LINGUISTIC & LITERARY STUDIES IN EASTERN EUROPE

LLSEE

Volume 1

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE & MEANING I:

Problems of Literary Theory

Edited by
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Offprint

ROMAN INGARDEN: ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR LITERARY THEORY

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1. *Introduction*

The Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden (1893-1970), follower and student of the early Husserl, was probably the most significant of all those philosophers who came within Husserl's sphere of Influence. He lived a long and productive life, despite economic and political difficulties, and he made contributions to many areas of philosophy. Yet he has acquired a reputation--until now--within one field only, that of aesthetics.[1] This is to some extent surprising since from the very start Ingarden himself conceived his aesthetic writings as part of a much larger, *ontological* project, that of providing the materials which would make possible the solution of what to him appeared to be the most important

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[1]Ingarden's first major work was in this field: The Literary Work of Art: Investigations on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic and the Theory of Literature original German edition, (Halle, 1931); English translation by George C. Grabowicz (Evanston, 1973). This was followed by The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art, original Polish edition (Lwów,

problem in philosophy, the so-called "idealism - realism"
problem: der Streit um die Existenz der Welt, in a massive
work (1500pp.) bearing this title Ingarden went a long way
toward providing such materials, and it is one of the
scandals of present-day philosophy that this work is so
little known.[2]

   This is from one point of view understandable: the
realism - idealism problem was, it is true, vital to philos-
ophy in the early 1900's. (The realist works of Brentano,
Meinong, Moore and Russell, for example, can all be seen as
reactions to various forms of Hegelian idealism). But it is
a problem which is no longer to be found amongst the central
concerns of philosophy. Yet Ingarden's work on this high
ontological plain is not thereby without significance for
present-day philosophers, nor, indeed, for literary
theorists who may look to philosophy in the hope of finding
ontological foundations for their discipline. For Ingar-
den's Streit book has, I want to suggest, a significance

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1937) English translation by Ruth A. Crowley and Kenneth B. Olson
(Evanston, 1973); and then by Investigations in the Ontology of Art:
Music, Painting, Architecture, Film, original German edition (Tübingen,
1962) English translation (Evanston, forthcoming).

[2]The work was, for political reasons, originally published in Polish:
Spór o istnienie świata (Kraków 1947-48), 2 vols., partial English
translation of vol. I as Time and modes of Being (Springfield, 1964).
Expanded German version: Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt, vol. I,
Existentialontologie (Tübingen, 1964); vol. II, Formalontologie,
part 1, Form und Wesen, part 2, Welt und Bewuβtsein, both Tübingen,
1965, vol. 3, Über die kausale Struktur der realen Welt (Tübingen, 1974).
Cf. the discussion of parts of vol. II, 1 in my "An Essay in Formal
Ontology", Grazer Philosophische Studien, IV (1978).

which resides elsewhere than its author had supposed: it
is the by-product of Ingarden's larger ontological investi-
gations which promise to yield their true value for present-
day thinkers.

Indeed the book contains a huge mass of individual
ontological insights systematically developed and applied
to specific areas (for example, causality, theory of
language, philosophy of mind, clarification of specific
ontological issues in the tradition of philosophy . . .)--
always for the sake of Ingarden's larger goal, that of
justifying in a critical manner his realist opposition to
those, such as Husserl, who argued in favour of some form
of idealist conception of the world and of the foundations
of consciousness.[3]

Now one further field in which this system of onto-
logical insights can profitably be applied is, of course,
that of literary theory, the area where Ingarden himself
carried out his most detailed investigations in "applied
ontology". But we must not be overoptimistic in regard to
the results of such application. It is difficult to see,
for example, how problems of value theory can be solved by
direct application of the kind of descriptive ontological
method practised by Ingarden. The most we can hope for--
in the beginning--is that we should come to a clearer con-
ception of the *locus* of aesthetic value, that is, of what

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[3]Ingarden characterised the idealist position as one according to which
the *real* world was conceived too closely after the fashion of *fictional*
worlds projected by works of literature; hence the ontological character
of his investigations of the literary work of art, which Ingarden hoped
would reveal the untenability of any narrowing of the gap between real
objects and products of consciousness.

kind of thing it is to which aesthetic value can properly
be ascribed.

