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani*, III.2 and *Quaest. in Matthaicum*, 12.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., citing Augustine, *Epistle*, XCIII.17.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., citing Augustine, *Epistle*, CLXXXV.22.

the application of the use of coercion concerns the distinction between *haeretici* and *infideles*. Heretics are those within the church who have abandoned the orthodox position while infidels refer to unbelievers in general. One of Aquinas' strengths is the manner by which he is able to synthesise what was previously seen as competing views. By making the distinction between heretics and infidels, Aquinas is able to embrace Chrysostom's position that heretics should be tolerated. But not without some modification. He shifts Chrysostom's stance from understanding the 'tares' as a reference to heretics to interpreting the 'tares' as a reference to infidels.<sup>137</sup>

He then synthesises Chrysostom's with Augustine's position. Aquinas does not adopt Augustine's view on the role of force or coercion on the will, but takes the earlier position that faith is voluntary, therefore conversion should not be forced. However, this only applied to infidels who were not hindering the faith.

Nevertheless, the faithful, if they are able, should compel them not to hinder the faith whether by their blasphemies or evil persuasions or even open persecutions. It is for this reason that Christ's faithful often wage war on infidels, not indeed for the purpose of forcing them to believe, because even were they to conquer them and take them captive, they should still leave them free to believe or not, but for the purpose of stopping them obstructing the faith of Christ.<sup>138</sup>

While a person cannot, and should not, be compelled to believe, once a person does convert, they are under obligation to keep the faith and thus may be "compelled to hold to the faith." Thus, Augustine's "*compelle intrare*" is adapted by Aquinas as a reference to heretics, not infidels.<sup>139</sup> This force is only to be exercised when a person's heresy is publicly known and presents no danger of creating a schism if an attempt was to be made to remove the heretic.

Drawing on Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast, Aquinas argues that an attempt to persuade the person of their error should be practised first. In contrast to Peter Comestor and Anselm, Aquinas interpreted those on the outer roads as heretics, not as infidels in need of salvation. While this shift may seem like an inconsequential point, the conclusions which Aquinas draws from them are quite significant. If a heretic refuses to return to the orthodox position then he or she is to be excommunicated from the church and then handed over to the secular court. "As for

<sup>137</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 10, art. 8 (Gilby, 32.60-61).

<sup>138</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 10, art. 8 (Gilby, 32.62-63). This section is most likely a reference to the Crusades which were occurring at that time. Gilby, 62-63 note a.

<sup>139</sup> Once again Aquinas opens by discussing the position of toleration and uses Augustine's change of mind on this matter to introduce the practice of coercion. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 10, art. 8. (Gilby, 32.60-65).



heretics their sin deserves banishment, not only from the Church by excommunication, but also from this world by death.”<sup>140</sup> This not only follows Augustine’s balance of authority between ecclesiastical and secular authorities but also defends the position by which the office of the Inquisition operated. With Aquinas, the Medieval church’s concept of dealing with infidels, heretics, and schismatics reaches its most articulate position. The enduring reception of Aquinas’ exposition of these passages is demonstrated by the fact that even as late as the sixteenth century his work was still being cited in inquisitorial trials.<sup>141</sup> Thus, it is through Aquinas that Augustine’s interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast is received during the late Middle Ages.

However, while Aquinas’ use of Augustine appears to follow Augustine fairly closely, there are several significant differences. Augustine attempted to formulate answers to the questions raised by the Donatist schism. His concern was not primarily in controlling or restraining Donatism as a heretical movement, but his concern arose because of the violence which resulted from this movement, especially in their attacks against the orthodox communities and clergy. At the same time, he exercised a great deal of care in the practice of his concept of coercion. But once his text entered into the effective history of the Christian tradition it went beyond his intentions.

For several hundred years, Augustine’s interpretation was not received as normative. With the historical shifts which took place during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a horizon of expectations opened up which allowed Aquinas to once again recognise Augustine’s comments on “*compelle intrare*” as relevant to his horizon. Even though the office of the Inquisition was established and the Crusades were taking place by the time Aquinas appropriated Augustine, his work in the *Catena Aurea* and *Summa Theologia* served to justify these institutions through his re-appropriation of Augustine’s interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast.<sup>142</sup> Aquinas’ appropriation of the meaning and significance of the parable through his reception of Augustine’s comments resulted in a concretization of the meaning of the parable which serves as an excellent example of productive and norm-building function of biblical commentaries and other forms of theological literature.

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<sup>140</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q. 11, art. 3 (Gilby 32.88-89).

<sup>141</sup> He gives the example of the trial of Claes de Praet in 1556 who appealed to Matthew 13:30 in his defence, “Why do you not let me grow until the harvest?” To which the examiner replied, “Because the master of the field gave this command to his servants lest they hurt the wheat and pull it out along with the tares, but I can skirt along the edge and pluck out one or two here and there sometimes six or eight or even ten or twelve, and sometimes a hundred without hurting the wheat.” Bainton, 106.

<sup>142</sup> See the translator’s note on Q.10, article 8.I in Gilby, *Summa Theologiae*, 32.62-63.

While Aquinas carefully stipulated how compulsion was to be applied, history has demonstrated that the reception and practice of his interpretations were not as careful or restrained. Augustine could never have envisioned the Crusades or the Inquisition but his defence of the use of force to compel the obstinate clearly helped defend these institutions through Aquinas' reception of his interpretation. This should serve as a warning that biblical interpretation should be engaged with an eye to the future. The exegete should carefully consider the implications of their interpretations for future generations just as a marksman carefully considers the trajectory his projectile will take.

#### IV. RECEPTION DURING THE REFORMATION

The Reformation presents us with several interesting aspects in the reception history of Matthew 22:1-14. It is not uncommon to find works on the history of biblical interpretation claiming that Luther and especially Calvin were not only the fore-runners to modern exegetical practices, but also that they shared more in common with modern exegetes than they did with their medieval predecessors.<sup>143</sup> However, recent work in this area has convincingly shown that work of the early Reformers demonstrates a high level of continuity in their exegetical interests with the medieval scholars.<sup>144</sup> While a detailed discussion of these issues is not possible here, I think the evidence from the Reformer's writings supports the latter perspective.

##### A. Martin Luther's *Expositions* and Bucer's *Enarrations*

Luther's cursing of the allegorical method employed by the fathers, and in particular the "clever tricks" of Origen, as being "nothing but rubbish" appears to give the impression that he was making a strong break from Patristic and medieval exegetical practices.<sup>145</sup> But at other places, he is quite hospitable to their allegorical interpretations. This is particularly obvious in the introduction to his teaching on the parable of the

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<sup>143</sup> Perhaps the classic text to make this argument is: Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961; originally, N.Y.: Dutton, 1886). For more recent works which hold to this view see: Hans Joachim Krauss, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," *Interpretation* 31 (1977), 9-18; William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 39-41.

