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THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF LITERATURE AND LITERARY EVALUATION

NORBERT GROEBEN *

It is explained why value judgments may be tolerated and analyzed in an empirical study of literature. The foundation of literary value judgments is anyhow based on an unavoidable inclusion of the reading subject, *i.e.,* the factual reading process must be considered. Hence it follows that the theory of literary valuation must be constructed as a mixed system of descriptive and prescriptive sentences. Examples are provided to point out how, by this means, all aspects of analysis, which have been developed for criticism of norms and purpose-strategy-analysis, can be applicated productively for the theory of literary valuation. This includes likewise criticism of literary-didactical demands on the reader of literary texts.

0. The problem

0.1 Theses

(1) The empirical study of literature does not necessarily imply the postulate that it be independent of value judgments (M. Weber).

(2) The notion of 'literary value' may be introduced in a meaningful way only as a many-place function including the position of the reader.

(3) Literary evaluation including the position of the reader requires that empirical reception processes be taken into account. The formal consequence is that literary evaluation must be conceived of as a mixed system of both prescriptive and descriptive statements.

(4) Thus all the analytical perspectives of the critical appraisal of norms may be applied in literary evaluation; among other things, it will have to examine critically the demands made upon the reader of literature by its teachers.

0.2 Definition postulates

Prescriptive statement: statement ascribing positive or negative significance to objects, events, *etc.,* with reference to an allegedly valid norm (*cf.* Albert and Topitsch 1971: 496).

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Example: a literary text which deviates from the 'grammar' of its literary type has literary value.

Descriptive statement: statement asserting some language-transcendent state-of-affairs in such a manner as to allow for empirical testing and thus potential falsification.

Example: deviation (from the accepted literary type) makes the (literary) text difficult to understand for the reader.

Object level (example): trivial literature is a kind of literature that employs stylistic devices of a literary epoch of the past.

Meta-level (example): whenever German academic critics speak of 'trivial literature', their use of the term is equivalent to 'conformist literature'.

1. Limits to the exclusion of value judgments

The empirical sciences are still, and not unjustly, considered to be hostile to value judgments. The reason for this lies in the postulate of the exclusion of value judgments as put forward by M. Weber (*cf.* Albert and Topitsch 1971). This postulate prohibits the framing of value judgments as scientific statements because the scientist is believed capable of justifying value judgments only in a subjective way, only as a private individual, so to speak. Despite some controversy, the empirical sciences, and also the social sciences, have by and large followed this postulate since the end of the Second World War. In contrast, the hermeneutical study of literature during the very same period has never felt any doubt about the need and legitimacy of including value judgments in its system of statements of knowledge. Literary evaluation has, moreover, had a fundamental function in determining the set of literary texts that was to be subjected to academic literary analysis (particularly in the phase of the so-called 'work-immanent interpretation' in Germany, *cf.* Schulte-Sasse 1976: 63–68). If now empirical social science which has, with some justification, been characterized as being 'allergic to evaluation', comes into contact with a discipline like literary study which is rather involved with values, the question poses itself: Will they repel each other, or may they be combined in some way?

A first reply is that in the last decade literary study has, at least in parts, come closer to being an empirical science. The fundamental function of evaluation, especially in 'work-immanent interpretation', had produced an opposition-scheme of literature (two- or three-layer model): art *vs.* kitsch, poetic *vs.* trivial literature, *etc.* (*cf.* Schulte-Sasse 1976). This opposition model of literary evaluation has increasingly been subjected to criticism within literary study itself, the main argument being that all the features supposedly characterizing trivial literature or kitsch, *e.g.* cumulation, repetition, synaesthesia, lyricalization, *etc.*, also appear in 'great' literature, and that it is therefore not the stylistic properties as such that matter but their uses (Kreuzer 1967: 173ff.). But what, for instance, is then to be done with

the concept of 'trivial literature' which has thus been rendered inadequate? Kreuzer (1967) has in this case provided the revolutionary answer for literary study: the concept itself is considered as an analytical term and made into a task of literary study itself; it is introduced only as the object of literary investigation which, consequently, has to analyze how readers (in a specific historical period) apply it to evaluate literary texts. In Kreuzer's own words: "Accordingly, we give this concept a new function and transform it from an immediately aesthetic concept into an immediately historical one; we define trivial literature as that complex of literature which is discriminated against aesthetically by the dominant representatives of taste of the respective contemporary social formation" (1967: 184f.). This is to say: Kreuzer proposes going to a meta-level regarding the concept of 'trivial literature', to stop using it to refer to a literary object, but to make the concept (and its use) itself the object of literary study. The term is thus no longer an evaluative concept in literary study, but evaluation itself has been made the object of analysis.

