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Art, Religion and Musement

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THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN natural and fictive discourse,[1] because it illuminates the possible aesthetic functions of the latter, suggests how verbal artworks might be religiously significant. In exploring that distinction, the present analysis will focus on the manner in which the reading and interpretation of literature can constitute a playful activity. When identified as a characteristic of certain forms of religious behavior, this "playfulness" provides the basis for a comparison between such behavior and the reader's aesthetic response. Additional resources for understanding the possible religious function of verbal art will be supplied by Charles Sanders Peirce's analysis of abductive reasoning and his portrayal of beliefs as habits, both viewed against the background created by his own theory of imaginative play, or "Musement."

No verbal artwork is in any "essential" way religious. This is the case because meaning and value, whether of the religious or nonreligious variety, are not simply properties of literary texts.[2] They are features of the relationship between a text and a reader, and the central dynamic of such relationships can be described in terms of habit-responses, hypothesis-formation, and the special "logic" of fictive discourse. Barbara Herrnstein Smith has suggested that poems, plays, and novels are types of verbal structures that, by virtue of their fictive character, are especially likely to evoke certain kinds of responses.[3] I shall argue here that it is the playful quality of these responses, rather

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than some mysterious quality or particular meaning inherent in a literary work, that is the key to understanding its possible religious value.[4]

I.

The search for the religious meaning of a verbal artwork leads to immediate confusion if it fails to distinguish between fictive discourses and other types of utterances. For example, to treat a poem or a novel as a piece of natural discourse, the function of which is to communicate something about "sacred" reality, is to invoke, in interpreting it, the conventions and assumptions that underlie and inform any theological utterance. If such a work is regarded as fictive, however, it will *not* be assumed that it makes any sort of theological truth-claim, or that it refers to or represents any kind of religious or sacred reality, idea, or meaning. This is not to deny the mimetic quality of fictive utterances; rather, it is to define the precise nature of the representational function of verbal art. Smith explains that

> As a mimetic artform, what a poem distinctively and characteristically represents is . . . *discourse.* Poetry does, like drama, represent actions and events, but exclusively verbal ones. And, as a verbal composition, a poem is characteristically taken to be not a natural utterance, but the *representation* of one.[5]

Natural utterances are characterized by an assumption of their historical specificity; they are taken to be the spoken or written actions of real persons and, as such, to have occurred at unique points in

space and time.[6] Since they are regarded as actual, historical events, it is important to know something about the context or situation out of which they have arisen or to which they constitute a response, in order to interpret and to understand these utterances.

Fictive discourse imitates natural discourse.[7] A poem or novel is comprised of utterances that are not generally taken to be the actual speech acts of real, historical persons; rather, they are assumed to be representative of the type or class of utterances to which such verbal actions belong. Consequently, a literary work consists of possible utterances, and a reader is likely to encounter and interpret these utterances *as possibilities* (unless he or she fails or refuses to recognize the conventions that designate their fictive character). Locating and defining the historical context of its origin will not, then, provide the key to understanding fictive discourse.[8] Such utterances are not themselves historical actions or events; they are representations of such actions and events. Of course, a particular poem or novel may refer to an actual, historical person or event. Smith construes the fictive character of verbal art in such a way, however, that her account is able to accommodate such instances. She argues, for example, that

> The essential fictiveness of novels . . . is not to be discovered in the unreality of the characters, objects, and events alluded to, but in the unreality of the *alludings* themselves. In other words, in a novel or tale, it is the *act* of reporting events, the *act* of describing persons and referring to places, that is fictive. The novel *represents* the verbal action of a man reporting, describing, and referring.[9]

I will argue below that the distinction between natural and fictive discourse, and the subsequent suggestion that much of "imaginative literature" can be regarded as fictive in character, are useful for understanding the religious significance of such literature. This distinction may easily be misunderstood, however, as indicating that the difference between the two categories consists in the "truth-value" of the utterances designated by

them; i.e., "fictive" may be misconstrued as designating false utterances. Such a misunderstanding is exposed by the observation that a natural utterance remains "natural" as long as the conventions and assumptions that govern its interpretation remain unchanged. The discovery that such an utterance is in some sense "untrue" does not suddenly transform it into a fictive statement. Of course, natural falsehoods can be fictively represented *as falsehoods*, but here the integrity of the distinction is preserved. What this distinction properly allows one to do is to understand the special functions of each type of discourse and the kinds of effects that each is likely to produce.