<sup>144</sup> For an excellent collection of articles which demonstrates this view see: Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, eds., *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996).

<sup>145</sup> Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert, vol. 54 in *Luther's Works*, Helmut T. Lehman, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 46-7, 406; A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 32.



Wedding Feast. "This Gospel presents to us the parable of the wedding; therefore we are compelled to understand it differently than it sounds and appears to the natural ear and eye. Hence we will give attention to the spiritual meaning of the parable and then notice how the text has been torn and perverted."<sup>146</sup>

Like many of the previous commentators, he understood the invitation to the feast to have been extended to the Jewish nation first and then, because they rejected the invitation it was extended to the Gentiles.<sup>147</sup> The thrust of the parable concerns the proclamation of this invitation, the gospel, throughout the whole world but very few people embrace it. However, Luther broke with previous interpretations of the parable at three critical points. The first concerned what the feast referred to, the second was the significance of the excuses, and third was what the wedding garment symbolised. The feast to which the king invites the guests in the parable is not seen primarily as a reference to the church by Luther, but rather it points to the richness of the teachings in the Bible. If all the food of the kings were gathered into one pile it could not compare with the "smallest word of God." This is why Jesus compared it to a marriage feast in the parable according to Luther.<sup>148</sup> "Wherefore the supper here is nothing else, but a very rich and sumptuous feast, which God hath made through Christ by the Gospel, which setteth before us great good things and rich treasures."<sup>149</sup>

The excuses which those who were invited gave reveal that our relationship to God should take priority over our relationship to the things of this world such as business or family. Most of the Patristic and Medieval scholars would agreed with Luther's exposition of the excuses so far. However, Luther did not go as far as Chrysostom and teach that the Christian should withdraw from the world. Instead, he took a softer position, we "should not cleave to them in our hearts."<sup>150</sup> The reason why those who were invited refused the invitation is because they did not possess enough faith in Christ to abandon their dependence on work, family, and other worldly concerns. As a result, Luther sees these characters as symbolising those who think that they can obtain salvation through their own good works.<sup>151</sup> "Wherefore no man cometh to this supper,

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<sup>146</sup> Beare, "The Parable of the Guests at the Banquet," 11 quoted from a sermon preached on the 20th Sunday after Trinity.

<sup>147</sup> Luther, "A Sermon of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning the Bidding of Guests to the Great Supper," in *Devotional Writings*, Martin O. Dietrich ed., vol. 42 in *Luther's Works*, 191.

<sup>148</sup> Luther, "An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer" in *Luther's Works*, 42.56.

<sup>149</sup> Idem, "A Sermon of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning the Bidding of Guests to the Great Supper," in *Luther's Works*, 42.191.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 42.192.

<sup>151</sup> Hunter, 32.

but he that bringeth with him a sincere faith, which God preferreth and loveth above all creatures.”<sup>152</sup> Faith now becomes the central theme in the parable. The wedding garment is interpreted in accordance with this theme; the lack of the wedding garment signifies the absences of sincere faith in that individual.<sup>153</sup> Thus, Luther makes a sharp turn in this aspect of the parable’s interpretation especially since the time of Augustine. The feast is no longer recognised as the church, but it refers to the invitation to feast on the rich truths of the gospel. This also allows Luther to shift from Augustine’s ecclesiological approach to ask questions about what this parable taught in relation to salvation through faith.

Luther’s approach to the parable appears to be characterised by the same degree of allegorical method as those who came before him. However, what he counted as the proper reference for the symbols in the parable had undergone a significant shift due to the questions which were being raised by him and other Reformers. His interpretation of the parable is inferior to previous interpretations in two respects. First, in comparison to the unified and holistic interpretation which the Patristic and medieval scholars offered, Luther’s interpretation is very fragmented. He draws out two distinct points, the gospel and faith, but it is difficult to see how in his explication of the parable they relate to each other logically or in the narrative structure of the parable. By contrast, most of the interpretations we have examined to this point present the parable in a manner in which all the elements are related to each other within the overall structure and narrative of the parable. Second, his interpretation of the wedding garment as faith not only reflects the Reformer’s emphasis on salvation by faith but, like Augustine, it reduces the surplus of meaning in this symbol to a single concept. This is a point which John Maldonatus justifiably criticises not only Luther but the other early Reformers.<sup>154</sup>

One of the more significant exegetical moves which Luther makes concerns the interpretation of “*compelle intrare*.” Luther argues that this phrase should not to be understood in terms of “outward compulsion, as some interpret it, that wicked and ungodly ones should be violently driven to the supper ....” A reference most likely directed at the Catholic position on this passage which had come down from Aquinas. In fact, the use of force to compel the “wicked and ungodly” to the feast results in no

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 42.913.

<sup>153</sup> Beare, 11.

<sup>154</sup> See below, “Maldonatus, Not Everything is Faith.”



benefits to either the church or the person being compelled.<sup>155</sup> There are two reasons for this. First, sincere faith requires a free act of the volition. And secondly, within the context of the parable itself, the feast is no longer the church but the gospel. While someone could be forced into the church or to comply with its teachings and practices, it is difficult to see how this could be applied to compelling a person to feast on the gospel. Instead, Luther understands this compulsion to refer “only to the conscience, and is inner and spiritual.”<sup>156</sup>

While there is no evidence that suggests that Luther changed his interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast, his stance on toleration did shift over time. The threats presented by the radical Reformers at Müntzer, Karlstadt, and the Peasants' Revolt resulted in his seeking to protect the established Protestant churches. This shift is best seen in his interpretation of the parable of the Tares. In his earlier works, he wrote that there will always be some measure of heresy in the church and that some degree of toleration should be extended toward the heretics. As time progressed, he taught that Protestant princes should defend the unity of the church and the truth of the gospel preached within their jurisdictions. In his final position, he argues that the heretics should not only be refuted by the ministers teaching but also punished by the civil magistrates.<sup>157</sup>

Martin Bucer's commentary agrees with Luther's interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast at almost every point. Towards the end of his discussion of Matthew 22:1-14, he makes a significant digression and comments on the “*compelle intrare*” in Luke 14:23 for several pages.<sup>158</sup> Compulsion must be understood in relation to the sending of the servants by the father. These servants went out to every part of the kingdom and found the poor, crippled and blind and through their diligence and perseverance commended the kingdom of God to everyone they found. In a manner very similar to Comestor's comments on this phrase, Bucer says that the king had his

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<sup>155</sup> Luther, “A Sermon of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning the Bidding of Guests to the Great Supper,” in *Luther's Works*, 42.194-5.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.195.