This approach converges with procedures developed by the theory of empirical science in order to avoid value judgments. Albert (1968: 208ff.), for instance, distinguishes three levels with regard to evaluation:

(1) the level of evaluations as the meta-basis of all scientific work: referring principally to prescriptions stemming from the philosophy of science as well as from methodology;

(2) the level of evaluations as the object of scientific investigation: *e.g.* political, literary, or other evaluations as objects of inquiry;

(3) value judgments as a subset of any disciplinary system of scientific statements.

It is the third level that represents the real, and the only, problem of value judgments; levels 1 and 2 do not imply value judgments as statements of some scientific discipline and are therefore not affected by the postulate of the exclusion of value judgments. Kreuzer's proposed re-definition of the concept of 'trivial literature' may therefore, against the background of this distinction of levels, be restated in a formally precise way as a shift from level 3 to level 2. It follows a strategy prevalent in the social sciences to evade value judgments in order to comply with the postulate of the exclusion of value judgments. The query is now whether literary study, too, should in this way attempt to exclude all value judgments?

The answer must be negative, mainly because the maxim of excluding value judgments has slowly become questionable even for the empirical sciences. Evading value judgments by shifting (originally evaluative) concepts from level 3 to level 2 presupposes the strict separability of these levels. In my opinion this is not the case: the meta-perspective still includes certain implicit or crypto-normative notions. In psychology, for instance, this can be shown for the notion of creativity (*cf.* Groeben and Scheele 1977: 125 ff.): the creativity of a product, for example, is established through an assessment by so-called experts; the notion of 'expert' is, however, a (crypto-)normative notion on the level of the system of scientific statements itself.

The same holds for the concept 'dominant representative of taste' as used in Kreuzer's meta-explication of 'trivial literature'. Thus the strategy of passing to a meta-level does not avoid evaluation; evaluation must therefore be explicitly justified. This means that the evaluations that have been made the object of scientific study (be it 'creativity' or 'trivial literature') must be made amenable to criticism from the side of science itself, otherwise scientific inquiry would in fact subject itself to the evaluations involved in its social object, *i.e.* succumb to the (potential) irrationality of its object (*i.e.* the evaluations under investigation). And the effect of the postulate of the exclusion of value judgments has, in fact, been precisely that: a scientific vacuum spread as far as the domain of evaluation was concerned, into which irrational evaluations could flow unimpeded. Thus, even the conception of evaluative scientific concepts (which, according to the postulate of the exclusion of value judgments, are inadmissible) as the object of scientific research does not exclude value judgments from the study of literature or even from an empirical science of literature.

2. Value judgments in the study of literature as a mixed system of (both prescriptive and descriptive) statements

From the discussion outlined at least two constructive conclusions must be drawn:

(*a*) The notion of 'literary value' in literary study should be introduced and applied as a many-place relational concept. This is to say that the concept denotes a relationship at least between a literary text and a reader; in addition, the norm or the standard according to which something is considered to have value must be stated in correspondence with the definition of prescription given above. 'Literary value' must therefore be used as an (at least) three-place concept: a literary text (1) has value for a reader (2) with reference to a given standard (3).

The inclusion of the position of the reader, in particular, is a requirement to which the paradigm of the 'work-immanent interpretation' has been unaccustomed. There 'evaluation' has always been concerned with the literary 'work' as such, and exclusively with it, *i.e.* it has been conceived of as a one-place concept. I view this as a strategy of immunization against criticism, a strategy often employed, for instance, in political speech. It is the aim of this strategy to introduce evaluative concepts below the required degree of their adequate specification and actual relations and to present them as concepts with a practically unbounded domain of meaning. Though such concepts, by virtue of their over-extension, may then more or less turn into empty formulae, it is precisely for this reason that they become effective within ideological systems (*cf.* Topitsch 1966, 1969).

In the political speech of the Federal Republic of Germany, for instance, this happens practically all the time with the concept of 'freedom' which, as a prescriptive empty formula, serves to cut off rational argument because it is not introduced as a many-place concept, *i.e.* as freedom for whom, from what, and what for!

