Philosophy of the Act and the Pragmatics of Fiction

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By

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To John Coetzee, in appreciation.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a work concerned with literary fiction as viewed through the lens of pragmatics, in this case a somewhat revisionist pragmatics. It is not a work of general narratology, but rather one that stresses the particularity of prose fiction, with its own particular functions and associated interests. Neither is it a work of literary criticism, since it is concerned with exploring how fictional works can come to have the aesthetic and ethical dimensions that they have, rather than with evaluating them according to any special aesthetic or ethical criteria. However, since pragmatics has become a multidisciplinary field, it can naturally accommodate insights generated within narratology and literary criticism, as well as semiotics, linguistics and philosophy.

The phrase the "philosophy of the act" has appeared in the titles of at least two well-known books before. It is the title of a work by George H. Mead (1938) in the field of psychology. There is a distant relationship between that book and the present one, in the fact that Mead was an adherent of philosophical pragmatism, along with others such as Peirce, James and Dewey. An editor of Mead's book was Charles Morris, and it was also Morris (1938) who in the same year identified pragmatics as a subfield within semiotics, along with syntax and semantics. In doing so he made an important distinction between *pragmatics*, as part of general semiotics, and the philosophy of *pragmatism*. Today pragmatics has become a field in which researchers from various tendencies continue to participate, some of whom have identified themselves as neither philosophers nor semioticians. The present work falls within this more broadly defined field of pragmatics.

Let me give a brief preliminary indication of how the present work is revisionist in relation to the pragmatics that has emerged since the pioneering contribution of Morris. The field of pragmatics in more recent times has been very strongly conditioned by parallel developments in analytic philosophy, more so than by the field of semiotics. While this analytic philosophical body of work is important—it has had enormous influence in linguistics—it does have certain shortcomings, even in its most important exemplars, which become particularly evident in relation to artistic prose, the topic of this book. I believe that these shortcomings need to be addressed

by balancing the work of philosophers such as Austin, Searle and Grice with others, such as Nietzsche, Bakhtin and Lukács. As an initial indication of this let me mention the notion of *ethical intention*, drawn from the early work of Lukács. Ethics is naturally at home in the domain of practical philosophy, yet it finds no place in most of pragmatics, where a much narrower notion of intentionality is usually encountered. But if one adopts this narrower notion of an intention one finds it very hard to define the range of intentionality that can be, and regularly is, postulated in regard to the act of the author of a novel. This problem becomes apparent not only in a consideration of ethics, but also aesthetics.

On the question of aesthetics I turn to Nietzsche's early formulations in *The Birth of Tragedy*. If the aesthetic dimension is to be taken seriously then due weight must be placed on such topics as style and form, and for Nietzsche this entails the spirit of music entering into literature, although with Nietzsche this applies primarily to drama and to poetry. But I argue, perhaps contra Nietzsche, that this spirit of music is discoverable in artistic prose as well. If it is the case that authors of fictional work have both ethical and aesthetic intentions (whether more or less consciously) in writing, then it may be that this activity is *agonistic* in nature. This seems to me to follow from the notions of ethical and aesthetic intentions, since ethics is always a struggle against the unethical and the aesthetic a struggle against the unaesthetic. These struggles may be weak or strong, depending on the seriousness of authorial intentionality. The elaboration of these concerns leads me to develop later in this work a quadratic model, consisting of the dimensions of content, substance, style and form, where these familiar terms are given very specific conceptual definitions. This model constitutes a theoretical contribution to the philosophy of the act in regard to prose fiction.

If one is to take seriously Morris's formulation of pragmatics as the relationship between a sign user and the sign vehicle itself, then these ethical and aesthetic considerations must find a place within pragmatics. Morris stressed the relationship between a sign user and a sign vehicle, in that an organism would, as a result of habit, respond to the sign in a similar way that it would respond to certain properties of an absent object, or unobserved properties of a present object, the organism being the *interpreter* and the habit being the *interpretant*. When one is dealing with a human actor, it is perhaps appropriate to drop the term "organism" and to consider what sorts of *agency* are involved in the production and processing of fictional literature. I argue that these are three and only three, namely author, reader

and character, and not, say, four, where the fourth is "the narrator". I provide an argument against this latter possibility.

So when we talk about the sign users and their relations with signs we are having to do with these three sorts of agent. But what of Morris's "habit" and "interpretant"? Here we seem to come a little closer to mainstream pragmatics, particularly in the *uptake* of an illocutionary act as just the kind of act that was intended (e.g. a promise) or in the implicature that consists in the *recognition* of a meaning that was intended but not made explicit. These notions indeed do come closer to the notion of habit (or *convention* in the case of human agents), but how close do they really come to the interpretation of literature, and the uptake or recognition of authorial intention there? I suggest that the point of intersection with literature lies in the notion of *genre*. A reader, for example, recognises certain familiar generic characteristics or forms and thereby acquires certain expectations. But the question of genre, as convention, must be articulated with the other concerns already mentioned, ethics and aesthetics, in a broader philosophy of the act, since the interpretation of literature is more complex than the reception of illocutionary acts. Its meanings are unique or singular, as well as being conventional signs. They very often involve a complex web of intertextual relations, which may or may not be apprehended by the interpreter. The thinker who has done most to incorporate the theory of genre into the broader philosophy of the act in the way I am suggesting is M. M. Bakhtin, and I will rely on his insights at many stages of this work.