Generally speaking, natural utterances are responses to specific historical situations, and they are intended to communicate information that has become relevant to the participants in those situations. Governed by the conventions (both social and linguistic) of a particular community, this kind of verbal activity is designed for the purpose of influencing the behavior of other persons, and for soliciting, supplying, and exchanging useful or interesting facts, beliefs, and opinions. Such actions usually have specific consequences, often entail significant responsibilities, and sometimes involve risks. An utterance may be intended to inform or deceive, to encourage or discourage, to intimidate or placate; in almost all cases, however, such discourse will serve to produce results that are desirable or valuable to the speaker or writer in a given situation. Listening and reading are generally governed by a similar set of motivations: the desire to acquire useful or valuable information and the need to formulate appropriate responses.[10]

It has already been argued that fictive utterances are not taken as being responses to determinate historical situations. Consequently, their purposes cannot be defined in terms of the specific verbal interactions that normally would be operative in such a situation; they must have another function or set of functions. Clearly, there is no need to opt for the singular here. It would be unreasonable to

assume, a priori, that these verbal structures are limited to serving a single purpose. Likewise, it would be incorrect to assert that all fictive utterances are, in whole or in part, examples of verbal artworks, i.e., that they all serve or are created to serve what one might think of as an "aesthetic" function.[11] In defining fictive discourse, one does not define verbal art; rather, one describes the class of verbal structures to which such artworks belong. The fictive status of an utterance does not, in itself, indicate that that utterance was designed or intended to stimulate the imagination or to produce any sort of pleasurable effect.

Despite the fact that the potential functions of language are not reduced to the singular as soon as the designations "fictive" and "aesthetic" are applied, one of the basic features of any verbal artwork is the manner in which it may operate to provide the occasion for a "playful" response.[12] Smith observes that

> Poems, novels, plays, and other "works of literature" are, among other things, verbal structures that have been designed to constitute precisely such conditions, to invite and reward the sorts of activities I have been describing as "cognitive play": here, the exploration of the formal and symbolic properties of language, the contextually unrestricted interpretation of verbal structures—that is, the playing out of their potential "meanings"—and the playing with or playing at the conventions of linguistic transactions.[13]

The "conditions" alluded to here are those that are necessary in order for a certain "distancing" or "framing" effect to be achieved. Such conditions are partially built into the conventions that govern fictive discourse. Taken as a representation of natural utterances, such discourse is placed, and itself places the reader, at a distance from the dynamics of actual verbal interactions, of historically determinate actions and events. This distancing has a liberating or "licensing" effect on the reader to the extent that it frees him or her from any immediate concern about the various causes and effects, motives and consequences, that govern verbal behavior in specific situations.

Schiller discovered at the roots of this

aspect of the aesthetic experience what he labels as the "play impulse," and he defines as one of its basic aims "the extinction of time within time."[14] One need not be concerned with all of Schiller's philosophical presuppositions in order to find his statement interesting. The fictive framework that literature provides, in a sense, neutralizes the concerns, the purposes, the consequences, and the principles of causality that govern actual, historical activity. In the reading of a novel, for example, it is the novelist and the reader who (each to a certain extent and in certain ways) control the manner in which time and events are to be experienced. Whether or not Schiller's statement seems excessively dramatic, clearly one's ordinary experience of time as the brute, irreversible succession of events is transformed in the act of reading a poem or a novel. Time is reorganized in terms of the rules of such a "game." It is neither simply lived nor endured; it is "played out." The reader is free to explore the various sounds, rhythms, meanings, ideas, images, situations, attitudes, and feelings that are evoked by the text. Such playfulness, while sustained by the fictive environment of the literary work of art, would not constitute a typical response to an actual situation or to the "natural" account or description of such a situation.

II.

This element of playfulness has also been identified as a characteristic of certain types of religious experience. For example, in a classic work in which he argues that all human cultural activity is ludic in its origin, Johan Huizinga discusses the intimate relationship that exists between religious ritual and play.

> We found that one of the most important characteristics of play was its spatial separation from ordinary life . . . . Inside this space the play proceeds, inside it the rules obtain. Now, the mapping out of some sacred spot is also the primary characteristic of every sacred act. This requirement of isolation for ritual, including magic and law, is much more than merely spatial and tem-

poral. Nearly all rites of consecration and initiation entail a certain artificial seclusion of the performers and those to be initiated. . . . Sacrament and mystery presuppose a hallowed spot.[15]

Huizinga observes that ordinary human experience is distanced or "framed out" by the ritual activity. He records similar observations about the art world, but he does not attempt to make explicit comparisons between these two forms of cultural behavior. Nonetheless, he is able to conclude that both the religious and aesthetic impulses are essentially playful.