The claim that 'literary value' can only be applied meaningfully if the position of the reader is included, may, in my opinion, be justified in two ways: first, a literary work does not come into existence without a 'concretizing' mind (Ingarden 1968), at least as far as its semiotic dimensions are concerned; I have explicitly presented this epistemological argument in my discussion of the foundations of a literary science (Groeben 1972, 1980), and it holds equally for literary evaluation. Secondly, there can be no evaluative position without reference to the reader: this is indeed the case; for even the value judgments within the paradigm of 'work-immanent interpretation', using the criteria of 'consistency, aesthetic tension, artistic totality' of a literary work, cannot in the last resort be justified without reference to the reader and his process of reception (evidence will be given further below).

(*b*) If we include the position of the reader in literary value judgments, then all such evaluation implies assertions about reception processes that must be established empirically. This, however, is to say that literary evaluation does not only consist of value judgments (prescriptive statements), but also of descriptive statements, and that it therefore represents a mixed system of statements. As regards the structure of this system of statements, the logical-methodological rules developed for the analysis of norms as well as of goals and means become applicable immediately (*cf.* König 1975; Groeben and Scheele 1977). Such rules are, among others:

– the separation of prescriptive and descriptive statements;
– the justification of prescriptions through the combination of a descriptive statement with a major prescriptive premiss (basic value);
– evaluations are therefore negatively criticized by testing the descriptive statements;
– values may, without exception, be justified only with reference to pre-established norms (basic values); *etc.*

I should like to elucidate these aspects with the help of a (fictitious) example: supposing a German academic critic proposes the following evaluative statement:

(1 P) A literary text that deviates from the 'grammar' of its literary type has literary value.

In a scientific context it is then necessary, as a matter of course, to ask for the justification, *i.e.* for the 'Why?', of such an evaluation. The critic will answer by producing a statement which contains at least a partial set of empirical assertion(s). In accordance with the requirement of the separation of prescription from description, in a first step the descriptive will have to be extracted. In our example, let this be the descriptive statement:

(2 D) Deviation from the literary type will make the (literary) text difficult to understand for the reader.

The example has been chosen in such a way as to make intuitively clear that this descriptive statement will not be sufficient to justify the thematic valuation (1 P), that it must furthermore be supplemented by an explicit value judgment:

(3 P) Literary texts that are difficult to understand have aesthetic value.

It is only with the help of this value judgment that the original evaluation in combination with the descriptive statement may be derived. The derivation of prescription (1 P) from the descriptive statement (2 D) is not possible in a logically correct way because the derived statement would then command a larger domain of meaning than the statement used in the derivation (*i.e.* the prescription); and this would logically be inadmissible. The mixed system of statements therefore exhibits the following structure: from a major prescriptive premiss (basic value: 3 P) and a descriptive statement (2 D) a specific evaluation (1 P) is to be derived (in the sense of justification). Two fundamental methodological consequences result which, in my opinion, will contribute considerably to improving argumentation in literary evaluation:

(*1*) If the empirical testing of the descriptive statement (*e.g.* 2 D) renders this statement false, then the value judgment derived with its help (*e.g.* 1 P) is proved false as well! The testing of the empirical subsets of a literary evaluation can, of course, never positively prove these to be justified; it can, however, supply cogent negative criticism, that is, in the case of a falsification of the descriptive statement, reveal the evaluation to be unfounded and reject it. Explication and testing of descriptive statements thus provide the stringent opportunity of repudiating false evaluations, something the traditional hermeneutical study of literature has not even approximated.

(*2*) Further, it becomes obvious that evaluations can only be justified with reference to overriding values; German *Sprachgefühl* has termed such overriding values basic values (or basic value judgments; Weisser 1970) because they are more fundamental. The justification of evaluations is thus never absolute, it is always related to a still more fundamental value and varies, furthermore, according to the situation in question, owing to the descriptive statement and the processes described therein (*cf.* König 1975: 205). Mixed systems of statements as the structure of literary evaluation thus comply with practically all the reasonable requirements that have been developed by the traditional hermeneutical discussion of evaluation; requirements, furthermore, that seemed mutually exclusive within the framework of hermeneutics.