Authors and readers, as well as fictional characters in their own way, are sign users. When it comes to the uses of human language, pragmatics presupposes the syntactic and semantic components of the given language, and, as Morris points out, in the case of the specifically linguistic sign "interpretation becomes especially complex, and the individual and social results especially important" (1938, 36). Interestingly Morris regarded rhetoric as an early but restricted form of pragmatics. He goes on to mention many fields of signifying activity as being part of the provenance of descriptive pragmatics, including newspaper statements, political doctrines, philosophical systems and dreams as interpreted in psychoanalysis, as well as the literary, pictorial and plastic arts. Of particular relevance here, he says: "For aesthetic and practical purposes the effective use of signs may require rather extensive variations from the use of the same sign vehicles most effective for the purposes of science" (1938, 40). Some of the most important terms that appear in Morris are "context", "interpretation" and "purpose".

The second book that includes "philosophy of the act" in its title is the English translation of one of Bakhtin's early philosophical essays, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993), a work principally of ethics, in which Bakhtin set out a concern that was to remain with him for his entire career, the relationship between culture and life. Bakhtin's early work is not an easy read—perhaps with good reason he held off drawing attention to the unpublished manuscripts until almost the end of his life. However, despite their frequent obscurity of expression, these essays do raise very important points concerning dialogue and alterity, which have been of great significance and which, I have no doubt, should be brought closer into the mainstream of pragmatics. I would go so far as to say that, post-Bakhtin, "the philosophy of the act" may be the best definition of pragmatics that we have.

It is interesting to observe how Bakhtin's career is almost a mirror image of that of Nietzsche. Whereas Nietzsche began with poetics and art criticism and went on to become known as a philosopher, Bakhtin made the opposite journey, from philosophy to poetics. This of course was not the only opposition between these two influential European thinkers, despite their common interest in aesthetics and ethics. Where Nietzsche praised music and tragedy above all other arts, practised atheism, and was determinedly elitist, Bakhtin was mostly interested in the novel, religiously inclined and thoroughly populist in orientation. However, both have highly interesting things to say about literature and representation, and such thinkers as these need to be considered in an expanded notion of pragmatics, along with the analytical philosophers and other Anglophone thinkers that have so far defined its mainstream.

Let me include in this brief introduction an etymological note relating to words such as *act* and *pragmatic*. These words, together with others such as *agent* and *agon*, appear to derive from a common Indo-European root, *-ag*. They are of course central to this work, concerned as it is with the *deed* in fiction, whether it be the deed of an author, a character or a reader, and thus there should be no ignoring any one of these agents in favour of the others. As I have said, it will be central to my argument that there are just these three agencies in fiction, and this too will require some engagement with proponents of other views, especially in the earlier chapters of this book, an agonistic project in itself.

List of Abbreviations

DD	Direct discourse
FID	Free indirect discourse
IA	Implied author
ID	Indirect discourse
JE	*Jane Eyre*
TBOT	*The Birth of Tragedy*
TLG	*The Long Good-Bye*
TSD	*The Savage Detectives*
TTN	Third-person transcendent narrator
WSS	*Wide Sargasso Sea*

CHAPTER ONE

AGENTS IN FICTION

A nexus of three

How is it that a novel has the ethical and aesthetic dimensions that it has for the interested and engaged reader? The claim of pragmatics must be that these value dimensions are a result of relations amongst the communicating agents and the communicative or semiotic acts that they perform relative to one another. In fiction these agents are three, author, character and the reader. The English philosopher Gillian Rose (1992) introduced the term "the agon of authorship"–suggesting that written texts should be considered, not as mere texts, but as works or struggles. This is as relevant for literary examples as it is for philosophical ones. I aim to show that it is from the point of view of agonistic authorship, and the responses of readers to its artefacts (Eco 1981; Iser 1978), that fiction opens itself up to pragmatics, and thereby to an enhanced appreciation of the powerful techniques that have sustained the novel over a number of centuries.

A pragmatic analysis of a work of fiction might conceivably confine itself to the agonistic interplay of the various characters that make up a fictional world. Going further, it could compare this world and its characters to types of people in the actual world. But, it is argued, a true analysis of the pragmatics of fiction also needs to articulate the character relations with the author-reader relationship. All three types of agent perform semiotic acts, even if they are not experienced as being on the same ontological level.

