



MONASH University

**The author *imago*:
addressing a lacuna in
hermeneutic applications of the
Author-figure**

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Abstract

My thesis is that readers form an individualised image of the author from an idiosyncratic range of intratextual, intertextual, paratextual and extratextual sources. This image evolves over time, and has the ability to influence a hermeneutic treatment of that author's texts. The proposal is not a quantitative one: it is argued neither that the author image is present in α percentage of readers or in the reading of β texts, nor that it will reside at γ level of consciousness or have δ influence over the construction of meaning. Nor is it a normative one: it is not argued that there is a 'correct' author image or use. Instead, the proposal is a general proposition for a functional category. It is hoped that establishing an appropriate theoretical construct may then lay the foundation for further empirical investigation.

Twentieth-century movements embracing formalism and radical textualism have established a dominant interpretive paradigm that excludes the author from the realm of hermeneutic meaning. Meanwhile, however, this decisive eradication has been matched by an increased focus on the personality, or 'cult', of the author in the marketing and labeling of texts. It almost as though the role of the author in one sphere has been at the expense of the role of the author in the other: the author that frames the product of the text is shunted into irrelevance once the practice of explication begins, but is not replaced with a version of the author in light of which a sophisticated reader may permissibly construe meaning. Figures such as the 'implied author' have been theorised to fill this hole, but they are derived solely from the language and structure of individual texts and are therefore a product of meaning rather than a source of it.

There is no existing body of literature or theory covering this concept. Contemporary 'author' theories tend towards the single-text intratextual, such as the 'implied author'; older work, on the other hand, tends towards the empirical biographical or an erasure of authorial personality. A small number of recent texts, such as *Author Representations in Literary Reading*, published in 2012 by Dutch scholar Eefje Claassen, do suggest the existence of a multi-source authorial image, but stop short of articulating it as a new kind of identifiable critical entity. Instead, observation and discussion usually default to the use or critique of existing authorial formulations such as the implied author, narrator and flesh-and-blood biographical author: they do not tend to identify a gap and make a new proposal with which to fill it.

In this thesis I argue that there is a gap, and the intentional object author-figure I propose to fill it is called the author *imago*.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Megan Blake

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Introduction

"I have been into the other gardens," she said.

"There was nothin' to prevent thee," he answered crustily.

"I went into the orchard."

"There was no dog at th' door to bite thee," he answered.

"There was no door there into the other garden," said Mary.

"What garden?" he said in a rough voice, stopping his digging for a moment.

"The one on the other side of the wall," answered Mistress Mary. "There are trees there—I saw the tops of them. A bird with a red breast was sitting on one of them and he sang."

To her surprise the surly old weather-beaten face actually changed its expression. A slow smile spread over it and the gardener looked quite different. It made her think that it was curious how much nicer a person looked when he smiled. She had not thought of it before.¹



I submit that there is a gap in theory concerning the reader's conception of the author-figure, and the way in which that individualised conception might influence the hermeneutic meaning constructed from a text. Critical vocabulary exists to identify the biographical author, and to debate the existence of any objective, unified and knowable self; vocabulary exists to identify the author implied by, or otherwise inferred from, the totality of perceived authorial choices; vocabulary exists to identify the public persona of the author created by marketing and book jackets; there is more vocabulary. Agreed critical vocabulary does not exist to identify the particular intentional object brought to the text by each reader, *particularly* if they do not conceive of that author as a normative entity, or if their intentional object differs qualitatively from someone else's who otherwise conceptualises the function of the author in the same way.

My contention is that, when we read and interpret the works of an author, we typically do so through the lens of an 'intentional object' centred on that author: an internalised construction of thoughts, feelings and 'knowledge' that we associate with the author, and that form a somewhat translucent lens through which we receive their works. This intentional object is shaped by a range of (perhaps not all fully conscious) influences including literary preference, texts already read, biographical material the reader believes to be true, and even prejudices they

¹ From Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (London: Heinemann, 1911).

may have; it then influences and is influenced by the reading of the text, and informs the interpretive choices made by that reader in her or his hermeneutic construction. The fact that this author-figure might, for some readers, coalesce with their conception of the biographical author, or for others coalesce with the received career author, or for still others be a more Derridean absence, does not negate the existence of it as an independent and functional, qualitatively-neutral, concept – nor the need for vocabulary with which to name it. Apples, bananas and oranges are different fruits, but the availability of the word ‘fruit’ to name the class is still useful. Broadly speaking, post-modernism denies the existence of any humanised author connected to the text, and this may seem to negate the existence of an intentional object engaged in the hermeneutic construction. The authorial intentional object remains, however: the effect of erasing the human figure of the named author merely creates an intention-neutral object that hovers outside context, but that has the power to influence interpretation in ways that a humanised figure cannot. The governing class still exists.

The purpose of this thesis is not to argue against a multiplicity of possible meanings existing in a text, in favour of an Ideal author-authorised meaning. The purpose is not to argue for the transparency of language or the limitation of interpretive liberation; it is not to return the figure of the author to an earlier ‘godlike’ status and elevate them and their intentions above the artistic object. This thesis will not argue that knowledge of an empirical author is the key to magically unlocking the hermeneutic or thematic meaning of her or his work, or that a purely mimetic view of representation should be adopted, in which factual details from an author’s life are seen as transparently represented in their work. Lastly, this thesis will not argue for any critical approach over another, or any composition of the intentional object author over another. I am not taking a normative position in my proposal: the purpose of this thesis is to propose a functional category.

I propose to name this category of hermeneutic practice – the individual reader’s author-image – the *imago*. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that it does not already exist in hermeneutic theory and criticism, and is therefore not redundant; to demonstrate that critics and professional readers use this author-figure in their own work, regardless of their dominant critical orientation, and that the proposal is therefore not nugatory; and to demonstrate that there are no conclusively persuasive arguments why it ought not to be recognised, and that it is therefore not illegitimate.

Backgrounding

The author's name has grown in cultish eminence in the book trade and middlebrow or 'pulp' literature, particularly in the last forty years, commencing largely as the perceived relevance of the author as originator and communicant of the text waned in more academic criticism. Public projections of the author are the basis of marketing strategies, social media engagement and unprecedented sales figures that are arguably independent of the actual texts the author has written, and the author-as-product has swirled around the materiality of the book – yet little has been said in critical or 'Academy' discourse on the function of the author in the generation of 'meaning' in a less transparent and more hermeneutic way.

Authors are virtually omnipresent in publicity, attribution and fandom, as celebrities in their own right – essentially, as one of Foucault's author functions. The hermeneutic relevance of the author, on the other hand, has, since the New Criticism and the *death of the author*, only been the renewed subject of published critical discussion in recent decades. Because of the nature of the assumptions underpinning it and the dicta and dogma being navigated – even just semantically – by the discourses, it has not resulted in the question of authorial influence in the post-post-modern world being satisfactorily unpacked. In the Introduction to his 1993 text on the subject of authors and authoring, *What is an author?*, Maurice Biriotti justifies the curiously quaint yet avant-garde nature of his project by asserting that "little has been published since 1969 that deals with authorship directly."² Rather than concluding that the question has been exhausted by the reams of papers tangentially referencing the author or arguing against recognition of it and in favour of recognition of an alternative form/function that excludes it, he insists that "[t]he challenge of dealing with authorship in the postmodern world is both serious and urgent."³ He then neatly sidesteps, however, possible backlash by focusing the collection on the journey of authorship through history and on competing diagnoses of its current state, and avoids suggestions for a new path in the future; he even shuns versions of authorship that are grounded in 'acceptable' terms but that push the envelope of happily-accepted content, such as Booth's career author, calling them "slippery" topics that are "no doubt wisely avoided by even the most committed advocates of the concept."⁴ Brian Richardson in 2011 similarly admits that the career author "can provide extremely fertile ground for

² Maurice Biriotti, "Introduction," in *What Is an Author?*, ed. Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller, eds., *What Is an Author?* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 2. 2

analysis;" however, he does so only as a concession to leaving it out of the *Style* volume he is introducing that is dedicated to implied authorship.⁵ European critics who might be drawn to an emergent or extratextual authorial figure wrestle with an even more powerful discouragement, as synecdochically represented by Frederic Régard: educated in Paris in the 1970s and 'playing the game' by never explicitly referring his students to the life of the author, he is unable to refrain from interlacing biographical information with textual cues in joyful disregard for all he was taught. He nonetheless recognises this for the *épatant* transgression it is, and repents: "I realise this is a shameful, despicable habit, which consequently I choose to confess publicly (very likely in the hope of absolution). Not in France, mind you."⁶

It is not uncommon to hear that the world has moved on from the concept of authorship and that the debate has been settled, but I suggest that it is only the rules of each paradigm in relation to its position on authorship that have been settled, and not the question itself – especially its marginal or uncomfortable parts. Leopold Damrosch describes the period of the 1970s and 1980s as one in which "poetics seems determined to supplant criticism," meaning that components of criticism such as the author and the context of the work have been dismissed as external to interpretation, and only that which can be described as the 'text on the page' is permitted to influence the generation of meaning.⁷ A presumption against combining hermeneutics with any independently-generated authorial figure has ossified somewhat into articles and slogans of absolutist dogma with an absence of complexities and measure – at least in the authorised Academy versions of the critical practice.

The argument presented in this dissertation relies on the distinction between a hermeneutical treatment of a text and other appropriations of it: this is because the author can be regarded as improper in the one sphere, while still dominating the other. Texts such as Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory* explain to the novice critic, for instance, that the assumption at the *foundation* of criticism and literary theory (in general, not limited to any branch of theory) is that a text is treated as though it contains its own meaning within itself, and that the role of the critic is to 'interpret' the text so that readers can enhance their appreciation of it. Here, the extratextual is explicitly excluded as a general foundation for the discipline. An exclusive focus on the

⁵ Brian Richardson, "Introduction. The Implied Author: Back from the Grave or Simply Dead Again?," *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 8.

⁶ Frederic Régard, "The Ethics of Biographical Reading: A Pragmatic Approach," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2000): 395.

⁷ Leopold Damrosch Jr., "Samuel Johnson and Reader-Response Criticism," *The Eighteenth Century* 21, no. 2 (Spring, 1980): 91.

hermeneutical exercise is matched with an exclusive focus on the intradiegetic content, as students of criticism are directed to study only the words on the page with no predefined agenda for what they want to find there and no integrated judgments made on the basis of *text + context*. This marriage of text with meaning, leaving the figure of the author to other, non-pertinent functions and relevance, is reflective of the interpretive paradigm within which Barry is operating, but this treatment is largely representative of 20th and 21st century treatments. The current argument will therefore limit itself to the hermeneutic treatment of texts in broadly-accepted Anglo-European academic practice, and discussions on the use of the author will be limited to her or his influence over the performance of this task.

The meanings of ‘author’

In this thesis I will use the term ‘author’, but I will avoid pinning it down in each instance, unless it is relevant to the point I am making. This is because, rather than seeking to make an argument about any one authorial persona in particular (such as the flesh-and-blood human, the implied author, and so on), I seek to make an argument about the function of the author-figure *in principle*, and its ability to influence the interpretive process and product. I also reject the idea that the various author-figures are always discrete in a reader’s mind and have unambiguous parameters and contents. The argument being advanced is not that any particular author conception influences interpretation, but that an author conception in general does; the language may be influenced by the critical paradigm or frame through which the reader is speaking, and some of the constitutive parts may likewise be afforded greater or lesser weight, but whatever intentional object does exist for a particular reader will interact with her or his reading experience and processes of interpretation and judgment. Authorship is an open structure, and ultimately there is a non-exhaustive list of conceptions the author can embody: none of the existing author-concepts is the same as the current proposal, however.

One of these figures is the most literal, the flesh-and-blood creator. This is the authorial figure that exists in physical form in the world outside the text and lives a real life that may be known to or hidden from the reader. Deference to this figure involves, in some measure, attributing to the text the meaning that the reader understands the tangible human figure of the author to have intended, either consciously or subconsciously. Illustrations range from the poetic expression of Tolstoy, that “Whatever the artist depicts, whether it be saints or robbers, kings

or lackeys, we seek and see only the soul of the artist himself,”⁸ to the practical, as argued by C K Ogden and I A Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*,⁹ that “The meaning of any text is what the speaker intends to be understood from it by the listener.” Even critics who have been inclined to distance themselves from the physical human body still attempt to convey, on occasion, this rough idea when bringing the ‘author’ into discussion; in some commentary, the flesh-and-blood author overlaps or is synonymous with the author created by researched biography, given that this is the only way for most readers to know the creator. Roland Barthes relies on biographemes for this creation: those ‘few tastes’, ‘few inflections’, the synecdochic snapshots of a life. Wayne Booth calls it the ‘postulated author’ created by the most careful biographers who work to reduce the fictional aspect of their creation and for whom the ‘real’ author is more than simply a namesake.¹⁰ It is still a “collection of postulates,” but it’s a collection that perhaps gets as close as one can to whomever or whatever the flesh-and-blood person ‘was’, and therefore is used to stand in for the flesh-and-blood person, able to convey much the same meaning for a commentator shying away from the ‘real’ human but who still tends to think of the entity as the ‘real’ writer.

The authority of the flesh-and-blood version of the author has been rejected by most critics since at least the 1930s, given various complications including the general acceptance of a psychologically-fragmented self, and has led to an authorial identity that covers similar ground but is differentiated where it counts: the author of public reputation. Wayne Booth defines this in *Critical Understanding* as the author that is divorced from any textual evidence, calling it initially a ‘character’ more than an author in order to suggest the powerfully determinative quality of reputation that constitutes it,¹¹ but eventually settles on ‘public myth’ in additions to the later 2nd edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. It a superficial veneer: a “fictitious hero created and played with, by author and public, independently of an author’s actual works.”¹² This independence is stressed in his other formulations that urge its artificiality, “a kind of super-author, often quite different from and only vaguely related to any of the others.” Overreliance on the superficiality of this appearance would be folly, though, as it is the zeitgeist version of the author and is therefore likely to be the figure conjured when many readers think of their

⁸ Quoted with approval in David J Gordon, *Literary Art and the Unconscious* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1976), 16.

⁹ Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and the Science of Symbolism* (London: ARK Paperbacks, 1985), 193.

¹⁰ Wayne Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 268-69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹² Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 431.

conception of many famous names. In the practice of reading, this unreal author may not be kept distinct from the flesh-and-blood – or the text-derived – one in conversations or ideas of authorship.

A more text-centric version is the implied author persona the flesh-and-blood creator puts on like a costume when writing. This author is the personality the real creator thinks of as their writing self – a compartmentalised fragment of the whole, or a ‘second self’, to use a term coined by Dowden in 1877 to describe the relationship between George Eliot and Marion Evans. James Phelan defines this author as “a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author’s capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of a particular text.”¹³ There are many different versions of this person, each as authentic as the other, which Wayne Booth explains as a natural product of the requirements of different works:

Just as one’s personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works.¹⁴

References made on the part of the reader to this authorial figure can only be by way of inference or hypothesis, as it is a type of author that exists only in the mind and habit of the author and cannot be accessed by an outside person save through approximated reconstruction. Deference to this figure or its intentions in the act of interpretation requires prior construction of it by the critic, as it does not empirically exist as a human entity; it is debatable, therefore, whether the use of this authorial figure in the hermeneutical exercise is truly a use of the author at all. Since the ‘second self’ authorial figure will, by necessity, be an interpretive construct from the perspective of the reader, it overlaps in use with the more common expression of ‘implied author’ – intended in this sense as the authorial figure the reader sees as emerging from the style, themes, word choice and all other textual features of the work being interpreted.¹⁵

¹³ James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 45.

¹⁴ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 71.

¹⁵ The original expression of the most well-known form of this authorial figure, Wayne Booth’s ‘implied author’ from his text *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, is frequently accused of conflating the two, or one usage of the term is criticised for faults arising from the other in instances of the critic themselves conflating them. For instance, H L Hix summarises Booth’s position as, “The real author puts the implied author into the text as he writes, and the implied author then reveals himself to the reader unchanged.” Instead, he offers an alternative thesis of the ‘implied author’ being correctly something the real author puts into the text and over which she or he exercises control, and a different creature, a ‘created author’ as he calls it, being the subjective reader-created figure or interpretation – thereby arriving at the same formulation proposed by Booth (clarified unambiguously in the full ‘author taxonomy’ supplied by Booth in the 1983 Afterword to the 2nd edition of his book) simply couched in different language. This is a common problem with the discussion of the implied author, and leads to many

A less well-known authorial figure is that of the career author: the writerly identity, born of the public's apprehension of 'this is how that author writes books'. It is first named in critical theory by Wayne Booth as the "sustained character" that persists across, and is derived from, the author's entire oeuvre.¹⁶ The 1961 first edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* – the one absent the complete taxonomy of author/reader concepts that is in the later *Afterword* – includes generalised comments about authorial images that are constituted by multiple textual sources, but the first explicit recognition of the tendency of readers to build opinions based on the connections between texts occurs in 1979 in *Critical Understanding*, in which Booth posits a 'career author' that is the "sustained creative centre implied by a *sequence* of implied authors."¹⁷ It is the 'golden thread' that ties the various implied authors together, giving them a unified voice that emanates from the one coherent personality, and it can appear fairly consistent from work to work or it can change over time: Booth gives Austen as an example of the former, and Faulkner and Hemingway as examples of the latter. Guarding against the possibility that any extratextual material might make its way into the career author conception, Seymour Chatman reinforces the textual and interpretive terms of the career author object: the image is composed of a "known subset of features, carried over from other, similarly signed texts," and it functions in criticism because it "provides readers with narratively significant information as they make their way through the new text."¹⁸

When thought of as a collection of textual markers in this way, the career author *seems* indistinguishable from the implied author, but it is necessary to recognise it as a distinct concept within narratology. As Susan Lanser, in its defence, argues, "Narratologists have long maintained that an 'implied' author is the property of a single text, and cannot be extrapolated to a writer's entire oeuvre," and she gives Booth's example of the 'Fielding' of *Tom Jones* and the 'Fielding' of *Amelia* as an illustration of two *different* Fielding implied authors. The single apostrophes mark out the author figure as a construct only, and therefore discontinuous as a humanised figure.¹⁹ In essence, the role of the career author is to stop being discontinuous in

debates being sidetracked, distancing themselves from something that was not intended in the first place and frequently proffering an alternative that is in essence the same. H L Hix, *Morte d'Author: An Autopsy*, ed. Joseph Margolis, *The Arts and their Philosophies*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 164. And Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 431 of the *Afterword*.

¹⁶ Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, 271.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 270-71.

¹⁸ Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 88.

¹⁹ Susan Lanser, "(Im)plying the Author," *Narrative* 9, no. 2 (May, 2001): 157. Her position will be discussed at greater length later in this thesis, but Lanser's other motivation for insisting on the apostrophe markers may be

the same way across the oeuvre. A career author concept, for instance, facilitates a reading of 'Ash Wednesday' in terms of Eliot's earlier 'The Wasteland' that, while it does not accommodate a change in the life experience or attitudes of the author – because biographical cues are impermissible as part of a narratologist career author – does pick up on textual cues to perceive change across the texts.²⁰

Still other author permutations include the "brand name" author, labeled as such by Andrew Wernick, called an institution "guaranteeing the value of the goods"²¹ but not materially dissimilar from an aspect of Michel Foucault's earlier 'author function'.²² Also, the confessional or autobiographical author – the writer who conflates the narrator and themselves, creating an intruding subject that claims to remove the authorial mask and expose itself in a "series of personal confidences."²³

The essential point is that the word 'author' is not neutral in discussion: it is unavoidably loaded, and behind its simple appearance lies a wildly varying range of evidentiary material – some deriving from the text, some from the human figure of the writer, some from the cultural or social context, some from commentary and descriptions from third persons, and some from the reader herself or himself. It is, therefore, not as simple as asserting blithely that texts ought or ought not to be interpreted "in line with the author's intentions," or that the author ought or ought not to play a role in the critical appreciation of written works; it is also possible to argue that some authorial figure will always come into play, and the real impact will emerge only when the specific material constituting that invocation of the author has been unpacked from what is often only implicitly suggestive context. Fine distinctions in terminology may thus strike some scholars – such as Lanser – as being far too 'nice', but they are, I submit, a necessary evil in order to speak with precision and expose those constitutive parts that may otherwise operate invisibly.

related to her criticisms of the implied author concept. She argues that it is an unnecessary, fine distinction, and does nothing in practice that the word 'author' taken reasonably in context is not able to do.

²⁰ Eliot is used as a case study in this species of misreading in Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, 318-19.

²¹ Andrew Wernick, "Authorship and the Supplement of Promotion," in *What is an author?*, ed. Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

²² Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *What is an author?*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2006).

²³ The description used by M L Rosenthal in the 1959 review of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, 'Poetry as confession', in which he coins the term 'confessional poetry'.

The imago

I propose that a content-neutral term for the author is required, which signifies an intentional figure as the originator of language but that neither proscribes nor prescribes the constitutive material of which it is made. This is the intentional object that influences you in your reading, helping you choose and eliminate in instances of ambiguity and build a picture of latent communication that explains in your mind the manifestations and authorial choices on the page, regardless of whether you compose that object of purely textual cues, largely biographical ones, psychological projections or some complex amalgam of these plus others – and regardless of whether the constitution changes depending on the information available to you and your familiarity with each author. In the function thus intended, the author is an empty signifier. Not only does this conception allow a flexible combination of intratextual, intertextual and extratextual sources – life experiences and attitudes attributed to the author name, and elements of their historical and geographical situation that are believed to have shaped their authorial ethos or practice, but extending equally to less evidence-based elements such as perceived personality, feelings, choices and creative spirit – it also recognises that conceptions may, are indeed likely to, change over time as the reader acquires new information or an altered perspective on the information they have.

Taken loosely from the principles of speech act theory, this is the author the reader pictures ‘speaking’ the words on the page. Lanser describes this type of designation as an inference she draws about the author who ‘could have’ produced the text, explaining, “through accretion and revision I attach to that image certain (moral, political, social, aesthetic, and/or personal) values, norms, perspectives, concerns.” Any knowledge she believes she possesses of the historical author and the cultural context then operate “in tandem or in tension” with her reading, “colluding, and colliding to produce [a] sense of the text’s producer.”²⁴ She suggests it offhand as a tangent to an essay questioning the need for the implied author as, and as a personal desire rather than a proposal of theory or advocated methodology. The bracketed asides also highlight another important nuance to her concept: the qualification of both text and reader as non-essentialist materials, both existing as slightly subjective constructions. This author object we each create has no agency or materiality of its own in a literal sense, but it does possess a ghost-form of any that we cede to it. This intentional object might for some readers and/or in relation to some texts this might be a disembodied voice, or a full, living human being, composed of

²⁴ Lanser, 155.

content taken from both inside and outside the text; either way, it is a partner in the hermeneutic practice that demands awareness and has the ability to at least partially explain interpretive difference.

It can be argued that readers are fundamentally Gestaltist,²⁵ with low tolerance for incoherence and arbitrariness. Psychoanalytic critic Charles Mauron, for instance, argues that we “repose” in and are nourished by unity because proving that A and B are related by some underlying logic “wards off that fear which every original existence awakes in us – the fear of the unknown”;²⁶ perceptual psychology regards this as a commonplace;²⁷ and Hirsch regards it as the process of analogy and metaphor, in that we want to find commonalities that can be ported from one text into another to help guide our expectations and experiences.²⁸ We do not read each text as though we have never read anything like it before and, when we recognise the authorial signature, we feel we have seen how the world looks and is expressed through her or his eyes—we then read that new text as a like product. Alan Purves explains how this hypothesis is borne out by empirical reading studies applying the discipline of cognitive psychology to literature, in that they study the concept of ‘schemata’ – defined as the mental outline one has that governs perception of it – and the impact of schemata on the interpretation of a text.²⁹ “Recent research in reading comprehension,” he says (note, in 1980), “suggests that when we read we project a schema upon the text. [...] Reading, then, appears to follow a pattern of prediction followed by confirmation; it is not a purely inductive process.”³⁰ The psychologists involved in the study tried only to observe the impact of schemata triggered by the “beginning elements” of the text, but Purves extrapolates on this to suggest that schemata can equally be acquired from prior reading and/or knowledge of the phenomenal world. Failing to explicitly authorise and examine the reader’s conception of the authorial figure, in criticism widely accepted as literary and operating within any one of the previously examined critical paradigms, and studying it as one schema framing the apprehension of a text, is the proposed gap.

²⁵ As defined in David H Richter, “Chicago School of Neo-Aristotelian Literary Theory,” in *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory: Literary Theory from 1900 to 1966*, ed. Michael Ryan and Gregory Castle (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 111.

²⁶ Charles Mauron, “Unity and Diversity in Art - Part I,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 47, no. 270 (Sept, 1925): 122.

²⁷ As demonstrated in Richter, 111.

²⁸ E D Hirsch, Jr, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 104-05.

²⁹ “Etiology of Reading Comprehension Style,” in *Technical Report No 124* (Centre for the Study of Reading: Urbana III, 1979).

³⁰ Alan C Purves, “Putting Readers in Their Places: Some Alternatives to Cloning Stanley Fish,” *College English* 42, no. 3 (Nov, 1980): 230.

The *imago* is therefore an intentional object or empty signifier, of the type described by Barthes in his 1957 essay ‘Myth today’, or summarised by Daniel Chandler in 2007: “Such signifiers mean different things to different people: they may stand for many or even *any* signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean.”³¹ Rather than having a fixed referent that itself must be evidenced to achieve acknowledged validity, the authorial name becomes a placeholder of meaning, void of absolutes and coming into being only through the consciousness of the creator. The concept of the ‘floating signifier’ as used by Claude Levi-Strauss in 1950 in his *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss*, as a kind of algebraic symbol without an immanent symbolic value, is an alternative conception. Jacques Lacan praises Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty as the “master of the signifier” because he asserts that “when *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”³²

The coining of yet another author-related term is required because this more *laissez faire* and inclusive *imago*, focused on effect rather than component parts, is a gap that no current critically-accepted author-term fills. ‘*Imago*’ is intended to evoke in part its psychoanalytic meaning, summarised by the OED as “An unconscious idealised mental image of someone, especially a parent, which influences a child’s behaviour.” Jung in particular uses it to indicate unconscious prototypes of personae that determine the way in which the subject apprehends others. The full range of complexes present in the psychoanalytic usage is not intended, but the idea that one can have a mental image of another person, based on a string of retained experiences and impressions, and that this image can alter choices that one makes – this is intended: this blend of fantasy, reality and subjective influence. The more simplified psychological influence can be seen, for instance, in Carl Spitteler’s autobiographical 1906 novella *Imago*, which is an internal monologue narrative in which the speaking voice examines the role of its own unconscious in the conflict between a creative mind and restrictive social mores. Finally, any connection the term makes with the classical rhetorical device *imagines agentes* is also welcome – the mental ‘theatre of memory’ consisting of a sequence of images – as this is roughly what comprises the author *imago*: the scenes we play in our minds of the author, the way we might picture them or their style, their introjected persona.

The idea of the *imago* is not a proposal of a new or alternative critical paradigm, complete with its own sets of methodologies, values and assumptions. Rather, like the concept of style, it will

³¹ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2 ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 78.

³² Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: W W Norton & Co, 2002), 79-80.

be a proposal of a meta-paradigmatic hermeneutical tool; the principles and assumptions of each paradigm will influence its express acknowledgement and the information of which it can be permissibly composed. Each individual reader will then, within each critical paradigm, conceive of the author in their subtly differentiated way. I propose no normative argument on the 'right' way to form an *imago* or that, thus constituted, it becomes a tool by which to unlock a text's 'correct' meaning. The current thesis is not an argument that one particular approach *should* be adopted because it will yield more valid hermeneutic results; it is rather an argument that a general class of approach *can* be adopted and, if this is true, that its nature and impact ought not to be a blind spot.

Method

This thesis will be composed of an entirely theoretical proposal. In order to examine how the *imago* interacts with different ideological paradigms of Anglo-European literary criticism, dating roughly from the 16th century to the current day, I will break the critical approaches into four general paradigms in the Kuhnian sense, and analyse each in terms of its treatment of the combination of *imago* and interpretation. These paradigms are not intended to be exhaustive accounts of each branch of theory, or of every critical strand that comprises each framework: attempting to do this would be both implausible and unnecessary. Instead, each paradigm will group together approaches that I argue share a relevant common ideology; I will examine these ideological premises, and analyse the way in which the aims, assumptions and methodologies of the paradigm frame the identity and relevance of the author name – thus, the role it is permitted to play in interpretation within the paradigmatic confines of that community.

A common method of grouping modern movements is in three stages. Terry Eagleton can be taken as a representative figure, generalising that “one might roughly periodise the history of modern literary theory in three stages: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years.”³³ Such a schema suffers, though, from a misleading focus on a single practice rather than on the foundational assumptions and aims that dictate those practices. I do not agree, for instance, that the author concept of the Romantic period should properly be conflated with the author concept of the entire nineteenth century. This blunt chronology also fails to take into account the progress of theory across different regions –

³³ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, anniversary edition ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 64.

specifically, specific areas on the continent versus the Anglophone world. For these reasons I shall not use this tripartite split, despite that it is often taken as a given, and shall structure this review with my own schema: a four-stage one composed of an initial Exoregulatory paradigm, a second Numinous one that evolves as both extension and response to Exoregulatory ideas, an approximately subsequent Scientistic paradigm, and a later-emerging Disruptive one that arises as a reaction to premises that unite the former three. These paradigms are intended as functional, ideological groupings – not as ontological categories of classification – and they do not constitute a totalising taxonomy. I am also not undertaking a ‘history of authorship’. In historical terms, each of the paradigms predominates successively in a series of loosely defined periods, but none is time-bound in the manner of scientific paradigms such as phlogiston or phrenology: each remains simultaneously available to critics in all periods.

I do not intend any of these four Parts to be exhaustive of the scope and depth of its paradigm: aspects of each paradigm that do not seem to relate to the author *imago* have not been included, some arguably important or notable critics have been omitted or discussed only briefly, and there are individual critical frameworks within the paradigms that are not discussed. I have also been unable to give a properly comprehensive account of any single scholar’s work or *weltanschauung*. On occasion, omissions were difficult choices made solely because of word limit constraints; at the other times the decision was made because I did not believe the material posed either a new contribution or a challenge to the arguments already made. In this thesis I have therefore attempted a balance between providing completeness and providing representative generalisations.

In order to illustrate my analysis of theory, ideology and critical practice, I have relied on examples of criticism and specific hermeneutic treatments of texts where appropriate. In movements where the criticism is heavily practical, such as Neoclassical criticism, the practical illustrations are more numerous and more detailed; in movements that are more heavily philosophical, and where the leading scholars practise abstracted theory more than practical hermeneutics, they are fewer and/or less detailed. Even though the focus of the proposal is a contribution to theory or methodology, and it is in no way limited in relevance to one or two particular authors, I have relied most heavily on the history of Shakespearean criticism; there is a tradition of hermeneutic treatment of Shakespeare that continues unbroken from the end of the 16th century, and since comparatively little is known of the empirical man (as opposed to a contemporary author, for instance), he exists almost entirely *as* an intentional object. The

effects of the *imago* on his reception are therefore more readily apparent than they are with other authors, where the public assessment of that author is more settled.

The approaches to literary criticism I cover will focus on the Anglophone tradition, but will draw on European developments and scholars where they intersect. My text illustrations will be drawn from what are popularly considered to be ‘literary’ or ‘canonical’ texts, primarily because these tend more to have hermeneutic treatments or theory-based commentary published on them. The question of authorship is also complicated by the inclusion of non-fiction texts, composite texts and ‘unauthored’ texts (such as those compiled by computer programs), and warrant a more extensive and nuanced treatment than there is space for here; I have therefore focused on conventionally-authored fiction texts – covering novels, plays, poems and essays – although some are the product of collaboration. Collaborative authorship presents another interesting avenue for *imago* analysis, because the nature of some *imagines* is such that readers resist the attribution of the text to multiple authors; Shakespeare, for instance, is frequently conceived of as a ‘solitary genius’, writing with such “easiness” that he scarce cross a line out on his papers, and could therefore not possibly plan a joint construction with another playwright.³⁴ The specific relationship between the *imago* and co-authored texts presents an opportunity for further study.

Hermeneutic paradigms

The Exoregulatory paradigm will be addressed in Part 1.

Though its roots lie in classical texts like Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, the Exoregulatory paradigm is dominant in the early modern period from the Renaissance to the late-18th century, and represents a criticism that conceives of literature as a process of construction in which the author has the power to assemble but not to uniquely inspire.

The Numinous paradigm will be addressed in Part 2.

This paradigm is based approximately on the period from the mid-18th century to the early 20th century, and represents a criticism that conceives of literature as a unique product of an artistic genius, infused with a divine spirit of creativity in a manner not dissimilar to the pre-Aristotelian

³⁴ The term ‘easiness’ comes from John Heminge and Henry Condell in their Introduction to the First Folio in 1623, but there are many similar examples.

tradition. Inspiration and artistic intention are located inside of authorial intentionality, but are divorced from the individual personality of the author by the admission of numinitas: the *je ne sais quoi* of the supernatural.

The Scientistic paradigm will be addressed in Part 3.

This paradigm centres approximately on the period from the early 20th century to the current day, despite that many Scientistic approaches are now less fashionable and can be criticised as outdated. The Scientistic paradigm represents a criticism that conceives of literature as an object of formal study: it must be legitimised and validated with a reliance on seemingly objective materials and transparent processes, it must be able to be taught and assessed, and it must be capable of producing replicable outcomes. The Scientistic paradigm is divided into two broad groups, based on the categories of text ‘evidence’ that are regarded as valid: those branches that admit a solely intradiegetic hermeneutic reliance, versus those who permit the extradiegetic. Compared with the two prior movements, the Scientistic paradigm sees a proliferation of diverse theories, so the umbrella of the paradigm must cast a bigger shadow.

The Disruptive paradigm is addressed in Part 4.

This paradigm is based approximately on the period beginning in the 1960s, that is both lauded as truly modern criticism and despised as entirely irrelevant to the literary project – Harold Bloom labels it the “School of Resentment,” and a “rabblement of lemmings” who neglect aesthetic value in order to pursue a political agenda.³⁵ The Disruptive paradigm represents a criticism that embodies Alain Bourdieu’s criticism of “the manifestation of the aristocracy of culture” and the essentialist hierarchies that vest chosen individuals, the “holders of titles of cultural nobility,” with the power to determine meaning simply by virtue of the position they hold. Authors are the figurative aristocracy in charge of determining authorised meaning in any essentialist paradigm, and the authors of academia and criticism are the aristocracy in charge of determining authorised meaning in any prescriptivist paradigm.³⁶ Bourdieu argues that, not only does an idea of essentialism require the establishment of an aristocracy to determine and

³⁵ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 4.

³⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996; repr., 8th), 23-24.

uphold it, aristocracies themselves are essentialist and will thus establish an essentialism wherever they exist. In order to eliminate one, one must also eliminate the other.

This final paradigm is also split into two groups: a radical branch that adopts a more absolute subversion, working to undermine the entire concept of meaning as a concept inseparable from a hierarchy of power; and a more moderate, inversive group that works more to examine the power relations implicit in works and influenced by them, and to redistribute power to traditionally marginalised groups where possible.

For each Part, I will attempt to trace out the ideological basis for its characterisation as a separate phase or movement, and then relate the dominant threads of its ideology to the space left for the author and the way in which it popularly conceives of the author's identity and role. I will then use writings from each relevant period to show how the *imago* concept is not redundant, nor nugatory, nor rendered illegitimate by convincing and consistent argument.

Section 1: Exoregulation

Chapter 1

The Exoregulatory paradigm

General introduction

As the Exoregulatory paradigm is expressed primarily through the Neoclassical criticism of the late 16th century through to the beginnings of Romanticism in the 18th century, my discussion of the paradigm will centre on this time period.

The Exoregulatory paradigm does not already provide for a critical concept that is the same as the *imago* because, largely, of the way in which it subjects both creation and interpretation to non-individual rules and methods; therefore, this paradigm does not render the *imago* proposal redundant. For similar reasons, it provides no persuasive arguments against recognition or use of the critical concept that is the *imago*, other than its contemporary presumptions against the possibility of individual creative action in either composition or reading; therefore, it does not convincingly cast the *imago* as illegitimate. The Exoregulatory paradigm does contain within it, however, specific instances of critics employing an *imago* figure in their reading and commentary, and in their attribution of meaning (or lack of meaning) to texts; notwithstanding its attempts to illegitimise the idea of an *imago*, or entirely omit an *imago*-concept from criticism, it fails to render the *imago* nugatory.

Exoregulation

The term 'exoregulatory' has been chosen because of the combined meanings of the morphemes, and because of its use in social sciences including sociology, geography and psychology. It is used here to denote the approach that underpins neo-Aristotelian hermeneutics, and that regards texts as being composed of forms provided by literary tradition and externally-derived rules rather than individual 'creativity'. Meaning is therefore determined by a force independent of unique and internal authorial intention.

The prefix 'exo-' connects the term with words such as 'exogenous', from the 19th century, meaning 'growing by additions on the outside' and standing in contrast with 'indigenous', 'born or begotten from the inside'. The meaning of 'regulate' that evolved in the 17th century, meaning

to govern by restriction, is intended, but also the earlier meaning of the Latin *regula*, meaning rule or a straight piece of wood: so, a lack of organic self-directed shape, and instead being straight, correct and conforming. Psychologist Suitbert Ertel uses 'exoregulation' as synonymous with 'exodynamic regulation', and defines both in terms of the regulation of a person's behaviours and personality traits as denoting "regulation by non-ego determinants, ie, by environmental stimulation, excitation, enticement, temptation, commands, etc." Ertel calls exoregulated behaviours "responsive" rather than "agentive," and distinguishes between those aspects of the self that are exoregulated and those that are endoregulated:

Features of an *inner* world may be described as vague, unarticulated, holistic, feeling-like and subjective. These characteristics shall henceforth be called *endomodal*. Features of mental representation belonging to an *outer* world are articulated, distinct, delimited, marked-off, detailed, and often called 'objective'. These characteristics will henceforth be called *exomodal*.³⁷

Neoclassical hermeneutics were treated as an application of and exercise in logic, and, as such, were method-oriented: texts were mostly regarded as being inspired by the outside world, composed of forms provided by literary tradition and the rules provided by nature, and containing meaning determined by the objective correlation between matter and form.

Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that, particularly as the 18th century progressed, critics tried increasingly to establish a "universal doctrine" for the interpretation of signs, and points to the popularity of manuals such as Matthias Flacius Illyricus's 1567 text *Clavis scripturae sacrae* (*The key to Holy Scripture*), which was continuously republished for over 150 years, as evidence of this desire to subject texts indiscriminately to general tests for meaning that are intended to 'unlock' an objectively true, essential unit of meaning.³⁸ In the *Clavis*, Flacius directs a teacher to reduce a text to its logical sum (*summa*) and its ultimate doctrinal purpose (*scopus*), and to provide these to students so that they might have their interpretation of the individual parts controlled – *regulated* – by this external authority, and proceed in a straight line along the rule. The *Clavis* does not explain how the teacher is meant to determine the *summa* and *scopus* of the whole, given that it is necessarily composed of its parts; rather, the absolute identification of them with themselves is treated as a given.

³⁷ Suitbert Ertel, *Factor Analysis: Healing an Ailing Model* (Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 2013), 127-28.

³⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (2006): 32-33, 1968.

Reliance on reason

Iser argues that, in the Age of Enlightenment, meaning and reality are so overdetermined by objective and exomodal factors that the general belief is that “whatever had been organised according to the rules and categories of reason presented either a state of affairs or an object as it really was.” There was no need for mediation or interpretation, because if a sentence was organised according to established principles it was ‘truthful’, and could be “automatically understood by virtue of [its] participation in [its] fountainhead: the power of reason shared by all human beings.” Iser refers his argument to Aquinas, and the mediaeval use of the word ‘meaning’: that which denotes participation and sharability rather than understanding. He argues that it was not until reason as the structuring principle of shared truth is questioned that understanding moves to the fore – under Schleiermacher.³⁹ The derivation of this argument can be seen in commentaries by Neoclassical critics such as Thomas Rymer. Rymer is in harmony with philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke and Descartes in terms of the role played by reason and the natural law; he argues regarding the character of Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, for instance, that Shakespeare has broken the rule of character type, and that Iago is therefore not a comprehensible unit of meaning:

He would pass upon us a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal instead of an open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing soldier – a character constantly worn by them for some thousand years in the world.

Rather than this being understood as a potentially strategic choice to comment on the difference between the face shown by a person and the face hidden by them, or to demonstrate the irony of Iago using the disguise of being precisely that in order to cozen his enemies, Rymer dismisses the representation as being “against common sense, and Nature”⁴⁰ and attempts no hermeneutic treatment of it.

In the period, the Exoregulatory blindness to a unique authorial expression is matched with a rejection of a unique reader experience or interpretation. The influence of the post-1700 Lockean empiricism, in particular, that emphasises learned, reasoned experience, results in every reader’s understanding and experience logically being the same – if all humans are, under ideal conditions, possessed of the same human nature. David Goellnicht uses allusion to show

³⁹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 45.

⁴⁰ Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: its Original, Excellency and Corruption: with some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage* (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1971), 93-94.

the way in which even perceived absences in texts are still considered to be regulated and pre-determined in terms of the response permitted to them:

Early eighteenth-century poetry of allusion does depend on certain responses from the audience to fill in gaps in the text, but those responses derive from a body of knowledge intimately shared by both poet and audience, so that responses are predictable and uniform, evoked in a controlled, associative way to construct what Umberto Eco has labeled a “closed text.”⁴¹

Alexander Pope’s allusions to *Paradise Lost* in *The Rape of the Lock*, for instance, seem purposed to elicit set responses through a comparison of the texts to build a non-variable meaning, and Goellnicht describes even the creation of material by the reader to fill the explicit absence as a “one-way process” where control resides “firmly” with the text. He concludes, “Since all persons are perceived as rational beings, all responses will basically be the same. Rational wit, rather than imaginative creativity, is demanded in both poet and audience.” If an author ‘breaks’ the rules it is read as an instance of being either malicious or disobedient for reasons such as ‘pleasing’ the uncultured masses,⁴² or manifesting an irrationality and blindness to nature and/or common sense in their ignorance of them. Examples will be provided of this throughout this Part.

Neoclassical creed

George Saintsbury identifies the Neoclassical period as the only time in history during which *all* critics operated with the same principles and rules. He calls this “a sort of general critical creed,” and argues that it renders criticism the same in 1750 as it is in 1550.⁴³

Poetry is the imitation of nature: but this imitation may be carried on either by copying nature as it is or by inventing things which do not actually exist, and have never actually existed, but which conduct themselves according to the laws of nature and reason. [...]

In practising them, and in practising all, the poet is to look first, midmost, and last to the practise [sic] of the ancients.

Generally speaking, the conceptions of nature relied upon during the period fall into four categories: what is meant by ‘nature’ can be nature in its particular or idiosyncratic form, or

⁴¹ David C Goellnicht, “Keats on Reading: “delicious diligent indolence”,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88, no. 2 (Apr, 1989): 191.

⁴² Such as Rymer’s explanation of Shakespeare’s depiction of Iago, that it is wilfully “to entertain the Audience with something new and surprising”: in *A Short View*, cited above.

⁴³ George Saintsbury, *A History of English Criticism, being the English Chapters of a History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe, Revised, Adapted and Supplemented* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1955), 94-95, 147.

natura naturata; it can be universal or general nature, a kind of trend line running through the particulars; it can be the Platonic Ideal, *natura naturans*, also called *la belle nature*; or it can be a fourth form, identified by Macklem based on the language of Reynolds's *Discourses*, of *idealised* nature – differentiated from the Ideal on the basis that the ideal is real, while the idealised is false.⁴⁴ Critics operating from within the Exoregulatory paradigm differ, often implicitly, on which of Ideal nature, general nature or idealised nature ought properly to be the concern of art: John Dennis, for instance, writes of Ideal nature that “as ev’ry Copy deviates from the Original both in Life and Grace, and Resemblance, a Poet who designs to give a true Draught of human Life and Manners, must consult the universal Idea, and not particular Persons,”⁴⁵ while Samuel Johnson defends Shakespeare’s variety and tolerance for the complex on the grounds that “[n]othing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature.”⁴⁶ The primary point on which most critics agree is that particular nature is not the proper domain of art:⁴⁷ if the poet’s images are not universal enough, they “might be monstrous, might be singular and please nobody’s maggot but [the poet’s] own”;⁴⁸ alternatively, even if they do please, if they fall far from the Ideal they will fail in the function of art to instruct humankind.

The ‘rules of art’ are therefore the means by which an author might achieve a proper representation of nature, and these can be accessed by an observation of nature directly; a study of prior effective representations of nature by the reading of works by authors such as Homer; or a reading of second-hand accounts of the way in which these prior works effected their purpose, in treatments such as the *Poetics*. Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* paraphrases sections of Rapin’s 1674 *Reflections on Aristotle’s ‘Treatise of Poesie’*:

The RULES of old *discover’d*, not *devis’d*,
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodiz’d;
Nature, like *Liberty*, is but restrain’d
By the same Laws which first *herself* ordain’d.
[...]

⁴⁴ Michael Macklem, "Reynolds and the Ambiguities of Neo-Classical Criticism," *Philological Quarterly* 31 (Jan, 1952): 388-89.

⁴⁵ John Dennis, *Reflections Critical and Satirical upon 'An Essay upon Criticism'* (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971), 31.

⁴⁶ Samuel Johnson, "Preface," in *Famous Introductions to Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. Beverley Warner (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1906), 113.

⁴⁷ This is a general statement supported, for instance, by Arthur O Lovejoy, "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm," *MLN* 17 (1927).

⁴⁸ Thomas Rymer, *The Tragedies of the Last Age: Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients and by the Common Sense of all Ages. In a Letter to Fleetwood Shepheard, Esq* (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1972), 69-70.

Be Homer's works your study and delight,
 Read them by day, and meditate by night,
 Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
 And trace the muses upward to their spring;
 [...]
 Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
 To copy Nature is to copy them. (88-91, 124-27, 139-40)

Here, the rules are an effective means by which to represent nature because they themselves derive from nature and are principles of nature put in written form. One may not have the judgment to see those rules by looking through ordinary eyes at a fallen and idiosyncratic nature that departs from them in its mundane particulars, but the ancients were both wise and closer in time to the unfallen original, therefore a contemporary author can look to them instead. Alternatively, a poet can endeavour to learn the rules of nature from a direct observation of nature itself. As Johnson has Imlac say in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*:

Being now resolved to be a poet, I saw everything with a new purpose; my sphere of attention was suddenly magnified; no kind of knowledge was to be overlooked. I ranged mountains and deserts for images and resemblances, and pictures upon my mind every tree of the forest and flower of the valley.

Once a poet has a mental imprint of every growth of botanical nature, every mode of life, every power of the passions in all their combinations, and every change of human mind occasioned by modified place and circumstance, they can "write as the interpreter of nature." If they perform this direct or indirect study of nature and apply the proper judgment to it, the Neoclassical creed considers that the same rules will emerge for all: verisimilitude, that drama will have unity of action, unity of time, and unity of place so as to provide the appearance of truth; that there will be decorum, through propriety of character, language and sentiment; that there will be purity of genre and the dramatic form; and that there will be probability⁴⁹ – which for many critics includes the requirement of poetic justice, as, in an explanation from Rymer, "the World can scarce be satisfied with God Almighty, whose holy will and purposes are not to be comprehended."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Trolander and Tenger provide a meta-summary of Neoclassical principles, taken from the work of literary historians such as Saintsbury. I differ from them in my grouping of some principles they list discretely, but I found their summary useful when developing my own. Many authors, including Saintsbury, list the three unities together, but then give a less organised, succinct or complete version of other Rules. See: Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, "Criticism Against Itself: Subverting Critical Authority in Late-Seventeenth-Century England," *Philological Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (Summer, 1996).

⁵⁰ Rymer, *The Tragedies of the Last Age: Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients and by the Common Sense of all Ages. In a Letter to Fleetwood Shepheard, Esq*, 14.

It is rarely, if ever, stated clearly *how* these rules will secure the lively and just representation of nature, but the process has been brought back into the realm of the conscious. In ‘An Epistle to Burlington’ Pope criticises artists who rely solely on their education or class-taught ‘taste’ for their judgment, saying that prior to each of these is the quality of “Sense;/Good Sense, which only is the Gift of Heav’n,” (26-27) and arguing that the proper intuition and application of Neoclassical rules requires of poets “A Light, which in yourself you must perceive.” (29) Reynolds expresses something similar in *Discourses VI*, writing forty years after Pope, saying that

it is an art, and no easy art, to know how or what to choose, and how to attain and secure the object of our choice. Thus the highest beauty of form must be taken from nature; but it is an art of long deduction and great experience to know how to find it.

There is something outside of the realm of pure reason in the concept of Pope’s “light,” or the slightly mysterious “no easy art” of Reynolds, but the combination of observation and sense is something accessible to ordinary mortals.

The function of art: to instruct and please

Part of the reason for the Rules extending past that which might arguably be attributed to the mere representation of nature is that mimesis is considered functional rather than an end in itself. Rymer, for instance, describes the stage as “our School of good manners,”⁵¹ and Dryden in *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* rules that to “instruct delightfully is the general end of all Poetry” – in this, it differs from writing like philosophy, which instructs, but which does not do so delightfully.⁵² Dennis calls drama a “Delicious Art” and claims that “Poetry, by restoring the Harmony of the Human Faculties, provides for the Happiness of [Humankind], better than any other Human Invention whatever.”⁵³ He even identifies the specific ways in which different genres achieve the same ends: tragedy instructs through evoking “Compassion and Terror”; epic through stimulating “Admiration”; and comedy by instructing primarily through pleasure, and therefore creating “the Ridiculum.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: its Original, Excellency and Corruption: with some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage*, 99.

⁵² John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, 18 vols., vol. 6, ed. Walter Scott (London: William Miller, 1808), 246.

⁵³ John Dennis, *The advancement and reformation of modern poetry: A critical discourse in two parts* (London: printed for Rich Parker, 1701), 171-72.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

We see disagreements over whether pleasing or instructing is the pre-eminent goal (a discussion that is often genre-dependent), or over whether they are coterminous – but there is general agreement on the necessity of both. Harmony on this point provides Exoregulatory critics a common standard against which to judge the *success* of an author's work.

Two branches

I submit that there are two branches within Neoclassicism that explain how contemporaries regarded the Rules: one, which conceives of the rules as operating like Dryden's 'spectacles', enabling humanity to perceive exomodal nature; a second, which conceives of the rules as operating like pruning shears, trimming wild, endomodal nature to be more decorous.

The dominant branch is that the rules of art allow a humanity alienated from the Ideal nature of either Eden or Plato to better perceive the complete, perfect form. In this, critics can either see the rules as prescriptive, in that they are conceived as objectively embodying nature; or they can see the rules as descriptive, and as 'recommended' approaches through which to achieve a mimetic representation, but not the sole ways or an exhaustive account of them – if the wit or genius of the artist allows, they may look to nature directly and find an alternative means of imitation. In this paradigm, the Rules of art are constitutive things, and are *part* of the Ideal: art operates as 'Spectacles' to allow humankind to perceive the perfect form. If, however, a critic considers nature to be something *internal* to humankind, and depraved rather than orderly, the Rules must operate as restorative things, repairing the ruins from the Fall: the Rules operate as tempering constraints on the wild and fertile excesses of a post-lapsarian genius, civilising it by enhancing decorum and propriety. In this second branch, nature is contained *within*, and genius has a negative edge in that it can run riot. Elizah Haywood, in 1745, for instance argues that adaptors of Shakespeare need to weed his over-abundant "garden," as it's "choaked up with Weeds through the too great Richness of the Soil." If the playwrights apply what she calls "shears" without mercy, they will make the plays "elegant Entertainments."⁵⁵ Originality is afforded a space it does not have in the Spectacles paradigm, where artists are not credited with creation derived from their own internal natures, and where the Rules are constitutive of the form and not merely housekeeping in the interests of propriety. In the former, the idea of nature is allied with fancy – in the latter, it is allied against it, with reason.

⁵⁵ Elizah Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (London: Printed for A Millar, W Law and R Cater, 1775), 76.

If a scholar sees nature as both orderly and external, they tend, therefore, to regard the Rules of art as ‘Spectacles’ through which to see or represent its perfect form; while, if a scholar sees nature as internal and depraved, they tend to construe the Rules as a kind of ‘Pruning Shears’, and give them the function of taming nature for the progressive betterment of society. It is the second branch that I have been unable to locate expressly identified in any discourse and that I therefore believe is missing; I also argue that it predates the more familiar Spectacles paradigm in popular usage.

The Rules as spectacles

The idea that the Rules of art constitute nature can be applied dogmatically or as a probable hypothesis, echoing the split in logic and knowables between Dogmatism and Academic probabilism that is popular in the 17th and 18th centuries in handbooks on logic and works such as Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Cowl represents a more Analytic approach when he says of the Neoclassicists that they “reserved the right to improve upon the instruction of the ancients by a direct study of Nature and by experience,”⁵⁶ while an essayist in the conservative British magazine the *Looker-On* argues, “All the great rules in the fine arts have fixed foundations in our general nature [...] These principles, I am convinced, are throughout human nature the same in kind, though different in degree according to the primary organisation of different minds.”⁵⁷

In his *Essay*, Pope demonstrates a similarly Analytic approach, describing much conscious Neoclassical craftwork as ‘gilding the lily’:

Poets like painters, thus, unskill’d to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
With *gold* and *jewels* cover ev’ry part,
And hide with *ornaments* their want of art. (293-96)

Pope believes that “True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,” only because most people are *not* geniuses of imaginative and empathic nature. He says, “In poets true genius is but rare,/True taste as seldom is the critic’s share.” It is entirely possible for an author untutored in the Rules to capture nature, but only if they possess the rare quality that permits them to see those Rules from nature itself. This is because Pope regards the existing collection of Rules to

⁵⁶ Richard Pape Cowl, *The Theory of Poetry in England: Its Development in Doctrines and Ideas from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1914), vii.

⁵⁷ No 74 in 1792, quoted in Arthur O Lovejoy, “The Parallel of Deism and Classicism,” *Modern Philology* 29, no. 3 (Feb, 1932): 292, 1930.

be composed of hypotheses rather than exhaustive demonstrations. He describes Virgil ('Maro') as having discovered that Homer fell into the great category of writing with "true ease," because Homer seemed superficially to be "above the critic's law"; when Virgil carefully examined each part of his works, however, "Nature and Homer were, he found, the same." In the Preface to his own 1715 translation of *The Iliad*, Pope writes that "Homer is universally allow'd to have had the greatest Invention of any Writer whatever. [...] It is the invention that in different Degrees distinguishes all great Genius's [sic]. The utmost Stretch of human Study, Learning, and Industry, which masters every thing besides, can never attain to this. It furnishes Art with all her Materials, and without it Judgment itself can at best but steal wisely." It is therefore impossible to critique the way in which Homer presents nature, because if his invention is the greatest of any writer, any criticisms a lesser writer might make could be explained as a product of their inferior judgment.

Pope therefore must edit Homer in a different way from how he edits Shakespeare: Shakespeare, according to Pope, has "grandeur," but the finished work is like "an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture, where many of the details are childish, ill-placed, and unequal to its grandeur."⁵⁸ Pope determines that even Homer himself "drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature," but conceives of Shakespeare as being too primitive to either know the Rules or have judgment that is equal to the task of capturing nature absent them. Pope is loath to blame Shakespeare for his ignorance because of the period in which he lived, but this combination of elevated regard for what he intuitively to be Shakespeare's spirit with depressed respect for Shakespeare's technical judgment and particulars, means he is comfortable overwriting Shakespeare's textual choices with his own. Rather than reading Shakespeare for what language has been put on the page and constructing a meaning to suit the text, Pope operates in reverse and alters the text to suit an interpolated or assumed meaning: in the 1725 edition of the plays he 'regularises' the metre and rewrites sections of verse; he demotes approximately 1560 lines of verse to footnotes on the basis that they are so "excessively bad" they could not have been penned by Shakespeare; and other lines he excludes entirely. In *The Comedy of Errors*, for instance, he removes eighty-eight lines in Act II scene ii alone; the line of sweet pathos, "Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care," (II.ii.37) in *Macbeth* is omitted; and Caesar is stripped of much of his uncomfortably complex braggadocio in *Julius Caesar*.

⁵⁸ *Preface to Shakespeare*, in Beverley Warner, *Famous Introductions to Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1906), 48.

Pope carries this disregard for Shakespeare's judgment in a somewhat uncomfortable parcel with a desire to blame previous editors such as Heminge and Condell for introducing many of the 'errors', in a way that also exculpates a Shakespeare he reveres from it. Pope urges us to "give into" the opinion that many of the 'faults' in Shakespeare's texts were placed there by others, as, then, "how many low and vicious parts and passages might no longer reflect upon this great Genius, but appear unworthily charged upon him?" He seems to struggle in the execution of this, however, because of the sheer volume that must be removed if he follows it to the extent of his judgment. He even introduces an intermediate category of notation, a star prefixed to a scene, where he believes that beauty can be perceived, but not in any identifiable "particulars" of the writing: he cannot identify what in the writing has been effectively constructed, but can identify that the overall effect meets his expectations of effect and representation, and this Pope values more highly than a Dogmatic application of technical rules.

Samuel Johnson adopts a more Dogmatic approach, in that any rule that does not prove to be either effective or necessary is dealt with by the rule's status *as a rule* being undermined: if a rule is in fact a rule it is absolute, and, if it is not absolute, it cannot be a rule. In *Rambler* No 156 (14 September 1751) Johnson doubts whether we ought "to judge genius by the event" if it succeeds by means that are wrong according to rule, because, if we do, we might think more of a genius – but we will think less of the work. Instead, the Rules themselves are questioned: among the many of them,

all of which have been received and established have not the same original right to our regard. Some are indeed to be considered as fundamental and indispensable, others only as useful and convenient; some as dictated by reason and necessity, others as enacted by despotic antiquity; some as invincibly supported by their conformity to the order of Nature and the operations of the intellect, others as formed by accident, or instituted by example, and therefore always liable to dispute and alteration.

If something is deemed a rule, its status as nature-derived admits no probabilistic hypotheses or incremental development.

If Johnson is confronted with an author, like Shakespeare, who frequently disregards the Rules, he must decide to either discount the Rule's status and change its categories, or discount the success of the text. Shakespeare is particularly adept at providing Johnson with what he values most in drama, "a faithful mirrour of manners and of life"⁵⁹ in a manner that is both universal

⁵⁹ Ibid., 114.

and diverse, principles of Neoclassical decorum such as the absolute distinctions between genres can therefore be reassessed as non-determinative:

Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, [...] and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolick of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.⁶⁰

Johnson also dismisses the unities of time and place as "not essential to a just drama," and explains them as preferred methods that "sometimes conduce to pleasure" rather than foundational principles. *Othello* can, therefore, enjoy the benefits of both regularity through Acts II-V and irregularity in the initial movement from Venice to Cyprus: the observance of the unities in the main section of the play builds suspense and urgency and gives the audience no space for relief or diversion until the *dénouement*, and therefore enhances the (uncomfortable and confronting) pleasure of the spectacle; it is the earlier move between islands that opens this portal into lawlessness and the audience can very easily imagine themselves transported without any material loss of realism. The "cool malignity of Iago, silent in his resentment, subtle in his designs, and studious at once of his interest and his vengeance" is not, as in Rymer, a "higlety, piglety" misrepresentation of an accepted rule of Theophrastan character type, but is instead a pleasingly mimetic representation of complex humanity that gives "proofs of Shakespeare's skill in human nature."⁶¹

Leopold Damrosch reads Johnson as premising his readings on an early version of speech-act theory, in which writing is conceived of as the unique product of one person speaking to other people. If this is the premise, then both sides of the relationship are important because, in Damrosch's explanation, "We try to see what the author is saying, not what we ourselves might say if we remade the text with perfect freedom"⁶² Damrosch gives an example from Johnson's peculiar blend of criticism and literary biography, citing Johnson's anecdote about an encounter with Goldsmith. Goldsmith was asked what he meant by "slow" in the first line of 'The Traveller', and whether he intended tardiness of locomotion. Goldsmith is said to have answered, without

⁶⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁶¹ Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D: With an Essay on His Life and Genius*, ed. Arthur Murphy, 6 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Alexander V Blake, 1843), 169.

⁶² Leopold Damrosch, "Samuel Johnson and Reader-Response Criticism," *The Eighteenth Century* 21, no. 2 (Spring, 1980): 96.

great thought: “Yes.” Johnson says that he was sitting by, and knew Goldsmith to be someone who would say something without due consideration, so he interrupted to correct him: “No, Sir; you do not mean tardiness of locomotion; you mean, that sluggishness of mind which comes upon a man in solitude.”⁶³ Here, Johnson is overriding authorial comment on the text, but in a way that demonstrates an intention to read the text in the light of its author, and the thoughts or ideas that Johnson believes to have shaped its construction. Damrosch pre-empts the criticism of Johnson being a “prisoner of an obsolete and unworkable aesthetic,” but defends him with a distinction between narrowly-defined poetics and broadly-defined criticism. He argues that Johnson’s criticism encompasses more than just poetics and broadens the imaginative capacity of the reader with an element of humanism.

Johnson demonstrates the way in which an Exoregulatory paradigm still admits an author-figure, because he shows the way in which a scholar expressing even ‘Dogmatic’ attitudes towards Neoclassical rules makes interpretive judgments that expressly involve the perceived figure of the author: he does not assert either the absence of the author from interpretation, as might be expected with an ideology based on largely exomodal standards, or the existence of an authoritative biographical person in a way that would introduce endomodal ones. The *imago* is therefore not proved nugatory by the Exoregulatory paradigm, because Johnson has an *imago* in mind: it is central to the way in which he reads the implied secondary meanings in texts, the imaginative content and the representation of non-standard personality types such as Iago’s in *Othello*. The *imago* is not rendered redundant, however, because the Exoregulatory author-figure is still significantly different from the concept proposed in this thesis. Johnson operates with an author-figure, but his particular *imago* of Shakespeare is curiously devoid of detail and operates according to an exoregulated intention. Johnson says, “Whether [he] knew the unities and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, it is, I think, impossible to decide, and useless to inquire.”⁶⁴

What the author is definitely trying to convey through the text is still non-individual, though: just as Imlac in *Rasselas* “could never describe what [he] had not seen,” Johnson has a view of nature that sits within a Spectacles ideology in that it locates nature outside the individual human self and conceives of it as a universal constant in which each individual merely participates. In the *Adventurer* No 99 (16 October 1753) he claims that “human nature is always

⁶³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 97-98.

