

# Housman, Richards, and Leavis: Between Physiology and Phenomenology

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Abstract

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The recent advent of accessible, high-quality neuroimaging technology has resulted in an increased accuracy of neuroanatomical descriptions of the brain. In particular, the imaging of the neurophysiological processes (such as neurochemical transmissions and blood-oxygen-level dependent contrasts) of the nervous system – both central and peripheral – provides a clearer picture of the neurophysiological origin of the phenomenological experience. One off-shoot of this prevalence of neuroimaging technology is the transposition of neuroscience to the humanities, which has resulted in the rise of the ‘neurohumanities’: a branch of traditional humanistic study (such as literature and film) that utilises the methods of neuroscience to uncover the relationship between the brain and subjective experiences. Twenty-first-century literary studies has benefited from the neurohumanities via associating the reading act with specific neurophysiological processes, demonstrating that certain parts of the nervous system (such as the brain, spinal cord, or nerves, or any combination of these three) influence how we internalise the emotions, feelings, physical sensations, ideas, and interpretations prompted by a literary text.

However, there is a distinct disparity between neurophysiological descriptions and phenomenological descriptions. Neurophysiological descriptions are often mechanistic accounts of the biological processes of the body. They describe biological processes from an objective perspective, and structure the biological narrative according to the methods of current empiricist neuroscience, which relies upon a technical, non-subjective selection of physiological, chemical, anatomical, and electrical measurements. In contrast, phenomenological descriptions often depict the felt texture of an experience from the internal perspective of the person, offering a thicker description of what the overall experience of something is like to the recipient.

Neurophysiology and phenomenology are entwined. Phenomenology arises from the activation of the nervous system. And the nervous system, and its various neurochemical and electrical circuitry, can be influenced by the reader’s phenomenological experience. In this thesis, I argue that neither neurophysiology nor phenomenology alone offer a complete account of the reading and writing process.

Rather, they need to be understood as providing a complementary picture of our interactions with literature.

To demonstrate this, I recover an English physiological tradition from the early twentieth century. This 'physiological tradition' is distinct from a 'neurophysiological tradition' in that it offered an incomplete and primitive understanding of the body and mind, with particular emphasis on the emotions, feelings, and physical sensations experienced by the reader, but with little understanding of their neurophysiological origin. I identify three primary practitioners of this tradition: A.E. Housman, I.A. Richards, and F.R. Leavis. These three critics are often perceived as contrarians to each other (with Richards and Leavis being especially contrarian to Housman). I argue, however, that their attention to the different manifestations of the mind and the body – the physical symptoms that verse and prose elicit from within the reader, the reader's capacity for assigning ideas and meanings to abstractions and physical sensations, and the conscious realisation of one's self and his or her corresponding acts – demonstrates the possibility of blending or balancing a physiological awareness with the phenomenological experience, while retaining at the same time the unique features of these two approaches. By recognising the distinctiveness of, and the interrelationship between, the physiological and phenomenological, I attempt to find a pre-history for recent critical shifts (specifically the neurocritic and his neuroliterary field) in seemingly unpromising past criticism.

For Bert and Elsie.

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Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent. The slogan ‘press on’ has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

- Attributed in the programme of a memorial service for Calvin Coolidge in 1933. See ‘Calvin Coolidge, 1872-1933’, in *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. Elizabeth Knowles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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# Introduction

## Between Physiology and Phenomenology

Neurophysiology is the study of the series of complex electrical and neurochemical changes that occur with the activity of the nervous system, which is itself divided into the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord) and the peripheral nervous system (the small whitish fibres that transmit impulses of sensation to the brain or spinal cord, and from the brain or spinal cord transmit impulses to the muscles and organs).<sup>1</sup> In recent years, neurophysiological studies have yielded increasingly insightful empirical descriptions of the brain, its cognitive and physiological functions, and its relation to the peripheral nervous system.<sup>2</sup> This has been aided by the advent of non-invasive medical neuroimaging technology (fMRI, CT, PET, EEG, MEG, NIRS, and fNIRS), which allows high-quality, functional, digital, quantitative renderings of the human brain as it executes complex functions such as perception, emotions, and behaviour.<sup>3</sup> An off-shoot of these medical imaging and neuroscientific developments has been the ‘neurohumanities’: the ‘largely traditional fields of humanistic study – prominently including literature and related arts, such as film – that have taken up findings or methods of

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Carpenter and Benjamin Reddi, *Neurophysiology: A Conceptual Approach*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Hoboken: CRC Press, 2012), pp. 3-16. Neurophysiology is a sub-branch combining neuroscience (the systematic, scientific study of the functioning nervous system, and which is itself an umbrella term for various neuro- branches: neuroanatomy; neurophysiology; and the other humanistic neuro- domains, such as neuroethics, neurophilosophy, and neuroaesthetics) and physiology (the normal functioning of living organisms and their systems and organs).