Concerning the source of a work, one needs to distinguish in a reading between that which is posited and that which is empirically discovered. For example, a reader may develop postulates concerning the author of a novel while reading it, but a reader may also bring to bear knowledge about the author derived from sources outside of the text at hand. It would surely not make sense that a reader would not integrate the "empirical author" of externally derived knowledge, with the "posited author" derived from the reading. The fact that we do, as readers, use one single term "author" for this blended result is thus unsurprising, and it suggests that readers busy

themselves, more or less consciously, blending differing sorts of cognitive entities while reading, to produce an emerging composite author figure. And having read a particular work, it would again be unsurprising to find the same reader interested to bring this experience to bear somehow while reading another of the same author's works. Thus the question of intertextual relations arises in such ways.

At no point should it be thought that a work of pragmatics such as this (a) aims to legislate how a reader *ought* to read, or (b) attempts to second-guess what it is that an individual reader will or will not find interesting in any work of fiction. Such judgments would be inappropriate here. What is being suggested instead, on available evidence (such as the existence of genres that are parallel to fiction), is that many readers do find aspects of authorship to be of great interest. Other readers may only find the question of authorship to be of passing interest, to the extent, for example, that they might seek out (or avoid) further works by the same author. It is the conditions of the very possibility of these forms of interest and their variety that is at issue here, not what should or should not be the case. It also worth mentioning that many possibilities arise concerning the relationship between the author as posited in a reading of his/her work and the empirical facts of an author's life. Just to take one dimension of this: a reader may admire an author's work but be repelled by aspects of that author's biography, or vice versa.

Many kinds of questions arise concerning the triad of agents mentioned, for example: how and why does a reading public become interested in the work of a particular author and/or a particular genre of fiction? Why does a reader find certain characters and/or character types to be interesting? What preparation or education does a reader require in order to be able to access certain dimensions of a given novel?

It is suggested that fictional communication remains triadic throughout, in the sense that (i) a reader with a given level of competence would be able to posit at any stage (ii) an author's intentions and purposes, while reading "about" (iii) his/her characters. More fundamentally it argues, on pragmatic grounds, that for a competent reader there can be no doubt that the work of fiction is indeed a *work*, produced by someone who has had intentions and purposes in its creation. It is this competence, and the sorts of interest associated with it, that need to be analysed in regard to emergent novelistic forms. One should be careful not to overstate the case, however. It is not to be thought that a reader has access to an author's full set of intentions, or even that any reader aims at such an unlikely achievement. But nevertheless

the notion of the posited author goes further than that of the implied author (discussed further below). It suggests more than the simple thought that every text implies an author. It suggests instead that the reader of fiction can imagine this author or become curious about him/her, speculate about the values and tastes of the author, and be motivated to think further, and indeed seek further information, about this author. Note that the notion of implied author, if taken on its own, does not block the thought that the text may have a non-human source, such as a machine, a god or a demon of some kind. Positing an author in the sense that I have just described, instead begins as an assumption that the work has been produced by someone about whom more can become known, in principle.

Apart from author and reader, the third party, the character, inhabits an ontological realm distinct from that of author and reader. However, all three are real, as subjects and as agents in relation to one another, and one might with equal veracity state that:

> Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby*
> We read *The Great Gatsby* in high school
> Gatsby dies near the end of *The Great Gatsby*

The difference between the last statement and the other two is that it is true of a possible world known to be distinct from the actual world in which reader and author have their flesh-and-blood existences. However, the difference between actual and fictional worlds is seldom clear-cut. I would like to make it clear in this book just how much of the appeal of fiction lies in the intriguing possibilities of these two sorts of "world" being interwoven. They are intriguing not only to the interested reader, but also intriguing in the complexities they present for anything approaching a scientific analysis.

To take a very simple example: Napoleon can appear as an actual historical agent, but also as a fictional character, as in *Scarlet and Black* or *War and Peace*. So if some novelist were to present us with Napoleon's inner, silent musings, this would be a *blending* of ontological levels. We would imagine the actual historical Napoleon (in the form of whatever empirical data is available to us) and imagine also that we were being admitted into his inner subjective being. Such privileged access is the preserve of literary fiction (Gallagher 2006; 2011).

Authorship and its denialists

In literary studies there have been frequent attempts to diminish the importance of authorship in the reading of literature, from the arguments of Wimsatt and Beardsley (1972 [1946]) against the "intentional fallacy" to the more radical claims of (post-) structuralism, to which we will pay attention shortly. It is an argument of this book, however, that such debates in literary criticism tend to become spurious from the point of view of pragmatics when their normative intent is made clear. Apart from their frequent embrace of scientistic and technical terminology, they are very often fundamentally concerned, with the question of how a critical reader *ought* to read, rather than with the question of what drives a reader to the act of reading, of why fiction is *interesting* in the first place. Why has it attracted the readership that it has and how has authorship managed to align itself with this kind of interest? These are the questions of a scientific nature rather than a normative one.