⁶⁴ Warner, 132.

the same,” and in the *Rambler* No 60 (13 October 1750) that “[w]hen the claims of nature and passion are satisfied, caprice, and vanity, and accident, begin to produce the discriminations and peculiarities, yet [...] we are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure.” Or, as *Rasselas* puts it, “you are only one atom of the ass of humanity.” The quality of ‘genius’ is then given a non-creative meaning, as it is “that energy which collects, combines amplifies, and animates.”⁶⁵

Rymer is a far more traditional example of a Dogmatic Neoclassical critic, but even he adheres to his dogmatism by selectively choosing certain principles to commit unwaveringly to, and others to discount as conventions or ‘recommendations’ rather than rules. Rymer has been described variously as a critic “obsessed” with rules (Saintsbury), or a critic who subordinates reason to a formalist application of the Rules (G B Dutton), but I disagree with this characterisation.⁶⁶ Rymer selects probability as the heart of all drama, but it is a kind of probability that he interprets as an Enlightenment-compatible, common-to-all-persons ‘common sense’;⁶⁷ Joan Grace describes Rymer’s common sense as “the reasoning of the enlightened man who can follow a logical sequence of thought resulting from his own experience and accept the judgments of competent [and properly ‘authorised’] authorities,” and attributes it to a “basic resistance to imaginative and irrational dimensions of experience.”⁶⁸ Consequently, many of his reasons are not elaborated on, because they ought to be equally accessible to all people in all times, as long as that person is the kind of person Rymer considers competent – ie someone like him:

Poetry has no life, nor can have any operation without probability: It may indeed amuse the People, but moves not the Wise, for whom alone (according to Pythagoras) it is ordain’d.⁶⁹

This probability also applies, somewhat incongruously, to the Ideal form of nature: the drama must be entirely probable, but only in a version of verisimilitude that copies the *best* version of

⁶⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D: With an Essay on His Life and Genius*, ed. Arthur Murphy, 6 vols., vol. 4 (New York: Alexander V Blake, 1843), 251.

⁶⁶ A useful summary of popular characterisations can be found in Joan C Grace, *Tragic Theory in the Critical Works of Thomas Rymer, John Dennis, and John Dryden* (London: Associated University Presses, 1975), 34-35.

⁶⁷ Rymer’s language changes over time, even though his principles remain constant. What he refers to mainly as “common sense” in the 1678 *The Tragedies of the Last Age* becomes “probability” in the 1693 *A Short View of Tragedy*.

⁶⁸ Grace, 37.

⁶⁹ Thomas Rymer, “The Preface of the Translator,” ed. Thomas Rymer, *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie* (London: printed by T Warren, for H Herringman, and sold by Francis Saunders, 1694). 16.

things as we experience them. This requires the tension between the particular and the plausible to be reconciled, in a reconciliation that favours Rymer's class and ideology. Rymer argues that this balance can be struck by a writer simply following their 'reason', because "reason is common to all people, and can never carry [them] from what is natural."

One rule that Rymer considers integral to probability is propriety of character; this is defined, for Rymer, in terms of character type, as part of the 17th century revival of the Theophrastan character. Peter Groves records that over sixty Character books were published between 1608 and 1658,⁷⁰ and an element of "moral didacticism" was added in 1608 with Bishop Hall's *Characters of Vertues and Vices*, which added 'virtuous' characters to provide a teachable contrast with the vice-ridden ones.⁷¹ Rymer complains, for instance, that the character of Iago in *Othello* is unnatural, and therefore unreasonable and implausible, as "never in Tragedy, or in Comedy, nor in Nature was a Souldier with his Character." Shakespeare has therefore included him not for any diegetic or thematic purpose, but "to entertain the Audience with something new and surprising, against common sense, and Nature." Rather than what he is in the play – a "close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal" – Iago ought only to be "an open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing Souldier, a character constantly worn by them for some thousands of years in the World."⁷² I am sure that Rymer does not choose the word for this reason, but the verb "worn" in his argument ironically overlooks the fact that Iago is able to play the role he does precisely *because* of this character presumption existing and *because* he 'wears' it so well atop his particular self. Rymer does not doubt that less-than-honourable soldiers exist in human form in the real world, but he *does* believe that dramatic probability can only be achieved if soldiers are presented in the form that we expect them ideally to be, because he differentiates poetry, in which the author presents things as nature *would have them*, from history, which presents things *as they are*.⁷³ Groves argues that Character increases in popularity during the first half of the 17th century because it addresses the ideological needs and problems of the time; it gives people such as Rymer a comforting anchor in a changing and less superficially-knowable world.⁷⁴ Rymer will therefore entertain no analysis of a soldier character that does not fit this mould. If Shakespeare chooses to present one, it must be out of a wilful disregard for the rules of nature.

⁷⁰ Peter Groves, "Preface," in *Character Books of the English Renaissance: A Selection*, ed. Peter Groves and Geoffrey Hillier (Fairview, NC: Pegasus Press, 2008), xi.

⁷¹ Groves, "General Introduction," 4-5.

⁷² Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: its Original, Excellency and Corruption: with some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage*, 93-94.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 144-45.

⁷⁴ Groves, "General Introduction," 7-8.

Curiously, this approach creates an *imago* of Shakespeare that credits him with conscious craftwork and even an early form of strategic marketing. Rymer says that the “French strollers” who performed scenes from the Passion and the Old Testament were “Carpenters, Coblers [sic], and illiterate fellows; who found that the Drolls, and Fooleries interlarded by them, brought in the rabble, and lengthened their time, so they got Money into the bargain.” Rymer’s explanation for Shakespeare’s (mis)representation of characters such as Iago is that Shakespeare had studied this phenomenon, and had decided to copy it for the gain of inducing the ‘uneducated muck’ to flow to him:

Our Shakespear, doubtless, was a great Master in this craft. These Carpenters and Coblers were the guides he followed. And it is then no wonder that we find so much farce and Apocryphal Matter in his Tragedies. Thereby un-hallowing the Theatre, profaning the name of Tragedy; And instead of representing Men and Manner, turning all Morality, good sense, and humanity into mockery and derision.⁷⁵

This explanation relies on an image of Shakespeare that has wit, careful study and judgment, but, since these are not cast as *literary* in nature, they also exculpate Rymer from any responsibility to treat Shakespeare’s choices in a *hermeneutic* way. Instead, he becomes almost angry at the way in which his ‘Shakespeare’ deliberately flouts literary rules and the expectations and responsibilities of decorum: “But never any Poet so boldly and barefac’d, flounced along from contradiction to contradiction.”⁷⁶

The Rules as Pruning Shears

The second way in which the Rules seem to be conceived of is as a way of taming the internal genius of the author: as a kind of pruning shears for wild and depraved nature. In this paradigm, the Rules do not facilitate mimesis – this is what is achieved by the author’s genius. Instead, the Rules trim nature to make it more decorous, and are devised not from looking at nature, but from looking at art. The Rules are still considered necessary, but to make the representation pleasing to others and more properly instructive; they are aligned with reason and judgment, but *against* nature, which instead resides with inspiration and wit.

⁷⁵ Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: its Original, Excellency and Corruption: with some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage*, 111-12.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

The idea that the Rules operate to contain the excesses of the endogenic faculties come through in very early criticisms, such as Jonson's comment in response to what he said was a compliment paid to Shakespeare by the players that he "never blotted out a line": Jonson writes in his *Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matters* that he "would he had blotted a thousand." Jonson defends his retort as not "malevolent speech," but as candour; he says that Shakespeare had such an "open and free nature" and such "an excellent fancy" that he flowed with such facility it was sometimes necessary that he should be stopped.

Sufflaminandus erat, as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things which could not escape laughter; as when he said in the person of Caesar, one speaking to him, 'Caesar, thou dost me wrong.' He replied: 'Caesar never did wrong, but with just cause.' And such like, which were ridiculous.

Jonson operates with an *imago* of Shakespeare that almost infantilises him. If Shakespeare is so sweet and facile in his facility as to be careless or limited to a simple and superficially digestible meaning, then he cannot intend for anything written to have layers of complexity. The character of Caesar is illuminated by his special pleading on the meaning of the word 'wrong' as it applies to his own actions; either that, or, if it is read with a layer of irony, an acknowledgement of his absolute power and ability to set the terms of what it considered 'right' and 'wrong'. Shakespeare could not have intended this, however, as he has not laboured long enough to build complexity.

John Dennis, on the other hand, represents a Pruning Shears operation of literary rules that sees them not as the source of *excellence* in art but the source of *polish*. Avon Jack Murphy, author of a 1984 biography and critical comment on Dennis's work, cites opinions such as William Godwin's that Dennis "is indeed to the last degree a bigot in poetry" for whom the Neoclassical rules are "his religion and his creed," but counterargues that Dennis is far more reasonable in his application of the unities and rules and that "he argues more generally that the greatest rule is to suspend a rule temporarily if in doing so the author can attain 'Sovereign Beauty'."⁷⁷ Dennis argues that "the Passions must be rais'd after such a manner, as to take Reason along with them," because "[i]f Reason is quite overcome, the Pleasure is neither long, nor sincere, nor safe."⁷⁸ The role of Rules is not to illuminate nature or provide the best means for the representation of it, but is to assist with the temperance of reason:

⁷⁷ Avon Jack Murphy, *John Dennis* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 11.

⁷⁸ *The Usefulness of the Stage* in John Dennis, *Miscellaneous tracts*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: printed for the author, 1727), 307.

The Unities of Time and Place are mechanick Rules, which, if they are observ'd with Judgment, strengthen the reasonableness of the Incidents, heighten the probability of the Action, promote the agreeable Deceit of the Representation, and add Cleanliness, Grace and Comeliness to it. But if they are practis'd without Discretion, they render the Action more improbable and the Representation more absurd, as an unworthy Performance turns an Act of the highest Devotion into an Act of the greatest Sin.⁷⁹

Here, we can see the Rules operating post hoc on an artistic creation that is formed otherwise than with or through them. Dennis is under no illusion that the drama is a false representation relying on the imagination of the audience to execute itself: a play contrives an “agreeable Deceit,” and the text of the play can either hinder or help that deceit play out by being reasonable and probable. Rules such as decorum and character type are not necessary in order to perpetuate a fiction of verisimilitude, characters strung awkwardly between an Ideal version of themselves and a universal version of no selves, and declaiming in metre rather than speaking naturalistically in prose – instead, they provide a measure of “Grace and Comeliness” to this fiction. The passions and the imaginative representation come first, and the Rules pertain to the execution, not the animation.

For Dennis, the genius is the capacity within a poet to execute a text in a way that raises the passions of the audience. It is aligned with the internal nature of the author, “[f]or Nature is the same thing with Genius, and Genius and Passion are all one. For Passion in a Poem is Genius, and the power of exciting Passion is Genius in a Poet.” The Rules operate in consequence: “The second thing is Art, by which I mean those Rules, and that Method, which capacitate us to manage every thing with the utmost dexterity, that may contribute to the Raising of Passion.”⁸⁰ Shakespeare can therefore be considered “one of the greatest geniuses that the world e’er saw for the tragic stage,”⁸¹ despite the fact that he fails to observe many of the rules of unity and propriety.

Dennis writes in the early 18th century, but has not altered his thinking in light of the by-then-established Scientific Revolution. He holds strongly to a version of human nature that is shaped by the Fall, and is concerned that modern “Empiricks in Poetry” will discard the traditions that over generations have shaped literature into an artform; they will make the theatres

⁷⁹ *Remarks upon Cato, a Tragedy* in John Dennis, *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), 68.

⁸⁰ Dennis, *The advancement and reformation of modern poetry: A critical discourse in two parts*, 115.

⁸¹ John Dennis, *An essay on the genius and writings of Shakespear: with some letters of criticism to The Spectator* (London: printed for Bernard Lintott, 1712).

“Mountebank Stages,” and “treat *Aristotle* and *Horace* with as contemptuous arrogance, as our Medicinal Quacks do *Galen*.”⁸² The reason why poetry needs the Rules at all is to achieve the end of social order and improvement: “if the end of poetry be to instruct and reform the word, that is, to bring [humankind] from irregularity, extravagance, and confusion, to rule and order, how this should be done by a thing that is in itself irregular and extravagant, is difficult to be conceived.”⁸³ This is because, unlike those adherents of the Spectacles conception of the Neoclassical edicts, who have possibly been influenced by the Scientific Revolution and regard nature as something governed by internal rule and order, Dennis believes that the *universe* is “regular in all its Parts,” and that “it is to that exact Regularity that it owes its admirable Beauty,” but that *human* nature is separate from the universal organ, and that *it* is no longer regular and beautiful because it has fallen from its “Primitive State.” The purpose of a rule-governed art is “to restore the Decays that happen’d to human Nature by the Fall, by restoring Order [...] the want of which causes most of our Ignorance, and all our Errors.”⁸⁴ In a letter to H___ C___ Esq in response to the claim that “Human nature is the same in all reasonable Creatures, and whatever falls in with it, will meet with Admirers among Readers of all Qualities and Conditions,” published in *The Spectator* No 70, Dennis counter-argues that:

Human Nature was Human Nature before the Fall, and 'tis Human Nature now 'tis degenerated from that perfect Virtue and that unclouded Knowledge, which it enjoy'd before. 'Tis the Business and Design of Education to endeavour to retrieve in some measure the Loss that Human Nature has sustain'd by the Fall; and to recover some Measure of Knowledge and Virtue.⁸⁵

It is not that Shakespeare cannot move passions without the decorous influence of the Rules; it is not that his characters will necessarily be improbable or his writing displeasing. Rather, it is that the arts cannot properly instruct or reform if they are beholden only to the artist’s depraved, idiosyncratic nature.

⁸² In the Preface to *Iphigenia* taken from the facsimile reprint of the 1700 London edition, reproduced in John Dennis, *The Plays of John Dennis*, ed. J W Johnson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980). The pages are not consecutively numbered in Johnson’s edition, and the pages of the prefaces are not numbered at all.

⁸³ John Dennis, *The grounds of criticism in poetry, contain'd in some new discoveries never made before, requisite for the writing and judging of poems surely* (London: printed for Geo Strahan and Bernard Lintott, 1704), 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁸⁵ John Dennis, *Original letters, familiar, moral and critical* (London: printed for W Mears, 1721), 168-69.

Chapter 2

The *imago* and Exoregulatory criticism

The hermeneutic impact of the Exoregulatory ideology dominant through the late 16th to late 18th centuries can be seen most distinctly in the position critics and readers take on the concept of originality, and the gap each perceives between what the author *wrote* and what they consider the author *ought* to have written. The author is more than a mere craftsman, mindlessly constructing an Ikea-like item of text according to a strict and fully-explicated (if sometimes confusing) pamphlet of instructions, but they exist almost as a separate entity to the text: their will and creative choices cannot overrule the expectations an individual critic has for their work; but, to the extent that their intentions can be considered compatible with those expectations, they will be integrated into the treatment and assessment of the text.

Originality

In 1543 Copernicus had published *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*, and Vesalius had published a theory of anatomy that repudiated Aristotle and Galen. Hippolyte Taine argues that the natural philosophy becomes its own religion:

Its right is supreme, since it is truth itself. Everybody must be ruled by it, for, in its nature, it is universal. [...] It differs, however, from the preceding religions in this respect, that instead of imposing itself in the name of God, it imposes itself in the name of reason.⁸⁶

Rather than reason being a Fallen force that is a poor guide for the soul, contemporary thought – as represented by texts such as John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* in 1690 – regard reason to be that human faculty through which everything is accessible and by which all nature loses its caprice and mystery. God, in a way, ceases to be omnipotent, because His whims become constrained by the rules he laid down for Creation in the first instance. Rather than nature being depraved and in need of progressive correction through the labour of an external art, nature is something truthful and common to all that has been corrupted and needs to be regressively shown the way back to its natural state: the former attitude corresponds with the function of the Rules in the Pruning Shears paradigm, while the latter explains the function of the Rules in the Spectacles one.

⁸⁶ Hippolyte Taine, *The Ancient Régime*, trans. John Durand (New York: Holt, 1913), 238-51.

Early Modern thought is suspicious of originality because of its element of ‘virgin’ conception and lack of reference to authority for validity – Milton, for instance, gives the impression of originality in *Paradise Lost* when he rejects the use of rhyme. Rather than arguing for his authorial right to decide whether to use rhyme in his own work or not, or arguing that the Rule is ineffective and ought to be changed, Milton redefines the rules of the past to validate the course that he has chosen – he rejects authority by means of calling on an even older and more ‘true’ version of it. In the *Introduction* he writes:

Rhime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meeter; grac't indeed since by the use of some famous modern Poets, carried away by Custom, but much to thir own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse then else they would have exprest them. [...] This neglect then of Rhime so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar Readers, that it rather is to be esteem'd an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recover'd to heroic Poem from the troublesom and modern bondage of Rimeing.

It is, therefore, not that Milton is breaking new ground; rather, it is that he is rediscovering old ground and erasing the false edicts that have since been applied to cover it. Milton is rescuing Martinez's *Ecce Homo* from the ill-judged applications of Cecília Gimenez's paint.

This initially Exoregulatory tension over originality persists to the current day. Original research is usually considered unreliable and unsubstantiated – even Wikipedia warns of original content that has not been supported with references. The consequence of this, however, is that the truth of the text cannot be traced back to the authority of its author.

Imagination

Just as the word ‘nature’ has no agreed meaning, and can be any of Ideal, particular, universal or idealised, so, too, does ‘imagination’ lack an agreed meaning. It can be either original or non-original in character.⁸⁷ The role attributed to creative or endomodal inspiration is eliminated through the way in which ‘imagination’ is defined, or the way it is treated with a degree of suspicion. Donald Bond argues, “An age which held scientific truth as the great goal to be attained in prose would quite naturally regard with some suspicion a faculty traditionally allied

⁸⁷ Grace, for instance, explores the impact that a lack of precise, agreed-upon meaning for the words ‘nature’, ‘imagination’ and ‘probability’ had on Dryden's work: Grace, 126-28.

with the senses and passions and devoted primarily to the making of images,”⁸⁸ and John Sergeant in 1696 warns people to be careful “lest Imaginations (which are the Offsprings of Fancy, and do oft misrepresent the Thing) so delude us, or the Equivocation of Words draw us aside, and make us deviate from those Genuine and Nature instill’d Notions.”⁸⁹ Implied in these comments is a union of reason and nature, and, thus, a form of nature that is non-depraved – this gives rise to an understanding of ‘imagination’ that puts it on the opposing side and divorces it from reason as something to treat with caution. I suggest that this is what we see in Spectacles-inflected criticism.

A slightly different attitude towards imagination is expressed in Pruning Shears commentary. Imagination is *not* allied with fancy and opposed to nature, but is instead the faculty by which depraved humans access nature. Edmund Burke in *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) defines ‘imagination’ as a force operating very much in nature and according to the rules of nature, working to perceive nature and combine these individual representations in new and pleasing forms:

the imagination, I conceive, can have no pleasure but what results from one or other of these causes [ie the properties of the natural object being represented, or the resemblance the imitation has to the original]. And these causes operate pretty uniformly upon all [people], because they operate by principles in nature, and which are not derived from any particular habits or advantages.

Imagination and nature are on the same side of the binary, and imagination accesses nature rather than leads away from it or distorts it. This definition of imagination is non-creative, however, and is composed entirely of exomodal aspects. The theory of art provided by Joshua Reynolds in 1769 in *Discourses II* adopts a similar ‘Pruning Shears’ understanding, with Reynolds arguing that the creation of art “originates with invention, or wit, which combines the material of experience into a general image of nature which is at once original and true to nature.” It is the *combination* that is original, though, and not the constituent parts themselves: invention is defined expressly as “little more than a new combination of those images of nature which have been previously deposited in memory.”

Macklem does not differentiate between the forms of ‘imagination’, and does not reference the paradigms that I have called ‘Spectacles’ and ‘Pruning Shears’ because they are original to this

⁸⁸ Donald F Bond, "'Distrust' of Imagination in English Neo-Classicism," *Philological Quarterly* 14 (Jan, 1935): 55-56.

⁸⁹ John Sergeant, *The Method to Science* (London: W Redmayne, 1696), 6.

thesis, but he provides a general description of the Neoclassical theory of art that applies to both: he describes this theory of art as centred on “mundane” inspiration, as it eliminates both the prior (in Classical paradigms) and subsequent (in Romantic paradigms) role played by the *furor poeticus*. This conception of imagination and of art in general “is opposed in its fundamentals to the concept of the poet as vates and to the idea of the imagination as the prophetic power of the mind which creates new materials of truth outside natural experience.” In *Discourses III* in 1770, Reynolds is in fact rather scathing in his dismissal of inspiration outside reason, and in his depiction of a very earth-bound process of creation:

[The poet] examines [their] own mind, and perceives there nothing of that divine inspiration with which [they are] told so many others have been favoured. [They] never traveled to heaven to gather new ideas; and [they find themselves] possessed of no other qualifications than what mere common observation and a plain understanding can confer.

Lodovico Castelvetro is similarly dismissive of the *furor poeticus* as an explanation for the works of particularly effective poets. His reading of Aristotle is that he “did not hold the opinion that poetry was a special gift of the gods, yielded to one [person] rather than to another, as is the gift of prophecy and similar privileges which do not derive from nature and are not common to all.” He positions Aristotle as someone actively wanting to counter the idea from Plato that poetry is composed in a “divine frenzy,” and suggests instead a far more prosaic explanation: that the belief in divine madness gained currency through a combination of the “vainglory” of poets desirous of promoting their powers, and the ignorance of the common person who was too willing to believe that it is “a miracle and a special gift of God what they cannot obtain by their own natural powers.”⁹⁰ It is not that either Aristotle or Castelvetro takes issue with the idea of prophetic inspiration itself – the prophets are accepted to speak through it – but only with the suggestion that poetry emerges as a product of it rather than of human gifts and attributes.

Exoregulatory critics are committed to the principle of knowledge over ecstasy. Ecstasy, from the Greek *ekstasis*, meaning the state of being rapt out of oneself, is a heightened state of pleasure or consciousness, an epiphany, or a feeling of immaculate inspiration. Emmanuel Levinas differentiates knowledge from this kind of inspired access to ideas on the basis that knowledge is where the Other belongs to the Same, whereas ecstasy is where the Same is

⁹⁰ Lodovico Castelvetro, “A Commentary on the *Poetics* of Aristotle,” in *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*, ed. and trans. Allan H Gilbert (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1962), 310.

absorbed into the Other.⁹¹ The exoregulatory paradigm concentrates on knowledge because this is what permits of an outside standard for deeming when that 'belonging' has been accurately obtained – possession of the Same by the Other is incorrigible.

Components of the text

The principles of the Exoregulatory movement affect the judgment and treatment of the text across the spectrum of its parts: what is perceived as valid or possible inspiration for the text; what is or should be the compositional elements of the text, such as its form, structure and language; what is therefore the meaning of the text; and, finally, what is the perceived success of the text, judged against what it is deemed it ought to be or do in the world. In each of these, a particular space is given to the author: the nature and role of that author-space, and the qualities attributed to the author within it, correspond to the influence of the *imago* over criticism in the period.

Inspiration

The inspiration for a text is attributed to almost exclusively exomodal aspects, because creation is meant to derive from conceits already existing in the world. Ideas for representation come from the material objects and situations of existence, and they inseminate themselves in the author's mind, to be acted upon by that quality which "collects, combines, amplifies, and animates" – whether it be a genius anchored by reason, or the ungoverned fancy of imagination. Rymer is criticised by Saintsbury for his "inability to understand the fable, the characters themselves [...] and that the excesses of this or that quality in Iago, in Desdemona, in Othello, is utterly lost in, or is unerringly adjusted to, their perfect humanity."⁹² Saintsbury, however, is not allowing for the fact that Rymer is judging Shakespeare against a conception of reality different from that which Saintsbury has – and different from that which Shakespeare very likely has.

The alignment of a critic with Exoregulatory principles introduces a kind of subjectivity in judgment, because it involves an assessment of the text as against exomodal facts and principles that the critic perceives as being objective and absolute; Rymer's criticism does tend to be

⁹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, trans. Richard A Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 8, 13.

⁹² Saintsbury, 137.

focused on literal representations and simplistic binaries, but this is entirely in line with how he sees the world and reality. Rymer finds the more cerebral or ‘spiritual’ attraction between Desdemona and Othello to be implausible, and cannot accept that Desdemona was unmoved by “a Womanish Appetite.” He mocks Desdemona for claiming to have been won by Othello’s conversation, saying derisively that:

This was the Charm, this was the philtre, the love-powder that took the Daughter of this Noble Venetian. This was sufficient to make the Black-amoor White, and reconcile all, tho’ there had been a Cloven-foot into the bargain. A meaner woman might be as soon taken by Aqua Tetrachymagogon [a ‘quack’ remedy for purging the four humours, satirised in Aphra Behn’s 1678 comedy *Sir Patient Fancy*].⁹³

Rymer cannot accept that a well-born Venetian woman would fall in love with a black man, but his answer to this is to argue Shakespeare’s lack of attention to ‘common sense’ and mimesis – not to read blackness out of the text. Rymer suggests that it would have improved the plausibility of the story had Shakespeare feigned that “some way, or other, a Black-amoor Woman had been her Nurse, and suckl’d her: Or that once, upon a time, some Virtuoso had transfus’d into her Veins the Blood of a black Sheep: after which she might never be at quiet till she is, as the Poet will have it, Tupt with an old black ram.” If Desdemona has ‘blackness’ introduced into her physiognomy, it is reasonable for Rymer to construe a reality in which she wants to physically unite with someone who is black: for him, an interracial couple bound by mutual sympathy is not real.

Rymer applies a similar expectation concerning what is ‘real’ to Othello’s behaviour in the final scene. Othello takes charge of his own denunciation and death, subverting natural justice and any semblance of submission to an independent judiciary, and casts himself both as the ungodly dog *and* as the great hero who executes that dog; for Rymer, this is incompatible with the behaviour of a hero or general:

We see nothing done by him, nor related concerning him, that comports with the condition of a General, or, indeed, of a Man, unless the killing himself, to avoid a death the Law was about to inflict upon him.

Rymer is not being simplistic here: Othello asks for sympathy for *himself*, calling himself a “rash and unfortunate man” and “[a]n honourable murderer.” Othello apologises (briefly) to Cassio for plotting his death, but in the next lines prays that he “demand that demi-devil/Why he hath

⁹³ Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: its Original, Excellency and Corruption: with some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage*, 89-90.

thus ensnared by soul and body,” as though immediately casting the responsibility for his behaviour onto Iago, presenting himself as one controlled. It is also the person whose death he was working to bring about whom he asks to do him the great favour of exculpating him. This is similar to his speech to Lodovico, where he begins with a reminder that he had “done the state some service, and they know’t,” and then moves to dictating to Lodovico how the day shall be recorded for posterity:

When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well.
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme. (V.ii.357-62)

Again we see this inclination to absolve himself of blame, calling his deeds “unlucky” rather than dictated by his own will, and alienating them with the passive demonstrative pronoun ‘these’ rather than owning them with the possessive pronoun ‘my’. It was not innocence or naïveté that moved his hand, though; the minute Othello realises his ‘error’ in murdering Desdemona, he declaims on the size and strength of his manhood:

Behold, I have a weapon;
A better never did itself sustain
Upon a soldier's thigh: I have seen the day,
That, with this little arm and this good sword,
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop: (V.ii.273-79)

The colloquial use of ‘sword’ for ‘penis’ at the time, through the Latin *gladius*, connects his violence inextricably with his sense of masculinity.

This is, therefore, not unsophisticated criticism from Rymer, despite it being expressed in an unsophisticated and colloquially caustic way. Leavis, in his 1937 essay *Diabolical Intellect and the Noble Hero*, excoriates Othello for his “habit of self-approving self-dramatisation” and his “self pride,” and, in 1983, Carol McGinnis Kay describes his two deathbed speeches as having a “childlike ‘Look at me’ quality”:⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Carol McGinnis Kay, "Othello's Need for Mirrors," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 262-63.

Othello may be considered *egocentric* in that he directs much of his energy and that of others into defining and bolstering a sense of his own identity, but this is because his sense of self is so weak and ill-defined as to require constant reinforcement.

Eliot dismisses Othello's heroic speeches in a characteristically dry way, saying that he reads them simply as Othello "thinking about himself" and "*cheering himself up*." Eliot judges that any reader who regards Othello as a hero after this final scene has been moved not by Othello's moral attitude, but by the way in which he has given himself an heroic *aesthetic* and dramatised himself as a pathetic hero against his environment.⁹⁵

While the 20th century critics judge Othello against a more sophisticated view of human nature, however, and are more willing to ask what Shakespeare is attempting to do rather than condemn him for not doing what he is expected, Rymer considers reality to be exoregulated and he does not understand what could act as the basis for Shakespeare's picture of the world. Rymer's *imago* of Shakespeare is as an author who both attempts a mimetic representation, and who sees the same external world as Rymer does and judges the Ideal of it with the same quality of 'common sense'.

Construction

The elements of construction that an Exoregulatory critic expects to see in a text are also derived exomodally, and authors are critiqued on their ability to apply these rules rather than analysed for their purposes when they do not. The three unities are anticipated and readers debate over the degree of flexibility in the application of them that can be tolerated; Theophrastan character types are imposed upon the fictional persons, and used as the measure of their reality or probability; plot, structure, rhyme and thematic purpose are all standardised against pre-existing genre conventions. The language used is also expected to be appropriate to the form and the genre, and should rely on the established poetic diction of the time. We do not see Shakespeare's words being treated as sacred during the Neoclassical period, partly because the rules of copyright are not yet established and no doubt partly because Shakespeare does not take pains to publish his works under his own name in the way Jonson does; but also possibly because his style of writing does not conform to the exoregulated expectations of his critics. This is certainly the explanation that Jean Inger Marsden advances, arguing, "Where the plays themselves cannot provide a complete explanation of why Shakespeare's text was not regarded

⁹⁵ T S Eliot, *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* (Folcroft, PA: The Folcroft Press, 1970), 8.

as sacred, critical writings often do,” because they show the way in which judgments are not based on the ability of the individual author to construct meaning in a unique act of intention.⁹⁶ Between 1660 and 1820 all thirty-seven plays are revised, over at least 123 adaptations, and these revisions generally supplant the originals entirely.⁹⁷

In 1701 George Granville adapts *The Merchant of Venice*, focusing on a simplification of expression and a reduction of ambiguity in theme and character. *The Jew of Venice* plays in London for 47 years, and is performed as a birthday entertainment for Queen Anne in 1711. In the *Advertisement to the Reader*, Granville notes that the play was written originally by Shakespeare, but that it has been “[n]ow altered & very much improved” while preserving the same “turn of Stile and Thought with the Original.” The changes that have been “requisite,” include changes to “Words, or single Lines, the Conduct of Incidents, and Method of Action throughout the whole Piece” – but these are only so as to “to bring it into the Form and Compass of a Play.” The logical conclusion is that Shakespeare lacks sufficiently in construction as to deny the play its own form. The *Prologue*, written by Bevill Higgons in the voice of the ghost of Shakespeare, has Shakespeare commending Granville on the way in which he has managed to elevate the text beyond the original language of it:

These Scenes in their rough Native Dress were mine;
But now improv'd with nobler Lustre shine:
The first rude Sketches *Shakespear's* Pencil drew,
But all the shining Master stroaks are new.
This Play, ye Criticks, shall your Fury stand,
Adorn'd and rescu'd by a faultless Hand.

The measure of deliberately hyperbolic praise suiting the format does not render his sentiments outliers at the time: Dryden writes two decades earlier that “if his embroideries were burnt down,” we would still find “silver at the bottom of the melting pot.” He argues in *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* that it is not Shakespeare’s sense of the passions that is deficient, but only his “manner of expression”: “he often obscures his meaning by his words, and sometimes makes it unintelligible.”⁹⁸ A curious split becomes apparent between the esteem granted Shakespeare on the basis of his ability to represent and raise the passions, and the disregard held for the particulars of the text through which he does this.

⁹⁶ Jean Inger Marsden, “The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Theory in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century” (PhD Harvard University, 1986), 9 (8620507).

⁹⁷ Numbers taken from George C Branam, *Eighteenth-Century Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 179-92.

⁹⁸ Dryden, 6, 261-62.

Meaning

Because the finding of hermeneutic meaning from a text is based in a large part on the interplay of its perceived inspiration and its apprehended construction, the judgment of meaning in the paradigm is largely exoregulated, and the author has little scope to construct meaning outside the exomodal intentions imputed to them by the critic. To the extent that anything different or 'original' is perceived in the text, many Neoclassical critics will normalise it and bring it within the realm of the already-known by explaining it as a nonstandard way to represent the same figures that are expected in any text that conforms to rule – or by dismissing it as nonsensical or deliberately mischievous because it departs too greatly. In either event, if hermeneutic meaning is derived, that meaning consistently bears the quality of what the critic believes is objectively mimetic or essentially moral. The axes of interpretation conform with the definition of art to which all Exoregulatory scholars in the period have subscribed: that art is a representation of reality, designed to instruct and please. In practice, therefore, the scope for interpretation is limited.

A critic may determine that the text is conveying meaning about reality, but this reality will be restricted to the version of reality that the critic themselves authorises with their 'common sense' and position on mimesis. This attitude will then be attributed to the author by imputing it to the *imago*, if the text comports with it; or, if the text does not comport with it, the author will be given an *imago* that is either deliberately subversive or ignorant of that reality, and meaning that *could* be derived from the text by taking it on its face is discounted. A critic may similarly determine that the reality that have perceived in the text is directed at the arousal of pleasure, in which case the hermeneutic treatment will be curtailed in favour of a shallower analysis of superficial effect. In a way, this necessitates the creation of an *imago* that does not intend for any more significant meaning to be communicated through the text, and the *imago* will usually be held to the standards imposed by the genre and form; if the text is structurally a comedy, for instance, the *imago* will be exomodally circumscribed by this, and will be more likely to have purely pleasurable or diverting intentions imputed to it.

If a critic determines that the representation in the text seems designed to instruct, on the other hand – or if the genre conventions prescribe this intention – the *imago* will be constructed as one that intends for the betterment of the reader or audience member through their experience of the text. The meaning derived from the text will then conform to the critic's idea of what humankind needs to be instructed in: for Dennis, this may be the surety of Divine justice,

through the representation of poetical justice; for Dryden, this may be the dangers of vice and folly, seen through the example of a great man brought tragically low. If Dryden regards the text to be a 'proper' tragedy, he shows an inclination to look for a measure of virtue in every tragic hero that outweighs the frailty, because the function of 'instruction' requires that the author intended that the hero have "virtuous inclinations, and degrees of moral goodness in them," so that there is "room for punishment on the one side, and pity on the other."⁹⁹

Simon takes a more author-intentionalist view of the period than I have here. She argues that the Neoclassical paradigm constrained interpretation, but without the exoregulated nature that I have identified. Instead, for Neoclassical critics governed by the rhetorical tradition, "the poem could not mean more than the poet intended it to mean, for their conception of the artist's procedure implied a conscious application of means to achieve a given end. They were ready to recognise that certain effects resulted from a lucky hit rather than from a deliberate choice, but this applied only to details not to the general purpose."¹⁰⁰ I suggest that the 'given end', however, is generally determined prior to the creation of the text instance, and therefore prior to the act of creation; once a critic has identified the type of text being read, and has determined what they conceive to be the real subject being represented, the poet's intentions are determined *from* those exomodal factors and are constrained by them. Rather than meaning emerging from the author, I suggest that for Exoregulatory critics there are a set of authorised meanings or intentions conceived of as existing exomodally out in the world, and the author could effect these through their textual choices – or disregard or be ignorant of them, and therefore produce a text lacking in meaning.

Rymer is routinely derided as an incompetent critic: he is described, for instance, as "the worst critic that ever lived" by Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1831,¹⁰¹ and "evidently entirely negligible as far as appreciation or intelligent criticism of the drama is concerned" by Charles Johnson in 1909.¹⁰² In 1693 in *A Short View of Tragedy*, Rymer, however, notices the double time scheme in *Othello* – the one that it is first credited to John Wilson, writing as Christopher North, in a series

⁹⁹ *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Irène Simon, ed., *Neo-Classical Criticism: 1660-1800*, Arnold's English Texts (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), 15.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Boswell's Johnson: The Edinburgh Review (1831)," in *Moulton's Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors through the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Charles Wells Moulton and Martin Tucker (New York: Ungar Pub Co, 1966), 583.

¹⁰² Charles Johnson, *Shakespeare and His Critics* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 69.

of three Blackwood's Magazine articles across 1849 and 1850. Rymer, however, notes that the first time Desdemona and Othello are in bed together, Iago says to Cassio that

His [Othello's] soul is so enfeather'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list:
Even as her appetite shall play the God
With his weak function (II.iii.254-7)
[...]
Our general's wife
is now the General – (II.iii.310)

Rymer argues, "This kind of discourse implies an experience and long conversation, the Honey-Moon over, and a Marriage of some standing. Would any man, in his wits, talk thus of a Bridegroom and Bride the first night of their coming together?" He gives other examples, such as Emilia saying of Othello "'Tis not a year or two shews us a man" (III.iv.92) as though a year or two had already passed, during which Othello had not demonstrated a jealousy that was obviously latent in his soul, and shows through his illustrations that the time query is based on a fairly sensitive reflection on what people might mean in saying those things in those contexts.¹⁰³ Rymer does not merely rely on a calculation of duration based on literal statements of time, as is often otherwise seen. Rather than dismissing the double-time scheme as an error, he also hypothesises that, strategically, "this is necessary for our Poet; it would otherwise not serve his turn," because the contrast between Desdemona's unearned confidence in Othello and the factually short time they have been acquainted gives Shakespeare "the spring and occasion for all the Jealousie and bluster that ensues." A structural paradox such as this has no authorised place in the construction of a play, though, and so Rymer treats it as though it is ineligible for a hermeneutic treatment: it can carry no thematic meaning and cannot illuminate character, because it has no pre-existing authorised function in meaning-making. His perception of it is acute, but his subsequent treatment of it is in line with Exoregulatory principles.

By way of contrast, 21st century scholar Steve Sohmer takes the same textual material and construes it as a comment on the way in which Europeans, after the Gregorian calendar reform of 1582, were forced to live for many years under two incompatible systems of reckoning time; he reads Shakespeare as creating the two time schemes by linking the dramatic action to dates on which the holy days in the Julian 'Old Style' calendar and the Gregorian 'New Style' calendar

¹⁰³ Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy: its Original, Excellency and Corruption: with some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage*, 114-15, 26-27.

conflicted, and thereby critiquing the increasing hegemony of the “anti-Protestant offensive” and the power the Church of Rome wished to assert “over time itself and The Word.”¹⁰⁴ Othello then becomes, through the process of internal compatibility, a symbol of the folly of Catholic dominion, and of Shakespeare’s rejection of the cult of virginity and the doctrine of works:

The exultation of the foppish-foolish-whoremongering and yet anointed, inexplicably elect Cassio is a resounding triumph of *sola gratia*. And the Moor’s veneration of a virgin brings his world and faith to ruin.¹⁰⁵

Unlike Rymer, Sohmer is willing to give the double time incongruity a deliberate *hermeneutic* meaning, and this choice (or ability) has an effect that ripples through the rest of his analysis of the text. I attribute Sohmer’s difference partly to his paradigm and age, and partly to his Shakespeare *imago*; the two are, naturally, interconnected.

Role of the author

Literary biography is, at best, in its infancy during the early years of Neoclassicism. The word ‘biography’ does not exist in the English language until the 1660s, and early discussions of biography focus on uncovering the person for the sake of posterity of curiosity rather than for some key to the meaning of their works. Rowe is the first official biographer of Shakespeare in 1709, and justifies his attempt to prepare a record of Shakespeare’s and append it to his literary compositions by saying that “though the works of Mr Shakespeare may seem to many not to want a comment, yet I fancy some little account of the man himself may not be thought improper to go along with them.”¹⁰⁶ The biography is not presented as being connected to the words in the texts or to the intended meaning of them, or general style of Shakespeare’s composition – instead, it stands alone, and is given to sate the curiosity of admirers who want to feel a personal, human connection with the author. The first tradition for reading the plays in light of a purported biography commences only with Edmond Malone in 1778, although Gildon advances some opinions on the connection between Shakespeare’s biography and his sonnets in the volume he appends to Rowe’s edition of the plays in 1710.

The author, to the extent that they are considered, is therefore kept ideologically separate from the details of the text and the intentions imputed to it: these are drawn from universally-

¹⁰⁴ Steve Sohmer, “The ‘Double Time’ Crux in *Othello* Solved,” *English Literary Renaissance* 32, no. 2 (Spring, 2002): 217-20.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholas Rowe, “Account of the Life, etc,” in *Famous Introductions to Shakespeare’s Plays*, ed. Beverley Warner (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1906), 7.

available structures that exist in history and the community, instead. Occasionally the name of the author is invoked as a justification for why the text presents as so faithful to academic principles and classical rules, or as a reason for the text being constructed in ignorance or disregard of them; Jonson's learning versus Shakespeare's assumed ignorance are examples of this. Generally, though, the text is made up of independent components, each derived from outside sources: these sources do not come together in the body of the author, and the text does not determine any of these components itself. It cannot set its own rules, and in a way is not *constitutive of itself*. There is also a split between the 'private text' that is attributed to the name of the author, and the material 'public text' that is written on the page and available to the audience. The author's private text is the silver at the bottom of the melting pot, or the 'soul' of the text that the critic perceives in, beyond, and even despite the language and structure that constitutes it; the public text is then a collection of smaller pieces superimposed on top of that text, and either effectively or ineffectively realising it in a material sense.

Seeing the private text as an independent entity, which is either illuminated by the realised material of the public text or hidden by it, explains the way in which critics within the Exoregulatory paradigm can entirely rewrite a text and view the act as *rescuing* it rather than destroying it; similarly, it explains how the inert tool of language can be blamed for being inadequate and unable to realise the private text, because the private text can be a work of genius even if the material expression of it is flawed. Exoregulatory critics do not think of inspiration and the private text as itself being constituted of language: the text is extraneous to the text. The author may therefore attach to the meaning of the text, and the *imago* the critic holds of the author will attach to and influence this meaning – but the text that is relevant here is the unembodied private text, and not the one that the flesh-and-blood author actually constructs. Theobald, for instance, claims in his 1793 *Preface*, "Our language sunk under him, and was unequal to that Greatness of Soul which furnish'd him with such glorious conceptions," and Edward Ravenscroft can adapt *Titus Andronicus* in 1679 and argue in his address 'To the Reader' that he is rescuing Shakespeare's true play from the "heap of Rubbish" under which it lies hidden. The 'Ravenscroft tradition' is an early version of authorship contestation, only operating in reverse: in the later arguments of authorship denialists such as Oxfordians and Baconians, the public texts are too good to have been written by the private man Shakespeare; in the Ravenscroft tradition, the public texts are too bad.

Impact on the imago

An objection to this paper's thesis may be that the Exoregulatory paradigm renders the *imago* concept nugatory, because it does not rely on the image of the author at all. If the author constructs the text entirely by the collation of pieces that derive their form and meaning from outside the author, the text is not a unique product of that author and a unique *imago* will not, therefore, influence the way in which it is construed. Alternatively, an objection may be that Exoregulatory principles cast the *imago* as an illegitimate component of hermeneutic appreciation, because each component of the text ought to be construed in a way that obviates the author's conscious will or intention. To the extent that any Exoregulatory critic expressly proscribes a reading of the author's character in the reading of the text, or locates the features of a text outside an author's subjectivity, they are suggesting that the interplay of an *imago* figure is illegitimate, even if they don't use this language.

Even though the Rules concerning mimesis and the structure and form of the text come from outside the author, there is an interaction between the two: the author is conceived of as a personality and a composite of biography, as fancy and imagination, and as the product or source of nature and insight into nature; frequently, as an imprecise combination of these captured under a title like 'genius'. The *imago* does not govern the Rules, or textual components such as poetic diction, character types or genre, but it does influence the way in which the author's side of the equation is construed, and how the two aspects of author and Rules are seen to interact with each other. This will often be most apparent in those non-standard or controversial text instances, whether the author is deemed to have misapplied the Rules, ignored or been ignorant of them for some hypothesised reason, or in fact followed them in an ingenious way.

In the Pruning Shears branch of criticism, scholars are more accepting of particular nature – as long as it is made decorous – and will thus be the most heavily influenced by their *imago* of the author. If the text is read as a product of internal and idiosyncratic genius, the text becomes a product of the author's choices and intentions. These may not always be credited as conscious, but they will be endogenic. If the author ignores too many of the Rules and the text is considered improper or indecorous, those improper choices can be ignored and the author can be criticised for an excess of *fancy*, if their *imago* supports it, or given excuses such as being ignorant of the Rules or living in a 'primitive' time. The more 'genius' contained in the *imago*, the more willing a critic will generally be to overlook any technical faults in the work.

The Spectacles branch, on the other hand, requires an ideal (or at least a universal) nature, because it assumes a nature that is external to the author. The *imago* is therefore less expressly recognised in a Spectacles criticism, because the nature of the author and what specifically they intend matters less to the judgment of what the text is representing. In the Dogmatic view of Spectacles, the author is credited with thought regarding how effectively the Rules are implemented to their ends: if a textual choice is effective, it must be consistent with the Rules (even if a Rule needs to be removed to avoid the contradiction); then, if a Rule produces something that is ineffective, it is that the author did not have the 'genius' needed to handle the Rules in an effective way, and applied them mathematically, or without taste. Even inside this Dogmatic frame, therefore, the *imago* has the power to determine whether the critic relies on what the author has actually written, or whether the critic dismisses the particularity of the text because it fails to conform with Rule. In the Analytic view of Spectacles, there is more flexibility, because authors are permitted the scope to find ways to represent nature that are different from what the Neoclassical rules prescribe. The *imago* therefore operates in the same way in both the Dogmatic and Analytic views, but is given more power to operate in the latter.

Part 2: Numina

Chapter 3 The Numinous paradigm

General introduction

To the extent that the Numinous paradigm is an expression of Romantic ideology, it can be seen most clearly in literary criticism and composition from the 18th century through to the early 20th century. Friedrich Schlegel gives the description that “*ist eben das romantisch, was uns einen sentimental Stoff in einer phantastischen Form darstellt*” (literature is ‘romantic’ if it depicts emotional matter in an imaginative form)¹⁰⁷ – essentially drawing out both the focus on the internal and the new conception of ‘imagination’ as a positive creative force instead of something that is commonly dismissed as, in Sergeant’s words, “the Offsprings of Fancy,”¹⁰⁸ and seen as a potential source of random delusion. For Coleridge, for instance, writers are in full possession of both their fancy, “the aggregating faculty of the mind,” and imagination, “the modifying and coadunating faculty,” and each is a useful tool of art.¹⁰⁹

In this chapter I will explain the ideological foundations of the Numinous approach to hermeneutics in both early German and English Romanticisms. Contrary, in fact, to the claim that the chief Romantic concern was a “claim for the relationship of a poet’s personality to his poems,”¹¹⁰ I suggest a characterisation of the author as a kind of vatic channel, making the text simultaneously illuminative and mysterious. This actually effaces the authorial personality to such an extent that ideas we might classify today as the ‘biographical’ author or the ‘implied’ author disappear from view, and are replaced by a functional *imago* in the shape of either the reader or critic themselves, or a close facsimile of what they consider enduring ‘human nature’ to be.

¹⁰⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1985), 315.

¹⁰⁸ Sergeant.

¹⁰⁹ Letter to Sotheby, 10 September 1802: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: with an introductory essay upon his philosophical and theological opinions*, 7 vols., vol. 2, ed. W G T Shedd (New York: Harper & Bros, 1860), 864.

¹¹⁰ Suresh Raval, "Intention and Contemporary Literary Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38, no. 3 (Spring, 1980): 262.

Numinitas

The word ‘numinous’ is chosen because of its relationship with the Latin *numen*, its use by sociologists to refer to the idea of magical power residing in an object, and its use in the tradition of Rudolf Otto’s 1917 text *Das Heilige*;¹¹¹ it also has an echoic (though not etymological) connection with Kant’s use of the Greek *noumenon*. In the Latin root, the *numen* is the deity presiding over a thing or location, similar to how the author can be thought of as regnant in the text; ‘numinous’ therefore captures the idea of a criticism that gives the author the character of a deity or spirit, unknowable, bright and awful in its majesty, arousing spiritual or even dogmatically religious emotion. Kant’s use of the Greek root indicates an unknowable reality underlying all things, and the two together combine to form an author who is somehow mortal, yet manages to transcend mere subjective humanity at the same time. Otto distinguishes the ‘holy’ from the ‘numinous’, by explaining that the holy entails a moral perfection, while the numinous does not: rather, the numinous is beyond the ethical sphere, and is a “non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling” that “presents itself as *ganz Andere*, wholly other, a condition absolutely *sui generis* and incomparable whereby the human being finds [itself] utterly abashed.”¹¹²

Otto also coins the phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (a mystery that is at once awe-ful and fascinating) to explain the experience of the numinous, using a description that evokes much Romantic commentary on escaping into ‘true’ (as Coleridge, Friedrich Schlegel and late Romantic Charles Johnson are apt to classify it) poetry:

The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may then pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its ‘profane’, non-religious mood of everyday experience.¹¹³

The deity powering the text creates a sublimity of feeling that lifts the base reader out of the prosaic ethics and concerns of worldly existence, and elevates them to an immortal plane of higher truth. De Staël conceives of the early German Romantic author in very similar terms, describing poetry as “the natural language of all worship” and the process of writing as “[a]midst

¹¹¹ Popularised in the Anglophone world as Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 5-7, 30.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

the wonders of the world, [they feel themselves] a being at once creator and created; who must die, and yet cannot cease to be; and whose heart, trembling, yet at the same time powerful, takes pride in itself, yet prostrates itself before God.”¹¹⁴ Hazlitt speculates that poetry “has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by conforming the show of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things, as reason and history do.”¹¹⁵ The poet accesses the imaginative faculty to somehow take themselves out of history.

Isaiah Berlin suggests the 1808 painting of *Napoléon on the Battlefield of Eylau* by Antoine-Jean Gros as an emblem of Romanticism, as it breaks the subtlety and quiet restraint of Neoclassical art in order to juxtapose the great and elevated with the base and macabre. It elevates Napoléon to the position of a Christ-figure in the way that he is both the cause of carnage and the salve that consoles and blesses.

It represents a horseman of indeterminate origin, a strange, mysterious rider set against an equally mysterious background, *l'homme fatal*, in touch with secret forces, a man of destiny, coming from nowhere, moving in accordance with occult laws to which all humanity and indeed all nature is subject, the exotic hero of the baroque novels of the time.¹¹⁶

Berlin only purports to connect Napoléon with the heroes revered in Gothic and Baroque art, but because the same idealised image is projected onto the poets of the period he succeeds in more. Present in his language of Napoléon “coming from nowhere” is the newly-conceived author as endogenic source of artistic inspiration: *fons et origo* with an aesthetic intuition preceded, taught and conceived by nothing. The artist is the uncaused cause, and in the beginning, first after this cause, is the word.

The mystery of the sublime comes at a critical cost, however. Shakespeare, for instance, is so inscrutable that he cannot be examined or understood. From a rustic who falls into error because of his “small Latin and less Greek,” or out of deference to an untutored audience, Shakespeare becomes an “immortal spirit,” in the words of Matthew Arnold’s 1849 sonnet in his name, who makes the “heaven of heavens his dwelling-place” yet also “[d]idst tread on earth unguess’d at.” A failure to reach Jonson’s level of learning is no longer a mark against

¹¹⁴ Quoted from her own translation: Germaine de Staël, *On Germany*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1813), 294, 98.

¹¹⁵ William Hazlitt, *Hazlitt on English Literature: An introduction to the appreciation of literature*, ed. Jacob Zeitlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1913), 254.

¹¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), 96.

Shakespeare's name, as he is *fons et origo* of his work and does not need an authorised source for it. "Self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honour'd, self-secure," he still succeeds in developing a store of knowledge greater than any other. The key, however, is that none of this can any longer be scrutinised or traced back to its origin: Arnold argues that other poets "abide our question," permitting analysis, but that Shakespeare is free of it, and somehow impervious – he rests smiling behind the texts like an enigmatic Mona Lisa, guaranteeing the 'value of the goods' but silent, and untouched by the votary's worldly urge to *know*. Genette in the 20th century observes that this role of 'Romantic' author also introduces a barrier to *self*-analysis: "for writers at that time were anxious [...] to give the impression that their inspiration had been of quasi-miraculous spontaneity; they were therefore not especially eager to exhibit inspiration's workshop."¹¹⁷

German Romanticism

Early German Romantic thought and English Romanticism do not have the same origins or ideology; many of their differing tenets end in a similar treatment of the author, however, and admit a similar space for the *imago*.

Sturm und Drang

German Romanticism and the 1760s *Sturm und Drang* movement¹¹⁸ both exalt the individual subjectivity and extremes of emotional experience that are denied expression by the extreme rationalism of the Enlightenment and the received regard for classical forms. In 1762 Johann Georg Hamann publishes an express critique of the Enlightenment, arguing ideas such as the singularity of aesthetic experience and the role of an artist's individual 'genius' in apprehending some truth or essence of nature through more mysterious means than rational sensory comprehension. Hamann prefigures many ideas and rhetorical conceits seen across German and English Romanticisms, and he uses the texture of his writing to radically deconstruct and subvert the assumptions of Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment. Hamann is fundamentally Christian, as the recognisable German Romanticism is, but in *Aesthetica in nuce* he uses the image of God and the pursuit of the eternal in ways that are also echoed half a century later in

¹¹⁷ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 367.

¹¹⁸ I am loosely dating *Sturm und Drang* here from Johann Georg Hamann's 1762 text *Aesthetica in nuce. Eine Rhapsodie in kabbalistischer Prose* because of its use by Herder in the later movement and its expression of ideas that became central to both *Sturm und Drang* and German Romanticism.

the secular English movement.¹¹⁹ As Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, and Edward Young do before him and critics of *Sturm und Drang* do after him, Hamann describes the author/poet as a “God in miniature”¹²⁰; but, as his editor H B Nisbet observes, he “characteristically” inverts the trope: it is not so much that the poet is a God, but that God is a poet, “the Poet at the beginning of days.’ Creation is the poetry of God, which speaks to us by means of images. Poetry, if it imitates nature, will itself be an image of creation – and, like the Bible (which is also poetry), an image of God, embodying something of the creator’s divinity.”¹²¹

Hamann establishes a base that permits of both the later German drive towards complex human nature and the mysterious Christianity of the Middle Ages, as well as the English movement’s tendency towards the pantheistic worship of natural phenomena and the primitive – even though *he himself* eschews the mysterious and the idea of meaning that is somehow ‘transcendental’. In his 1784 *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*, Hamann says of Kant’s explanation of a ‘transcendental object’ that it is “a something = x, of which we know, and with the present constitution of our understanding can know, nothing whatsoever”:

Through this learned troublemaking it works the honest decency of language into such a meaningless, rutting, unstable, indefinite something = x that nothing is left but a windy sough, a magic show play, at most, as the wise Helvétius says, the talisman and rosary of a transcendental superstitious belief in *entia rationis* [objects of thought alone], their empty sacks and slogans.¹²²

Hamann mocks Kant’s question without meaningfully answering or rebutting it, but with the underlying purpose of dismissing both the transcendental, that which lies outside human comprehension, and the concept of reason as differentiated from it and desirous of reaching some kind of mathematical certainty of it.

Frühromantiks

From 1798 to 1804, philosophers and academics working in Jena develop the foundations of German idealism that become recognisable after 1800 as the ‘Romantic’ movement.

¹¹⁹ Johann Georg Hamann, “Aesthetica in Nuce: A Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose (1762),” in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe*, ed. H B Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹²⁰ Hamann references Shaftesbury’s work in *Socratic Memorabilia* (1759), which indicates his familiarity.

¹²¹ Johann Georg Hamann, “Aesthetica in Nuce: Eine Rhapsodie in kabbalistischer Prose,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Josef Nadler (Vienna: Herder, 1950), 206.

¹²² Johann Georg Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, ed. and trans. Kenneth Haynes, ed. Karl Ameriks and Desmond M Clarke, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 210.

Friedrich Schlegel shows how many of Hamann's ideas are adopted by the Romantic movement, although with a reintroduction of the numinous: a neo-mediaeval flourish that posits a divine that is singular and metaphysical. One example of this is Schlegel's reconceptualization of *das Mimische* after 1797. *Mimische poesie* is the attempt to mirror the holiness of reality, or the holiness *in* reality, regarding reality as a living symbol of the divine. This originally drives Schlegel towards a preference for history as the basis of 'romance' rather than myth, seen, for instance, in his appreciation of Shakespeare in his role as historian. Around 1800, however, Schlegel develops the idea of the symbol to the point where mythology is no longer in conflict with history; Peer explains Schlegel's evolved position as myth being "a world view which abolishes the course of logical reason and returns to the beautiful confusion of imagination, the original chaos of human nature, and the reflection of it in the course of history."¹²³ Both myth and history work through systems of correspondences between narrative and underlying meaning to locate a knowledge in the past that drives humanity into the future.

Schiller's philosophy begins with his reflections on Kant, and his repudiation of Kant's definition of beauty being an entirely subjective, aesthetic judgment rather than a cognitive one capable of rational disproof according to an external standard. In 1790's *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues, "In order to distinguish whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer the representation, not by the understanding to the object for cognition, but by the imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or pain." The judgment of beauty, therefore, "can be no other than subjective."¹²⁴ This rejects the pre-existing Exoregulatory standards of, for instance, a posited ideal nature, Johnson's 'universal' nature or socially-constructed character types, but it also creates a tension between the self-contained and self-determining internality of the work itself, and the reader's subjectivity in apprehending and constructing an intentional object of that internality and having an individual response of pleasure or pain independent of any essential property of the object.

In letters to Christian Gottfried Körner in 1793, later published as the Kallias Letters, Schiller departs from Kant on virtually this point alone, suggesting an alternative formulation for aesthetic judgment that re-establishes an external standard and a role for reason in relating the

¹²³ Larry H Peer, "Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of the Novel Revisited," *Colloquia Germanica* 10, no. 1 (1976/77): 29.

¹²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, trans. J H Bernard, 2nd ed., ed. J H Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1931), 45.

object to this standard. He argues that the primary principle of reason is freedom, therefore an apprehension of beauty is “nothing less than freedom in appearance.”¹²⁵ Two properties are necessary for the appearance of freedom: autonomy, the “being-determined-through-itself of the thing,” with form governing matter and not the other way around; and heautonomy, the ability of the object to self-determine its own form, such that the rules of form of an object are “both given and obeyed by the thing.”¹²⁶ Schiller gives examples such as dancers moving together “so skilfully and yet so artlessly that both seem merely to be following their own mind,” and a workhorse contrasted with a Spanish palfrey: the palfrey moves so lightly that its movements appear as “an effect of nature that has been left to itself” while the workhorse “trots just as tiredly and clumsily as if it were still pulling a wagon, even when it is not pulling one.”¹²⁷ The workhorse is not ‘beautiful’, because its movement is determined by the matters of gravity and load-bearing weight rather than by its own form or self-determined nature. The parable of the Good Samaritan is given as instructive here, as the Samaritan must act against the socially-constructed matters of selfishness and enmity to follow his essential nature and act in a way that is beautiful.¹²⁸ Since the qualities of autonomy and heautonomy persist in the object whether it is being observed or not, Schiller claims that beauty must be a property that is located in the object and not in the observing subject, and, because it can be referred to an external standard, beauty is not purely internal – even though the form that embodies the quality of beauty must itself be both spontaneous and intrinsic.

Schiller later criticises his own early formulation of aesthetic judgment, and it is rejected by many critics in favour of later works such as *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*. I see a correspondence between the two, though, and an influence on the later German Romanticism. This early definition of beauty carries through into Schiller’s later works by laying the foundation for his distinction between the sense drive (*Sachtrieb*) and the form drive (*Formtrieb*) in humankind, and the naïve and the sentimental in poetry – I shall omit here his arguments relating to ethics and moral beauty, as they do not relate to my thesis. In his 1793 and 1794 essays and letters, Schiller suggests that all people possess a ‘sense drive’ that proceeds from their mere physical existence and locates them out of life context, in a single “occupied

¹²⁵ Friedrich Schiller, “Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner,” in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J M Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 152.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 154, 67.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 174, 63-64.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 159.

moment of time” and with their personality “suspended” as long as they are ruled by sensation.¹²⁹ The sense drive is therefore connected with freedom and lawlessness – the sense drive is intuitive genius, apprehending nature. The ‘form drive’, on the other hand, is the essence of the individual self, constant through change: “It wants the real to be necessary and eternal, and the eternal and the necessary to be real. In other words, it insists on truth and the right.”¹³⁰ The form drive is therefore with abstract principles and rules – the form drive is intention and art.

The sense drive is then aligned with the effortlessness of the early definition of beauty in *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* through the concept of the ‘naïve’: the naïve is the artistic genius that is “guided solely by nature or instinct,” that acts with “simplicity and ease” and names things “by their right name and in the most straightforward manner” – as though the language to name things emanates directly from those things and exists in a transparent state independent of the poet.¹³¹ Schiller goes on to argue that the truly naïve poet “can have only a single relation to his object and, in this respect, he has no choice regarding the treatment.”¹³² Any individuality, affective perception, subjective mediation of the material or idiolect is erased. Schiller introduces the primitivism of Romanticism at this point, arguing that, in ‘modern life’, nature “has disappeared from our humanity.”¹³³ The intrusion of self-consciousness and subjective sentimentality that replaces unmediated nature is what is known as ‘art’, and is the hallmark of what Schiller calls ‘sentimental poetry’: poetry in which the poet foregrounds their own perspective and “reflects on the impression the objects make upon [them]” rather than touching us directly “through nature.” Schiller’s definition of sentimental poetry reminds us of Keats’s later condemnation of the “egotistical sublime,” which he calls synonymously “the Wordsworthian.”¹³⁴ Schiller is a philosopher more than a critic, so does not explicate the difference between a naïve expression and a sentimental expression through an analysis of texts, but he does provide Shakespeare as a model for achievement of the naïve in the modern world, saying that Shakespeare never allows himself as a conscious self to be “grasped” in his work.¹³⁵ In other words, Shakespeare achieves an effacement of self.

¹²⁹ Friedrich Schiller, *Schiller's 'On Grace and Dignity' in Its Cultural Context: Essays and a New Translation*, trans. Jane V Curran, ed. Jane V Curran and Christophe Fricker (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 344-45.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 346.

¹³¹ Friedrich Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795-6)," in *Essays*, ed. Daniel O Dahlstrom and Walter Hinderer (New York: Continuum, 1993), 189, 91.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹³⁴ Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818: John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, 2 vols., ed. H E Rollins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

¹³⁵ Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795-6)," 197.

The secret to the reconciliation of the two lies in the ‘play drive’ (*Spieltrieb*), which permits sense and form to “work in concert.” The play drive marries the spontaneous moment of “becoming” with “absolute being,” and “change with identity,” and permits the artist to move with the intuition of nature while at the same time strive for the expression of the ideal.¹³⁶ The naïve thus reflects the property of autonomy in beauty, through the intuition of nature that is not moved or guided by any outside force; while the sentimental derives from the heautonomous creation of one’s own form – it thus involves both self-consciousness and the adherence to rules, albeit self-determined rules. The play sense is dominated by neither form nor sensory intuition, and this creates a ‘first class’ genius (in Addison’s language) who can strip back their distant-from-nature constructed self in order to intuit the essence of things, but can also balance this with self-conscious government and the imposition of organic form in order to achieve a recursive relationship between the two that moves ever close to the infinitely perfectible. In this way, Schiller says, the artist may achieve something “divine.”¹³⁷

August Schlegel continues the assertion of a required tension/harmony between nature and art, saying that

Form is mechanical when, through external force, it is imparted to any material merely as an accidental addition without reference to its quality as, for example, when we give a particular shape to a soft mass that it may retain the same after its induration. Organical form, again, is innate; it unfolds itself from within [...] In the fine arts as well as in the domain of nature – the supreme artist – all genuine forms are organical, that is determined by the quality of the work.

In conclusion, “[t]he works of genius cannot therefore be permitted to be without form; but of this there is no danger.”¹³⁸ Poetry becomes genius when the artist is able to use it to reveal the union of the individual mind and the essential nature underlying it. The ‘essential nature’ then becomes increasingly metaphysical the closer Schlegel moves to his conversion to Roman Catholicism.