   At first it might be supposed that there is a simple
answer to this question: that it is the "work of art" which
has aesthetic value. But as yet this tells us nothing of the
intrinsic nature, the ontological structure of the "work of
art". As can be seen by reflection upon the case of, say,
the dramatic work, this structure may be tremendously
complex, for in our determination of its constituents we
must find a way of taking account of *all* those features
which may contribute to the status of the work as an
aesthetically formed whole, take account, that is, of all
that may be phenomenologically given in the various different
kinds of appreciation of the work, not only by the spectator
in relation to the concrete visual and aural material of
a given performance and by the actors performing the work
in relation to this visual and aural material and to the
script, but also by subjects outside any context of perform-
ance who accede to the work as an abstract whole, either in
a temporally extended way (in some kind of mental 'perfor-
mance', or 'reading' of the script), or in such a way that
the work is treated as an unextended unity, for example
within contexts where it is merely referred to in passing.

   Yet however complex nay be the structure of works of
art of each of the various different species, it is crucial
to the whole of aesthetics that the appropriate ontological
analyses of this structure be carried through. For only when
we know what kind of thing the work of art is can we deter-
mine the various axes along which it may acquire aesthetic
value, be compared with other works, etc. Only then, that
is to say, would we be in a position to tackle the central

Value-theoretical problems of aesthetics itself.

2. *The Ontology of Fiction*

In the present essay I want to sketch one plank of such an ontological foundation for literary theory, using the problems which arise as a means of introducing the Ingardenian mode of argument to the practising literary theorist. A literary work conceived as an organised whole has various constituents, e.g. the characters of the work, the individual word-meanings, sentence-rhythms, plot-segments, historical allusions, and so on. Clearly there is no question that these 'constituents' be conceived after the pattern of matches in a box (side by side with each other). They exhibit, rather, a whole series of inter-relations and mutual dependencies. It is Ingarden's service to have unravelled this texture of interrelationships, to have shown that in order to make clear the structure of the literary work it is necessary to conceive it as a "stratified" whole, constituents of one particular stratum acting together to "found" constituents of "higher" strata when the text of the work is "concretised" in our acts of reading.[4]

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[4]The technical terms introduced in the text are all of them drawn from Ingarden's The Literary Work of Art. Note how, given the stratified conception of the literary work, Ingarden can then begin to determine in an extremely precise way the types of aesthetic quality which such a work may possess. For he will argue that particular sets of value-qualities can be associated, in a systematic way, first of all with the constituents of each particular stratum: of sound-material, meaning-unities, represented objects, aspects, metaphysical qualities, etc.,

Ingarden's account of the various strata of the literary work, and the resultant conception of the work as a two-dimensional formation, have received adequate treatment in the literature.[5] Here, therefore, I want to consider in more detail than hitherto one particular subsidiary problem in the ontology of literature, the problem of the nature of individual fictional characters. Some schools of philosophers would wish to dismiss this very formulation of a "problem" as itself misleading from the start. Such philosophers would assert that there are no such things as fictional characters

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reflecting the fact that different ranges of value criteria are applied by the critic in his estimations of the work according to whether he is concerning himself with, say, the poetic qualities of individual sentences, or with the subtleties of the plot, or with the delineations of the characters, and so on. But then secondly the critic may concern himself with the *interrelations* between constituents of the various different strata. And this is reflected in Ingarden's theory by the fact that value-qualities are associated with the different types of interrelationships which exist between the various strata. Ingarden speaks, indeed, of a *polyphony* of the literary work, quite deliberately suggesting a parallel to the case of musical polyphony, where our appreciation of the subtlety of the interrelations of the various different voices plays a role in our evaluation of the work which is no less important than our estimation of the themes and variations articulated by these individual voices taken separately.