There is a great deal of existing scholarship devoted specifically to exploring the ludic aspect of religious phenomena.[16] This material is uneven in quality and much of it draws heavily upon Huizinga's discussion. In modern Christian thought there has even emerged a "theology of play" which focuses on this element as a paradigm for religious thinking and behavior. Such theologians, at least in the United States, have tended to affirm an extremist position, reducing the entire content of religion to its playful aspect.[17] One fairly recent argument has even attempted to designate all religions as complex "fictions" designed to evoke and to cultivate the kind of playful response that constitutes our most "ancient" and "cherished" defense "against the void."[18] This type of analysis is an outgrowth of the "Death of God" theology of the 1960s, and it represents an attempt to salvage the meaningfulness of religious systems of belief during a period of declining confidence in the validity of theological truth claims. It has already been argued here, however, that the "truth" or "falsity" of an utterance is irrelevant to its status as natural or fictive discourse. Verbal artworks are fictive not because they are comprised of utterances that are untrue, but rather, because they are not regarded as making "truth claims." Their fictive status is indicated by the precise nature of the conventions and assumptions that underlie and govern them, their special mimetic function, and their typical effects. Conversely, to argue that certain theological assertions are false is not to deny that they are natural utterances or

that they function in the same general way that all such utterances do. Moreover, one cannot say that theological discourse is fictive despite the fact that most theologians and believers regard it as natural, since the distinction between the two types of discourse is contingent upon socially accepted norms and conventions; i.e., the concern here is not with the logical status or "metaphysical" validity of specific assertions, but with the "metacommunicative" devices that govern verbal behavior in a social context.[19]

Despite this observable tendency among theologians of play to overstate the case, the work of anthropologists and phenomenologists of religion suggests that there is indeed an element of playfulness in religious behavior. Furthermore, such scholarship indicates that Huizinga's basic formulation of how this element is operative in religious behavior is correct. He focuses on the ludic quality of religious liturgy, ritual, and ceremony. Such activities involve the creation of a special framework or context; here, the rules that generally govern human social intercourse are superseded by a new set of norms and conventions. These conventions are designed to annul the laws of temporal or historical process. This becomes obvious just by noting one typical example, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical calendar, which repeats a specific pattern of celebrations each year without reference to particular, historically determined events and changes. The potential patterns of meaning for such behavior are immanent in the interplay between the designed ritual structures and the religious participant, and do not arise out of the specificity of some historical occasion or situation.

This insight into the playful aspect of religious phenomena is by no means uniquely modern. Plato prescribed the playful attitude as being most appropriate for mortal men and women, and he did so for essentially theological reasons (i.e., man has been constructed as a "toy" for God).[20] In the late thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas carefully noted the similarities that exist between play and reli-

gious contemplation.[21] His analysis suggests that the pleasure and the freedom that characterize certain forms of meditation and contemplation indicate that these activities might be recognized as "playful." Peirce makes this connection explicit in a argument that will be examined below.

Locating the play-element in both religious behavior and the typical response to verbal artworks does not negate the fact that any comparison between these two realms of phenomena will raise certain problematic issues. One might question the extent to which, for example, religious ritual activity has any sort "fictive" quality. This issue seems to be complicated by the fact that "fictiveness" has been defined here as a characteristic of verbal behavior, while the verbal utterances that are involved in a religious ceremony comprise only a part of a complex of behaviorial forms. There is no reason, however, to assume that this category is limited in its application to the human use of language. Smith explains that

> . . . the relation between fictive and natural *discourse* . . . is to be seen not as unique to language but rather as one instance of the more general relation between "fictive" and "natural" objects and events.[22]

Thus, for example, it is possible to designate a dramatic performance in the theater as the fictive representation of natural human actions, both verbal and nonverbal.

The problem here, stated more clearly, concerns the extent to which ritual activity is a "representation" or "imitation" rather than a "reactualization," "recreation," or "reenactment" of some actual event or activity. It has been shown that the conventions governing fictive discourse indicate that it is composed of utterances that imitate natural verbal actions; these utterances are not themselves speech events that have actually occurred in a particular historical situation. Ritual participants, however, often seem to make different sorts of claims for their actions; a certain actual event is not simply

imitated or represented by the ritual activity, but rather, *it itself recurs.* (In Danto's terms, one might say that the religious ritual, unlike art, is incapable of "putting reality at a distance."[23] Bateson addresses this issue directly when he points to "the sacrament that is felt to be more than 'an outward and visible sign given unto us' as 'an attempt to deny the differences between map and territory'."[24])

One might try to sidestep this problem by arguing that the religious believer is simply wrong, and that the ritual represents an event without causing it, in any sense, to recur (e.g., the Catholic idea that the Eucharist is a reenactment of Christ's sacrificial death is misconceived, and the Eucharist must be properly regarded as a "symbolic representation" of that death). Once again, this is to misunderstand the distinction between "natural" and "fictive" as being contingent on the validity of a theological claim, rather than on metacommunicative or "framing" strategies.[25] How then is this issue to be resolved?