<sup>2</sup> See, among many possible examples, the following: Jeffrey G. Tasker and William E. Armstrong, *Neurophysiology of Neuroendocrine Neurons* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), C. Hammond, *Cellular and Molecular Neurophysiology*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), and Devon I. Rubin and Jasper R. Daube, eds., *Clinical Neurophysiology*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). My use of ‘empirical’ here refers to descriptions which identify the physical transformation of the brain during the activation of its neurophysiological features.

<sup>3</sup> Scott H. Farzo and Feroze B. Mohamed, eds., *Bold fMRI: A Guide to Functional Imaging for Neuroscientists* (New York: Springer Verlag, 2010), Cameron S. Carter and Jeffrey W. Dalley, eds., *Brain Imaging in Behavioral Neuroscience*, (New York: Springer, 2012), Mark A. Anastasio, *Emerging Imaging Technologies in Medicine* (Hoboken: CRC Press, 2012), and Thomas P. Naidich, *Imaging of the Brain* (Philadelphia: Saunders/Elsevier, 2012).



neuroscience to advance their research'.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the prefix 'neuro' has come to denote a burgeoning field of neurophysiological and neuroscientific enquiry, which is not limited to the traditional humanities or sciences, but encompasses various other fields and disciplines (neuroeducation, neuroeconomics, neurolaw, neurosociology, neuropsychiatry, neurotheology, neuroaesthetics, neurophilosophy, and neurophenomenology, for example).<sup>5</sup> The cross-pollination of neurophysiology with the humanities and, more specifically, with the field of literary studies has been seen by some as a means by which to add an element of the scientific to an otherwise creative and subjective domain.<sup>6</sup> However, the persistence of differences between the humanities and the neurosciences has given rise to numerous disputes about

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick C. Hogan, 'Literary Brains: Neuroscience, Criticism, and Theory', in *Literature Compass*, vol. 11, no. 4 (April 2014), p. 293. Hogan's book, *Cognitive Science, Literature, and the Arts: A Guide for Humanists* (New York: Routledge, 2003), provides a fundamental overview of the key principles of cognitive science and their potential application as a scientific approach to the study of literature and the arts. Perhaps ominously, Hogan opens with a brief anecdote about a warning issued by the American Comparative Literature Association in the early 1990s: 'comparatists had better move from their narrow literary areas into the larger field of culture study or they would be left on the "dustheap of history"' (p. 1). What follows is a fascinating case for the literary critic to turn to the cognitive sciences if he wishes to remain relevant throughout the twenty-first century; it is, as Hogan argues, imperative that the field of literary studies not ignore important trends in other fields that bear directly on the arts (pp. 1-7). The initial application of cognitive science to literary studies can be found in George Lakoff and Mark Turner's *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (1989).

<sup>5</sup> Nikolas S. Rose and Jolle M. Abi-Rached, *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> In practical terms, scientific studies of the literary reader's interactions with literature are becoming more frequent, and we are now beginning to see the impact of this on the wider field of literary studies. For example, the journal *Scientific Studies of Literature* (or *SSOL*) debuted in 2011, and claims on its front cover to publish 'empirical studies that apply scientific stringency to cast light on the structure and function of literary phenomena'. Neuroscientific journals which deal primarily in traditional neurology are also now slowly seeing a rise in articles which combine literary studies with neuroscientific studies (*NeuroImage*, for example). Various empirical neuroliterary studies of readers are also becoming more frequent: G. Thierry's 'Event-Related Potential Characterisation of the Shakespearean Functional Shift in Narrative Sentence Structure' (2008), which focuses on the physiological consequences of a disruption in the flow of language comprehension, and which helped confirm the significance of grammatical deviation in literature; and Lisa Zunshine's *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us About Popular Culture* (2012) which offers a neuroscientific approach to the study of literature and its cultural and social ramifications. The increase in these fields suggests that some critics are becoming more receptive of a union between the empiricist neuroscientist and the literary critic – indeed, Jonathon Gottschall's *Literature, Science, and a New Humanities* (2008) argues that the literary disciplines will wither and die if an appropriate scientific paradigm is not soon adopted within English departments.

whether or not the application of neurophysiology to literature is valuable, and, alternatively, whether or not poetry and fictional prose have anything to offer to the neuroscientist's understanding of consciousness and the phenomenological experience.<sup>7</sup>