[5]Cf. the various standard philosophical reference-books, as well as the English translation of The Literary Work of Art (summarised in my review in Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, VI (1975), 111-114 and also, from a different point of view, in the paper referred to in note 11 below.) Ingarden's stratificational analysis lies at the root of the central, ontological chapter of Warren and Wellek's Theory of Literature (Penguin Books; originally published 1949)--but

rather only, say, the concrete printed material of
particular texts and the sequences of mental events
associated with the readings of such texts (themselves
regarded as somehow intrinsically private). But it seems
clear that once who would maintain such a reductivist
position is incapable of providing an acceptable foundation
for the theory of literature, i.e. one which could satisfy
the criteria of adequacy to *all* that is phenomenologically
given in our commune with works of literature. For whilst
fictional characters clearly have no kind of real, concrete
existence, even the most cursory glance through works of
literary criticism or literary history will show that there
are certain kinds of deliberative, critical concern with
literary works within which a central role is played by
fictional characters as such. Indeed there is no way in
which we can achieve a faithful reading of a fictional work
without presupposing from the start that it is correlated
with its own specific *field of fictional characters*. We can
gain some idea of the nature of this "field of characters"
if we spend some time reflecting upon the notion of "access"
--a notion which has always stood at the very centre of
phenomenological ontology.

3. *Ontological and Epistemological Incompleteness*

   We have access to those flesh-and-blood human beings
who are our contemporaries through physical contact of
various kinds (shaking hands, etc.). We have progressively
weaker access to no longer existing human beings through

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cf. Ingarden's criticisms reproduced on pp. *lxxviii* to *lxxxiii* of
Grabowicz's translation.

memories, newspaper reports, historical remains, etc., and
it seems clear that this kind of "documentary" access is a
well-founded extension of the more primitive physical modes
of access. I want to argue that one of the underlying
justifications for the conception of fictional characters
as individual objects forming a well-demarcated "field"
associated with each particular novel is a further, analo-
gous extension of this notion of access, extended beyond
historical documents, now, to include also literary works.

The analogy involved here should not, however, mislead
us into supposing that there is any similarity in ontolo-
gical structure between the two kinds of object (real and
fictional). Perhaps the most radical dissimilarity turns
on a quite peculiar ontological incompleteness which is
enjoyed by fictional objects. This notion may be explained
as follows: In the case of historical figures it is true
that our *knowledge* is always incomplete, owing to the fact
that it rests on only a finite quantity of information,[6]
where the *objects* of our knowledge, like all temporally
existing things, have (more correctly: had, when they
existed) an infinite number of ever-changing concrete
properties. Nevertheless the incompleteness involved here
is purely epistemological: if we know only that Henry Nth
lost an arm in the Battle of X, but not *which* arm, then we
do not suppose that after the battle Henry himself was
ontologically structured in such a way that the missing
arm was indeterminately neither right nor left. With

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[6]Problems arise owing to the fact that in particular cases some or all
of this information may be false; this may even lead, on the epistemolo-
gical side, to the existence of conflicting properties in the stock of
all that we know about a given object.

fictional characters however we have to come to terms in
our theory with just this kind of intrinsic incompleteness
(an incompleteness suffered by the characters themselves,
independently of any additional epistemological incom-
pleteness which may arise due to inadequacies in particular
readings of the appropriate works).

    Real objects cannot be *ontologically* incomplete in this
sense, for although every act of perception of such objects
is partial and one-sided, there exists (or, in the case of
real objects in the past, did exist) the constant possib-
ility of further, complementary perceptions (Husserl talks
of 'turning the apple in one's hand . . . '), such that
there is in principle no point where indeterminacies in the
object may lay undetected.[7] Fictional objects on the other
hand are such that from the very start we can exclude the
possibility of supplementary information, information which
would be additional to that which is to be *found in* (or,
within certain limits, *read into*) the texts themselves.
Note however that this problem of ontological incompleteness
is something which raises its head exclusively on the
theoretical level: we are never aware of the intrinsic in-
completeness of fictional characters in our actual readings
of works. This is because the possibility of a complete per-
ception or complete knowledge is excluded also in the case
of real objects, owing to the ever-present *epistemological*
incompleteness involved in our access to such objects. Thus
we can do no other, in our pre-theoretical commune with real
objects and with the quasi-real objects of fiction, than
ascribe all inadequacies in our knowledge to the side of