First, it should be admitted that the analogy does begin to break down at this point. The attitude of a reader towards a verbal artwork is not identical to the attitude of a religious believer towards the ritual patterns of behavior in which he or she participates. This admission must be balanced by three additional remarks, however. (1) The distinction between the "mimetic" character of verbal art and the presumed "reactualizing" character of some rituals would be most problematic if the events being reactualized by the latter were themselves "natural," historical events. In that case the ritual could not serve to distance the participant from the kind of temporality, causality, and purposefulness that governs such events, and "play" would become difficult or impossible in this context. Clearly, however, the events reenacted in ritual, even if they are considered to be "real" or "actual," are, in another sense, never quite "natural." These events are themselves of a special quality, considered by believers to be, by their very nature, not historically determinate events, but rather, in some sense

time-transcending. Fictive discourse distances itself from the rules that govern natural discourse by being understood as an imitation rather than a member of the latter class of utterances; ritual actions, even when they are not designated as imitative, achieve this distance by being understood as reenacting actions and events that are themselves "unnatural" (and therefore not governed by the norms and criteria of meaning that shape and inform historical events and interactions). (2) Many religious rituals are explicitly and self-consciously representational. The Roman Catholic celebration of the Eucharist has been advanced as a "nonmimetic" example, but many of the Reformed Christian traditions treat the same ritual action as a symbolic representation or imitation. Here, the event does not "recur." (3) In general, playful activity has a certain "labile" quality; this characteristic of play has been noted by both Bateson and Huizinga.[26] The distinction between "this is play" and "this is not play," between "this is not real and serious" and "this is real and serious" is very often a fragile and unstable distinction. Huizinga has observed how ritual behavior is marked by this duplicity of seriousness/playfulness, of events recognized as both being and not being "real."[27] A similar duplicity can be detected in the reader's experience of the verbal artwork.

> The artwork interests, impresses, and moves us both as the thing represented and as the representing itself: as the actions and passions of Prince Hamlet and as the achievement of William Shakespeare, as the speech of men—and as the poet's fictions.[28]

This ambiguous, even paradoxical nature of play renders it significant in a potentially religious sense. Religious behavior is itself fundamentally "bifocal," motivated both by the concern with a sacred reality that is believed to transcend time and space, and by the desire to secure some insight into the basic meaning of human experience.[29] Play, at least occasionally, serves this double function; it

both displaces and illuminates "reality." Furthermore, the latter, positive effect of play seems to be contingent on the achievement of the negative, i.e., the neutralizing of ordinary attitudes and concerns. Within the religious context it often seems to be presupposed that one must first lose one's commonplace sense of reality in order to gain a richer, more insightful perspective.

The distancing effect of play (or, more appropriately, of the play-frame) has already been discussed here. The view that playful activity can function positively as a source of insight is a hypothesis that will be considered below.[30] In addition, the conditions under which the playful response to a verbal artwork is likely to be considered religiously meaningful will need to be specified. Several of the philosophical notions articulated by Peirce will facilitate this investigation.

III.

Peirce regarded all beliefs as habits;[31] to hold a belief is to be disposed to behave in a certain specifiable way under certain specifiable circumstances. The essence of belief is expectation, and when the expectations generated by a particular belief are disappointed, doubt arises in the mind of the believer. Doubt is a dissatisfied state of mind that stimulates inquiry, the sole purpose of which is the dispelling of doubt through the fixation of some new and satisfying belief. Belief-habits, then, are not purely subjective phenomena for Peirce, but rather, they mediate between the human organism and its environment. They define a meaningful relationship between an individual and a certain set of objective conditions.

In an essay entitled "A Neglected Argument For The Reality of God,"[32] Peirce introduces the notion of "Pure Play" or "Musement." When his doubt-belief theory of inquiry is examined within the context of this discussion, certain adjustments in that theory seem to be required. Here, the inquiring activity itself

is said to constitute an enjoyable and "satisfying" experience, and the resulting beliefs need not be directly or immediately utilized as "habits of action." This is to say that thought or inquiry can take the form of play. Peirce's description of Musement as playful inquiry characterizes a special context within which the goals of thought are transformed and thinking itself takes on new qualities. His discussion identifies aesthetic and religious contemplation as two species of Musement. Belief does not cease to be the goal of inquiry here, but the practical purposes and consequences with which such beliefs are generally associated have, at least temporarily, been suppressed.[33] Thinking itself becomes a free and pleasurable activity, not bound by the contingencies and the requirements of actual situations and circumstances.