The requirement of a norm for each single value judgment is met because the overriding basic value supplies precisely this standard for any more specific evaluation derived (Schulte-Sasse 1976: 59). Of course this kind of norm itself must be examined with regard to its justification: the mixed system of statements is thus to be further developed hierarchically in the direction of still more fundamental values (example to follow further below). All the evaluations which are thus referred to an

overriding basic value are therefore not absolute but relative. There is, however, no infinite regress of justifications of evaluations because at some stage one reaches uppermost, ultimate basic values: whether these are to be established as absolute, and how these are to be justified, cannot be discussed here for reasons of space (*cf.* König 1975; Groeben and Scheele 1977: 170ff.).

The connection with a situation as formulated by the descriptive statement complies with the requirement that evaluation must be related to the historical situation (Schulte-Sasse 1976: 98ff., 181ff.). As evaluations may be metonymically equated with norms, evaluations that have been derived and justified may also be regarded as justified goals, and instrumental versions of any such evaluation may be produced (I shall give an example further below when sketching certain possible applications; *cf.* Schulte-Sasse 1976: 69).

This analytic structure of evaluation represents, in my opinion, particular progress in that it allows for the flexible development of the norms of evaluations (the basic values); this is to say that literary evaluation may in this manner establish and pursue a varying number of values and norms and thus help to integrate the most diverse perspectives of evaluation. I think that such a procedure may help to overcome the scattered multiplicity of models of evaluation like work-immanent, historical-materialist, reception-aesthetic, ideology-critical ones *etc.* I should like to give some indication of this by stating examples of alternative (but not mutually exclusive) justifications for evaluation.

(3 P)	Literary texts that are difficult to understand have aesthetic value.
(4 D_a)	Literary texts that are difficult to understand induce the reader to receive literature in a more qualified way.
(4 D_b)	Literary texts that are difficult to understand create aesthetic pleasure in the reader.
(4 D_c)	Literary texts that are difficult to understand induce the reader to think independently (to be critical of ideologies) and effect transfer.
(5 P_a)	More qualified reception of literature is valuable.
(5 P_b)	Aesthetic pleasure is valuable.
(5 P_c)	Independent thinking (critical appraisal of ideologies) is valuable.

The evaluations of level 5 are already very fundamental and thus also very inclusive, *i.e.* they claim extensive validity. The empirical statements implied on such a level of inclusiveness (4 D) must, in my opinion, inevitably be related to reception processes on the part of the reader. This also becomes obvious with evaluations (5) P_a and P_b, in which traditional criteria of evaluation, *e.g.* of work-immanent interpretation, customarily converge. This also helps to make clear, I think, that the work-oriented evaluations cannot, in fact, evade taking into account the position of the reader as I asserted above. They only leave this relationship implicit, *i.e.* usually cut off the train of argument before the reference to reader data becomes evidently unavoidable.

Finally, I must point out here that all the examples given are naturally strong simplifications with respect to what would, in fact, have to be investigated according to the framework of such a mixed system of statements. Thus the inclusion of the position of the reader offers, and indeed requires, the investigation of the characteristics of the reader (*e.g.* of Jauss's 'horizon of expectation'; but also of the reader's specific abilities and skills). As an example, I shall formulate a descriptive statement which is also apt to show that the aspects of justification distinguished above do not (necessarily) exclude each other:

(4 D_c)   Difficult (literary) texts of the 20th century induce readers who experience cognitive dissonance as a pleasurable challenge to receive literature more intensively and in a more qualified way, to think independently, to appraise ideologies critically, and to effect transfer.

In order to test such a descriptive statement in a systematic and empirical manner it will have to be reformulated as an if-then-hypothesis expressing a sequence of conditions and events:

(4 $D_{c'}$ (hyp))   If a literary text is difficult to understand and is of the 20th century, and if the reader experiences cognitive dissonance as a pleasurable challenge, then it will induce more intensive and more qualified reception of literature, independent and ideology-critical thinking as well as transfer effects (in the very same reader).

3. Example of an empirical investigation

To give at least some impression of the empirical testing of descriptive statement, I should like to present briefly an empirical investigation that may serve as a test of statement 2 D (Bower 1976; Thorndyke 1977). The project formulates a simple 'story grammar' for narrative tales and tests to what extent deviation from this grammar makes understanding and recall more difficult or even deficient.

The analysis of the text structure proceeds from propositions (*i.e.* stated states-of-affairs) as has been characteristic of work in the psychology of memory and language since the early 70's.