In the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the text that heavily influences Coleridge, Schelling uses the idea of the unconscious to give an empirical basis for moving away from reason and rational enquiry as the sole means by which truth can be known. He argues that the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 353.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 193.

¹³⁸ August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black, ed. Rev A J W Morrison (London: Henry G Bohn, 1861), 340.

unconscious manifests itself through works – artistic and otherwise – that strive towards an essential kind of knowing: that “[h]istory as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the Absolute.” Schelling does not believe that the divine can be known in its true character through reason and inquiry alone, but once the senses are made intuitive it shifts the model from one of pure comprehension to one that requires a mystical level of apprehension. It recalls Theseus’s claim in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that

I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. (V.i.2-17)

Theseus’s text attempts to disparage fancy and intuitive sense, but his subtext subtly affirms them as meaningful and valuable sources of non-empirical knowledge. A human may dismiss “fairy toys” as mere creations of an over-active fancy, but the same meaning is not conveyed when the words are spoken by a person who is themselves a fairy, and whose ‘toys’ have that very night had demonstrable effects.

The contrast between ‘apprehension’ and ‘comprehension’ is also interesting, triggering thoughts, perhaps, of Heidegger’s ‘seizing’ apprehension that precedes comprehension: “we shall never have comprehended these concepts (*Begriffe*) and their conceptual rigour unless we have first been *gripped* (*engriffen*) by whatever they are supposed to comprehend.” The imagination has the power to bring forth forms, but this is of things merely *unknown* to the poet

– not non-existent. It is merely that the poet's cognition has not yet grasped them, despite that their apprehending faculty has *been grasped*.

If we apply this principle to hermeneutics, however, we create a situation in which we attribute to the poet an expression of truth that lies outside the realm of cognition and comprehension, and are therefore able to interpolate whatever meaning or unconscious intention we choose. This meaning, the poet's 'apprehension' of the Absolute or essential nature, can sit in that unconscious realm transcending the literal text, with little exposure to disproof. This results in an idealisation of the poet and an idealised conception of the poetry, although it is difficult to judge which of the two usually precedes the other. Schiller, for instance, is described exclusively through superlatives by de Staël:

Schiller was the best of friends, the best of fathers, the best of husbands; no quality was wanting to complete that gentle and peaceful character which was animated by the fire of genius alone: the love of liberty, respect for the female sex, enthusiastic admiration of the fine arts, inspired his mind; and in the analysis of his works it would be easy to point out to what particular virtue we owe the various productions of his masterly pen.¹³⁹

She does not actually engage in any of this analysis – she is writing a text more political and sociological in nature than aesthetic – but her aggrandising generalisations and lack of critical analysis in support of her findings are by no means anomalous. They are representative of the age.

Christian ethos

Unlike its English counterpart, German Romanticism is conceived of as a consciously and essentially *Christian* ideology. In 1796, before he converts to Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel in his review of Herder's *Humanitätsbriefe*, says that the philosophy of striving for the perfect and infinite is "a very strange phenomenon" and highly "modern"; the earlier Neoclassical age associated with the Ancients aimed to imitate nature rather than transcend it, so the focus on essence over form is the more modern, albeit mediaevalised, practice. In 1797, after Schlegel moves to Romantic thought, he describes Romantic writing as *eine progressive Universalpoesie*: a universal poetry striving towards infinite progress.¹⁴⁰ In 1804 writer Jean Paul (born Johann

¹³⁹ de Staël, 1, 277.

¹⁴⁰ *Athenaeum Fragments* No 116 in Friedrich Schlegel, "Critical Fragments," in *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

Paul Friedrich Richter) writes that the origin and character of modern German poetry is so transparently present in the ideas of Christianity that one could almost be called the other:

*Ursprung und Charakter der ganzen neuern Poesie lässt sich so leicht aus dem Christentume ableiten, dass man die romantische eben so gut die christliche nennen könnte.*¹⁴¹

In 1876 Hermann Ulrici performs an analysis of Shakespeare's drama through a distinctly Christian lens, equating "modern aesthetics" with "Christian aesthetics" and claiming that art "is a channel of divine revelation – a lever for the advancement of the history of the species towards its last great end":¹⁴² "Strange as this may sound, in regard to the structure and position of the modern drama, still it is no less certain that the Church was also its birth-place." The essence of drama is explained as act of Christian worship.¹⁴³ All of Shakespeare's works and characters are therefore interpreted through a Christian lens, and Ulrici defends himself against conjectured accusations of 'Pietism' by proposing that Christianity cannot be 'imposed' on Shakespeare's works because they are themselves intrinsically Christian:

I have therefore confined myself to set forth the profundity and sublimity of his poetical view of life, which was simply on this account sublime and profound, because it was Christian, and Christian also, even because it was profound and sublime.¹⁴⁴

If Ulrici limits himself to the essence of meaning in Shakespearean drama, and looks past the veneer of the text and its corporeal structure to what metaphysical truths it captures, he will only be accessing that which is Christian. Shakespeare becomes Christian because Ulrici's conception of art and manner of processing it is thought of as Christian. There is no way in this circular equation for Shakespeare to *not* produce Christian works.

This correspondence between Romanticism and Christianity helps to understand the privileging of the inward-facing gaze. Rather than the outward act, the poet is expected to look to her or his own emotions in a process of both truth-recovery and self-actualisation. It is the language associated with these ideas that I believe frequently leads readers to claim that the Romantic author is one who self-expresses an individual personality in their works, rather than effacing themselves in the service of a more abstract humanity. Is it easy to take fragments such

¹⁴¹ In *Vorschule der Aesthetik* but quoted in Arthur O Lovejoy, "On the Discriminations of Romanticisms," *PMLA* 39, no. 2 (June, 1924): 246.

¹⁴² Hermann Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art: History and Character of Shakespeare's Plays*, trans. L Dora Schmitz, 3rd ed., vol. 1, ed. L Dora Schmitz (London: George Bell and Sons, 1876), x.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

as Friedrich Schlegel saying rhetorically in fragment No 116 that many artists write a novel, only to provide the reader “with a portrait of themselves.” But it is not ultimately the form drive that is the ‘self’ being referred to here; it is not the self of *personality* that is constant through time. In order to achieve the true purpose of art, the form drive must be balanced with the sense drive, and the sense drive is absent all personality. The person being represented through the text is therefore the self of play drive, and therefore the unity of absolute immediate individuality *with* absolute timeless universality.

English Romanticism

Naturalism ↔ *nativism*

An element dominant in English Romanticism, which is not present to the same extent in German Romanticism and that affects the willingness of a scholar to credit an author with a sophisticated designing intellect, is the concept of nativism. The strain of nativism in the naturalism of the English is what grasps Milton’s earlier description of Shakespeare in ‘L’Allegro’ as merely “Fancy’s child,” warbling “native wood-notes wild” rather than constructing a poem through cognitive and emotional labour, and gives Wordsworth cause to depict the sonnet as the key by which Shakespeare “unlocked his heart” (in ‘Scorn not the Sonnet’) and not a passive tool put to sophisticated use. One of the themes of *Lyrical Ballads* is the return to a hypothesised ‘original’ state of nature, in which people are conceived to have led a purer and more innocent existence – along the lines of Rousseau, who argues that humanity has been corrupted by the influence of society, in what is described by Lovejoy as a “negative conception of history.”¹⁴⁵ Lovejoy describes the specifically English form of Romanticism as “the assumption of the sole excellence of what in [humans] is native, primitive, ‘wild’ attainable without other struggle than that required for emancipation from social conventions and artificialities”:¹⁴⁶ such as that which might be possible in a forest, for instance, by a nymph shorn of social structures, history and even clothes.

Lovejoy isolates Joseph Warton’s 1740 poem *The Enthusiast* as emblematic of English Romantic nativist sentiment, and the primitivism, antinomianism and rejection of ‘legalistic’ rules that characterise it, and argues that it demonstrates a clear contrast with the then-nascent German Romanticism. Schiller, for instance, implies through the definition of the ‘play sense’ that

¹⁴⁵ Lovejoy, “The Parallel of Deism and Classicism.”

¹⁴⁶ Lovejoy, “On the Discriminations of Romanticisms,” 248.

harmony with nature in art cannot result from an opposition of nature and culture; Lovejoy also points out Friedrich Schlegel's argument that, for humans, the artificial *is* natural, and point that "*Eine nu rim Gegensatz der Kunst und Bildung naturliche Denkart soll es gar nicht gebe*" (There should not be a way of thinking that is only in contrast to art and education).¹⁴⁷ Lovejoy paraphrases the German explanation of this phenomenon as: "Those poets whom it is customary to represent as carefree nurslings of nature, without art and without schooling, if they produce works of genuine excellence, give evidence of exceptional cultivation (*Kultur*) of their mental powers, of practised art, of ripely-pondered and just designs."¹⁴⁸

Primacy of feeling

The English Romantics seem less commonly in favour of a rational source for intuition, and instead privilege feeling or a physiologically nonspecific source of spiritual connection with nature.

German Romanticism exhibits an undecided relationship between the apprehension of supra-phenomenal truth and reason: a question constantly under discussion is whether it can be accessed by means of the intellect and rational mind, or whether it can only be done through feeling. Save Coleridge, the English Romantics lean decidedly more towards feeling. Wordsworth, in his 1800 *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, defines all "good" poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," written by a poet who is "possessed of more than usual organic sensibility." It is true that the poet must, in order to write, have "also thought long and deeply" on the subject; but these thoughts are often passive remembrances, with the feeling returning and visiting upon the poet while they rest in a kind of semi-dreamlike state, having only used the rational mind to conjure up a memory of the past knowledge so that the feelings associated with it might be organically reawakened – such as in 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', where the images come almost of their own accord and "flash upon that inward eye" while the poet is "[i]n vacant or in pensive mood." And it is Wordsworth's heart that responds, not his head. Much of Keats's work also suggests a more primitive kind of aesthetic intuition than the objective proofs offered by Schiller, offering the seemingly linear equation of "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' but using a syllogistic logic in its construction that repudiates and rebuffs intellectual understanding.

¹⁴⁷ Lovejoy's translation in *ibid.*, 242-43.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 243-44.

Somewhat characteristically, Coleridge redefines reason rather than responding directly. In *Literary Remains* he likens the conflation of 'Reason' and 'Understanding' to a "Surinam toad with a swarm of toadlings sprouting out of its back and sides."¹⁴⁹ Coleridge argues that only humans, of all species, possess Reason, and that it is the "power distinctive of humanity" that elevates humans above animals and primitive beings: the latter might have something of Understanding but are not 'rational' beings.¹⁵⁰ He calls Understanding a "form of instinctive intelligence," suggesting *prima facie* that it exists as a kind of non-cognitive, immediate sensory apprehension; but then Reason is described as the "noblest form of instinct," both of them sharing the common property of that which cannot be explained or made deliberate. Coleridge further defines Understanding, specifically, as "[i]nstant in a rational, responsible, and self-conscious animal." As he has already defined humans, however, as the only 'rational' creatures, this elaborated explanation leaves it unclear what space is left for Understanding to exist in non-human creatures. Ultimately, even despite the bipartite division of cognitive processes into Reason and Understanding, it seems that Coleridge follows in a large part the other English Romantics and locates 'truth' in something that is mystical.

Not only is truth outside conscious thought, it is also entirely subjective. The source of all truth, which is that which 'Reason' accesses when it unquestioningly trusts itself, is an inner light that "must be found within us before it can be intelligibly reflected back on the mind from without."

That which we find within ourselves, which is more than ourselves, and yet the ground of whatever is good and permanent therein, is the substance and life of all other knowledge.

The nominal distinction between Reason and Understanding predates Coleridge, and a version is seen in Kant and Jacobi, as far back as Aristotle, Plato and Aquinas, but Coleridge does not use it as he finds it in any of these earlier philosophies. Instead, Coleridge redefines it in a way that bleeds Reason into Understanding, and seems to differentiate them only to the extent that Reason can access an instinct that is numinous rather than sensory – pre-dating, not primal – and is constituted by what it intuits: "Thus, God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c, are objects of Reason; but they are themselves *reason*."¹⁵¹ Understanding, although based on instinct, also, *cannot* be Reason, because it does not operate and derive *ab intra*; instead, it derives from

¹⁴⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: with an introductory essay upon his philosophical and theological opinions*, 7 vols., vol. 5, ed. W G T Shedd (New York: Harper & Bros, 1860), 90.

¹⁵⁰ *Aids to Reflection* in *ibid.*, 1: 252.

¹⁵¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Prose and Verse: Complete in One Volume* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co, 1840), 410.

external stimuli, and operates in “the mind of the flesh.” If we trace Schiller’s own philosophical development, the Understanding also operates as the naïve in poetry, without personality and unable to access the essence of humanity or the universal in the self.

Coleridge’s concept of ‘esemplastic power’ from *Biographia Literaria* echoes a number of these same concepts. The esemplastic power is called the faculty by which the poet’s soul is able to perceive the “spiritual unity” of the universe; it is compared with the fancy, which is merely an ‘associative function’. Coleridge uses the terms ‘secondary imagination’ and ‘primary imagination’ in a similar way, where the primary imagination is the faculty that forms impressions, like the Understanding, and the secondary imagination is where we break down the identity and meaning of what we have apprehended in order to “idealise and unify” it.¹⁵² The esemplastic power is the name Coleridge gives to this latter conception of imagination, and it is very similar to what Johnson calls ‘genius’ in *Life of Pope*: “that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates.” The difference in Coleridge is that the acts of combination, amplification and animation create a knowledge product that transcends its materials and reaches closer to the ‘ideal’; in Johnson, that which is achieved is knowledge merely of the universal. The term ‘double touch’ appears only once in Coleridge’s published works, but is spoken of more frequently in his notes and letters, and it is this concept that I suggest explains part of the disconnect between the concept of the esemplastic imagination and the question of whether the intuition necessary to perceive or access Absolute truth derives from rationality or feeling.

‘Double touch’ involves two kinds of knowledge: the phenomenal or sensory, and the metaphysical or essential. After Keats dies, for instance, Coleridge recalls touching his hand on their 1819 meeting and claims that he said prophetically to Leigh Hunt after Keats departed that “There is Death in that hand” – in essence, that the single touch of having experienced Keats’s flesh gave to his intuition a double touch knowledge of Keats’s spirit, and therefore access to a mystical sense of Keats’s impending death through a consumption that had not at that time yet gripped him.¹⁵³ Coleridge does not assign ‘single touch’ consistently to phenomenal knowledge and ‘double touch’ consistently to metaphysical knowledge, however; rather, ‘double’ means literally both of the categories of truth and ‘single’ means one of them but either. Coleridge

¹⁵² Ibid., 297.

¹⁵³ 14 August 1832 in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk; Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, 2 vols., vol. 2, ed. Carl Woodring (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), 89.

writes in his notebook on 25 January 1811 that he has been suffering a physical ailment, and it has made him reflect on the fact that this overriding physical discomfort

transmits double Touch as single Touch: to which the Imagination therefore, the true inward Creatrix, instantly out of the chaos of the elements or shattered fragments of Memory puts together some form to fit it – which derives an over-powering sense of Reality from the circumstance, that the power of Reason being in good measure awake most generally presents to us all the accompanying images very nearly as they existed the moment before, when we fell out of anxious wakefulness into this Reverie.¹⁵⁴

Here, ‘single touch’ refers to a metaphysical essence rather than phenomenal fact. Secondly, Reason is separate from the Imagination, as it is the Imagination that creates the idealised “form” and it is the Reason that then accumulates only those remembered aspects of phenomenal Reality that conform to the form apprehended/created by the Imagination – the images of Reality shown to us are not precisely as they are, but only “very nearly as they existed the moment before” we conjured in our Imaginations a form of truth that required some alteration in or selection of phenomena to suit it.

Coleridge does not say unequivocally that the intuition of the Absolute comes from the Poet’s feelings, but his discussion of double touch shows that it *cannot* derive from reason – and in *Literary Remains* he objects to calling Reason “super-rational,” using it synonymously with the “mysteries of faith” and labeling it *plusquam rationalia*, ‘beyond rationality’, instead.

Endogenesis

The internal source of English ‘intuition’ is conceived of as a wild, mystical nature bubbling up inside the poet and spilling out into the poetry. To the extent that this is a valid observation, I believe it can be traced back to the influence of the earlier Pruning Shears Neoclassicism, which was a peculiarly English phenomenon and that bridged the gap between the mediaeval tradition of miracle plays and the nascent neo-Aristotelian ideology. The German tradition of Neoclassicism centred on a received Spectacles form inherited from France, and the entrenched Protestantism in the 16th and 17th centuries perhaps distanced German thinkers from an analysing poetic nature in terms of the Fall.

¹⁵⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Notebooks: A Selection*, ed. Seamus Perry (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122.

Keats writes to Neoclassical poets that:

Ye were dead
To things ye know not of – were closely wed
To musty laws, lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile! so that ye taught a school
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
Till like the certain wands of Jacob's wit
Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:
A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
Of Poesy.

Keats expresses here the endogenic idea that poetry should be an immersive self-expression of experience and the apprehension of knowledge rather than descriptive *of* that experience from the outside. The exoregulatory following of rules to depict nature may satisfy the 'form sense', to borrow Schiller's category name, but it will 'deaden' the poetic imagination and the poet's intuition of the Absolute. Any poetry formed by this process will thus be nothing more than a mask and a pretence to 'true' Poesy. Instead, Keats argues consistently, such as in his 27 February 1818 letter to John Taylor that "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all." Rather than the poet expressing her or his own remembrances of sense and intuition, poetry should come organically in the moment of feeling as a simultaneous effusion, and should be so essentially true to human experience that it strikes the *reader* as a remembrance of *their* past feelings and experience.

Author as vates

One unifying element of the two Romanticisms is the way in which the author becomes a new kind of vatic channel: different from the ancient conduit for the muse, mad or possessed, but also not a mere 'vates' topos as in the Neoclassic period. This unifying thread comes about as a result of the common rejection of exoregulatory standards of judgment in the success or value of the work; the replacement of those standards with the test of 'sincerity'; and the effacement of the individual authorial self in favour of a neutral channel that can access the impersonal Absolute or the essence of humanity.

Effacement of the authorial self

The exoregulatory standard of mimesis – and therefore the extent to which the work conforms to the socially-determined rules fit for attaining that end – is rejected, and a general test is found in the ‘sincerity’ of the art, instead: sincerity judged nominally with reference to the artist’s outside intention or experience, but substantially in terms of how the reader perceives an emotional sincerity themselves. The text moves from what Erich Frank describes as a Greek view of creation and soul-making – a product of its history, with an essence that is drawn back into the life-cycle when it divorces from its body – and embodies a more Christian view of the soul: it is “a unique, unrepeatable individuality,” with a future but also located outside the circle of time.¹⁵⁵

In 1977 Nigel Alexander can write definitively that “the century after Dryden had seen the complete critical triumph of those who believed that ‘originality’ and ‘spontaneity’ were the only criteria for poetry,”¹⁵⁶ but even 160 years earlier Hazlitt speaks of the special nature of ‘truth’ in poetry as judged only by its sincerity:

The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower: not that he is anything like so large, but because the excess of his size beyond what we are accustomed to expect, or the usual size of things of the same class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal, to the imagination, which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight, or love.¹⁵⁷

It is not, Hazlitt explains, that the language is untrue, even if it is false; rather, it is *even more* true if it is “false in point of fact,” but that naturally “conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind.” Similarly, de Staël can describe Schiller confidently as “a man of uncommon genius and of perfect sincerity” and claim that in artists the qualities ought always to be “inseparable.”¹⁵⁸ This sincerity does not, however, result in an

¹⁵⁵ Erich Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 58, 67.

¹⁵⁶ Nigel Alexander, “Thomas Rymer and *Othello*,” in *Aspects of Othello*, ed. Kenneth Muir and Philip Edwards (London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 100.

¹⁵⁷ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets: Delivered at the Surrey Institution*, 2 ed. (London: printed for Taylor and Hessey, 1819), 8.

¹⁵⁸ de Staël, 1, 273.

intentionalist reading through the individual personality of the author, because of the intervention of the vates and the role of the poet in standing in for the whole of humankind.

Charles Johnson describes Romanticism prosaically as “an attempt to get at the nature of the thing,”¹⁵⁹ and Coleridge claims that his own aesthetic theory works “to reduce all knowledges into harmony” and show what is both true and incomplete in each:

I have endeavoured to unite the insulated fragments of truth, and therewith to frame a perfect mirror. I show to each system that I fully understand and rightfully appreciate what that system means; but then I lift up that system to a higher point of view, from which I enable it to see its former position, where it was, indeed, but under another light and with different relations; so that the fragment of truth is not only acknowledged, but explained.¹⁶⁰

Coleridge is here putting himself in the place of a god. Not only is he able to see beyond what others have perceived to judge the truth of *every* system of knowledge as well as what it itself has missed, but he is somehow placed above those systems such that he can “lift” them up to his elevated plane. For the author to access a universal quantity such as a soul or spirit, there must be an effacement of the unique authorial individual: if we use the language of one of the most influential philosophical texts of the period, they must be both naïve and sentimental.

This is the essential quantity I have tried to capture with the descriptor ‘numinous’. Historian H J Rose elaborates on the meaning of *numen*, explaining that it is a passive concept that means “that which is produced by nodding,” just as *flamen* is that which is produced by blowing.¹⁶¹ *Numen* is therefore that *something* produced when a god inclines its head, without being the nod itself or any will-to-act that produces the nod; it is almost a performative, because the nod is a power that others bow to, perceiving in it a divine and *authoritative* word. But the god creates this effect without effort, and it comes as easily as leaves to a tree. *Numen* is thus divinity, but it is not personified and is distinguished in that sense from *deus*. The author as *numen* inspires the text and illuminates it, but is invisible, mysterious and not a personified self. In Romantic ideology there is a crafting intellect, but the author is overdetermined by the extent to which they are presumed to capture the nature of their subject and their reader. A belief in Enlightenment uniformitarianism will create a perception of universality that will give to all humanity a common essence; to all humankind a common experience of the passions; and to

¹⁵⁹ Johnson, 168.

¹⁶⁰ Coleridge, *Table Talk; Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, 2, 147-48.

¹⁶¹ H J Rose, *Primitive Culture in Italy* (London: Methuen & Co, 1926), 44-45.

all human readers a common soul in the author. This is a neo-Platonic idea, expressed in Yeats's 'Among School Children' in the line "Plato thought nature but a spume that plays/Upon a ghostly paradigm of things."¹⁶² There is an organic and internal order, albeit superficially hidden by idiosyncratic nature. De Staël explains that the artist can hope to see beyond this veneer, however, if they follow the edict to "[b]e virtuous, be faithful, be free; respect what is dear to you, seek immortality in love, and the Deity in nature; in short, sanctify your soul as a temple, and the angel of noble thoughts will not disdain to appear in it."¹⁶³ As a Protestant may hope to be entered by Grace, an artist may hope to be entered by the conceit of inspiration.

The ideal effacement of the authorial self is captured in Keats's theory of negative capability. He first uses the term in a letter from December 1817, but at this time he has not yet fully developed its meaning and uses it exclusively in an ethical sense, to describe the attitude of the poet towards her or his subjects and characters, restraining their own judgment in favour of embodying the ethos of the poetic subject without it being characterised as right or wrong.¹⁶⁴ Almost a year later, in October 1818, he engages further with its meaning and begins to apply it to what Eliot later characterises as "the escape from personality":

As to the poetical Character itself [... that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime ...] it is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – It has no character [...] A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because [she or he] has no Identity – he is continually in for – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity.¹⁶⁵

The individual poetic voice cannot be authoritative, because the poetic language is the merger of the poet's consciousness and the field of its contemplation to access that which is uniform in the human response to it. Rather than attempt a more detailed theoretical explanation or specific text examples, Keats provides Shakespeare – one assumes in all his works – as exemplar.

¹⁶² Lines 41-2.

¹⁶³ de Staël, 1, 303.

¹⁶⁴ Letter to his brothers George and Thomas, 22 December 1817, in Keats.

¹⁶⁵ Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, in *ibid.*

Hermeneutic impact

Transparency of language

A Numinous aesthetic stance produces an attitude to language that sees it as transparent in a Platonic or pre-lapsarian sense. Wordsworth, in his 1800 *Preface*, rejects the argument that the poet ought to consider themselves a “translator” of nature, saying that language does not mediate through a philosopher poet:

its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal.

Throughout the *Preface* there is a tension between the author determining which words to use based on her or his idiolect and will-to-express, and the words being channelled through the author by something as specific as nature or as imprecise as the ‘truth’ that the words will exist to contain – here, the meaning of the language pre-exists the language itself. Wordsworth writes that, the more an author takes herself or himself out of the writing process, “the deeper will be [her or his] faith that no words which [*her or his*] fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth.” Because the pronoun is italicised in Wordsworth’s origin text, it suggests that he regards the words chosen by the *poet* as existing in a different category from the words ‘chosen’ by truth. Schiller also suggests that nature has its own transparent language, separate from the language chosen by humans to express or describe it, arguing that a genius is someone who names things “by their right name.”¹⁶⁶

De Staël evokes the ancient vates in her argument on a complex intention being able to exist prior to even an internal language to ‘mean’ anything. She says, “The true poet, it may be said, conceives [their] whole poem at once in [their] soul, and, were it not for the difficulties of language, would pour forth [their] extemporaneous effusions, the sacred hymns of genius, as the sibyls and prophets did in ancient times.”¹⁶⁷ This is a curious mix of a *fons-et-origo* approach to the author’s text, and a naïve view of how language works – as though an entire poem is waiting, fully formed, somewhere in nature without the need for, or inconvenience of, language. This renders the *text* of the poem curiously redundant in its own expression of itself; and even

¹⁶⁶ Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795-6),” 191.

¹⁶⁷ de Staël, 1, 302.

treats it as something actually *standing in the way of* the full and immediate apprehension of itself. Even Walter Benjamin, writing in the 20th century, argues that the effectiveness of language is not *in* language, saying: “Although language may appear to be effective in so many forms, it will not be so through the mediation of its content, rather it will be effective through the purest opening up of its dignity and essence.” His conception of the end-goal of language is that we achieve an “elimination of the unsayable” so that language “attains the purity of crystal.”¹⁶⁸

Interpolation of the reader

If poetry has contained within it a mystical expression of something fundamental to human nature and the human experience, it gives the reader virtually free reign to interpolate their own feelings and meanings and read into the text an expression of either their own conception of the Absolute or, often, of themselves. This is likely not something that is done consciously, but it is encouraged and legitimised by the following logical chain: humanity is essentially uniform, and the author is expressing something essential in humanity; the reader is human, so whatever is essential about them or strikes them as true is essentially true of humanity as a whole; this essential truth must therefore be that which is represented by or embodied in the text. Keats writes to Reynolds in 1818, for instance, two months after his letter regarding negative capability, that it may be *thought* that “the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse journeys that it may at least appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions,” but the truth is “quite the contrary”: “Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and all last greet each other at the Journeys end.”¹⁶⁹ De Staël identifies the “genius” of Romantic literature being that it “addresses itself immediately to our hearts, and seems to call forth the spirit of our own lives, of all phantoms at once the most powerful and the most terrible.”¹⁷⁰

Impact on the imago

Scholars such as Eagleton often conflate a deification of the *figure* of the author with the author as an individual hermeneutic influence, but I do not believe this accurately reflects the ideology of the period. Eagleton ‘roughly periodises’ modern literary theory in three stages, which he

¹⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, 2 vols., vol. 1, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor Adorno (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 126-27. Translation of these extracts is by David Ferris.

¹⁶⁹ Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 19 February 1818, in Keats.

¹⁷⁰ de Staël, 1, 312.

describes as “a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years.”¹⁷¹ I argue that it misstates the object of the Romantic period’s “preoccupation” and thus mischaracterises it as a hermeneutic practice. Wimsatt and Beardsley offer a similar mischaracterisation when they provide Benedetto Croce as the embodiment of the “philosophic expression of Romanticism,” on the basis that he asks “what did the author set out to do, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?”¹⁷² I do not believe these are the questions.

Rather, I agree with Gasché’s expression of Romantic philosophy: that it is a “paradox” in which “the universal can be achieved only in a manner that is each time singular.” Art, Gasché argues, becomes a paradigm for thought, and philosophy is both accomplished through art and itself constitutes art – just as the symbol, to refer back to Coleridge’s definition, “always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible.” This is one reason why both Friedrich Schlegel and Coleridge write so extensively in fragment form: fragments point, as Schlegel says, towards a higher unity, “toward the heart of things” that – like Derrida’s endless deferral of the Signified – is itself made up only of “a chain or garland of fragments.”¹⁷³ But this leads to the effacement of true authorial identity and the deification of valued authors, because no human *is* singular, nor any thing produced: there is continuity across moments and instances, but the unity is erased by the universal. The author therefore becomes simultaneously no person and every person.

The Romantic author can thus be accommodated by the broader concept of *imago* because, being an intentional object, it is contained by the idea: the *imago* may in one instance be formed from the idea of nature that the reader extrapolates out to all human nature and attributes to the author; it may in another be composed of that reader’s idea of themselves. The *imago* cannot be exhausted by the Romantic author, however, and is not coterminous with it, and the *imago* as a concept is available also to readers who do not restrict it to the numinous or the self-representational. The Romantic author does not render the *imago* redundant.

¹⁷¹ Eagleton, 64.

¹⁷² William K Wimsatt, Jnr and Monroe C Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (Jul-Sep, 1946): 472.

¹⁷³ *Athenaeum Fragments* No 77 in Schlegel, “Critical Fragments.”

Chapter 4

The *imago* and Numinous criticism

Lack of close reading

One consequence of Numinous ideology is that it influences a lack of attentive reading through privileging the reader's sentimental associations or the 'spirit' they feel drawn to over and above the detailed specificity of the text. Friedrich Schlegel argues, "Only in relation to the infinite is there meaning and purpose; whatever lacks such a relation is absolutely meaningless and pointless,"¹⁷⁴ and this not only creates a clear hierarchy that subordinates whatever is perceived as literal and tied to the moment of writing over that which is considered universal or philosophical, it also suggests that all features of a text must be reconciled into a unity of purpose.

Thomas Carlyle selects Dante and Shakespeare as his 'Heroes as Poet', and argues that poet and prophet are "still the same," even in languages where *vates* is no longer used as the word for both of them. He says, however, that they must always be joined in essence, because they are marked by having

penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe; [...] That divine mystery, which lies everywhere in all Beings, 'the Divine Idea of the World,' that which lies at 'the bottom of Appearance,' as Fichte styles it; of which all Appearance, from the starry sky to the grass of the field, but especially the Appearance of [Humankind] and [its] work, is but the *vesture*, the embodiment that renders it visible.¹⁷⁵

Shakespeare – "wide, placid, far-seeing, as the Sun, the upper light of the world"¹⁷⁶ – surpasses even Dante and is the "chief of all Poets," because he is so natural that "[t]he thing he looks at reveals not this or that face of it, but its inmost heart, and generic secret." The actual text of the object is so superfluous that "it dissolves itself as in light before him, so that he discerns the perfect structure of it."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ *Ideas* No 3 in Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow, ed. Rodolphe Gasché (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 104-05.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-36.

As a result, Carlyle uses virtually none of Shakespeare's text in his book. He names Falstaff, Othello, Juliet and Coriolanus as "all kinds of men and objects,"¹⁷⁸ and suggests that Hamlet, Macbeth and Coriolanus all have "suffering hearts," with natures differentiated from each other,¹⁷⁹ but concludes, "We have no room to speak of Shakespeare's individual works."¹⁸⁰ He has said, in terms of individual works, little more than one line from the great "Once more unto the breach" speech from *Henry V* – this, likely quoted from the heart's memory, because Carlyle uses the singular "you, good yeoman" for the plural "ye good yeomen."¹⁸¹ Rather than providing specific illustrations, Carlyle works to diminish and dismiss the manifest text, arguing that the words themselves mostly *hamper* the brilliance of the writer. Carlyle argues that, because Shakespeare had to write for the common person and the playhouse, his works give "only here and there *a note* of the full utterance of the man" [my italics]:

Passages there are that come upon you like splendour out of Heaven; bursts of radiance, illuminating the very heart of the thing; you say, 'That is *true*, spoken once and forever; wheresoever and whensoever there is an open human soul, that will be recognised as true!' Such bursts, however, make us feel that the surrounding matter is not radiant; that it is, in part, temporary, conventional.¹⁸²

In actuality, it seems to be only the smallest part of Shakespeare's words that give a proper account of him as a writer. For the truth, one needs to look past, or beyond, the text.

De Staël performs a similar kind of top-level hermeneutic description as Carlyle. She argues that Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock pioneers the new form of 'romantic' literature and opens up German writing to forms outside of French models by the way in which he is able to "invest unbounded ideas with visible imagery," but that the poetry itself becomes "lost in the immeasurable space which it attempts to embrace." She therefore declines to identify any particular lines or authorial choices that can be used by another reader to construct this inferred space for themselves, arguing that any quotations she might give would be inadequate to the meaning contained by the whole:

It is difficult to quote any particular verses in his religious odes which may be repeated as detached sentences. The beauty of his poetry consists in the general impression which it produces. Should we ask the man who contemplates the sea, that immense body of waters, which is always in motion yet always inexhaustible; which seems to give an idea

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 142.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 135-43.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 144.

¹⁸² Ibid., 144-45.

of all periods of time at once, of all its successions become simultaneous; should we ask him, while wave follows wave, to count the pleasures he experiences while ruminating on their progress? It is the same with religious meditations embellished by poetry.¹⁸³

While it may be true that all quotation is fragmentary and all interpretation merely paraphrase, the only way in which one reader or critic can communicate her or his ideas on a text and receive thoughtful critique on them is by making concessions of this kind. De Staël seems to acknowledge the burden to provide illustrations, defending herself against her failure to do it, but ends up treating the text as perfectly indivisible rather than the sum of many parts, and relying on a disingenuous analogy. Any form of objective – or even subjective but independently verifiable – analysis disappears.

In the event that texts are provided in quotation to support a hermeneutic argument, it is not uncommon to see them recalled imperfectly (possibly from an impression left in memory) or altered in translation. De Staël describes an “affecting purity” in Voss’s Idyll *Louisa*; while she does not *name* the poem she is discussing, she does reproduce the speech from it that she suggests embodies the “most conspicuous” example of this quality – the nuptial benediction given by the pastor, Louisa’s father, which she has translated into English. A similar observation is made of the same passage by the English author of ‘Writings of Voss, the German Poet’ in *The Salopian Magazine and Monthly Observer*, who says, “The pathological purity of this production, which is the principal charm throughout, is no where so strikingly conspicuous as in the Blessing given by the Pastor.” The *Salopian* author then reproduces the same passage as de Staël, starting and ending with the same lines – only, with differences in translation that are not explained by common ambiguities in the original German. *The Salopian*, for instance, has Louisa leaning “for support” on her new husband’s arm in the “simplicity of innocence,”¹⁸⁴ while in de Staël she simply leans on his arm in the “simplicity of her heart”;¹⁸⁵ then, when Louisa leaves the family home, in *The Salopian* her father enjoins her to “[b]e as a fruitful vine about *his* house, and mayest thou soon be surrounded with olive-branches,”¹⁸⁶ whereas in de Staël she is told to go and “be *in thy* house like a fruitful vine, surround thy table with noble branches.”¹⁸⁷ [my italics] Interestingly, the description of the scene in *The Salopian* also relies on a more patriarchal act of the pastor in “uniting his Louisa” with her suitor – unlike de Staël, who refers to it with a

¹⁸³ de Staël, 1, 325-26.

¹⁸⁴ Charles Hulbert, ed., *The Salopian Magazine*, vol. 8 (London: Oxford University Press, 1815), 262.

¹⁸⁵ de Staël, 1, 339.

¹⁸⁶ Hulbert, 263.

¹⁸⁷ de Staël, 1, 340.

passive construction for the pastor as “the marriage of his daughter.” Neither critic identifies details of their transcription that support their reading.

Numinous Shakespeare

The emergence of Numinous ideology attaches most particularly to Shakespeare, both in England and Germany. Four years after Arnold’s sonnet ‘Shakespeare’, in which Shakespeare is depicted as living in Heaven outside the realms of mortal comprehension, Arnold argues that Shakespeare is an unsafe model for English writers because he does not have “purity” of method; instead, he has idiosyncratic ways that are “inseparable from his own rich nature.”¹⁸⁸ From 1794, when the first major forgery is conducted by William-Henry Ireland, the ‘question’ of authorship also gains traction as a direct result of Shakespeare’s popular *imago* outstripping anything that a common man would be able to satisfy. James Shapiro calls Shakespeare’s growing identification with a deity in the 18th century a “crucial precondition” for all subsequent controversies over his identity,¹⁸⁹ but it also hampers the ability of the faithful to regard the words and structure of Shakespearean texts in anything resembling a dispassionate way.

From trope to descriptor

By the time of the First Folio in 1623, a hyperbole of divinity is already employed for descriptions of Shakespeare, such as in Jonson’s paeon:

But stay, I see thee in the hemisphere,
Advanced and made a constellation there!
Shine forth thou star of poets.

In the 17th century Dryden professes “to imitate the divine Shakespeare” in his repurposing of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and by 1728 this kind of language is so common that Voltaire complains Shakespeare is “rarely called anything but ‘divine’ in England.” At this stage, however, the invocation of the divine is merely a trope. Shapiro pinpoints 1758 as the year in which, observably, a divide begins to be popularly commented on between the myth and the man.¹⁹⁰

The transition from a hyperbolic godlike status to something much more ambiguously literal comes around the time of the Garrick Jubilee in 1769, and can be traced through the curious

¹⁸⁸ Matthew Arnold, *Poems of Matthew Arnold (1840-1967)*, ed. Arthur T Quiller-Couch (London: W Heinemann, 1913), 9.

¹⁸⁹ James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 29.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

history of the New Place mulberry tree. In 1756 the owner of New Place, the Rev Francis Gastrell, cut down the mulberry tree that was thought to have been planted by Shakespeare personally. In 1780, Thomas Davies, David Garrick's first biographer writes that Gastrell did this because it "overshadow'd his window, and rendered the house, as he thought, subject to damp and moisture";¹⁹¹ Davies uses the Miltonic phrase "in evil hour" to describe the blasphemy of this act, and called Gastrell a "miserable culprit" who was hounded out of town, but the cited motive was not itself malicious or determinedly heretical. In 1790, editor Edmund Malone reprints the story, changing only Gastrell's motivation: now, he cuts it down directly to spite those Shakespeare pilgrims "whose admiration of our great poet led them to visit the poetick ground on which it stood."¹⁹² Malone calls it a "fit of pique." Once local watchmaker (a silversmith, in fewer accounts), Thomas Sharp, buys the tree, however, it develops its own narrative and is rapidly sold in parts in the fashion of relics of the 'true cross'. Christian Deelman's account of this is both fascinating and comprehensively researched.¹⁹³ The website of furniture and fine art dealers H Blairman & Sons features a table crafted in 1824 with 'WSMT' and '1609' inlaid in its top: the inscription stands for 'William Shakespeare's Mulberry Tree' and the year it is thought to have been planted.

In 1767 the Stratford town council has hopes of Garrick becoming a benefactor for the new town hall. The Council resolution of 11 October 1768 reads:

David Garrick, Esq, the great theatrical genius of the age, and who has done the highest honours to the memory of the immortal Shakespeare (a native of this place) was unanimously elected an honorary burgess of this Corporation, and his freedom was directed to be presented to him in a box made of the Mulberry-tree planted by Shakespeare's own hands.¹⁹⁴

It is in response to this honour that Garrick determines to establish a septennial Stratford Jubilee, with the first planned for what would have been Shakespeare's 205th birthday. Deelman argues that its importance in the history of Shakespeare's reputation cannot be overstated, and says that it "marks the point at which Shakespeare stopped being regarded as an increasingly popular and admirable dramatist, and became a god."¹⁹⁵ Garrick builds a temple to Shakespeare,

¹⁹¹ Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Esq: Interspersed with Characters and Anecdotes of His Theatrical Contemporaries*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London, 1780), 209-10.

¹⁹² Edmund Malone, ed., *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, 1 vols., vol. 10 (London: 1790), 141-42.

¹⁹³ Christian Deelman, *The Great Shakespeare Jubilee* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

¹⁹⁴ Reproduced in James Boaden, ed., *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the Most Celebrated Persons of His Time*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: H Colburn and R Bentley, 1831-1832), 323.

¹⁹⁵ Deelman, 7.

filled with a statue, carvings from the mulberry tree, personal effects such as a leather glove and a signet ring with 'WS' in it, and an altar with the fat of venison smoking. Shapiro writes that the labourer hired to deliver a double-bass viol to the event thought it literally was for the resurrection of Shakespeare. Samuel Foote at the time notes the heresy, that Garrick has "dedicated a temple to a certain divinity called Σχάχεςπειαρ ['Shakespeare'] before whose shrine frequent libations are made, and on whose altar the fat of venison, a viand grateful to the deity, is seen often to smoke," and tells Garrick that the heavy rain that day is "the Judgment of Heaven" and "God's revenge against Vanity" – suggesting, here, that Garrick's true object of worship is his own body rather than Shakespeare's.¹⁹⁶

By 1840 Carlyle can then wave aside concerns over the conflation of Shakespeare and a deity with what amounts to an argument that the conflation is, in fact, borne out:

But call it worship, call it what you will, is it not a right glorious thing, and set of things, this that Shakespeare has brought us? For myself, I feel that there is actually a kind of sacredness in the fact of such a man being sent into this Earth. Is he not an eye to us all; a blessed heaven-sent Bringer of Light?¹⁹⁷

The first instance of someone publicly reconciling any tension between the two ideas of Shakespeare by suggesting two *actual* persons of Shakespeare is, according to Shapiro (and I have not found an earlier alternative), in 1852, in an essay 'Who wrote Shakespeare?' from *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*. An anonymous author argues that the "unsurpassed brilliancy of the writer throws not one single spark to make noticeable the quiet uniform mediocrity of the man." The writer concludes that another person must be the true author, or that the Shakespeare of record retreated to a cave to receive "by divine afflatus" his texts.¹⁹⁸ The language of apostasy, conversion, orthodoxy and heresy, that is then being used in the classical criticism of Homer after Friedrich August Wolf's 1795 *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, itself adopted from the Higher Criticism, attaches to the criticism of Shakespeare and fuels a perception that the name 'Shakespeare' – like the name 'Homer' or the name of any of the authors of the gospels – should be properly separated from the mysterious light illuminating the texts. Current Oxfordians even believe that Oxford must have written not only 'Shakespeare' but all of Shakespeare's English *sources*, as well: everything must be self-originated, as in divine creation.

¹⁹⁶ Samuel Foote, *The Works of Samuel Foote Esq* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1830), cvii.

¹⁹⁷ Carlyle, 146.

¹⁹⁸ Shapiro, 77-78.

The deified body given to Shakespeare by many Romantic critics seems to superficially lend itself to a heightened appreciation of Shakespeare's works and writing, but this *admiration* influences a disposition to read his work in a less generous light: for instance, in terms of finding deliberate rigour and crafting intellect, or endorsing peoples and values contrary to the ethics of the age or the individual reader. Being fashioned into the Romantic figure of the bard and Coleridge's "young man of genius and fire" does not allow Shakespeare to be read fairly for textual choices that even unlikely suspects such as Rymer observe in an earlier, less idolatrous age, when Shakespeare occupies a mortal body.

Textual criticism

Biographical readings

Interpolating biography will intersect with the operation of an *imago* because the intentional object author will often include aspects of biography or perceived biography. The biographical author is not, then, the same as the *imago*; it does not exhaust the *imago*, and is conceived of as an essentialist, unified character that exists in the world independent of any reader. The biographical author can therefore be 'correct' or 'incorrect', whereas the *imago* is not subject to these kinds of tests.

From 1800 onwards, Shakespeare's sonnets begin to take on special prominence, with Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, criticising the English in general in his 1808 Viennese lectures for 'neglecting' them. The reason Schlegel gives is that they never "thought of availing themselves of the Sonnets for tracing the circumstances and sentiments of the poet." Heinrich Heine agrees, saying that the sonnets are "authentic records of the circumstances and sentiments of Shakespeare's life." Frank Harris, in 1909, explains, "The sonnets give us the story, the whole terrible, sinful, magical story of Shakespeare's passion," by telling how Shakespeare fell in love with Mistress Mary Fitton, a maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth I, and sent his friend William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke, to woo her on Shakespeare's behalf. Fitton fell in love with Herbert instead, wooed him on her own behalf, "and Shakespeare had to mourn the loss of both friend and mistress." Sonnets 1-126 are said to tell the story from the perspective of Shakespeare's friendship with Herbert, while sonnets 128-152 are said to "corroborate" that story from the point of view of Shakespeare's regard for Fitton.¹⁹⁹ At the time Harris is writing it is not yet known

¹⁹⁹ Frank Harris, *The Man Shakespeare and his Tragic Life-Story* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1909), 360.

that Fitton had fair hair and complexion, but it is available knowledge that Fitton most likely did not meet Herbert until June 1600, at a masque celebrating the wedding of Lady Anne Russell and Henry Somerset (later created Marquess of Worcester); also, that early versions of sonnets 138 and 144, scathing on the topic of the Dark Lady, appeared in William Jaggard's 1599 octavo *The Passionate Pilgrime. By W Shakespeare*. He nonetheless supports his reading of the sonnets with biographical details from the (imagined) relationships between the three actors, and with readings of the plays – at least three of which, Harris argues, dramatise the same story of love and betrayed friendship.

Harris quotes Valentine from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, after overhearing Proteus pressing his suit on and sexually assaulting Silvia: "Thou common friend, that's without faith or love,/For such is a friend now; treacherous man! [...] The private wound is deepest: O time most accurst,/Mongst all foes that a friend should be the worst!" (V.iv.66-7 and 75-6) Harris claims that the "first lines which I have italicised are too plain to be misread; when they were written Shakespeare had just been cheated by his friend; they are his passionate comment on the occurrence," and that the final couplet echoes sonnet 40, as the line "To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury" expresses the same sentiment: 'foe' and 'friend' are contrasted just as 'hate' and 'love' are contrasted, and they thus tell the same story. Harris submits that this reading of the play "can hardly be otherwise explained."²⁰⁰ In this reading, 151 individual sonnets are collapsed into one narrative point and one act of either simultaneous composition or meticulous plotting in which the later poems replicate the speaker, sentiments and cause for injury of the earlier ones.

Reference to Shakespeare's personal life is used to substantiate these readings, as, according to Harris, Shakespeare understood by this time "what a drag on him his foolish marriage [had] been"; particularly since he had chosen a woman older than himself, who Harris decides was controlling of Shakespeare's freedom and harsh-natured on account of her age. Valentine's attempt to dissuade Proteus from pursuing love, in Act I when Valentine has not yet actually felt the enchantment of love's arrow himself, is that "by Love the young and tender wit/Is turned to folly, blasting in the bud,/Losing his verdure even in the prime,/And all the fair effects of future hopes." (I.i.46-51) Harris says:

Here is Shakespeare's confession that his marriage had been a failure, not only because of his wife's mad jealousy and violent temper, which we have been forced to realise in

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 107.

‘The Comedy of Errors,’ but also because love and its home-keeping ways threatened to dull and imprison the eager artist.²⁰¹

The reference here to *The Comedy of Errors* is Harris’s belief that the comedy of the play would have been better served if Adriana had been loving and constant, inflicting affection that was “inconvenient” upon both husbands, but being true and sincere in it. The only justification Shakespeare must have, therefore, for this depiction of Adriana as a “jealous, nagging, violent scold” is a feeling of enmity for his own wife, which must explain Valentine’s early injunctions against love – despite him ending the play happily betrothed and entirely recovered from his early sentiment. In the play, it is the *disavowal* of love that is depicted as the immature sentiment, along with anger felt for a friend who themselves acts only out of passion. Harris cannot conceive of a text-inherent justification for Adriana’s character, however; nor will he consider thematic or dramatic purposes. This renders parts of the text such as Antipholus’s Act III scene ii exclamation “even my soul/Doth for a wife abhor,” in Harris’s words, “uncalled-for” and “over-emphatic,” even though he is speaking here of someone who is *not* his wife and who has actually mistaken him.

Wordsworth famously writes in ‘Scorn Not the Sonnet’ that “With this key, Shakespeare unlocked his heart.” Wordsworth claims to delay publication of *The Prelude* on account of it being too autobiographical, and it being “a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself,”²⁰² but a belief in Shakespeare’s own self-expression through the sonnets does not necessarily contradict this, because Shakespeare’s “himself” is tremendous and therefore universal. Wordsworth is unlikely to consider *Wordsworth* numinous and all-encompassing because of his familiarity with his own idiosyncratic thoughts and experiences – it is impossible to experience oneself as sublime. Wordsworth can therefore feel the sting of humility when considering the extent to which he has inserted his unique self into his poetry, without applying that same rule to a literary deity such as Shakespeare who can be, as the *numen*, simultaneously without personality.

Of the plays, *Hamlet* is a particularly interesting case example: raised in Germany to a symbol of national identity – take, for instance the Freiligrath poem, ‘April, 1844’: “YES, Germany is Hamlet!” – interpretations of Hamlet tend to follow images put forward by the critics of themselves, of their national identities, of Shakespeare, or of all three. Keats writes in an 1819

²⁰¹ Ibid., 177.

²⁰² Letter to George Beaumont, 1 May 1805, in Ernest de Selincourt, ed., *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 8 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 586-87.

letter that Shakespeare's own middle age was not more happy than Hamlet's days, as Hamlet "is perhaps more like Shakespeare himself in his common everyday Life than any other of his Characters."²⁰³ Hamlet in the text is a courtier and a soldier, an athlete who associates mirth and joy with engaging in "all custom of exercises," and a man with "something dangerous" in him and can leap onto a pirate ship. The arguably more Galenic form of 'madness' melancholy suffered by Hamlet – a debilitating physiological and psychological disorder that fits the modern DSM description of depression – makes way for the more Aristotelian conception of melancholy as a refined, intellectual thing that leads one into contemplative, creative practice, and Hamlet becomes a dreamy, sensitive, passive, physically weak and almost limpid or 'effete' image of an idealised Coleridge or Goethe.

Coleridge adopts Hamlet as an idealised image of himself, giving him a reluctance born of intellectual reflection and introspection: "Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalising habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will, or opportunity; but every incident sets him thinking" – not unlike how Coleridge talks of his own practice of taking contemporaneous notes or composing fragments. His conclusion is the famous line, "I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so."²⁰⁴ For Ulrici, Hamlet is simply too conscientious; while for Richard Loening, a late 19th century jurist rather than a literary scholar or philosopher, Hamlet neglects his duty "because it was too troublesome, too laborious, and thence unpleasant and repulsive."²⁰⁵ Loening comes under fire from his 1894 reviewer, however, for construing a 'Hamlet' derived too little from a popular *imago* of the author. Above all else, his reviewer claims, "It is the defect of his book, in our view, to abstract 'Hamlet' too much from Shakespeare's personality, and from the outer and inner conditions under which he wrote it – to deal with it as an isolated and dependent working out of a problem."²⁰⁶ Herford otherwise calls Loening's text "a piece of massive specialism, exhaustive in matter and subtle in style." E Schröder's preface to a second text, *Shakspere* by Bernhard ten Brink, is quoted with approval by Herford, though, because the five lectures reprinted in the text "are not an introduction to Shakspere literature, but an introduction to the poet himself."²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Letter 8 June 1819, to Miss Jeffrey, Keats.

²⁰⁴ 24 June 1827 in Coleridge, *Table Talk; Recorded by Henry Nelson Coleridge (and John Taylor Coleridge)*, 2.

²⁰⁵ Loening's 1893 text *Die Hamlet – Tragödie Shakespeares* is reviewed and quoted in C H Herford, "Some German Works on Shakspere," *The Academy*, no. 1159 (21 July 1894): 44-45.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

The merging of Hamlet with Shakespeare and even Shakespeare with leading figures in criticism is almost inescapable. Harris, for instance, says:

Some critics are sure to say that I have now given a portrait of Coleridge rather than a portrait of Shakespeare. This is not altogether the fact, though I for one see no shame in acknowledging the likeness. Coleridge had a “smack of Hamlet” in him, as he himself saw; indeed, in his rich endowment as poet and philosopher, and in his sweetness and gentleness of disposition, he was more like Shakespeare than any other Englishman whom I can think of.²⁰⁸

The primary difference visible to Harris is that Coleridge eventually disappears into the “visionary and sophist” and upholder of the “English Church,” whereas Shakespeare stays the course by virtue of his stronger passions, slightly superior richness of nature, and because – in addition to the sweetness and philosophy of Coleridge – the “sensuousness of Keats was in him.” In the conflated image, though, we lose the full import of inconvenient moments such as Hamlet’s command to the English king to put his otherwise close friends to “sudden death,” saying, “Not shriving time allowed.” (V.ii.49-50) This is a callousness and a vindictiveness in excess of anything required, given that Hamlet most likely would have known that Claudius, as politician, would not have told Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the contents of the letter.

Once Shakespeare has been established as divine, as a mirror of humanity or the symbolic embodiment of an entire nation, it is very easy to insert particular ethics or attitudes that to the reader seem axiomatic – such as patriarchal norms. Ideals can easily be interpolated into the texts, such as Johnson’s 1909 argument that Ophelia ‘causes’ Hamlet’s madness by not being nurturing enough for his sensitive nature, and not being a sufficiently sympathetic intellectual equal for his meditations; Hamlet therefore torments her as just punishment for these inadequacies. Similarly, one can construe Shakespeare as having written Oberon as the sympathetic character in his conflict with Titania in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, because she refuses to grant his peremptory wish to ‘give’ him the young boy to be his “henchman” and trophy. Although she explains her motivation as care for the boy and loyalty to the memory of his mother, in language replete with love and the “richness” of the mother’s womb and the ships they watched, Oberon recharacterises her entirely personal reasons as an “injury” to himself and essentially accuses her of lying: by calling the boy a “changeling” he suggests that the boy is not her ward and is instead a stolen child, an illicit possession, to whom she has no greater claim than he.

²⁰⁸ Harris, 141.

Notwithstanding that the source of this appellation is Oberon's self-serving and unevidenced claim, the name 'changeling' persists in many sources today – Oberon's fanciful slur has been taken for granted as fact, over Titania's more persuasive account. In 1862, British magazine *Punch* publishes a political cartoon on the US Civil War, in which Oberon is depicted as President Lincoln and Titania as the State of Virginia. The young boy is depicted as a slave boy, making Oberon the noble Lincoln, fighting to liberate the boy from his slave-owner. Harold Brooks, in the New Arden edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, adopts the same patriarchal attitude towards the quarrel, describing Oberon as Titania's "mentor," taking "charge of her experience in order to guide her into a change of attitude." Brooks argues that Oberon does seek to reconcile himself and Titania on *his* terms, but that this is perfectly acceptable because "it is of course she who is principally at fault": her attachment to the child "has become an obsession," and, in refusing Oberon's demand for the child and for her virtually undivided attention, she "has got her priorities wrong." Oberon, therefore, "must compel her," because she will not renounce that which he demands for them to be reconciled.²⁰⁹

If Shakespeare is to embody the heart of a patriarchal Christian nation, then his works must be read in support of the values and injunctions that inhere in this – regardless of textual ambiguity otherwise.

Erasure of textual elements

Connected with the tendency to merge interpretation and (even imagined) biography, is the erasure of character elements or indicators of thematic ambiguity or complexity that complicate an interpreter's ideal meaning. King Lear could not be played with Lear and Cordelia's death until 1838; even in 1823 an actor as highly-regarded as Kean could not gain sufficient public support to revert Tate's 'happy ending'.

Coleridge is also not immune to this erasure. He calls Shakespeare the "myriad-minded man" and says that he "passes into *all* the forms of human character and passion,"²¹⁰ [my italics] but when performing a more 'global' criticism he tends to favour sweeping statements that essentialise and generalise characters, despite the fact that he will contradict those

²⁰⁹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F Brooks, Harold Jenkins, and Brian Morris, The Arden Shakespeare, (Bristol: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1979), cvi-cvii.

²¹⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria. Edited with his Aesthetical Essays.*, ed. J Shawcross, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), Chapter XV.

characterisations when dealing with a discrete text instance in concrete form. Coleridge argues that Shakespeare depicts the soul of 'womanhood' – specifically, how Coleridge himself regards ideal 'womanhood' – and therefore exits the texts entirely in order to broadly characterise this essence. Coleridge says that:

in Shakespeare all the elements of womanhood are holy, and there is the sweet yet dignified feeling of all that continuates society, as sense of ancestry and of sex, with a purity unassailable by sophistry, because it rests not in analytical process, but in that same equipoise of the faculties, during which the feelings are representative of all past experience, not of the individual only, but of all those by whom she has been educated and their predecessors even up to the first woman that lived.²¹¹

Women, here, are not human, because they have not evolved; therefore, if Shakespeare is thought to represent any kind of realistic human in his works, he cannot represent women as represented here, because this kind of woman simply does not exist. Coleridge goes further, however, and creates an homogenous female character who is said to occupy all cast list names, but who simultaneously occupies none of them in their complexity. He says:

Shakespeare saw that the want of prominence [...] was the blessed beauty of woman's character, and knew that it arose not from any deficiency, but from the more exquisite harmony of all the part of the moral being constituting one living total of head and heart. He has drawn it, indeed, in all its distinctive energies of faith, patience, constancy, fortitude, – shown in all of them as following the heart, which gives its results by a nice tact and intuition, without the intervention of the discursive faculty, – sees all things in and by the light of the affections, and errs, if it ever err, in the exaggeration of love alone.

Coleridge himself does not uniformly agree with his own statements, however: the 4 November 1813 edition of the *Bristol Gazette* reported of his 2 November *Macbeth* lecture that he refuted what he called "the prejudiced idea of Lady Macbeth as a Monster," on the grounds that "her constant effort throughout the play was, if the expression may be forgiven, to bully conscience." This is supported by Coleridge's *Marginalia*, as in the 6th volume of Rann's 1786-94 edition he writes next to Lady Macbeth's "raven is hoarse" soliloquy that "character of L.M. bullying her own feelings"; two scenes later, regarding her claim to be willing to dash out the brains of the babe that milks her, that she is "still Bullying."²¹² He says that "desperate reprobate Villains talk

²¹¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Essays: Coleridge's Lectures on Shakespeare and Other Poets and Dramatists*, 4 ed., ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J M Dent & Sons, 1914), 67.

²¹² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: with an introductory essay upon his philosophical and theological opinions*, 7 vols., vol. 4, ed. W G T Shedd (New York: Harper & Bros, 1860), 771-72.

no such language.” Lady Macbeth is not a monster, but nor is she an “exquisite harmony” lead only by the heart, absent of discursive faculties, and with an excess only of love; arguably, it is an excess of the discursive faculties that allows her so acutely before Duncan’s murder to bully her conscience and intuition.

In 1778, Malone’s biographically-inflected dating of the plays creates an Enlightenment-friendly portrait of growing wisdom and improvement. In order to achieve this, some plays are placed outside of what we estimate now to be their true sequence, illustrating the way in which his decisions seem to be driven more by a requirement to complement the *imago* than by the textual features of the plays – in an extraordinary failure to read stylistic development, *The Winter’s Tale*, for instance, is dated by Malone to 1594, almost two decades too early. Malone institutes the first thorough tradition for reading Shakespeare’s plays biographically (after Gildon’s briefer sketch in 1710), but this is developed further by Edward Dowden in 1875: Dowden attributes to Shakespeare a progression of discrete ‘life stages’ based not so much on the technical quality he reads in the plays, but the tone and character depiction – even as according to an inaccurate play chronology. In a classic example of *petitio principii*, he then uses the life stages that are based on his interpretation of plays to validate the tones and character depictions originally constructed.

In order to construe Shakespeare’s final play, *The Tempest*, in a way that supports the final ‘Serene Shakespeare’ life stage, Dowden reads Prospero selectively as a kindly, avuncular magus rather than an angry and capricious prince. When Prospero tries to reassure Miranda that no one has truly died on the ship because the storm was an illusion, and that Prospero has

with such provision in mine art
So safely ordered that there is no soul –
No, not so much perdition as an hair
Betid to any creature in the vessel,” (I.ii.35-38)

his volatility produces an anacoluthon, keeping the semantic link between souls and perdition but disrupting the grammar of the sentence. F1 prints the text as “no ſoule”; Rowe in 1709 uses the word ‘soul’, and Steevens in the 1790s keeps the word and adds the m-dash to further heighten the grammatical break. It isn’t until the Cambridge edition of 1863 that the line changes to quieten Prospero’s mental perturbation by eliminating the anacoluthon by ‘emending’ “soul” to “soil” – as in, there are no hairs lost to them, and they didn’t even get dirty. Serenity and continuity within Prospero – and, thus, by extension, Serene Shakespeare – have

been restored. The 1980 BBC production of *The Tempest* then uses this corrupted line, probably unaware of its origins, and directs down Prospero's violence throughout.

In *Othello*, reliance is similarly placed on the reader's *imago* and conception of ideal meaning rather than the language. Othello being a black man is in keeping with the weight of textual evidence. He is described in various ways with the term 'black' six times before he commits himself to 'black thoughts' – after which the colour could arguably be used in a metaphorical or symbolic sense, designating his frame of mind and *moral* decline in the way that black routinely is used in white-privileging societies. After the point at which it could be read figuratively, the word 'black' is used to describe him five more times. The earlier instances include the phrases "old black ram" (I.i.87-88), "more fair than black" (I.iii.286), simply "black Othello" (II.iii.22) and Othello's own explanation for Desdemona's unfaithfulness – "Haply, for I am black." (III.iii.268) Stereotyped black physicality is also used as an epithet with "Thick-lips." (I.i.68) In the source text of Giraldi Cinthio's 1565 *Hecatommithi*, Othello is told that Desdemona is "like someone to whom your blackness has become distasteful" (*come colei a cui è già venuta a noia questa vostra nerezza*), in an even more unequivocal reference to Othello's literal appearance. Like Rymer, Friedrich Schlegel reads Othello to be black; Coleridge and many other Romantic critics do not. Interestingly, both arguments are supported by an imagined racial 'essence' that is derived from values located outside the play, however.

Schlegel says that Othello "has been made by Shakespeare in every respect a negro" but not because of dialogue such as "black Othello" in the text. Instead, it is because

We recognise in Othello the wild nature of that glowing zone [the Barbary Coast] [...] His jealousy is not the jealousy of the heart which is compatible with the tenderest feelings and adoration of the beloved object; it is of that sensual kind which in burning climes has given birth to the disgraceful confinement of women and many other unnatural usages.