Peirce is reluctant to exclude any form of reasoning from the domain of Musement,[34] but it rapidly becomes clear that he regards "abduction" (or "retroduction") as the most typical sort of playful inquiry. At this point in his philosophical career, Peirce identified abductive reasoning as the first stage of any scientific investigation, the purpose of which is to suggest or formulate hypotheses that can subsequently be deductively explicated and inductively tested. Here, Peirce remains faithful to his general theory of inquiry, describing the Neglected Argument as consisting of three separate phases, the first of which involves the playful entertaining of the God-hypothesis. This phase itself constitutes an argument that, while the second and third stages are dependent upon it, can also be regarded in isolation. That is to say, prior to any deductive explication or inductive confirmation, a particular hypothesis may be selected and affirmed simply because of its "beauty" and explanatory force.[35] Musement, then, consists of observation and of the entertaining of hypotheses that might explain or render intelligible observed phenomena.

Especially since it is located within the context of a discussion of religious belief, Peirce's analysis of Musement resonates with John Wisdom's treatment, in his essay "Gods," of a certain type of human

reasoning.[36] Wisdom describes a form of inquiry that does not involve the gathering of new evidence or the deductive "linking" of premises with their necessary conclusions; rather, it is a process of connecting and disconnecting, of presenting and representing the observable facts, of drawing new relationships and analogies, of foregrounding and suppressing certain details, all for the purpose of formulating or supporting an explanatory hypothesis. Such a hypothesis, especially if it becomes a firm belief, partially determines an individual's perception of the observed phenomena. In this regard, it is important to note that, according to Peirce, hypothetical reasoning is involved in every act of perception.[37] Automatic and indubitable though it may be, a perceptual judgment is nonetheless an abductive inference; all experience is interpreted experience.

Since Peirce regarded perceptual judgments as a kind of "limit case" of abduction, it would seem justifiable to locate Musement at the other end of the continuum. Perceptual judgments are automatic, virtually uncontrollable, and predetermined by a specific state of affairs; on the other hand, the muser is free to entertain and to explore any sort of hypotheses, having placed himself or herself within an environment especially conducive to such a purpose (i.e., the purpose of having no specific purpose).[38] To playfully entertain a hypothesis is, after all, to "see" the world or some aspect of it in a certain way. Furthermore, while Peirce was concerned with the question of truth and therefore with ultimately testing the validity of each hypothesis, a hypothesis certainly need not be true in order to have explanatory power. Many metaphors provide excellent examples of "hypotheses" that, while they are clearly false in a literal sense, can function as sources of insight. As hypotheses that invite the reader or listener to entertain them while resisting being neatly affirmed as "true," metaphors function as miniature "verbal toys,"[39] i.e., analogously to verbal artworks. (Within the context of the present discussion, it is also interesting to ob-

serve, though impossible to explore, the fact that metaphorical usage is especially characteristic of both religious and literary discourse.)

It has been shown that playful behavior, behavior that not only suppresses the commonplace but also transforms human perceptions, is a typical occurrence within both aesthetic and religious contexts. The fact that specific artworks might be ascribed religious significance by some individual, however, does not indicate *how* this is likely to occur (although that it does indeed occur seems indubitable). Once again, Peirce's argument provides some assistance here. If, as Peirce insists, certain beliefs function for the reasoner as "rules" or "habits of inference,"[40] then an analysis of those beliefs should illuminate the reasoning process itself. That is to say, beliefs are predispositions to think and to interpret as well as to act in a certain way, given certain circumstances. Even within the context of Musement, beliefs continue to generate expectations; these beliefs, however, have themselves been foregrounded and the muser is free to playfully "test" and explore them (as well as the hypotheses that they help to generate), since the consequences that might attach to actually believing or disbelieving (and acting accordingly) within a specific, concrete situation have been neutralized.

Here, the emphasis on abduction as the first stage of inquiry should not obscure the fact that inquiry for Peirce is an evolutionary process; i.e., the initial stage of a present investigation will presuppose certain knowledge and beliefs, the results of previous investigations. More specifically, every abductive inference presupposes, in addition to the given phenomenon requiring explanation, some general belief or habit of thought (formulated as a "rule"). The belief that all things of the type or class "A" have such and such characteristics will, when the inquirer happens to observe this configuration of characteristics, facilitate the inference that the observed thing or phenomenon is a member of the "A-class" (i.e., a "case" is subsumed under the "rule"; the rule is a working

"model" for explaining cases).[41] Consequently, while hypotheses often require subsequent inductive confirmation, there is also a sense in which abduction "completes" induction. Inductive inferences can only yield general laws or beliefs; the conclusion that a specific "X" is a member of a certain class or governed by a certain rule, however, is always the result of hypothetical reasoning. To classify "X" *as* something involves abduction.