Witness the controversy over the "implied author" (IA), as an attempt to settle the question of authorship within professional narratology. The meaning of this term has proved to be elusive and its scientific status undecidable. In 2011 the journal *Style* devoted an entire edition to discussion of this concept. Again, the results confirmed or settled nothing, and perhaps Marie-Laure Ryan's contribution was the most sensible, in which she proposed that the IA be laid to rest. She traces briefly some of the history of author scepticism and author denial, from the New Criticism to (post-) structuralism, pointing out that Wayne Booth's original proposal concerning the implied author was "an attempt to restore to literature the human dimension" that had been denied (Ryan 2011, 30). It appears, on available evidence, that that attempt has failed and that the semantics of the expression "implied author" has fragmented into a number of widely differing postulates. In the same edition of *Style*, Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller discuss several of these, all of which they reject: "the implied author as a phenomenon of reception"; "the implied author as a participant in communication"; "the implied author as a postulated subject behind the text"—the last of these having various intentionalist and non-intentionalist variants (2011, 67-79). It should go without saying that there are great incompatibilities between some of these notions, and the project of finding something like a grain of truth in each of them seems hardly worth one's time. Ryan herself comes to the telling conclusion that the IA has probably made little positive difference to the practice of criticism and that Ockham's razor is called for. She says

> I regard IA as a lame compromise between radical textualism and reading texts as the expression of a human mind (a view widely rejected by critics as biographism). I see nothing wrong with constructing an author-image; but if readers are interested in the author as a whole person, there is no reason to exclude other data in the construction of this image. 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. (2011, 41-42)

The kind of intertextuality that underpins the last sentence concerning Kafka is also of great interest and we shall return to it. But let us consider first the "radical textualism" that she mentions and which became so fashionable after the early 1960s and which is still current today, with a view to evaluating the claims on our attention that it may or may not still have (relative to the claims of pragmatics). I use the term (post-) structuralism for this radical textualism, under the influence of an interesting comment made by François Rastier, that in comparison to American structuralism, French structuralism has always been *post*-structuralism (personal communication 2007).

Its major proponents have included Barthes (1977 [1961]) and Foucault (1980). A proper critical estimation of these two essays would need to situate them within their broader intellectual context. Fortunately that job was done some time ago by Burke (1989), amongst others, in an impressive PhD thesis, the findings of which I will mention shortly. But let me first offer a much more limited set of critical comments from the specific point of view of pragmatics and the agon of authorship. Here is the central part of Barthes' essay:

> Surrealism, though unable to accord language a supreme place (language being system and the aim of the movement being, romantically, a direct subversion of codes–itself moreover illusory: a code cannot be destroyed, only "played off"), contributed to the desacrilisation of the image of the Author by ceaselessly recommending the abrupt disappointment of expectations of meaning (the famous surrealist "jolt"), by entrusting the hand with the task of writing as quickly as possible what the head itself is unaware of (automatic writing), by accepting the principle and the experience of several people writing together. Leaving aside literature itself (such distinctions really becoming invalid), linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable, analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors. Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a "subject"," not a "person", and this subject, empty outside of the very

> enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language "hold together", suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it. (1977, 144-145)

Barthes' ex cathedra pronouncements conceal much more than they reveal. Language as pure system and code—said to be indestructible above—a staple of (post-) structuralism and the Parisian school of semiotics in this period, has the clear imprint of Saussure. But, as is so often the case, the notion presented depends on a reading of Saussure in which the langue/parole antinomy is suppressed and langue becomes the stand-in for language as a whole. Similarly tendentious readings of Saussure suppress the synchronic/diachronic antinomy and privilege the first term at the expense of the second. But such antinomies are much more insightfully taken as indicating the points where a line of thought has reached its limit and thought needs to seek a way forward by critically engaging with the antinomy itself, not by tendentiously supporting one of its poles against the other. Admittedly such tendencies do find some licence in Saussure's own practice, but that is a matter for other studies.

"Linguistics" has shown no such thing as Barthes claims here and the subsequent further broadening of linguistics, away from the narrow post-Saussurean base he represents, into many schools of thought has borne this out, agonistic as these schools may be in relation to one another. The continuing rise of pragmatics as a field aligned to modern linguistics itself attests to this.