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[7]This situation may fail to hold on the level of quantum physics.

epistemological incompleteness: this explains why our mode
of reading works of fiction is--from this point of view--
almost identical with our mode of reading not only histori-
cal works but also e.g. newspaper reports concerning our
contemporaries. In no case do we find it possible, in our
reading, to draw a line between indeterminacies which are
merely epistemological and indeterminacies which may be
contributed by the objects themselves.

4. *The Double Structure of the Objects of Fiction*

Parallels of this nature between our mode of access to
real and fictional objects respectively should not be allowed
to mask the radical heterogeneity of the two types of object
from the ontological point of view. However complex may be
the interrelations between the various properties possessed
by a real object (say between the perceptual, biological,
chemical and physical qualities of a given apple), there
remains an intrinsic unity amongst these properties, in
consequence of the fact that these interrelations exist,
that the properties in question are bound up together within
the structure of the object itself. For the case of fictional
objects however, Ingarden argues that we have to deal with
a quite peculiar kind of 'double structure' in the fabric of
properties possessed by these objects. That is, where the
real object possesses a single rank of properties all of
which are bound together within the object itself, the
fictional object possesses two ranks of properties with no
non-arbitrary relationships existing across the 'barrier'
between them. This 'double structure' is reflected in the
fact that we encounter two quite different sets of statements
about fictional characters, with two quite different kinds
of truth-behaviour. Statements of the first kind (A) might

be, e.g.:

> (1) Sherlock Holmes was presented by Conan Doyle in work W as a detective who lived in Baker Street, played the violin . . . .
>
> (2) Dr. Watson is a less adequately developed character than Holmes.
>
> (3) Raskolnikov did not exist as a flesh-and-blood human being; 'his' status is exclusively that of an ontological correlate of particular networks of conscious acts on the part of certain appropriately qualified subjects.
>
> (4) (Shakespeare's) Hamlet is a fictional character.

And of the second kind (B):

> (5) Sherlock Holmes was a detective who lived in Baker Street, played the violin . . . .
>
> (6) Dr. Watson is a more likeable character than, has a warmer personality than Holmes.
>
> (7) The Blagdon rapist imitated Raskolnikov.
>
> (8) I know more about Hamlet than I do about Hannibal.

Now our account of the structure of fictional objects must reflect (i) the fact that A-statements may be *true*, unconditionally, and that such statements satisfy the law of excluded middle;[8] and (ii) that we can acknowledge B-state-

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[8]The law of excluded middle states that for any given sentence either it or its negation is true. In particular if 'S' is the name of an object, then for any predicate expression 'p' ('is red', 'is taller than 3 feet', and so on), one or other of the two sentences, 'S is p',

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ments as (in some way) 'correct' or 'incorrect' only if we interpret the predicates involved more or less *metaphorically*: Sherlock Holmes was not, after all, a detective in the strict sense of this term--since only flesh-and-blood human beings may qualify for the status of detectivehood. We must also note that B-statements fail to satisfy the law of excluded middle, in the sense that there are many incorrect B-statements which are such that their negations, too, are incorrect. (Consider, e.g., the statement-pair: 'Hamlet was left-handed', 'Hamlet was not left-handed'.)

    This means that whilst we may associate with each true A-statement concerning a given fictional object some determination *within the object itself*, B-statements must be dealt with in a quite different way. Ingarden's suggestion is, then, that we develop a conception of fictional objects as radically distinct, in their property behaviour, from real objects of the material world. Fictional objects are to be conceived, namely, as possessing two quite distinct ranks of properties, one rank corresponding to true A-statements about a given object, and a second rank--of properties which are merely *ascribed*--corresponding to correct B-statements, i.e., in effect, to the sentences of the appropriate novel. Any resultant incompatibility is made harmless by the fact that members of each group are acceded to within two quite distinct contexts, for it is only on the level of theory that we accede to rank A properties, where it is exclusively rank B properties which hold our attention during any actual reading of the work. Only within certain

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'S is not p', is true. Thus failure of the Law of excluded middle for names of objects of a given type correspond to ontological incompleteness of those objects.

quite peculiar ontological contexts does our commune with
fictional objects suffer a certain "bifocal" character (as,
for example, within the context established by the present
essay). But then again, of course, that there are such con-
texts can itself be accounted for only if we accept some
kind of double-rank ontology along the lines suggested by
Ingarden.