What sort of beliefs, then, would be relevant to the hypothetical judgment that an artwork is religiously meaningful? There seem to be at least three different types of such beliefs: (1) specific religious beliefs, (2) beliefs about verbal artworks, and (3) beliefs about the nature of religious experience. In each case the individual's belief will function as a habit-response mediating between that individual and a certain aspect of the work of art, i.e., the type of natural discourse that it represents, its context or frame, and its function and effects. Each belief serves as a "rule" guiding the abductive inferences that constitute the individual's playful response to the text. In many instances where a text is identified as a "religious work of art" it is likely that several of these kinds of beliefs, as well as the objective conditions that support them, have entered into the picture.

In the first case, an individual with religious beliefs about the world will tend to employ or test such beliefs in the process of interpreting and understanding a verbal artwork. (Note that a belief-habit is a tendency, a predisposition, and not a absolute, determining force.) This tendency will be strengthened if the artwork itself consists of fictive utterances that represent a type of natural discourse conventionally used to serve a religious function, or to communicate about religious phenomena and concerns (eg., a poem imitating a prayer, or a novel imitating the biography of a religiously significant figure). Here, the text displays features that such an individual would regard as being characteristic of the class of religiously meaningful texts in that it represents a type of utterance that he or she considers

to be religiously meaningful. Some of the beliefs that are normally utilized to interpret or explain such natural utterances will now come into "play" in the fictive context (i.e., they will be "entertained," their power to illuminate freely explored, without concern for the practical motives and consequences that govern their interpretive function in natural contexts).

In the second case, an individual who believes that verbal artworks are the sorts of things that can and often do have religious meaning will tend, in a way that a person lacking such a belief will not, to ascribe to a given work religious value, especially if that work is appropriately framed. That is to say, value-ascription is a habit-response, but habits can be, at least partially, socially determined. A work that is metacommunicatively designated as "religious" will tend to elicit a religiously meaningful response from a person properly predisposed. For example, undoubtedly many individuals have had religiously meaningful responses to the *Song of Songs,* have inferred that it has religious value, and have employed religious ideas and beliefs when interpreting it, in no small measure due to its presence in the Jewish and Christian canons. Here, the characteristic features that facilitate the abductive intrepretation or classification of the work as "religious" are contextual; i.e., they have to do with the way that the text is presented by its author, conventionally regarded, or "framed" by some community.

Third, an individual who has previously behaved "playfully" within a religious context may maintain a belief, vague and implicit or quite explicit, about the playful character of religious experience. This belief will serve as a "habit of thought" predisposing such an individual to attach religious meaning or significance to a verbal artwork and to the response that it evokes. Here, the inference would proceed loosely as follows: religious experiences are playful in character; my response to this artwork is playful in character; consequently, my response to this artwork is of the class of religious experiences. (Of course, these experiences need

not be explicitly designated by the reader as "playful" so long as they possess those qualities that have been identified in this essay as being characteristic of play-behavior.)

This last case is especially significant, since verbal artworks have been described here as fictive utterances that are designed or discovered to elicit and to sustain a playful response. Consequently, *any* artwork might be considered religiously meaningful and might provide an occasion for religious "musing," even if it fails to represent natural religious discourse and even if it has not been conventionally designated as "religious." In order for a certain aspect (i.e., the play aspect) of the religious experience to be actualized, a certain type of framework is required, and the encounter between reader and verbal artwork provides such a framework; i.e., in some ways it functions very much like the explicitly religious contexts of the ceremony, the ritual, and various forms of contemplation. To hypothetically infer, on a particular occasion, that the response to a literary work, since it shares some of the characteristics of religious experiences, is a member of the class of such experiences, is not to conclude that all play-behavior is essentially religious. Abductive inferences function as explanations of particular cases. My purpose here has been to describe the results that such inferences might possibly yield for some persons, in some instances. An individual, moved and enlightened by a work of art, transformed and delighted by his or her playful encounter with it, might indeed be inclined to label this a "religious" experience (i.e., to interpret it as such, even if the work appears to lack an explicitly religious theme). Of course, such hypothetical judgments may either be made retrospectively or pervade and inform the experience itself.