<sup>157</sup> Ole Peter Grell, “Introduction,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5; Bainton, “Religious Liberty and the Parable of the Tares,” 110-13.

<sup>158</sup> Bucer thinks that the parables of the Wedding Feast in Matthew and the Great Feast in Luke 14 are the same parable, but does not remark on the relationship between the different accounts in his commentary. Martin Bucer, *Enarrationes per Petuae, in Sacra Quatuor Evangelia*, ad Academiam Marpurgensem de seruada unitate Ecclesiae (Argentorati: Georgium, 1530), 165-67.

servants compel them to enter the feast through persuasion.<sup>159</sup> The people were compelled to enter the feast on account of the diligent and persistent ministry of the prophets, apostles, and evangelists.<sup>160</sup>

Whereas Luther only vaguely referred to “the others” who misinterpreted “*compelle intrare*”, Bucer attributes the abuse of this phrase’s meaning to the popes who twisted its meaning in order to legitimatise their use of imprisonment and the death sentence as a means to enrich the church, not to bring glory to God. According to Bucer, the error in their interpretation was simple, the text says, “*compelle intrare*”, compel them to enter.<sup>161</sup> It does not speak about the use of force against those who create divisions or spread false teachings, but it refers to the tireless effort by God’s servants to exhort and persuade the people to accept the invitation to the heavenly feast which God has prepared. The apostle Paul’s ministry serves as the prime example of this type of compulsion. On the recipient’s side, only those who willingly and gladly accepted this invitation were worthy to receive it. Thus, decisions made under the threat of force would be of no avail as Luther had claimed.<sup>162</sup>

#### B. Calvin’s *Commentary* and *Institutes*

Calvin’s interpretation of the parable of the Wedding Feast occurs at two locations: in his *Harmony of the Gospels* and in Book IV of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. While Calvin enjoyed the advantage of having access to Luther and Bucer’s work on this passage before he wrote on this parable, his views on the parable raise some very interesting questions especially in light of their work.<sup>163</sup> Because his discussion of

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<sup>159</sup> The parallels with Comestar not only include the same argument and use of *compella induco* but also “*quasi compellerent*.” Ibid.; Peter Comestar, *Historia Scholastica*, cap. CXXVIII (P.L. 198.1605).

<sup>160</sup> “...*ad sua caena uelut compellerent, ut tande conuiuatu numerus impleretur.*” Bucer, 165.

<sup>161</sup> “*Quidam abutuntur hoc dicto, ad comprobendam uim, qua carcerum & mortis metu, ad approbanda Papae commenta quoslibet compellunt. Scriptum est, inquit, Compelle intrare.*” Bucer, 166.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> While I cannot date Luther’s sermons which I cited above, nor prove that Calvin had access to them, he did have access to Luther’s other works. In the case of Bucer and other Reformers such as Melancthon and Bullinger, Calvin not only read their commentaries but commented upon their work in his commentaries. Thomas H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press 1993), 60-77, 87-90.



the parable is briefer in the *Institutes* and is chronologically prior to his *Harmony*, I shall examine that text first.<sup>164</sup>

Like the other Reformers, Calvin interprets the parable around the central themes of the faith and the gospel. The feast refers to the gospel and the invitations signify the “outward preaching of the word.”<sup>165</sup> The invitation to attend the feast corresponds to Calvin’s doctrine that God extends a general call of salvation to everyone. At the same time, there is a special call that is issued to believers only and takes place through the ministry of the Holy Spirit illuminating the preaching of God’s word in the believer’s heart.<sup>166</sup> The successive sending of the servants to invite the guests refers to the general calling.

The guest without the wedding garment should “be understood as applying to those who enter the church on profession of faith but not clothed with Christ’s sanctification.”<sup>167</sup> The binding and casting of this guest into the outer darkness serves two purposes. The fate of this imprudent guest serves as a warning against hypocrisy within the church. At the same time, the king’s actions should serve as an encouragement to believers who are disheartened over the low moral or spiritual state of the church since it demonstrates that God will purge the church of all who are not true believers.<sup>168</sup> The special call to salvation is sometimes experienced only temporarily by an individual and because of ungratefulness on their part God withdraws the offer of this grace to them. “God will not forever bear such dishonors ... but as their baseness deserves will cast them out.”<sup>169</sup> The result is that they are in an even “greater blindness” than their previous state. Calvin does not specifically identify this teaching to a passage in the parable, but the impression is fairly clear that it is related to his understanding of the guest without the garment being expelled.

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<sup>164</sup> *In Harmoniam ex Matthaeo, Marco et Luca Compositam Commentarii* first appeared in 1555 while the *Institutio Christianae Religionis* was first published in 1539, but underwent several revisions during Calvin’s life.

<sup>165</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, ch. xxiv, §8, trans. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2.974.

<sup>166</sup> “For this call is common also to the wicked, but the other bears with it the Spirit of regeneration [cf. Titus 3:5], the guarantee and seal of the inheritance to come [Eph. 1:13-14], with which our hearts are sealed [II Cor. 1:22] unto the day of the Lord.” *Ibid.*, 2.974-5.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.974.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.975. This reflects Calvin’s teaching on the nature of the church. The church was both visible and invisible: the invisible church comprised all true believers, the visible church was the actual, mixed church which included everyone who professed to be a Christian. *Institutes* IV.I.7 (McNeill, 1960 edition, 2.1021-22).

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.974.