The study of the reader's internalised phenomenological literary experience – 'phenomenology' is here defined as an empirical account of a subjective event, but which is not measurable according to the objectivist methods of current empiricist neuroscience – is distinct from the empirical study of neurophysiology.<sup>8</sup> The subjective perception of the literary work from within the mind of the reader does not necessarily correlate to the empirical description of neurophysiological activity during that same reading act. Relatively little attention has been given to this disparity. Rather, phenomenology is becoming increasingly a part of the neuro- domain, with the most recent scientific research attempting to identify the neurophysiological origin of the subjective experience, thus assimilating consciousness and

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<sup>7</sup> As Norman Holland writes in 2001 using an excellent analogy: 'I think of neuroscience and the human sciences as like two very small human beings energetically tunnelling in from opposite sides of a very large Alp. [...] I imagine the neuroscientist tunnelling in from the west, and the humanists from the east. I am afraid the neuroscientists on the west side of the Alp do not listen much to sounds of digging from the humanists on the east side. Humanists, however, listen very closely to what the neuroscientists are doing'. Norman N. Holland, 'The Neurosciences and the Arts', in *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts* (January 2001), p. 1. For a more recent discussion on this analogy, see Sarah Birge, 'Brainhood, Selfhood, or "Meat with a Point of View": The Value of Fiction for Neuroscientific Research and Neurological Medicine', in *The Neuroscientific Turn: Transdisciplinarity in the Age of the Brain*, eds. Melissa M. Littlefield and Jenell M. Johnson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2012). David S. Miall is also an important interlocutor in this area, and his writings on the state of the current literary discipline are paramount in understanding the potential trajectories of future literary studies. In particular, he argues that, despite whatever scientific enquiry might shadow the study of literature, it should be impossible for literature itself to change radically or to altogether disappear under a scientific paradigm. This is because literary values are an inherent quality of our human nature, and thus no matter the extent to which we impose a scientific paradigm, these literary values will remain available and accessible to the reader. See, for example, David S. Miall, 'Empirical Approaches to Studying Literary Readers: The State of the Discipline', in *Book History*, vol. 9 (2006).

<sup>8</sup> The 'internal' rendering of a literary work is the form that the work takes within the mind and body of the reader: the emotions, ideas, ideals, morals, ethics, thoughts, memories, associations, physical reactions, and so on. In other words, it is the experience of perceiving the work of art from the perspective of the reader. Obviously the nature of such an experience is subject to intense scrutiny, which is largely due to the difficulty in identifying and describing 'phenomenology'. See Daniel Schmicking, 'A Toolbox of Phenomenological Methods', in *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, eds. Shaun Gallagher and Daniel Schmicking (New York: Springer, 2010), pp. 36, 37-8, 51-3.

experience into the domain of the ‘neurophenomenologist’.<sup>9</sup> So the scientific and humanist distinctions between *what* it is to be ‘human’ (along with its various qualities; emotions, intellect, physiology, psychology, culture, morality, and creativity, for example) and *how* we experience our humanity is currently defined by methods of description: the phenomenological methods of description versus the neurophysiological methods of description.

For example, neuroscience describes the molecular, cellular, structural, and functional aspects of the nervous system.<sup>10</sup> The subcortical regions governing emotional, motivational, and homeostatic functions via neurochemical circuit activation (one cell communicating to the next cell in the neurological circuit), or the neocortex’s functional lobes (occipital, parietal, temporal, and frontal) corresponding to visual, somatosensory, auditory, and motor stimulus, present empirical descriptions of a neurophysiological activity. But this activity does not capture the phenomenological experience from the perspective of the reader.<sup>11</sup> The reader does not feel these circuit activations, and although he may be aware of them (which itself would constitute an entirely unique phenomenology), he does not experience an explicit sensory manifestation.<sup>12</sup> Instead, our reading experience – the internalised subjective perception of the literary text – arises from a combination of the implicit neurophysiological circuitry of the brain, the explicit phenomenological manifestation of the neurophysiological circuitry (sight

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, C.U.M. Smith and Harry Whitaker, eds., *Brain, Mind and Consciousness in the History of Neuroscience* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014). In particular, Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen (‘Is There a Link Between Quantum Mechanics and Consciousness?’ and ‘Consciousness and the Neuronal Microtubules’, respectively) provide examples of these kinds of approaches.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell Glickstein, *Neuroscience: A Historical Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2014), pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see D.H. Whalen, Lisa Zunshine, and Michael Holquist, ‘Increases in Perspective Embedding Increase Reading Time Even with Typical Text Presentation: Implications for the Reading of Literature’, in *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 6, art. 1778 (November 2015). This essay focuses on quantitative, empirical measurements of objective neurological processes that are indirectly associated with the phenomenological experience (the reading time, for example) but not indicative of the whole of the subjective experience of the reading act.