For whatever reasons, Peirce regarded aesthetic delight as an index of religious meaningfulness.[42] The God-hypothesis, he felt, is a hypothesis that the playful, musing mind will be naturally predisposed to entertain. While the metaphysical convictions that underlie Peirce's assumption

are interesting in their own right, one need not appeal to them or to any "innate" tendency in order to understand why some verbal artworks are considered to be religiously significant. However they are acquired, certain beliefs—about the world, about artworks themselves, and about the meaning of specific types of experience—function as habits predisposing an individual to respond in a religiously meaningful way to certain poems, plays, and novels. It is not a matter of either extracting religious meaning from the work or reading it into the work, since the meaning is not "in" the work at all, but rather, describes a relationship between text and reader. In this essay, it has been argued that that relationship may be a playful one, that such play is always shaped and informed by certain beliefs and hypotheses, and that these beliefs have a habit-function. Verbal artworks themselves have contexts ("frames") and create contexts. They have a special mimetic character and they tend to produce certain kinds of effects. Attention to these factors is the key, then, to understanding the religious significance of verbal art.

¹ The notion of such a distinction is borrowed from Barbara Herrnstein Smith's insightful analysis in *On The Margins Of Discourse: The Relation of Literature To Language* (The University of Chicago Press, 1978). I do not intend to suggest, however, that Smith would endorse the precise manner in which I construe this distinction (*see*, e.g., notes 7 & 10 below) or utilize it in my analysis of religious behavior (in section II of this essay). Furthermore, it should be noted that Smith, in her more recent work, has revised and reformulated some of the arguments upon which I am drawing here. (*See*, e.g., "Fixed Marks and Variable Constancies: A Parable of Literary Value," *Poetics Today* 1, no. 1-2 [1979], 7-31; "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 [1980] pp. 213-36; "Contingencies Of Value," *Critical Inquiry* [forthcoming, Fall, 1983].)

² This is not to deny that there is one species of meaning, i.e., "linguistic meaning," that is inherent in language itself. *See* C.I. Lewis, "The Modes of Meaning," in the *Collected Papers of Clarence Irving Lewis*, J.D. Goheen and J.L. Mothershead, Jr., eds. (Stanford University Press, 1970), p. 314; also, James F. Ross, *Portraying Analogy* (Cambridge University Press, 1981) pp. 65-66. Nonetheless, the total

meaning of an utterance for a listener or reader cannot be identified with its linguistic meaning.

³ Smith; *see* her discussion of the playful response that verbal artworks are frequently designed or discovered to elicit and sustain, pp. 116-24.

⁴ Having outlined my basic agenda, it might be appropriate to define more precisely the nature and scope of my project. While recognizing the significance of eastern contributions to the study of play, I will draw here only upon the resources of western thought and scholarship. In doing so, I restrict myself to a body of literature with which I feel comfortably familiar, without excluding material that is essential to my argument. It should be noted as well that I have selected an approach to my topic that differs from the standard analytic accounts of the nature of art, both verbal and non-verbal. (*See*, e.g. Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Harvard University Press, 1981); Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, 1976); Joseph Margolis, *The Language of Art and Art Criticism* (Wayne State University Press, 1965), and *Art and Philosophy: Conceptual Issues in Aesthetics* (New York, 1980). These accounts have demonstrated both their utility and their power to illuminate; my concern, however, is less with the "language of art" than it is with "verbal behavior," and with the responses that certain types of verbal structures are designed to provoke or elicit. Finally, the appropriation of Peirce's philosophy by contemporary semioticians of art differs somewhat from my own appeal to his thought. *See*, e.g., Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, 1976) and *The Role of the Reader: Exploration in the Semiotics of Texts* (Indiana University Press, 1979). My interest in Peirce here is focused, not on his theory of signification, but on his analysis of belief-habits and hypothetical reasoning, and on his utilization of that analysis within the context of his "Neglected Argument."

⁵ Smith, p. 25.

⁶ My brief description of natural discourse, while it suffices for the purposes of this essay, is not intended to be an adequate summary of Smith's detailed analysis. (*See*, esp. pp. 15-24 and 79-106.)

⁷ *See* Smith's comments on fictive discourse, pp. 24-40. Smith tends, especially in her more recent work, to emphasize the "mimetic" character of fictive utterances to a lesser extent that I do in this essay. (For an interesting and, in some ways, similar account of the nature of the utterances that comprise verbal artworks, *see* Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* [Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978], esp. pp. 64ff.).

⁸ John M. Ellis also argues this point in his *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis* (University of California Press, 1974), pp. 44, 112.

⁹ Smith, p. 29.