The prurient yet puritan sound of the phrase "unnatural usages" echoes Iago's accounts of Desdemona and Othello's lovemaking and the "beast with two backs," and the choice of "confinement" marries with Iago's claim that Desdemona has been "stolen" from her father's house. Iago is not the character we might think to read in sympathy with, but Coleridge argues *against* Othello's blackness from precisely the same position. In preparation for his 1818-19 lectures he argues in his marginalia that Othello *must* be a light-skinned 'noble Arab' because we cannot suppose Shakespeare to be "so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous Negro plead

Royal Birth – Were Negros then known but as Slaves.” In his lecture of 9 November 1813 he is confounded at Roderigo calling Othello “Thick-lips,” saying that it creates a “wilful confusion” between the supposedly two different ‘types’ of African, the Moor and the Negro, and that there could never be mutual love between “a beautiful Venetian girl” and a “veritable Negro.” In his marginalia in preparation for this lecture he says that such a situation would be “monstrous,” and that it “would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance, in Desdemona.” Coleridge is confident that this is something “which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated.” Despite calling Iago “[a] being next to Devil,” Coleridge uses the exact same expression, ‘disproportion’, as Iago does:

Ay, there’s the point: as – to be bold with you –
 Not to affect many proposed matches
 Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
 Whereto we see in all things nature tends –
 Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,
 Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural. (III.iii.226-32)

Charles Johnson supports Coleridge and draws swords in Coleridge’s argument with Schlegel – but, on the basis that the “disgraceful confinement” of all women and demand for “female exclusiveness” is the province of Arab men and not black men. Therefore, Schlegel’s reading of Othello as black must be wrong not because his reading of the text is flawed, but because his allocation of essential racist characteristics is flawed.²¹³

Romantics also depart from Rymer in their assessment of Othello’s final heroism and nobility. As previously discussed, Rymer regards Othello to be a self-serving coward.²¹⁴ A C Bradley, however, calls Othello “by far the most romantic figure among Shakespeare’s heroes,” and exculpates Othello by virtue of his elevation beyond the mortal, to the “wonderland” realm of the supernatural. Othello becomes beyond sin and, in Bradley’s eyes, is blameless.²¹⁵ Bradley calls “hopelessly un-Shakespearean the view that Othello might be considered acting on the “savage passions of his Moorish blood” (most likely a reference to August Schlegel’s argument), not because of its racist foundations but because he considers it antithetical to the nature of the *author* – in other words, to Bradley’s Shakespeare *imago*. He states as fact that Shakespeare did not have an “historical mind” and did not occupy himself with problems of “*Culturgeschichte*”

²¹³ Johnson, 215.

²¹⁴ T S Eliot’s published opinion on this will be discussed in the next Part.

²¹⁵ This discussion takes place across a section of Lecture V on *Othello*; reproduced in A C Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan and Co, 1905), 186-98.

[sic]; rather, “if anyone had told Shakespeare that no Englishman would have acted like the Moor, and had congratulated him on the accuracy of his racial psychology, I am sure he would have laughed.”

Instead, Othello is blameless because his entire nature is “romantic”: he is more poetic than Hamlet; he “has watched with a poet’s eye the Arabian trees dropping their med’cinable gum, and the Indian throwing away his chance-found pearl”; and, finally, “he comes to have his life crowned with the final glory of love, a love as strange, adventurous and romantic as any passage of his eventful history, filling his heart with tenderness and his imagination with ecstasy.” Bradley does not specify that which makes Othello’s feelings more transcendental than the ordinary early infatuation of first meeting and the honeymoon phase; what he does do, however, is use his construction of Othello’s most noble and romantic nature to recharacterise the strangulation of Desdemona as “no murder, but a sacrifice.” Othello is not a proud man seeking to control that which has threatened his security of manhood, but a man who acts “in honour, and also in love” to “save Desdemona from herself.” In Bradley’s reading, the final scene is one only of “majestic dignity and sovereign ascendancy,” and nothing has passed that could but increase our admiration and love. This is Bradley’s construction of the way in which Shakespeare captures the essence of romantic imagination made to doubt itself. The only error of perfect nobility is that it trusts too completely, but that is also what defines it as itself.

Othello is also entirely excused by Coleridge, on the grounds that Othello has been overcome, in feeling and in reason, by his response to Iago’s lies. Coleridge’s assertion to himself, in preparation for his 1818-19 lectures, is vehement:

let me repeat that Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago, such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago’s honesty as Othello did.²¹⁶

If Iago is superhuman, then of course no mere mortal has the ability to question, disbelieve or otherwise assert individual will against him; in the first breath it is that any man “would” entertain the same conviction as Othello, but this is quickly elevated to “must,” so that Othello becomes *every* man and therefore acting in concert with a nature that he has no ability to escape. It is therefore not Othello’s choice to murder his wife, for it is no choice at all: it is Iago’s fault and, to the extent that Iago is a superhuman construct of “motiveless malignity,” it is no fault, for no blame can be attributed to that which is motiveless, and no blame can be laid at the feet

²¹⁶ From marginalia in the Samuel Ayscough edition of *The Dramatic Works of Shakespeare*.

of mortals who do nothing more than simply be mortal. Coleridge asks the reader to “perseveringly place ourselves in his situation, and under his circumstances,” demanding that unquestioning sympathy be afforded to a man who kills rather than converses – Coleridge is so confident that we will see ourselves feeling and acting exactly as Othello did if we only see things from his point of view. It is almost offensive the implication here that we, too, would universally be so quickly spurred to violence and the denial of another’s bodily integrity. Coleridge reads the final scene as Othello *excusing* himself by *accusing* himself, but this is merely another way of locating blame outside the body of the person who acted.

It is true that, in the final moment, Othello bifurcates himself such that he can play act a ‘Christian’ self executing an ‘infidel’ self, but this does not absolve the Christian self of blame because both the selves remain him and have always been so. He either wears the mantle of Christianity so lightly that he is willing to commit a *felonia de seipso*, a crime against oneself, for which it is not possible to repent, on the grounds that it supposedly demonstrates his fundamental nobility; or he is acting out an unbroken pattern of control in which he is fundamentally unwilling to subject himself to humility or the independent agency and judgment – possibly rejection – of others on their terms.²¹⁷ If Othello retains a Muslim ethos of suicide beneath his conversion, then what he has actually done is demand the care and attention of those who ought to be allowed to grieve in peace for Desdemona, his victim, as it is a *fard kifaya* (a communal duty) still to wash and shroud a believer who has suicided, pray over them and bury them inside a Muslim cemetery.

Coleridge, however, accepts Othello’s self-serving bifurcation and places blame on the past Muslim self for whom the Venetian general Othello need take no responsibility; and, as for that Venetian general, it is allowed that he take Desdemona’s life, because “Othello had no life but in Desdemona.” Because Othello possesses and Others her as “his angel,” her life is bled of any value in itself should it falter from his idealised conception of it and threaten his view of himself as its ideally masculine counterpart. Coleridge finishes his note by asking “As the curtain drops, which do we pity the most?” Clearly, for Coleridge, Shakespeare does not intend ‘mankind’ to pity the one who was murdered, and Coleridge does not acknowledge at any point the problem of Othello’s professed Christianity, or, thematically, the question of Othello’s complete failure of faith.

²¹⁷ Discussion of the status of suicide in Renaissance England can be found in, for instance, Michael MacDonald and Terence R Murphy, *Sleepless Souls* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 15.

In the Numinous period, the text is a private object and criticism tends to be an activity conducted in the solitude of a reader's own apartments, developed through contemplation and letters exchanged with friends. It is therefore easy for these more leisured readers to treat the text as a veritable *tabula rasa* and imprint on it a set of meanings and sentiments that accord with their own conception of the world. This is a setting that changes in the late 1800s, however, as the text becomes an accepted object of institutional study and public discourse, and the domain of 'men of letters' moves into the universities and is subject to peer review prior to publication. This evolution of the environment is both driven by, and driver of, a matching change in ideology, aims and vocabulary that wrests the author – at least nominally – from the reader's own subjective self-identification.

Part 3: Scientism

Chapter 5 The Scientistic paradigm

General introduction

The Scientistic paradigm represents a movement that conceives of literature as an object 'worthy' of institutional study. Shifting from the Romantic *belle lettrist* approach that lacks a level of semantic rigour in its mode of appreciation, the Scientistic hermeneutic product is a critical construction of the text that uses the textual artefact as a springboard to go beyond it and into a deductive conclusion regarding meaning and/or significance that is not transparently communicated by it.

The 'truth' of a text is, in the Scientistic paradigm, the findings one gains from a scrutiny, measurement and evaluative assessment of the text. This construction can be deemed either objectively valid or invalid, as it is ostensibly founded upon objective data, such as a forensic analysis of metre, biography conceived of as a verifiable chronology of life events, or bibliographical records. This is the commencement of the properly hermeneutic approach to literature, if 'hermeneutics' is taken to be the explication of something in or about the text that is not present on the literal surface of it, and it is also the start of scholars overtly claiming to 'interpret' the text. The Neoclassical and Romantic periods are both marked by a tendency to claim individual appreciations or constructions of a text as universal and incorrigible, but in the Scientistic paradigm critics attempt to prove *validity* for their judgments. However, for all that scientism focuses on the understanding of an objective and empirical truth, because it is based on a scientific method that eschews claims of final truth and certainty, all findings are subject indefinitely to falsification and therefore remain open. A scientistic interpretation is ideologically modeled on a scientific theory, and both are premised on the evidence available at the time, so can likewise be disproved by any new evidence that comes to light. In the Scientistic paradigm, the *imago* can both constitute a piece or source of that evidence, or can influence the way in which other evidence – such as internal textual evidence – is construed.

Historical development

I mark the second half of the 19th century as the time at which the Anglophone world exhibits, in critical mass, a literary approach that models its method of understanding and analysing the ‘truth’ of texts on the scientific method and deductive reasoning. Literature is first included as a discrete object of study in English tertiary curricula in 1828, with the Reverend Thomas Dale teaching one course on ‘The Principles and Practice of Literary Composition’ and another on ‘Lectures on English Literature’ at the then-called London University – at the time a private institution with no power to grant degrees. These lectures are not part of a core curriculum, and focus on the study of language and vernacular.²¹⁸ The inclusion of English literature as a study in King’s College in 1831 is then only justified through a reliance on the accepted authority of Numinous philosophy: F D Maurice in 1840, in his inaugural lecture as professor of English literature and history at King’s College, London, claims that the study of English literature has the power to “emancipate us [...] from the notions and habits which are peculiar to our own age,” and connect us instead with “what is fixed and enduring.”²¹⁹ The study of literature takes the rest of the century to properly gain acceptance, and it achieves this by being associated conceptually with the sciences.

Cambridge initially permits the study of English literature only insofar as it can be accommodated within the existing schools of Greek, Latin and Anglo-Saxon. *Beowulf*, for instance, is taught at Oxford and Cambridge not as a complex and fascinating poem, but as a lumber room of philological exemplar – in Tolkien’s 1936 lecture, ‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics’, he argues that the poem *as a poem* had all but disappeared under the weight of historical and philological study heaped on it. The first chair of English literature proper isn’t created at Cambridge until 1911, and it isn’t until the 1920s that literature is conceived of as a study worthy of attention independent of philology. At this time the school comes under the influence of Richards, F R Leavis and William Empson, and they institute changes that rise to the challenge of finding a version of literary studies that goes beyond an historical or philological analysis, but that avoids the charges of subjectivity and imprecision leveled at the criticism of the Romantic period: to be accepted as a legitimate and respectable object of study within academic institutions, literature must present itself as empirically-grounded, and its findings must be replicable and have some claim to objective truth; to be conceived of as intellectually

²¹⁸ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/english/departments/history-of-the-english-department> University College London

²¹⁹ Recorded in Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 14.

and aesthetically worthwhile, on the other hand, they must also be directed towards analyses that have thematic or hermeneutic value.

The Numinous assumption of an essential truth infusing every instance of ‘true’ art sets the tone for the Scientistic, academic idea of the hermeneutic meaning of a text being contained within it like a wrapped parcel, needing only the proper decoding strategies to be worked on the particularities of the text in order to discover it. It also works as an effort to validate textual study by association, snatching some reflected glory from religion by positing literature as a kind of modern, enlightened faith. Iser supports this last interpretation, arguing in 1982 that these kinds of commendations appeal to people at the time because art and literature had been “promoted to the status of a secular religion which occupied a leading position in bourgeois society.”²²⁰ Richards, Leavis and Empson therefore find other ways in which to combine the same quasi-religious essentialism of literature that had theretofore dominated aesthetically, with the expectation of scientistic data and a teachable methodology. These core principles eventually suffuse the general climate of English literature studies, and influence the space given to the author in the discourse within it.

Monism

Ideologically and emotionally, many critics are still drawn to the possibility of finding an essential ‘truth’ at the heart of the text, but lack the tools by which to assert this – if one is looking for hermeneutic and non-literal ‘meaning’, neither intention nor language work in a transparent enough way to be capable of forming an Ideal object. Only a divine entity has the power to construct a unit of meaning that is entirely self-consistent and of which [s]he is entirely self-aware, and only a divine entity has the ability to use an unfallen language to communicate this in a way that is wholly and perfectly communicated to an audience: only the divine can erase the effect of idiolects, layers of consciousness, and subjectivity. If the ‘divinity’ of the author is obviated, then language and intention cease to be coterminous; ‘meaning’ instead becomes a shifting product of idiolects, and both conscious and unconscious intentions on the parts of author and of reader.

The Romanticism-inflected pursuit of human truth and what C S Lewis calls the “unchanging human heart” manages to nonetheless remain unexpectedly at the heart of Scientistic ideology.

²²⁰ Wolfgang Iser, "Ulysses and the Reader: Wolfgang Iser Discusses the Importance of Ulysses in the Development of 'Reader Response' Criticism," *James Joyce Broadsheet* 9 (Oct, 1982): 1.

This is the main departure from the principles of Romanticism and the mystery of numinitas: the introduction of empiricism to an essentialist discourse. It produces a paradigm founded on monism, a core belief of a single ideal meaning, but fraught with methodological anxieties regarding the most objective and replicable way of ‘uncovering’ the ‘correct’ one.²²¹ Each Scientistic method manifests these premises in its own way, but the fundamental marriage of often fundamentally incompatible ideas remains constant.

An example of this diagnosis coming from others outside this thesis is Wimsatt and Beardsley’s description of Allan Tate’s work on Shelley. In his essay ‘On three types of poetry’ Tate writes:

We must understand that the lines

Life like a dome of many-coloured glass

Stains the white radiance of eternity

are not poetry; they express the *frustrated will* trying to compete with science. The *will* asserts a rhetorical proposition about the whole of life, but the *imagination* has not seized upon the materials of the poem and made them into a whole. Shelley’s simile is imposed upon the material from above; it does not grow out of the material.

Wimsatt and Beardsley characterise this as “trying to describe something mysterious and perhaps indescribable, an ‘imaginative whole of life’, a ‘wholeness of vision at a particular moment of experience’, something which ‘yields us the quality of the experience’.” They say:

If a poet had a toothache at the moment of conceiving a poem, that would be part of the experience, but Mr Tate of course does not mean anything like that. He is thinking about some kind of ‘whole’ which in this essay at least he does not describe, but which doubtless it is the prime need of criticism to describe – in terms that may be publicly tested.²²²

This slightly derisive tone might suggest that Wimsatt and Beardsley themselves reject empiricism and essentialism: they don’t. On their next page, for instance, they identify three of the foundational terms of analysis to be ‘integrity’, ‘relevance’, and ‘unity’. They have merely chosen a different way of achieving a sense of ideological resolution within their own practice. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, a text can contain and intend its own essentialist meaning; the author’s subjectivity is then removed from the hermeneutic equation, and the critic merely

²²¹ A number of accounts of the origins of literary studies in academia exist that support this analysis. For instance, the comprehensive account of the beginnings of English literature as a university subject in Barry. A narrower account of the tendency of early literary criticism to compete with the sciences, or to position itself as one of the sciences, is in Jon Adams, “Making a Science of Literary Criticism,” *Endeavour* 31, no. 1 (2007).

²²² Wimsatt and Beardsley, 474.

needs to suspend her or his own subjectivity in order to properly analyse the quantitative data provided by the text for the key to its Ideal, unifying essence.

E D Hirsch Jr, the 'father' of intentionalism, opposes the text-internal approach of Wimsatt and Beardsley, but is ideologically aligned. Hirsch locates the essence of the text in the *author*, and considers the text to be a transparent container for this meaning. In this way, Hirsch reduces the ability of the author to be in possession of a meaning that is different from that which can be derived from the text, and also construes the text as a transparent and almost prelapsarian unit of language. Finally, he reduces participation in meaning-making down to only the first-established authorial intention by dividing the reader's subjective assessment from their objective comprehension: the two are separated by 'understanding' being defined as the reader's simple and almost mechanical processing of the text – merely unpacking its boxes – and 'evaluation' as any subjective meaning-making or apprehension of significance that occurs *after* understanding has been achieved. Through this strict delineation, Hirsch argues that it "might even make it plausible to think of literary study as a corporate enterprise and a progressive discipline," because the scientific demands for validity have been united with an Ideal, monistic meaning-object that is self-identifiable and verifiable.²²³ Hirsch's position can be considered antithetical to Wimsatt and Beardsley's position, because Hirsch locates meaning in the author while Wimsatt and Beardsley locate it in the text and reject the author, but the ideological priorities that underpin the two unite them as members of the same underlying paradigm.

A problem that persists through all Scientific criticism is that, arguably, the kind of hermeneutic, subtextual meaning that critics commence at this point to properly search for, is the exact kind of meaning that ceases to exist if one tries to frame about it in too specific, finite or self-identical a way. It cannot *be* studied in the same way that a biological organism or a material substance can, nor is it an empirical force like gravity that can be measured, that produces consistent and objective effects on the world.

John Searle, for instance, divides a reader's comprehension of a text into the meaning that is immediately understood – which he calls the 'literal meaning' – and the meaning that is mediated by the reader's subjectivity, which he calls the meaning that must be 'understood'. He argues that the literal meaning endures and has an essential existence – despite only being capable of being understood against the background of readers having subjectivities, idiolects

²²³ E D Hirsch, Jr, "Objective Interpretation," *PMLA* 75, no. 4 (Sep, 1960): 461-63.

and experiences that makes that literal meaning intelligible to them – but does not explain how the literal meaning is unchanged by this condition or how it can be identified without ‘understanding’. Instead, he uses an analogy with movement:

When one says the notion of the movement of the body only has application relative to some coordinate system, one is not denying the existence of motion. Motion, though relative, is still motion.²²⁴

Motion, however, unlike meaning, has an empirical existence in the world, measurable and quantifiable by physics. Objects *actually* move; bodies, material objects, gases and the particles of which they are all composed do shift relative to other particles as a matter of demonstrable fact. It is not the motion that is relative, but the measurement of it, and the coordinate system used by one person to record that motion and communicate it to another. This, therefore, is not an appropriate analogy. Text has material properties, but the language of which it is composed has no *meaning* independent of the human measurement of it: the meaning is not the *sign*, but what the interlocutors have determined that it signifies. This is how it is possible for people to disagree on what even the ‘literal’ meaning of a word is. It is fatuous to draw a clear line between two things when they are interdependent, and when one exists as a construction of the other.

It is true that not every critic agrees with my characterisation: Paul de Man, for instance, argues that the entire secular hermeneutical tradition, from Schleiermacher on, shares with Jauss a resistance to essentialism. I do not agree. I argue that this is not borne out by the language of Schleiermacher’s lectures, nor by the Romantic flavour that is later given to Schleiermacher-oriented hermeneutics, which speaks of intuitively accessing the ‘spirit’ of the author. This language of methodological essentialism continues into the modern Scientistic era, seen in James Phelan in the 21st century:

One of the challenges and pleasures of interpretation is finding the ‘right translation,’ uncovering the code that allows us to claim cognitive understanding of the text, to hear the ‘click’ of the numerous signals of the text rearranging themselves into our new system of intelligibility.²²⁵

The confusion that I see is that Scientistic literary criticism purports to have a progressive, disinterested, empirical and anti-essentialist nature that it does not have. It is overtly premised

²²⁴ John R Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 132.

²²⁵ James Phelan, "Toward a Rhetorical Reader-Response Criticism: The Difficult, the Stubborn, and the Ending of *Beloved*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 39, no. 3 (Fall, 1993): 713.

on a method that uses the word 'knowledge' to indicate not truth but a reliable *theory* of the truth, and therefore deals in probabilities more than in demonstrables. Sciences *can* combine the probabilistic study of indicative evidence without resorting to pluralism in the face of uncertainty, though, because they are studying something that does in fact exist, regardless of their theories on it. The irony is that, by trying to follow a scientific, empirical and objective method for something that does not provide the materials needed to perform this kind of an assessment, Scientific critics are often led into the exact opposite: a subjective process of self-referential validity. The sciences work upon the material world; therefore, the projection of a truth outside what is currently known, or ever able to be known, does not require the postulation of an imaginary Ideal. By adopting a premise of 'science' for a study of something – 'meaning' – that does not exist in the material world, the person testing the evidence for whether or not it supports or disproves the theory of meaning must also create that meaning in the first place; the process, thus rendered, will always be recursive. What results from this is the unending tension within Scientism over what evidence is relevant and permissible for what purposes, and where the meaning comes from against which a critic is to judge the validity of their theory of interpretation. Hirsch calls his landmark 1969 text *Validity in Interpretation* in order to make this exact point: his argument is that, if the author's intention for meaning is not self-identical with textual meaning, there is no objective standard against which any analysis of evidence can be judged for validity. The irony emerges in this example in the fact that the primary source of the author's meaning is the critic's analysis of evidence.

Any situation in which modern secular hermeneutics departs entirely from the principle of monistic essentialism is grouped together, for the purposes of this thesis, under the 'Disruptive' umbrella in the next Part. To the extent that any hermeneutic criticism remains in the Scientific paradigm, it posits an essentialist meaning – and this holds in principle, even if it is a transcendent meaning that perpetually eludes identification, but against *the idea of which* an interpretation may be judged.

The use of 'evidence'

Possibly as a result of its beginnings as a compromise between Romantic essentialism and institutionalised empiricism, the spectre of unworthiness haunted, and arguably still haunts, the study of literature. This is a conclusion supported by Jon Adams, for instance:

There persists a continued sense of methodological inadequacy, giving rise to an environment where supporters of literary study are repeatedly obliged to defend their

positions, to explain why – in the absence of a solid conceptual framework – there is more to studying literature than merely chattering about poets.²²⁶

It was, perhaps, the obol due to the ferryman for literature's passage from the private practice of women and men of letters to the institutionalised practice of education and academic publication. The 'practical criticism' of Richards, establishing a blind trial in the manner of scientific experimentation, and the 1957 *Anatomy of Criticism* by Northrop Frye, with its supposedly empirical taxonomy, cataloguing the 'natural world' of literature, can be seen as examples of this. Similarly, Tzvetan Todorov and Arnold Weinstein's 1969 language that "the structural analysis of literature is a kind of propaedeutic for a future science of literature."²²⁷ Russian Formalism follows a similar path, justifying itself prior to the Russian Revolution with reference to the authority of empiricism and cognitive studies. Roman Jakobson's 1919 characterisation of literary studies uses the term "literary science" and recalibrates the study towards the generic and away from the individual manifestation. He says, "the object of literary science is not literature but literariness, ie. what makes a given work a literary work."²²⁸ Wimsatt and Beardsley mock a fellow critic's desire to arrive at an interpretation that can be "publicly tested," but themselves, in that same essay, label their endeavour "the public science of evaluating poems" and "the science of objective evaluation" – they contrast this with "the art of producing them."²²⁹ The expectation that the quantitative validity of the hermeneutic outcome is guaranteed by the principle of falsifiability (because others can test whether following the same methodology in relation to the same text data produces replicable outcomes) validates the critic's own conclusions – as long as peer review relies on the same evidence.

I perceive Scientistic criticisms as falling into two broad groups: one group is focused on the study of knowledge peripheral to the text, with the text existing as evidence of some external body of knowledge, such as philology or forensic bibliography; the other group is focused on the study of the meaning and/or 'success' of the text, with the text existing as self-sufficient or partial evidence of its own meaning and significance. The former group will not be discussed here, because there are no hermeneutical implications to consider in relation to the *imago*. The latter group includes approaches such as formalism and New Criticism, genre study, archetypal criticism, traditional biographical criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, semiotics and structuralism, and constitutes the focus of this study. Because Scientistic methodologies are

²²⁶ Adams, 31.

²²⁷ Tzvetan Todorov and Arnold Weinstein, "Structural Analysis of Narrative," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 3 (Autumn, 1969): 71.

²²⁸ Quoted in Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 23.

²²⁹ Wimsatt and Beardsley, 476.

defined by their reliance on a quasi-scientific epistemology that treats material as ‘evidence’, the hermeneutic approaches will be divided within the paradigm on the basis of what evidence is authorised, within that approach, to be used for the determination of meaning.

Wimsatt and Beardsley, for instance, adopt a quasi-legal classification of admissible and inadmissible evidence: all intradiegetic and extradiegetic materials are ‘evidence’, along with the affective responses of the reader and the private intentions of the author, but each item must be separated into its proper category – “internal evidence,” “external evidence,” or “intermediate evidence” – and then properly classed on that basis as hermeneutically admissible or inadmissible, much as a judge would classify evidence in pre-trial.²³⁰ Meanings arrived at by readers are then either valid or invalid depending on whether they can be supported by permissible evidence, and whether they are replicable by other readers (particularly authoritative professional readers), based on a similar method being applied to the same evidence. Therefore, the question of permissibility is vital when categorising the critical methods – the figure of the author is one species of evidence, albeit conceived of and named differently depending on the method, and can be classed as either allowable or not, depending on the academic community.

Extradiegetic vs intradiegetic hermeneutical reliance

Hermeneutically-oriented studies that permit an extradiegetic hermeneutical reliance will be referred to as ‘EHR’ methods: evidence for the meaning of the text can come from outside the text, and can therefore include the figure of a text-external author such as the so-called biographical author.

Scientistic methodologies that insist on a strictly intradiegetic reliance for hermeneutic evidence instead will be called ‘IHR’ methods: in these, evidence for the meaning of the text can only come from inside the text, and thus exclude the text-external author – as in D H Lawrence’s advice to “Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.”²³¹

²³⁰ Ibid., 477-78.

²³¹ D H Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1995), 12.

Structure of the Part

The Scientific paradigm will here be used to group the critical methods that are connected by the paradoxical yoking of essentialism and empiricism. They also tend to have common origins within academia, but an institutional provenance is not required – Freud and Ernest Jones, for instance, are influenced by the Scientific ideology, but do not develop the psychoanalytic method from within an institution.

In the previous two Parts I have commenced with a general analysis of the impact that paradigm – Exoregulatory and Numinous – has had on the *imago* in criticism, before examining illustrative instances of criticism in more detail. That structure is not appropriate for the current part. The beginning of the 20th century ushers in a radical diversification and proliferation of critical approaches, and an increase in speculative rather than demonstrated theory. This Part will therefore seek to balance comprehensiveness and completeness by discussing both EHR and IHR bodies of Scientific criticism, each through a selection of representative methodologies – there is not space to attend to every strand. If a strand is dominated by one or two scholars – such as traditional hermeneutics and Schleiermacher, or the New Criticism and Wimsatt and Beardsley – I will privilege depth over breadth; if a field is more diverse, such as Intentionalism, I will attempt to provide a sample of the range.

The primary goal of this Part is to demonstrate how in no strand is there any express aspect of the theory that is the same as the *imago* concept, and no analysis of the role played by a figure of that nature in the construction of meaning. Because Scientific theories reference the ‘author’ frequently, either as a figure that – in some guise – ought to be admitted as evidence of meaning or as a figure that ought *not*, I believe it is important that I demonstrate the way in which the normative author of Scientism differs from the functional category of the *imago*. For those IHR methodologies that proscribe the author in the practice of interpretation, it is equally important that I respond to those concerns and, where appropriate, show that the *imago* can and does coexist with these theoretical objections; there is, frequently, a reliance on the *imago* concept in practice, which is disclosed through semantic leaks and logical inconsistencies but may or may not be fully conscious. This functional presence of an *imago* therefore undermines an assumption that the IHR Scientific paradigm makes the *imago* illegitimate. Each section will therefore draw the strand of criticism back to its relationship both with the author and the *imago* author concept.

Chapter 6

The *imago* and Scientific criticism permitting EHR

General introduction

It is possible to superficially construe EHR methodologies as already covering the ground of the *imago*: in other words, to argue that EHR approaches such as biographical criticism provide an author-concept that is the same as the *imago*. I submit that they do not. The implied definition in EHR use of the verb 'to mean' is 'to intend', which draws in the name of the author insofar as the focus of interpretation is the intention of meaning and how the physical author or historical/social context informs that intention; this bifurcates between the text being a literal manifestation of the lived experience of the author, with events and people from the writer's life appearing transparently in the surface of the text, and it being a more oblique manifestation of the *unconscious* of the author – but both are prongs of the same fork. Because the focus of EHR criticisms is in forming an interpretation of the work in light of the author (or, forming an interpretation of the author in light of the work – both quantities trapped as they often are in a self-validating hermeneutic circle), it is perhaps easy to see the name of the author as performing the same role as the *imago*.

Because EHR methodologies rely on essentialism in terms of both meaning and author, the EHR author figure is not the *imago* because it is normative and posited as a falsifiable ontological entity. The author that emerges from EHR criticisms is often diversified and dependent on the material each critic is privy to and gives weight to; but, in the language of the criticism, that diversification is not acknowledged and valid individual variation tends to be denied in practice. The author figure used in biographical criticism *is* the author; the author figure constructed through psychoanalytic criticism *is* the author (an even more true and essential author than the one seen by people without the proper insight, in fact); and the author figure contributing the subjective psychological aspect to the text in hermeneutics *is* the author, even if no-one can fully state what or who that author is.

In EHR theories there is not an open acknowledgement that there exist different, and mutable, concepts of the author, or that each of these might be equally valid hypotheses of a more complex object – in these theories, the old one must be discarded as flawed for the new one to be accepted. Nor is there an analysis of how differing author concepts may have influenced different yet equally valid hermeneutic results. At best, the author is segmented into a

progression of discrete identities, following one after the other over the author's life: there is an 'early James', for instance, and an entirely different 'late James': an ambiguous expression in an Early James might be attributed to the psychological realism of a character's taciturn nature, while the same ambiguous expression in a Late James might be construed as an example of his increasingly experimental authorial style and desire for an ambiguity that transcends the individual consciousness or personality of any single character. But the two Jameses and constructions do not coexist in the one text, and a different reader cannot have a competing conception of James at the same point in his life, without the question being raised of which James is the more correct.

In the event that readers do entertain inconsistent author-images, we often see the biographically-documented experiences that a critic 'finds' in the text being chosen arbitrarily to suit the *imago* held by the critic, even while the *imago* goes unstated; a different critic, possessed or convinced of different biographical facts and holding a different *imago*, then finds different references in the same text evidence the support their own intentional object. The same can be said for biographical experiences that are *not* found to be represented, in that they are used as proof that a particular text (absent the biographical reference) could not possibly be a product of a particular author (where the *imago* includes that aspect of biography). For instance, arguments in favour of the Earl of Oxford being the true author of *Hamlet* instead of Shakespeare rely on the episode on board the pirate ship being traceable to Oxford's life, even though the numerous murders are inexplicably not expected to have a similar parallel. The *imago* in these practices can be remarkably flexible according to the needs of the interpreter, sometimes with aspects of a text or a biography being conveniently ignored because they have no perceived correlative, or at other times being introjected or hypothesised because the interpreter *wants* a connection to exist to validate her or his personal author image.

Studies viewing the text as a manifestation of the unconscious operate in essentially the same way, but travel even more flexibly if anything from author to text and text to author. Conjectural unconscious motivations are elicited from the biographies of the author and then matched with textual interpretations that suggest the same psychological orientation or impulses, in a way influenced in no small part by confirmation bias. Alternatively, the text can be used as the source material for a psychoanalytic examination of the author – life events can be sought out to validate the hermeneutic act, or the text alone can exist as a self-proving demonstration. The existence of a life event is sometimes taken as substantiating a particular unconscious

motivation in an interpretation of the text, even if that life event itself has been partly constructed or hypothesised *from* the text in the first place. Leon Edel, for example, works psychoanalytically in his five-volume biography of Henry James. He interprets a reflection on self-worth in the texts immediately after James is hissed by the gallery on the 1895 opening night of *Guy Domville*, and then finds a renewed confidence and liberation in the major novels of James's later years – Edel treats James's later texts thematically and stylistically as the result of a successful literary catharsis. Edel validates the reconstructed life of James as text-pertinent evidence, as he conceives of the purpose of literary biography as being to *make that hermeneutic justification*. It is difficult to ascertain whether he begins with a text-based interpretation and works backwards to the author's biography and psychological intentions from that, or the other way around, but in his 1957 text on the subject he defines the *raison d'être* of constructing a biography for literary figures being to “enfold a subjective author's self-perceptions into his output,”²³² because “for surely the writing of a literary life would be nothing but a kind of indecent curiosity, and an invasion of privacy, were it not that it seeks always to illuminate the mysterious and magical process of creation.”

Notwithstanding, some of the same biographical material as Edel uses has been used to justify different interpretive conclusions. F O Matthiessen, for instance, writes of the *Guy Domville* episode and James's subsequent works that, “Instead of being crushed by the collapse of his hopes [...] he felt a resurgence of new energy.”²³³ These cannot help but pit two James *imagines* against each other – one more resilient than the other – and the hermeneutic effect is to cast texts such as *The Other House*, *The Figure in the Carpet* and *What Maisie Knew* in entirely different lights, as though one were a correct construal of textual ambiguity and the other an incorrect one (or could any changes here be influenced by James's switch to dictation for his works?). Both of these competing interpretations turn, really, on the way in which each critic chooses to use several enigmatic notes from James' notebooks: on 22 January 1895 that he must “Produce again – produce; produce better than ever, and all will yet be well”; and, on 23 January, “I take up my own old pen again – the pen of all my old unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles. To myself – today – I need say no more. Large and full and high the future still opens. It is now indeed that I may do the work of my life. And I will.” These kinds of statements will generally reek of both self-confidence and self-doubt, constituting as they do a cheer-squad-to-

²³² He distinguishes literary biography as having a goal distinct from other forms of biography – or, really, biographies of people known for different types of acts or works. The purpose of a literary biography involves the greatest amount of psychoanalysis and conjecture regarding root motivations and inspiration.

²³³ F O Matthiessen and Kenneth B Murdock, eds., *The Notebooks of Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 179.

self. There is no empirical reason to construe the statements absolutely in one sense to the exclusion of the other; there is also no absolute basis on which to claim that either sentiment dominates the construction and thematic import of the texts that follow. James also enters a period in which he comments frequently on economic insecurity, and – to the extent that one might like to credit it in a hermeneutic treatment of any work – explains pieces such as *The Other House* and *The Turn of the Screw* as intentionally constructed around ‘trashy’ themes and second helpings of pathos and thrill in order to give the “idiots” their “bellyful.” In 1898 he claims in informal negotiations with his to-be agent J B Pinker that the “abject depression” he had suffered was, “as to disposing of my work, that I scarce cared what I did with it.”²³⁴

Ultimately, in EHR methods the author-figure used is treated as though it is *the* author. Differing hermeneutic results are generally explained in terms of that author being perceived incorrectly, or valid perceptions of the author applied to the text incorrectly (with an improper application of method); it does not seem to be the case that competing interpretations can coexist simultaneously, each grounded comfortably upon differing ideas of the author that are individually incorrigible with respect to external evidence. Following a strict Scientific EHR approach to interpretation will result in scholars being authorised – and even required – to reconcile *imago* and interpretation, and to offer the identity of an evidenced extradiegetic humanised and unique *fons et origo* as proof of the validity of their interpretations.

Stylistics

I regard stylistics to be the closest parallel in criticism to the *imago*, but it is still essentialist in terms of the authorial personality deemed to be the source of the style, and it fails to be meta-paradigmatic in the way that the *imago* is because of its heavily Scientific reliance on evidence. More than having mere reliance, stylistics is, itself, composed almost entirely of evidence.

Stylistics and *imago*-inflected analysis share a common methodology: as stylistics tries to establish principles capable of explaining choices made by people in their use of language, analysis influenced by an *imago* tries to choose between competing or ambiguous explanations for authorial choices on the basis of what is compatible with a reader’s author image. The two can therefore overlap in practical execution. Robert Chodat’s explanation of style makes the

²³⁴ Letter dated 27 March 1906. Unpublished letter to J B Pinkner stored in the Yale Library and quoted in Alfred R Ferguson, “The Triple Quest of James: Fame, Art and Fortune,” in *On Henry James: The Best from American Literature*, ed. Edwin H Cady and Louis J Budd (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), 73.

parallels clear: “when speakers describe the style of a sentence or passage, they do not sound like they are offering a ‘miniature idea’ or paraphrasing what it ‘really’ means. They sound instead like they are describing human personalities, which, like styles, are typically regarded as *expressions of* something, not *propositions about* something” – for instance, boisterous, restrained, cautious, sentimental.²³⁵ For a practical illustration of this overlap, one can look to Chodat’s own analysis.

Chodat takes two sentences from Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*:

A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.

He analyses perceived aspects of style, such as the bracketing of clauses and the relative length of sentences, commenting that both the inclusion and bracketing of ‘mercifully’ could suggest the communication of empathy; unless, however, one reads it in the context of its surrounding sentences, which describe the slow shift of the natural world in the Hebrides during the First World War in baroque prose and complex sentences of thirty-eight, twenty-nine and forty-four words. These surrounding sentences contain inverted clauses, adverbs in unconventional places and the anthropomorphisation of nature and the earth. Against this background, the shorter statements “sound shockingly blunt, neutral, and reportorial. From the standpoint of the natural world, the difference between ‘twenty or thirty’ young men seems to be negligible, unworthy of high rhetoric.” If read in an even broader context, however – that of the novel as a whole – Chodat sees a telling contrast in style between the studied phrase and the earlier quotation of Tennyson’s *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, evoked here by the use of the word ‘shell’. Readers may then read into the merciful death of Andrew Ramsay “a scoffing retort to all the Victorian ideals of sacrifice” that Tennyson celebrates, and into the blunt bracketing and “prosaically inexact” twenty or thirty young men an echo of the poetic approximation of six hundred that “suggests that the event will be viewed as something other than a tragically grand loss worthy of a Poet Laureate’s attention.”²³⁶

Chodat presents this as an examination solely of text-manifest style, but he reinforces the validity of the hermeneutic product with reference to his *imago* of Woolf. He says that the parallel of six hundred with ‘twenty or thirty’ turns the latter into “something other than a tragically grand loss worthy of a Poet Laureate’s attention,” and comments that this ironic

²³⁵ Robert Chodat, “Is Style Information?,” *Partial Answers* 11, no. 1 (2013): 148.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 150-51.

minimisation – an ironic minimisation that *he has constructed* from the text but that now is relied on as something text-immanent – “recalls Woolf’s pointed critique of literary patriarchy.” These are interpretive claims, but they are presented as fact in part, I suggest, because they are compatible with Chodat’s conception of Woolf. Finally, the interpretive claims with which he concludes rely on his individualised perception of the extratextual, which is brought in to modify the experience of the textual and the validity of his experience of it:

If, as I noted a moment ago, the framework of ‘Time Passes’ suggests that the bracketed sentences are disinterested and neutral, these larger frames of reference – the novel as a whole and Woolf’s cultural moment – suggest a mocking, angrily ironic tone, an expression of critical defiance, a denunciation of the Great War and all the outworn archetypes and attitudes that engendered it.²³⁷

Of interest is the retreat, in the final moments, from the person of Woolf. Instead, the analysis is displaced onto her “cultural moment.” But even this depersonalised “moment” would only be relevant if he believed her to embody, and generally agree with, the aspects of it that support or help to produce his interpretation.

The *imago* may be seen as a complement to the study of style, because it brings together threads more diverse than style; in some applications it encompasses style, and, as has been demonstrated, can overlap with stylistics explications when style is treated as ‘that which suggests elements of a human personality’. The *imago* is the perceived totality of that personality.

Hermeneutics

Initially, under Schleiermacher, the hermeneutic activity relies on something very similar to the proposed *imago* insofar as the author is thought to contribute an indefinable and unsystemisable psychological (*psychologische*) aspect to the meaning of the text (and the reader’s [re]construction of that meaning). Had Schleiermacher published a coherent manifesto, we might know more confidently the extent to which his use of the authorial figure correlates with the *imago* proposal; absent this, it is possible to say that the general quality of his language suggests he likely has in mind an *essentialist* psychological contribution. Schleiermacher argues that the art of textual interpretation is simply the art of understanding, but, for him, the object [deliberate syllepsis] of that understanding is the way in which language

²³⁷ Ibid., 151-52.

has been shaped by the unique author of it. He relies on an early anticipation of speech-act theory, characterising the text as a dialogue between author and reader, with neither interlocutor disconnected from the origin or reception of meaning – he argues that one of the conditions of understanding is a knowledge of the speaker. Schleiermacher defines discourse as “a mediation of thought among individuals,” expressed through the medium that allows communication of thought between different people: language. Literature is, therefore, an application of rhetoric: “The unity of hermeneutics and rhetoric results from the fact that every act of understanding is the obverse of an act of discourse, in that one must come to grasp the thought which was at the base of the discourse.”²³⁸

Schleiermacher’s modern literary hermeneutics observes a distinction that is similar to Saussure’s differentiation between *langue* and *parole*: it assumes that there exists a web of language rules that unite reader and writer in their shared premises *and* that simultaneously divide them in their individualised comprehension and usage of it. It also posits a thinking, feeling and intending author, influenced by motivations both conscious and hidden, and assumes that one of the tasks of the reader is to understand the discourse in light of this person. The path he takes to this argument is a criticism of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant insists on an absolute division of knowable appearances and unknowable ‘things in themselves’, and the issue Schleiermacher takes with this forms the basis of his own theory. The grammatical aspect of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics is similar to Kant’s idea of objective ‘things in themselves’, but in Schleiermacher the object is everywhere mediated and modified by the individual’s internal processing, their subjective, their spontaneous sense-making – and this is the psychological or divinatory aspect. Schleiermacher departs from the rigidly Idealist tradition he is responding to, and Andrew Bowie argues that this movement was influenced by his time sharing a house with Friedrich Schlegel from 1797: “Both Schleiermacher and Schlegel are suspicious of the correspondence theory of truth, but they are equally suspicious of the kind of scepticism which fails to account for the ways in which we do in fact engage with the world in terms of ‘holding as true’.”²³⁹

In his lectures, Schleiermacher expressly acknowledges the difficulty of balancing the precise with the personal – the ‘precise’ being articulated in what he terms grammatical interpretation,

²³⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, “‘The Hermeneutics’: Outline of the 1819 Lectures,” *New Literary History* 10, no. 1 (Fall, 1978): 2.

²³⁹ Andrew Bowie, “Introduction,” in *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Andrew Bowie, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xxiii-xxiv.

or the study of the language of the text; and the ‘personal’ in the psychological (or what he also calls ‘technical’) interpretation, ie the study of the individual person using that language. He suggests that the weight afforded each part will depend on the ideology of the person performing the task: if one believes that language “stipulates” the thinking of a person *ab initio*, one will tend to privilege the grammatical interpretation; if one believes that language is only a way of communicating pre-existing thoughts, one will privilege the psychological; if one sees reciprocity, they will be equal.²⁴⁰ Schleiermacher, for his part, tends to move to different points along the continuum depending on the material he is discussing and the mood or focus of the lecture he is giving. He never undertakes a full-text application for a later reader of his to analyse and draw explication from, but he does give general examples of when the psychological might predominate – such as when interpreting personal letters and possibly lyrics or polemics. He also gives examples of when the grammatical might be relied on more heavily, such as with more ‘objective’ subjects such as histories, epics and commercial discussions. Most of the time, however, he suggests that neither the grammatical nor the psychological will be close to exclusively influential, and that a ‘text’ will properly “lie between these two points.”²⁴¹

Discourse is therefore composed of two parts, united in expression: language and thought. The reader has the task of understanding the ‘speech’ that comprises them insofar as it derives from the whole language *and* insofar as it derives from the mind of the thinker.²⁴² The text is then the vehicle by which inner thoughts and impulses, existing in the author previous to the creation of the text, are translated (as far as possible) into outer expression and communicated to another person, the reader; the task of the reader is then to allow a grammatical analysis of the text to be informed by a psychological analysis of the writer and her or his idiosyncratic use of language. The *imago* is not a figure in the theory, because the theory posits a unified and essentialist intending subject, but it will necessarily be a figure in the practice.

Something that I believe is a misreading of Schleiermacher’s lectures is the depiction of this psychological aspect as being purely empathic, spiritual and evidence-neutral. Schleiermacher seems to suggest an essentialist intending author as the source of ‘correct’ meaning, but he is not simplistic about the nature of the self. In addition to an acknowledgement that language itself is in a constant state of flux, he argues that individuals, the way they articulate themselves and, indeed, the very things they have to articulate, are likewise always evolving. He explains:

²⁴⁰ Schleiermacher, 3.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁴² Ibid., 2.

Every discourse depends on earlier thought. [...] It follows that every person is on one hand a locus in which a given language is formed after an individual fashion and, on the other, a speaker who is only able to be understood within the totality of the language. In the same way, he is also a constantly developing spirit, while his discourse remains an object within the context of another intellection.²⁴³

In this, we can see a recognition of the divide between what might be termed the ‘internal self’, and the self as it exists in the conception of others – Schleiermacher does not see these two as the same self, and he recognises the stasis of the self as it is captured (however imprecisely) in a text at a given moment in time and remains stable in its material form regardless of whatever subsequent evolution the flesh-and-blood individual might experience, able to be interpreted in ways unrelated to that self.

There is also a divide between the language of the author, the linguistic competence of the reader, and the language as it exists as a social web outside of them both; but, simultaneously, an argument that the three will comeingle in the actual practice of understanding. This is not the argument of a naïve Romantic stereotype, but it is perhaps easy to see how the headline could emerge: the fundamental problem is that any ‘psychological’ aspect, as Schleiermacher understands it, will always be difficult to establish precise, impersonal rules for, simply because it is subjective in the pure sense of attempting an ethical understanding of a subject who is Other. This isn’t something from which Schleiermacher hides, either, saying that neither the grammatical nor the psychological can ever be complete in itself as a discrete source/object, so “one must go from one to the other, and it is not possible to give any rules as to how this should be done.”²⁴⁴

Schleiermacher defines something very close to an *imago*, without giving name to it – he explains that one can “perceive the author as [she or] he functions in the language: partly bringing forth new things by [her or] his use of language, partly retaining qualities of language which [she or] he repeats and transmits. In the same way, from a knowledge of an area of speech, I can perceive the author’s language as its product and see how [she or] he operates under its aegis.”²⁴⁵ He therefore advocates a “subjective reconstruction” of the biographical life and character of the author, a reading of the author’s complete oeuvre in order to understand a more complete authorial vocabulary, and an attempt to place the work within the history of the period

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

in which it was written.²⁴⁶ Publishers are specifically encouraged to use prolegomena to lay out these kinds of information. Neither interpretation nor the author is conceived of as a closed system. The author is herself or himself seen as a developing subject, but one that is able to be treated as a fixed entity in the practice of interpretation, and interpretation is seen as an “infinite process” that can always be “rectified” and in which “[n]o individual inspection of a work ever exhausts its meaning.”²⁴⁷ Regardless of the more nuanced and self-aware nature and function of Schleiermacher’s ‘psychological aspect’ for which I am arguing, the author for Schleiermacher is still a “locus” and a “spirit” working within and shaped by the totality of grammar, and the goal is to apprehend this figure as accurately as possible – given the caveat that full and proper apprehension is impossible. The author is not an accuracy-neutral intentional object that is studied for its own influence over interpretation; thus, the *imago* is still absent, despite being so almost-articulated in the theory. The author-figure theorised by Schleiermacher seems to be very close to the *imago* formulation suggested by a great deal of criticism and professional interpretation.

Dilthey and Poulet take Schleiermacher’s concept of the intending author further away from the *imago*. Poulet posits a *cogito* in every work, which he attributes to the name of the author and describes in mystical terms as “this mind who all alone by himself fills my consciousness and who, when I say *I*, is indeed that *I*?”²⁴⁸ Underneath his rhetoric he articulates something very close to the implied author, though. The ‘authorial spirit’ that animates the pages of the text, “impregnates” every word and “reveals” itself “to us *in us*” is in one sense the intending spirit of the author pre-existing the text, who uses her or his lived experience to choose between that word and this, but it is only that author or “spirit” in terms of the reader’s own construction of it. Poulet acknowledges that the author embodying the reader’s “I” is nothing more than a reconstruction. Poulet’s idea of the *cogito*, which is often explained by others as the essence of the *author*, actually exists in the “innermost self” of the *reader*, and its existence is limited to that space. Poulet says, “The subject who is revealed to me through my reading of it is not the author, either in the disordered totality of his outer experiences, or in the aggregate, better organised and concentrated totality, which is the one of his writings.” Instead, “the subject which presides over the work can exist only in the work.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 14.

²⁴⁸ Georges Poulet, “Phenomenology of Reading,” *New Literary History* 1, no. 1 (1969): 57.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 58.

Poulet qualifies, in passing, that the reader's apprehension of the text-internal author may in practice be influenced by material from outside the text if they associate one with the other, saying, "To be sure, nothing is unimportant for understanding the work, and a mass of biographical, bibliographical, textual, and general critical information is indispensable to me." But he argues that these extratextual cues cannot determine the meaning of the text independently of the text, because "this knowledge does not coincide with the internal knowledge of the work."²⁵⁰ The influence of an *imago* figure is here very close to being stated, and the hint of it is what differentiates Poulet from the later body of mostly North American work on the implied author; what differentiates it from the current proposal is that any inter- or extratextual aspects drop in the final moment to a subordinate place, in preference to a differently-named implied author. A text-internal construction that is unique to each individual work and that is ultimately discontinuous across the body of an author's works is privileged, and the reader is not considered able (or 'authorised'?) to draw connections. An "analogy among all the works" is perceived as a secondary consideration, but the discrete single-text implied author remains unchanged and does extend outside the text: "Each of the works, however, while I am reading it, lives in me in its own life."

Gadamer moves hermeneutics in the opposite direction, away from a more text-centric narratologist position and towards a purely subjective reader-centred reception aesthetic. Initially Gadamer regards Poulet's treatment of Schleiermacher's psychological aspect as having been "disproved" by Heidegger in 1927 in *Being and Time*,²⁵¹ and credits the 'Heideggerian' deviation with pushing hermeneutical analysis "away from a subjective and psychological basis" and "in the direction of the objective meaning (the meaning coming from the object)." What is interesting in the language of this sentence is the way in which the parentheses indicate that the definition is subordinate to the label, 'objective', already given; but the elaboration/definition in the parentheses takes the word away from its common meaning and turns it into something that is virtually the opposite. 'Objective' in Gadamer's usage here does *not* oppose itself to subjectivity, the way it suggests; instead, because the parenthetical material requires the word to contain its own communicative intention, or standard for objectively judging the accuracy of a reader's comprehension of it, and because language is not sentient and cannot intend either of these things, any meaning 'coming' from the object can only come

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Gadamer, 40.

from the person judging the object: the reader. Heidegger and Gadamer collapse the two verbs *to intend* and *to signify*, and treat the text grammatically as an intending self.²⁵²

Since a text cannot, however, ‘mean’ without either one human agent attempting to communicate an intention through it or another human agent deriving a signification from it, what is claimed to be an objective formulation is really a less explicit substitution: the reader’s conception of the author’s intending thoughts, combined with their conception of language as an impersonal totality, is switched for the reader’s conception of meaning attributed to an intention-neutral text. The former, Gadamer calls “Romantic hermeneutics” and repudiates; the latter, he names “philosophical hermeneutics,” and endorses. Gadamer argues that Romantic hermeneutics are concerned with understanding, but actually brackets “understanding” off from “meaning,” defining meaning as that which is *not altered* by the subjectivity of the self, and defines understanding as the “subjective experience” of “one’s own *senses* of meaning.”²⁵³ [my italics] Gone is Schleiermacher’s original definition of hermeneutics being the “understanding of meaning,” and in its place is understanding as a Romantic myopia, projected into the text, and meaning as a philosophical truth emerging from the text, independent of anyone to intend or perceive it.

Gadamer subsequently, in 1968, concedes that the removal of authorial intention as a measure of the validity of interpretation removes a measure of the kind of scientific objectivity he previously argued that his hermeneutics were working to claim; 1968 is also the year when he begins foreshadowing a changed opinion of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics. He alters the interpretive parameters, arguing that the application of art to the individual must abandon any pretence to an entirely “objective” analysis in favour of an express recognition of the subjective experience – essentially a clearer naming of what I understand the earlier process to have been. He calls it an “application-structure of understanding,” and claims that it unites the ability to “understand without presuppositions what a text *itself* says,” [my italics] with the ability to unite a text “with one’s ‘own’ senses of its meaning.” These latter ‘senses’ are described as the “productive contribution” of the reader, and Gadamer gives a list of things that might alter the experience of a text from one reader to another: this list includes differences in culture, time periods, classes, races and differences “between persons.”

²⁵² Ibid., 45.

²⁵³ Ibid.

On its face, this seems to acknowledge subjectivity in reading, and even to correspond closely to the marriage of the grammatical and the psychological proposed by Schleiermacher – although Gadamer still claims that an intentional type of meaning emanates independently from language, rather than from the linguistic community and/or author. Gadamer frames it as a departure from Schleiermacher, though, and describes it in the text as a “more than subjective” (*übersubjektive*) process that “has been fundamentally pushed away from a subjective and psychological basis and moved in the direction of the objective meaning (the meaning coming from the object) mediated by effective history.”²⁵⁴ It is to be assumed that the “effective history” is that which provides different “own” senses of meaning across readers, and therefore the “more than” aspect of the subjectivity; since it is framed, however, as an impersonal mediation displaced onto culture and history and avoids the language of authorial spirit and psychological projection, it is presented as grounded in a self-intending text. Ultimately it is left to the reader to determine the meanings signified by the immaculate conception of the text, when they are choosing between competing possibilities of meaning.

Biographical criticism

Traditional biographical criticism employs the name of the author so expressly that it may be difficult to see where room might be left for an *imago*. It extends Romanticism’s focus on the individual author and her or his unique genius by elevating a single self to the kind of godlike status that justifies a fascination with the personal details of its life, but it opposes the Romantic conception of the artist as passive channel for divine inspiration and looks for meaning in the unique facts of that life rather than in an idea of universal human truths. Some modernist critics like T E Hulme and Eliot have played on this overlap to characterise traditional biographical critics such as Hippolyte Taine as “Romantic critics,” and other scholars who have written on common ideological threads present in superficially diverse approaches. Suresh Raval, for instance, in his text *Metacriticism*,²⁵⁵ sees the connection emerging through a commonly “genetic” approach;²⁵⁶ others such as René Wellek have a different view, and focus on the scientific contribution layered onto this genetic basis: Wellek (not without criticism of his methods) calls Taine “the founder of a sociological science of literature.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Suresh Raval, *Metacriticism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

²⁵⁶ Raval, “Intention and Contemporary Literary Theory,” 263.

²⁵⁷ René Wellek, “Hippolyte Taine's Literary Theory and Criticism,” *Criticism* 1, no. 1 (Winter, 1959): 1.

When we find the point of intersection of these threads, the author *imago* appears as an idea of the real biographical author, but the use of it lacks sophistication. In other instances of biographical criticism, references to the author lack a hermeneutical focus because the text is merely a means by which to learn about the life and times of the author. As a generalisation, the former trend can be seen more in North American and English biographical criticism, possibly because of the influence of the formalism developing at the same time; the latter is perhaps better illustrated by the tradition of the French Academy.

Under the sway of critics such as Sainte-Beuve, a powerful strain of French criticism weaves two contradictory yet self-validating strands together: one, that, in order to understand the work of the artist, one must first understand the life of the artist (because an organic apprehension of the art will follow); two, that the value of an artwork lies in its being a carrier of the artist's genius, so an understanding of the work will supply the more 'valuable' understanding – that of the human creator. In this, we can see a confusion, or conflation, of intentional meaning and significance (baked into the French language in phrases such as *vouloir dire*) that plagues much of Scientific criticism, and that leads to a faulty apprehension of critical principles when maxims directed at one are attached to the other as though they are interchangeable.

French exemplar

In the 1864 introduction to the *History of English Literature*, Taine illustrates this (arguably more historical or archaeological than literary) approach, as well as the *mélange* of meaning and value: literature is a product of the author's "race, milieu et moment," so its meaning can be apprehended via a study of these externals; the *value* of literature, on the other hand, is justified with reference to the externals – value derives from the creator. In the first premise, Taine travels from author to text: "when we have considered *race*, *milieu* and *moment*, we have exhausted not only all real causes, but even more all possible causes of movements."²⁵⁸ In the latter, from text to author:

Why do you study the shell unless to form some idea of the animal? In the same way do you study the document in order to comprehend the man; both shell and document are dead fragments and of value only as indications of the complete living being. The aim is to reach this being; this is what you strive to reconstruct. It is a mistake to study the document as if it existed alone by itself.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Hippolyte Taine, *History of English Literature*, trans. H Van Laun (New York: Henry Holt, 1896), 1.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Not only, therefore, is the author the guarantor of meaning in the text, the meaning is a transparent representation of the author's life; and, in terms of its value, the text is subordinated to that life. One of Wellek's criticisms is that "Taine's whole method minimises the fact and value of art, for, with him, art becomes only a piece of life," and he moreover argues that mediocre writing may serve as a passable social document, but that great art is poor evidence because of the influence of the form and the "specific angle of imagination" brought by a 'great' author.²⁶⁰ Taine focuses only on that literature which he considers 'great', though, and sets out to grasp this great individuality: to "reproduce the emotion, the particular passion of the [person] one describes [...] in short to paint [them] in the manner of artists and at the same time to construe [them] in the manner of reasoners."²⁶¹ The biographically-inferential way in which he works betrays a belief in the literal transparency of the text and the essentialism of the authority identity.

Anglophone exemplar

Anglophone iterations of the biographical approach in the early 20th century reflect the influence of formalism in their application of an almost statistical method to the collation and analysis of text fragments and biographical extracts, presenting them as disinterested records that themselves generate unavoidable correlations. The treatment of the name of the author is, nonetheless, close to the same as the French criticism and operates much the same way in relation to an *imago*-figure. Caroline Spurgeon, for instance, from the 1930s to the 1950s publishes studies of Shakespeare's imagery as a means of establishing an authorial persona. In one essay, for instance, she compares the imagery found in texts signed Shakespeare with the kinds of imagery found, she argues, in texts signed Francis Bacon, in order to trace the ways in which unique personalities, ethe and life experiences shape the language of a text and can be reconstructed through a close attention to it.

Ironically, while focusing on the employment of imagery, the one thing Spurgeon neglects to analyse is the *use* of imagery: she limits herself to observations on the presence of it, and on her own suppositions regarding what these visual figures signify about the person employing them. She moves from observations on types of imagery and a methodical collection of instances, directly to biographical speculations without analysing their literary effect. What is taken is

²⁶⁰ Wellek, 2-3.

²⁶¹ In a letter to Sainte-Beuve, reprinted in Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Nouveaux Lundis*, 3rd ed., XII vols., vol. VIII (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1879), 88.

almost a Freudian approach to imagery, where it bubbles up from the unconscious and tells us things that are beyond the author's conscious intellection in a kind of authorship defence:

We see, on examining their images, that the writers of these two sets of works viewed the world from a different standpoint, had had different experiences and were interested in and familiar with a different range of objects in everyday life; that even when interested in the same subject [...] different aspects of it appealed to their imaginations.²⁶²

She argues, for instance, that the images show Bacon to be an author more attuned to the experience of being on a ship, while Shakespeare the one used to looking at the sea from the shore. Shakespeare is "chiefly concerned with the general character, quality or aspect of the sea, usually in a storm," presumably because of his infamously empathic connection with the human condition; whereas Bacon's "practical and scientific mind is interested in the balance of boats on the water."²⁶³

It is interesting to observe her use of "we see," to posit the conclusions she draws as deriving solely from the works and available equally to all readers. The connection between biographical criticism and psychoanalytic criticism is also apparent – the methods and assumptions of the one being the same as the methods and assumptions of the other. Calvin S Hall, for instance, follows a similar line of argument to Spurgeon in his 1953 monograph on a new "cognitive theory" of symbols used in dreams and their analogy with slang and idiom – he argues that they reveal the underlying thought structures of the author, and contain the imprint of personal experiences. Hall calls Spurgeon's multi-part Shakespeare analysis a "remarkable *tour de force*."²⁶⁴

Modern biographical criticism

Biographical interpretation continues in the 21st century in the same vein, particularly in biographies that contain text interpretation woven into the account of the life in a way that suggests the biographical information and the hermeneutic commentary on the texts mutually confirm each other. The main concession to the criticisms of the preceding half-century is that it is couched in terms that are less dogmatic and are slightly speculative. Claims that the 'biographical approach' to interpretation is considered old-fashioned and superseded, and that

²⁶² Caroline F E Spurgeon, "The Use of Imagery by Shakespeare and Bacon," *The Review of English Studies* 9, no. 36 (Oct, 1933): 396.

²⁶³ Ibid., 393.

²⁶⁴ Calvin S Hall, "A Cognitive Theory of Dream Symbols," *The Journal of General Psychology* 48 (1953): 174.

modern application is considered 'biographical *in orientation*' more than traditionally simply biographical, are common,²⁶⁵ but are not really borne out by the practice. Andrew Hadfield in 2014, in a 'modern' defence of the use of literary biography, describes biographical knowledge as providing "a life in which to ground those works,"²⁶⁶ and argues that use of it in interpretation makes sense because "[t]he life, works, and the self/ego are intertwined, and if we avoid the issues involved and refuse to engage with questions of how the life and works interact, we risk misreading the poetry." When works cannot be superficially "anchored" in the life of the author, Hadfield's conclusion tends to the argument that "not enough facts remain for us to be able to do this."²⁶⁷

Jackson J Benson, writing in 1989 in "defence" of biographical criticism, differentiates his use of biography from earlier uses with the language of deconstructionism, but he works to approximately the same principles. Benson argues that formalism and other IHR approaches expose themselves to misreadings by treating the text as a closed system rather than an open one, because the interpretation of language relies on making connections – including connections between the specific instance of language in the text and the world outside it. Benson grounds this approach in the ethics of reading, in that biographical criticism can be used as an appreciation of Otherness and a recognition that "there is an author who is different in personality and background from the reader."²⁶⁸ Even though he uses it to somewhat different ends, the language with which he frames his approach recalls Derrida's assertion that "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" from his Rousseau essay.²⁶⁹

The language might be contemporary, but Benson applies the method in a traditional way, striking a note between literalist biography and speculative psychoanalysis. He argues that the quantity of sentimentality that has traditionally been read into Steinbeck's texts is inappropriate, for instance, because it is contradicted by direct or indirect evidence of the author's character – such as that Steinbeck wanted to dissect cadavers at Stanford and ostensibly gave the reason that "I want to learn about human beings." The fact that Steinbeck believed this would be best effected through a study of the objectified corporeal and not through poetry or

²⁶⁵ A representative instance is

²⁶⁶ Andrew Hadfield, "Why Does Literary Biography Matter?," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (Winter, 2014): 374.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 377.

²⁶⁸ Jackson J Benson, "Steinbeck: A Defense of Biographical Criticism," *Jackson College Literature* 16, no. 2 (Spring, 1989): 107-10.

²⁶⁹

art is taken as informative, as is the fact that he refused to dig a bomb shelter in the 1950s on the grounds that humans would disappear from the earth soon enough anyway and be replaced by a different “species.” Benson takes these biographical observations to be indicative of a detached, biological strain in Steinbeck’s character, and believes they expose a flawed tendency to attribute to Steinbeck a more humanist thematic position. “Go back to *Of Mice and Men*, *The Red Pony*, or the infamous ending of *The Grapes of Wrath*,” Benson writes, “and note how your interpretation is altered by using this perspective.”²⁷⁰ Note Benson’s use of ‘how’ and not ‘whether’ in this, as it takes the certitude of an altered interpretation as a given that transcends individual readers. He uses this conclusion to demonstrate the validity of his own discourse, arguing that:

It also shows how a misinterpretation – namely, that Steinbeck’s work is essentially sentimental – can be etched in stone as doctrine by those who have paid attention only to the text, as seen through their own preconceptions and values. They have judged without giving up themselves to participate in something other than what they are.²⁷¹

The evocation of deconstructionism only carries the argument so far, though, because the position he takes relies on the signifying power of language to represent fixed meanings, and on the ability to classify constructions of those meanings as ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ – proper readings or misreadings – based on the extent to which they align with the character embodied in his Steinbeck *imago*. The *imago* is itself based on his interpretation of the biographical sources and projected like a silhouette overlay onto the texts.