<sup>12</sup> This is precluding the fact that by reading and interpreting a work of literature, we are intuitively enacting these brain functions; this is automatic and indiscernible. We can, however, discern its indirect influence: by seeing the words written upon a page, we know (if we have been informed) that the occipital lobe’s visual processing function is activated. But we do not directly feel this in the same sense that we might feel a slight breeze, or a hot flame, or a fasciculation. That is, we lack a conscious awareness of its neurophysiological activation.

and touch, for example), and the conscious awareness or description of these manifestations such that we can have an idea of the phenomenological and neurophysiological experience that can be subjected to intellectual analysis.

There thus exists a disparity between the expression of subjective phenomenological experiences and the description of our neurophysiological activity.<sup>13</sup> Efforts to reconcile this disparity have included the analysis of how historical conceptions of physiology influenced an author's work, and how knowledge of contemporary neuroscience and physiology can provide new ways of understanding character and literary form.<sup>14</sup> From these efforts, we might recognise two new types of agency: the 'neuroauthor' and the 'neuroreader'. The 'neuroauthor' is either theorised through a retroactive application of contemporary neuroscience (for historical authors who have since died) or practically assessed by way of neuroimaging technology (to proactively monitor, record, and assess the neurophysiological activity of an author during his writing act). Similarly, the 'neuroreader' arises from the application of non-invasive neuroimaging technology to provide new insight into how the brain functions when reading literary texts.<sup>15</sup> In these neuroimaging efforts, the monist approach reveals itself: the phenomenological experience is conceived as indistinguishable from the neurophysiological activity. But the problem with monism is that, from the subjective perspective of the reader, the neurophysiological description remains distinctly separate from the phenomenological experience. To say that the neuroimage (an fMRI scan, for example) is an empirical representation of a reader's phenomenological experience is arguably correct, but to claim that

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<sup>13</sup> An excellent discussion on the distinction between a neurophysiological description and a phenomenological description can be found in Paul M. Churchland, 'Consciousness and the Introspection of "Qualitative Samples"' (Part Two, Chapter Four), in *Consciousness Inside and Out: Phenomenology, Neuroscience, and the Nature of Experience*, ed. Richard Brown (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013). The sub-section 4.3 'Subjective Knowledge Versus Objective Knowledge' is especially instructive (pp. 41-6).

<sup>14</sup> Michele Augusto Riva's 'The Neurologist in Dante's *Inferno*' (2015) provides a fascinating account of Dante's medieval notions of neuroanatomy and the neurophysiology, and how these primitive ideas influenced his descriptions of the tortured souls in *Inferno*. And Joseph Carroll's 'Intentional Meaning in Hamlet: An Evolutionary Perspective' (2010) applies the principles of neurochemistry to Hamlet's depressed personality – the secretion of cortisol from the adrenal glands, which damages the brain and kills neurons, shrinking the hippocampus, and producing the typical effects of depression associated with Hamlet (pp. 246-8).

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Zunshine's 'Style Brings in Mental States' demonstrates how fMRI may be used to assess the neurophysiological effect of embedded mental states when reading narrative vignettes.

the neuroimage *is* the reader's phenomenological experience ignores the inherent distinction between the data of an empirical science and our own subjective experience.

However, this thesis is not about contemporary neurophysiology. And it does not offer an explicit attempt to contextualise a historical debate, or a historical author, under the guise of contemporary neurophysiology.<sup>16</sup> Rather, this thesis recovers an early-twentieth-century English physiological tradition that incorporated primeval elements of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century physiology (and, to a lesser extent, neurophysiology) to produce a uniquely subjective interpretation of poetry and the novel.<sup>17</sup> The tenor of this thesis does presume an ahistorical human experience, but with the occasional careful historicising of certain areas of research, such as scientific developments (early twentieth-century medical knowledge and its development throughout the twentieth century, and late-twentieth-century technological developments in medical imaging) and their impact on cultural, social, and literary perceptions.