A state-of-affairs is what is stated by a statement about reality (if I, for instance, say "My brother is 30 years old", then my father must express the same state-of-affairs by the statement "My youngest son is 30 years old"). In the present investigation the proposed operational definition is such that each sentence or sentence part containing a verb denoting some action or state expresses a state-of-affairs. The story under investigation, 'Circle Island', consequently consists of 34 statements of state-of-affairs:

(1) Circle Island is located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, (2) north of Ronald Island. (3) The main occupations on the island are farming and ranching. (4) Circle Island has good soil, (5) but few rivers and (6) hence a shortage of water. (7) The island is run democratically. (8) All issues are decided by a majority vote of the islanders. (9) The governing body is a senate, (10) whose job is to carry out the will of the majority. (11) Recently, an island scientist discovered a cheap method (12) of converting salt water into fresh water. (13) As a result, the island farmers wanted (14) to build a canal across the island, (15) so that they could use water from the canal (16) to cultivate the island's central region. (17) Therefore, the farmers formed a procanal association (18) and persuaded a few senators (19) to join. (20) The procanal association brought the construction idea to a vote. (21) All the islanders voted. (22) The majority voted in favor of construction. (23) The senate, however, decided that (24) the farmers' proposed canal was ecologically unsound. (25) The senators agreed (26) to build a smaller canal (27) that was 2 feet wide and 1 foot deep. (28) After starting construction on the smaller canal, (29) the islanders discovered that (30) no water would flow into it. (31) Thus the project was abandoned. (32) The farmers were angry (33) because of the failure of the canal project. (34) Civil war appeared inevitable.

The 'story grammar' distilled from simple tales, *e.g.* fairy tales, is made up of a system of rules allowing for the generation of any number of different, formally correct, stories; this system is as follows:

(1)   Story → setting + theme + plot + resolution
(2)   Setting → characters + location + time
(3)   Theme → event + goal
(4)   Plot → episode
(5)   Episode → subgoal + attempt + outcome
(6)   Attempt → event/episode
(7)   Outcome → event/state
(8)   Resolution → event/state
(9)   Subgoal/goal → desired state
(10) Characters/location/time → state

Through the integration of the story grammar and the propositions of the story the text structure shown in fig. 1 is produced. This text structure has, for the sake of the experiment, been destroyed in varying measure: in a 'narrative-after-theme' version the propositions 11—16 were placed at the end; in the 'narrative-no-theme' version these propositions were left out altogether; in a 'description' version the propositions were simply strung together one after the other without any indication of relation, causal connection *etc.* These four textual versions (including the original story: 'story') were received by the subjects both reading and listening; then ratings of comprehensibility as well as tests of recall were carried out. The results (*cf.* fig. 2) show that deviations from the story grammar do indeed lead to losses in understanding and recall (the recall value being referrable to the impeded process of understanding); the difference between conditions 1, 2, 3 are significant for recall and comprehension.

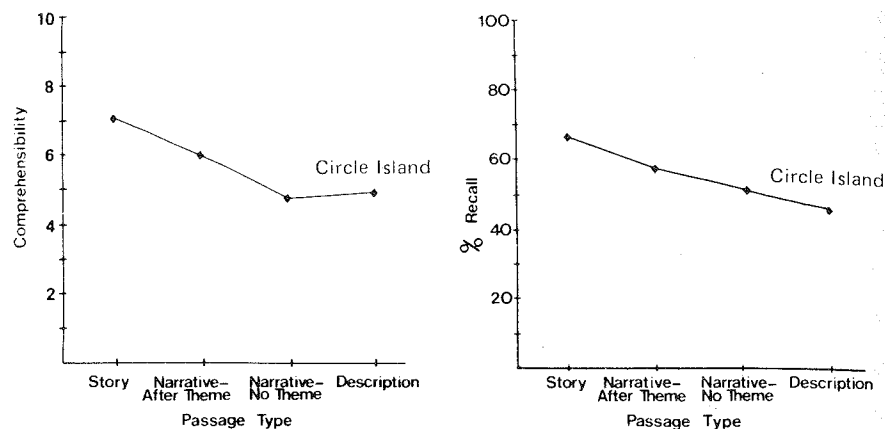Thus the statement 2 D that was to be tested may, with reference to texts with

Fig. 1.