A furtive sense of unworthiness haunts the modern use of biography in criticism, and this seems to stimulate a defensive impulse and lead critics to either perform basically the same analysis but call it by a different name, or to validate an erstwhile-biographical analysis by reference to ‘accepted’ methods and discourses outside itself. Benson, for instance, gives the example of a colleague who self-identifies as a New Critic and openly scorns the use of biography for hermeneutic ends, yet visits museums and galleries that hold works mentioned by Hemingway, reads works published by Hemingway’s friends and contemporaries, and travels to cities in which Hemingway was based – all to, he claims, determine the “precise meaning” of the words Hemingway used. Benson says, “To his face, I call him a biographical critic, and I think he feels that I have insulted him.”²⁷² Benson’s essential point is that biographical criticism cannot truly be the pariah it is claimed to be if all the ‘respectable’ critics covertly do it, too; the biographical

²⁷⁰ Benson, 107-08.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid., 111.

orientation of the interpretation may be obfuscated in much modern work, but underneath it is still the idea of the author as a quantity existing outside the mind or interpretation of the reader, and providing the key to a correct construction of the text if the reader is able to apply the biographical record in the right way.

The main points of difference between traditional and modern approaches seem to be the tendency after the middle of the 20th century for the text to have value independent of the creator, and for the biographical critic to distance herself or himself from the pre-existing body of biographical interpretation by either changing the name of the method or claiming to practise a more 'self-aware' version of it. Regardless, neither provides an author concept that performs the same function as the *imago*, and biographical criticisms do not, therefore, render the proposal redundant.

Intentionalism

Intentionalism belongs to what Stephen Davies describes as 'contextualist ontologies' for literary works – treatments that see texts as being created by specific people in specific times and places.²⁷³ Contemporary intentionalism can operate as a developed branch of biographical criticism if the conscious intentions of the empirical author are subjected to an archival research activity, or as more of a species of formalism or narratology if the intentions of the author are hypothesised or drawn entirely from the text. Davies divides the field of intentionalist criticism into three broad categories: actual intentionalism, in which the "author's intentions constrain how their works are to be interpreted"; hypothetical intentionalism, in which "interpretations are justified as those most likely intended by a postulated author"; and what he calls the "value-maximising theory," which when critics postulate an intention on the part of the conjectural author to write something with maximum value as a work of literature, and decide hermeneutic questions in light of that by choosing "interpretations presenting the work in the most favourable light."

Davies argues that no model of intentionalism accounts, in practice, for the behaviour of critics and the explications of all texts. He says that intentionalism – if deemed 'actual' – cannot account for the "appropriateness or legitimacy" of all interpretations, because some must be constructed absent evidence of the author's meaning-intention or some will be incompatible

²⁷³ Stephen Davies, *Philosophical Perspectives on Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 167.

with what the author's stated intentions are; or, alternatively, "it must be weakened to the point that considerations raised by hypothetical intentionalists and value-maximisers come into play."²⁷⁴ In this event, intentions that are never intended by the critic to attach empirically to the real author are still spoken of as authorial meaning, and are given the normative weight that attaches ideally to only actual intentions. Many critics fall somewhere between the poles of empirical author and reader-constructed author, with William E Tolhurst and Jerrold Levinson, for instance, requiring that the hypothesised author have the same personality, knowledge, temperament, oeuvre and art-historical location as the flesh-and-blood author, thus placing limits on what the reader can claim as 'author'.²⁷⁵

Conceptions of actual intention can be integrated into a reader's *imago* and can be used to influence their interpretation of the text; equally, hypotheses or projections of hypothesised meaning can influence the image. The primary difference between them is that the former places more constraints on the critic's liberty, because it derives from a source other than themselves and is therefore less likely to give their interpretations circular validation. Even critics who subscribe to actual intentionalism face a quandary when the author states express intentions that do not coincide with the ordinary understanding of the text – that are outside what it is considered the text can bear. The 'Humpty Dumpty objection' that is occasionally made by opponents argues that committing to an author's intentions if they are not sustained by the text is an endorsement of a relativist anarchy that would see authors being able to change the rules for communication by way of entirely private and therefore infelicitous (in J L Austin's classification) mental acts: when Humpty says "When *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean" he does *not* say that it means just what it *declares* it to mean.

The ability for an author to establish a *parole* that is entirely at odds with the conventions of the *langue* by means of a public statement would arguably be more acceptable because of its transparency, but is still disempowering for the reading community; it is, however, the position that Humpty's creator takes in his private theory:

I maintain that any writer of a book is fully authorised in attaching any meaning [she or he] likes to any word or phrase [she or he] intends to use. If I find an author saying, at the beginning of [her or his] book, "Let it be understood that by the word *black* I shall

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 166.

²⁷⁵ William E Tolhurst, "On What a Text Is and How it Means," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, no. 1 (Winter, 1979). Also, Jerrold Levinson, "Defending Hypothetical Intentionalism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 2 (2010).

always mean *white*, and that by the word *white* I shall always mean *black*,” I meekly accept his ruling, however injudicious I may think it.²⁷⁶

Dodgson makes it clear in letters that he expects, if an author wishes for an interpreter to follow a stipulative definition, it to be explained “beforehand.”²⁷⁷ An actual intentionalist would, strictly, follow this stipulation, and their *imago* would be altered to the extent that it included a person who inverted ‘white’ and ‘black’ in their usage; a hypothetical or value-maximiser intentionalist would need to decide whether they considered this stipulated definition to be compatible with either a construction of both reasonable and plausible intentions directing the text, or compatible with a reading of the text that produced the most valuable construction. This is why Davies describes hypothetical intentionalists and value-maximisers as “more inclined to insist that the work should be both autonomous and self-sustaining”²⁷⁸ – because their iteration of ‘authorial intention’ permits them to disregard the actual intentions of the author.

Noël Carroll defends his version of hypothetical intentionalism not with reference to the nature of the author, but to the effect the authorial nature ought to have on the hermeneutic act. He identifies two ways in which the ‘intentional fallacy’ can be framed, and argues that only the latter, the “narrower” framing is the one known properly as the (often convincingly discredited) ‘identity thesis’:

The broader interpretation of the intentional fallacy concerns whether an artist’s intention is ever relevant to the meaning of the artwork; the narrower interpretation concerns whether the meaning an artist intended is identical with the meaning of the artwork.²⁷⁹

Carroll essentially argues that the narrow identity thesis has become a type of strawperson for critics of intentionalist criticism, but that the contemporary form of intentionalism – the one “beginning to attract a following among philosophers of art”²⁸⁰ – concerns the broader framing of the question: in other words, the extent of that circumscription. He rejects outright the ability of actual intention to determine the meaning of the text, referencing Beardsley’s flippant ‘Humpty Dumpty’ from 1981 that it could compel us to regard a blue sculpture as pink simply

²⁷⁶ Lewis Carroll, *Symbolic Logic*, ed. William Warren Bartley, III (New York: Clarkson N Potter, 1977), 232.

²⁷⁷ Lewis Carroll, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*, ed. Stuart Dodgson Collingwood (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1898), 242.

²⁷⁸ Davies, 171.

²⁷⁹ Noël Carroll, “The Intentional Fallacy: Defending Myself,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 3 (Summer, 1997): 305.

²⁸⁰ Noël Carroll, “Interpretation and Intention: The Debate between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism,” *Metaphilosophy* 31, no. 1/2 (Jan, 2000): 75.

because the artist said it was, and focuses the argument on the points of departure between hypothetical intentionalism and modest actual intentionalism.

Cioffi suggests that, even within intentionalism, our interpretation of a work takes precedence over any stated intention if that intention runs counter to what we perceive in the text, because the work itself is “more conclusive evidence” of those intentions than the conscious statements are. He gives the example of Edmund Wilson advancing first the interpretation that the ghosts in Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* are figments of the narrator’s imagination and the work therefore a study in thwarted “anglo-saxon spinsterdom.” Wilson read the text as “skilfully ambiguous” and supported his reading with reference to James’s Preface to the book. When James’s private notebooks were later published, however, his stated intentions that the story be a conventional ghost story were made public:

Nevertheless, Wilson continued to insist that it was not a straightforward ghost story, but a study in the neurotic effects of repressed sexuality. [...] Instead of simply enjoying a gratuitous effect for its own sake, Wilson convinces himself on the basis of certain biographical facts about James that at the time the book was written, his faith in himself had been shaken.

Thus, Wilson can not only persist in his interpretation, but further validate it to himself on the grounds that it demonstrates James’s *self*-deceptions about the governess and is a mirror to James’s own doubts about his own life. Cioffi explains this as persisting in an interpretation on the basis that one feels the author is mistaken as to their own intention.²⁸¹ The interesting aspect for my thesis is the substitution of a third-party attribution of intention for the author’s stated ones, and the extrapolation of that out into the life of the author.

Modern intentionalism

Hirsch is referred to as the “founder of contemporary intentionalism,”²⁸² and his 1967 text *Validity in Interpretation* the “most systematic full-length defence of intentionalism” published.²⁸³ In *Validity*, Hirsch sets out the stakes of his position, arguing that literary studies has endured, across the previous four decades, a “heavy and largely victorious assault on the

²⁸¹ Frank Cioffi, “Intention and Interpretation in Criticism,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series* 64 (1963-64): 98-99.

²⁸² Søren Harnow Klausen, “Levels of Literary Meaning,” *Philosophy and Literature* 41, no. 1 (April, 2017): 71.

²⁸³ Peter Lamarque, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Patricia Waugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 187.

sensible belief that a text means what its author meant.”²⁸⁴ The language used in this is plain and direct: it taps into the same drive to rely on a transparent, primitive common sense as is seen in the Exoregulatory paradigm. Hirsch argues that “meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words,” and that a “word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it.”

The insight that generated all of my theoretical work since my first theoretical publication in 1965 [1960] is the realisation that language does not speak its own meaning. No linguistic code can determine the meanings of a text, because linguistic codes by themselves are far too capacious and flexible to determine meanings for individual texts. Some special human agency or act is needed to decide upon the choice of a governing sub-code.²⁸⁵

Hirsch therefore commits himself to the need for a normative principle – and, consequentially, the need for a “normative agent.” Going further than this, he confines himself to the stated meaning-intentions of the empirical author, asking “who shall decide the sub-code – shall it be the present critic or somebody from the past?” This introduces not only a human agent who can override, Humpty-Dumpty-like, the accepted use of *langue* in the text; it also treats that human agent as a transparent and accessible self that does not have to be mediated or inferred by the reader. Hirsch attempts to remove the determination of meaning from the realm of the reader’s subjectivity, but in doing so he saddles himself with a normative source that can only operate in theory and not in practice. By doing so, he hides whatever operations the reader must undergo to fill this gap behind the language of objective authority.

This is in keeping with his reliance on other terms signifying scientific objectivity, such as “scholarly discipline,” “professional practice,” and “empirical inquiry,” which he claims to use precisely because of that signification:

All of those terms imply that a professional, scholarly enterprise is an empirical subject like history or geology. An empirical subject is *a posteriori* in its essence. Its results are determined by a reality that is not constituted in advance by the investigator. For that reason, different colleagues, working together or in competition, can add to the knowledge of that reality, and discover new evidence that cause adjustments in our theories about that reality.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1.

²⁸⁵ E D Hirsch, Jr, “On Justifying Interpretive Norms,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43, no. 1 (Autumn, 1984): 90.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

Hirsch rejects text constructions without any normative limitation, where there is no single, reproducible, and determinate meaning able to be interpreted and falsified,²⁸⁷ on the basis that engaging with a text “solipsistically” is a manipulation and abuse of another person’s intentional act; also, that they turn literature into a “protean” object, the study of which cannot be taken seriously.²⁸⁸ Taking the author’s intentions as the guiding principle, on the other hand, gives a critic a clear picture of what “a correct interpretation is in principle,” and allows fair measurement of success in the hermeneutic practice.²⁸⁹

One example of this is his commentary on Eliot’s correction of the poem *Ulalume – A Ballad* (1847). In the poem, the speaker recalls his “most immemorial year.” Eliot quotes the OED definition in his analysis of the text, criticising Poe’s use of the word and amending it to read ‘memorable’ on the basis that “sound and sense must cooperate, [and] the dictionary meaning cannot be disregarded with impunity.” He even calls the act of writing this line an “irresponsibility towards the meaning of words.”²⁹⁰ Poe could have intended a play on the idea of a memorial, suggesting that it was a year he was most likely to remember (as his wife Virginia died), but that it was the one year he did *not* want a reminder of – but neither Eliot nor Hirsch consider this an option. Instead, Hirsch endorses Eliot’s alteration as an example of Eliot “understanding meaning,” even when that attributed meaning is directly counter to the evidence of the printed text. Hirsch argues that Eliot neither misread the text nor inserted his own preferences or hypotheses for Poe’s own meaning-intentions; rather, he “made the correction from contextual evidence,” and it is thus an appreciation of the intentions contained in the text better than the text itself can express them.²⁹¹

Problems with Hirschian intentionalism

Hirsch bases his distinction on the classical one in hermeneutics, which he calls the “vestigial science of hermeneutics.” He cites August Boeckh, who divides the theoretical part of his 1877 *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften* (Encyclopaedia and Methodology of the Philological Sciences) into two sections: ‘Interpretation’ or ‘Hermeneutik’, and ‘Kritik’. Boeckh’s justification is that interpretation is the construction of textual meaning

²⁸⁷ E D Hirsch, Jr, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-80.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁸⁹ Hirsch, “Objective Interpretation,” 464.

²⁹⁰ T S Eliot, “From Poe to Valéry (1949),” in *The Recognition of Edgar Allen Poe: Selected Criticism since 1829*, ed. Eric W Carlson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 210.

²⁹¹ E D Hirsch, Jr, “Coming to Terms with Meaning,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (Spring, 1986): 628.

and the “*legt aus*” (explication) of only those meanings that the text explicitly or implicitly represents, whereas criticism, Hirsch paraphrases, “builds on the results of interpretation; it confronts textual meaning not as such, but as a component within a larger context.”²⁹² Boeckh defines it as “that philological function through which a text is understood not simply on its own terms and for its own sake, but in order to establish a relationship with something else, in such a way that the goal is a knowledge of this relationship.”²⁹³ Hirsch adopts the same division of attitudes or treatments, and calls them Meaning and Significance.

This distinction runs through all of his work from his first texts, with little variation, until 1984 when he seeks to modify not the categories, but the apprehensions that are included in each of them. Rather than Meaning only encompassing what earlier seems to be something more explicitly available from the text and consciously intended – through statements such as “meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words” – he seeks to expand it to account for material that goes beyond the author’s contemporaneous active consciousness, but that seem like logically-intended further extrapolations of that consciousness. He justifies, “We intend our meanings to transcend our momentary limitations of attention and knowledge.” Significance remains the same, while Meaning extends to anything “whose boundaries are determined by an originating speech event.”²⁹⁴ Anything that an interpreter deems to be within the scope of the original speech event becomes part of the author’s originating intention, even if it was absent from their consciousness or outside what they could possibly know.

Hirsch gives Shakespeare’s Sonnet 55 ‘Not marble nor the gilded monuments’ as an example of an historical speech event that contains, as part of its meaning, a future application of that meaning.²⁹⁵ The poet names the lover as “you,” and Hirsch argues that an application of that pronoun by the reader to her or his own lover lives within the Meaning of the sonnet and not outside it: it is not an act to change Shakespeare’s meaning-intention, but rather “to instantiate and fulfill it.”

If we adhere to the principle that meaning is the aspect of interpretation which remains the same, while significance is what changes, we now find that we must take a more generous and capacious view of what remains the same. We cannot limit meaning to what was within an original event any more than we can limit a concept to its original

²⁹² Hirsch, “Objective Interpretation,” 463.

²⁹³ August Boeckh, *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877), 170.

²⁹⁴ E D Hirsch, Jr, “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (Dec, 1984): 202-04.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

enunciation. A concept is by its nature both an ‘internal’ generality and an ‘external’ array of things embraced by the generality; it is both an ‘intension’ and an ‘extension.’²⁹⁶ This is a radical expansion of what is capable of being considered part of ‘the same’, however. It also takes the concept of ‘application’ – that which previously *defined* the category of Significance – and incorporates it into Meaning. This re-evaluation is not merely technical: the definition of Meaning, and its attribution to the *author* rather than to the reader or the *langue*, is what functions for Hirsch as the entire normative basis of interpretive validity.

What I believe lies at the heart of this problematic ambiguity of classification is a naïveté in relation to the competing, though complementary, aspects of the verb ‘to mean’. As previously identified, *to mean* is two homophonic yet different verbs: to intend, and to signify. The actual object that mediates these two is the language. Hirsch relies both on Husserlian theory of intentional objects in language and on the distinction in Gottlob Frege’s work between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, but I suggest that he has either misunderstood or misapplied the terms of each. Hirsch demonstrates a belief in the transparent nature of language, and a consequent willingness to interpolate the interpreter’s apprehended meaning into the author’s signified meaning: the interpretation – if it feels valid – must be transparently contained in that signification.

It is surprising that most critics do not question Hirsch’s use of Husserl’s ideas, because I perceive a conflation of real object and intentional object in it that attributes actual presence to both intended presence and apprehended presence. Frank Lentricchia, for instance, affirms Hirsch’s reading of Husserl by unquestioningly endorsing the same conflation:

A particular object like a table, and a particular text like Wordsworth’s ‘A Slumber Did My Spirit Steal,’ are what Husserl would call ‘intentional objects’; they remain unchanging or self-identical, through the variety of culturally and temporally located ‘intentional acts’ which grasp them.²⁹⁷

Neither Lentricchia nor Hirsch mean that it is the materiality or particular language of the text that occupies the space of the unchanging, self-identical object, though; and neither is speaking from the point of view of Wordsworth’s originating intention – they speak of the apprehended meaning that is communicated by the text, and “grasped” by the reader. The “particular object” of the text’s language is self-identical across different printings and readings of the poem, but

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 210.

²⁹⁷ Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 271.

this is not the object that is grasped by the interpreter: the meaning is that which is grasped, and this will not be self-identical. The intentional object that is formed by the intentional act of the reader grasping the poem has, for Husserl, an objective reality in the phenomenological experience of the reader, but that does not mean that it has an objective *material* reality. The object is not the same as the mental apprehension of that object. Hirsch wishes to argue that the author's intentional object, the originating meaning-intention and mental conception of the text, should be the normative standard for any subsequent interpretation of that text; he also, however, speaks of the intentional act of the reader in apprehending and conceptualising the text *as if it is self-identical with that text*.

Hirsch relies on the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* for his elaboration of this. The *Sinn* of a text is the meaning of it in terms of the sense it communicates, while the *Bedeutung* is the meaning of the text in terms of what outside itself it is indicating – the *Bedeutung* can also be thought of as the truth-value of the statement. *Bedeutungen* can exist without *Sinn*, as the state of the world or the material object exists without a unit of language pointing to it; and *Sinn* can exist without *Bedeutung*, if the sense of something exists despite the absence of a self-identical object – for instance, with the author name 'Homer'. The distinction between the two is first explored by Frege in 1892.²⁹⁸ Hirsch explains it, uncontroversially, as Frege demonstrating that "although the meaning of two 'texts' may be different, their referential or truth-value may be identical."

For example, the statement, 'Scott is the author of Waverley' is true and yet the meaning of 'Scott' is different from that of 'the author of Waverley.' The *Sinn* of each is different, but the *Bedeutung* (or one aspect of *Bedeutung* – the designatum of 'Scott' and 'author of Waverley') is the same.²⁹⁹

Hirsch then reverses the formula, saying that the one *Sinn* can have multiple *Bedeutungen*: if one says "there is a unicorn in the garden," for instance, the statement would be tested against a *Bedeutung* and proved false in the real world, but tested against a different *Bedeutung* in an imaginary world and proved true. The *Sinn* of the sentence, the sense of it, remains constant across both iterations, as this is the only way in which the true/false comparison can be made.

This is a valid argument, for the instance given. However, Hirsch uses it to conclude that the *Sinn* of a text is therefore that which is "self-identical" across unlimited instances of it. The *Sinn*

²⁹⁸ Gottlob Frege, "Über Sinn und Bedeutung: On Sense and Nominatum," in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1949).

²⁹⁹ Hirsch, "Objective Interpretation," 464.

is the 'sense', though, and this exists only *as* an act of comprehension, or an apprehension of the qualitative substance of the text – it can only, therefore, exist as an intentional object. Hirsch turns the *Sinn* into a tangible, physical object to demonstrate his point (and mine):

It goes without saying that the character of a component considered as such changes whenever the larger realm of which it is a part changes. A red object will appear to have different colour qualities when viewed against differently coloured backgrounds. The same is true of textual meaning. But the meaning of the text (its *Sinn*) does not change any more than the hue and saturation of the red object changes when seen against different backgrounds.³⁰⁰

It is the material in parentheses that undermines his analogy, because the meaning of a text is not a box: if anything, either the material form of the text in terms of the words printed on the page could be analogous with a box, or potentially the underlying real objects or states to which the *Sinn* of the text is pointing – but not the *Sinn* itself, as it has no objective materiality. If anything, the better analogy is between the box and the *Bedeutung*. The word 'Scott' points to the same human box as 'the author of *Waverley*', but the two *Sinne* take on different colours when painted against differently coloured backgrounds: spoken by someone who loathes *Waverley*, 'Scott' becomes a condemnation; spoken by someone who doesn't know who wrote *Waverley*, it becomes a question. Hirsch argues for the self-identical nature of the *Sinn* by identifying the self-identical nature of the *Bedeutung* – and the continued use of the imprecise "meaning" instead of one of its more precise alternatives (such as *Sinn*, *Bedeutung*, intended meaning, or signification) facilitates the category conflation.

The *Sinn* is only the sense-meaning that is intended for a text in the author's act of composing it, or the sense-meaning derived from a text in the author's act of interpreting it; the *Sinn* an interpreter derives from the text may not be the same as the meaning intended by the author, and this may point them to a different *Bedeutung*. What is at stake is still the question of what criteria we use to determine the 'correct' *Sinn*. Hirsch's example is not evidence for his argument: it sets out the terms of his argument.

The interpretations of the reader, if they are deemed valid by an unstated authority, are treated with the relative objectivity of *langue*; but what is treated as *langue* is then named the author's intention. Hirsch's desire for normative validity requires this linguistic transposition, though, because verification of interpretations will not be possible if an interpreter relies on "solipsism"

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 466.

and the location of “connotations and emphases which [she herself] imposes.” Rather, “[i]f criticism is going to be objective in any significant sense, it must be founded on a self-critical construction of textual meaning, which is to say, on objective interpretation.”³⁰¹ Susan Ruth Carlton believes that Hirsch has largely captured this process in his theory:

The author draws upon language in much the same way as any craftsman draws upon the specific materials of his craft. The objectivity of language, its amazing ‘thinginess,’ ensures its reproducibility and its ability to be shared as a determinate entity between author and reader.³⁰²

But I submit that she has confused the real object of the language and the intentional object of the ‘meaning’ in the same way as Hirsch. Language, the container into which meaning is put and from which meaning is taken, is merely a sign: the sign has the property of thinginess, but the meaning does not. Attribution of objective thinginess to the meaning that the reader takes out of the container merely allows the interpreter scope to determine precise meanings, and to claim validity for them on the basis of their authorised objectivity. In terms of the *imago*, it allows the reader’s author image to shape the meaning that is ‘objectively’ attributed to the text. Even if it works as an *imago* in practice, Hirsch’s ‘author’ in the theory is not – it cannot be the *imago* because, by labeling it the ‘real’ author and insisting on its status as an essentialist and self-identical quantity that remains the same across all readers, Hirsch denies readers individualised conceptions, and he denies the express recognition of the subjective choices that readers make in determining the text’s ‘objective’ meaning. His theory of intentionalism does not, therefore, render the *imago* redundant.

A spectrum of intentionalisms

Davies describes the spectrum of intentionalisms that emerges after Hirsch:

a shift from holding that interpretation should concern itself only with what was intended to the view that interpretation can consider any meanings apparent in the work that are not disavowed by the author or that would not have been disavowed had [she or he] had the chance to consider them, either at the time of writing or subsequently. The move is from a position holding that the author’s intentions alone determine the content of the object of interpretation to one excluding only those possible meanings the author does or would reject as incompatible with [her or his]

³⁰¹ Ibid., 475, 63.

³⁰² Susan Ruth Carlton, "On Authors, Readers, and Phenomenology: Husserlian Intentionality in the Literary Theories of E D Hirsch and Jacques Derrida" (Doctor of Philosophy University of Michigan, 1984), 4.

project. According to this view, authors' intentions are defeaters of interpreted meanings, not determiners of the meanings to be identified by interpretations.³⁰³

Carroll calls himself a "modest actual intentionalist," and describes the metric for validity to be that "the author's [real and stated] intention here must square with what [she or he] has written, but if it squares with what [she or he] has written, then the author's intention is authoritative."³⁰⁴ Carroll defines hypothetical intentionalism as the version practised by Tolhurst and Levinson: "the meaning of a text is what an ideal reader, fully informed about the cultural background of the text, the oeuvre of the author, the publicly available information about the text and the author, and the text itself, would hypothesise the intended meaning of the text to be."³⁰⁵ Both reformulations provide for an interpretation that is more transparently attributed to the reader's meaning-making processes, because it is deemed to be a 'constructed' meaning, and subject merely to constraints imposed by the *langue* or by evidence of an authorial intention that precludes it. Because readers are expressly authorised to produce meanings, however, Davies rejects hypothetical intentionalism as a form of intentionalism, arguing that "hypothesised authors are not special kinds of authors, they are not authors at all."³⁰⁶

Alexander Nehamas proposes a form of intentionalism that bears out Davies's criticism. Nehamas proposes a figure he calls the 'postulated author', and defines it as "the agent whose actions account for the text's features; [they are] a character, a hypothesis which is accepted provisionally, guides interpretation, and is in turn modified in its light."³⁰⁷ Because the character of the postulated author is an idea based on an explanation of textual features, it has the same basis in theory as the implied author and is only differentiated insofar as an understanding of historical and biographical plausibility and the rest of the author's oeuvre are permitted to circumscribe it: "A methodological constraint on this view is that the postulated author be historically plausible; the principle is that a text does not mean what its writer could not, historically, have meant by it."³⁰⁸ Nehamas thereby places himself in an unclear, and perhaps contradictory, position in relation to the biographical author and her or his intentions. If the postulated author exists in the thought of the reader but is conceived of as a biographical person, then logically the intentions attributed to it must be historically plausible; if it is conceived of

³⁰³ Davies, 174-75.

³⁰⁴ Carroll, "Interpretation and Intention: The Debate between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism," 77.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 78.

³⁰⁶ Davies, 186.

³⁰⁷ Alexander Nehamas, "The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (Autumn, 1981): 145.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

only as an explanation of the features of the text, on the other hand, then the rationale for requiring historical plausibility is less obvious.

The fundamental difference between the postulated author and the *imago* is that Nehamas's historically-plausible author is both an ideal quantity and a normative proposal. It is the best-fit construct that authorises the hypothesis of ideal meaning, and Nehamas clearly stipulates its intended normative function: "The critical monism which I advocate is a regulative idea and identifies the meaning of a text with whatever is specified by that text's ideal interpretation."³⁰⁹ The ideas of interpretive regulation and ideal interpretations even form the title of his essay – Nehamas is not merely providing the language to name a functional category.

Psychoanalytic criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism focuses on that which is not transparently present in the life of the author. In a sense, this gives it more unfalsifiable interpretive flexibility, and more scope for an *imago*-type figure to influence the reception of the text. If the purpose of the analysis is to find meaning in the text, perhaps as indicated by the reader's understanding of the psychology of the author, then the activity is a more straightforward act of literary interpretation and the *imago* will be implicated in the psychology that is introjected into the text; if, however, the purpose is to use the text to undertake a diagnosis of author or characters, the activity is less an act of literary interpretation and more an act of literature appropriation for use as a (crude) site of diagnosis. In the latter case, an *imago* will be formed, but it will be an end-product rather than an interpretive strategy.

Richard Ellman prefers to frame the task of psychoanalysis in the language of literary theory rather than the other way around, describing the method as finding possible connections "between the fiery clay and the wrought jar" by making "biographical speculations" that connect a feasible text intention with a feasible subconscious response to a known life event.³¹⁰ This does introduce a cautious level of unknowability into the conception and construction of a life, but it also incidentally clarifies the purpose of the endeavour: to use an understanding of the text to build an image (albeit hypothesised and tentative) of the person, and not to use an understanding of the person to choose between competing conceptions of the mood, themes and subtext of the text. Freud, for instance, is converted to the Oxfordian cause in the main

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 144.

³¹⁰ Richard Ellman, *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

because his psychoanalytic explanation of *Hamlet* requires the author's father to have already died at the time of writing; Shakespeare's father was still alive when the play was written, so Freud is persuaded to the Oxfordian position by J Thomas Looney's 1920 text, *Shakespeare Identified*, which argues in favour of the 17th Earl of Oxford. Freud's last published words on the authorship question are on this exact point of 'evidence': "The name 'William Shakespeare' is most probably a pseudonym behind which lies concealed a great unknown. Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, a man who has been regarded as the author of Shakespeare's works, lost a beloved and admired father while he was still a boy, and complete repudiated his mother, who contracted a new marriage soon after her husband's death."³¹¹

Psychocriticism

The 'psychocriticism' initiated by Mauryon attempts a reframing of the clinical with the discourse of the literary. Mauryon uses the text on a structural and symbolic level to hypothesise the emotional and psychological impulses that might have prompted the hallmarks of style that emerge – and then travels back to the text by using those psychological hypotheses to mediate between competing thematic and metaphoric meanings. Mauryon calls his approach "comparative psychocriticism," and explains the methodology as "searching [...] for groups of obsessive associations which form underlying networks necessarily linked to the unconscious."³¹² These are then married with readings of personal artefacts such as letters, known facts of biography and culture, and the traditions of language within which the author was situated. Making clear the relationship between psychoanalytic and biographical criticisms by echoing his compatriot Taine, Mauryon explains his approach as based on the argument that literature owes its bounds of meaning to three variables: "the environment, language, and personality of the writer."³¹³ If the critic can understand these three as fully as possible, and understand the field of meaning within which the text is situated, they will be more equipped to choose among competing interpretations for the one that fits best. The end-goal of this must be an appreciation of the text, however: "To probe the unconscious [of the author], after all,

³¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*, trans. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), 96. Strachey notes that this statement had been removed, on request of the publishers, from the 1935 English edition of *Autobiographical Study*; Strachey quotes Freud that the sentence could remain in the American edition because "the same sort of narcissistic defence need not be feared over there." (62-63)

³¹² Charles Mauryon, *Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé*, trans. Archibald Henderson Jr and Will L McLendon, vol. 10, *Perspectives in Criticism*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 1-2.

³¹³ Charles Mauryon, "Psychocriticism," *SubStance* 1, no. 3 (Spring, 1972): 56.

would be nothing more than an indiscretion and lack of piety if the end in view were not the beauty of the work, which to my mind all true knowledge has a way of enriching.”³¹⁴

Mauron derives a very specific meaning from Stéphane Mallarmé’s writing based on the fact that Mallarmé lost his beloved sister, Maria, at the age of fifteen; although it does not explain every passage, he submits that it is “everywhere present.”³¹⁵ Because of his knowledge of this childhood tragedy, Mauron attributes to the recurring Mallarméan symbols of flowers, musical instruments, light and windows, the “constant architecture” of his obsession with his dead sister and, before her, his dead mother;³¹⁶ so strong is this association, he “can scarcely think of Mallarmé’s windows or his white pages without seeing in filigree the tomb they stand for.”³¹⁷ In doing this, though, he rejects other, equally valid interpretations. Because of the image he has of Mallarmé, consumed by his sister’s death more than any other event or abstract question, Mauron unravels the meaning of Mallarmé’s poems in one very specific way and not in others. Instead of Mallarmé’s windows representing the barrier between him and the world of the departed that he simultaneously wants to join and flee from, for instance, they could signify the unreachable artistic perfection that exists in his mind but not, somehow, as hard as he tries, in the words he scratches on the page. A Mallarmé obsessed with the afterlife would probably mean the former, but a Mallarmé more concerned with his own work product and legacy may not. It is equally possible that the lines of Mallarmé’s mind did not converge “toward the past and toward death,” as Mauron puts it; but, instead, toward a more prosaic intersection of his own goal of the production of ‘sublime’ poetry, and the practical difficulty of writing it.

In ‘Don du poème’, when Mallarmé writes how “through the window burnished with spices and gold,/Through the icy panes alas! still bleak,/dawn hurled itself on the angelic lamp”³¹⁸ (*Par le verre brûlé d’aromates et d’or,/Par les carreaux glacés, hélas! mornes encore/L’aurore se jeta sur la lampe angélique*) he may well have been sitting in his study, hunched over his writing table after yet another frigidly barren night of trying to write, looking out the window to see the spice and gold of the burnished sunrise reach in to illuminate his bleak page. Similarly, in ‘Las de l’amer repos’, when he writes of the effort to “hollow out by vigils a new pit each night/in the greedy, frigid earth” (*De creuser par veillée use fosse nouvelle/Dans le terrain avare et froid*) of his brain, all the while reproached “by friends, by the past, by genius” (*reproches vieilliss/Que me font mes*

³¹⁴ Mauron, *Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé*, 10, 51.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

³¹⁸ My translations have been used throughout for Mallarmé.

amis, le passé, le génie) and even his “lamp which nonetheless knows [his] agony,” (*Et ma lampe qui sait pourtant mon agonie*) the agony may plausibly be that of the endless white page. When he asks at the end of that poem what he can “say to this Dawn” when “out of fear of its deathly pale roses,/The vast graveyard will merge these empty holes,” (*Que dire à cette Aurore, ô Rêves, visité/Par les roses, quand, peur de ses livides,/Le vaste cimetière unira les trous vides?*) he may be evoking the spirit of that future night when all the blank pages join together to affirm his failure. The point I make is not the alternative interpretation is ‘correct’, but that it is not *necessary* to see death and the corpse of his sister Maria beckoning to him.

For Mauron to have the confidence in his interpretation that he does, requires a selective misreading. Mallarmé writes, for instance, that “all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book,” and admits in notes to himself and in private letters that he is terrified to think of the artistic qualities that feat will require and that he is sure he does not possess.³¹⁹ He also grumbles to his friend Aubanel, eight days after the birth of his daughter in 1864, that “I have not yet resumed work; with her cried this bad baby has banished Hérodiade, of hair cold as gold, heavy-robed and sterile”; and, four months later, to another friend, Cazalis, that “I do not enjoy all this enchantment that hovers about a cradle [...] I am too much the poet and too taken with Poetry itself to savour, when I cannot work, an inner happiness which seems to me to take the place of the other happiness, the great happiness, the one the Muse gives...”³²⁰ The reader’s awareness of these other biographical fragments has the power to create for them a different picture of the author and his motivations and inspirations. This is illustrated by Marshall C Olds, for example, who says that Mallarmé was “haunted throughout his life by the thought that he would never finish his poetic task, but not because he would be robbed of any posthumous glory. Rather, it was because something necessary might be left unsaid.”³²¹ The window in Mallarmé can then change from a symbolic barrier separating the poet from the afterlife he so desperately wants to join, to a barrier dividing poetic aspiration from poetic reality; the graveyard, from the literal graveyard housing the poet’s sister and mother, to a figurative one communicating a more worldly fear of inadequacy and garden-variety writer’s block.

³¹⁹ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, trans. Paul Auster et al., ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: New Directions Books, 1982), 80-81.

³²⁰ Translated in Mauron, *Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé*, 10.

³²¹ Marshall C Olds, *Desire Seeking Expression: Mallarmé's "Prose Pour Des Esseintes"*, vol. 46, ed. R C La Charité and V A La Charité, French Forum Monographs, (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1983), 81.

Although Maumon still relies on the idea of 'truth' in relation to the essence of the author and the influence that essence has on the presence and nature of meaning, he is circumspect and, one might argue, realistic about the ability of a critic to know it:

In science that hypothesis is 'true' which in the present state of knowledge brings together the most facts and gives the best account of them. Since there is no end to experiment, new facts emerge, and it often happens that a new hypothesis must be adopted to include and bind together the experimental materials which have accumulated. This second hypothesis, displacing the first, in its turn becomes truth.³²²

Here, the application of scientism actually has the effect of decreasing the essentialism that often lies at the heart of Scientistic approaches. Truth exists, just as the flesh-and-blood author exists, but in the practice of the criticism it exists as a qualified conceptual entity and not as an absolute. Despite his confidence in having discovered Mallarmé's obsessive metaphors and thus the 'true' meaning of his work, this concession brings Maumon within the realm of what could be termed *imago*, as the contextually-dependent conceptions of truth and self allow for an awareness of the impact that differing conceptions might have on the hermeneutic outcome that is often lacking in psychoanalytic criticism. There is, however, still a gap between theory and practice; what is cautious in explicit discourse often acquires certainty when used in hermeneutic pronouncements.

³²² Maumon, *Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Mallarmé*, 10, 193.

Chapter 7

The *imago* and Scientific criticism restricted to IHR

General introduction

IHR approaches are defined by the exclusion of all extratextual information to permit only the text as the locus and source of meaning: a sort of ‘immaculate conception’. Intentions pre-existing the text, and the material figure of the intending object author, are not *repudiated*, but they are banished from the sphere of textual interpretation. As Wimsatt and Beardsley write in their 1946 paper, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’, “to insist on the designing intellect as a *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a *standard*.”³²³ It is possible that the Aristotelian taxonomy of causes is infecting Wimsatt and Beardsley’s thinking here; if so, they differ from Aristotle in that they exclude the designing intellect from the final, teleological cause. For Aristotle, the ‘author’ provides the formal cause, or plan; the effective cause, or the performance; *and* the final cause, the purpose. It was not until Darwin that there existed a popular understanding of great complexity of being without a teleological cause or end-goal to post hoc explain the process. It is possible that Wimsatt and Beardsley intend an allusion to Aristotle’s causes, and, if they do, they have departed both from Aristotle and from Darwin, because at the heart of IHR methodologies is still a search for an Ideal meaning that will bring the strands and ambiguities of the text together and unify them into a complete and internally-consistent whole.

Allowing interpretation and the apprehension of this unity to be influenced by extradiegetic material is rejected as being a form of eisegesis, subjectively reading into a text that which is not supported by it, rather than pure exegesis. The direction of communicative intent must emanate always from the text, and is reinforced by the semantics of the discourse: there is an insistence on the ‘centrality’ of the text, the ‘autonomy’ of the text, and the ‘authority’ of the text. Mary Louise Pratt, for instance, labels it the “doctrine of the autonomy of art;”³²⁴ Wayne Booth describes the formalist position as “autonomous;”³²⁵ and Richard Johnson defines the core purpose of cultural studies as being “to decentre ‘the text’ as an object of study.”³²⁶

³²³ Wimsatt and Beardsley, 469.

³²⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, “Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader Response Criticism,” *boundary 2* 11, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 1982 - Winter, 1983): 209.

³²⁵ Wayne Booth, “‘The Rhetoric of Fiction’ and the Poetics of Fictions,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 1, no. 2 (Winter, 1968): 108.

³²⁶ Richard Johnson, “What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?,” in *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Arnold, 1997), 97.

The rationale given for this position is variously that the author's private thoughts and intentions are so unknowable, even to the conscious mind of the author herself or himself, that they cannot be determinative; and/or that the text being studied, as a product of language and form (both of which are products of social signification and conventions) is possessed of a self-contained *objective* meaning that either renders reference to authorial intention unnecessary, or renders the text itself symbolically depreciated as an art object if it is viewed merely as a vehicle for external thoughts and impulses. Because of this approach to text-centred meaning, IHR interpretations are less susceptible to the hermeneutic circle of meaning and extradiegetically-constructed *imago*, because the author is not directly part of the equation of meaning. They can, nonetheless, succumb to a comparably circular self-validation in the interpretation of textual features: the textual features are claimed to be the originating source of meaning, but the features deemed important and the meaning ascribed to them can be judged as such *because* they validate an interpretation imposed on the text by the reader. I suggest that this interpretation has often itself been influenced by the *imago* held by the interpreting reader, and that the author's name in this way continues to influence the assessment of otherwise 'autonomous' textual features. Only, this is not part of the accepted theory. When it happens, textual features operate in the criticism as semantic stand-ins for the effect of a sublimated authorial image, and obscure the covert use of an *imago*; the author is eliminated from the explicit discourse, and perceived textual signs are referenced in the criticism because of their acceptance in the interpretive community.

Booth, for instance, describes teaching experiences in which students have adopted implied author figures that differ from his own, and have constructed a pattern of (arguably invalid, but nonetheless grounded in the text) hermeneutic choices in order to support this figure. For example, with e e cummings's 'ygUDuh':

I have found that students who are troubled by cummings asking them to be bigoted about bigots and condescending toward poor readers try to rescue the author. Since they don't want to feel bigoted, or to think that cummings was bigoted, they will assume that we should really read the poem as expression and asking for compassion for the bigot or bigots dramatised [thereby rejecting a reading that connects text signals to satire].³²⁷

Booth's image of cummings, on the other hand, gives him a voice of "elitist avantgardism" that supports a reading of satire – a sympathetic voice, certainly, but still one responsible for text

³²⁷ Wayne Booth, "'The Way I Loved George Eliot': Friendship with Books as a Neglected Critical Metaphor," *The Kenyon Review* 2, no. 2 (Spring, 1980): 25.

signals that ask their readers to mock the bigot's moral and intellectual inferiority in the face of his own certainty regarding his superiority; moreover, signals that, through their obscure and demanding syntax, ask readers to mock anyone not clever enough to understand the poem. Booth's language leaks out his own confidence, though: his identification of cummings and cummings's intended meaning is the 'correct' one, and that his students' identification is a misconstrual of the text. It is, of course, that the students are "troubled by *cummings* asking them to be bigoted" and not that they are troubled by *Booth's* version of cummings; their non-satirical reading derives really from their own feelings and personal identification with the poem, and not from the evidence provided by the text, as his does. IHR methodologies, in their insistence on the ambivalence of evidence and the Popperian heuristics, ought to lend themselves to more flexible and less dogmatic interpretive positions; in practice, however, they tend not to, because they privilege a sacerdotally-revealed meaning that is afforded canonical status.

Because of their exclusion of extradiegetic materials, the essentialism in IHR methods is located in the text instead of the intending author. Even critical approaches such as narratology, which may be seen as permissive of a plurality of meanings depending on the textual signals that are relied on in the exegesis, betray it in concepts such as the implied author: Mieke Bal defines the implied author as "the totality of meanings that can be inferred from a text,"³²⁸ and Chatman as the personality that "instructs us silently, through the design of the whole."³²⁹ There is also a hierarchy of institutional power stratifying critics that renders hermeneutic data and/or constructed meanings either valid or invalid, depending on the declarations of those with authority. It may not be the flesh-and-blood author's stated intentions or life experiences that are authoritative here, but the *idea* of the author still has power – invisible in their physical person, not in full control of their own consciousness or any meaning of the text that is unmediated by the social aspect of language or the reader's own subjectivity, but still present. The idea of the author's intentions still exists as embedded in the text and able to be retrieved and decoded with the right training and skills: it is this lurking author to which Derrida later attributes the 'myth of presence'. The author is permitted to say what the text is intended to mean, but this will only be considered relevant to interpretation if what they say is the communicative intent of the text is authorised by the interpretive community as something contained in the language.

³²⁸ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Buffalo Press, 1997), 18.

³²⁹ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 148.

In the space left by the absence of an ‘author-god’, a range of alternative author-figures spring up such as the author of biography, the single-text implied author and even the career author inferred from the author’s oeuvre – all of these are acknowledged constructions of the reader, though, and do not exist in a practical sense as *sources* of meaning. These author-figures therefore do not operate as a guiding force in the hermeneutic process or guarantee of ‘validity’ in interpretation; author-figures that are themselves the product of interpretation ought not logically be used to explain why one interpretation has been preferred over another, or why one interpretive choice has been made instead of an equally-possible one. This allows the traditional author-function to be occupied by whatever the reader chooses to project into it, which often ends up being the reader herself or himself: it is no accident, for instance, that Fish’s ‘ideal reader’ is the source and determinant of meaning, and that Fish’s ideal reader is, ultimately, Fish;³³⁰ just like it is no accident that Coleridge’s Hamlet is Shakespeare, and Coleridge’s Shakespeare is Coleridge. This is the same understanding of process that underlies one of Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck’s objections, that, “since the source is really a projection of the reader’s own processing, the effect on the reader is mistaken for the origins of the story.”³³¹ It can be difficult for any reader to maintain the mental ‘ethical wall’ in practice.

The problem faced by the premise of texts springing from nothing and having no source of meaning outside themselves can only really *be* resolved by an implicit reassertion of authorial intention – even if it is masked or rendered invisible in the explicit discourse. Without this standard against which to judge a derived meaning, the criticism ceases to be Scientistic, and ceases to rest on its originating premises. If a text is thought to speak for itself in terms of its meaning, there has to be a caveat of hypothesised communicative intention circumscribing that; in the IHR paradigm, however, that hypothesis cannot be formed on the basis of most extratextual evidence. Ultimately, in order to simultaneously construct ‘meaning’, repudiate an explicit author as the source of that meaning, but also to deny a kind of authorship by the “affective fallacy” and a reader-constructed meaning, an inferred authorial intention must be given determining force, and this is where the influence of an *imago* would operate.

³³⁰ Fish says: “aren’t I really just talking about myself, and making myself into a surrogate for all the millions of readers who are not me at all? Yes and no. [...] If the speakers of a language share a system of rules that each of them has somehow internalised, understanding will, in some sense, be uniform.” Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 401-02.

³³¹ Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, “The Implied Author: A Secular Excommunication,” *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 11.

Phenomenology

The main practice of phenomenology will be exemplified by the Konstanz School. Heidegger, Gadamer and Husserl have been discussed previously in relation to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, so will not be included here. The ideology of the Geneva School, as represented by Poulet, has been addressed in the previous Chapter because of its contemplation of the author's context, and Roman Ingarden has been omitted entirely because, despite his prominence in the field of phenomenology, his work as an ontological phenomenologist rather than a transcendental idealist means he focuses primarily on the state of being occupied by a text and does not publish any significant work relevant to hermeneutic interpretation or author image. Nuances of interpretation are acknowledged in his works, but as a premise rather than as the object of theory.

Konstanz School

The Konstanz School practice of Jauss and Iser moves away from the study of individual interpretations with its alternative focus on the meta-interpretation of a text by entire communities, as that interpretation changes over time. In retrospect, it can be seen as the bridge between phenomenology and reception studies as a branch of reader-response criticism. Jauss's inaugural lecture in 1967, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', lays down the theoretical assumptions of the critical practice, and establishes it as much more of a pure theory than his contemporaneous Anglophone movements or then the previous practice of Romanticism: interpretation becomes a passive noun and not an object-oriented verb. In consequence, specific interpretive tools or aspects of a text such as style, narrative voice or authorial image fall ambiguously within the ambit of the theory, but without being explicitly included or studied; the reader may choose to apply theoretical principles to them, but cannot claim their subsequent conclusions to necessarily be those of Jauss, or Iser. Jauss and Iser do not themselves apply specific interpretive practices to instances of literature.

In Jauss's lecture, he argues that a literary work is not possessed of an absolute, fixed meaning that will signify the same to all readers at all times; rather, he argues that it is less like "an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period," and is more like an orchestration that "strikes ever new chords among its readers and which frees the text

from the substance of words and makes it meaningful for the time.”³³² Jauss dismisses any approach that assumes a work to have a “timeless truth” embedded within it as irredeemably anachronistic.³³³ It can be argued that the *imago* is one of those preconditions of understanding, and that it therefore fits implicitly into phenomenological practice. The problem is that Jauss himself does not discuss at any length the aspects of interpretation that he considers relevant, so the inclusion of a reader’s perception of the author is an exercise in conjectural extension. Jauss does identify a small number of factors that might be taken into account, but these are not presented as exhaustive, and they do not reference the author: he says, for instance, that the reception of a work will include “a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works which [she or he] has already read;”³³⁴ also, that a “definable frame of reference” for what at any point constitutes the operating horizon of expectations will be determined from “a previous understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the contrast between poetic and practical language.”³³⁵ Here, the language of the latter suggests that it is exhaustive, but this is contradicted by the fact that it doesn’t include the previous works read by a reader. Jauss has explicitly referred to the impact of this factor three pages earlier, though, so it is unambiguously something he considers relevant. The list cannot, therefore, be exhaustive. Thus, even though “the reader’s perception of the author” is likewise omitted, we can hypothesise that it *might* have been explicitly included so had it come to Jauss’s mind at the pertinent time.

The tradition of the Konstanz School is, in this abstract way, more a practice of theorising what we understand broadly *as* meaning or the interpretation of meaning – concretising gaps, and doing it differently depending on the horizon of expectations with which we approach the work. It is less an applied practice of interpretation. The Konstanz theorists propose the existence of factors that might influence a reading, and the *fact* of influence is argued, but the factors themselves are neither identified nor studied in terms of their effects. The *imago* may well be an interpretive tool that fits comfortably within the phenomenological strategy, but it is not one explicitly articulated.

³³² Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (Autumn, 1970): 10, 1967.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 20.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

Formalism and the New Criticism

The scientific desire to validate literary studies as a respectable object of technical study gives birth also to English formalism; it replaces the previously-dominant Romantic judgment, as described by Terry Eagleton, that a text is the product of a Great Man, and therefore that its “value lies chiefly in allowing us intimate access to their souls,”³³⁶ with the judgment that the text’s value lies in its own form.

In ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, Eliot argues the need for an impersonal theory of art; the second branch of this theory in particular separates the poet from the poem, and the feelings and vision contained in and evoked by the poem from the feelings and vision in the mind of the poet. This suggests an excision of person from creation, and Eliot argues that the poet who is not able to properly effect this is possessed of poor art: the more perfect the poet, the more the artwork will be an escape both from individual emotion and individual personality. This seems, though, to contradict the premise of his requirement for an objective correlative in the writing of emotions. If the only way true emotion can be expressed through art is through the finding of “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts [...] are given, the emotion is immediately evoked,”³³⁷ one must choose how to embody the quantity in language and, in doing this, draw on some measure of subjective experience.

Unless we are prepared to assume that every person reacts in precisely the same way to all stimuli, and that these correlations are known equally to all people regardless of their own feelings or experiences, the choice the author makes of which object correlates with which emotion will draw on, and potentially express, something of the individualised response of that particular individual. The correlative that an author chooses will be premised on underlying value judgments, sensory responses and conscious or unconscious associations, linking poet uniquely with poem; and, for the reader, a picture of the author may emerge that has the power to influence how that reader apprehends the current piece or subsequent ones. John Donne, for instance, in ‘The Canonisation’, may have chosen the symbol of canonisation to represent secular love and to therefore evoke derision for either love, religion, or both – but Cleanth Brooks cannot reconcile this interpretation with his *imago* of Donne as a man who takes “both love and religion seriously.” Brooks concludes that it must express Donne’s reconciliation of

³³⁶ Eagleton, 41.

³³⁷ T S Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems,” *Athenaeum* 4665 (1919): 940.

secular with sacred devotion, each held in equal reverence,³³⁸ and the interpretive product he thus constructs is influenced by the values and experiences Brooks perceives as underlying the poet's choice of object.

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák employs a similar practice in his thematic analysis of Henry James, ironically in the very act of denying the role of the author. He argues, "The idea that intentions are annihilated by the finished work (the 'rounded form')" runs through a number of James's works, including *The Figure in the Carpet* and *The Lesson of the Master*. He notes that the same idea *also* dominates the "notebooks in which [James] recorded the phases in the composition of his works," and that this proves "his conscious decision to refute the idea that what has to be understood in a work of art can be identified as a fixed entity." The basis of this argument is that 'intentions' supposedly exist in a form too complete and neatly-packaged to be appropriate to the experience of engaging with a literary text, and that the experience ought instead, therefore, be likened to listening to music or regarding a painting. Szegedy-Maszák draws on the musical motif running through James's own oeuvre to support this reading, as well as a statement made in 1906 in a letter to Joseph Conrad: that the highest praise for a writer would be expressed as: "I read you as I listen to rare music."³³⁹ The interpretation these premises lead to is roughly as follows: because of an expressed desire on the part of the author to refute meaning in a literary work, one can read into texts such as *The Figure in the Carpet* a thematic argument that reading a text ought not to be a search for a fixed entity of meaning; and, because of an expressed desire on the part of the author to erase his intentions with the finished work, one ought not to look for his intentions in the finished work.

I do not claim that these interpretations are faulty or ill-conceived; rather, I wish to advance the more modest claim that nuanced and sometimes inconsistent elements of a methodology can fail to be expressly reconciled. My proposal is that recognising a privilege granted to an *imago* can help to reconcile them, if that intentional object is made explicit and acknowledged by the interpretive community.

³³⁸ Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1947), 10-11.

³³⁹ Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, "Henry James and Reader-Response Criticism (*The Figure in the Carpet*)," *Neohelicon* 27, no. 1 (2000): 64-67.

The Cambridge School

Once Cambridge belatedly introduces literature as a standalone subject, Richards leads the push towards a model of interpretation that treats hermeneutics as a skill comparable to thought-to-be practical endeavours such as pole-jumping and quantifiable studies such as mathematics.³⁴⁰ He argues against the Romantic fear that ‘we murder to dissect’, saying, “The fear that to look too closely may be damaging to what we care about is a sign of a weak or ill-balanced interest.”³⁴¹ In the Cambridge philosophy the text is demystified, and, although the idea of interpretation still retains *some* of the flavour of ‘poetry being the only true way to give an exegesis of poetry’, it is expressed in more pragmatic and commonly-realizable terms: it is the task of distinguishing “the thought invited by the words from other thoughts more or less like it.”³⁴² This naturally requires a discerning mind for the nuances and intricacies of language, but one no longer needs to be a poet oneself in order to adequately understand the text, possessed equally by the divine spirits of both *furor poeticus* and ‘*furor criticus*’.

Richards’s approach to authorial intention and the reader’s understanding of the author is balanced and methodical, inferred as one variable by which to judge, or to which to attribute, the thought the reader perceives to be invited by the text. Richards divides the functions of language into four parts: to express sense, or ‘thought’ in terms of an idea or object; to express or evoke feeling; to convey attitude or tone; and to embody intention.³⁴³ Wimsatt and Beardsley, presumably because of the inclusion of intention in the list, call this “probably the most influential statement of intentionalism in the past fifteen years,”³⁴⁴ but intention is here merely one of four facets of expression, none of which is given prominence over another, and it is not the guiding principle behind which to judge the other three; one of the functions of language is to express intention, but it is an accessing of intention through the text, and not an imposition of externally-derived intention imposed onto the text. Therefore, it is entirely compatible with the New Criticism. In addition, if one reads through the appendices, Richards hedges that intention may frequently be removed from consideration without injury to understanding, and that often it is redundant on top of sense, feeling and tone; there are merely instances when a consideration of intention holistically might assist analysis.

³⁴⁰ I A Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1930), 309-10.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 327.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 329.

³⁴⁴ Wimsatt and Beardsley, 473.

The primary exception in Richards's practice of formalism is his preferred methodology in the case of unresolvable ambiguity. It is here that he sees the primary role to be played of an authorial intention derived from a source other than the text. Richards argues that:

Where conjecture, or the weight of what is left *unsaid*, is the writer's weapon, it seems unnatural to bring this under the heading of sense (or statement). The false trail or misleading hope may be due not to anything the writer has said or to any feelings he has expressed, but merely to the order and degree of prominence that he has given to various parts of his composition.

He says that, if this hypothetical is accepted, "it is no long step to admitting that the form or construction or development of a work may frequently have a significance that is not reducible to any combination of our other three functions. This significance is then the author's intention."³⁴⁵ Richards specifies text instances in which there are text-immanent indications of an absence of clear hermeneutic meaning as the trigger for any reference to intention, and he is looking for *meaning* from that intention rather than the wholly-proscribed (by Wimsatt and Beardsley) judgment on the success of the text in fulfilling that intention. Ultimately, Richards seems to conceive of a single absolute and self-contained intention that is fully present to the consciousness of the author and unambiguously "invited" by a trained reading of the words. These predispositions also mark his attitude towards the author as essentialist and literal. If a formalist author attends to texts strictly intradiegetically, according to the conditions of the theory, it is true that the *imago* will become nugatory; to the extent that they allow themselves to be directed or circumscribed – as Richards suggests above – by the figure they imagine to be the author, however, their criticism will be influenced by it.

Like Richards, Leavis is sometimes aligned with intentionalism and sometimes with formalism. Leavis suggests that it is a pity so much is known of Pope's life, as a great part of the "venom," "envy," "malice" and "spite" found in Pope's writing may be a result of the colouring influence of this knowledge: "If nothing had been known but the works," he asks, would they "have played so large a part in the commentary?"³⁴⁶ He also claims that the formal "intensity of art" in Pope is striking, but that much of the criticism published at the time betrays "an essential inability to read Pope" because of its over-persuasion by the extratextual.³⁴⁷ This aspect of his legacy can be seen, for example, in Eagleton's *criticism* of him as a "text-centric" scholar, who "assumed you

³⁴⁵ Richards, 356.

³⁴⁶ F R Leavis, "Revaluations (II): The Poetry of Pope," *Scrutiny* (Dec, 1933): 277.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.

could judge literary ‘greatness’ through focused attention on texts, isolated from their contexts (including social and historical).³⁴⁸ On the other hand, Leavis has also been criticised by later New Critics for refusing to separate ‘art from life’, and for believing that the moral character of authors and their intense interest in important social questions are the driving forces behind their composition. Cioffi, for instance, queries Leavis’s “New Critical credentials” (which can be read as “formalist credentials”, given the timeline of Leavis’s scholarship), arguing that he frequently cites other works by the same author and earlier, unpublished, drafts of the same work in his criticism, and suggests that this is used as evidence of intention in a way presumably disallowed by the paradigm.³⁴⁹

The New Criticism

It is not uncommon to read that debates over authorial intention date from the publication of ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946.³⁵⁰ Isaac Asimov playfully illustrates the argument in his palm-sized story ‘The Immortal Bard’, in which Shakespeare is projected into the modern day, takes a New Critical course on his own works – and flunks. The ‘intentional fallacy’ is the name given in the subsequent tradition to the assumption that an author’s life, or their own apprehension of the meaning of the text, is relevant to the hermeneutic activity, and has been described by psychoanalyst David Gordon, in a covert criticism of it, as a vision of literary art being “a separation from the self altogether.”³⁵¹ The publication of the essay marks the point at which mainstream Anglophone criticism rules overt references to the author to be off-limits in discussions of literary meaning *and* merit.

Even though the New Criticism arises as a reaction to the perceived unsophistication of Romantic criticism, it betrays a naïveté that marks it as not materially divergent in underlying assumptions. Monroe and Beardsley draw on a heavily essentialist premise, that each text does have one ‘correct’ meaning, but they see that meaning as being contained within the text itself; the text operates as a subjective-neutral machine, inexorably leading a reader who is ‘alive’ to its signals and nuances, towards the treasure within, and the intentions of the author are both

³⁴⁸ Eagleton, 37.

³⁴⁹ Cioffi, 101. The extent to which New Criticism does originally, in fact, disallow evidence of authorial intention in the construction of meaning is something discussed further below.

³⁵⁰ For instance: Kaye Mitchell, “Authorial Intention,” in *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory: Literary Theory from 1966 to the Present*, ed. Michael Ryan and Robert Eaglestone (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 487.

³⁵¹ Gordon, 17-18.

unnecessary and irrelevant to this excavation.³⁵² The premise of New Critical formalism necessarily still rests on the intention of the Author-God, therefore; albeit, an Author-God stripped of her or his biography and vocalised idolatry. Meaning passes from the author transparently into language, and that language then perfectly contains a unifying essence that can be discerned by readers who are sophisticated enough to break its codes. It relies still on the Platonic world of ideal forms, and reduces the text to mere physical phenomena: an imperfect particular with ambiguities and inconsistencies that needs an alive reader to reconcile them. It is this conception of complexity that really separates them from Hirsch.

Wimsatt and Beardsley appear to argue against the relevance of the author's intentions and/or biography to the reader's act of construing the meaning of the text, and this is certainly how their essay has been applied. I suggest, however, somewhat ironically, that their essay has taken on a life of its own through interpretation and application that is not borne out by the words. The points on which I argue that the popular expression of the essay departs from its actual words are in the understanding of what is meant when they write of 'intention'; in what critical activity they have in mind when dismissing the authors 'intentions'; and in the extent to which they do in reality dismantle the Romanticised image of divine author and text.

Firstly, rather than using 'intention' to signify a thematic or content-based meaning that is intended (either consciously or subconsciously), it is used generally through the essay to signify the Romantic ideal of inspiration or emotional sincerity. When authorially-intended meaning of a thematic nature is intended, the word 'meaning' is generally used instead of 'intention', and the arguments on these points are considerably different. The authors define their terms at the start of the essay; unfortunately, the definitions are too vague to be helpful without a holistic reflection on the part of the reader after completing their essay; because the authors move tangentially away from their key arguments at many points it can be easy to conflate the different ideas and treat them as though the same contention applies to all. Wimsatt and Beardsley's nominated use is defined on the first page, that 'intention' "corresponds to *what [the author] intended* in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance."³⁵³ In other words, 'intention' is defined as 'what is intended'. Intention, they go on to say, will therefore have "obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way [they] felt, what made

³⁵² This use of 'alive' is the one taken by DuBois in his description of the New Critical argument. In Andrew DuBois, "Close Reading: An Introduction," in *Close Reading: The Reader*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Andrew DuBois (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 22.

³⁵³ Wimsatt and Beardsley, 468.

[them] write.”³⁵⁴ The latter elaboration suggests that intention is *not* in actuality being used to denote the communicative idea of *what the author is trying to have the words say*; instead, it is being used to denote the creation-based idea of inspiration. This reading is borne out in later definitions that are woven casually into the fabric of the discussion: for instance, that the “passwords of the intentional school” are words such as “‘sincerity,’ ‘fidelity,’ ‘spontaneity,’ ‘authenticity,’ ‘genuineness,’ ‘originality’ – these are not the “terms of analysis” that the essay argues are pertinent to a critical aesthetic assessment, and not the intention of intended signification.

When the authors do begin to talk about the thematic or content-based communicative intent driving the work, from p477 of their original print, they stop relying on the term ‘intention’ and begin to focus heavily on the word ‘meaning’. When they do this, they employ a reasonably conventional and classical intentionalism. The text retains its focus – it does not retreat to the status of Hippolyte Taine’s “shell,” nor is one meant to grasp some exterior, transcendental meaning and discard the text – but it is an embodiment and expression of the author’s intended meaning, and the problem is reduced to the question of being able to read the language of the text properly in order to decipher what that is. Materials such as letters and journals are rejected as ‘external’ to the interpretation of the text, but on the basis that they communicate only “how or why the author wrote the poem,”³⁵⁵ going back to Romantic ideas of inspiration rather than ‘meaning’ as the justification. Insofar as these materials aid the reader in the task of ‘correctly’ understanding the meaning of the language, however, they *are* deemed pertinent to the task: “The meaning of words is the history of words, and the biography of an author, his use of a word, and the associations which the word had for *him*, and part of the word’s history and meaning.”³⁵⁶ Similarly, Eliot’s exhaustive notes to ‘The Wasteland’ are considered internal to the text because they help the reader construe the meaning of the poem *correctly*.