The second place where Calvin examines the parable of the Wedding Feast is found in his *Harmony of the Gospels*. Calvin did not write individual commentaries on the synoptic gospels, but like Augustine, chose instead to compile a harmony of the gospels. It is only natural then that Calvin places the parable in Matthew 22 alongside the parable of the Great Feast in Luke 14. After an introductory section comparing Matthew and Luke's accounts, Calvin begins his exposition of the parables.<sup>170</sup>

Like Luther, Calvin wanted to be seen as making a break from the previous tradition of interpretation. His statement that "...we ought not to attempt an ingenious explanation of every minute clause" at the conclusion of his discussion of the parable of the Wedding Feast is one example of this.<sup>171</sup> This criticism appears to be directed at the allegorical interpretations from the Patristic and medieval exegetes. However, like Luther, Calvin is guilty of his own criticism when he examines each particular element of the parable as closely as those he criticised. His interpretation of the various characters and their action in the parable also agrees with most of the allegorical interpretations offered by the Patristic and medieval scholars.<sup>172</sup> Those who were invited to the feast but rejected the invitation and had their city burned symbolise the Jewish nation.<sup>173</sup> The different excuses which the business person and farmer gave represent how the cares of the world entangle and impede our entering the kingdom of God. This is a universal condition of humanity and not just a failure on the part of the Jewish nation. As a result, Calvin laments that "hardly one person in a hundred can be found who prefers the kingdom of God to the fading riches."<sup>174</sup> The lame and blind who are found on the outer roads are once again recognised as a reference to the Gentiles. Their invitation to

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<sup>170</sup> Calvin argues that these two accounts relate the same parable. While Luke's setting is preferred and Matthew filled out more of the details "there is remarkable agreement between them on the main points of the parable." Ioannis Calvini, *In Harmoniam Matthaeo, Marco et Luca Compositam Commentarii*, sect. XIII.121 Matth. 1-2, Ad Editionem Amstelodamensem ed. (Berolini: Apud Gustavum Eichler, 1833), 40-1: Eng. trans., *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1.167-9.

<sup>171</sup> "... unde colligimus, non esse subtiliter excutiendas singulas particulas" Calvin, *In Harmoniam*, XIII.121 Matth. 11 (43); Pringle's translation, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 1.175.

<sup>172</sup> While much of Calvin's exegesis overlaps with Patristic interpretations, his use of the fathers differs from that of the medieval exegete. He uses their interpretations but he does not appeal to their authority in order to substantiate his argument. David C. Steinmetz, "Calvin and Patristic Exegesis," in *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 135-7.

<sup>173</sup> Calvin., *In Harmoniam*, XIII.121 Matth. 4 (41-2); Pringle, 170-1.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.121 Matth. 4 (42-3); Pringle, 171. This echoes a similar lament made by Origen and Gregory the Great. Origen, *In Matthaeum*, XVII.24 (G.C.S. 10.652); Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Evangelia*, II.XXXVIII.7 (P.L. 76.1285; Burke 38).



the feast speaks about the initiation of the Gentile mission and the inception of the church according to Calvin.

There are several significant points in Calvin's commentary which deserve attention. The first is the subtle manner by which he explicates the significance of the feast. As he begins his discussion of the parable, he speaks of the feast in terms of the kingdom of God. But when he reaches verse 22:9 where the invitation is extended to the destitute on the outer roads, Calvin no longer speaks of the feast in reference to the kingdom of God. Now he explicitly identifies the feast as the Church. "What the prophets had obscurely foretold about creating a new church is now plainly explained."<sup>175</sup> In this way, his exegesis of the parable follows the narrative logic of the parable closer than previous interpreters had.<sup>176</sup>

The second point concerns his interpretation of the wedding garment. The king's casting the guest without the garment into the outer darkness illustrates that God will judge and remove those who pollute the church. "The general truth conveyed is, that not all who have entered the Church will become partakers of everlasting life, but only those who are found to wear the dress which befits the heavenly palace."<sup>177</sup> So far his commentary agrees with his discussion in the *Institutes*.<sup>178</sup> The wedding garment symbolises "putting on Christ" while the man without the wedding garment signifies a person who has not put off his old self with its pollution.<sup>179</sup> Thus, the lesson that should be learned from the parable is that an external profession of faith is not sufficient for salvation.

The third point in his commentary which deserves attention involves the differences between his commentary and the *Institutes*. In the *Institutes*, the general and special call of God were the prominent teachings which Calvin recognised in the parable. However, these calls are not mentioned at all in his *Harmony of the Gospels*. In fact, he even makes the point that he will not enter into a discussion of "the eternal election of God" in the *Harmony*.<sup>180</sup> While these two works do not contradict each other, they do

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<sup>175</sup> "Ita quod obscurius de creanda nova Ecclesia praedictum fuerat a Prophetis, clare exprimit." Calvin, *In Harmoniam*, XIII.121 Matth. 9 (42); Pringle, 172.

<sup>176</sup> This is not to deny that other interpreters did not follow the narrative logic of the parable, but that Calvin's exegesis at this point followed it more closely. Instead of reading the feast as the church throughout the entire parable, Calvin sees the reference changing at verse 22:9 in the parable.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., XIII.121 Matth. 11 (43); Pringle, 174.

<sup>178</sup> Idem, *Institutes*, 2.974.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.; idem, *In Harmoniam*, XIII.121 Matth. 11 (43); Pringle, 174.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., XIII.121 Matth. 14 (43); Pringle, 175.

illustrate Collingwood and Gadamer's point that meaning of a text is related to the questions one asks the text. In the *Institutes*, Calvin was concerned with questions about various theological *loci*; in the commentary he was addressing a different agenda, to explicate the meaning of the biblical text. This stands in contrast to Bucer who tried to combine both a discussion of the theological *loci* and a commentary into a single work. A solution which Calvin did not find satisfactory and chose instead to write his *Institutes* and commentaries as complementary works.<sup>181</sup> The difference between Calvin's hermeneutical interests in the *Institutes* and his commentaries results in different questions being asked which yield different answers in his works.

The most remarkable aspect of Calvin's commentary is his adoption of Augustine's "*compelle intrare*". "It will excite more general surprises to find the great Reformer maintaining the right of the civil magistrate to punish heretics, and even to inflict on them the last sentence of the law."<sup>182</sup> While Calvin does mention that 'compel them to enter' is an allusion to the fact that the gospel is not just a verbal invitation but that it is accompanied with "exhortations fitted to arouse our minds" in a manner very similar to Luther and Bucer, he devotes more attention and force of argument to support his adoption of Augustine's position.<sup>183</sup> Because his appropriation of Augustine is so important, I will quote this passage at length.

And yet, I do not disapprove of Augustine's frequent use of this passage against the Donatists, in order to recommend that godly princes may lawfully issue edicts to force the obstinate and rebellious to worship the true God and (maintain) the unity of the faith. Although faith is voluntary, nevertheless we see that such means are profitable for breaking their stubbornness, who unless they are forced will not be obedient (or submit).<sup>184</sup>

There are four aspects to Calvin's reception of Augustine's position which are important. First, force may be used to "compel obstinate and rebellious to worship the true God." In Calvin's Geneva this meant the execution of heretics such as Servetus and

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<sup>181</sup> Parker, 88-90.

<sup>182</sup> Pringle, "Translator's Preface" in *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, xv. Steinmetz's claim that "In every case, explicit and anonymous, in which Calvin has referred to Patristic exegesis, he has quarrelled with it." is clearly an overstatement. Especially, when we consider Calvin's explicit approval of Augustine's view on this passage. Steinmetz, "Calvin and Patristic Exegesis," 136.