A word or two also needs to be said about the claims for surrealism, automatic writing and group writing. To take the emergence of surrealism as some sort of herald of authorless text production is again to conceal many aspects of the issue. Surrealism has since come to be seen more as a phenomenon of psychoanalytical experimentation with occasional influences upon literature rather than any literature-wide revolution, or even indication of such a revolution. It has probably had its greatest influence in popular cultural movements, like psychedelia, rather than in fiction. Barthes would have been well aware of Sartre's vehement (1948) critique of surrealism and automatic writing, hence the feeble qualification of his own approving comments, on the basis of the alleged indestructability of codes, which comes nowhere near answering that critique. More to the point, however, surrealism has certainly not put paid in any way to the autographing of literary works, and there is still no more prospect of this now than at the time of Barthes' essay more than half a century ago. Surrealist texts, and surrealist artworks generally, are *themselves* autographed.

Automatic writing, on its own at least, would seem to be dubious as a source of novelistic fiction. It suffers from an association with crackpot mystical movements. It has turned out to be a less than widely applied technique, and when it is applied in conjunction with other techniques, this process remains subject to the intentional control of the author—that is, the very same writing subject whose psyche has "automatically" generated text—in shaping, editing, etc., so as to bring the text into line with more conscious artistic purposes.

Similarly, group writing has usually meant collaboration with others who share at least certain conscious intentions and purposes, if not others. On the face of it, such a phenomenon would seem hardly to present any challenge at all to authorship. After all if the Author somehow equates to God, as we are told, why should a group of authors not equate to a pantheon of gods?

If the addresser is somehow language itself, rather than a subject, what then of the reader? Barthes is not entirely clear on this matter of reader subjectivity. This is how he concludes his essay:

> The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of a humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author. (1977, 148)

The reader is a *space*? It is difficult to know what sort of reader could be lacking in "history, biography or psychology" and yet be a "someone", that is, an actual agent with subjective dispositions. "Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader," we are told, but it is difficult to see exactly what sort of attention to the reader, if any, is being proposed by Barthes. It may be the supreme irony that authors pay more *actual* attention to their readerships. Compare Bakhtin (1986, 98) on a vital aspect of this matter: "… each epoch, each literary trend and literary-artistic style, each literary genre within an epoch or trend, is typified by its own special concepts of the addressee of the literary work, a special sense and understanding of its

reader, listener, public, or people." This observation will be further engaged in the chapters that follow.

The liberationist aims that are said to underlie Barthes' call for the author's demise are proclaimed and not substantiated. I hope to make the case in due course that suppression of the author (in interpretation) is far more likely to disempower the reader than otherwise.

Foucault, for his part, discusses a construct that he calls "the author-function". The first characteristic of the author-function is that it is linked to modernity and that it is a "system of ownership for texts" (1980, 148). We may put aside for the moment the fact that written texts of many kinds have been autographed since ancient times and pay attention to the second characteristic, namely that "the author-function does not affect all discourses in a universal and constant way" (1980, 149). Whereas the author's name was once a guarantee of veracity of the scientific text, this function began to change "in the seventeenth or eighteenth century" as "scientific discourses began to be received for themselves, in the anonymity of an established or always redemonstrable truth." But then, "by the same token, literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author-function" (1980, 149). And so the author function has come to play a role whereby, it is said, we cannot tolerate anonymity in literary works. Then:

> The third characteristic of this author-function is that it does not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual. It is, rather, the result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call "author." Critics doubtless try to give this intelligible being a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a "deep" motive, a "creative" power, or a "design," the milieu in which writing originates. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologising terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice. (1980, 150)

It is true that texts can be looked at in isolation and in ignorance of the precise conditions under which they have been produced, and that such readings may be legitimate and interesting. But even when readers do focus closely on the text as an object this does not mean that they entertain the thought that there is no author, or that they do not further *posit* the author as being male or female, a contemporary or someone from the ancient world, gay or straight, etc.

It is also true that autographed literature represents only a relatively small part of the literature that has ever been produced–it does not include all those instances that are referred to as "folktales" for example–and this is a different point that will be dealt with in another chapter. Folktales, legends and myths have been produced in entirely different ways to those of the written novel. Those earlier forms have been subsumed into what we recognise today as fiction; they have been "novelised", in Bakhtin's terminology, over the course of millennia. Secondly, what in modern times has been regarded as fiction, serves quite different functions and its emergent techniques do not result in mere differences of form. It is the task of pragmatics to show this. The interest that the reading public shows in novels is appreciably different in nature to what it was in the case of pre-novelistic forms.