This tradition is significant because it reveals how the mind-body problem has influenced criticism in ways that are still poorly understood.<sup>18</sup> The 'mind-body problem' refers to the illogicality (the problem is an issue of logic) of the interaction between the mind and the body: (1) the mind is a nonphysical thing; (2) the body is a physical thing; (3) the mind and body

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Dames' *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*, for example, is a brilliant assessment of Victorian physiological and neurological principles. It is, in part, inspired by our contemporary understanding of the neurophysiology of the brain. See also Lalita Pandit and Patrick C. Hogan, 'Introduction: Morsels and Modules: On Embodying Cognition in Shakespeare's Plays', in *College Literature*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2006), which approaches Shakespeare's plays from a cognitive perspective of the notion of a play as a mental model. And James L. Keidel et al., 'How Shakespeare Tempests the Brain: Neuroimaging Insights', in *Cortex*, vol. 49, no. 4 (April 2013), which assesses changes to grammatical structures within Shakespeare's plays and their corresponding neurological effect within the reader.

<sup>17</sup> For nineteenth-century neurophysiology, see Anne Stiles, *Neurology and Literature, 1860-1920* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2007), and J. Wayne Lazar, 'Brain Physiology and the Mind of the Nineteenth Century', in *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, vol. 12, no. 4 (September 2012).

<sup>18</sup> C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* and F.R. Leavis' *Two Cultures?: The Significance of C.P. Snow* are mid-century extensions of this problem. The sub-field of neurophilosophy is instructive in the mind-body problem. See, for example, Friedrich G. Barth's *Sensory Perception: Mind and Matter*, which discusses the relationship between biology, neuroscience, and philosophy.

interact; (4) physical and nonphysical things cannot interact.<sup>19</sup> But in neurophysiology, the mind is positioned as a direct part of the body. That is, the mind has a neurophysiological origin and hence it is physical. So the mind-body problem encapsulates a difference of perspective: objectively, the mind is physical and stems from the neurology of the brain; subjectively, our internal experience often conceives the mind as a nonphysical entity. These competing perspectives impact how we express and describe the respective conceptions of the body and the mind. The point here is that the distinction between *how* we feel (from a neurophysiological sense) and *what* we feel (from a phenomenological sense) arises from the historical notion that the body and the mind are intrinsically separate.<sup>20</sup> The mind constituted one approach to reading, while the body constituted a second approach, and these two approaches were conceived within the early-twentieth-century English physiological tradition as being distinct and separate (but also complementary, albeit from an embryonic understanding of neurophysiology). This distinction benefited early-twentieth-century scholars by providing two paths to the reading experience, both of which were, and still are, valid representations of our literary interactions. The twenty-first-century assimilation of the mind and body – such that they are perceived to be identical, or rather similar enough as to not warrant any overt differentiation – does not satisfy the demands of the literary critic, for whom the subjective perspective of the reader is paramount in comprehending and discussing the reading act.<sup>21</sup> Literature may be expressed in terms of the neurophysiological activities that it elicits, but it involves many more complex sociohistorical and intellectual processes. Indeed, any attempt to ignore the phenomenological experience of literature, or devaluing its existence by subordinating or merging it with the body's physiology without taking into consideration its internal subjective perspective, will fail to grasp literature's function and purpose, particularly its far-reaching social, political, and ethical effects.

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<sup>19</sup> Jonathon Westphal, *The Mind-Body Problem* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), pp. 1-2. See also Mario Bunge, *The Mind-Body Problem: A Psychological Approach* (Burlington: Elsevier Science, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Omar T. Khachouf et al., 'The Embodied Transcendental: A Kantian Perspective on Neurophenomenology', in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 7, art. 611 (September 2013), pp. 1-3, 12-3.

<sup>21</sup> The classic works from this well-known area are: Georges Poulet's 'Phenomenology of Reading', Wolfgang Iser's 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', Norman Holland's *5 Readers Reading*, and Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class?*.

The early-twentieth-century English physiological tradition arises from three core critics: A.E. Housman (1859 – 1936), I.A. Richards (1893 – 1979), and F.R. Leavis (1895 – 1978). I define this tradition as ‘physiological’ as opposed to ‘neurophysiological’ because its practitioners lacked substantive knowledge of neurology as well as non-invasive neuroimaging technology. The term ‘physiological tradition’ is intended to capture the relatively primitive and inchoate ideas about the feelings elicited by literature, as opposed to the more complex twenty-first-century ideas about neurology.<sup>22</sup> Whereas ‘neurophysiology’ refers to the specific assessment of the neurochemical and electrical circuitry of the brain and its nervous system, ‘physiology’ denotes a broader assessment of the physical sensations, feelings, and emotions of the physical body. This thesis is thus an exercise in using *the concept of physiology to unify an otherwise unrelated series of contentious early-twentieth-century theoretical approaches (Housman, Richards, and Leavis), which, considered together, offer a serious contribution to present-day efforts to blend or balance the phenomenological experience of literature with the neurophysiological description of the reader.* It is the delicate and, unsurprisingly, inconsistent blending or balancing of phenomenology and physiology that yields a thicker description of what the overall reading experience is like for the reader. By ‘blending or balancing’, I refer to the degree that physiology informs the phenomenological experience (and vice versa), and seek to determine, when and where possible, the ratio in which each approach is applied to the critical study of the literary work. Most importantly, Housman, Richards, and Leavis are not neurohumanists, neuroanatomists, neuroscientists, or any other type of neuro- practitioners. They are literary critics, poet-scholars and, in the case of Housman and to a lesser extent Richards, artists. It is because they are primarily concerned with a subjective comprehension