<sup>183</sup> Calvin., *In Harmoniam*, XIII.121 Luc.23 (42-3); Pringle, 173; Luther, "A Sermon of Dr. Martin Luther Concerning the Bidding of Guests to the Great Supper," 42.195; Bucer, *Enarrationes*, 165.

<sup>184</sup> "*Interea non improbo, quod Augustus hoc testimonio saepius contra Donatistas usus est, ut probaret, piorum principum edictis ad veri Dei cultum et fidei unitatem licite cogi prae fractos et rebelles: quia, etsi voluntaria est fides, videmus tamen, iis mediis utiliter domari eorum pervicaciam, qui non nisi coacti parent.*" Calvin, XIII.121 Luc. 23 (43); Pringle, 713.



the repression of the Anabaptists movements. For Calvin, the purpose of compulsion was not conversion as Augustine argued, but “to vindicate the honour of [God] by silencing those who sully His holy name.”<sup>185</sup> Second, the goal of compulsion was to “maintain the unity of the faith.” This reflects the medieval character of Calvin’s thought-world. The Reformers could not fathom how a person could leave his family and occupation and become a wandering evangelist. To ignore these social relationships was seen as introducing a destabilising element into society. But for the Anabaptists these were worldly concerns.<sup>186</sup> Third, this force was to be exercised by godly princes. Calvin taught that Christians should extend toleration to others unless they were “firmly committed to making propaganda for error.”<sup>187</sup> Inside the church, the truth was to be defended by means of proper teaching and the exercise of church discipline. Outside, the civil magistrate was in a different situation, he was “under obligation to *repress* error.”<sup>188</sup> The relationship between ecclesial and civil authorities is discussed in his commentary on Daniel 4:1-3. Once again Calvin appropriated Augustine. Since the magistrate is God’s representative, he has authority to exercise the use of force and the Christian magistrate in particular should be ashamed if he is indulgent with heretics.<sup>189</sup> And finally, while he held to the Reformation’s and the earlier church’s view that faith was voluntary, we see him adopting Augustine’s teaching that force can serve the purpose of subduing those who are obstinate. While many Protestants were divided over the idea of religious tolerance, Calvin was a strong advocate that civil magistrates should use the sword to defend the faith against heretics and schismatics. As the Protestant church established itself in Northern Europe, the Reformers’ role shifted from dissidents attempting to reform the church to ecclesiastical leaders who sought to consolidate and protect the Reformation churches. It was in this context that Calvin’s appropriation of Augustine’s

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<sup>185</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus: 1511-1553* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1960), 170.

<sup>186</sup> Hans Kasdorf, “The Anabaptist Approach to Mission,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 51-69; Franklin H. Littell, “The Anabaptist Theology of Mission,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, 20.

<sup>187</sup> Paul Wooly, “Calvin and Toleration,” in *The Heritage of John Calvin: Heritage Hall Lectures 1960-1970*, John Bratt ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 141.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-5.

<sup>189</sup> Calvin, *Daniel 1: Chapters 1-6*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries*, D. F. Wright ed., vol. 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 153. For an excellent discussion of the actual mechanics and workings of the secular and ecclesial government of Geneva see: E. William Monter, *Calvin’s Geneva, New Dimensions in History: Historical Cities*, ed. Norman F. Cantor (N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1967). Especially chapters 5 “The Church of Geneva to 1564” 125-143; and 6 “The Secular Arm” 144-164.

"*compelle intrare*" was received and became a norm for church-state relations in Switzerland and parts of France especially in relation to radical reformers and Anabaptists.<sup>190</sup>

Calvin's adoption of Augustine's position was mediated through the prejudices which he inherited from the medieval period, and in particular from Aquinas, and not directly from Augustine. This is reflected in the four points I have just discussed. Calvin's goal of maintaining the unity of the faith was not the same as Augustine's desire to restore the wayward back to the church.<sup>191</sup> Christian rulers during the medieval period swore an oath to advance the glory of God by suppressing doctrines contrary to his glory. The use of force to constrain heresy and provide an inducement for heretics to abandon their views was part of canon and civil law in the late middle ages.<sup>192</sup> Thus, Calvin's reception of Augustine was shaped by the horizon in which he lived, his historical position in the Christian tradition, and in particular by classic texts, such as Aquinas' works. The manner by which Aquinas mediates Calvin's appropriation of Augustine is an example of the summit-dialogue between authors which Jauss discusses in relation to role of classic texts in a tradition.

### C. A Critique of Calvin by way of his Contemporaries

In this section I will examine two texts which through their relationship to Calvin (and the other Reformers at certain points) allow us to say something about the appropriateness of Calvin's exegesis. The first is John Maldonatus' commentary on Matthew and the second is the Geneva Bible.

#### 1. *Maldonatus, Not Everything is Faith*

Maldonatus is significant not only because he was a Catholic exegete who was contemporary of the Reformers and very familiar with their work, but also because he was regarded as a master of exegesis whose works were widely received for several

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<sup>190</sup> Ole Peter Grell, "Introduction," in *Tolerance and Intolerance*, 3-6. Some Reformers, such as Jean Bonneau, who disagreed with this view were eventually forced to adopt Calvin's position. Philip Benedict, "*Un roi, une loi, deux fois* Parameters for the History of Catholic-Reformed Co-existence in France, 1555-1685," in *Tolerance and Intolerance*, 70-1.

<sup>191</sup> Bainton, 170.

<sup>192</sup> Benedict discusses these responsibilities in relation to the duties of the medieval rulers. Benedict, 68.



hundred years.<sup>193</sup> Like Calvin and Luther, Maldonatus also professed a distrust for the allegorical method.<sup>194</sup>

One of his common criticisms of the Reformers was their tendency to read all the parables according to the framework of salvation by faith. In his comments on the parable of the Dragnet in Matthew 13, Maldonatus writes that all the fish caught in the net (which symbolises the church) are Christians and have entered the church by faith. The fact that some are good and some are bad points to the conclusion that only those who practice good works are saved. This refutes those he labels as the modern heretics, Calvin and Luther, who teach that “all who have faith will be saved.”<sup>195</sup> To support his interpretation of the parable of the Dragnet, he appeals to Augustine.