We need to be open to the hypothesis that the autographing of literature itself serves a number of social and cultural functions, rather than the one fairly simplistic idea that an author stands as an overbearing authority on his or her work. Texts of all kinds are autographed in modern times, from journalistic articles to scientific monographs to cartoons. Most citizens in democratic society are used to adopting a critical attitude towards communicating individuals and their works, even though they may have no other personal contact with authors and artists. By-lines, autographing and all other similar means of identification serve as means of accountability and allocation of responsibility. The question of intellectual property is thereby implicated, required by individuals for their livelihoods. And there is the question of reader interest: the biographical notes on authors that are regularly supplied with novels today are supplied due to reader interest in the individuals responsible, an interest that they may want to investigate further. And far from intentionality being an invention of conservative literary critics, who wish to establish or impose criteria of validity in interpretation, it is deeply embedded in the human notions of agency that are the stuff of pragmatics. In communication amongst human individuals it is entirely reasonable to ask who it is that is communicating with me in this manner and why? And why should their identity be withheld from me? "Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself–in the unity of my *answerability*" (Bakhtin 1990, 2 [emphasis added]). More on this later. Let us also consider the proposition that anonymity in literature may in fact involve a large-scale *loss* of meaning. Consider first the following good-natured argument:

> I'll happily concede to anti-Stratfordians that Shakespeare's Hamlet will be as good a play if someone down the road proves that it was actually written

> by the earl of Oxford, or by Francis Bacon, or even by the spirit of Elvis Presley. But the corrected attribution will then change the meanings of Hamlet, of Shakespeare (the man), and of Shakespeare (the body of texts), for the voice of Hamlet has conditioned the ways in which readers experience the voice of other texts commonly ascribed to "William Shakespeare." (Foster 2002, 395)

Foucault may well have wished to publish his *own* writings anonymously, but I am sure that he would have had great difficulty in writing some of them without ever mentioning "Nietzsche", "Hegel", "Kant", as well as "Proust", "Mallarme", "Baudelaire" and others. And that is the point: names do not just represent some nefarious author-function that restricts our reading pleasure; they bring with them a vast wealth of intertextual associations, thereby adding layers of potential meaning for the one who is interested. Consider as a simple illustration the putative abolition, by Foucauldian decree, of items from the lexicon such as "Kafkaesque", "Shakespearean", or "Platonic". What these words currently convey to us, while they are still meaningful, is a wealth of intertextual associations that make up the fabric of culture. When speakers use these words, they are indicating how their own subjectivities have been shaped through exposure to authors and their legacy, and the ways in which such literary experience can be applied to life's situations. On this matter of the situatedness of literature within overall culture, Bakhtin made the following cautionary statement:

> The outstanding works of recent scholarship that I have mentioned … with all the diversity of their methodology are alike in that they do not separate literature from culture; they strive to understand literary phenomena in the differentiated unity of the epoch's entire culture. It should be emphasized here that literature is too complex and multifaceted a phenomenon and literary scholarship is still too young for it to be possible to speak of any one single "redeeming" method in literary scholarship. Various approaches are justified and are even quite necessary as long as they are serious and reveal something new in the literary phenomenon being studied, as long as they promote a deeper understanding of it. (1986, 3)

This is a formulation highly congenial to the multidisciplinary field of pragmatics and I have no doubt that more attention should be paid to it. It is a caution against one-sided and cavalier approaches to the study of literature. Bakhtin was writing this in 1970 (in Russian), well after Barthes' essay, and just a little before the essay by John Searle that I will turn to in the next subsection. But it could be taken as a judgment on both their (opposing) houses.

The relevance of culture as a whole here is the fact that culture is formative, it is the *Bildung*, the actuality that makes authors and readers alike what they are. Why would this reality be so stubbornly resisted by many practitioners in literary theory? Burke (1989) argues that the anti-humanism in French thought, as represented by Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, arises as a hyperbolic reaction to the Cartesian ego, said to have been resuscitated in phenomenology. In America the reception of these figures has been such that it has become an assumption that the disengagement of the author from the text has been decisively achieved, and this achievement has consequently been celebrated for opening up the possibilities of new kinds of hermeneutics and textual criticism. The further result, however, has been that criticism has polarised between two tendencies, a dogmatic author-denialism and a lingering biographism. Work and life have become polarised, the very phenomenon that Bakhtin resolutely set himself against throughout his writings, from his early philosophical works onward.

Of particular interest is the way that Burke accounts for this in agonistic terms. Beginning from Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence", in which authorship, particularly authorship of poetry, is conceived of as a life and death Oedipal struggle against some precursor poet, Burke states with complete consistency:

> It is not difficult to see how Bloom's theory maps every bit as comfortably—if not more so—onto the relationship between critic and author such as it has been played out in recent times. We have seen that the death of the author is promulgated in agonistic terms, in the form of usurpation, as we have seen also that it is inseparable from a strong act of rewriting by all these critics: Barthes rewriting Balzac, Foucault making literally what he will of four hundred years of philosophical thought, Derrida rewriting Rousseau. (Burke 1989, 188)

A further irony in these developments has been the fact that the kinds of tour-de-force writing that is found in (post-) structuralist critics has come to rival the original literary texts as primary discourses. The author-deniers have themselves become the authors of this new form of quasi-literary discourse, so that if we were to go "in search of the most flagrant abuses of critical *auteurism* in recent times then we need look no further than the secondary literature on Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, which is for the most part given over to scrupulously faithful and entirely uncritical reconstitutions of their thought" (Burke 1989, 190).