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<sup>22</sup> The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has several books on the neurophysiology of feeling that lay the basis for studying literary reading: *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994), *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion, and the Making of Consciousness* (2000), *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (2003), and *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (2010). Of particular note is the belief (which Damasio challenges in *Looking for Spinoza*) that feelings are impossible to define with any real specificity. Just like motor and homeostatic functions, feelings can be traced to corresponding parts of the brain. Furthermore, the definitions that we apply to feelings, along with how we conceive them culturally, are not necessarily reflective of their neurobiological origin: feelings – such as compassion or embarrassment – are not co-dependent on other types of feelings, such as happiness, sadness, or fearfulness. There is, in other words, an important distinction between how we perceive the qualities which contribute to our identity and the neurophysiological origin of these qualities. This gives us pause to reconsider, not only how literary works affect the brain, but how we might define our feelings in a cultural and literary context.

of literature that they are able to present to us an interrelation between neurophysiology (and, for the purpose of this thesis, its physiological precursors) and phenomenology.

## Terminology

To define a few key terms is important: phenomenology, feelings, emotion, subjective, and the paradigm of science. These are influential terms which helped develop the work of literary critics, philosophers, psychologists, cognitive scientists, and empiricist neuroscientists throughout both the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. There is thus a great degree of resonance in these terms, and it is important that they be brought into a clear focus.

My definition of phenomenology is a particular one and it is quite separate from the phenomenology of Hegel or Husserl.<sup>23</sup> As outlined in the previous section, phenomenology is defined as an empirical account of a subjective event, but which is not measurable according to the objectivist methods of current empiricist neuroscience. There is a fine distinction here between an ‘empirical account’ and ‘empiricist neuroscience’. An empirical account is something which can be experienced, observed, and described. To this end, it appeals to the various sensory qualities (sight, touch, taste, and so on), to our ability or capacity to intellectualise and identify both the source and effect, and to communicate through descriptive

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<sup>23</sup> Hegel, for example, considered phenomenology to be a form of science. In the ‘Preface’ to *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), Hegel writes: ‘The systematic development of truth in scientific form can alone be the true shape in which truth exists. To help to bring philosophy nearer to the form of science – that goal where it can lay aside the name of *love* of knowledge and be actual *knowledge* – that is what I have set before me. The inner necessity that knowledge should be science lies in its very nature; and the adequate and sufficient reason for this is simply and solely the systematic exposition of philosophy itself’. But science, for Hegel, was non-empirical in the sense that it appeals, strictly speaking, to a conceptual framework: ‘Hence the important thing for the student of science is to make himself undergo the strenuous toil of conceptual reflection, of thinking in the form of the notion. This demands concentrated attention on the notion as such, on simple and ultimate determinations like being-in-itself, being-for-itself, self-identity, and so on; for these are elemental, pure, self-determined functions of a kind we might call souls’. This brings forth various incompatibilities with Hegel’s use of ‘science’ (specifically its non-empirical nature) and what might be considered a more general application of the term ‘science’ in the twenty-first century (which is distinctly, and perhaps definitively, empirical). G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind, Volume I*, trans. J.B. Baillie (New York: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 5, 56. Italics in original. Similar distinctions in Husserl’s use of ‘science’ may be made, at least in so much as they differ and are, in fact, quite contrarian to its contemporary use. See Edmund Husserl’s *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (Books One, Two, and Three), *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology: From the Lectures, Winter Semester, 1910-1911*, and *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge: Lectures 1906-1907*.



language the felt texture of our experience. Empiricist neuroscience, however, diverges from this path in its association with ‘science’; not a Hegelian or Husserlian science, but a contemporary science built upon the modern scientific method of testing both direct and indirect observations.<sup>24</sup> As such, the contemporary scientific paradigm is one of observing cause and effect, creating testable hypotheses, verifying and clarifying the hypothesis, and which ultimately culminates in prediction.<sup>25</sup> And it is this observational empiricism which separates the twentieth- and twenty-first-century neuroscientist from the nineteenth-century philosopher: the empiricist neuroscientist desires the ability to make predictions from his empirical data; the philosopher (at least according to Hegel and Husserl) believes that a non-empirical science, or rather ‘philosophy’ itself, underpins and dictates the workings of actual science, and appeals to an inherent logic universal to all agents. So modern science is based in