It may well be said that, although Saint Augustine refuted no class of heretics so completely as the Donatists, yet that he wrote his many works against them, and not only against them but also against the followers of Luther and Calvin long after. This is so great a matter, that whoever reads them may substitute the word ‘Donatists’ with the followers of Luther and Calvin.<sup>196</sup>

According to Maldonatus, the parable of the Wedding Feast teaches two main ideas: (1) many are called but few come, and (2) that all who enter the church will not be saved.<sup>197</sup> He questions Calvin’s interpretation of the significance of the wedding garment. “The followers of Calvin say that it is faith — for everything is faith with them when they themselves have no faith; nor ... do they consider that that guest came only by faith, without which he could not have entered the guest-chamber — that is, the church.”<sup>198</sup> Therefore, the marriage garment cannot symbolise faith. Maldonatus cites

<sup>193</sup> Often the Reformers called him *maledicentissimus Maldonatus* (evil speaking) but, at the same time, praised him for his learning and thinking. George J. Davie, “Introduction, Life of John Maldonatus,” in *A Commentary on the Holy Gospels*, trans. George J. Davie, *Catholic Standard Library*, vol. 1 (London: John Hodges, 1888), ix.

<sup>194</sup> For example, in his discussion of the parable of the persistent widow he writes, “*Haec simplicia sunt et ad sensum literalem pertinent, alios sensus allegoricos si quis quaerit, legat Augustinum, Theophilum, Antiochenum, Anastasium.*” Joannis Maldonati, *Commentarii in Quatuor Evangelistas* (London and Paris: Moguntiae, 1853-54; from the 1596 ed.), II.316.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, I.192-3; Davie, I.146. This same point is brought out in his discussion of the wedding garment. *Ibid.*, I.306; Davie, I.229.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, I.192-3; Davie, I.146.

<sup>197</sup> While he does not personally interpret the parable allegorically as Calvin and Luther did, he does discuss seven main elements of the parable by way of citing the church fathers’ interpretations and then offering his opinion as to which he thought was best according to grammatical or theological grounds. Joannis Maldonati, *Commentarii in Quatuor Evangelistas* (London and Paris: Moguntiae, 1853-54; from the 1596 ed.), I.304-6; Davie, I.224-9.

<sup>198</sup> “*Neque considerant homines valde, ut sibi videntur, acuti, invitatum illum non nisi per fidem venire, aut in coenaculum, id est, in Ecclesiam ingredi potuisse. Venire enim est credere.*” *Ibid.*, I.306; Davie, II.229. Maldonatus does not treat Calvin’s commentary fairly at this



various church fathers to support his position much like a medieval exegete did, but he does so with a critical eye on their exegesis and the grammatical structure of the text.<sup>199</sup> To support his position he calls Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Theophylact who all viewed “that the wedding garment is charity, good works, and a life answering to the faith in Christ.”<sup>200</sup> While Maldonatus recaptures some of the breadth of play to the interpretation of the wedding garment, he concludes his comments on the parable by restricting the play of meaning to “good works”.<sup>201</sup> This was most likely a result of his polemical activity against the Reformation.

What is more significant, is his mentioning the question about “compelling them to come in”. If Calvin’s reception of Augustine’s position is striking, then so is Maldonatus’ denial of it. For him, this phrase cannot mean that a person should literally be forced to convert. Rather, it is a metaphor for inducing and exhorting people to accept the gospel, “almost to appear in a manner compelled.”<sup>202</sup> Luther, Bucer, and especially Maldonatus’ interpretation of the phrase, “compel them to come in” demonstrate, on a synchronic plane, that by the time of the Reformation the horizon of expectations had shifted so that Augustine’s interpretation would not have been recognised as an appropriate interpretation. If this is so, then we must question Calvin’s appropriation of Augustine’s position as forcing an agenda upon the text which most commentators at that time would have realised was doing violence to the meaning of the text.

This is especially crucial since one of Calvin’s hermeneutical criteria was that an interpretation should follow and explain the mind of the author. The degree to which the interpreter strays from this principle, is the degree to which “he leads his readers away from it [the truth of the text].”<sup>203</sup> I think we can safely say that, even within his horizon,

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point. For Calvin does mention that the question whether it is faith or works is a “useless controversy; for faith cannot be separated from good works, nor do good works proceed from any other source than from faith.” Calvin, XIII.121 Matth. 11 (43); Pringle, 174.

<sup>199</sup> When he finds differing interpretations among the church fathers for a passage, Maldonatus goes with the one he thinks is best, often against tradition or the majority of commentators. In particular, he often rejects Augustine’s interpretations on the grounds of grammar or theology. Davie, “Introduction, Life of John Maldonatus,” viii.

<sup>200</sup> Maldonatus, I.306; Davie, I.229.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> “*Compelle intrare, non significat, ad fidem cogendos esse homines, sed adeo rogandos, adeo incitandos, ut quodammodo compelli videantur.*” Ibid., I.307 ; Davie, I.232. In his discussion of the parable of the Great Feast in Luke 14, Maldonatus does not even mention this phrase at all. Ibid., II.250-1.

<sup>203</sup> Parker, 91, quoting Calvin’s preface to his Commentary on Romans.



it is surprising, perhaps even self-contradictory. In the light of his contemporaries commentaries, Calvin should have recognised that Matthew and Luke could not have had the use of coercive force in mind. As a result, his commentary did not address the subject matter of the parable. Instead, he adopted Augustine's ecclesiological interpretation, though modified through the history of its reception, to support his concept of church-state relations in Geneva and to maintain the medieval ideal of the unity of the faith in the midst of the changes of the sixteenth century. Calvin it appears is guilty of Luz's complaint that "because the reality of churches did not correspond to the reality of the texts, very often the interpretations served as an excuse or an alibi."<sup>204</sup> From the perspective of reception theory, if Calvin had been open to the claims of the text (or what his contemporaries recognised as the claims of the text) then his prejudices should have been provoked in his engagement with the text. This should have caused him to question his appropriation of Augustine (and Aquinas') view.

## 2. *The Geneva Bible's Annotations*

The Geneva Bible makes an important contribution to our understanding of Calvin for several reasons.<sup>205</sup> Calvin was very interested in influencing the English authorities toward embracing the Reformation in a more whole-hearted manner.<sup>206</sup> It represents the appropriation of Calvin's theology by English scholars who sought refuge in Geneva from Queen Mary.<sup>207</sup> In the Geneva Bible's annotations on Matthew 22:1-14, the translators followed Calvin's *Harmony* almost point by point. The notes are designed to function by (1) helping the reader identify with the characters in the text, (2) showing the reader how to apply lessons from the text, and (3) filling in the gaps in the text for the reader. The goal was to decode the Bible for the average reader, but in many places, such as the parable of the Wedding Feast, it also functioned by encoding the reader's expectations.<sup>208</sup> This is seen by the way the notes guide the reader to recognise that the parable teaches the mixed nature of the church and that God suffers hypocrites

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<sup>204</sup> Luz, *Matthew in History*, 49.