An example of this confusion over intention and meaning in the essay is the counterargument launched by Cioffi. Cioffi argues that the thesis is semantically inconsistent and ambiguous (criticisms which bear weight), and so substitutes what he considers to be clearer expressions for their ambiguous or circular terms. Their central thesis becomes: “biographical data about an author, particularly concerning [her or his] artistic intentions is not desirable” as a means of “judging the meaning of a literary work of art.” Cioffi ‘translates’ Wimsatt and Beardsley’s “the

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 468-69.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 478.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

success of” as “the meaning of.” As I have demonstrated, I do not believe this to be what Wimsatt and Beardsley intend, or argue throughout the essay – which explains why Cioffi regards them to be self-contradictory. Cioffi then, however, relies on his own reworded thesis statement to demonstrate the inconsistency in the way in which Wimsatt and Beardsley take into account biographical or extratextual material when constructing an interpretation of hermeneutic meaning; he says they do it in approximately the same way as he does, even though he is an unashamedly biographical critic who disagrees with their paradigm. My interpretation of both of their essays is that he has misread their argument and made terms synonymous that they have kept separate – therefore, of course he will find that his practice overlaps with theirs. This is, however, a representative example of how ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ is often treated.³⁵⁷

If the meaning construed by the critic is found to be at odds with the meaning intended to be communicated, as professed later by the author, there are two options given for resolution: the meaning found by the critic to repose ‘objectively’ in the text can be held to the correct one, contrary to what the author says; or the author can be deemed to be mistaken as to what her or his intended meaning was. An illustration of this quandary can be found in the oft-cited conversation between Housman and Harris regarding Housman’s poem ‘1887’. Beardsley concludes that “we cannot allow him to make the poem mean what he wants it to mean, just by fiat,” but shows an ultimate preference for the solution that “his unconscious guides his pen more than his consciousness can admit.”³⁵⁸ If the meaning is that which is intended by the subconscious of the author in the event that conscious meanings are professed that are at odds with the critical exegesis of the text, the interpretive paradigm is still one of intentionalism. When the author is not expressly invoked like this, they are still often used in a more hypothesised, intentional object sense, to covertly validate interpretive conclusions; Beardsley may dismiss Housman’s overt statements of his intention, but he uses his own *imago* of Housman to support his hermeneutic construction of the text.

The second point is what Wimsatt and Beardsley mean when they talk of aesthetic criticism. The thesis statement on the opening page of the essay is that an author’s intention is irrelevant, neither desirable nor available as a standard – but irrelevant to *what*? Not to judging the meaning of the work, as it happens, but to judging “the success” of a work; in other words, whether it is any good. The authors clarify this later, offering two alternative questions that

³⁵⁷ Cioffi.

³⁵⁸ Monroe C Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, 2 ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 1981), 26.

can be asked in the critical analysis of a poem: whether or not the artist achieved her or his intentions, and whether the work of art is of high quality, or worth preserving and studying. The *latter*, they say, is “an enquiry of more worth,” and is therefore more properly the realm of artistic criticism.³⁵⁹ This is also the one for which authorial intention is deemed irrelevant. The same meaning is made clear by the terms chosen to replace the “intentional school” terms of sincerity and the like: “‘integrity,’ ‘relevance,’ ‘unity,’ ‘function’ [...] ‘maturity,’ ‘subtlety,’ and ‘adequacy,’” are recommended to the reader as “precise axiological terms” that are properly the “terms of analysis,” but these do not relate to the construal of thematic meaning.³⁶⁰ When this understanding of the critical aesthetic project is combined with the function of the word ‘intention’ in the essay, one is left with the argument that the emotional sincerity of the author at the moment of conception is irrelevant to the success of the work of art. This is a very different argument from that which might be taken from the essay at first blush, and one which in no way contradicts their later reference to authorial ‘intention’ when construing hermeneutic meaning. A ‘successful’ poem is one that merely communicates this meaning with integrity, unity of function, maturity and subtlety. Hirsch is an example of a scholar who derives this meaning from Wimsatt and Beardsley’s work, too. He first divides the concept of ‘intention’ into the idea of the communicative purpose, and the ideal of a mental object; as an adjunct to these forms of intention, he then adds:

Even more regrettably, there’s a third sense of ‘intention’ that concerns such perlocutionary aims as making a good or moving work. That is the sort of intention that the ‘Intentional Fallacy’ properly refers to. It was in order to untangle such multiple sense of ‘intention’ in *Validity* that I called the communicative purpose ‘will.’³⁶¹

Finally, the essay does not in fact reject the Romantic vision of the author as mystical genius and the status of the text as divine manifestation; instead, it instantiates those same principles in a language that is merely more scientific on its surface.

Poetry is differentiated from “practical messages” on the grounds that practical messages include material that is irrelevant, and thus the intention/meaning must be inferred sometimes independently of the words; poetry, on the other hand, is that which has all irrelevant meanings excised, like lumps removed from a pudding.³⁶² It may be reasonable to argue that whatever the

³⁵⁹ Wimsatt and Beardsley, 471.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 476.

³⁶¹ Hirsch, “Coming to Terms with Meaning,” 629.

³⁶² Wimsatt and Beardsley, 469-70.

words are taken to mean is what the text means, but this is not what is done: instead, ‘perfection’ is attributed to the construction of the text. This not only reintroduces authorial intention in another way, but it does it in an impractical way that relies on assumptions of poetic genius. The poet, even if it is merely her or his unconscious, is deemed to be so in control of language, meaning and subsequent interpretations of it that they can make sure that all possible meanings – meanings that a reader might attribute to the express language *or* take to be implied – are “relevant,” and that any “irrelevant” ones that *could* in theory be derived are removed. Poetry is cast as some transcendental metaliterature with perfect form. This is fanciful, and the impossibility of achieving it is only compounded by the fact that different people are capable of arriving at differing interpretations, thus rendering varying meanings and parts of the text relevant or irrelevant accordingly. Eagleton interprets New Criticism similarly, arguing, “The New Critical poem, like the Romantic symbol, was thus imbued with an absolute mystical authority which brooked no rational argument, and was the beginning of the ‘reification’ of the literary work.”³⁶³ Creating an absolute standard of ‘relevant versus irrelevant’ also assumes a fixed measure against which it will be judged so: if something is relevant or irrelevant, it must be relevant or irrelevant *to something*, and this thing is necessarily – by the terms of their argument – the intended meaning of the author. With this, intentionalism is united with authorial deification, and both are introduced incidentally and covertly into a formalist enterprise.

This conflict between the popular precis of Wimsatt and Beardsley’s essay and the principles I argue the essay really endorses can be found in the following thesis. Bobby Joe Leggett says that his study is a “sound” and “critical analysis” of the themes and structures of Housman’s work, and not “the enigma of Housman the man” as others are. “[F]or some scholars,” he laments, “the poetry is read only as a key to the personality.”³⁶⁴ Leggett criticises the use of biographical data to try to explain the inspiration for the collection. He nominates Tom Burns Haber as an example of this, as Haber finds an explanation for the “continuous excitement” with which Housman claimed he wrote *A Shropshire Lad* in the death of a German woman with whom Housman had been close; Haber finds in the poems a “feminine” language and emotional imbalance that resonates for him with this biographical instance. Leggett repudiates this identification, arguing that making such connections turns Housman into a case study and “explains nothing about the poetry *as poetry*.” Ironically, Leggett also argues that Haber’s

³⁶³ Eagleton, 38-42.

³⁶⁴ Bobby Joe Leggett, “Theme and Structure in Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad*” (PhD University of Florida, 1965), 2.

interpretation ignores Housman's own statement in a private letter that "[v]ery little in the book is biographical."³⁶⁵

Once Leggett commences his own thematic analysis, however, he makes many similar connections between Housman's poetry and what he thinks of as Housman the man. For instance, he quotes Housman from his 1892 introductory lecture for the Faculties of Arts and Laws and Science at University College, London, where he says, "But the pleasure of learning and knowing, though not the keenest, is yet the least perishable of pleasures; the least subject to external things, and the play of chance, and the wear of time." Leggett concludes: "Here then is a link between Housman's scholarship and his poetry. Both represent a search for permanence in a mutable world."³⁶⁶ That the lecture was "delivered less than three years before" much of *A Shropshire Lad* was written is telling for Leggett, who sees the timeframe as evidence of Housman's argument in favour of the pleasures of the intellect becoming subsequently "a moulding idea in his poetry."³⁶⁷ Three years as a timeframe is empirically, of course, neither short nor long, and can equally be argued as evidence of a break in ethos if one does *not* find a relationship between the lecture and the poetry. Leggett does, however, and concludes, "It is in this context that his concern with death in *A Shropshire Lad* must be seen."³⁶⁸ When applied to individual poems, this statements manifests itself in interpretive conclusions such as "[r]ecognising the relationship between Housman's view of death and his concern with mutability, one is thus led to the obvious conclusion that death in 'To an Athlete Dying Young' is part of a poetic conceit which runs throughout the poem."³⁶⁹ In other words, that the athlete is a frozen triumph over time. The presence of words such as "must" and "obvious" is notable.

The connection that Leggett draws between the text and the biographical may be differentiated from that made by Haber in terms of literalness; Leggett might argue that he is being broadly thematic, drawing on the demonstrated ethos of the author rather than superficial factual instances, and therefore homing in on what ideas might be advanced through Housman's art. Cioffi argues that the difference in New Criticism between allowable evidence and disallowed evidence is precisely this arbitrary and self-determining: allowable evidence is supposedly everything that is 'internal' to the work, ie evidence that is deemed pertinent to its meaning; disallowed evidence is everything that is 'external' to the work, ie evidence that is deemed non-

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 75.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 76.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 78.

relevant. He argues that this cannot be anything other than a relative standard, as the status of any evidence will change depending on the reading the critic gives to the work. If a piece of evidence for one critic illuminates the work or changes the meaning they perceive in it, that piece of evidence will be deemed internal and part of the poetic exegesis of the text; on the other hand, “[i]f a critical remark fails to confirm or consolidate or transform a reader’s interpretation of a work it will then become for him just evidence of something or other, perhaps the critic’s obtuseness.”³⁷⁰

The New Criticism by all means urges critics to privilege the text, and to focus their extratextual energies on materials that reasonably may be judged to illuminate the hermeneutic meaning and are not just concerned with the length of Tennyson’s beard, but this is not the same as proscribing the extratextual and the authorial entirely.³⁷¹ In this pared-back edict the *imago* has an important role to play, and one that can be seen covertly operating in many formalist readings; express recognition of this role, however, is something that has been repudiated because of an arguably overstated and overenthusiastic rhetoric.

Narratology

Narratology emerges in the void left by the removal of speech acts from the theory of formalist interpretation, using the language of rhetoric to reinstate the communicative chain. Phelan defines this use of rhetoric as the recognition of “a feedback loop among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response,” and narratology can be broadly understood, therefore, as a criticism focused on the way in which textual phenomena are shaped in order to influence or evoke a particular reader response.³⁷² This could equally manifest in either a focus on the way in which the author shapes the text, or in a focus on the way in which the shape of the text is perceived and responded to by the reader; possibly because of the environment in which it gains prominence and developed, narratology has tended to focus on the latter. Narratology (most particularly rhetorical narratology rather than structuralist) presumes a similar essential identity for author and text to that of biographical criticism and psychoanalytical, but it differs from these by displacing these identities onto a ‘valid’ reconstruction of the text by a competent reader. There is a single, unified implied author for

³⁷⁰ Cioffi, 95-96.

³⁷¹ Paraphrasing one of Terry Eagleton’s quips on close reading: Eagleton, 38.

³⁷² James Phelan, “The Implied Author, Deficient Narration, and Nonfiction Narrative: Or, What’s Off-Kilter in ‘The Year of Magical Thinking’ and ‘The Diving Bell and the Butterfly’?,” *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 125.

each text, but this is taken to be the product of a competent assessment of text-internal features rather than the manifestation of a flesh-and-blood author.

Phelan, for instance, speaks of authorial intention in his definition of rhetorical communication, but he qualifies it: “authorial agency – and more specifically, authorial intention – is accessible through textual phenomena and (partially) testable against reader response.”³⁷³ To the extent that it coheres with Phelan’s basic expression of intention (and, for the most part, it does), narratology thereby sidesteps injunctions against the biographical author and retains its scientific character by suggesting that a full catalogue or taxonomy of textual features embodying or *standing in for* intention can be identified and tested against. In this way, a kind of force-field is created around the work, insulating it from the biographical author while still allowing critics to discuss the intention they perceive embodied in the work or the ‘voice’ they hear, albeit in a way vulnerable to self-validation and circularity.

Implied authors

Concepts such as the ‘implied author’ gain popularity around a decade after the publication of Wimsatt and Beardsley’s essay. They allow an authorial figure to be recognised, because it is sanitised by virtue of its reliance on textual features. Booth is credited with having introduced the term in his 1961 text, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*,³⁷⁴ as Peter Rabinowitz’s says, “at a dark time when author and intention were banned. To a certain extent, the terminology was a sleight of hand to smuggle the categories back into more or less formalist discourse.”³⁷⁵ It maintains the integrity of Wimsatt and Beardsley’s pudding, and also satisfies a post-Freudian world keen to discourage what Seymour Chatman calls “the overhasty assumption” that a fictional text composed of polysemous language can give a reader direct access to a unified authorial psyche.³⁷⁶

It is also criticised by Lanser, Bal and others as nothing more than an unquantifiable reading effect. Lanser specifically dismisses it as an unnecessary subspecies of the encompassing term ‘author’, which in practice will likely include historical, cultural and literary contexts, as well.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ The concept has older origins, such as one of Booth’s own papers from 1952 and traditions in Russian Formalism.

³⁷⁵ Peter J Rabinowitz, “The Absence of Her Voice from that Concord’: The Value of the Implied Author,” *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 101.

³⁷⁶ Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, 30.

Lanser's brief sketch of the composite author, which she provides to illustrate her criticism of the 'implied author', operates somewhat the way that the suggested *imago* of this thesis does, but she does not elaborate on it because it is a concept that she relies on as a given rather than as a thesis she advances substantively.³⁷⁷ Marie-Laure Ryan makes a similar point, that she sees no need to limit the perceived authorial 'voice' to being that of the implied author only and not the biographical author, but it is unclear whether the focus of her hermeneutics is an understanding of the text or an understanding of the author:

We can build an image of Kafka on the basis of *The Trial*, but we will build a better image by also reading his correspondence and diaries. In the implied author model, every text projects its own implied author, and the author-image built on the basis of *The Trial* exclusively would be considered an autonomous and self-sufficient product, rather than a draft in a work-in-progress.³⁷⁸

The implied author is, by definition, single-text, and does not accommodate a construction that draws on elements of style or perceived thematic consistency from across the author's oeuvre; nor does it permit an image implied by paratextual or extratextual materials such as dust jackets, published interviews, or releases from the author's publishing house. Gérard Genette relies on some of these materials from the fringes of the diegetic text in his discussion of the relationship between reader and author-image in his book *Paratexts*, but he limits this relationship to *only* paratext and does not admit anything cross-textual, purely diegetic, extratextual or biographical.³⁷⁹

In response to these criticisms, Booth and others over time have added extra personae to the catalogue of 'implied author' concepts existing within narrative studies, including the career author and the author of public myth. This is in addition to those author functions that exist independently of narratology and often predate it, such as the author as a legal entity.

Because the implied author exists in intuited essence rather than in materiality, it is invariably described as epiphenomenal. It is an "imaginative construct developed by the reader or critic from formal and rhetorical elements," in the *Encyclopaedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*;³⁸⁰ "a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text" by Shlomith

³⁷⁷ Lanser, 18.

³⁷⁸ Marie-Laure Ryan, "Meaning, Intent, and the Implied Author," *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 42.

³⁷⁹ Genette.

³⁸⁰ Justin Sully, "Implied Author/Reader," in *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory: Literary Theory from 1900 to 1966*, ed. Michael Ryan and Gregory Castle (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 254.

Rimmon-Kenan;³⁸¹ and “the author-image contained in a work and constituted by the stylistic, ideological, and aesthetic properties for which indexical signs can be found in the text” by Wolf Schmid – Schmid’s focus on the autonomy of the text combined with the fact that the reader projects a theorised intention into it leads Schmid to name the author-figure the “abstract author.”³⁸² Since the reader builds this personality *from* the text, it does not and cannot exist outside it and so cannot ‘put’ anything ‘into’ the work. Dan Shen argues that, when used in the decoding sense of the apprehended author, like the ‘second self’ discussed above, the implied author “ceases to be an ‘author’.”³⁸³ Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller argue similarly, suggesting it ought more properly to be called a “hypothetical” or “postulated” author in order to strip it of the seeming empirical and reader-neutral existence suggested by the directionality of the term ‘implied’ author.³⁸⁴ Because it is the product of the reader’s theories about the kind of authorial personality that would write that particular text in that particular way, Umberto Eco in 1979 renames it the “model author.”

Not all users of the term ‘implied author’ (or one of the close analogues) expressly acknowledge their power to determine the identity of the authorial figure, and this may be a habit authorised by the author-oriented language. The validity of an interpretation is often argued with reference to the nature of the implied author, despite it being arguably the other way around. Chatman’s concerns lead to him suggest a range of alternative terms including “text implication,” “text instance,” “text design” and “text intent.”³⁸⁵ Bal sees the impact of self-referentiality in the way the implied author is constructed being that it becomes more properly “the result of the investigation of the meaning of a text, and not the source of that meaning.”³⁸⁶ In the words of Herman and Vervaeck, “since the source is really a projection of the reader’s own processing, the effect on the reader is mistaken for the origins of the story.”³⁸⁷ Not all theorists are comfortable with the nomenclature focusing on authorship. Booth acknowledges that the nature of the implied author is almost entirely determined by the attitude of the reader, saying in relation to a hypothetical reading of Sylvia Plath repeated after decades that “the IA I recreate by reading the text *now* is not identical with the IA I would have recreated 40 or 20 years ago,” but he chooses the word ‘recreate’ instead of ‘create’, suggesting that he is reconstituting an

³⁸¹ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 88.

³⁸² Quoted with approval in Richardson, 1.

³⁸³ Dan Shen, “What Is the Implied Author?,” *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 90.

³⁸⁴ Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, “Six Ways Not to Save the Implied Author,” *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 72-73.

³⁸⁵ Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*.

³⁸⁶ Bal, 18.

³⁸⁷ Herman and Vervaeck, 11.

ideal or pre-existing quantity that has some kind of substance before he creates it. Booth also frequently conflates the 'implied author' personality adopted by the *author* when writing, and the 'implied author' hypothesised personality adopted by the *reader* when reading. Criticisms of his tendency to do this in his initial 1961 explication is what prompts him to clarify his author functions in a taxonomy appended later to the 2nd edition. But Booth persists in conflating them even after this, and there is a question concerning the line he genuinely sees dividing the subset of the 'real' author from the construed creation of the reader.

In 2005, for instance, he calls Plath the "top contender for prize as 'FBP [flesh-and-blood person] With Largest Collection of Contradictory IAs'" on the basis that neither Plath nor the reader knows which of the implied authors is the most 'real' in terms of Plath's 'actual' self. Booth says that Plath "herself felt divided about just which of her poems really fit the person she wanted to appear to be"; but that he, after reading her final poem, 'Edge', finds himself "not just admiring it but in effect loving the author implied by every stroke: a wonderfully different person from the one I have met in her diaries and in some of her more careless poems."³⁸⁸ In the Introduction to the 2nd edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth addresses criticisms from the first publication based on the way he used text examples; he says that, two decades later, he sees how he claimed his illustrations were definitive and exhaustive. The earlier implied Booth is discussed as an autonomous entity, able to be constructed from the original text: "These readers must have sensed, in my implied author, someone who is just a bit proud about all the fiction he *has* read – somewhat too willing to suggest that he has mastered, or is just on the edge of mastering, this whole world. [...] In my own rereading, I sometimes detect that brash young man, and I herewith take it all back." Through the use of "sensed" rather than a more autonomous verb like 'hypothesised', we can see that the assumed connection between implied author and flesh-and-blood author dies hard.

Jenefer Robinson encounters a similar problem. Initially, in her essay 'Style and Personality in the Literary Work', she advances an argument based on an *imago*:

The ordinary conception of style is that it consists of nothing but a set of verbal elements such as a certain kind of vocabulary, imagery, sentence structure and so on. On my conception, however, a literary style is rather a way of *doing* certain things, such as describing characters, commenting on the action and manipulating the plot. I shall

³⁸⁸ Wayne C Booth, "Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?," in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J Rabinowitz (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 80-82.

claim that an author's way of doing these things is an expression of her personality, or, more accurately, of the personality she seems to have.³⁸⁹

She claims that many critics do what she is identifying, writing about an author as though style is an expression of personality, even if they fail to acknowledge it expressly, and gives as illustration the criticism of Ian Watt on James's *The Ambassadors*.³⁹⁰ He says that "the most obvious and demonstrable features of James' prose style, its vocabulary and syntax, are direct reflections of his attitude to life and his conception of the novel."³⁹¹ This could be explained as a comment on the implied author, but Watt's reference to "life" suggests he does not conceive of it this way. Robinson unequivocally accuses him of this: "This essay is an attempt to explain and justify the assumption of Watt and others like him that style is essentially an expression of qualities of mind, attitudes, interests and personality traits which appear to be the author's own."³⁹² She draws an analogy between writing, and dressing, speaking and decision-making, saying that these all express personality by the way in which they are done. She even qualifies this by saying that they are neither transparent nor exhaustive, but are "an expression of (some features of) [...] personality, character, mind or sensibility" and that one can track back to a hypothesis of these personal traits because the traits cause a person to do things in the particular way they do; they thus "leave a matching imprint or trace upon the actions which express them."³⁹³ Style may evolve over time or manifest differently in the details of different works, but any underlying unity, coherence and – above all – consistency will be important because it will be that which signifies the originating "attitudes, interests and qualities of mind."³⁹⁴

It would seem to be an intentionalist argument, but, halfway through the essay, after establishing and defending this ability of style to communicate personality, Robinson qualifies that it is "normally the case that the personality expressed by the style of a literary work is not that of the actual author but that of the implied author"³⁹⁵ – or, even, giving the example of *Ulysses* by James Joyce, that of the narrator (which she conflates with 'Joyce', or uses as an interchangeable figure). If the importance of style is that it expresses the underlying personality that motivates it, it is difficult to see how this logic can be applied to characters that are nothing

³⁸⁹ Jenefer M Robinson, "Style and Personality in the Literary Work," *The Philosophical Review* 94, no. 2 (Apr, 1985): 227.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*: An Explication," in *Henry James*, ed. Tony Tanner (London: Macmillan, 1968), 301.

³⁹² Robinson, 229.

³⁹³ Ibid., 228-29.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 230-31.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 234.

more than explanatory or fictional concepts – they have no ‘personality’ pre-existing the text that can shape its form, and exist instead only as a product of that form.

Robinson references Nehamas’s postulated author in support of her argument, saying that it “fits very nicely with a plausible theory of critical interpretation recently defended” by Nehamas: “Here Nehamas uses ‘author’ to mean ‘implied author. His claim is that a text must be read as an expression of the attitudes and so on of the implied author.” She concedes, “Of course, it could turn out that Nehamas is wrong and the correct way to read literary texts is as the expression of attitudes in the actual author”; but reflects, “My thesis can accommodate either view.”³⁹⁶ My reading is that Robinson is caught between the impulse to construct an intentionalist *imago* of the flesh-and-blood author, and the received doctrine of decontextualised texts; as a result of this she tries to reconcile her sense that writing is as illustrative of writer as clothing is illustrative of wearer, or as speech is illustrative of speaker, with the rules about how to ‘correctly’ (as she says) read literary texts, handed down by her interpretive community. In the desire to stay within the bounds of each she introduces contradictions and, ultimately, fails to take a position on either: “My thesis can accommodate either view.”

Hermeneutic deference to the implied author therefore involves a self-affirming process of interpretation by which an inferred figure is created that will best fit the textual elements relied upon for its creation, but in a way that is usually not explicitly acknowledged. Regardless, use of this ‘author’ in interpretation requires an interpretation of the text that appears to fulfil the intention of the authorial figure postulated as being responsible for it, because the two are conterminous. Herman and Vervaeck argue, “Though believers say they construct the implied author on the basis of textual features, the thousands of pages on the subject have not yielded a single discovery procedure. Indeed, as far as we know, there are no procedures one can follow to go from text to implied author.”³⁹⁷ This claim is also supported by empirical studies including the work by Kindt and Müller, the authors of the only book-length study of the implied author.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 239.

³⁹⁷ Herman and Vervaeck, 11.

³⁹⁸ Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, *The Implied Author: Concept and Controversy*, trans. Alastair Matthews (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).

Ultimately, if the rules for constructing this implied author can be identified, then the same figure ought to be able to be constructed by any reader attempting to replicate the analysis. The fact that narratology practitioners expect this to be the case is illustrated by the frequent lamentations and even *surprise* at the discipline failing heretofore to properly identify and catalogue these rules to enable it to happen; Schmid, for instance, argues a “pressing need to identify the indexical signs that refer to the implied author,”³⁹⁹ and Maria Stefanescu expresses concern at the lack of progress in the theory:

One would expect [...] that some clearly specified narratological tools have been made accessible to differentiate between these various kinds of readings and unambiguously to single out the authorial ones, but none seem available. As in 1961... so today: critics can only invoke an ‘*intuitive* apprehension of a completed artistic whole’ [referencing Booth’s characterisation in the 1961 *The Rhetoric of Fiction*] when pressed to substantiate their claim that they have successfully produced an authorial reading. [...] [T]he ultimate argument for designating one’s own as an ‘authorial reading’ appears to be, however, one’s subjective belief that ‘this is what the implied author must have meant when designing a particular literary piece’.⁴⁰⁰

The ‘implied author’ can only be constructed from the text evidence supplied by a single text instance, but there is as yet no agreed-upon formula for determining which elements of the text are most determinative or how to construe them consistently across readers. There has also been as yet no empirical analysis of the extent to which readers are able to do this, without allowing implied author images from similarly-signed texts (or even material from outside the author’s texts) to influence each single-text image. Lanser argues, “What I believe we need is the equivalent of an S/Z for implied authorship: an effort to trace, sentence by sentence or seme by seme, the ways in which a reader, even a lone narratologist reader, might go about creating the ‘implied author’ from the intersecting codes and sign systems that comprise the text.”⁴⁰¹ This scientific taxonomy is presumably required because it will lend validity to the authorial figure.

Booth’s alternative ‘career author’ is composed of all the implied authors emanating from the writer’s texts, and is “the sustained creative centre implied by a *sequence* of implied authors,”⁴⁰² stretching across all works similarly signed. Chatman argues in favour of an author-figure

³⁹⁹ “Implied Author,” *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Hamburg University Press, http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Implied_Author.

⁴⁰⁰ Maria Stefanescu, “Revisiting the Implied Author Yet Again: Why (Still) Bother?,” *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 58-59.

⁴⁰¹ Susan Lanser, “The Implied Author: An Agnostic Manifesto,” *Style* 45, no. 1 (Spring, 2011): 157.

⁴⁰² Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, 270-71.

constructed from knowledge about an author's oeuvre because of the "necessary constraint" it places "on possible contexts and styles implicit in his or her signature on the text," and uses the vastly different career author personae of Hemingway and James to illustrate. If a character in each of their novels remained silent in response to a direct question, for example, knowledge of the career author might help the reader make meaning (the implication here is make *valid* meaning) out of it; if other Hemingway texts use a character who is similarly mute, in contexts that suggest it expresses an 'heroic stoicism', he says, one might reasonably apply that interpretation to the new text instance.⁴⁰³ Logically we might extend Chatman's example to the silence of James's character, and think that this author's previous contexts might instead suggest a feeling of peevishness on the part of the person being asked the question, or implied feebleness on the part of the person asking it.

Chatman tries to bracket off the oeuvre author from any author figures outside the texts, but Booth is not so disciplined. Booth writes many texts arguing in favour of reinstatement of the human dimension of reading and interpretation, and, in the book in which the category of 'career author' is first suggested, claims that *The Turn of the Screw* ought to be read and made sense of as something produced by James and not, for instance, Conan Doyle or Robbe-Grillet. That, by using what we know of the rest of James's life and works, "We are unashamedly exploiting the 'extrinsic' here, reading the story as in fact we all read stories: using, where needed, our postulates about how a certain kind of human being might address other human beings."⁴⁰⁴ Booth's readers may thus forget that, at least in his expressly theoretical enumerations of authorial figures, he avoids a proposal that mixes text with context. In *Critical Understanding*, published eighteen years after the original *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (which does not mention the 'career author') and in the Appendix added to the 2nd edition *Rhetoric*, Booth holds to this position: the career author is "a composite of the Implied Authors of all his or her works."⁴⁰⁵ In his exhaustive(ing), multi-page taxonomy, no author figure that blends aspects of the career author with something like the public myth and/or biographical author is identified.

While the career author is based *solely* on the works, Booth and Chatman's concept of the 'public myth' is thoroughly independent of them: the latter is text-prohibitive, while the former admits nothing outside the pages. These mutually-exclusive categories suggest an omission by their insistence on one image taken *only* from textual inference, and a second, entirely separate

⁴⁰³ Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, 88-89.

⁴⁰⁴ Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, 290.

⁴⁰⁵ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 431.

image, composed *solely* of the hyped parody of extratextual and biographical that exists in marketing. There is also no version that combines texts by the same author if they are signed differently – Stephen King and Richard Bachman, for instance. Questions can also be raised regarding the universal availability of this image, and its ability to be both based in, yet somehow transcendental of, the author's individual texts. In Booth's words, the career author is the "composite of the implied authors of *all* his or her works" [my emphasis],⁴⁰⁶ but this implies one unified and objective persona that does not come to fruition until the author has ceased to write and is dead. It also implies an ideal reader who has read all of these texts, and is aware of the correct order in which they were written. The conception as it stands does not therefore encompass an image of the author that is both individualised and constantly evolving. By virtue of each reader not being familiar with every piece in an author's oeuvre, nor having read texts in the same order, interpreted them in precisely the same way, or noticed the same 'golden thread' of authorial voice woven through, this is nonetheless likely to be the case.

H L Hix initially commits to a counter-proposal close to the *imago*, but retreats before a complete transgression of prevailing norms is achieved. Specifically, Hix enumerates three types of 'author': the narrator; the singular proxy, which he defines as the reader-generated implied author of a *single* work; and the synoptic proxy, which he defines as the reader-generated implied author of *multiple* works by that author.⁴⁰⁷ The synoptic proxy at this point sounds like Booth's career author, but Hix differentiates it by arguing that it occupies "the space of tension between the fictional and the real," and that "[o]ne might also think of this as the tension between what is inferred from within the artifact and what is inferred from outside the artifact." The synoptic therefore differs from the singular not only in that it includes information taken from across multiple texts, but that it also includes information taken from outside the works, "such as historical or biographical information, which colours the way the reader interprets." Even though this could not be inferred from the initial definition of the term, he says subsequently what is intended. The application of the theory ought then, one might assume, to follow this line – but it doesn't.

When Hemingway is used in illustration, Hix argues that his suicide "collided" with the thematic focus of his works on courage and machismo; anyone who saw the suicide as evidence of a lack of courage or manliness would, Hix says, find the singular proxies within the works to be

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Hix, 169.

insincere. Hix argues in favour of a schism opening between singular and synoptic, and not, as might be expected from his claim that the synoptic “colours the way the reader interprets,” in favour of an altered reading of the texts. The interpretation remains the same, despite the fact that Hix otherwise argues in favour of the interpretation changing with a shift in proxy. He calls it later a “tug-of-war between proxy and text,” and specifies that the “one rule” of this game be “that proxy and text must always be compatible” – if the reading of the text affects the conception of the proxy, he names the resulting reconciliation “proxy revision.”⁴⁰⁸ But it seems that he does not conceive of it operating the other way around; in other words, despite his claim that the proxy influences the reading, he does not believe in text revision in the event of proxy revision. Or, in the case of Hemingway, even in that compatibility he asserts is the “one rule.”

The precise language used by Hix in making this argument is also interesting, as he changes his relative prepositions ever so slightly: he concludes that “the factual information about the way Hemingway ended his life has so altered the (synoptic) proxy inferred from outside his works that many readers now view the (singular) proxy inferred from within the works as unbelievable or insincere.”⁴⁰⁹ The “space of tension between being inside and outside the work” has been narrowed to existing “outside” the works, and is thus contrasted rather than combined with the single proxy inferred from “within” them. Previously it seemed that the single proxy was a subset of the synoptic, altered perhaps in nature when constructed in light of the additional information, but in application it becomes a contrasting complement, and Hix’s synoptic proxy is reduced to a concept identical to the career author that pre-existed it. Hix also argues that works written under a pseudonym ought to be read with a self-contained proxy, and not absorbed into the broader synoptic proxy of the author behind the pseudonym. He draws an analogy with Hamlet’s soliloquies, and claims that pseudonymous works likewise speak the thoughts of a character and *not* the author.⁴¹⁰ This extraordinary qualification ignores the idea that authors are capable of writing works under their own name in which they try to express a personality or advance values or ideas different from those they really have – as Tolstoy is said to have done in *War and Peace*, for instance – but, even more than this, seems to ignore his own basis of singular proxy interpretation: not that the literal representations of the text, including representations by characters, be read as the literal representations of the author, but that the literal representations of the text be read as the *kinds of things that that kind of author might conceive of*.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 170-71.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 183.

Even though Hix seems at first to be offering a theory that covers the same ground as the here-proposed *imago*, and different ground from existing concepts of authors, the retreats and contradictions that appear in the subsequent explication of it disprove that. Ultimately, Hix misunderstands Booth's implied author, criticises it for transgressions that aren't present in Booth's actual form, and then proposes an alternative that is the same as Booth's proposal.

Part 4: Disruption

Chapter 8 The Disruptive paradigm

General introduction

The Disruptive paradigm is a *contre-pouvoir* reaction to the hierarchical power relations embedded in the dominant models of criticism prior to the mid-20th century. The Scientific paradigm that predominates in the decades before places a particular reliance on authority, hierarchy and the power of both to validate or disapprove the resulting interpretations; the Disruptive paradigm interacts with contemporary movements urging democracy and a reaction against class and traditional power structures, and is overtly political, frequently using the text as a tool to critique society and dismantle or challenge systems operating within it.

Biriotti argues that the mood of the time is focused on “combating the bourgeois values enshrined in the canon, and overturning the hierarchical distinction between high and low culture,” because of the extent to which subjectivity, authority, “and indeed authorship itself” have been denied to large segments of the population, “those oppressed on the grounds of race, gender and sexuality.” Branches of critical theory that I class as working in a ‘Disruptive’ paradigm attack the centrality of the humanist author and, even more broadly, the humanist subject, to become part of a broader “strategy of political liberation.”⁴¹¹ Guerin and others describe the post-modern mood in general – encompassing the specific movements of post-structuralism and deconstruction but, I argue, extending also to less radical theories such as reader response criticism – as not only a critique of the *aesthetics* of the preceding age(s), but as projects to dismember and dismantle the traditions and hierarchies wholesale:

Postmodernism questions everything rationalist European philosophy held to be true, arguing that it is all contingent and that most cultural constructions have served the function of empowering members of a dominant social group at the expense of ‘others’.⁴¹²

The specific post-modernism that Guerin focuses on does not begin until the mid-1980s, but I regard the dismantling and democratisation efforts to have begun decades earlier; if not in the

⁴¹¹ Biriotti, 4.

⁴¹² Wilfred L Guerin et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 300.

less-recognised early work of educators such as Louise Rosenblatt,⁴¹³ with the ‘transactional’ theory of language, then certainly by the time of Derrida’s 1966 paper, ‘Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.’⁴¹⁴

Barthes and Nehamas both nominate the author as a ‘modern’ construct, dating from around the time of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and the English Restoration. Barthes nominates English empiricism, French rationalism and the Protestant belief in a faith revealed through private revelation, while Nehamas relies upon the definition given in Hobbes’s discussion of authors as one half of a “Naturall”/“Artificiall” dichotomy: “A Person, is [she or he] whose words or actions are considered, either as [her or his] own, or as representing the words or actions of an other [human], or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction.” A Naturall person is therefore one who owns her or his words, either spoken in their own person or given to an Artificiall person to speak: an actor. This conceives of the author-figure as entirely a category of power. Hobbes uses the language of capitalist, individualistic ownership in order to explain the relationship that an Artificiall person bears to the words that they speak: “some have their words and actions Owned by those whom they represent. And the Person is the Actor; and [they] that owneth [the] words and actions, is the AUTHOR: In which case the Actor acteth by Authority.”⁴¹⁵ Nehamas applies this to literary texts, but expands the dominion the author exercises over the actor (viz, characters) to a dominion over the reader – only, with respect to the subtextual or hermeneutic meaning.⁴¹⁶ Hix argues that the link made by Nehamas is not self-evident, because Hobbes is discussing a contractual relationship and his ‘Actor’ is now more commonly known as an ‘Agent’ – the ‘Author’ is the ‘Principal’.⁴¹⁷ I think, however, this expansion based on a fiduciary or proprietary relationship may be precisely what Nehamas has in mind, and what he conceives as the basis for the Disruptive rebellion. The language of contract is what establishes the author-character-reader relationship as a power hierarchy and system of vested authority.

The modern concept of the author can also be seen as emerging from Biblical traditions: since God’s universe has a natural hierarchy, the natural role of rational creatures consists in obeying

⁴¹³ Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York and London: D Appleton-Century Company, 1938).

⁴¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁴¹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: or, the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (London: printed for Andrew Crooke, 1651), 98-99.

⁴¹⁶ Alexander Nehamas, “Writer, Text, Work, Author,” in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Cascardi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁴¹⁷ Hix, 5.

those naturally above and ruling those naturally below. To proponents of a Disruptive ideology, this sounds like tyranny; but that is only because they hear it with Fallen ears. The Fall is an act of rebellious self-assertiveness, an individualism, in which a creature forgets the righteous duty and love they owe to their creator. Paternal love spreads downwards and filial love spreads upwards, and thus it should be with an Author and (His) readers so that each is happy in a mutual exchange of love and courtesy. A *self-righteous* individualism that either forgets or repudiates this is where evil lies; the Disruptive ideology of a movement such as reader response criticism echoes the language of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

self-begot, self-rai'd,

By your own quickening power (5.861-2)

Satan cannot remember his own creation, just as the reader is not present at the inception of the text – not for the words, nor the first intentional act of meaning that is the effective cause of them. But Satan's pride requires him to be his own creator, autonomous, and in denial of his contingent relation to God. To the extent that literary reception and theory are premised on this theological foundation, the autonomous reader enacts the same sin of pride by denying the author command over the teleological cause of the work. This, naturally, would be the precise attraction for a Disruptive theorist, either by inverting the power hierarchy as Satan attempts to do, or by subverting it and attempting to undermine the communicative or transactional model of language altogether. As Biriotti concludes, "The traditional, humanist concept of a single, human source of all meaning was discarded amid the clamour of disturbances and manifestations against authority all over Europe."⁴¹⁸

Cain argues that post-structuralism poses a far greater threat to the stability of intentionalism than any formalism. The theories

endanger literary and cultural order by calling into question the existence and need for authority. Their theories subvert the goal of objective knowledge that should structure our interpretations, and encourage an interpretive solipsism that undercuts our belief in research and teaching as a shared, communal enterprise.⁴¹⁹

Many commentators object to Disruptive criticisms on the basis of a deep ideological or emotional opposition rather than a technical or methodological disagreement; both advocacy and opposition often come across as polarised or somewhat radicalised, and claims carry more

⁴¹⁸ Biriotti, 1.

⁴¹⁹ William E Cain, "Authority, 'Cognitive Atheism', and the Aims of Interpretation: The Literary Theory of E D Hirsch," *College English* 39, Teaching Literature, no. 3 (Nov, 1977): 334-35.

impact than specificity. Barthes's phrase 'death of the author' is an example of this: when examined, his proposal is far more qualified than the popular forms that exist of it.

Two branches

The paradigm develops across what I propose is two stages: beginning as a pure rejection of power hierarchies and, indeed, of power itself; then subsiding into a less radical challenge of traditional power relations that doesn't destabilise *ab initio* the concept of stratified power. The second stage keeps intact the hierarchical structure of the binary opposition, but inverts it so that the subordinate can seize dominance.

The first stage, named 'Subversive Disruption', covers the vanguard of revolutionary critics within post-structuralism, focusing on Barthes, Derrida and Fish; the second, referred to as 'Inversive Disruption', covers ideologies such as psychology-based reader response criticism and 'cultural theories'. The Subversive branch is differentiated from the Inversive one in that the former subscribes more fully to a Nietzschean philosophy, while the latter accepts the premise of power in the forms of private ownership and individualism, and accepts the ability of language to signify. Instead of radically overturning these doctrines, the Inversive branch is focused on challenging the distribution of power within them, and re-allocating power through interpretation to those people traditionally dispossessed of it: for instance, re-allocating power to the subjects appropriated by the text (such as in post-colonial criticism), and to the readers of it. The concept of 'literature', used to denote texts of supposedly greater merit, is challenged, as well as the distinction between (trained) critics and (untrained) readers.

Despite its subversive political goals, the Inversive paradigm does not distance itself from a practice embodying the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism, as the text is treated as an object that can be appropriated by each reader or critic for her or his own ends. The individuals who consume the text or own the labour required to execute the text are able to determine it, rather than the individual who produced it and who owns the means of that production. Critical readings of texts by Inversive theorists still work towards explications – owning the words of the text by transforming them and the experience of them into other words, the words of the critic. Jane Tompkins says that "the formalist identification of criticism with explication" is an expression of its ideological commitment to bourgeois aesthetics – specifically, a "consumerist

view” of art that allows it to be owned and available for privatised leisure use.⁴²⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, referencing Tompkins, argues that this is why the critical community has been so much more willing to ignore the ‘affective fallacy’ than the intentional one, because the production of art is truly the act that challenges the bourgeois model of private acquisition of it.⁴²¹

The role of the author is admitted into the Inversive paradigm, but partly as a fetish object: it contains no determinative meaning and wields no authority. If the author belongs to a traditionally marginalised group, the text is taken as an instance of the empowerment of that group, and – to the extent that the text is deemed to speak ‘for’ the author – the text can be interpreted to provide a commentary on the world about how a member of that marginalised group experiences it.

The Subversive stage of the Disruptive paradigm attempts to do more than merely invert the hierarchical chain by elevating the subordinate term and subordinating the dominant: that would, in the end, merely reinforce the existing imbalance. The Subversive movement works to deny any authoritative meaning, but in order to do this it cuts the text off from its context even more absolutely than do Scientistic IHR methods. Construing Subversive movements in this way is a departure from some existing analysis. Many scholars perceive Disruptive theories to be a liberation of the reader from oppressive structures of imposed authoritative meaning, and therefore a hermeneutic project still existing within the binary of text and meaning. Hix argues that post-structuralism and deconstructionism locate the author outside the text, and it is *this* that makes them disruptive; he cites Derrida’s statement of “*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*,” and interprets it to say that “he does not mean that the author is inside the text, only that because he is outside he is nothing.”⁴²² His construction of these “anti-traditional” critics is that they rebel against tradition by removing the author from the interior of the text and disempowering her or him; but, for Hix, in doing so, they implicitly reinforce the inside as the place of privilege and power. I disagree with Hix’s first statement, that these disruptive scholars remove the author from the inside of the text before commencing a traditional hermeneutics on it, precisely *because* I agree with his second – that this would reinforce the inside as the place of privilege and power. I suggest that the disruption attempted is far more subversive.

⁴²⁰ Jane P Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 224-25.

⁴²¹ Pratt, 209.

⁴²² Hix, 199.

Instead, I read Derrida as claiming in *On Grammatology* that, interior and exterior, *all is text* – this is a far more Nietzschean approach, and accords with the philosophical debt acknowledged by Derrida, Barthes and others. Nietzsche argues that “we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar”;⁴²³ the only way to deny God, therefore, is to deny the existence of ideals, and not to merely challenge the privilege or hierarchical place of them. Derrida can be accused of changing the semantics of his argument over time – so, relying on Derrida to explain Derrida is problematic – but he himself gives a similar explanation in his later *Afterword*: he claims that *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*, “which has for some become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction [...] means nothing else: there is nothing outside context.”⁴²⁴ This dissolution of text into context manifests itself in a depiction of text that is absent that dimension of explicable Platonic ‘meaning’: it is not that the author is outside the text; it is that there is no ‘outside’ the text. Or perhaps that everything is outside; or that everything is text. The author therefore does not need to be ‘removed’ from criticism because they are effectively both acknowledged and erased by an ideology that denies anything a centre. This can be contrasted with the Inversive branch, which attempts to invert the hierarchy of ‘inside versus outside’ by leaving the author inside the text but privileging the outside of it instead. Simple inversion falls into the trap of reinforcement identified by Derrida, but it does at least attempt to challenge the premise instead of just operating within it.

The primary difficulty with executing a truly Subversive textual criticism in practice is that one hits the end of a finite ability to treat texts if one repudiates the self-existence of texts or the idea of ‘meaning’: a hermeneutic treatment cannot be sustained by pure commitment to a premise that repudiates hermeneutics.

Summary

The author has rematerialised somewhat, but often as nothing more than a representative of the social and historical context of her or his work, as yet one more reader of it, or as a text in herself or himself, separate from the text of the *text*. Insofar as authors exist external to the work they have re-entered criticism following the dominance of IHR hermeneutic strategies, but they are usually afforded no greater privilege than any other outside element; alternatively, if the

⁴²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 483.

⁴²⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” in *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 136.

author's creative act is considered relevant to the interior of the work, she or he has been deprioritised to the extent that the inner has been replaced in status and value by the outer.

Disruptive criticism can be concerned with meaning, particularly when the reader or a reading community is licensed to construe hermeneutic meaning using independent methods of construction and validation, but often it is primarily concerned with the repudiation of essentialist meaning or with the determination of individual significance or cultural value. This moves many Disruptive treatments of texts out of the realm of hermeneutics and out of the scope of this thesis: the *imago* is proposed as a hermeneutic tool to explain a heretofore-often-unnamed influence on hermeneutic construction. Subversive disruption focuses on value through the privileging of complexity, but in a different way from formalism, which seeks to resolve that complexity and show how the art object reconciles tension and seeming opposites; subversive complexity seeks out and champions *unresolvability*. Representation and communication are not the end-goal. Inversive ideologies, and any modified applications of the more radical subversive ones that use them merely to proliferate meanings rather than to destabilise meaning *ab initio*, do focus on meaning – but it is a cacophony of individual meanings that undermine the idea of a *single* meaning. Value then lies in personal or cultural significance more than in the validity or ‘truth’ of that meaning.

This places the focus of Disruptive criticisms onto the signification use of the verb ‘to mean’, liberating it or destabilising it but, either way, divorcing it in a large part from the influence of the author-figure. The *imago* may be a direct focus of scholarly investigation, or it may be viewed in relation to how the text shows the way in which the author has been constituted and acted on by social and historical forces, but these concerns are extra-textual and not hermeneutic.

To the extent that Disruptive criticisms permit study of the author, the individual scholar's author-image will be implicated, and this could be construed as the Disruptive paradigm providing an author concept that is the same as the *imago*. I argue that Disruptive criticisms do not render the *imago* proposal redundant in this way, however, because the Disruptive author is not a hermeneutic tool. Disruptive arguments against authorial authority in the construction of meaning – or, indeed, against the concept of meaning itself – can be construed as prohibiting the *imago*, or rendering it illegitimate by virtue of persuasive arguments against its recognition or use, but I suggest that these arguments have very narrow application. Many critics themselves betray an influence from an intentional object in their own commentary or criticism, and radical

Subversive critics frequently fail to uphold their own injunctions against the search for hermeneutic significance. For this last reason, I argue also that the Disruptive ideology fails to render the *imago* proposal nugatory.

Chapter 9

The *imago* and Inversive Disruptive criticism

General introduction

Inversive theories do not claim to seek or produce a ‘correct’ interpretation for texts, because the presumption of correctness existing as a category relies on a hierarchy of authority that privileges the text and, by implication, the source of meaning in that text (viz, an ‘author-figure’ if not the actual author) over the individual experiencing and processing the text: in some inversive criticism, the text doesn’t even *become* a text until it is read. Ingarden’s theory of *Unbestimmtheitsstellen*, or the “gaps of indeterminacy,” requires readers to interpolate meaning in order to properly concretise and realise the text, for instance.⁴²⁵ Ingarden rejects the possibility of there existing an “aesthetic observer,” on the grounds that this construes reading as the mere *contemplation* of a finished art product. Instead, a quasi-perceptual act is needed for the text to constitute a full quasi-real object in the reader’s consciousness, and, without it, the text isn’t self-sufficient and cannot have a single correct meaning. The same drive is not present as in the Scientistic paradigm to rely on the concept of evidence for the determination of relative validity. Similarly, a Marxist treatment of a text is not in competition with a feminist treatment, such that a finding of validity in one would invalidate or disprove the finding in another.

Robert E Probst defines reader response criticism as a theory focused on the capacity for literature to “stimulate images, feelings, associations, and thoughts, so that reading might be personally significant”;⁴²⁶ a scholarly text, *Self-Analysis in Literary Studies*, for instance, collects essays from critics who discuss elements of their own personalities and lives in light of their reading of a text.⁴²⁷ This approach is critiqued as the very problem with the methods, however: Kent Bales argues that the “*problem* with reader-centred theories generally and reader-response criticism in particular is the identification of meaning with the reader’s experience.”⁴²⁸ [*my italics*] Hirsch has a similar objection, and locates the source of the problem in a fundamental lack of appreciation for the distinction between detached understanding and implicated

⁴²⁵ Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, trans. George G Grabowicz (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

⁴²⁶ Robert E Probst, *Response and Analysis* (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1988), 63.

⁴²⁷ D Rancour-Laferriere, ed., *Self-Analysis in Literary Study: Exploring Hidden Agendas* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994).

⁴²⁸ Kent Bales, “Intention and Readers’ Responses,” *Neohelicon* XIII, no. 1 (1986): 193.

evaluation. Understanding a text involves an appreciation of the Otherness of the text, and a putting aside of Self as much as possible in order to apprehend a kind of meaning that emerges from the text without a readerly subjectivity to influence and circumscribe it; evaluation then relies on an objective experience of understanding as its premise, because it takes the construed meaning and asks the subsequent question of what is its significance or value. Either omitting the first behaviour or conflating the two such that a personal significance is given the weight of an objectively valid meaning is, Hirsch argues, succumbing to “subjectivism and relativism.” Going even further, he casts doubt on the name ‘criticism’ even being given to textual engagements that focus on pluralistic apprehensions of texts:

The fact that the term ‘criticism’ has now come to designate all commentary on textual meaning reflects a general acceptance of the doctrine that description and evaluation are inseparable in literary study. In any serious confrontation of literature it would be futile, of course, to attempt a rigorous banishment of all evaluative judgment, but this fact does not give us the license to misunderstand or misinterpret our texts. It does not entitle us to use the text as the basis for an exercise in ‘creativity’ or to submit as serious textual commentary a disguised argument for a particular ethical, cultural, or aesthetic viewpoint.

Any criticism that argues, therefore, that the ‘meaning’ of a text is coterminous with its meaning “to us, today” is denied the proper classification ‘criticism’ by Hirsch.⁴²⁹

The author, like the reader, is allowed a full subjectivity and an existence as an individually- and socially-constructed being, and is considered generally to have had intentions, influences and aims when writing. They are permitted this level of actualisation and intentionality, however, because this does not exercise authority over the way in which the reader or reading community appropriates the text; in essence, the author becomes another text. Inversive theories therefore proscribe the use of an *imago* in the construction or appreciation of a text, even though they encourage the construction or appreciation of an *author*. An *imago* is created by individual readers or collective discourse, but it is divorced from the ideal hermeneutic or evaluative act. Instead, an *imago* may be used to illustrate an analysis of power relations perceived in the text; or, as a point of self-identification from reader to apprehended author.

⁴²⁹ Hirsch, “Objective Interpretation,” 463.

Reader response criticism

Broadly speaking, reader response criticism (which I shall call 'RRC') focuses on the reader as an alternative to the author and/or the text. RRC can be applied to many different lenses, such as a narratological or rhetorical RRC, psychoanalytic RRC, or the RRC that is practised through cultural theories such as postcolonialism or gender criticism, but by itself it can be examined as a general critical stance in which a text is considered to have no fixed, essential or final meaning, and only a meaning that is contextual, 'transactional', or 'dialogic', created through the interaction of reader and text. Rosenblatt, for instance, defines a poem as "what the reader lives through under the guidance of the text," as the reader "selects, organises and synthesises – in short, interprets – what has emerged from [her or his] relationship with the verbal symbols."⁴³⁰ RRC admits meaning as an ontological or, at the least, functional category, but refers authority over it to the reader or community construing the language.

Inversive RRC will be taken to have commenced in the 20th century with pedagogical practices pioneered by Rosenblatt in the 1930s, and popularised at a 'scholarly' level in the 1960s and 1970s throughout mainly the United States and Germany. Hughes explains the largely American, New Criticism-triggered RRC as an extension of the contemporary developments in psychology, and differentiates this branch from that evolving in Germany and France, which can be seen as a radicalisation of Husserlian phenomenology – given the reliance Hirsch places on Husserl, it is interesting to see the divergent conclusions to which each movement is drawn. Hughes explains this as the reason why American RRC is more focused on reading and active construction that is influenced by individual differences; instead, central European RRC tends to treat response as "common to a class or era or text," and is a more philosophical and collective approach born of, Holland says, the "German tendency to theorise and generalise."⁴³¹ This branch of RRC can be denoted 'reception studies', or '*Rezeptionsästhetik*' (reception aesthetics).

Types of RRC

Crouch and Rutherford note that the terms 'reader response criticism' and 'reception theory' are often used interchangeably: I will not use them interchangeably. Reception theory will be used synonymously with *Rezeptionsästhetik*. Aspects of *Rezeptionsästhetik* that study the

⁴³⁰ Louise Rosenblatt, "Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading," *Journal of Reading Behaviour* 1, no. 1 (Mar, 1969): 38.

⁴³¹ Norman Holland, "Reader-Response Criticism," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 79, no. 6 (Jan, 1998): 1204-05.

changing way in which texts have been read over time, and that are premised on Iser's phenomenological 'act of reading', for instance, use only an implied reader, which is a textual construct and not actually an inversion of the traditional power relation between text and reader at all. Iser defines the implied reader:

The implied reader as a concept has its roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; [she or he] is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader [...] The concept of the implied reader as an expression of the role offered by the text is in no way an abstraction derived from a real reader, but is rather the conditioning force behind a particular kind of tension produced by the real reader when [she or he] accepts the role.⁴³²

Because of this ideological basis, in terms of that which is governed by the particulars of the text, the discussion of this branch already conducted in the Scientific Part will stand as sufficient. 'Reader response criticism' will, on the other hand, from here be used to denote only the more individualised and particular study of what happens during the reading process, and the way in which meaning is generated by individual readers – either hypothesised or empirical. This is line with the distinction advanced by Crouch and Rutherford, Holland, Hughes, and others.

This form of RRC has been split into three broad categories in a range of popular resources and less academic publications, and I find this tripartite division to be helpful, so I will use it here: individualist RRC focuses on the individual reader's experience; experimental RRC seeks to analyse the processes and experiences of defined sets of readers through empirical studies and experiments; and uniformist RRC assumes a uniform response by all readers within a given real or hypothetical class of reader.⁴³³ To the extent that *Rezeptionsästhetik*s sit within RRC, it comprises part of this third category. For the purposes of the current proposal, the *imago* will be discussed in relation to individualist RRC and those aspects of uniformist RRC that are focused on reader-driven responses rather than text-driven ones.

⁴³² Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 34-38.

⁴³³ One example of this division being used in published literature, without attribution to a recognised source, is Kieran Beville, *How to Interpret the Bible: An Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2016).

Uniformists

One alternative to the necessarily fragmented project of studying the way in which individual readings can, or might, evolve out of a single text, is the uniformist theory of RRC: a study that coheres diverse possible readings by gathering them together into a subjective universal, as in Kant; by constructing a hypothesised ideal or normative reader that is produced by the phenomenological experience of the text, as in Iser; or by creating uniformity in readings by homogenising the influences acting on each reader, as in the interpretive communities of Fish. Iser creates a normative reader on the basis that this figure is “extrapolated from the reader’s role laid down in the text,” and he differentiates it from an ‘ideal’ reader, which emerges, by way of contrast, “from the brain of the philologist or critic.”⁴³⁴ In practice, the distinction becomes blurred. Jauss argues for more of a homogenised reader, for instance, in his theory of the ‘horizon of expectations’: readers are gathered into historical groupings, each reading a text from a prescribed vantage point in which they have access to the prior knowledge and expectations of their age in relation to genre, style and thematic concerns.

In 1957 Michael Riffaterre proposes a category of the ‘super-reader’ that is positioned as a hypothesised, normative function. He defines the super-reader as “never anything like a real reader or [her or his] substitute,” but, even though he denies it is a “reading norm,” it is “a technique for spotting the segments of the text that drew most reader response.” ‘Reader response’ is measured here, though, by Riffaterre’s own assessment of what aspects of the text trigger that response: specifically, aspects that require more complex interpretive strategies to decode, because their semiotic significance is something other than their ‘natural’ mimetic referents.⁴³⁵ In interview with Riffaterre in 1981, *Diacritics* describes his work as showing an “unwavering attention to the performance of the reader,” but defines this attention in terms of Riffaterre’s own understanding of the text. In the description of Riffaterre’s theory as “a model of the relation between a text and the understanding that this text engenders,” the interviewer semantically replaces the reader with the text, and claims that Riffaterre shows how “the text contains a paradigm of the reader’s transformative praxis.” The interviewer goes so far as to break Riffaterre’s method into two stages: his first position, in which the text guarantees the “normative value” of a “set of reader responses”; and his second position, in which there is an “over-determination of the reading process by the text.” Both of these necessarily exclude the

⁴³⁴ Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, 28.

⁴³⁵ Michael Riffaterre, “Interview: Michael Riffaterre,” *Diacritics* 11, no. 4 (Winter, 1981): 12.

reader. Even the first stage, which names the reader, limits their appropriate responses to a “set” authorised by Riffaterre and produced by his own reading.⁴³⁶

Riffaterre does not object to the interviewer’s characterisation; instead, he defends it by explaining that the emphasis on textuality is required, because “textuality, defined as what makes a text a semiotic unit, is the quality conferring the immanence and permanence essential to literature.”⁴³⁷ In other words, ‘literature’ as a category is defined by the presence of language that contains both mimetic meaning *and* semiotic significance which can only be ‘decoded’ with reference to homologs – other instances of similar linguistic structures either inside the text or outside it. Riffaterre says that language contains homological, semiotic significance essentially inside itself such that it determines its *own* interpretation. If language does not control its own interpretation, it is not literature. Riffaterre argues, “It is a literary artefact only so long as it is looked at from the perspective the text commands the reader to adopt.”⁴³⁸ Riffaterre defines ‘production’ as the act of *reading* not of generation, but he determines both reading and the reader’s concept of the author to be entirely contained in, and controlled by, the text. Riffaterre does not propose a theory that validates a reader’s individual hermeneutic treatment of a text, nor the aggregated treatments of a class of reader; he does not, however, propose a theory in which readers respond to a text in a way mediated by the limiting force of its genetic inspiration, because the text is deemed to contain that inspiration.

Riffaterre argues that the “artefact” of the text “presupposes in turn the presence of an author.” He also claims that we go so far as to “unavoidably assume that its dependence on the writer’s real or imagined intention modifies and supersedes its dependence on linguistic usage and on the users’ consensus about reality,” and that authorial intention therefore determines a text over and above its linguistic usage. It is, however, the author’s “imagined” intention that does this: in other words, the intention imagined for the writer by the reader of the text. The construal, by the reader, of authorial intention has the power to determine the text over and above the linguistic content of the text; it is the linguistic content of that text that determines the reader’s response to the text, though.

This is because Riffaterre’s theory of ‘monumentality’ (which he regards as a constant in any text) is that textual signs for interpretation exist as ‘imprints’ left on the verbal sequence by the

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 15.

presence of semiotic significance, and that these are accessible to all people and will be construed in the same way by all people in all times: "This imprint insures the durability of their impact and their continuous perception by any reader (monumentality)."⁴³⁹ Therefore, even though it is not mimetically or literally present, "the interpretant itself is partially inscribed in the verbal sequence – a monument to the semiosis that took place in the author's mind."⁴⁴⁰ This means that text determines the reader's interpretation of its significance, and therefore the intention that the reader imagines the author to have; this imagined intention has the power to supersede accepted linguistic usage, but not because of the authority of the reader – because of the authority of a text whose hermeneutic meaning is considered immanent and permanent. Taken to its logical extreme, any 'approved' interpretation the reader has is determined to be both controlled by the text and attributable to the author's intentions, even if it goes beyond the accepted meaning of linguistic conventions used in the text. Riffaterre does not 'believe' in the concept of 'ambiguity';⁴⁴¹ he does not believe that there can be multiple possible interpretations of a text that are equally valid, because "[t]he link which leads a reader back to that correspondent is not vulnerable to [her or his] absentmindedness or ideological blind spots, for the very logic of language controls [her or his] response."⁴⁴²

Riffaterre seeks to demonstrate his theory by applying it to a passage in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*, and the repetition of the phrase "so it goes". He focuses specifically on the night after Barbara's wedding when her father Billy wanders about the empty house and sees a leftover bottle of champagne:

"Drink me," it seems to say.

So Billy uncorked it with his thumbs. It didn't make a pop. The champagne was dead. So it goes.

Riffaterre says the literary aspect of "so it goes" is its function as a parody of its earlier uses, because until now it has been used in instances of serious death and loss. The reader's interpretation is "strictly controlled, as soon as [she or he] perceives the incident as a parody, and the form in which it is recounted as the agent of meaning. [...] Its significance (the parody) results from the fact that the previous, comparable subtexts now function as its intertext."⁴⁴³ Thus, Riffaterre removes the construal of the phrase as parody out of the field of interpretation.

⁴³⁹ Michael Riffaterre, "The Interpretant in Literary Semiotics," *American Journal in Semiotics* 3, no. 4 (Jan, 1985): 51.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁴¹ Riffaterre, "Interview: Michael Riffaterre."

⁴⁴² Riffaterre, "The Interpretant in Literary Semiotics," 42.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 46.

It is not part of the mimetic meaning, yet it is treated as a premise *for* interpretation. Riffaterre construes the text as signifying that the ‘simple’ message developed by earlier repetitions of the phrase – that heroics are futile, war is futile, life is futile – is made similarly futile by Vonnegut’s mockery of it. He uses phrases such as “the reader is obliged to notice,” and that “parody is actually encoded in the text so as to insure that the proper interpretation will be repeated from one reading to the next.”⁴⁴⁴ Riffaterre’s theory is therefore not so much a theory of *reading* experience as it is a validation of one *particular* reading experience with validity asserted on the basis of it being a textual and linguistic fact. The *imago* is brought in, here, but as a constructed object onto which that interpretation can be projected in its hypothetical genesis.