5. *Ontological and Epistemological Nodality: the Nature of
   the Objects of Fiction*

   We might summarise our results thus far concerning the
ontological structure of fictional characters by saying
that such characters are individual objects possessing two
ranks of properties, members of the first rank being all,
as inspection reveals, "non-material properties" (being
either formal or "purely intentional"), members of the second
rank consisting of those properties which seem to be assigned
to the given characters by the sentences of the appropriate
works.[9] In the final section of this paper I shall attempt
to clarify this peculiar structure and at the same time to
show how the problems which it reveals are relevant to the
practical concerns of the literary theorist, by going beyond
the Ingardenian ontological mode of investigation and
calling into aid certain considerations relating to the
"act phenomenology" of our reading of literary works.[10]

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[9]Here we include also all those properties which are, within certain
limits, *deducible* from the properties assigned by the given sentences.
Cf. the discussion in J. Wood, The Logic of Fiction (Paris and the
Hague 1974), § 13.

[10]The group of analyses which pertain to act phenomenology of the kind
which is illustrated in the text are drawn not only from Ingarden's

Let us recall, first of all, the notions of epistemo-
logical and ontological incompleteness introduced in 3 above.
For the sake of the present argument we may risk talking in
terms of two "spheres", an epistemological and an ontological
sphere, and it will be clear, I hope, that the *degrees of
completeness* on either side of the boundary between the two
spheres may vary, more or less independently of each other.
Thus we can encounter, on the one hand, cases of epistemo-
logically incomplete access to ontologically complete
objects--this is true, indeed, of every perception of a
real object. And we can encounter also, on the other hand,
cases of access to objects where the degree of epistemo-
logical completeness is greater than is warranted by inde-
terminacy intrinsic to the object in question. This arises,
e.g., when in reading a work of fiction we import from our
own experience aspects which are additional to those held
in readiness within the work itself. (As when I identify
myself with the hero of a work of detective fiction, and
ascribe to him qualities which I possess). Further the axes
of epistemological and ontological completeness may lie
wholly skew to each other. This occurs when the "matter"
with which I epistemologically "complete" an object is alien
to the material—ontological constitution of that object
itself (when I mistake a sand-dune for an oasis, or a Van
Meegeren for a Vermeer).

What is important is that it is not only in regard to
the notion of relative completeness - incompleteness that
we encounter this kind of two-sided independence of variation

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works but also from those of his mentor, Edmund Husserl, in particular
from the latter's <u>Ideas</u> (originally published, 1913).

(i.e. among acts and their objects). An act may be *temporally extended* even though its object be temporally *punctual* (as when I reflect for some time on a particular instantaneous event). And it is possible also to relate to temporally extended objects in temporally instantaneous acts, (e.g. in acts of passing reference to performances of musical works). And again, an act and its object may be "skew" in regard to their temporal extendedness: I may re-live, in memory, a particular performance of a musical work, succeeding only partially in re-creating the original temporal relations introduced by the conductor, introducing gaps of my own, etc. An act may have a more or less *discursive character* (acts of assertion, of argument, of deduction . . .), and so too may the ontological correlate of an act (e.g. of an act of reference to a proposition, a syllogism, a theorem . . .). Yet clearly we may have a wholly non-discursive act (an act of *pure* reference) whose ontological correlate is itself discursive, just as we may have highly complex discursive acts involving reference to entities which are in themselves non-discursive.