<sup>205</sup> The following article provides a clear outline of the significance of the Geneva Bible from the perspective of reception theory. Michael Jensen, "'Simply' Reading the Geneva Bible: The Geneva Bible and its Readers," *Literature and Theology*, 9 (1, 1995): 30-45.

<sup>206</sup> Parker, 8.

<sup>207</sup> Also, when Luther's and Calvin's commentaries were translated into English during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the translators used the Geneva Bible as the biblical text. Thus, English understanding of the Reformers would have been coloured though the perspective of this translation. John David Alexander, "The Genevan Version of the English Bible." D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1956, 249-51.

<sup>208</sup> Jensen, "'Simply' Reading the Geneva Bible," 40-4.

for a time in the church but will “fanne them out.”<sup>209</sup> Concepts which represent a specific trajectory in the reception history of the parable, the trajectory from Augustine to Calvin.

Like Calvin, and contrary to Maldonatus, the annotators interpret the wedding garment in terms of the changed life which proceeds from true faith. However, on the crucial question concerning compulsion in Luke 14:23, the annotations read “The compulsiō cometh of the feling of the power of Gods worde, after that his worde hath bene preached.”<sup>210</sup> This reflects Luther, Bucer, and Calvin’s explanation in the *Institutes* — that “*compelle intrare*” refers to the exhortations of the evangelists and the inward illumination of the Spirit of the gospel message.<sup>211</sup>

The fact that the translators and commentators of the Geneva Bible were seeking refuge under Calvin displays a critical difference between their horizons of expectations, even though they were geographically and chronologically contemporary. They stood in the shoes of the Anabaptists, whose obstinacy Calvin sought to restrain. For them, the civil authorities in England represented a hindrance to the Gospel, not a partner to the church as was Calvin’s experience in Geneva. This difference between their horizons was reflected in the annotations at other points.

“The single most important feature of the Geneva Bible, to both the laity and the clergy, consisted in the marginal notes.”<sup>212</sup> However these marginal notes were also very controversial. Archbishop Parker thought the Church of England should issue a new translation to replace the Geneva Bible because of its ‘bitter’ notes.<sup>213</sup> The notes on Exodus 1:19, where the Egyptian midwives refused to obey Pharaoh’s order to kill the Jewish babies when they were born, is a good example. The notes read “Their disobiēnce herein was lawful, but their dissembling evil.” In 1603, Dr. John Reynolds presented the

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<sup>209</sup> Matthew 22:11-13, note f, Geneva Bible.

<sup>210</sup> Luke 14:23, note f, Geneva Bible.

<sup>211</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.XXIV.8; 2.974.

<sup>212</sup> Lloyd E. Berry, “Introduction,” in *The Geneva Bible, A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* ed. (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969; from *The Bible and Holy Scriptures Contained in the Olde and Newe Testament*. [Geneva: Routland Hall, 1560]), 15.

<sup>213</sup> Alfred W. Pollard, ed. *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), 297. Referring to the Geneva Bible Archbishop Parker wrote, that a new translation should be commissioned because the Geneva Bible is being used, “as for that in certaine places be pulikely vsed sum translations which have not byn Labored in your Realme having inspersed diverse preiudicall nots which might have ben also well spared.” “Archbishop Parker to Queen Elizabeth,” Pollard 295; reprinted from original in *Record Office, Domestic State Papers, Elizabeth*, vol. xlvi, 6, I.



following argument for a new translation in which “no marginall notes should be added, hauing found in them which are annexed to the *Geneua* translation (which he sawe in a Bible giuen him by an English Lady) some notes very partiall, vntrue, seditious, and sauouring too much of daungerous, and trayterous conceites. As for example, Exod. 1,19, where the marginal note alloweth *disobedience to Kings*.”<sup>214</sup>

If the translators of the Geneva Bible did not see fit to follow Calvin’s commentary on the meaning of “*compelle intrare*” but went with his interpretation found in the *Institutes*, the other Reformers, and the church fathers, then we must once again question Calvin’s interpretation. In this case, Jauss’ concept of ‘culinary art’ can function as a critical tool against Calvin’s appropriation of Augustine. Calvin’s interpretation was tied to his historical, cultural, and political/ecclesiological horizon that his appropriation of Augustine at this point reduces to ‘culinary art’. It was not capable of being applied in different horizons of interpretation, rather it was an interpretation offered to meet the immediate needs of his situation. The rejection of his interpretation of “compel them to come in” by the translators and annotators of the Geneva Bible demonstrates the inappropriateness of Calvin’s understanding of this passage for an audience which did not share Calvin’s cultural and historical situation.

### CONCLUSION

It is hoped that I have been able to demonstrate in this chapter that reception theory offers several productive directions or methods for biblical interpretation and its history. Since I have offered a summary at the end of each section of this chapter, I will focus primarily on the Reformers in the conclusion. First, in the preceding section I have tried to show the role and significance which previous interpretations play in shaping new interpretations, specifically how medieval and Patristic interpretations played such an influential role in the commentaries of the Reformers. As such, it is difficult to separate the text from the history of its interpretations and the effects of those interpretations. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the biblical texts “belongs to the texts in the same way that a river flowing away from its source belongs to the source.”<sup>215</sup> Second, the ‘summit dialogue’ between authors was clearly seen in the Augustine-Aquinas-Calvin trajectory of interpretation. This trajectory also demonstrated the norm-forming potential of biblical interpretations and the importance of a hermeneutic of consequences. Third, several conclusions can be reached about Calvin’s interpretation of

<sup>214</sup> Pollard, *Records*, 46.

<sup>215</sup> Luz, *Matthew in History*, 24.

the parable of the Wedding Feast by employing Jauss' idea of synchronic studies. Calvin should have realised that his appropriation of Augustine's "*compelle intrare*" was not a legitimate interpretation or application of the text because it was not closely related to the question which the author originally intended to answer, or as Jauss would say, it would have been an idea foreign to the original horizon of reception. The questions which we ask of the text must be appropriate to the answers with the text gives. Questions about the nature of the church and how to preserve its unity were central elements in Augustine's horizon of expectations when he approached the biblical texts. In the parable of the Wedding Feast, he found answers to these questions. Calvin most likely recognised that Augustine's questions and answers resonated with similar questions he was asking within his horizon about social unity and consolidating the gains of the Reformation. However, it is the inappropriateness of Calvin's questions which falsify his answers.<sup>216</sup> Because Calvin's interpretation was tied to his historical and cultural horizon, his appropriation of Augustine's "*compelle intrare*" was not capable of being received by other horizons of interpreters, especially once the Enlightenment's concept of toleration was accepted. One of the reasons why we find his adoption of Augustine's position so striking today is because we are heirs of the Enlightenment and toleration is almost a virtue in contemporary society. As a result, Calvin's comments on this passage *provoke* our prejudices and call them into play. Finally, the acceptance of Calvin's interpretation by the early Reformation church in Switzerland reflected the shift from their being 'outsiders' who sought to reform the church to 'insiders' who sought to protect the gains they had made. As such, it demonstrates once again the norm-forming power which occurs in the reception of any particular interpretation. Ideas have consequences.