¹⁰ My account here of the motives and purposes that govern natural verbal interactions should not be identified with Smith's detailed investigation of the "economics" of "verbal transactions" (*see Margins*, Ch. 4); my claims are sufficient to distinguish between the functions and effects of natural and of fictive discourse.

[11] Smith, e.g., discusses logicians' examples, greeting card messages, quotations, proverbs, and other verbal utterances as types of fictive discourse that do not appear to be designed to perform what is typically called an "aesthetic" function. *See* pp. 50-75.

[12] Ellis also describes the typical response to verbal artworks as "playful"; *see* pp. 238-9.

[13] Smith, p. 121. Smith sufficiently qualifies her usage of the word "cognitive" here so as to preclude anything other than a general understanding of that term *(see* pp. 11-13, 116-24, and 211, note 2). That is to say, cognitive play involves and accentuates perceptual and learning processes, the gathering of information, and the "playful" manipulation of such information. I have chosen to describe this playful activity in terms of Peirce's analysis of abductive reasoning *(see* part III).

[14] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, R. Snell, trans. (New York, 1965), p. 74.

[15] Johan Huinzinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston, 1950), p. 13; for a development and a critique of Huizinga's theory of play, *see* Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games* (New York, 1979).

[16] Especially valuable are the following discussions: Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search For The Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (Garden City, 1972), pp. 170-9; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, R. Ulrich, trans. (New York, 1971); Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, A. Dru, trans. (New York, 1963); Hugo Rahner, *Man At Play*, B. Battershaw and E. Quinn, trans. (New York, 1967).

[17] The dissatisfaction with such a reduction constitutes the essence of Moltmann's critique of American theology of play, pp. 111-13.

[18] Lonnie Kliever, "Fictive Religion: Rhetoric and Play," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49 (December 1981), 657-69.

[19] Gregory Bateson has described some of the metacommunicative messages that identify certain forms of behavior (human and nonhuman) as "playful" in *Steps To An Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972), esp. pp. 177ff. In a similar vein, Smith discusses the "cues or signals" that distinguish fictive verbal structures from other types of discourse: *see* pp. 126-32.

[20] Plato, *Laws* 803b-c.

[21] Aquinas, *Commentary on Proverbs*, 1, d. 2 (exposito tertus).

[22] Smith, p. xi.

[23] Arthur Danto, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXXIII (1974), p. 145.

[24] Bateson, p. 183.

[25] For an insightful discussion of "framing" strategies, *see* Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York, 1974).

[26] Bateson, pp. 183-85; Huizinga, p. 21.

[27] Huizinga, p. 23.

[28] Smith, p. 40.

[29] Regarding the "ambivalence" of religious experience, *see* Dupré, pp. 13-20.

[30] In arguing that religious insight must often be imaginatively appropriated and therefore "poetically" expressed, Kierkegaard developed a theory of "indirect communication" that, in some ways, resonates with the present discussion of fictive discourse; *see* e.g., "First and Last Declaration," in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, D. Swenson and W. Lowrie, trans. (Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 551-54.

[31] Charles S. Pierce, *Collected Papers*, V. 1-6, Hartshorne and Weiss, eds., V. 7-8, Burks, ed. (Harvard University Press,), esp. 5.370ff.

[32] Peirce, 6.452-491; for an excellent commentary on this argument and related topics, *see* John E. Smith, "Religion and Theology in Peirce," in *Reason and God* (Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 62-91.

[33] Peirce, 6.458-61.

[34] Peirce, 6.461.

[35] Peirce, 6.465, 6.467.

[36] John Wisdom, "Gods," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1944-45).

[37] Peirce, 5.181ff.; *see* Murray G. Murphey's analysis in *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 396ff.

[38] For a contemporary psychological examination of the role that hypotheses play in thinking and perception *see* Jerome Bruner, *Beyond The Information Given*, J.M. Anglin, ed. (New York, 1973); similar notions are creatively utilized by James Ross in the development of a theory of religious knowledge and perception: *see* "Ways of Religious Knowing," in *The Challenge of Religion*, F.F. Ferre, J. Kockelmans, and J.E. Smith, eds. (New York, 1982), pp. 83-103. *See also* Peirce himself on hypotheses as perceptual "skills," 6.145.

[39] This term is borrowed from Smith; *(see,* e. g., her reference to *Finnegan's Wake*, p. 122).

[40] *See*, e.g., Peirce, 2.170, 2.444, 2.643, 2.713.

[41] *See*, e.g., Peirce, 2.146, 2.776, 2.708ff., 6.145, 8.218ff.

[42] This relationship between aesthetic and religious experience in Peirce's thought was long ago observed and commented upon by Murray Murphey; *see* pp. 354, 364ff.