a simple story grammar, be considered to have been empirically confirmed. In the long run, of course, this statement must be tested with regard to texts embodying a more complex structure (*cf.* Black and Bower 1980; Johnson and Mandler 1980; Meyer *et al.* 1980). Of the further possible enlargements of such experimental set-ups I shall indicate only two:

— First, a comparison with, for instance, literary tales (short stories resp. short, short stories) on the basis of this story grammar would be interesting, tales whose 'immediate beginning' suggests an 'after-theme' structure; if one, further-more, takes into account the often-quoted characteristic of the 'open ending' (Kilchenmann 1967), the structure may even approximate a 'no-theme' version of the proposed story grammar.
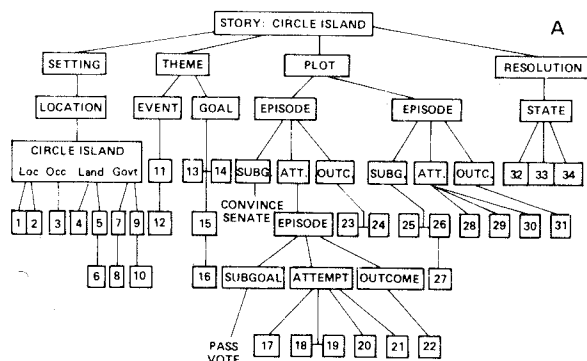

Fig. 2.

— The empirical investigation of such literary types would then have to increase the number of dependent variables, for instance by examining reading motiva-tion aesthetic pleasure, and the resulting thought activities. This kind of enlarged experiment would help to test the descriptive statements mentioned in the above example at least for a specific category of literary texts and thus allow for a critical appraisal and (relative) justification of literary value judgments as outlined.

4. Applications

In conclusion, I should like to discuss some of the possible applications of an evalu-ation procedure structured as a mixed system of statements: my approach is based on the already indicated metonymic equivalence of values and norms: evaluations *qua* 'theoretical processes' lie behind norms; these turn into 'directives for action' because of the aspect of 'practical consequence' (Tröger 1974: 113). With regard to criticism and justification, evaluations and norms thus take an identical functional position (Kalinowski 1972: 9). This is to say that mixed systems of statements, at the same time, imply Ought-statements. As regards the literary work, this has been well-known: the requirement 'Literary texts ought to deviate from the "grammar" of their (established) type' as derivable from (1 P) has been well-known within cer-tain aesthetic frameworks (*e.g.* Russian formalism) because precisely this feature has been considered to constitute aesthetic value in the sense of innovation. The justification of such a norm is then to be carried out in the same way as described above for evaluation (the corresponding norms *qua* ought-statements taking the place of the evaluations).

The inclusion of the position of the reader into the many-place concept of 'aesthetic value' also implies that ought-statements about the reader and about reception processes may be derived. Formulated in the form of norms, the state-ments (5 P_a) and (5 P_c) express, for instance, that the reader is to receive literary texts in an ever more qualified way and that, in this process, he is to (learn how to) think independently and (how) to appraise ideologies. Statement (4 D_c), how-ever, expresses as the empirical prerequisites for this to come about not only that the text must be difficult to understand *etc.*, but also that the reader must experi-ence cognitive dissonance as a pleasurable challenge; psychologically speaking: that the reader must possess greater tolerance of dissonance. Supposing it to be the case that hypothesis (4 D_c) has been tested and confirmed empirically, then the norm of qualified reception of literary texts and of independent, ideology-critical thinking would needs also imply the requirement of tolerance of cognitive dissonance. This, however, is an eminently fundamental norm or prerequisite in the teaching of liter-ature and thus, in fact, to be found in most methodologies for the teaching of liter-ature. As concerns the fulfilment of this requirement by the reader, the outlined structure of the critical appraisal of evaluations and norms here demands a critical