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<sup>216</sup> "When a preceding interpretation can be falsified, for the most part this indicates neither historical errors nor objective 'mistakes,' but rather falsely posed or illegitimate questions on the part of the interpreter." Jauss, *Towards*, 185; Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 3.173.



## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Reception theory presents a hermeneutical model which involves a three-way dialogue. It integrates the history of the text's reception into the traditional hermeneutical model which is concerned with the dialogue between the interpreter and the text. Dobschütz, Ebeling, and Froehlich were sensitive to the need to incorporate this third element into biblical hermeneutics and church history. The resources for constructing an adequate framework for this hermeneutical model are found in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the literary hermeneutics of Hans Robert Jauss.

I have attempted to establish that Gadamer's work is in part a reaction against a shallow positivistic approach toward history which is our inheritance from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. While a detailed examination of the historical-critical method was omitted for the sake of space, there are two concepts in this approach of which Gadamer is particularly critical. These are the imposition of a methodological approach from the natural sciences into the humanities and the reduction of classical texts, such as the Bible or Plato, to lifeless relics from the past.

Gadamer rehabilitates the concept of tradition and demonstrates how we not only belong to our tradition, but must learn to listen and dialogue with it as well. Hegel's thought on experience, sublation, and the I/Thou relationship allow Gadamer to present a viable alternative to historicism. Collingwood's logic of question and answer provides a model for how to engage the past in an authentic and open dialogue while at the same time is concerned about the subject-matter under discussion. In contrast to the lifeless facts of historicism, Gadamer argues that approaching the past in this manner will produce a historically-effected consciousness, *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*. Historically-effected consciousness is characterised by an openness on the interpreter's part which consists in his knowing that he still has something to learn from his tradition. The priority which Gadamer attributes to the question is a weakness which Pannenberg recognises in Gadamer's work. Jauss adopts the logic of question and answer but is able to reconcile Pannenberg's criticism by assigning it to the second level of reading.

In the second chapter, I argued that while Gadamer emphasises the historical thrownness of the reader, his view does not reduce to a post-modern view of tradition

characterised by plurality, relativity, and discontinuity. Tradition and historical knowledge are not an unrestricted field of free-play. The play of tradition takes place within certain defined boundaries and in the course of play, the boundaries for the playing field are reconfigured. Our experience with works of art and texts exemplify this form of play. Through the categories of presentation, transformation into structure, representation, and imitation, Gadamer demonstrates how there can be differences between performances of a work and at the same time maintain a continuity between different performances. It is through the performance of play that tradition formation occurs. Thus, in a tradition there will be different concretizations (performances) of the meaning of a text and at the same time criteria for recognising what constitutes an appropriate or inappropriate interpretation of a text. But this is a two-way street. Not only does Gadamer open up the possibility for new and diverse understandings of a text but in the play of understanding, the reader's prejudices are raised to consciousness and questioned as well.

Jauss' work allows us to actually formulate a hermeneutical model which is more than just theoretical. If there is a central thrust to his work, it is the attempt to place history at the centre of literary studies. I have attempted to demonstrate that he is able to introduce some methodological considerations into literary hermeneutics in a manner which avoids Gadamer's criticism of positivistic approaches to method. This makes reception theory a more practical hermeneutic for the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Bible in several areas. First, it transforms Gadamer's passive fusion of horizons into an active meditation between the horizons. Jauss' hermeneutical tool of the horizon of expectations allows us to compare not only the original horizon in which the text was written or first read with our horizon but also successive horizons in which the meaning of the text was concretized. Second, the norm-forming function integrates literary and general history, or in our case, biblical interpretation and church history. I showed how this also resolves one of the more significant criticism of Gadamer's work: the lack of any form of ideological critique. Third, I established how Jauss faithfully develops Gadamer's hermeneutic in its application to literary theory. The historical situatedness of the interpreter within successive horizons of understanding is not a liability for literary theory or biblical interpretation but is one of its most liberating aspects. It demonstrates the fact that each generation must engage the text anew; to ask it new questions and to find new answers which are appropriate to their horizon.



I concluded by applying reception theory to the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22. The internally representative nature of parables and the modern perception that the allegorical method is hermeneutically unconstrained proved to be a good case study to demonstrate several positive aspects of reception theory for biblical studies. One of these was the manner in which previous interpretations and the prejudices which constitute our pre-understanding determine what we recognise in a text. In the parable of the Wedding Feast, the symbol of the wedding garment and the responses of the different characters in the parable who reject the invitation provide numerous illustrations of this point. Another aspect of reception theory which proved very useful was the summit-dialogue between authors: how Augustine recognised an answer to the pressing needs of his horizon within the parable of the wedding feast, how Aquinas appropriated Augustine's interpretation, and how Calvin adopted Augustine's position prejudiced by Aquinas. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this parable demonstrated many of the points concerning the role of the classic within a tradition.

In the introduction, I observed how the need for a hermeneutic which incorporated both biblical studies and history was raised by Ebeling and Froehlich. It is hoped that I have established how Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic and Jauss' reception theory answer that call and provide the theoretical framework for its application to the reception history of the Bible. Is it worth the effort to apply reception theory to the biblical text? I believe it is for three reasons. First, the Christian tradition is filled with a rich treasury of biblical interpretation and application in a wide diversity of historical situations. Not only does this treasury provide the interpreter with a historical map which reveals legitimate and illegitimate interpretations of the text, but it also provides the interpreter with hermeneutical resources and insights which may have been forgotten in the transmission of the tradition. Second, the norm-forming power of texts helps to explain how the reception of biblical texts and previous interpretations of the Bible have shaped church history. Third, the practice of reception theory leads to the development (*gebildet*) of the interpreter's *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*. We learn who we are as a result of our tradition and our position within that living tradition. But in order to learn how we belong to a tradition, we must first learn how to listen to it. This is perhaps the most significant contribution which reception theory presents to biblical hermeneutics, a means by which we can not only study past interpretations but listen to them as well.

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