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) established these qualities. Kuhn argued that science is not merely the incremental accumulation of knowledge through scientific methods, but that science is episodic in nature. The scientific paradigm in effect at one point may be challenged and overthrown, leading to new theories, new paradigms, and new assessments of data (both past and present). In doing so, new methods of observation are created, producing new means by which to verify and test hypotheses, resulting in greater insights about cause and effect. Incidentally, if a union between neuroscience and the humanities becomes common practice then one might wonder the effect that this will have on literary paradigms: will they become more episodic in nature?; and will future paradigms completely alter our current understandings of literature and literary theory? To this end, we may be witnessing the coming of a complete overhaul of the literary tradition, its methods, and its purpose.

<sup>25</sup> These ideas are positivist, which suggests that knowledge and truth can only be discovered *a posteriori*. Hence only empirical research is capable of revealing the physical laws of the universe. According to Auguste Comte’s *A General View of Positivism*, the significance of this is that it repositions philosophy from being a ‘speculation’ to a truth: ‘But all Positive speculations owe their first origin to the occupations of practical life; and, consequently, they have always given some indication of their capacity for regulating our active powers, which had been omitted from every former synthesis. [...] The importance that we attach to theories which teach laws of phenomena, and give us the power of prevision, is chiefly due to the fact that they alone can regulate our otherwise blind action upon the external world’ (p.11). That is, a positivist speculation originates from practical observations, and thus elevates it above purely theoretical speculation. Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J.H. Bridges (New York: Routledge, 2015). John Stuart Mill’s *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* is also instructive on the principles of inductive reasoning, as well as the nature of empirical observations in the development of science: ‘A science may undoubtedly be brought to a certain, not inconsiderable, stage of advancement, without the application of any other logic to it than what all persons, who are said to have a sound understanding, acquire empirically in the course of their studies’ (p. 17). See also Mill’s chapter ‘Of Empirical Laws’ in *A System of Logic* for a discussion on empirical observations (pp. 635-45).

its empirical observations through experimentation, whereas Hegelian and Husserlian philosophy arises from an inherent logic (which predicates science).

‘Phenomenology’, as used in this thesis, refers to the private observations made of our own subjective experiences (which may then be divulged to others, should we so choose). This is an empirical process because it involves the observation, acknowledgment, and description of the nature of our feelings, emotions, and experiences. The empiricist neuroscientist, by contrast, would take issue with such a process because it offers weak predictive power. However, another distinction must here be made. It is not that the empirical description of our private observations is inherently unpredictable, but that the current observational methods available to the neuroscientist (specifically neuroimaging technology) do not allow for the degree of detail required to make said predictions. It is thus highly possible (if not probable) that future technological advances will provide a more detailed account of both the neurology and subjective experience of the felt texture of an event. But for the time being, my use of phenomenology refers to an internal, subjective experience that is unobservable to the current objectivist methods of the empiricist neuroscientist, unless through the agent’s conscious and intentional divulgence.

What is meant by ‘subjective’, though? An objective experience is ostensibly one which remains consistent across multiple viewings. It is, in other words, singular. A subjective experience relates the subject of the experience, and adheres to a set of properties or attributes inherent to the subject; it relates the consciousness or perception of the subject, and has as its source the subject’s internal consciousness.<sup>26</sup> As such, the subjective experience is unique to the subject.

So phenomenology addresses a subjective event. It occurs within the cognition of the agent’s mind, and it is the product of various, mostly unaccountable, complex thought-processes. In neuroscience, these thought-processes are often correlated to specific neurochemical interactions within the brain, with sub-sections (the neocortical and the subcortical, for example) being responsible for emotions, impulses, integration and processing

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph Neisser’s *The Science of Subjectivity* provides an insightful overview of the common approaches to subjectivity, consciousness, and neuroscience. In particular, the claim that ‘experience essentially involves a subjective point of view has been a constant theme in the literature on consciousness’. Neisser, however, suggests that a first-person perspective is not necessarily synonymous with consciousness because ‘subjective thought can take place without awareness’. In this sense, my definition of ‘subjective’ refers equally to both the subject’s conscious *awareness* of his experience and to the experience itself. Joseph Neisser, *The Science of Subjectivity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 2.

of sense modalities, and so on. We have known for several decades that thought-processes are neither purely physiological, intellectual, nor psychological, but a combination of these three elements:

The brain is part of the central nervous system. In a preliminary way, it may be thought of as the organ that integrates experience and produces action. [...] Roughly speaking, the subcortex has motivational and homeostatic functions (e.g., governing thirst). Thus, emotions such as anger are largely a function of subcortical regions. The neocortex is responsible for perception and motion, as well as the integration of information from different sense modalities. The isolation of emotional and information processing functions has fairly obvious importance for literature and the arts.