appraisal of this very norm itself with reference to the meta-norm 'Ought presupposes Being Able'. This meta-norm is the principle forming the bridge between descriptive and prescriptive statements (Albert 1971) – it is a norm norming norming: it prohibits demanding something the individual is incapable of carrying out. It is, for example, unjustified to demand of a student that he sit two examinations at the same time in two different places because he does not command the ability of being 'bi-local', and any university demanding this ability would lose all administrative court proceedings because of this meta-norm 'Ought presupposes Being Able'. As for the question of the tolerance of dissonance, it can be shown empirically that readers of the kind of literature which is termed 'trivial literature' by the 'dominant representatives of taste in our time', do not in fact possess this kind of tolerance of dissonance, but on the contrary show a strong need for security (Groeben and Scheele 1975). One cannot immediately deduce from this that one should not provide the qualifications for the desired kind of literature reception. It might, however, prove to be the case (as is maintained by the methodological school of literature teaching oriented towards ideology-criticism) that this need of security is due to respective individual's socialization, to social and economic existential conditions *etc.* which have become irreversible. With respect to the meta-norm 'Ought presupposes Being Able' there are then only two admissible consequences: first, to change the restricting non-psychological social conditions (as far as this is possible); and secondly, not to demand fulfillment of this norm of more intensive, more qualified, ideology-critical *etc.* literature reception from readers who are subject to the social conditions indicated (but to try and find other, more adequate, norms)! Looking back to the original problem of literary evaluation, something has thus been made explicit and precise that is already inherent in the conception of of the notion of 'aesthetic value' as a many-place concept: a literary text may be designated as 'valuable' only with reference to the empirically justified capabilities of the reader. Put in extreme terms, this means that one and the same literary text may be of differing value for different readers; or, different literary texts may have the same value for different readers; or, different literary texts may have the same value for different readers. Like any other kind of teaching, the teaching of literature attempts to make as many learners as possible reach a certain goal (*e.g.* the ability of qualified, ideology-critical reception of literature), but such attempts are legitimate only within the limits of the reader's capabilities, and they will be the more successful the more precise knowledge we have of the learner's capabilites and their effects on the goal-directed learning process. This, however, can only be achieved if literary study is developed into an empirical science (which is, in my opinion, imperative) and will therefore be able to test descriptive statements that are put forward (as shown) within the outlined structure of mixed systems of statements in the context of literary evaluation.

Note

This thesis is based on the results of research into the working of human memory with regard to the (semantic) processing of sentences and texts (Bock 1978; Bredenkamp and Wippich 1977; Hörmann 1976), which show that the processes of 're-coding' taking place in text comprehension as well as text storage are identical, and that the construction of meaning which was not achieved in the process of text comprehension cannot be compensatorily effected through processes of storage or recall. Positive evidence is for instance (Bock 1978: 82f.): paraphrasing operations (change of syntactic form, replacing central context words by synonyms *etc.*) which are symptomatic of the reproduction of stored textual information are excellent means for testing comprehension performance; textual propositions which can easily be integrated reduce the time needed for drawing conclusions – conclusions, that is, which are actively added and produced when stored information is reproduced.

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SUBJECTIVE WORD FREQUENCY ESTIMATES AND THEIR STYLISTIC RELEVANCE IN LITERATURE

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Stylistics has been described by various scholars as the study of the frequency distributions of linguistic features in a text or context, and many other scholars have based their stylistic arguments on frequency counts of some sort. Such a concept of style implies that every reader or speaker has a distinct sense of the frequencies and probabilities of occurence of linguistic features in a certain context.

To investigate the nature and accuracy of this linguistic sensitivity, subjects of various ages and backgrounds were asked, among other things, to rank 12 words in the order of their frequency in general as well as in certain well-defined situational contexts. The subjects' rankings generally agreed within 2–3 points, and it became clear that the average ranking of about a dozen subjects could be considered a more reliable indication of general word frequencies than any frequency count conducted so far, and even more so in the case of situational frequencies, for which there are hardly any good counts available.

The average reader can distinguish around 10 frequency gradations in a total vocabulary and will notice a difference if a word is 3–10 times as frequent as another. Accordingly, statistical argumentation with considerably smaller frequency differences cannot be considered truly relevant to the stylistic impression or literary interpretation of a text.

Subjects asked to underline any striking or stylistically effective elements in a text tend to single out the elements of lowest general or situational frequency (*e.g.*, rare, precise words and metaphors), especially if those elements are repeated in the text. Thus style analysis is indeed closely linked to a reader's linguistic frequency estimations.

A convenient, if somewhat cumbersome, way to settle stylistic arguments is to start counting [1]. Is Hemingway's style indeed characterized by short sentences? We can count the words or syllables per sentence in some well-chosen text samples and compare the results with samples taken from Faulkner or Steinbeck or with some established general average. Does Kafka really prefer extended participial constructions or bureaucratic vocabulary in his writings? We can define our terms, count,