   An act may be such as to be perceptually fulfilled, just as the object of an act may possess its own ontological "fulfilling qualities"--those of its determinations which give rise to corresponding perceptual fulfilment In appropriately directed acts. All *perceptual* objects are ontologically "full" in the sense here delineated, and clearly it is possible that an act of reference to such an ontologically "full" object should itself be epistemologically "empty". (As when I refer to the no-longer-perceivable perceptual object Julius Caesar). But so too it is possible that an act should be characterised by an imported perceptual fulfilment which is alien to the object of the act. This

is the case, e.g., in those acts which may--rightly or
wrongly--accompany our acts of reading works of fiction,
acts which project more or less sensually "filled" *images*
of the characters involved.

   And here at last we are beginning to see how these
considerations may throw light on the nature of our acts
of reading works of fiction and on the ontological correlates
of such acts, including fictional characters. We have seen
that our acts on one side and their objects on the other are
characterised by various different kinds of epistemological,
respectively ontological variation possibilities. And what
I wish to claim is that it is the existence of coherent,
determinately structured manipulations of such variation-
possibilities which makes possible our access to non-real
objects of all kinds, not only to the objects of fiction but
also--where appeal is made to a quite different selection of
axes of variation--to the objects of the various natural
sciences, of mathematics, etc.[11]

   In the case of acts of reading fiction we make a con-
tinuous appeal to the possibility of epistemological ful-
filments of specific kinds which are not rooted in ontolo-
gical filling qualities in the objects themselves. Thus
whilst the objects of fiction are clearly not themselves
perceptual objects, our acts of attention to such objects
yet involve treating them as if they were perceptually
filled, even though the filling qualities which we introduce

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[11]For a discussion of the mathematical work as a borderline case of the
literary work of art see my paper "The 0ntogenesis of Mathematical
Objects", Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, VI (1975),
91-101.

are--in the case of adequate readings--determinately
"neutralised", (i.e. do not involve any *sensual* filling
out on our part, by means of actual *images* of the objects
involved). Similarly when we move from the level of per-
ceptual features to the level of events and actions depicted
in the novel: ontologically speaking fictional characters
are not involved in any actually existing plot. Fictional
characters can in no way become embroiled in actual murders,
suffer from fear, make decisions, engage in conversations.
Yet in our readings of works we "fill out" the objects
depicted by conceiving them as involved precisely in actions
and events of this sort. Indeed because our only access-
route to such objects lies through the understanding of a
determinately structured set of sentences involving action
and event-verbs of determinate types, it follows that we
cannot accede to fictional objects in a fulfilled way at all
except as bound up with corresponding actions and events.
Yet this epistemological filling out on the level of plot
is again something which is "neutralised", "suppressed"--at
least in adequate readings of a work: aesthetically adequate
readings involve a certain detachment of our own personal
interest from the fate of the characters depicted.

In fact similar epistemological fillings out--each
determinately neutralised or suppressed--pertain to every
level of the work. In each case we have to deal with *objects*
which are in themselves in a certain sense 'nodai', i.e.
purely non-extended: they serve as mere co-ordinate points
of our attention in our acts of reading works of fiction.
Yet they are at the same time objects which bring-forth in
determinate ways epistemological fillings out, in consequence
of the fact that it is only be making an adequate concre-
tisation of relevant sequences of sentences that we can gain

access to those objects at all. Just as the access-route
to perceptual objects, through an array of perceptual ex-
periences of certain kinds, determines the nature of our
epistemological model of such objects, so the access-route
to fictional objects through an array of sentences of
particular types determinates the nature of the model which
we bring to bear in our re-creation of such objects in
particular readings.

It is the task of the literary theorist to clarify the
consequences of this dependence of fictional objects upon
determinate types of readings of particular sequences of
sentences. In particular he must find a way of determining
the axes along which epistemological fillings out of the
various different kinds may take place in such a way as to
remain faithful to the work and then, eventually, to yield
a reading which is adequate to bring to light the aesthetic
qualities of the work on each of its various different
levels. I hope that I have shown that both ontological arid
phenomenological analyses--of the type so well demonstrated
by Ingarden--may be of help to the literary theorist in his
execution of these tasks.