Fish’s early work commences with a focus on a theorised reader that draws heavily from his own interpretive method and choices: his second text, *Surprised by Sin*, offers a reading of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* that homogenises competing receptions into one ‘correct’ response, which Fish later explains as an insight into “how its readers came to be the way they are.” Fish’s thesis is that the two extant camps – one reading Milton as justifying Satan’s position, and the other reading Milton as condemning humans for questioning the ways of a perfect God – is each ‘correct’ in that it plays out the *real* meaning of the poem, which is to implicate readers themselves in “manifestations of the legacy left to us by Adam when he fell”:

Milton’s strategy in the poem is to make the reader feel self-conscious about [her or his] own performance, to force [her or him] to doubt the correctness of [her or his] responses, and to bring [her or him] to the realisation that [her or his] inability to read the poem with any confidence in [her or his] own perception is the focus.⁴⁴⁵

This otherwise totalising reading does not apply to Fish, though, as he is able to read the poem with confidence in his own perception. Fish seeks to show the reader not only a ‘truth’ about the text, but a ‘truth’ about themselves and the world: in an argument that simply does not make sense for Atheists or non-Christians, he argues to reconcile all readings of *Paradise Lost* by demonstrating the way in which they enact the fact of the fallenness of the readers themselves. W Gardner Campbell comments, “Unlike Blake or Empson, Fish offers a remarkably consistent Milton, so consistent that Fish could confidently title an anthology of his own Milton criticism *How Milton Works*, a title suggesting an exhaustive and definitive answer to our many questions.”⁴⁴⁶ The text is replete with long, untranslated blocks of French and Latin: Fish has a

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 46-47.

⁴⁴⁵ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 21.

⁴⁴⁶ W Gardner Campbell, “Temptation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost*, ed. Louise Schwartz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 165-66.

very specific readership in mind when writing what is supposedly intended to be an accessible explainer, and he seems to give to his reader whatever attributes he has himself.

In both *Surprised by Sin* and 1970's 'Literature in the Reader', Fish answers the rhetorical charge of: "aren't I really talking about myself, and making myself into a surrogate for all the millions of readers who are not me at all?"⁴⁴⁷ His answer is: "Yes and no." Fish acknowledges, "Obviously, my reader is a construct, an ideal or idealised reader," but argues that he has characterised a linguistic system that "every speaker shares" – *if*, however, they are "sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalised the properties of literary discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, etc) to whole genres." The idealised hypothesis of a reader that emerges is therefore "a real reader (me) who does everything within *his* power to make *himself* informed." [my italics]

Even though Fish considers his uniform reader to be, essentially, *him*, he also considers himself to be every reader:

I can with some justification project my responses into that of 'the' reader because they have been modified by the constraints placed on me by the assumptions and operations of the method: (1) the conscious attempt to become the informed reader by making my mind the repository of the (potential) responses a given text might call out and (2) the attendant suppressing, in so far as that is possible, of what is personal and idiosyncratic and 1970ish in my response.

Fish is not homogenising or [ignoring] the responses of every reader other than him, because he simply makes a conscious effort to not be himself and to be all of them instead. To be fair, Fish does acknowledge some of the limits of this method, and says it is better to have "an acknowledged and controlled subjectivity than an objectivity which is finally an illusion."⁴⁴⁸ To the extent that Fish recognises common errors in hermeneutic construction in *Surprised by Sin* – errors made by actual readers, but naïve or unpractised ones – he subsumes them into his theory by elevating them to the status of 'authorially intended enactments' of the core meaning of the text. His reading of Milton is that Milton sought for readers to *have* these divergent and 'incorrect' responses. In terms of a more disruptive aim – to validate the idiosyncratic readings themselves and afford them status absent of authorisation by an external standard – he does not speak to the non-ideal reader.

⁴⁴⁷ Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, 401-02.

Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (Autumn, 1970): 141.

⁴⁴⁸ Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," 145-46.

In 1976 Fish moves beyond this heavily-theorised 'reader', with his theory of interpretive communities. In this stage, he examines the concept of individual readers belonging to communities of interpretive norms, and producing, as a result, interpretations that are shaped by these norms. This shifts Fish's work from the reader's mental processes to the generic idea of information or text, and, as Robert Chodat argues, takes an individual reader's reading and an individual text's particulars "and displace[s] it onto the social environment, of which the reader is considered a sort of symptom." The information that Fish focuses on is what he calls "shared background information," and what Chodat interprets as "the common knowledge that is constitutive of an interpretive community and determines a given group's perception of a given text's properties" – but these particular readers do not need to be explored, or these particular texts, as they all are subsumed by the general theory.⁴⁴⁹ This shares one of the premises of Disruption, in that it seeks to question the authority of existing *single* hermeneutic explanations or sources of essentialist meaning, but it deauthorises readers to produce interpretations that supersede supposedly text-authorised or author-authorised ones. Fish goes so far as to call the results an "interpretive unanimity," with resultant meanings "already calculated,"⁴⁵⁰ and argues that "what the experience [of belonging to an interpretive community] in turn produces is not open or free, but determinate, constrained by the possibilities that are built into a conventional system of intelligibility."⁴⁵¹ Even the idea of 'meaning' is undermined, as Fish moves from the concept of meaning to the concept of response – switching his language mostly to response, reception and experience rather than actual interpretation.

In an homogenised reception, the individual author-image is lost: except to the extent that an author-image may be shared uniformly across a community. Neither Fish nor others tend to explore precisely *what* assumptions or cognitive premises are held by the readers in any given community, or whether these include assumptions or premises concerning the author; as can be seen in Fish's own work with Milton, however, stretching from his initial 1967 text through to his 2001 anthology *How Milton Works*, an *imago* in practice may certainly be one of those influencing factors.

⁴⁴⁹ Chodat, 143-44.

⁴⁵⁰ Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 333, 18.

⁴⁵¹ Stanley Fish, "Review: Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," *Diacritics* 11, no. 1 (Spring, 1981): 11.

Individualists

Individualist RRC is that which Adams calls a privileging of “radical subjectivity,”⁴⁵² and is defined by pedagogical theorists like Susan Hennberg as an entirely open process of locating “personal meaning”:

One of the premises of reader response theory is that there is no one “meaning” of a text. I used to despair during college literature courses because I had enormous difficulty coming up with the right interpretation of a text. I always had to wait until the instructor explained it to me, and then I thought, “Boy, am I stupid. I never would have come up with that by myself.” It took a long time, many years of teaching English and many workshops on reader response theory, before I developed the confidence to find my own interpretations of the texts I read. I looked forward to inviting my own students to offer their own personal meanings in poems, stories, and plays.⁴⁵³

When this hermeneutic is challenged to be more ‘critical’, it is framed again as self-reflective and reflexive: the reader asking themselves not only what the text means to them, but then questioning where those responses come from and what about them as readers and human beings – construed in terms of their race, class, gender, age and personal history, for instance – is reflected in their interpretations. This is the case with Bruce Pirie’s form of ‘critical RRC’, which includes examining the context in which the text was written, and whose interests it reflects, serves and omits; or using the text to question the assumptions of the author or reader’s society, and thereby ‘reading the world’.⁴⁵⁴ The world is being examined, but perhaps not yet the word.

David Bleich is a New Criticism-trained scholar who pioneers the study of the actual feelings of readers during the reading process, and the free associations made while experiencing and mentally constructing the text. From this, he produces a theoretical model of the reading process, in an effort to show the way in which the text artefact relates to the individualised process of construal. He proposes that there are two pathways leading towards a conception of literature and art:

The first pathway is that the work of art is real as a function of perceiver’s mind and its history. The other pathway concerns the other end of the artistic transaction: what is

⁴⁵² Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato: Revised Edition*, 2 ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc, 1992), 7.

⁴⁵³ Susan Henneberg, “Dimensions of Failure in Reader Response,” *English Journal* 85, no. 3 (Mar, 1996): 21.

⁴⁵⁴ Bruce Pirie, *Reshaping High School English* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1997).

happening in the mind of the artist; how can the work be responsibly construed as a function of the creator's mind and its history?⁴⁵⁵

He argues that biographies are one of the things that can aid us in answering this question, and in mediating between the subjective and the objective. Bleich champions a form of "subjective criticism" that locates interpretation in the reader's subjectivity, and thus performs a kind of RRC. He equates the reader's subjectivity with the author's subjectivity in terms of importance, saying: "For the author, the work of literature is a response to [her or his] life experiences. For the reader, the interpretation is the response to [her or his] reading experience." He also argues that the "personalities involved in the literary transaction are of primary importance," while "the properties of the work of art, while necessary, are insufficient and of secondary importance."⁴⁵⁶

These kinds of statements suggest Disruptive attitudes towards the traditional power relations that subordinate reader subjectivity to authorial intention, but he betrays this by having the author determine the text, and the text determine the reader. The "fantasy" that animates the text is something that can be objectively perceived and empirically replicated or disproved by other critics, and is something that derives from the author. The text here is conceived of as a response to the author's "life experiences," while the interpretation of the text emerges only as a response to the reader's "reading experience" – not the reader's life experiences, which are omitted as irrelevant. When discussing the theory of the author-fantasy immanent in the text, Bleich also removes the reader's subjectivity – this time, by refiguring it as objectivity. Bleich argues that "seeing" the fantasy as a product of the author's biography, rather than as a product of the text, places the apprehension (interpretation?) of it outside the reader's own mind, but he ignores the necessarily subjective element of processing inherent in the verb 'to see' – particularly when it is paired with a purely intentional or imaginary object. The presumption, however, is that the known facts of an author's life are accurate and somewhat complete; that they and their significance will be perceived in the same way by every critic; and that they will be applied to a hermeneutic appreciation of the text in the same way to derive the same results. Bleich acknowledges that there are ambiguities regarding this method, but replies, "Obviously, the question of how transformed fantasies systematically relate to an author's life will not be answered now," as he wishes only to make a point about the "logic" of the process.

⁴⁵⁵ David Bleich, "The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation," *College English* 36, no. 7 (Mar, 1975): 753.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 754.

Bleich asserts that studying the reader “along with the text” has achieved the status of critical legitimacy, but does not seem to propose a theory for subjective construction that occurs *in relation to the text* (rather than in relation to “radical subjectivity”) without anchoring the interpretation in an essentialist and Scientistic conception of meaning residing in the text, and an EHR conception of the author. To the extent that the *imago* operates in these forms of RRC, it exists as an aspect of the reader’s mental image of the text that remains unidentified and unexamined, or as an essentialist image of the author that is perceived to be empirical and not merely an intentional object.

An example of individualist RRC being performed in practice is the work of artistic director Stuart Bousel. In 2012 Bousel modernises Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* for San Francisco’s The Custom Made Theatre Co as, in its advertisements, “a stylistic cross between *Mad Men* and *American Psycho*.” The Venetians are Wall Street traders, Antonio and Bassanio take cocaine together, the Christian characters frequently use mobile phones, and the caskets played for Portia’s hand are replaced with USB drives.⁴⁵⁷ Bousel’s conception of the play is clear from before the time of this production, however: in relation to his 2008 staged reading of *Merchant*, raising money for the support of Proposition 8 in California, Bousel said that he felt the play was “an ideal platform on which to discuss how the best intentions can get buried when divided interest groups fail to recognise their shared humanity.”⁴⁵⁸ This perception of parity between the groups in the play extends to 2012, too: he says in 2017 that “the objective of the play isn’t to demonise anyone or to put anyone on a pedestal” – but it is difficult to judge what he means by the word ‘play’, because he uses the word (as many people do) interchangeably to sometimes mean Shakespeare’s text as written, sometimes his specific production of that text, and sometimes a kind of ‘golden thread’ of the text’s essence or meaning that he sees running through both the original and his production.

Bousel sees Antonio as an internally-conflicted character, and his treatment of Shylock as a joint product of that inner turmoil plus the vicious world of capitalist individualism he finds himself embroiled in:

⁴⁵⁷ Unless otherwise referenced, material on Bousel’s production and approach to textual interpretation come from my own watching of the performance or an interview I conducted with Bousel on 24 July 2017. All quotations of Bousel that are otherwise unattributed come from this interview. It is attached to this thesis as Appendix 1.

⁴⁵⁸ Nirmala Nataraj, “‘The Merchant of Venice’ Has a Contemporary Makeover,” *SFGATE* (San Francisco) 3 July 2012, Perform, <https://www.sfgate.com/performance/article/The-Merchant-of-Venice-has-contemporary-makeover-3682934.php>.

Venice, like San Francisco, is a place where people have gravitated seeking a better life. The trouble is, a better life often comes at the expense of someone else [...] someone is always going to end up being alienated.

Systemic and targeted marginalisation and oppression is therefore not laid at Antonio's feet, even as he spits on Shylock's clothes and calls him a "cutthroat dog" (I.iii.109-10); indeed, no Christian character is held responsible for choosing to participate in an act of abuse of power, even Gratiano, whose mercy to the already-beaten Shylock consists of telling him to "Beg that thou mayest have leave to hang thyself." (IV.1.356) Instead, Shylock's position is a passive inevitability. Bousel grants Antonio further immunity, on the basis that he reads a sympathetic personal motivation into Antonio's behaviour that triggers identification and, thus, exculpation:

Yes, I absolutely and unquestionably see Antonio as homosexual and yes, I believe it's as explicit in the text as it could be at the time [...] And yes, I do believe Antonio's homosexuality is self-loathing, and it's this self-loathing that makes him [...] so volatile towards Shylock, an open outsider he feels safe to abuse. And yes, I think these men go after one another in a way that only people who feel hated and confined by society are capable of, and so when audiences interpret that as drawing analogies they are correct[.]

Antonio is not only given interpolated psychological and emotional motivations for behaviour, he is also given an intimate private life that is compatible with these feelings. This is what equalises him and Shylock, and results in a construction in which they attack "each other" – it is not a power dynamic, it is *both sides*. Bousel finishes his discussion of Antonio's motivations by claiming immanence, saying that it is not his *interpretation* per se, but "I think that's already there to begin with."

One aspect of the performance that might undercut this claim is the fact that he cuts the forced conversion. Bousel argues that this is done only because he feels that a modern audience will have a negative reaction to it that *Shakespeare* does not intend, and will be unable to see it as a genuine kindness on the part of Antonio. Bousel says that the conversion

actually reinforces the play's theme of forgiveness, but only if you can wrap your head around the idea that someone at that time and in that culture would think forcing a Jew to become Christian WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO AND GOOD FOR THE JEW. Antonio believes he is being kind and this action is supposed to demonstrate some personal growth on his end, but a modern audience is going to have a negative reaction to this so I cut it from my production[.]

Bousel calls his production “a modernisation at once entirely my own but reverent of the original text,” and argues that his ideas about the characters are instances of taking “what was already there” and painting it with “contemporary paint”; he rejects the idea that this form of hermeneutic treatment is “rewriting” – or even that it is precisely RRC. In his choices there exists an essentialism that regards the original text as containing a ‘true’ core of meaning, and there is a fundamental commitment to honouring that. Bousel argues that anything can be done in a modern treatment of Shakespeare, as long as two conditions are met: firstly, that the choices are consistent within the treatment; and, secondly, that the choices derive from the text and are not imposed on it from without. Bousel does say that “any production of Shakespeare is interpretative, as I see it, even ones that lay claim to being purist”; but, also, that “all I can say for me is that I have never felt like I have ever brought anything to a Shakespearean text that wasn’t there to begin with, so much as provided a new lens through which to see what was always there.”

The contemporary example of Bousel – an experienced producer of Shakespearean texts, but not a scholar of literary theory – serves, I suggest, to make a point about the practice of individualist RRC: the liberation of the reader authorises each reader to make her or his own construction that is on some basis derived from the text, but it does not prevent that construction from being attributed, still, to an idiosyncratic image of the author. This *imago* wields influence over the reader’s interpretive choices, and is in turn influenced by that interpretation in a recursive process; once established, though, it can have the effect of validating the reader’s construction in a way that obviates the need for critical, close textual justification, because what seems to matter is the reader’s perception that the authorial figure intends the meaning they have derived.

Cultural studies

Cultural studies occupy a liminal space in literary criticism: they engage with texts and the significance or reception of texts, and work to undercut the same power hierarchies that other Inversive criticisms and theories reject; they are only ambiguously studies in literary criticism or hermeneutic practice, however. Phelan’s expression of what is sought in a hermeneutic practice, the desire to “hear the ‘click’ of the numerous signals of the text rearranging themselves into our new system of intelligibility,” is arguably not the focus. Rather, the text is utilised as a means by which readers and critics can hear a ‘click’ about the world and its systems: the text is now the key. Colin Sparks traces the origins of contemporary cultural studies to two books

published in the 1950s: *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart, and *Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams.⁴⁵⁹ Both Hoggart and Williams are trained in the academic study of literature, and each rejects the dominant literary tradition on expressly political grounds.

Hoggart's text is a paean to the working class and to the 'low-brow' entertainment and popular texts that were, and are, associated with them and used to marginalise the lower classes: the sub-title of the text is *Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments*; Part II of the book focuses exclusively on the commercial "mass art" associated with the working class and juxtaposed against 'canonical' works; and the original title of the text was *The Abuse of Literacy*, signifying the way in which academic hierarchies are used in a system of oppression and homogenisation. Hoggart's text is polemical: he questions what makes a worthwhile focus for analysis, in terms of both people and works. From the beginning, the cultural studies proposal is text-extrusive, and of concern is the society about which the text communicates rather than the materials or structure of the text itself, or the individual concerns of its author. The affective or meaning-making response of readers is similarly not a focus. Williams performs a 'settling of accounts' with the literary tradition in which he has been trained, and reformulates the scope of 'culture' in terms of anthropology rather than aesthetics. Sparks positions both men as democratic forces, saying, "The real origins of the crisis were quite precisely political. The dominant tradition was openly unashamedly and profoundly anti-democratic; cultural studies, from its inception, was a champion of democracy." Hoggart and Williams seek in their texts to disrupt, but not to entirely subvert: each only reverses the terms of elite culture versus popular culture, so neither escapes the already-settled terms of the opposition.⁴⁶⁰

Stuart Hall writes about his own involvement in the beginnings of institutional cultural studies, in terms that make it clear the way in which the focus of the project is culture rather than literature:

When I first went to the University of Birmingham in 1964 to help Professor Richard Hoggart found the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, no such thing as cultural studies yet existed. [...] There was little of the concern that Richard Hoggart and I had

⁴⁵⁹ Colin Sparks, "The Evolution of Cultural Studies..." in *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Arnold, 1997).

Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957).

Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958).

⁴⁶⁰ Sparks, 14-15.

in questions of culture. [...] The question was, where to study them? At that time we taught no anthropology at Birmingham and, besides, the English on whom we wished to turn our inquiring, ethnographic gaze had not yet learned to conceive of themselves as 'the natives'.⁴⁶¹

The gaze of the scholars is not aesthetic, linguistic, hermeneutic or even literary: it is ethnographic. Hall explains that the term 'cultural studies' is then chosen because it is the most broad, encompassing term the founders could conceive of: "thereby we ensured that no department in either the humanities or social sciences who thought that they had already taken care of culture could fail to feel affronted by our presence." The opposition to existing literary analysis (among other studies) is a deliberately-taken position. When these studies are now combined in institutional structures, it is not necessarily because they share a core ethos; some of their subject matter is shared, and institutions have an economic stake in the logistical organisation and rationalisation of disciplines. Richard Johnson defines cultural studies as a distinct discipline that merely *impacts* on literary studies; that, "[i]n the history of cultural studies, the earliest encounters were with literary criticism,"⁴⁶² but that literary texts are merely a "criterion" for the work of cultural studies, and that, actually, "the aim is to decentre 'the text' as an object of study." It is, in fact, dispensable, and "only a means in cultural study; strictly, perhaps, it is a raw material from which certain forms [...] may be abstracted."⁴⁶³

This is an understanding with which many disparate scholars agree. Eagleton, for instance, defines his own specialty of Marxist criticism as "grasping" the forms, styles and "meanings' of a work "as the product of a particular history" –it is assessing the political tendency of a work in terms of its content and form, rather than interrogating the construction, scope and nature of that content or meaning in the first place.⁴⁶⁴ Adams defines feminist scholarship in terms of its cultural effects rather than its hermeneutic outcomes:

Perhaps the most successful of these political movements has been feminism [...] Feminism has recovered and revered the writings of many women excluded from the so-called literary canon and raised many voices against the canon's sexual (and racial) exclusiveness. It has shown how male writing has excluded the female perspective and even actively opposed or disdained women and so-called female values. It has created a form of textual analysis sensitive to gender differences. All of these developments are

⁴⁶¹ Stuart Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies," in *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Arnold, 1997), 336-37.

⁴⁶² Johnson, 75.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁶⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

grounded either on a certain set of moral principles or on a theory of power (or both) and are activist in the desire to change society.⁴⁶⁵

Only the last of these ‘developments’ is vaguely hermeneutic, and it is arguably undercut by the expressly political aims of the treatment; it suggests a use of the text for pre-determined ends.

Despite his rhetorical alignment with the Disruptive paradigm, this is what Fish objects to in the practice of cultural studies/criticism. He argues that any work that considers itself “academic” ought to first concern itself with “what is true, what are the facts of the matter,” and only then might the researcher consider whether it be “a consequence of her scholarly work that the arguments and analyses she offers find a political use.”

That’s the distinction I kept trying to make in *Professional Correctness* and it was made most starkly in the context of a book written in World War II by a very famous literary critic, G. Wilson Knight. The book was a point for point comparison between the scenario and characters of *Paradise Lost* and the scenario and characters of World War II. It was an effort for which one might be grateful, but it was not an academic literary effort. It wasn’t something that Mr. Knight set out to do in order to advance the discussion of Milton [...] I certainly don’t want to say that the work that academics do can’t have a political effect [...] But I do want to hold on to the distinction between beginning your work with an avowedly partisan, political intention as opposed to beginning your work with the intention of engaging with the literature that structures the field.⁴⁶⁶

Fish echoes the thoughts from scholars from the other side of the ideological divide: in response to an analysis by Margolis that takes ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ as an exemplar text and demonstrates the way in which it can be construed as a Freudian symbolism, a Marxist fable and a Christian allegory, Beardsley says he has “no doubt” that it can be. He, however, emphasises the construction “can be taken as,” and argues that disparate readings like these are *possible*, but that they surely “do not bring out of the work something that lies momentarily hidden in it.” Instead, “they are rather ways of using the work to illustrate a pre-existent system of thought.” They are therefore, in Beardsley’s view, not properly ‘interpretations’, and he offers an alternative label: “superimpositions.”⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ Adams, 7.

⁴⁶⁶ Jeffrey Williams, “Stanley Agonistes: An Interview with Stanley Fish,” *The Minnesota Review*, 2001.

⁴⁶⁷ Monroe C Beardsley, *The Possibility of Criticism* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 37-38.

Literary Darwinism is a recent addition to the suite of cultural studies being applied to literary analysis; it appears here as an example of the way in which textual meaning can be prior-appropriated for the purposes of illustrating an external priority. It is not fully articulated whether the analysis assumes an intention on the part of the author to represent these cultural influences and ethnographic facts, or whether these are manifest as a result of the shaping forces of the author's society.

Literary Darwinism

'Literary Darwinism' relies on a brave return to Enlightenment rationalism to locate that which is 'universal' and common to all humans in the fabric of a text or the characters within it. Arguably, since the understanding of 'human nature' used in Literary Darwinism goes beyond rationality and the capacity for 'common sense', the underlying principle goes back further than the long 18th century and introduces a modern articulation of what C S Lewis labels the doctrine of the 'unchanging human heart'. There is a reliance on the language of science, not in the least through the nomenclature and its suggestion of some literary application of evolutionary biology, and on the more scientistic preference for absolute statements of truth and 'nature' rather than an acknowledgement of the post-structuralist awareness of the radical indeterminacy of language and a more nuanced account of the interaction between evolution and culture. Literary Darwinism uses a form of Inversive RRC to explore an experience of the text that uses largely formalist terms, but that draws out text elements in support of a prior reading of society.

Taking Joseph Carroll as exemplar, given his defining role in the field, there is a curious conflation of historicism and ahistoricism, scientistic rationalisation and affective subjectivism, that seems to preclude the use of a unique origin-figure such as the *imago* but that actually relies on it. Carroll argues that the arts are "communicative media" because "universal, species-typical characteristics" such as male-female bonding, dual parenting, "the growth of the neocortex to enhance powers for suppressing impulses and engaging in long-term planning" and the self-identification with extended social groups, are all "variations on the basic, universal patterns of human nature."⁴⁶⁸ Individual writers can therefore create texts and characters within those texts that 'speak' to individual readers, because those enduring species-typical characteristics are shared by all. The critic is therefore able to mine the text for evidence of these

⁴⁶⁸ Joseph Carroll, "Intentional Meaning in *Hamlet*: An Evolutionary Perspective," *Style* 44, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer, 2010): 232-33.

shared psychological, cognitive, behavioural and emotional conditions. It is not entirely clear whether an author is then 'great' because she or he is able to employ a more finely-tuned sensitivity to explore these faithfully, or because she or he has no control over the extent to which the text reflects these innate and inalienable characteristics (by virtue of their innate and inalienable nature), but is merely able to render them with above-average sophistication in terms of form and style.

Carroll applies this theory to *Hamlet*. He argues from the outset that any "comprehensively adequate interpretive account" of the play must take into account "phenomenal effects" including tone, style, theme and formal organisation; it must locate the text in a cultural context, and explain that context as a "particular organisation of the elements of human nature within a specific set of environmental conditions"; must take into account the responses of audiences and readers; must describe the socio-cultural, political, and psychological functions the work fulfils and "locate all these functions in relation to the evolved needs of human nature"; and must, finally, "link the work comparatively with other artistic works, using a taxonomy of themes, formal structures, affects, and functions derived from a comprehensive model of human nature."⁴⁶⁹ Questions such as which model of 'human nature' is to be used, the responses of which specific audiences are to be registered, and whether the cultural context in which the work is to be located is that of the author or the audience are not addressed.

It should also be noted that Carroll does not in fact claim that his own subsequent account of *Hamlet* fulfils the conditions required to be "comprehensively adequate": it occupies less than ten pages, and fails to, for instance, discuss any specific environmental conditions of the early 17th century that might have contextualised its production; it also quotes the play at only two points in the essay. Carroll says of Hazlitt and Bradley – certainly not scholars who identify with a 'Literary Darwinism' critical practice – that they "get to much that is true and important about the play": that which is "true" and that which is "important" are seemingly coterminous, rendering anything that strikes Carroll as 'true' (to his own experience of life? to his preferred model of human nature or personality? to his understanding of Shakespeare's perception of late Elizabethan London?) the primary communicative content of the play – and, thus, "important."⁴⁷⁰ And anything important as therefore true.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 233.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 240.

In respect of his own analysis, Carroll's guiding question is more limited and intentionalist: viz, "What was Shakespeare getting at?"⁴⁷¹ He also criticises Daniel Nettle's essay, 'What happens in *Hamlet*?', on the grounds that it "considers only the motives of the characters, leaving out point of view, and thus leaving out the meaning that both characters and *authors* invest in actions."⁴⁷² [my italics] This may of course be nothing more than casual diction and may invoke the author's name only as a stand-in for some intratextual agent such as the implied author, or even a formalist shorthand; regardless, however, the language has shifted. It is no longer a question of underlying context and enduring nature embodying and shaping a largely passive text, but is now a question of what an active text has to "tell us" about that context and nature. The text – and perhaps a human figure of an author at the origin of it – is now located strangely out of time and place, in that it is able to observe and comment on the precise same building blocks of human commonality of which it itself is meant to be inalienably constituted.

Carroll's analysis of *Hamlet* centres on Hamlet himself and the modern Five Factor Personality Model, and it uses the language of psychiatry and psychoanalysis to endow Shakespeare with a kind of clinical, diagnostic perception that justifies Shakespeare's high status as an author. It provides circular proof of both Carroll's theory of the relationship between great literature and enduring human nature *and* his specific diagnosis of Hamlet's character. Carroll says:

Shakespeare depicts Hamlet with a pathological condition – a mood disorder that in our current culture would be treated with anti-depressant medication or electroconvulsive therapy. The intuitive psychological power that Shakespeare displays in depicting this condition is just one more piece of evidence supporting the legitimacy of the canonical status he holds.⁴⁷³

The *imago* of Shakespeare here is fundamental to Carroll's interpretation of the text, because Shakespeare is required to have the kind of "penetrating psychological insight" that allows him to perceive, articulate and mimetically represent, in a very sophisticated and subtle way, in order for Hamlet to be read as a character that *communicates* this condition – a character 'depicted' with it, thus an intentional vehicle. This ultimately is what is perceived as the primary reason for *Hamlet*'s enduring success as a text and "niche" in the literary canon: because Shakespeare was, as author, able to define a range of emotion in Hamlet that touched then and touches now

⁴⁷¹ Joseph Carroll, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2011), 131.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 140.

“powerfully responsive chords” and communicates enough of the truth of the “general human condition” that it persists in its ability to “fix our attention and win our grave approval.”⁴⁷⁴

The extent to which the details of this general condition are common and unchanging is flexible, however: doubt and discouragement, Carroll argues, are not new to the human experience in the modern era, but the fact that they predominate in the current stage of human evolution is evidenced by the fact that Hamlet imitates them and “[w]e have taken it to heart and made it an anthem for our own imaginative lives.”⁴⁷⁵ He cites Sophocles, Dante and Chaucer as readers who might be too distant from our present moment to enjoy the same existentialism and personality, and might therefore rank *Hamlet* lower in their literary canons; in saying this, Carroll creates a tension between the quantity of what is unchanging and what is temporally-influenced. In trying to deny neither history (or evolution) nor the idea of human nature, Carroll creates an unchanging human heart that is not technically unchanging, and requires an author able to diagnose and mimetically represent the psychological condition relevant to their age.

If this is not a tragedy for all times and seasons – not the kind of thing that would fulfil the deepest imaginative needs of Sophocles, Dante, or the Tiv⁴⁷⁶ – it nonetheless fulfils a tragic potential originating in the basic features of human nature. Perhaps at some point, possibly centuries from now, we shall no longer regard Hamlet as one of the voices that speak most intimately to us, probing our fears, winning our fervent sympathy, voicing our outrage, making us laugh, and giving us an unsurpassed standard of meditative power. If that ever happens, we shall know that we have truly entered into another phase in the development of the human imagination.”⁴⁷⁷

The ‘human nature’ here seems to be both culturally-conditioned and immutably shared by all: would it disturb the hermeneutics, we could wonder, if anyone with a vaguely Anglo-European background, living in the post-1485 modern age, failed to connect with Hamlet’s psychological condition; whether the source of that failure would be their interpretation or their own ‘human nature’. The argument is not that *some* texts are of a nature that lends them to this ‘Darwinian’ interpretive approach – rather, it is that every text can be analysed equally with the same critical method, and is a text of high or low quality depending on how deep, “true” and resonant the

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁷⁶ Carroll is here referencing the study done in the 1960s by ethnographer Laura Bohannan, who lived with the Tiv – a non-literate Nigerian tribe – and recorded responses to *Hamlet* from them that differed from the expected Anglocentric reception. She concluded that literary meanings were not universally available to all readers.

⁴⁷⁷ Carroll, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice*, 147.

human condition represented by the author is. One alternative, of course, would be that equally-talented and effective authors are simply, on occasion, depicting a more specific time- and place-bound nature: they could be Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* and *Arethusa*, torn between impossible ideals of love and honour, predicated by a specific time and place. With the passage of time, even a 'true' character may become a caricature.

Likewise, with *Hamlet*: Carroll locates value in the representation of a human condition that resonates with his *Weltanschauung*, his conception of the world and the self, and he assumes this insight to be both universally-perceived and authorially-intended. He seems not to see the play as a fairly specific product of the modern era, the rise of capitalism, the decline of the stronghold of the Christian faith and the emergence of bourgeois individualism. Hamlet exists in a pagan society complicated by Stoic principles, Norse mythology and more than one type of Christianity, and by the middle of the play finds himself an atheist in denial of all resurrection and speaking of death as "The undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveller returns." (3.1.86-7) By the end of the play he has actually retreated from virtual nihilism to an emotionally-safer belief in Providence, giving the audience – feeling perhaps, like Eliot says, that "humankind cannot bear too much reality" – a trinket of reassurance in what is otherwise a bloodbath of despair. This might very well be an author demonstrating keen insight into humans as they exist in social conditions, but it is not necessarily one demonstrating insight into the everlasting 'human condition.' Carroll's definition of value seems to be set at the level of the "unchanging human heart," however, and it requires a fixed sort of *imago* to work. Every author must see around herself or himself the same immutable psychological conditions that Carroll's model of human nature and evolution diagnoses, and must be (successfully or unsuccessfully) endeavouring to perceive and imitate it. It is a curiously Aristotelian author figure, working to lay bare that which is permanent, universal and structural, interested in the skeleton and not the physiology.

My proposal is that Literary Darwinists working in the vein of Carroll might state more clearly the assumptions underlying their hermeneutics if this *imago* were expressly predicated and defined.

Chapter 10

The *imago* and Subversive Disruptive criticism

General introduction

Subversive methods of disruption such as post-structuralism and a radical, purely affective form of reader response criticism establish readers who are liberated by the imprecision of the 'sign' and of language, to the extent that language is denied (in theory) the capacity for even simple representation. Once the very concepts of 'text' and 'author' are destabilised, no reader can be tied to an author's intentions re meaning. In the purest form of this theory, every interlocutor is both author and reader, and the concept of the *imago* is rendered nugatory; to expand this to an argument that pure Subversive theory demonstrates that any reader conception of an author is *illegitimate* in all cases of practical hermeneutical engagement is, however, an overdetermination of practice by polemics.

Jeffrey Di Leo argues that the very idea of *what a text is* is premised on criticism's traditional demand for a fixed meaning: that a unifying essence is not simply the goal of one or two branches of literary theory, but is actually the foundational premise of a text that determines what its identity is composed of, and whether the text itself is located more in the language, the author, or the readings of it. Di Leo says it is this classical conception of a text being constituted by 'meaning' that is rejected in the 1960s, in what I have termed 'Subversive' goals of Disruption. Di Leo names specifically Barthes, Derrida and Juri Lotman for their work in building on and rejecting the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure to displace the demand for an essence beyond the particulars, and their claims that language is not representational; that, therefore, there is no 'meaning'.⁴⁷⁸ This approach is the foundation on which the Subversive approach rests.

Pierre Bayard questions whether critics see themselves as *discovering* meaning through interpretation or *creating* meaning through interpretation, and draws a distinction between the two. He connects the former goal with hermeneutics and the latter with post-modernism,⁴⁷⁹ but what his two-part classification system lacks, is the possibility of eliminating meaning altogether. It still presupposes a traditional 'interpretive goal'. Rather, Subversive theories

⁴⁷⁸ Jeffrey R Di Leo, "Sovereignty of the Dead: Authors, Editors, and the Aesthetic Text," *The Comparatist* 36 (2012): 127.

⁴⁷⁹ Pierre Bayard, "Is it Possible to Apply Literature to Psychoanalysis?," *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture* 56, no. 3 (Fall, 1999): 209-10.

counter Plato and suggest that everything simply is what it is because we decide to make it so, in the moment in which we make it, and with a self-identity that is not enduring. Subversive theories are more entirely premised on the Nietzschean tradition, and Nietzsche's analogy with money can be extended similarly to texts:

Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions – they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins.⁴⁸⁰

Textual meaning is an illusion which we have forgotten is an illusion. Subversive theories are focused more on value than on meaning, but this concept of value is defined in terms of complexity that leads to *unresolvability*: it is therefore a contrasting form of complexity to that of ideal formalism.

In my discussion I will address some offshoots of a radical form of reader response criticism, exemplified by Iser, that in theory destabilises meaning entirely and explores the reader's experience of the text in terms of the evolution of affect across the units of the text's language; also, the post-structuralism of Barthes and deconstructive criticism of Derrida, specifically in terms of how those theories relate to the figure of the author.

Ideological premises

Some commentators such as Hix agree with the characterisation of radical Disruptive critics as fundamentally subversive of the concept of meaning, but are able to reconcile this with their own hermeneutic readings of texts by seeing their explication in terms analogous with Ancient Greek spirituality. Hix references Frank's description of Ancient Greek philosophy and religious truth, that Greeks saw the soul as something that would be "drawn back again into the life-cycle, into a new body," and create a new person with a past – denying, therefore, any *ex nihilo* point of origin or creator.⁴⁸¹ Meaning derived by someone like Barthes is, therefore, for Hix, merely an explication of language as it exists in the circle of time and world of phenomena, and not a construction of 'meaning' in a way that would reinstate the power of the Author-God. The text and Barthes' meaning are epiphenomena of language, and are themselves constantly being absorbed back into language to be reborn, like the Greek soul, in another body.⁴⁸² This would be a form of meaning different from that created by Michael Gass's 'human mind', for instance,

⁴⁸⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, trans. Daniel Brazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), 84.

⁴⁸¹ Frank, 58.

⁴⁸² Hix, 57-59.

which has a transcendental identity and exists in the Kantian noumenal world and gives the text an eternal soul; it is, by contrast, temporary and insubstantial, but it allows a critic to declaim 'meaning' while at the same time constructing and relying on it in the moment of engaging with the text.

Impact on the imago

In this paradigm the *imago* is largely absent from criticism, but this is often because the goalposts have moved. It seems superficially as though the *imago* has been proscribed from hermeneutic engagement, but it is more that the nature of textual engagement has been redefined, and the traditional project of 'hermeneutics' has been dismantled. The kind of work that in other paradigms might be 'literary criticism' or 'interpretation' takes the form of pure theory more often, and this theory seeks to undermine both *to intend* and *to signify* as equally fallacious ideas of meaning, both connected with power and thus with violence. If the concept of meaning exists, then 'incorrect meaning' must also exist in order to determine its composition – this hierarchy of 'inside' the meaning versus 'outside' the correct meaning empowers the order of operations that the radical nature of Disruptive criticism seeks to destabilise, and it cannot therefore form the premise of criticism.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, this allows discussion of the author and her or his *imago* back into criticism, but only because she or he is neutralised as a figure of authority and need not, therefore, be avoided: refusing to speak Voldemort's name is what grants him power. But the author in the Disruptive movement is in fact nothing more than a text herself or himself, existing in a web of fragmentary impressions or *biographemes* in the mind of the other.⁴⁸³ Ricoeur, for instance, constructs the author as a category originating from the interpretation, even the recursive self-interpretation, of the work, because "[t]here is no self-understanding which is not mediated through signs, symbols, and texts."⁴⁸⁴ The self-understanding of the author "is now postponed until the end, as final factor, and not as introductory factor, and even less centre of gravity," and cannot therefore inspire the work nor can it invest the work with any self-understood meaning that is immanent in it.⁴⁸⁵ Ricoeur's 'cogito' author-concept can be read as akin to Booth's 'career author', if the "human being" aspect of the definition is read as an

⁴⁸³ Roland Barthes's term from *Sade Fourier Loyola* has been appropriated here, to distinguish these biographically-based narratives or images centred on the author from the elements of more traditional biography:

⁴⁸⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 29.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

intentional object: “a human being individualised by producing individual works.”⁴⁸⁶ Pol Vandavelde does not read it this way, though, and instead construes it literally, arguing that authors must literally self-actualise their own ‘meaning’ through their texts, “because, before the arising of works, there was no author.” Texts cannot then be read for intentional meaning, as, “[i]f authors have to construe their own self-understanding through and in their works, and only there, then the notion of the author’s intention becomes ambiguous.”⁴⁸⁷ It is more radical than the flesh-and-blood author simply having their conscious selfhood mediated by their own idiolect and previous narratives they have engaged in; the author, in a way, is created by their intention before they exist to have it.

Following a strictly Subversive approach will result, therefore, in not being supposed to unite *imago* and interpretation – but this is because ‘interpretation’ now takes the form of a less hermeneutic or exegetical activity. The *imago* does enter readings insofar as it constitutes its own textual construct, but it is not connected with a justification or construction of meaning because that goal itself is displaced. Radical deconstructive criticism is thus difficult to sustain; discussing the absence of meaning can only be taken so far, absent by necessity of illustrative detail, and it does not lend itself to nuanced iterations when discussed in relation to different texts – Subversive deconstructive readings, as a result, are criticised for finding exactly the same things or absence of things in every single text. The radical critics therefore tend to fall into two groups. The first group, nominally represented by Foucault and Derrida, focus properly on theory, and tend to avoid hermeneutical ‘readings’ per se; they use texts as illustrations of theoretical propositions rather than as objects of study in themselves. The second group, represented perhaps controversially by Barthes, Iser and Fish, break from theory to perform (some) detailed readings of texts, but often find themselves trespassing against their own professed ideology. When this is done one may see the influence of the *imago*, albeit not overtly performed – or, in the case of Barthes, proposed as an exception that proves the rule.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁸⁷ Pol Vandavelde, *The Task of the Interpreter: Text, Meaning, and Negotiation* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 159-60.

Deconstructionism

In 1949 Samuel Beckett publishes *Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*, a partial transcript of a conversation with the contemporary art critic about the work of Pierre Tal-Coat, among others. Beckett speaks of what he perceives to be Tal-Coat's "ferocious dilemma of expression," in that he is caught between two irreconcilable states:

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.⁴⁸⁸

He even goes so far as to recommend this as the *ideal* state for the artist—giving in to both poles, and not attempting to reconcile them by either giving up on the obligation to express or by trying to attempt an expression. Beckett refers to the art of (his personal friend) Bram van Velde as contrast, describing van Velde as "the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation" between the artist and her or his work, and therefore capable of producing art that is entirely "inexpressive."⁴⁸⁹ Duthuit processes Beckett's position as being that the ideal form of art is art that is "authentically fruitless, incapable of any image whatsoever."⁴⁹⁰

In Derrida's 1966 paper he positions the new theory as the opposite of the archetypal assumptions of structuralism, arguing that structuralist ideology attempts to claim a centre of meaning even as its principles lead logically to the rejection of any origin. Structuralism dissolves substance into a set of relations, based on Saussure's theory of language that it is the relationship space between concepts that conveys meaning rather than the concepts themselves; Derrida's argument is essentially that this denies any concept – or word – the status of 'first word', and that meaning cannot, therefore, ever come to rest at any origin. There is an implicit rejection of the Biblical origin stories giving the beginning as a word, and that word being God. A fairly straightforward application of this principle to writing undermines any search for a communicative origin or authorial intention, but Suresh Raval describes deconstructionism's reliance on Nietzsche in terms that also explain how it arrives at an erasure of the *reader's* role in any quest for meaning, too:

[F]or Nietzsche, the referential drive of language is forever doomed to failure, since words originate out of nothing and language can never contain and capture the mind's relationship to reality in any unproblematic way. Nietzsche's contention has radical

⁴⁸⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder, 1965), 103.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

implications for the theory of interpretation, for he would not only question but reject ordinarily held notions of intention and authorship. For him, “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; the ‘doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything.”⁴⁹¹

If the kind of authorial intention often posited is really a fiction of power that does not exist, then any effort to interpret for that intentional meaning is rendered a “will to power.”⁴⁹² This interpretation marries with others, such as Adams’s description of deconstructionism being an attempt to free discourse and understanding from the “prison house of language.”⁴⁹³

Other scholars have commented on the way in which acceptance of a deconstructionist ideology produces a dead end for criticism. Hirsch is bothered by its simple impracticality, arguing that nobody could live or work according to the naked theories in any kind of “ordinary intercourse with the world.” He also argues that few would *want* to. Hirsch does value pragmatic concerns over pure theory, however: in *The Aims of Interpretation* he speaks repeatedly of the “usefulness” of theories, the applicability of them to “common sense,” their ability to answer “practical questions” and to achieve “concrete goals.”⁴⁹⁴ And deconstructionism operates a little like Zeno’s paradox: for all that philosophers can demonstrate the ways in which meaning must be asymptotically deferred, when it comes to an “ordinary intercourse with the world” readers *do* act on the assumption that they are able to comprehend a point, just as they act on the assumption that they will be able to walk through the doorway. When seeking to do work outside of their own explication of theory, deconstructionist scholars do, too. Despite the pure theory of deconstructionism working to render an *imago*-figure illegitimate in the criticism or hermeneutic treatment of a text (indeed, to make a hermeneutic treatment illegitimate *ab initio*), it is in this gap made by ordinary intercourse that it revives.

Theorists

In Derrida’s 1978 *Writing and Difference* he lauds the “revelatory power of true literary language” that is “unburdened of its signalling functions.” His argument is that this liberation is the key to genuinely free speech:

⁴⁹¹ Raval, “Intention and Contemporary Literary Theory,” 269. Raval quotes Nietzsche from Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 45.

⁴⁹² Raval, “Intention and Contemporary Literary Theory,” 269. Raval quotes Nietzsche from Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 302.

⁴⁹³ Adams, 5-6.

⁴⁹⁴ Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation*, 3, 31-32, 39 & 118, 81, 27, 35.

It is when that which is written is *deceased* as a sign-signal that it is born as language; for then it says what is, thereby referring only to itself, a sign without signification, a game or pure functioning, since it ceased to be *utilised* as natural, biological or technical information, or as the transition from one existent to another, from a signifier to a signified.⁴⁹⁵

If the search for meaning is an infinite regress, then hermeneutic explication or 'interpretation' is impossible as a matter of foundation.

For Husserl, the entanglement of the expressive and indicative functions of a sign is accidental, or coincidental: the lexical meaning that resides in the word is married by agreement or random allocation with an indicative function that points towards a signified. For Derrida, the entanglement is necessary, and the expressive function is the indicative – there is no transcendental signified.⁴⁹⁶ Dario Compagno explains this in a way that makes its relationship to authorial intention and reader interpretation clear:

For Derrida there is no ideal dimension of language – for example a house autonomous from the actual thoughts of a person saying the word 'house', and from the real houses in which we live. There are no ideal meanings: signs tend to stable meanings (the word 'house' tends toward a shared idea), but signs are made of empirical uses, with all their imperfections and variations due to the contingent situation of use. [...] Whenever we say or write the word 'house' we let our listener or reader access a net of links (deferments), connecting in a heterogeneous way memories, references and past uses. We cannot isolate an ideal dimension of meaning that excludes all contingent references, leaving only pure thought.⁴⁹⁷

There can be no private intentions, because there are no real or ideal houses; there can therefore be no interpretation by a reader of what 'house' is intended by the author, but nor can there be any centre of 'housely' construal by that reader, because there can also be no idiosyncratic houses. The 'myth of interiority' is the belief that there exist private and self-contained intentions – intentional objects of meaning – separate from text.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 12.

⁴⁹⁶ I draw here from the analysis of Derrida provided by Rudolf Bernet, "Derrida and His Master's Voice," in *Derrida: Critical Assessments*, ed. Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁹⁷ Dario Compagno, "Theories of Authorship and Intention in the Twentieth Century: An Overview," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 42-43.

⁴⁹⁸ Jacques Bouveresse, *Le Mythe de l'Intériorité* (Paris: Minuit, 1987).

Critics of deconstructionism argue that this leaves Derrida without the ability to create productive criticism. Raval calls the work of trying to adopt Derridean theory productive of “absurd consequences,” as it becomes more of an “anti-method” than a method;⁴⁹⁹ Wellek also calls it “absurd consequences” – specifically, when ‘lesser’ scholars than Derrida attempt it with “utter caprice, extreme subjectivity, and hence the destruction of the very concepts of knowledge and truth.”⁵⁰⁰ When Derrida performs it, his textual analysis does avoid any reference to a message or point that could be intended by the author of the words, and any reductive statements of ‘point’. What emerges instead, however, is a criticism focused on either *disproving* meaning, or on building tangential networks of tentative word associations that play with perhaps sound or etymology but lead the reader nowhere other than to a recognition of correlation. Derrida describes this as the “turbulence of a certain lack” breaking down “the limit of the text” and exempting it from “exhausting and enclosing formalisation or at least [...] a saturating taxonomy of its themes, of its signifieds, of its intended meaning.”⁵⁰¹

When translating Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* into French, for instance, Derrida does not translate Portia’s trial statement, “Then must the Jew be merciful.” (IV.i.171) Even though his text is, itself, a translation, Derrida does not provide a translation for this line because the words (create?) something that cannot be captured by another word. In ‘What Is a “Relevant” Translation?’ Derrida announces that “the word (for the word will be my theme) [...] interests me, I believe I can say that I love it, that’s the word, only in the body of its idiomatic singularity, that is to say, where a passion for translation comes to lick it”;⁵⁰² he does not explain why he is willing to perform a translation/transformation on *some* words but not others, but by expressly leaving this one line in its original English he implies a statement about his belief in its *particular* untranslatability/uninterpretability. It is then curious to reflect on why this line has been chosen. If all words have about them a particular “idiomatic singularity,” then each word is unique and *none* can be translated: no word is unique. Through his selective refusal to translate, Derrida suggests a construal of either meaning or significance, but includes it only by omission such that it cannot be scrutinised.

Alternatively, Derrida often performs a criticism of almost free association, presenting a critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, Genet’s *Thief’s Journal*, of both, or of neither, in the form of a

⁴⁹⁹ Raval, “Intention and Contemporary Literary Theory,” 272.

⁵⁰⁰ René Wellek, “Destroying Literary Studies,” in *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent*, ed. Daphne Patai and Will H Corral (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 44.

⁵⁰¹ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 37.

⁵⁰² Jacques Derrida, “What Is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?,” *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Winter, 2001): 175.

string of quotations from each set out in columns. It is, as Wellek says, “a series of puns,” with the French pronunciation of ‘Hegel’ (*aigle*) being connected with the English translation of *aigle* (eagle), and then *seigle* – the English of which is ‘rye’, which is the field the thief crosses in Genet. ‘*Seigle*’ is then associated with ‘*sigle*’, which is the French for ‘sign’. Wellek criticises it for being not an aesthetic experience, nor literary criticism, nor good philosophy.⁵⁰³ Hélène Cixous describes it as an almost unconscious process of following something akin to the hidden essence of the language – despite this being the very thing that Derrida seeks to deny:

A genius in him guides the blind man that he is, unerringly guides his hand, his beak, his quill, his stylus, his syringe towards the worm (*vers le ver*) or the vein. He learns a text by ear, hears the secret cry of being a language. Besides, he only likes texts, works, corpses which have the word, which sign, which conceal yet leave traces of the keys, which have well-kept secrets.⁵⁰⁴

The words “secret cry,” “keys” and “soul” suggest a very different kind of project from the one that searches for no centre of meaning; if Derrida searches for them, and is indeed figuratively blind, is he being guided towards some transcendental and transparent signified behind the surface of the sign that he cannot see? Cixous says that Derrida “takes the words of a language, he takes a language, that is to say, a soul, an idiom within an idiom at its words,” but this conflation of language and words with ‘soul’ makes sense primarily if the words cease to be taken as signs and are instead autotelic self-references. The marriage of this with the “vein” towards which Derrida’s syringe is guided produces a confusing image, however, as the vein is the lifeblood beneath the surface of the skin.

When discussing why Derrida has a particular attraction to the works of Shakespeare, Cixous explains it as Shakespeare being the “Lord of the Ghosts,” and “the name of a corpus, of an infinite, unlimited body.” Derrida is then able to appropriate Shakespeare’s texts for himself in his engagement with them: “Because he does not exist, he can be more easily incorporated than others with whom Derrida weaves an alliance (Blanchot for instance).” Cixous then refers to “Hamlet Derrida” in her discussion of Derrida’s treatment of Hamlet, and says that Derrida “adopts as his shemblable [referring perhaps to the French *semblable*, or counterpart] this double problematic Hamlet” – possibly so that he can gather his own archives of “innumerable melancholy affects” when Hamlet speaks to the skull amongst the graves.⁵⁰⁵ One interpretation of Cixous’s elusive essay is that Derrida does not simply (or actually?) write about Shakespeare

⁵⁰³ Wellek, “Destroying Literary Studies,” 44.

⁵⁰⁴ Hélène Cixous, “Shakespeare Ghosting Derrida,” *The Oxford Literary Review* 34, no. 1 (2012): 3.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

– or Joyce, or Freud: he writes about and exposes himself. Cixous suggests that the “assemblage” that results from the insertion of the critic into the text opens up space for the Other, and is a feminine space: a medium for dialogue among different authors. One of the problems with this thesis, however, is that Derrida repurposes those authors such that they are excluded from the dialogue; to admit their voices into the monologue would be to admit meaning and authority into the criticism. Without that, though, both text and author become in effect Derrida. The *imago* at work can only be the mirror of the reader.

Michel Foucault is often joined with Derrida, as though denying an authorial role in interpretation, but I suggest that he does not.⁵⁰⁶ Rather, he insists that the figure of the author is best grasped as a legal and historical character that performs contextually-determined functions: it is a pragmatic construction set in opposition to the numinous *unreality* of the Romantic author-figure. The influence of the anti-expression and anti-referent movement can be seen in Foucault’s 1969 claim that “today’s writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression,”⁵⁰⁷ but scholars such as Compagno interpret this as an acknowledgement of how language is mediated, rather than as a complete deconstructionist denial of the communicative or meaning-making ability of words. Compagno argues that Foucault still imagines a “real author” behind the text, but that this results only in an unexpressed intention located beyond the text: however far a reader goes, she or he will never reach the person or intended meaning behind the work.⁵⁰⁸

Instead of suggesting that this private form of the author is accessible through the text, therefore, Foucault suggests that we regard texts as being free from the “dimension of expression,” and regard the author instead as a pragmatic function of discourse. We may certainly perceive “a certain unity of writing” within the work, but the name that we use does not have an origin before language. Foucault argues that it characterises “a certain mode of being of discourse” and that it therefore serves a regulative function over the text because it dictates that it “must be received in a certain mode,”⁵⁰⁹ But the author cannot be found hidden ‘within’ the text. Likewise, it is not entirely outside the text, as the text must be linked with the particular context from which it derives, and to definite historical practices of meaning

⁵⁰⁶ This is, for instance, Eagleton’s reading of Foucault: Terry Eagleton, “Self-Authoring Subjects,” in *What Is an Author?*, ed. Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 42.

⁵⁰⁷ Foucault, 281.

⁵⁰⁸ Compagno, 46.

⁵⁰⁹ Foucault, 281.

production that allow it to have sense. To use Foucault's language, I propose that the *imago* be recognised as a pragmatic author-function.

'Death of the Author'

What formalism and the New Criticism fail to remove of the author-figure from hermeneutic discourse, Barthes's essay 'Death of the Author' is frequently cited as eliminating.⁵¹⁰ Inspired by Nietzsche's *death of God*, his own work on structuralism and linguistics, and Derrida's then-recent reversal of deconstructionism, Barthes is seen to have in 1968 launched a rebellious and provocative attack on the "Author-God" that stripped 'him' of his privilege over the work and liberated readers from the tyranny of his lived existence and intentions.

It is true that Barthes repudiates an interpretive norm that equates the received meaning of a text with the biography or intentions of the author. Barthes's licence in classical literature from the Sorbonne was earned at a time when the school rules prohibited theses on authors who were still alive, because they could not be studied as the required form of 'venerated artefact'. Barthes has said:

We are generally inclined, at least today, to believe that the author can lay claim to the meaning of his work and can himself make that its legal meaning; from this notion flows the unreasonable interrogation directed by the critic at the dead writer, at his life, at the traces of his intentions, so that he himself can guarantee the meaning of his work: people want at all costs to make the dead person, or a substitute for him, speak. Such substitute may be his historical period, the genre, the vocabulary, in a word everything that is *contemporary* with the author; these contemporary phenomena acquire metonymically the author's right over his creation. Even more: we are asked to wait until the author is dead so that we can treat him with 'objectivity'.⁵¹¹

He also points to the "fine tautology" of studying and 'interpreting' an author in light of a previously-acquired image the reader holds of that author.⁵¹² Barthes does express an investment in breaking this conventional reliance on the quasi-divinity of the author figure.

⁵¹⁰ I will be using the edition of the essay published as "The Death of the Author," in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵¹¹ Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, ed. and trans. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), 75-76.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 38.

The title of his essay 'Death of the Author' has emerged as a catchphrase for a specific pro-meaning but anti-*intentionalist* meaning method of criticism, but I argue that this is the best understanding of neither the essay nor Barthes's theory in general. In terms of Barthes's continental legacy, the essay is not considered a notable part of his oeuvre until the 1990s or later: Derrida fails to mention it in his 1981 elegiac essay on Barthes, 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes', nor is it included in the first comprehensive biography of Barthes, Louis-Jean Calvert's 1990 *Roland Barthes*. John Logie attributes its popularity and influence to citation by American scholars who found it useful for their own projects of critiquing authorship, with the way in which it can be used to support the situation of meaning in alternative locations such as the psychology of the reader.⁵¹³ The essay is also commonly dated to 1968, and associated with the revolutionary stirrings in Paris, and Barthes's response to the failures of those movements to break the structures of state power. Eagleton, for instance, says that: "Post-structuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968."⁵¹⁴ McCann dates the essay: "What may have been in 1968 a polemical overstatement is now entrenched academic dogma."⁵¹⁵ There are others. It is, in fact, uncommon to see the essay dated correctly to 1967, and the later French publication is usually considered to be the original version. The first publication of 'The Death of the Author' was in the Fall-Winter 5+6 issue of *aspen* magazine, translated into English by Richard Howard; the first publication in French was as 'La Mort de l'Auteur', in the 1968 edition of the journal *Manteia*. The essay was written before the stirrings of the 1968 student movement and the decentralised, disorganised May/June revolt in France.

It was also written for a context dissimilar to that in which it is used. In 1967 art critic Michael Fried, writing for the magazine *Artforum*, scathingly criticises the minimalist art movement, deriding the skills of artists responsible for minimalist sculpture on the basis that the art "depends on the beholder, is *incomplete* without him."⁵¹⁶ He seems to suggest that art is not art, and the artist is not an artist, if viewers have to create all the 'art' parts themselves. The editors of avant-garde unbound magazine *Aspen* quickly plan a special double issue, 5+6, to cheekily respond, mailing it to subscribers in a box that must be used by readers to assemble a sculpture – 'The Maze', by Tony Smith – that is contained in pieces inside. The issue also includes cut-and-paste projects and reader-authored works such as a poem by Dan Graham known as

⁵¹³ John Logie, "1967: The Birth of 'The death of the author'," *College English* 75, no. 5 (May 2013): 496-97.

⁵¹⁴ Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 123.

⁵¹⁵ Graham McCann, "Distant Voices, Real Lives: Authorship, Criticism, Responsibility," in *What is an author?*, ed. Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 72.

⁵¹⁶ Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 (Summer, 1967): 21.

'Schema', which requires readers to construct their own poems from a series of prompts. Correspondence from the time shows that Barthes is contacted by editor Brian O'Doherty, and asked to put together a contribution. After some back-and-forth, the completed essay is delivered to *Aspen* on 29 October 1967 along with a note that apologises for its brevity but hopes that it is "in sufficient harmony with the issue."⁵¹⁷ Texts such as Graham Allen's *Roland Barthes*, published as part of Routledge Critical Thinkers series in 2003, frame 'The Death of the Author' as a distinctly literature-focused response to Derrida's *On Grammatology* – but this should be reconsidered. The exact purpose of the essay is unclear, but at the very least it is possible that it is as much a lampooning of Fried's high-handed dismissal of all art that fails to conform to the traditional model as it is a new paradigm of literary interpretation.

Other interpretations include that it merely endorses a traditional hermeneutic explication, led more by reader response than by an attempted recovery of authorial intention. Barthes's work post-1970, commencing with *S/Z*, also lends itself to this kind of reading, as the idea of *lisible* works versus *scriptible* ones is described as two competing ways in which the meaning of the work can be determined: in the former, meaning is handed without equivocation to the reader; in the latter, meaning is decided by the reader. Eagleton links this with the 1968 political movements and explains it in similarly revolutionary terms:

[L]iterature is now less an object to which criticism must conform than a free space in which it can sport. [...] The 'writable' text, usually a modernist one, has no determinate meaning, no settled signified, but is plural and diffuse, an inexhaustible tissue or galaxy of signifiers, a seamless weave of codes and fragments of codes, through which the critic may cut his own errant path. [...] The work cannot be sprung shut, rendered determinate, by an appeal to the author, for the 'death of the author' is a slogan that modern criticism is now confidently able to proclaim.⁵¹⁸

Daniel Just argues that the totality of Barthes' theory is usually seen through this lens because it lends itself to the Americanised theory of textuality and popular ideas such as 'absences' that introduce the subject. Just does not himself support this reading of Barthes, though, and argues that it is both self-serving and superficial; he says it demands, for it to work, an ignorance or avoidance of the fact that "Barthes never, not even at the height of his later work, lost sight of his early preoccupation with blank writing, its historical place and political potential."⁵¹⁹ It is,

⁵¹⁷ Correspondence collected in Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

⁵¹⁸ Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 119-20.

⁵¹⁹ Daniel Just, "Against the Novel: Meaning and History in Roland Barthes's *Le degré zéro a la écriture*," *New Literary History* 38 (2007): 400.

however, the reading that gives the phrase 'the death of the author' its primary power to proscribe the *imago* from the site of hermeneutic interpretation. Without it, the injunction disappears – or, at the least, loses its force.

In this reader-response interpretation of him, Barthes is primarily against the privilege of the author over the meaning of the work: it is not against the premise of signification. This is how William Gass interprets Barthes's 'death of the author'. He argues there are four avenues "out" of a text, giving the reader "outside helps" in the construction of meaning: firstly, the writer as a good or bad person or genius; secondly, the literary tradition; thirdly, the world as referent; and, fourthly, the reader as interpreting subject or rhetorical object. He argues that:

Actually, Barthes, while appearing to free the text from externals, is going to tie it rather firmly to two of them: the literary tradition and social usage, on the one hand, and the reader's caprices on the other.⁵²⁰

This reading explicitly keeps the premise of signification, and simply shifts the location of its determination. Under these readings, Barthes undertakes a New Critical, text-centric project. Just summarises:

In this Americanised version, Barthes becomes a proponent of 'textuality' - of absences, traces, and deferrals, conceptions that replaced the old-fashioned concerns for the subject, history, and reality. Such a Barthes has no pretence of historical criticism and instead advocates pleasures of analytical bravura and textual proliferation, which very much repeat the contemporary social logic rather than offering any critical distance from it.⁵²¹

It is because this version of Barthes is both revolutionary and comfortably familiar that I suggest it receives the power to dominate criticism in the way it does: it keeps the practice of criticism and interpretation relatively intact, but provides the critic with a new set of rationales to justify her or his hermeneutic product, and a liberation from the existing ones whose strictures can be felt to be stifling.

To the extent that we ought to credit the intentions regarding meaning of the person who wrote the essay – ironically, something that remains important in theory at the same time as being contentious in fiction – the question of what Barthes's theory really *is* ought to be considered;

⁵²⁰ William H Gass, "The Death of the Author," *Salmagundi* 65 (Fall, 1984): 16-17.

⁵²¹ Just, 400.

especially if, as argued above, it is not simply that authorial references should be removed from the construction of conventional hermeneutic explication.

Le Degré Zéro a La Écriture (later translated as *Writing Degree Zero*) was published in 1953; 'The Death of the Author' in 1967; *S/Z* in 1970; *The Pleasure of the Text* in 1973; and *Sade Fourier Loyola* in 1980. This is by no means a complete account of Barthes's publications, but it is a representative sample that illustrates the phases through which his ideas move *post* structuralism. On the surface they present an inconsistent ideology of literary criticism, but underneath the polemic they are linked by, as Malcolm Bowie describes it, a "refusal of interpretation [...], an unlimited recalcitrance towards the efforts of criticism."⁵²² A similar reading is performed by Just, extrapolating out from *Writing Degree Zero*:

Barthes proposes to call this new mode of writing *degré zero* – a notion that embraces those narratives that systematically try to suspend the totalising tendencies of the novel. The originality of this way of writing, as Barthes sees it in its opposition to the novel, is its ability to recover a level of language where signification is not of primary concern and where the disposition of language to stabilise meaning is largely neutralised.⁵²³

Barthes never does find his exemplary text – the one that achieves his level zero of signification. It remains an idealised concept designating an unreachable but enduringly sought-after goal.