Need I add that with this doxa in place there would be many a critic afraid to be associated with what is seen as a naïve biographism and a discredited

or conservative philosophy? The present work, however, is not a work of literary criticism, but an intervention in literary pragmatics that cannot accept this fatal polarisation of text and life, as if they belonged to entirely separate and sealed domains of being. The philosophy of the act is indeed closer to the intuitions of authors themselves. For example, one might mention a recent collection of literary essays by J. M. Coetzee (2017). One of the most innovative and acclaimed authors of our time, Coetzee begins many of the essays in this collection with a biographical sketch of the life, times and influences of a range of authors from Defoe to Beckett, drawing the most interesting parallels and connections between these lives and specific works, with considerable attention to the techniques they have developed. Even more importantly for my project he does not hesitate to make mention of various authorial *purposes*.

Authorial intention

Let us turn to a different school of thought, this time in the mainstream of pragmatics, one which is in a certain sense diametrically opposed to (post-) structuralism or radical textualism. Whereas variants of the latter focus most intently on the text and (allegedly) on the reader, the receiver of the text, speech act theory has come to focus mostly on the sender (whether conceived as author or "narrator").

In speech act theory a distinction is made between an illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act. This separation having been made, the tendency has been overwhelmingly for speech act theorists to ignore the perlocutionary altogether. Here again the antinomy itself must be brought into question rather than its partial suppression in this way. Elsewhere (2015) I showed the remarkable parallel between speech act theory and formalistic Kantian ethics, which similarly tends to separate the deed from its effect or result. But the philosophy of the act that I am hoping to advance is not a project of choosing between a formal intention in an act, on the one hand, and its effect on the other, but rather to appreciate the act both in its generic and in its unique or non-recurrent aspects, and to see it as a dialogic unity. A key concept in that project is *intended effect*, i.e. purpose.

At first sight speech act theory would not seem to offer much to the study of fiction, given that Austin (1975, 104) regarded literature as being "not serious" and "not full normal" use of language. No doubt speech acts performed by characters in a novel are seen as non-serious because the characters do not exist as actual people. The way in which one might apply speech act theory to fiction then is to pretend that the characters are real and

to ask questions concerning their speech, such as "What speech act is character X performing here?" or "Is X's speech act felicitous or not?" and so on. But this alone cannot be the pragmatics of fiction, even though it may be pragmatics of a sort within fiction.

However, to dismiss the contribution of speech act theory altogether would be to overlook the important notion of the intentional act, discussed most influentially by John Searle (1969; 1975). This intentionality can itself be split into two. Any communicator has intentions of a generic nature, in other words to perform socially recognised acts. But intention may also have another sense, to perform an act with certain intended consequences. Speech act theory has prioritised the first aspect over the second, the conventional and generic over the singular and unique.

Searle writes at the end of his (1975) article: "Literary critics have explained on an ad hoc and particularistic basis how the author conveys a serious speech act through the performance of the pretended speech acts which constitute the work of fiction, but there is as yet no general theory of the mechanisms by which such serious illocutionary intentions are conveyed by pretended illocutions." (1975, 332)

"Serious speech act" is, from an agonistic perspective, a highly attenuated notion of authorial intentionality. Searle may have defended the intentional nature of an author's act, especially its conventional-generic nature, and also conceded the possibility of its "seriousness" (contra Austin), but for us this is not where the matter can rest. The notion of illocutionary act is reductionist because it does not have any bearing on questions of style or intended effect, and therefore has no bearing on aesthetics or ethics. The best that this approach can be expected to yield is the intention of an author to produce a work of a certain genre or sub-genre of fiction, defined for us by "constitutive rules". This would tell us nothing about why a reader might find one work more compelling or satisfying than another, or even why a genre, so constituted, would be interesting.

Searle is taken to task in the same issue of *New Literary History* in which his article appeared, for relying on the "discredited" notion of authorial intention (Doležel 1975, 468). But from what point of view is it discredited? The case against Searle is that his position is said to involve a judgment that the text is fictional and then on that basis an intention is ascribed to the author, i.e. the intention to produce a fictional text. Looking back in time at this sort of objection—if one can even recognise it as an objection—and perhaps ignoring some of the intellectual context of its period (Barthes,

etc.), one might be somewhat bemused by such a charge. After all, are we to think that readers (and critics) do not make judgments as to a text's fictionality or otherwise? "The intention is not independently testable, at least not by logical procedures," we are told. Well, let us consider that perhaps the existence of an author as source of the text is also not testable by logical procedures. I see little to choose between these two propositions. But if after all there turns out to have been an author, we surely are not to believe ("logically") that perhaps this author produced the text by accident while dusting her computer keyboard, or perhaps (automatically?) while unconscious.