In the book Barthes uses *L'Étranger* by Camus and *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert to illustrate the style of writing he seeks to class as 'true literature', with textual references and fragments standing in for a formal or structural analysis of what 'degree zero' writing might involve. Only three pages of discussion are dedicated to positive explication of this kind of language across the whole of the text. Even with the two writers whom Barthes chooses specifically to demonstrate this elusive (illusive?) form of literature, he finds he needs to qualify his findings: he concludes that it is "still" possible to lose oneself in Flaubert (suggesting a predominance of the alternative); and that one "almost" experiences an absence of style in Camus. Barthes does not define precisely what *degré zéro a la écriture* looks like, and cannot find the exemplary text for its unequivocal illustration, but it remains his primary interest from 1953 through to his latest texts. Just describes him as moving away from literature and towards artworks such as photographs and movie stills, in an effort to define "artistic creation of something that resists meaning and thus conceptual understanding."⁵²⁴

⁵²² Malcolm Bowie, "Barthes on Proust," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 2 (2001): 516.

⁵²³ Just, 391.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 396.

In *Sade Fourier Loyola*, almost three decades after the publication of *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes argues how the strength shared by the three writers is the way they each express nothing more than a “happiness of writing,” and use language in a peculiarly autotelic way – “precisely in order to say nothing.”⁵²⁵ His argument is that “[n]othing is more depressing than to imagine the Text as an intellectual object (for reflection, analysis, comparison, mirroring, etc).” Rather, he argues that none of the three conceives of a text in this way with the argument that “if they wanted to say *something* [...] they could be *summarised*, which is not the case with any one of them.” Sade, for instance, “makes sperm the substitute for speech,” practising what Barthes labels ‘metonymic violence’ by juxtaposing elements of language, such as the Church and pornography, that are usually kept separate through taboo. The writing is thus conceived of as a transgression of language and an overturning of the accepted classes of writing, and not as a thematic communication on the transgression of morality; Sade’s obsession with “crime” is actually, then, an obsession with exploding conventions of style.⁵²⁶ Barthes decries any criticism of Sade’s material being ‘monotonous’, saying that it can be found repetitive “only if we arbitrarily shift our reading from the Sadian discourse to the ‘reality’ it is supposed to represent or imagine,” and argues against any reading that condemns Sade on legal grounds, because these can only be based on a flawed conception of literature as realism.⁵²⁷ Instead of conveying something that might be called meaning, therefore, each author uses language only in order to *enact language*.⁵²⁸

The unclear hierarchy of ‘mere writing’ versus ‘true literature’ echoes a similar distinction in Derrida: in *Writing and Difference* Derrida lauds the “revelatory power of true literary language,” distinguishing “true” language as that which is “unburdened of its signalling functions.”⁵²⁹ The three subjects of Sade, Fourier and Loyola are chosen by Barthes precisely because they, and not others, have in common a range of special linguistic operations that differentiate their writing from the “artificial language” of their fellow authors; he criticises those other authors for being tied, still, to the domain of language as representation, and distinguishes the classification of their writing accordingly. Barthes therefore expressly acknowledges that *most* writing does not conform to his ideal. Compagno, for instance, seems confused: “Let us simply say that it is not

⁵²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Sade Fourier Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 6-9.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-34.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁵²⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 12.

fully clear whether Barthes (1967) refers to all literary works, to all contemporary literary works, or to some contemporary literary works.”⁵³⁰

It is not only that texts must be *written* as ‘true literature’, however: introducing his interpretation of Loyola at one point, Barthes adds to the requirement that texts be constructed in a way that denies representation of meaning, the qualification that they be *received* in this way, too. He qualifies, almost unnoticeably, his treatment of Loyola with the caveat that, “If we want to read Ignatius’ discourse *with this reading*” [my emphasis]. Here, the act of specifying *which* reading implies clearly that one could choose to do it otherwise, and thus fall outside the idealised view of language and ‘interpretation’ that is being proposed.⁵³¹ The alternative – to read Ignatius as though he were a simple conveyor of mimetic meaning rather than a founder of language and style – is not the approach advocated by Barthes, in which the authorial subject need be entirely eliminated; if it *were* the approach taken, however, the same principles would not necessarily apply. In this, we can see not only the way in which Barthes sets an idealised anti-mimetic text-and-reading apart from a traditional hermeneutic one, but also the way in which he sets conditions for the former that make it virtually impossible to encounter.

The deconstructionists share an idealised image of a language that is both entirely constituted by context and the history of language and word-use, but that simultaneously operates *ex nihilo* and free from contextual reference. Barthes suggests, “One need not be a Jesuit, a Catholic, a Christian, a believer” to read Loyola’s discourse and meditations the way he does; if anything, Barthes suggest that readers would enjoy an advantage by not being any of the above, as then they could give themselves fully to Loyola’s language as its own kind of ‘God’.⁵³² Sometimes in Barthes’s very expression of reactivity to deification he suggests his own deification impulse, but simply shifts it to a different subject. Lacoue-Labarthe also sees an inheritance from Romanticism in the theory of ‘true literature’: Lacoue-Labarthe interprets the deconstructive desire for a kind of autotelic experience of language with Walter Benjamin’s descriptive of the Romantic desire for ‘pure language’.

‘Pure language’ is language after the manner of the divine word that names and creates the world in Genesis (or after the manner of the highest poetry when it seeks to be equal

⁵³⁰ Compagno, 41 fn51.

⁵³¹ Barthes, *Sade Fourier Loyola*, 4.

⁵³² Ibid.

to the language of Eden, for example, in Hölderlin) insofar as it is not an instrument or a means of communication: pure language is a purely intransitive language.⁵³³

If an intransitive language fails to take any direct object, it is a language absent of any external reference.

Once the striking phrases of death and disembodied hands harden into the “entrenched academic dogma” that scholars such as McCann criticise, though,⁵³⁴ it is almost as though a double binary suddenly emerges: first, the author has to take absolute precedence over the work or be absented entirely; second, readers can engage with the meanings of the text (in which case they have to exclude the author), or they can engage with the author in the form of biography and publicity (in which case they have to exclude the meanings of the text). But they cannot do both. Seen cynically, it could be argued that Barthes’s polemical phrases dovetailed with the pre-existing IHR movement that disallowed author-related evidence, thereby strengthening its position, and was thus co-opted. It has since been taken out of its deconstructive context and been absorbed into diverse methodologies such as narrative studies, phenomenology and formalism, forming an assumed precondition even if the methodology as a whole abandons the rest of Barthes’s theory or is unable to implement it in practical terms. The “entrenched academic dogma” of which McCann speaks may be primarily the product of a selective appropriation based on convenient or compatible interests.

Radical RRC

Iser argues that, until the end of the Age of Enlightenment in the late 18th century, ‘understanding’ was presupposed if a text was organised according to the rules and categories of reason; ‘meaning’ was thus the sharability of the content expressed by that text, and not the construction of an understanding by the individual reader. When reasoning as the structuring principle of truth was no longer taken for granted, attention moved to understanding as a process. This view of the dialectic influences Iser’s reading theory, as it undermines the concept of meaning as a noun and refocuses it as a verb: “meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced.”⁵³⁵ It therefore becomes not a question of constructing

⁵³³ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Walter Benjamin on Romanticism,” *Studies in Romanticism* 31, no. 4 (Winter, 1992): 424.

⁵³⁴ McCann, 72.

⁵³⁵ Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, 10.

meaning, or authorising one ‘true’ meaning to the exclusion of others – rather, meaning is transformed from an end-goal to an endlessly deferred process.

Iser commends the New Criticism for re-focusing criticism on the “functions operating within the work”, but claims it falls short of any radical change in direction because it still works to define and understand those functions “through the same norms of interpretation that were used in uncovering representative meanings.” He corrects their assumptions: “A function is not a meaning – it brings about an effect, and this effect cannot be measured by the same criteria as are used in evaluating the appearance of truth,” as previously defined by that which is expressed through the transparent rules and categories of reason.⁵³⁶ For this reason he prefers the term *Wirkung* over *meaning* or *interpretation*, because it denotes a combination of effect and response that talks of the experience rather than the product.⁵³⁷ If any referential meaning is given to a text, it is strictly the reader’s “projection” and not at all the text’s own “hidden content.”⁵³⁸

This is not an exhaustive account of Iser’s theory, but it is the aspect of it that places him outside the reception aesthetics that follows him. Iser himself dates the critical appreciation of this shift in the understanding of meaning to the advent of modern art, arguing that it is the undecidability of Joyce’s *Ulysses* that frustrates attempts to construct a more traditional meaning to such an extent that it demands a re-evaluation of the term and renders “obsolete the classical quest for the meaning of a text.”⁵³⁹ Iser frames the new understanding of interpretation in teleological terms, arguing that “the referential reduction of fictional texts to a single ‘hidden’ meaning represents a phase of interpretation that belongs in the past.”⁵⁴⁰ He borrows negative associations from Ricoeur: he does not use the precise term ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, but calls the traditional search for meaning “parasitic,” in that it seeks to extract what it regards to be meaning and leave behind the text as merely vehicle of no intrinsic value.⁵⁴¹ The proper study of the text ought not to be focused on this, he argues. That older tradition is only helpful now because its premises operate as “signs of a now blocked path of interpretation” that

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 15-16.

⁵³⁷ In fact, in his English works Iser uses the term ‘response’, but he explains in a footnote that this is only due to the perceived necessity of selecting an English word; he intends the meaning of *Wirkung*, but is unable to find an existing English word that is a perfect synonym. ‘Response’ is what he settles for. Ibid., ix.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., xi.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 4-5.

can point the way to a new path: "The old semantic search for the message has given rise to the analysis of the means of assembling the aesthetic object."⁵⁴²

The reason *Ulysses* is remarkable as a text is that its resistance to this method has reduced it to a puzzle – a "jigsaw of fragmented patterns" – that exists only in the transitory experience of it and does not need to be, nor can be, closed. It is impossible to apply traditional standards of judgment to *Ulysses* – the text does not permit a (re)construction of the author's intention, or a final reconciliation of the work that wraps its ultimate meaning or message in a neatly-unified package.

In his rejection of hermeneutic meaning, Iser also rejects the relevance of the *imago*; in what he suggests should replace hermeneutic meaning, however, the *imago* still exerts influence. Iser argues that the new regime of the 'poetics of aesthetic function' directs the critic to look for the effects caused by the text. In the 'Oxen of the Sun' chapter of *Ulysses*, the process of birth is conveyed through a progression of period styles of English literature: it is not thematic meaning that is conveyed by this stylistic strategy, but thematised engagement with or access to the world.⁵⁴³ The text confronts the reader with the *processing* of reality instead of the representation of reality, and Iser argues that it is this shift in perception that marks the break with Romantic quintessence and the move from an author-focused paradigm to a reader-focused one. He says that "the reader cannot help being drawn into a process of communication, and at the same time jerked out of an attitude of passive contemplation"; and, that the "continual effort to separate the patterns of one's perception from the things perceived" that is effected by the text enacts in literary synecdoche the experience of living and "adumbrates the multifariousness and openness of the real world." The text is thus not able to be reduced to a meaning that is constituted by some representation of the world or by its refusal to be represented.

It is a question of semantics the extent to which this really deviates from a traditional paradigm of meaning and interpretation, however: Iser may be overstating his case. The understanding of the text is still ultimately reduced to an understanding of what the text – viz, the author via the text – is intending to effect through the particular instance of language, and the so-called 'thematized access' to the world in terms of an intended class of experience (be it the experience

⁵⁴² Iser, "Ulysses and the Reader: Wolfgang Iser Discusses the Importance of Ulysses in the Development of 'Reader Response' Criticism," 1.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 2.

of the 'real world' or something else) is not dissimilar in essence to the Romantic access to feeling and experience of the spirit. Both are perceived end-goals of the structure and style of the text, with authorial intent taken as the invisible organising principle; the 'meaning' of the text is therefore the conclusion to which the reader comes about the class of experience as a result of undergoing it in the manner directed by the text. The *imago* has been expressly omitted from analysis, but will nonetheless have the power to operate to the extent that it influences the reader's perception of this intended textual operation.

This puts Iser in the interesting position of both defining himself out of the terms of this discussion, and illustrating its premise. To the extent that he attempts to invalidate the premise of hermeneutic meaning he becomes tangential to the question of authorial *imago* and its impact on the construction of meaning, but to the extent that he unintentionally permits perceived design to influence the determination of thematised experience he illustrates the power that an embedded mental construct of the author can have. The intention attributed to the text must be compatible with the intention the critic is willing to attribute to the author behind it. Iser's Joyce is an author who would construct a text that refused closure on the level of simple representation; one wonders whether the same critical conclusion would have been drawn had the text been authored by James Patterson, for instance. Kent Bales interprets Iser in a similar fashion, but uses Iser's analysis of James's 'The Figure in the Carpet' to illustrate. Curiously, Iser finds that 'The Figure in the Carpet' enacts the same *Wirkung* as *Ulysses*.

Most maddening, given his "theory," is his insistent *interpreting* of literary texts. He interprets 'The Figure in the Carpet', for example, to *mean* [...] that literary texts cannot be reduced to a referential meaning – a referential meaning if ever there was one. In similar fashion, he everywhere interprets novels as disclosing (or leading their readers to recognise – an important distinction, to be sure) the limits, the omissions of the dominant norms and *schemata*.⁵⁴⁴

Iser finds referential meaning in the very modern texts which he has chosen to illustrate his theory that referential meaning is displaced and *is not found* in modern texts; not only that, however, but he finds *the same* referential meaning in all: "the identical pearl of great price in every oyster." Bales contrasts Iser with someone like Derrida, who argues the same impossibility of referential closure, but who at least "acknowledges his necessary subjection to the logocentrism he seeks to undo."⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Bales, 182.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

Stanley Fish also performs a deconstructive reader-response criticism in his more rhetorical moments, and is criticised by other academics for operating with sophistry and arguing theories based on “extreme relativism and even radical subjectivism.”⁵⁴⁶ Fish illustrates one of the traps of radical Subversive criticism: because of its denial of a centre, any scholar wishing to practise a more explicated criticism or engage with ‘meaning’ must find *sophisticated* ways in which to reconcile principle with practice, argue exceptions (such as distinguishing ‘true’ literature from mere writing, as Barthes does), or simply work in contradiction with themselves at some points without expressly noting the conflict. Fish exhibits instances of all three. This means that he *does* engage with hermeneutic meaning, and does invoke the authority of a personal *imago*, even as his theory would explicitly deny the appropriateness or even possible existence of either of these things.

Despite ideological commonalities he shares with theorists such as Barthes and Derrida, Fish considers himself an anti-foundationalist, in that he rejects the idea of a foundation existing wholesale for *any* knowledge. His 1999 text, *The Trouble with Principle*, essentially lays out an argument that it is impossible to arrive at any theory or explanatory ideology that occupies a vantage point above local and partisan concerns; that any theory will therefore be grounded in the philosopher’s own everyday practices, histories and habituations; and that knowing these two things does not advance knowledge or theory because knowing them does not enable a person to change or escape from them.⁵⁴⁷ Like Iser, Fish also argues that literal or representative meaning cannot be located within language, and points to what we refer to as ‘meaning’ being an experience in the reader’s contextualised processing only. In *Is There a Text in This Class* he unequivocally rules that “there are no determinate meanings,” and the entirety of his 1990 text, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, is essentially a thesis against the existence of literal meaning. In *Literature and the Reader* he argues that “the word meaning should also be discarded, since it carries with it the notion of message or point”;⁵⁴⁸ in *Interpreting the Variorum*, that “[t]he assumptions to which I stand opposed [are] that there *is* a sense, that is embedded or encoded in the text.”⁵⁴⁹ Rather than regarding language as possessing some kind of a communicative point, Fish argues that we should construe language as merely facilitating an experience, with each word acquiring ‘meaning’ given to it by the reader “by virtue of [its] position in a structure

⁵⁴⁶ Martha Nussbaum, “Sophistry about Conventions,” in *Love’s Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 220.

⁵⁴⁷ Stanley Fish, *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴⁸ Fish, “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” 160.

⁵⁴⁹ Stanley Fish, “Interpreting the Variorum,” *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Spring, 1976): 473.

of experience.”⁵⁵⁰ Edward Regis Jnr’s view of this is that it demonstrates Fish putting “the cart before the horse,” as “the reader’s experience is what it is because the words mean what they mean, not, as Fish insists, vice versa”;⁵⁵¹ Fish’s conclusion is different, and is that the replacement of ‘message’ with ‘experience’ means that “experience is immediately compromised the minute you say anything about it,” therefore it follows that “we shouldn’t try to analyse language at all.”⁵⁵²

Fish concedes that, since Chomsky, understanding is accepted as more than a strictly linear processing of information in order of its fragmented acquisition:

In my method of analysis, the temporal flow is monitored and structured by everything the reader brings with [her or him], by [her or his] competences; and it is by taking these into account as they interact with the temporal left to right reception of the verbal string, that I am able to chart and project *the* developing response.⁵⁵³

The sweeping nature of the claim, to be able to take into account “everything” a reader brings with her or him without the need to consider prior what those things are, casts some doubt on the practical ability to apply the method, and renders Fish perilously like Lady Catherine as pianist in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*: “If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient.” Regardless, hypothetical room is left for the operation of the reader’s author *imago* in the way they structure and process their experience of language. Fish does not give examples of what a reader might bring with them, or explore the specific impact that each influence might have, but generic allowance is made for them in the structure of the theory. In *Is There a Text in This Class*, for instance, Fish dismantles communicative essentialism and counter-proposes a ‘meaning’ based on semantic processing experience, but he doesn’t provide specific text instances of that happening, or outline how meaning is constructed absent explicatory content. He does, however, note that:

As soon as you descend from theoretical reasoning about your assumptions, you will once again inhabit them and you will inhabit them without any reservations whatsoever; so that when you are called on to talk about Milton or Wordsworth or Yeats, you will do so from within whatever beliefs you hold about these authors.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁰ Fish, “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” 143.

⁵⁵¹ Edward Regis, Jnr, “Literature by the Reader: The ‘Affective’ Theory of Stanley Fish,” *College English* 38, no. 3 (Nov, 1976): 277-78.

⁵⁵² Fish, “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” 160.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵⁵⁴ Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 370.

The inference that can be drawn from this is that Fish acknowledges that both his 'authorised' reading processes (ie meaning through experience) and his 'unauthorised' reading processes (ie meaning through embedded sense) will potentially involve a mental construction of the author.

In his own practice, at least, Fish produces critical works that pursue a realisation of authorial intention. This makes purely pragmatic sense, however. As Regis says, "on Fish's theory the most basic function of language, communication, becomes impossible": "if 'the reader' creates the text, its formal features, *and its meaning* in the very process of 'reading' it, how can it be claimed that anything has come through from the author?"⁵⁵⁵ Speaking on Milton, for instance, Fish supports his interpretive method on the basis that it will make us "capable of having the experience the author wished to provide,"⁵⁵⁶ and he describes the art of close reading as "the most exciting activity": "It still remains, at least in my experience, the most powerful pedagogical tool which can really awaken students' interest when they begin to realise that they can perform analyses of texts that remove the texts from the category of the alien and the strange."⁵⁵⁷ Damrosch notes the way in which Fish takes one position in his theory, but another in his pedagogy and critical practice, saying, "Because Fish is a brilliant critic he finds much in his texts that we are glad to have, but it is seldom the result of grinding up Plato and Bunyan and Milton, with their superb individuality and special kinds of strangeness, into a single self-consuming product."⁵⁵⁸

A possibly unintentional example of Fish expressly using an *imago* in *reaching* an interpretation, rather than – as in his work on Milton – using it retrospectively to justify an explication already derived, is in Fish's criticism (ironically) of Iser's very similar theory of language. Fish gives the example of a New Yorker cartoon in which a woman says to her husband "You look sorry, you act sorry, you say you're sorry, but you're not sorry." Fish argues, "What the woman is able to hear depends on her assumption of the kind of man her husband is; she constructs an image of him (has been constructing it for a long time) and that image controls her sense of his intentions and produces what is for her the obvious literal meaning of his utterance."⁵⁵⁹ Notably, Fish, elsewhere, has collapsed the conventional distinction between literature and non-literature, so in the context of his own methodology this observation of *imago* effect should hold true across styles and genres. Using this cartoon example in a later piece (but turning the wife into himself

⁵⁵⁵ Regis, 279.

⁵⁵⁶ Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*," 475.

⁵⁵⁷ Williams.

⁵⁵⁸ Damrosch, 104.

⁵⁵⁹ Fish, "Review: Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," 9-10.

and the husband into Derrida), Fish explicitly defines understanding as something that is always “operating from within a prior construction of the character of our interlocutors.”⁵⁶⁰ Fish even addresses the question of the recursive relationship between *imago* and interpretation, pointing out one of the problems with a narratological implied author, which presumes that a reader’s author-image will always necessarily post-date the reading of the text and be formed from at least an initial understanding of it:

[T]he cartoon seems to be reminding us that the direction of inference is often the other way around: the woman knows in advance what will be meant by what her husband says because she knows, and knows with the passion of belief, what kind of person he is; and therefore she is able to hear whatever works issue from him as confirmation of what she already knows.⁵⁶¹

Fish clarifies in a footnote that she could change her interpretation, but conceives of this only being possible if she *first* changes her own intentional object of his character. Fish differentiates between a theory that sees context as something *in* the world that can be perceived or recorded disinterestedly, and a theory that sees context as a construction *of* the world, from which no person can escape to gain an outside view.

Fish therefore rejects hermeneutic explication and meaning in the pure, conjectural form of his theory, but he also holds that it is impossible to cognitively embody or ever enact this theory in reality. In his own practice, therefore, he performs a critical method that is more aligned with Inversive reader response and the projection of a hypothesised reader, or a formalist method that attends to formal features of the text to justify a normative position on communicative intent.

⁵⁶⁰ Stanley Fish, “With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Summer, 1982): 705.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 699.

Conclusions

Utility of the proposal

I propose that the lack of a cross-paradigmatic author function is a gap in theory. The impact of this gap can be argued on ethical or practical grounds: the ethical grounds focus on the question of what *ought* to be done and why; the practical grounds on what *is* done and whether current practice matches current theory. The ethical grounds rely for their perceived merit on the values of the person judging them, whereas the practical grounds rely on example and demonstration.

Practical grounds

From a practical standpoint, study of the *imago* could enable some interpretive disagreements to be more directly analysed and understood. It is possible that competing explications of a text could be, at least in part, a consequence of competing *imagines* held by readers, and examining the nature and composition of those *imagines* could shed light on the grounds on which the differing interpretations have been (often unconsciously) based. Kaye Mitchell, in the discussion of authorial intention in the Wiley-Blackwell *Encyclopaedia of Literary and Cultural Theory* claims that intention can “help decide interpretive disagreements,”⁵⁶² but I submit that the finality of this outcome, “decision,” is neither necessary nor desirable. Instead, I argue for understanding or enlightenment, to help tease out otherwise opaque disagreements. This is one reason why I argue for a functional category of author, in the tradition of Foucault, and not a normative principle: if we do not seek to *decide* interpretive disagreements, we do not need to locate an unassailable standard against which to judge competing claims.

For some readers, naming an author and being able to posit intentions for them gives a means by which to achieve greater ‘validity’ in interpretation, and the ability to agree upon an objective measuring stick is itself a value-dependent benefit. Naming an *imago* and examining its constituent parts facilitates this in a way that traditional intentionalism demonstrably struggles with. If the figure of the author “gives us a stable measure against which to judge whether or not a work has succeeded in communicating its meaning and whether we have succeeded in interpreting a valid and appropriate meaning,”⁵⁶³ as Hirsch argues, the figure of the author

⁵⁶² Mitchell, 489.

⁵⁶³ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 27.

shared by any reader wishing to rely on the same stable measure must itself be transparent and able to be communicated.

Additionally, if we accept the evidence that suggests that interpretation of texts by even sophisticated and formally-trained readers is frequently influenced by the nature of their *imago*, this is an influence that we had best be as aware of as possible. The ability of an *imago* to shape interpretive decisions we make introduces a variable for which the text itself does not account; if we decline to examine this impact on the basis that it *ought* not to happen, I suggest that we put ourselves at the mercy of unconscious influence, and that denying the practice in theory bars us from an exercise of subjectivity that is as aware and managed as possible.

Ethical arguments

Ethically, an examination of the *imago* gives us another window into the text, another set of interpretive possibilities, alternative explications we might not have come up with ourselves. We could, naturally, obtain the same suggestions and insights from other third-party readers and critics, but the author can be a very effective reader of the work herself or himself. Ideas that either *were* in the author's mind when they composed the text may not be readily available on the surface, yet may illuminate our reading, and enhance our appreciation and the impact of the work; alternatively, ideas that we *conceive* as being in the *imago* author's mind when we attempt to remove ourselves may similarly broaden our experience.

Express and conscious discourse surrounding an *imago* has the power to mediate between otherwise contradictory methodologies such as formalism and reader response criticism, and return an element of human connection to the work that can sometimes find itself lacking when ideologies work to excise the 'real' author and her or his bourgeois authority or idealised fiction. McCann writes that the human face of literature has been washed away in the 20th and 21st centuries, leaving us – in the aloneness and non-referentiality of our reading – with “no-one to live with, and nothing to live for.”⁵⁶⁴ It is not a question for McCann of subordinating individual response to expressed authorial intention, or subordinating artwork to artist; rather, it is a question of liberating the motivation for reading to permit a relationship (felt imaginatively to be two-sided) with the human consciousness that lives projected on the other side of the page. Others such as Phelan and Ryan argue similarly, that coming to know – or *feeling* like we are

⁵⁶⁴ McCann, 75-77.

able to know – a version of the author through her or his narrative ought not to contradict in any way the repudiation of language giving transparent access to a unified authorial psyche.⁵⁶⁵

Other ethical arguments rely on the idea of ownership of language, and the power afforded by that. Hirsch's argument that a person's intentions for her or his words are "the soul of the speech," means that reading those words in light of at least *perceived* intentions is an ethical act in itself;⁵⁶⁶ it is doing respect to the Otherness of the author, by respecting the language as an embodiment of the Other's personal ethos. In this view, an author in a sense 'owns' the language they choose by virtue of having chosen it, and it is unethical to appropriate it without respect or regard for where it came from. Benson argues similarly, saying that biographical criticism is an appreciation of Otherness, in that it recognises "that there is an author who is different in personality and background from the reader," and minimises misinterpretations by critics who have not given themselves up "to participate in something other than what they are."⁵⁶⁷ He gives as illustration how, when younger, he overdetermined Steinbeck with reference to himself, and became aware of this when a comment by Steinbeck's wife made him realise that he was quite a different man and had been introjecting himself: he had been interpreting Steinbeck's works from within Sameness.⁵⁶⁸ An extension of this ethical premise is, then, that conferring or denying an author the authority to own their language also confers or denies her or him authority in the world as it exists outside the text. The literary is related to the practical reality of the social.

Miller points out that, by stripping authors of authorship – of the privilege of subjectivity and the power to define the terms of the world around them through the language chosen – at the exact moment in history at which it was popularly done, we succeeded in stripping it also from a whole range of people who had until that point been denied it.⁵⁶⁹ Texts by women, by people of colour, by the working class, by lesbians – all these became socially and socioeconomically more possible and more valued at precisely the same time as the privilege granted to authorship was being eroded (coincidence?). Critical theories approaching texts from within these concerns have also emerged, but are framed more as cultural or political studies more than as strictly literary ones. If, therefore, we *should* use authorship as a means of granting power to people

⁵⁶⁵ Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*, 46. Ryan, 40.

⁵⁶⁶ Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation*, 90.

⁵⁶⁷ Benson, 107-08.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵⁶⁹ Nancy Miller, "Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader," in *What is an author?*, ed. Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 284.

who have traditionally been denied it, we should examine our perception of the meaning of texts in light of the *imago* we posit being behind the words.

Imagines will by necessity be appropriations of another's selfhood because they will be constructions of that other in the mind of the perceiver, but this is a practical constraint that cannot be escaped and must be mitigated as best as one can with a judicious and ethical attempt at empathy.

Meeting existing need

That the *imago* is an existing blind spot in critical discourse is something that is demonstrated by existing criticism, professional as well as amateur. Many scholars expressly support the deaths both of author and intention, but then weave their conception of the author – in a way not technically explained by a currently-permissible author concept such as the implied author – into the rationale for their interpretive choices; or, they leave an unexamined leap in the conclusions they draw about text and meaning that is logically filled when one inserts an *imago*.

The focus so far has been on the way in which the *imago* is excluded from interpretation, or diminished in its composition or impact, but there are also voices calling for a hermeneutic strategy the *imago* would supply. The problem is that the strategy tends to be expressed as a vague or wishful suggestion, and not a proposal that is fully justified and explored through case studies – or, alternatively, it is hedged at the end with caveats and retroactive limitations that reduce it to a form of existing theory such as formalist text inference or inferred authorship. Guerin and others in the *Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* suggest what they call a “reliable middle ground,” that authorial intention be one of myriad factors to be considered by a reader insofar as it is deemed to be useful,⁵⁷⁰ and Stefanescu concludes that

the voice of the real author has been routinely dismissed, to the point that one wonders whether it may not be time to give it a fair (relaxed and guilt-free) hearing, not as the final word on the one putatively ‘truthful’ interpretation but as *one* voice in the chorus that surrounds the literary work and may possibly complicate the reader’s engagement with the otherness of the text.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ Wilfred L Guerin et al., *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89.

⁵⁷¹ Stefanescu, 49-50.

Régard writes about the conflict he experiences as a result of the clash between the literary paradigm in which he was educated and in which he works, and the desire he has to connect his readings with biographical and extratextual material. He claims he is “in desperate need of a theory capable of reconciling my degenerate tendencies with my enviable filiation,” and desires a way of treating authorship that avoids the reintroduction of authorial intention or the flesh-and-blood self as the unique authority on a fixed meaning, but that also allows interpretation to be informed by a “broadly pragmatic” intratextual and extratextual author figure. He conceives of this as a process in which “eloquent anecdotes are interlaced with the effect produced by the literary works” to form a ‘global event of thought’⁵⁷² – in other words, an *imago*, in which he is at liberty to regard the significance of “eloquent anecdotes.”

In 2010, Schmid describes this essential idea as readers supposing they can hear the voice of the concrete author directly, and argues that this voice is neither uniform across readers nor limited only to the voice of a single text: he says, “the inference about the concrete author is then indeed an interpretation based on knowledge of the work and the life of the author. Differing information necessarily determines different images of the real author and leads to different hermeneutical results.”⁵⁷³ He reduces his comments to a statement on the ‘real’ or flesh-and-blood author, however, and does not name an individualised intentional object; he also does not go on to examine the implementation or potential impact of this. Andrew DuBois also claims that close reading criticism “still uses biographical and historical information and cultural context, but it is much more sophisticated in the way in which it does it (and more subtle)”⁵⁷⁴ – but he omits to explain the way in which it is done, and in a sense it is precisely this silent subtlety that I am arguing works against its full effectiveness and sophistication. An example of published statements that seemingly *unintentionally* propose an *imago* come from Herman and Vervaeck: after arguing soundly against the implied author, that it is an entirely unnecessary addition to literary study, they conclude that “even if we want to do away with the concept of the implied author, it makes little sense to deny the importance of the reader’s author image.”⁵⁷⁵ And then no more is said about it, as this is the end of the text.

Cioffi insists on there being an “implicit biographical reference in our response to literature,” regardless of whether we intend for there to be. He draws an analogy with Wittgenstein’s

⁵⁷² Régard, 395-96.

⁵⁷³ Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction*, trans. Alexander Starritt (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 46.

⁵⁷⁴ DuBois, 5.

⁵⁷⁵ Herman and Vervaeck, 15.

description of philosophy, 'putting into order our notions as to what can be said about the world', to come up with a programme for aesthetics: namely, that it is "putting into order our notions as to what can be said about works of art." One task in this programme is thus "to elucidate the relation in which biographical data about an author, particularly of the kind loosely known as knowledge of [her or] his intentions, stand to those issues we call matters of interpretation." He shows that this could mean the difference between reading Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality' as a dirge sung over departing poetic powers *or* as a dedication to new powers;⁵⁷⁶ a dramatic shift, indeed, and one that ought not officially to be made – or, at least, not made in the same way – on the formal grounds of existing hermeneutic programmes of aesthetics.

The biographical flavour of Cioffi's authorial hermeneutics is a theme running through many expressions of author-influenced interpretation. Barber, for instance, argues that "The interpretation of the subject's writings will depend upon the life narrative already imagined for the author of those works,"⁵⁷⁷ and gives as example Shakespeare's Sonnet 45. It describes the joy of exchanging letters, but the immediate despair that descends as soon as a reply is sent and the wait for the next one begins; Barber explains the metaphorical reading of this passage as being due to the absence of any known journey undertaken by (her *imago* of) Shakespeare that would account for delayed exchanges of this sort. Katherine Duncan-Jones, for instance, reads the letters as "reciprocal sentiments" rather than as actual letters, or an exchange of actual letters that (her *imago* of) Shakespeare might be able to project himself imaginatively into despite not having ever perhaps experienced it first-hand. Barber explains that the choice to read the letters metaphorically rests on the life narrative associated with them, and suggests that attributing the Shakespearean sonnets to Marlowe, for instance, would enable a critic more easily to read them as literal missives.⁵⁷⁸

Shen takes it for granted that this kind of hermeneutics is routinely practised, and uses it as evidence of the inability of some readers to apprehend the implied author of an individual text. He argues that "some critics today tend to form a fairly stable general image of the author as very much based on biographical information and/or the reading of some of the author's

⁵⁷⁶ Cioffi, 85.

⁵⁷⁷ Rosalind Barber, "Exploring Biographical Fictions: The Role of Imagination in Writing and Reading Narrative," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 14, no. 2 (2010): 165-66.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

representative works,” and this can “stand in the way of perceiving the specific stance of the implied author of a particular narrative.”⁵⁷⁹ Here, the influence of an *imago* is taken as a given.

Areas for further investigation

The gap that emerges from the absence of the *imago* from theory is twofold:

1. We fail to study the *imagines* brought to texts by different readers; and, therefore, lack insight into the various ways in which the same author may be conceived of by different readers.
2. We fail as a result to be properly aware of the impact that an *imago* may have on the construction of meaning from or in any given text; and, the extent to which differing *imagines* may influence the construction of differing meanings.

It is entirely plausible, for instance, that some readers consciously and deliberately alter their perceived meaning in a text to fit their apprehension of the author. Anecdotal evidence has been published to support this, such as Booth’s account of teaching e e cummings⁵⁸⁰ and Hirsch’s account of teaching Donne,⁵⁸¹ and some has been canvassed in this thesis. It is also entirely plausible that readers may have their hermeneutics acted on by their apprehension of the author without them being aware of it. We do not know whether similar *imagines* are likely to influence similar hermeneutic results, or whether one of the many other factors influencing interpretation overrides the impact of the *imago* to the point that there is no observable correlation or trend. The entrenched dogma, and the way it has evolved over the history of modern literary theory without specifically addressing the above questions, has resulted in inadequate study of the answers to them.

Empirical studies

The *imago* does not exist as a theoretical concept, and there are practical difficulties in assessing a reader’s author image and the impact it has on interpretation. Regardless, the general disinclination of literary studies to test its theories on real-world human beings may also be

⁵⁷⁹ Shen, 95.

⁵⁸⁰ Booth, “‘The Way I Loved George Eliot’: Friendship with Books as a Neglected Critical Metaphor,” 25.

⁵⁸¹ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 73-75.

explained by the common assertion of mutual exclusivity between it and the sciences. Literary theories have also tended, other than reader response theory, to move in specifically depersonalised directions. Formalism and post-modernism, for instance, seek in different ways to sever a text from its human causes. By locating the essential 'meaning' of a text within the presumably transparent medium of its language, New Criticism effectively removes the need for practical studies because any sophisticated hypothesised reader will have equal access to that meaning; if a particular reader does not, it is more a sign of their failure to be 'alive' to the meaning rather than a sign of their apprehension of a different meaning based on subjective interpretive practices or judgment that warrant study. This assumption could have been undermined, or at least problematised, by Richards's experiment, documented in *Practical Criticism*, in which he asked undergraduate students to write interpretations of unfamiliar poems, given to them without titles, attributions or any authorial and social context. The widely divergent results could have prompted fruitful examination of the factors that influenced each student to derive meanings and experience the poems in the way they did, but instead it is dismissed as anomalous by Richards. Different reader outcomes are attributed solely to the fact that the students are not properly "alive" to the essence of the poems in the way that "better-trained" readers are.⁵⁸²

Post-modernist approaches have bent their philosophy towards the 'High Theory' of detached thought experiments, so have not, in practice, embraced the empirical observation of real reading practice in the way that the popular liberation of the individual reader could have engendered. Iser expressly declaimed any empirical basis for this theory, saying:

The theory developed here has not undergone any empirical tests. We are not concerned with proving its validity so much as with helping to devise a framework for mapping out and guiding empirical studies of reader reaction.⁵⁸³

It appears almost as though one kind of validity (hypothetical or theorised validity) can exist entirely separately from another kind of validity (actual validity). Ansgar Nünning argues, specifically in relation to the narratological implied author but in terms that could apply to the effect of any intentional object conceptualised by the reader, that the "supposition that readers construct an image of the author during the act of reading [is at best] an intuitively plausible hypothesis" – "which has," he says, "however, not yet been empirically tested."⁵⁸⁴ In 1998 Holland

⁵⁸² Richards.

⁵⁸³ Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, x-xi.

⁵⁸⁴ Ansgar Nünning, "Renaissance eines Anthropomorphisierten Passepartouts oder Nachruf auf ein Literaturkritisches Phantom? Überlegungen und Alternativen zum Konzept des 'Implied Author'," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 67, no. 1 (1993).

notes a number of experimental studies emerging from countries such as Canada, Germany, Hungary and Israel, but argues that the findings “tend to be small and particular (rather than large and global in the manner of literary theorists).” He concludes, “It is hard, therefore, to summarise them or derive from them any general model of response.”⁵⁸⁵ Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, constructing a union of cognitive psychology, literary studies and linguistics, observe that the trend in literary theory is towards “purely intuitive speculation formulated in the absence of an objective method of validation.”⁵⁸⁶

The empirical tradition in literary studies is therefore not historically strong, but the past three decades have seen an increase in studies and cross-disciplinary work. I agree with Lanser when she asks for a switch to confirmation or disproof, and away from pure theorising:

[W]e need to understand not simply how actual readers infer an author from a text, but whether readers read differently if they think there is an ‘implied author’. In sum, I believe we will learn more about implied authorship by testing out how readers process a sense of the author than by continued debate.⁵⁸⁷

The empirical work that does exist – in which the author has ‘snuck in’ as a relevant variable – suggests a likely middle ground for many readers: occupying an ill-defined midway point between total subjection to a unified and authoritative creator, and complete liberation from any authorial figure, a reader’s intentional object author figure seems to be something that exists in their minds and is taken into account during their processing of the text and weighing up of hermeneutic choices.

In the 2011 reading circle discussions conducted by Sara Whiteley, for instance, where participants engaged with Simon Armitage’s poem, ‘An Accommodation’, readers ranging from hobbyists to university literature professors debated the ‘points’ being made by the poem, and overtly used personal understandings of the author. Whiteley observed that “group members drew on the notion of the author to strengthen their arguments or validate their points of view.”⁵⁸⁸ One reader argued that some interpretations were “elevating it rather higher than he [the author] would have wished,” and another insisted that the line ‘this tattered shroud, this ravaged lace’ ought to be read in connection with Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, as it used wording

⁵⁸⁵ Holland, 1205.

⁵⁸⁶ Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, *Psychonarratology. Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

⁵⁸⁷ Lanser, “The Implied Author: An Agnostic Manifesto,” 158.

⁵⁸⁸ Sara Whiteley, “Talking about ‘An Accommodation’: The Implications of Discussion Group Data for Community Engagement and Pedagogy,” *Language and Literature* 20, no. 3 (2011): 251.

from it. Despite the fact that no similar reference to lace, shrouds, tattering or ravaging exists in *Henry V* or another play, she was certain that Armitage had made the allusion deliberately: “I mean he has done that, that’s been in his head.”⁵⁸⁹ She lived her imaginative displacement so completely she knew without doubt that *her* intertextual association was *Armitage’s* association, and the line was objectively impregnated with the imported Shakespearean meaning as a result.

Other studies where readers have been asked to commentate their reading experience as they’re doing it in ‘read-aloud’ testing, or have been recorded while discussing a text with a reading group afterwards, have shown people building an image of the author as an intentional creator. In the first book-length empirical study on ‘reader-generated author inferences’, *Author Representations in Literary Reading*, published in 2012 by Dutch academic Eefje Claassen,⁵⁹⁰ every single person was able to describe the author from a picture in their head, and changes in the text affected this image. Two of the test subjects recognised the test material, and read biographical detail they knew from outside the texts into the image of the author they perceived; readers with no knowledge of the ‘real’ author, on the other hand, reported imagined speakers “sitting in a comfortable chair”, or wearing bowler hats, a “long, dark coat that’s perhaps a bit greasy”, or “sturdy shoes and jeans that sag a bit.” Personality and character were also ascribed to the unseen writers of the texts, with one reader painting a vivid picture of “an ordinary man in a suit that arrives at six and then reads his children a story, and wants to make it as thrilling as possible but with a happy ending of course” – or perhaps they were a “very lugubrious little fellow”. The reader was yet to make up their mind.⁵⁹¹

The combination of literary theory with cognitive psychology used by Claassen found not only that composite images of the authors were inferred from both the text and what the readers knew of the flesh-and-blood people from outside the works, but that these images were used during the interpretation and meaning-construction processes. Her focus was on the conditions under which readers construct separate mental representations of the empirical author, single-text implied author and narrator. This means the reader’s own authorial image was examined only insofar as it differentiated itself or blended with the image of the narrator, but her work still reinforces the subtle suggestions that have been weaving through reader response studies for a number of years – many of which carry hints that the picture of the author is often used to

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 249. The line “tattered weed” is in Sonnet 2, in the lines “Thy youth’s proud livery, so gazed on now,/Will be a tattered weed, of small worth held.” (3-4) It is a matter of conjecture whether this was the intended reference.

⁵⁹⁰ Eefje Claassen, *Author Representations in Literary Reading* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2012).

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 92-93.

help readers understand the meaning and significance of the text and how it relates to real life, both theirs and the author's. In their 1997 study on the interpretation of satire, Kerry Pfaff and Raymond Gibbs found that 92% of readers spontaneously considered the author's intended meaning and purpose to help them interpret the text; also, they were more likely to identify the satirical subtext of the work if they believed the author to personally be from the opposite end of the political spectrum, but much less likely to if they thought the author was personally on the same side.⁵⁹²

Bortolussi and Dixon somewhat foreground parts of Claassen's findings in their 2003 text *Psychonarratology*, which presents a hypothesis regarding the extent to which readers are likely to conflate a conversational narrator with the named author of the text and form, from this, a general image of the author. Bortolussi and Dixon suggest that readers treat a narrator as a conversational participant, and attribute to it a desire to convey a "message" or "point."⁵⁹³ This treatment of the text as a communicative construct then has the capacity to trigger an association between narrator and author; or, at the very least, an inference made about "the existence of a creative figure with a set of goals and plans" that they name the "represented author." One possibility presented for the composition of this author-figure is that it may be in some instances a merger of the historical author, the single-text implied author, and the narrator – particularly if the narrator is presented as a conversational participant.⁵⁹⁴

The focus of the text is not the study itself, but a framework for future study: it sets out a hopeful program for the investigation of a 'creative figure' inferred by readers during literary processing, and, in order to benefit from advances and knowledges in each discipline, proposes a marriage of cognitive studies, particularly discourse processing; literary studies such as narratology and reader response criticisms; and linguistics, including language forms related to spatial descriptions and the means by which 'point of view' is established. The 2003 text is a backgrounding and framework, not a previously-worked testing of the hypothesis. The proposal that Bortolussi and Dixon make regarding the represented author intersects with the concept of *imago* and has the ability to inform it in the future as the represented author is tested and elaborated, as well as other aspects from the final chapter on 'Directions and Unsolved Problems': for example, they name 'extratextual information' as one aspect of reader concern that may affect a reader's intentional concept of the author and, thus, their reading of a text. In

⁵⁹² Kerry Pfaff and Raymond Gibbs, "Authorial Intentions in Understanding Satirical Texts," *Poetics* 25 (1997).

⁵⁹³ Bortolussi and Dixon, 60-61.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-76.

this section, they speculate that studies could show a recursive relationship between author-image and text, in that an altered author-image could influence the interpretation of a text and the interpretation of a text could trigger a revision of author-image.⁵⁹⁵

In this thesis I have, in fact, performed the type of pseudo-empirical work that Bortolussi and Dixon comment on: I have used critical interpretations of literary works in order to draw material in support of general inferences about readers in the practice of reading.⁵⁹⁶ This pool presents issues surrounding self-selection and a lack of controls, however; I agree that the next steps must be more methodological and focused. I want to build on the work that currently exists and is currently progressing, and apply it to an *imago* figure, but for the moment seek only to define a theoretical basis for the object of study.

Conclusion

In contrast to a conception of the author that posits her or him as an authorised God, the *imago* is a pious ejaculation. *Enthusiasm* originally meant inspiration or possession by a divine idea, breath or energy, and Plato used *Ἐνθουσιασμός* to describe the inspired madness of the poets.⁵⁹⁷ But, in the 18th century, it was transformed into a term of abuse, and leveled at early Methodists such as John Wesley because he gave permission for each person to connect with God on an individual, inward level instead of going through the authorised church. Wesley, in his sermon ‘The witness of the spirit’, defined the experience and affirmation of the Holy Spirit as “an inward impression on the soul of believers”: as a religion of the self. ‘Enthusiasm’ therefore has a double meaning: it is an individualised conception of God, permitting a plurality of ‘gods’ instead of enforcing one externally-derived authoritative entity, and it evokes in a playful way some of the freedom and enjoyment that should come from being able to do this.

This subjectivity and indeterminacy allow each individual reader to fill the space of the name with the biographical stories, text intent, style, views and values that engage with the texts they are reading and have read, and then to alter that image as their information changes. The *imago* has no agency or materiality of its own in a material sense, but it does possess any that we give to it. It may not in any literal way, therefore, exercise authority over the work or circumscribe its meaning, but it may have that effect on our reading *if we permit it* to do so. The question

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 245.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁹⁷ *Timaeus* e 7-8.

here is not whether this *ought* to be the case: it is whether it *is* the case; and, if so, what the impact of this dynamic is.

I argue that a survey of the history of literary theory shows that a figure corresponding with the *imago* is not an authorised part of any discourse, and that the *imago* proposal is not made redundant by any existing ideology. I argue further that no existing critical methodology or theory presents convincing arguments that the use of an *imago* figure by readers is illegitimate, and that the naming of the concept would seem to authorise or legitimise a practice that ought to be entirely proscribed. Finally, I argue that there are instances from each paradigm in which professional readers have themselves been influenced in their hermeneutics and criticism by an individualised *imago* they hold of the author of the texts they are working with; if this is true even when scholars are working from within those paradigms that nominally exclude the author from the practice of interpretation – and I submit that it is – then it cannot also be true that the *imago* is made redundant and is not required as a functional aspect of literary vocabulary.

Appendices

Appendix A

Stuart Bousel

Merchant of Venice
CustomMade Theatre
San Francisco, 2012

Interview conducted 24 July 2017

Transcript

1. What are your thoughts on the humour, or lack of humour, in *MoV*?

Encompassing any and all of:

- From your perspective.
- From Shakespeare's perspective, the intended perspective, or what you perceive to be the intended perspective.
- In other productions, with which you either disagree or agree, that you like or dislike.

Generally speaking, I think the humor in *MERCHANT* often comes from the "This is absurd... and yet" moments, and in my production we really tried to play those up, because for me the whole point of doing *MERCHANT*, and especially a *MERCHANT* set in a modern American city, was to get the audience- which would be largely affluent, comfortable, educated San Franciscans – to think about the every day absurdities and actions of ourselves and our own culture, many of which don't seem absurd because we're simply used to them or don't really consider their long-term implications. The pound of flesh deal I think best exemplifies that. In my opinion the deal has always been preposterous and meant to get a laugh, even in the Renaissance. Who proposes that deal- and who agrees to that deal? But then they do, and that to me says a lot about Bassanio and Shylock but also the mercantile world in general. I mean, business deals go down every day that have the potential to

make and break people's lives, and nobody bats an eye at it. To me, the humor of *MERCHANT* often lies in the part where the characters do bat an eye- and then continue to plow ahead anyway. In my production, the deal got a huge laugh every night because the actor playing Shylock (Catz Forsman) would propose the deal as absurd, and the actor playing Antonio (Ryan Hayes) would laugh at it, and then both of them would laugh together and then the actor playing Bassanio (Dashell Hillman) would nervously join in and then suddenly all three would get very silent and thoughtful and THAT is when the audience would bust up. And then Antonio would accept the deal and the audience would nod and go, "Yup." It's a "been there/done that/was that stupid/selfish/sloppy" humor that is the lifeblood of the play.

2. What are your thoughts on changing the script versus changing the staging/costuming/setting of a Shakespeare play in general, or of *MoV* in particular?

Encompassing any and all of:

- The purpose or intentions behind each type of change, being either similar or different.
- 'Modernising' or regularising the language.
- Adding, subtracting or conflating characters.
- Highlighting or enlarging on themes, and possibly backgrounding or trying to remove others.

In my opinion you can do anything you want to Shakespeare, whether it's about costumes or cuts, as long as you 1) create a consistency within your own production so that every choice is supported by the other choices and 2) can justify your choices with the text, and by that I don't mean that your reason has to be spelled out in the text per se, but rather that the text inspires your idea rather than you impose your idea on the text. I think when you mine the source material for what's there you find that every choice you make comes much easier and in the service of helping to realize what the story is about (for you), recognizing that every play is about something different for every interpreter. I think author's intent (which I do think is valuable but only to a point) is kind of hard-to-impossible to argue when it comes to a many centuries old text that also lacks any kind of authorial commentary about the text outside of the text itself, so really any production of Shakespeare is interpretative, as I see it, even ones that lay claim to being purist. When we argue about what is

acceptable to do to Shakespeare in production we're really arguing WHAT WORKS, in my opinion, and that's bound to be pretty subjective in the end.

All I can say for me is that I have never felt like I have ever brought anything to a Shakespearean text that wasn't there to begin with, so much as provided a new lens through which to see what was always there, or highlighted what I believe to be the important aspects of the text over those which get in the way, usually due to our modern sensibilities. An instance of this in *MERCHANT* would be the forced conversion at the end, which in my opinion actually reinforces the play's theme of forgiveness but only if you can wrap your head around the idea that someone at that time and in that culture would think forcing a Jew to become Christian WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO AND GOOD FOR THE JEW. Antonio believes he is being kind and this action is supposed to demonstrate some personal growth on his end, but a modern audience, understandably, is going to have a negative reaction to this so I cut it from my production, closing to focus on Antonio's other benevolent acts, namely not demanding Shylock's execution (a recognition of his humanity not afforded, say, Cloten in *CYMBELINE*), and restoring half of his wealth so Shylock is not left destitute (and you could argue giving the other half to Jessica is encouragement for father and daughter to reconcile).

Would I have made this same cut if my *MERCHANT* wasn't set in contemporary times? Probably, actually, but it doesn't hurt that the choice here also helps the play, in general, feel more contemporary, thus supporting my production concept and my interpretation of the play at the same time.

It's also worth pointing out that I don't think I would be interested in directing a production of *MERCHANT* that was set in its historical time and place because to me that makes the material too safe for the audience, allowing them to be like "that's not us" too easily. Which doesn't mean I think you can't do a more traditional production successfully because I think you can (I love the film, which is set in the historic context)- I just wouldn't choose to do that myself. What called to me about this particular text was how oddly contemporary I find it, and thus my entire concept rose out of that, as opposed to going, "I want to tell a story about X, using Merchant of Venice." To my mind, there is a real distinction between those two approaches.

3. Your reviewers are divided in opinion when it comes to their readings of Antonio, Shylock, Bassanio and Gratiano, and what your intentions were for them (particularly in re Antonio and Shylock).

For example, Antonio is a very sympathetic figure for some, an outsider, a gay man lacking a satisfying, reciprocal relationship and social acceptance, a victim of the same system as Shylock; for others, he is a ruthless hypocrite, morally polluted with double-standards. Charles Kruger, eg, sees a parallel between Antonio and Shylock, and Antonio spitting on Shylock is the pain of an outsider lashing out at another outside. (14 July 2012) Stacy Trevenon gives nifty adjectives to each character, such as “hapless” for Antonio and “heartless” for Shylock; Shylock has “gloating avarice,” but the play essentially boils down to opposites sharing in common more than they think. (14 July 2012) Richard Conneman, on the other hand, sees the production as presenting Shylock as “not the villain but the tragic victim,” and Antonio as having “honorable motives” but acting as of a ‘witless’ class full of its own “obligatory supremacy.” (26 July 2012)

And so on! The affective response to the characters is diverse.

Do you, or did you, have any identifiable ideas about who or what each of these characters was, and/or how you wanted to them to be assessed or perceived by your audience?

I definitely had strong ideas about each of the characters but again, I drew them from the text, and felt like I was really just painting what was already there with “contemporary paint” rather than rewriting them to any degree. Yes, I absolutely and unquestionably see Antonio as homosexual and yes, I believe it’s as explicit in the text as it could be at the time and that many of the other characters are aware of it – Salanio and Salarino, especially – and that Antonio is too, and deeply uncomfortable with it, and thus deeply unhappy, as evidenced in the first lines of the play and by the bulk of Antonio’s decisions, all of which seem to be sad attempts secure some kind of emotional validation from Bassanio, something he wants so badly he’s willing to put his life at stake and when his actual destruction seems assured it’s always struck me as sad and sort of absurdly funny how much Antonio obviously relishes this opportunity to basically emotionally blackmail Bassanio with his sacrifice, something he flat out states in Act 4 when the knife is all but pressed against his chest. And yes, I do believe Antonio’s homosexuality is self-loathing, and it’s this self-loathing that makes

him, an insider who is really an outsider masked by his own shame, so volatile towards Shylock, an open outsider he feels safe to abuse. And yes, I think these men go after one another in a way that only people who feel hated and confined by society are capable of, and so when audiences interpret that as me drawing analogies they are correct but again, I think that's already there to begin with. Shakespeare is showing us a society run on taking advantage of one another and building one's self up at someone else's my expense and in my experience there's a lot of truth to the phenomena of one disenfranchised person doing this to another because each perceives the other as low-hanging fruit, so to speak. Antonio and Shylock are both unhappy with their lives and angry at the world in general, before the play begins, and they both take out that anger on one another in a desperate attempt to assert their own imperiled humanity. To seek your own value at the expense of others is not usually a sign of being a happy with who you are.

As for the other major players... Bassanio I see as a treasure hunter and manipulator. Which doesn't mean I think he's incapable of loving Portia sincerely. Or Antonio for that matter. Bassanio has always struck me as the epitome of a non-malevolent opportunist whose one true ability is charming people and who has just enough brains to know he's not going to be able to ride that boat forever. While I think he would never consider Portia if she wasn't rich, to his credit, he is willing to risk a lot to win her and that does say something in his favor – he recognizes a good thing when it's in front of him and his intentions, while mercenary, are at the very least, specific to her as an individual and everything she has to offer, including, presumably, herself. And unlike Gratiano, who I really think is just a waste of a human being, the epitome of a brainless, entitled loudmouth, Bassanio at least attempts to play by the rules. He doesn't fight them in any way, and since the rules of his society are kind of bullshit that is disappointing. But he also doesn't break them to his own advantage. He's of weak character, undoubtedly, but not a villain, and the only debate our audiences seemed to have in his regard was just how much he was knowingly manipulating Antonio and how much was him just being so feckless as to also be occasionally inconsiderate to downright negligent of the very people who love him so much. A love he's not particularly worthy of, to be sure, but if he's a disappointing mate for Portia- and I maintain that she rather knows that by the end, but chooses to forgive him in hopes of his potential growth into a better one- then at least he's not the disaster in the making that is Gratiano and Nerissa. That said, a lot of Gratiano in our production was played up, very effectively by Matt Gunnison, for comedy. Until it wasn't, in Act 4. That, too, was frequently commented on, with many critics and audience members finding our Gratiano both amusing and scary, and I would argue that maybe in this characterization my concept most landed, as I think the "type" was very recognizable to modern audiences, while being utterly true to source material.

One really bold choice, I thought, that we made but which wasn't commented on at all in my memory, was having Jessica played by an actress who was older than the actresses usually cast in the role. Kim Saunders, who played the role, was partly chosen because she was a 10+ years older than Brian Martin, the actor playing Lorenzo. When cast, she and I discussed the idea that Jessica's actions in the play might be more understandable, even forgivable, if she was nearing an age where the desire to escape her father and find a husband would feel more urgent, both for social and biological reasons. We also both liked the idea that Shylock was actively preventing his adult daughter from truly growing up, maybe even relying on her too heavily as a replacement for her mother and companion to his dotage (after all, it's not like we hear talk of ANY potential husband, gentile or Jewish, for Jessica), and that thus attention from any man, but especially one offering a way out of the situation, would be more likely to be met with fervor and passion of the kind that makes you okay with robbing your own father blind, abandoning your faith, and in general throwing caution to the wind. While we didn't imply that Shylock and Jessica's relationship was abusive, we did depict it as unhappy, fraught with tension and alienation on both sides, while our Lorenzo was deeply and obviously smitten. Kim would play Jessica very differently opposite everyone but Brian, with whom she would noticeably become... girlish. No one complained, but no one brought it up either. I've sometimes wondered if people just didn't notice the age difference, or didn't feel like it would be polite to make a note of it, but either way, even reviews that mentioned the actor's performances failed to comment on what I think was a pretty unconventional take on that relationship.

4. Portia receives less divided opinion (and has, historically). She is witty and clever; but, however, it is not as often commented that she is also ruthless, superficial, manipulative, racist, classist, hypocritical...

What are your thoughts on Portia, and on her reception by the audience?

I think to call Portia "ruthless, superficial, manipulative, racist, classist, hypocritical" is to be pretty unforgiving of Portia, who, for me, is actually the main character of the play, and was most certainly the focus of my production. While I suppose one can contest if the play is "about her", she certainly has the most amount of stage time and text, and more important I think she experiences the most amount of personal growth over the course of the play, moving from a relatively helpless and

somewhat sheltered girl of vast intellect but very little experience, to a much more savvy but also world-weary woman who is so in control of her world that the final scene is her wrapping up everyone else's storylines for them- but you'll note she kind of leaves us hanging as to what exactly the future holds for her. While it's true that she doesn't always act in the most admirable ways, that doesn't make her a un-admirable- it makes her human- and if her lapses in perfection aren't often commented on I would venture it's because, unlike many of the other characters, we end the play feeling satisfied that Portia has learned and evolved into a better person, and so she doesn't rankle in the imagination the way Shylock, Antonio, Jessica, and even Bassanio do. It also feels real to me that part of that personal evolution is doing some bad things, or witnessing others do so and understanding better the realities of the world she lives in, and when I was directing the show I frequently discussed with the actress, Megan Briggs, that a lot of Portia is her reactions and chronicling that growth of awareness of just what kind of people her new husband and his associates are, and what kind of person she herself is capable of being, culminating in the line, "So shines a good deed in a weary world." The woman who utters that does so not out of pride, in my opinion, at what she's accomplished in the previous act, but out of the bittersweet understanding that nothing in the world comes without cost, including her own good fortune, and that self-awareness and greater understanding of the complexities of society makes her a good focal point for a play in which most the characters aren't so self-aware and never become more so. Her trajectory is also a good way in for modern audience members, one they can relate to, which is why I think she's remained an audience favorite even as our relationship to the rest of the play has changed through the years. Portia might not be the most admirable person in the play (though I think she is), but she is definitely the most human, and that's actually better in my opinion.

5. Who or what do you think is "central" to this play, in terms of characters and/or themes?

A number of different reviewers have credited you with properly focusing on, highlighting, or bringing out, what should be or "is" central in the play and Shakespeare's intentions – but they don't all agree on what that is. What are your thoughts on what is central, what should be central, what you tried to make central? Perceptions of centrality, or lack of centrality, is a concept I always find very interesting.

To me, the most central idea in *MERCHANT* is that all human society is a complex web of relationships, acknowledged and otherwise, and that everyone is caught in a web of social

expectations, norms, pressures and prejudices active and passive, that can often seem to dictate our actions and behaviors, allowing for some truly monstrous behavior, particularly if these relationships go unexamined, but also we are all, as individuals, fundamentally responsible for how we react to something and what we do to others. Nobody in *MERCHANT* is innocent (except maybe Nerissa), but nobody is unsympathetic either (except maybe Gratiano- who really is just a despicable person), and more importantly everyone is given chances, numerous chances, to make different decisions. The characters who are most trapped by social conventions- Portia, Shylock, Jessica, Antonio- are all given moments of incredible agency where they get to make choices that directly impact the trajectory of the play- reminding us that we are all masters of ourselves, if not our fates, it's about what you're willing to risk and for why that determines who you are. Additionally, the play points out that all of our actions- be they spitting on someone or pursuing our heart's desire or forgiving someone their attempt on our life have repercussions- and that's very empowering, very affirming, very cautionary all at once and thus also very modern. What I find so fascinating about *MERCHANT* is that while it shows us a society that is abusive, restrictive, and clearly has problematic priorities and values, it 1) pulls no punches about that society being broken (Venice isn't Belmont for a reason) and 2) also posits that IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THIS WAY (Belmont is an alternative to Venice, after all, operating on different values). The world of *MERCHANT* is terrible, but one can chose to make the world better, even if only by one good deed at a time. And because the play really is so brutal in its depiction of human beings as being frail, petty, angry, scared, vindictive, greedy, disloyal I actually find the idea that we're capable of so much more infinitely more powerful because of the contrast between the reality and the possibility – a real candle piercing the night, as it were.

6. What are your thoughts or feelings about Shakespeare, or your attitude towards him? The human, the author, the name?

And, please, any other comments you think might be interesting or useful to my project and that I have overlooked, or just that you'd like to talk about. Including whether you knew anything of Granville's 1701 adaptation; and, if so, what your thoughts were on it.

I like Shakespeare, a lot, as an author. I genuinely enjoy his work and am time and time again blown away by the insight into the human condition he provides and the beauty with which he provides it. As a person I don't really have much of an opinion, outside of finding the debate about whether or not he actually authored his plays both tiresome and fundamentally classist. As an actor I've enjoyed

playing his incredibly nuanced characters, especially the ones people don't think of as terribly nuanced (Ned Poins, in Henry IV, is my personal favorite role I have played, and I've played Macbeth and Oberon) and I think he has written some of the greatest roles ever written, for a diverse variety of actors- something many playwrights whose work I also enjoy can't say. As a director I love most of all his worlds, and feel like they provide a cornucopia of themes and ideas to explore, as well as unique design opportunities and storytelling possibilities. As a playwright in my own right, I slyly reference him all the time, and have most certainly found him very inspiring through the years. In regards to the ongoing conversation of Theater, particularly Western Theater and Theater in English, the only other voice which I think comes close to having his impact and level of contribution is Stephen Sondheim, and while I wouldn't say he's my favorite playwright, or that any of his plays are in my, say, top five, I do think it's impossible to make theater in this country and in this language and not have some understanding of the magnitude of his influence.

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