Searle's intentionality cannot be discredited from the point of view whereby the author as an actual agent is bracketed out of existence, the kind of view of which the abovementioned is a variant. Such approaches are fundamentally inconscient of pragmatics and the question of the relationship between sign and sign user that provides its scientific raison d'être. Speech act theory, for its part, makes the reasonable claim that there is no speech without a speaker, and that part of decoding that speech lies in a recognition of the speaker's intention in speaking. It is not the postulate of authorial intention that is the weakness in Searle's position—that is actually its only strength—rather it is the anaemic notion of intention that he has always favoured, i.e. illocutionary intention. Authorial intention in the act of writing is inherently linked to purposes. Without such a notion the question of literary techniques would be incomprehensible. What would they be *for*? Let it be readily admitted though that this point is not, and cannot be, substantiated by (post-) structuralist procedures, which are entirely unequipped to help us at all with any aspect of authorship, including intention or purpose, not because of their superior logic but because they are reductionist, albeit in an opposite way to speech act theory.

From intention to reception

From the perspective of pragmatics, a competent reader of fiction understands him/herself to be a joint participant in an intentional act, a dialogic act. It is only in this way that a text achieves full coherence, as a work. Even in cases of randomness in composition, there is some generic framing device, such as a name or a context, which indicates that this is not *merely* a random occurrence brought about by nature or machine for example (cf. Ruthrof 2004). The *telos* is such that we understand the complexities of character, plot, perspective, etc., as all somehow a result of authorial purposiveness, whether we know the identity of the author empirically or not. Yet the

author can only be posited on the basis of, and to the extent of, the individual reader's cognitive powers, and the precise content of these positings is an empirical matter.

The question of the author's freedom is situated within the communicative situation, which imposes a constraint, a generic constraint. The author is bound to communicate with a reader in a way that is not only intelligible but that also produces other effects, for example an aesthetic experience. To put it in Bakhtinian terms, the word of an author is constituted by, and in dialogue with, the word of another; it is never entirely free, solipsistic or sufficient unto itself. Considering the role of the reader in relationship to the author's work, any idea that he or she has an entirely free set of wishes to impose on the work, *a la* Foucault, would at the very least require some qualification. For example, does an author not have some conception of his or her reading public and what it is that interests that public, or how much effort its members are prepared to make in the work of comprehending it? It is true that no two readings of a work are exactly alike—interest, attention span, competence and background knowledge all play a role in a reading. Yet the discourse strategy adopted by an author must be based on some apprehension, some calculation, more or less conscious, more or less intuitive, concerning these readership factors. In the following chapter we will consider some of the challenges that the reading of fiction poses to the reader who is sufficiently prepared and interested to meet them.

The hypothesis here is simply that the author posits the kind of readership that might benefit from reading his/her work. Just as a reader may develop certain postulates concerning the author of a given work, similarly an author, rather than believing that any and every other human being might be a reader of her work, may have in mind certain postulates concerning members of this readership, for example that they have had a literary education of some kind, that they have read *Jane Eyre*, that they have heard of Charles Darwin, and so on.

CHAPTER TWO

EMERGENT TECHNIQUES OF FICTION

The narrator

As late as her 2011 article, mentioned in the previous chapter, Ryan describes Searle's (1975) contribution as "groundbreaking", thereby remaining firmly in support of not only intentionality in general, but also the illocutionary formulation of what it is that an author intends and does. Let us trace this back to one of her own early articles that appeared following Searle's. It deals with the matter raised by Barthes, the question of who it is that speaks. Ryan (1981) arrives at the conclusion that speech must in all cases of fiction be attributable to a narrator rather than to the author, even if this is an "impersonal narrator" (her term), or the "third-person omniscient narrator" postulated by literary critics. If the narrator is of this impersonal kind, then this means that the text entails, logically, a speaker devoid of properties. This then relieves the reader, perhaps somewhat too easily, of any need to seek an answer to the question of who it is that speaks. The truism is offered that a linguistic meaning implies a speaker as origin of that meaning. However the postulate of an impersonal being speaking raises logical problems of its own. Such a being could not be a subject. Yet an act of narrating necessarily has subjective elements, for example in the selection of one thing to be reported rather than another.

If this seems rather unsatisfactory, let us rather consider the alternative proposal that the communicating person in fiction is never *not* the author. The "voice" or "speaker" is better understood then as a matter of alternative masks or personae donned by the author. As Bakhtin put it: "The novelist stands in need of some essential formal and generic mask that could serve to define the position from which he views life, as well as the position from which he makes that life public" (1988, 161). In one case the mask is such that the author speaks through a character's speech and in another case the author speaks in such a way as to transcend character speech. Thus the author's discourse is "refracted". When speaking transcendently authors have traditionally resorted to an upper register of standard language in contrast to the low, dialectal or idiosyncratic speech of characters.