[...]

Different neurochemicals have excitatory or inhibitory effects on different systems. For example, what is called the 'reward system' operates through the neurotransmitter dopamine. While there are, of course, neuroanatomical components to the reward system, it is perhaps better characterized through neurochemical functionality. In phenomenological terms, the function of the 'dopaminergic' reward system is the anticipatory pursuit of pleasure [...] or perhaps the anticipatory pursuit of emotional need satisfaction. The reward system is a key component of aesthetic response.<sup>27</sup>

'Emotion', then, can be conceived in terms of its physiological manifestations, as well as the ideas (cultural, social, literary, historical, and so on) that we might attribute to specific emotional states. And we might also say that our emotions are the initial catalyst for any future intellectual considerations because an emotional reaction (or, more specifically, a neurophysiological reaction) produces the effect that draws our conscious awareness. To think of the brain as the 'organ that integrates experience and produces action' is a pertinent description of the relationship between the phenomenological experience and its basis in both abstractions of thought (intellectual and psychological) and the physiology of the physical body (the brain itself). The reading experience, if we are to think of it in terms of a purely physiological and physical process, may be conceived in the following way: first, the literary text exists as an external stimulus; second, the stimulus modality of light activates the sense of vision, so that we might see the words written upon the page; third, the light reaches the cornea, it is then focused by the eye's lens, after which it then hits the retina at the back of the eye; fourth, the retina sends electrical impulses to the occipital lobe in the neocortex (the largest part of the cerebral cortex, which is the outer layer of the brain's neural tissue); fifth, the

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<sup>27</sup> Patrick C. Hogan, 'Literary Brains: Neuroscience, Criticism, and Theory', pp. 293-4, 295. Hogan's essay provides insight into the neurological processes of the brain, and provides a clear and concise description of how the brain is organised.

neocortex integrates the input of information via neurochemical reactions; and, sixth, the neocortex draws upon various other neurological faculties, including the Broca's and Wernicke's areas of the superior temporal gyrus and the inferior frontal gyrus respectively (both of which are a part of the brain's language processing centre). After this point, it might be said that we have reached a basic understanding of the biology of reading. There are, of course, other scientific elements of reading, such as linguistic processing comprehension, as well as visualising what the text represents, and the cognition of hearing a spoken work.<sup>28</sup> Obviously this is a simplified version – the actual process is far too long to detail in a paragraph – but this should give an idea of how an external text can influence the physiology of the brain. We can also easily include the author as well, should we so desire. Doing so merely requires the addition of a precipitating component to the external stimulus (the literary text). However, whereas the reader is absorbing information, the author is exuding information. In this sense, the physiological process is somewhat reversed for the author: the idea begins within the brain (if it is an emotional idea then within the subcortex, or if it is an intellectual idea within the neocortex, although it is often a combination of the two); it is then processed via the language faculties so that words might be put to the author's feelings and ideas; and then the process of writing is dispersed throughout the nervous system, including the motor functions required to write the text and the sight with which to evaluate what is written ('sight', incidentally, produces a loop wherein the author fulfils the physiological requirements of being a reader while simultaneously being the author). This holistic view is intended to demonstrate that the phenomenological experience is interconnected with the neurophysiological processes.

Such descriptions do not account for what the reader *feels* when reading a text. But we must be careful to distinguish a 'feeling' from a 'neurological description', a 'meaning', or an 'interpretation'. A 'feeling' refers to the distinctly phenomenological sensations experienced by the reader. In broad, basic terms, it may denote primordial feelings: a lump in the throat, a tingling in the pit of the stomach, a quick exhaling of the breath, or a shiver down the spine, for example. But it can also denote (as it most frequently does in the discussion of literature)

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<sup>28</sup> For linguistic processing comprehension, see Peter F. Dominey et al., 'Neural Network Processing of Natural Language: Towards a Unified Model of Corticostriatal Function in Learning Sentence Comprehension and Non-Linguistic Sequencing', in *Brain and Language*, vol. 2, no. 109 (2009). For an overview of the neurological processes involved in auditory stimulation, see James O. Pickles' *Introduction to the Physiology of Hearing*.

more complex, emotional sensations: affection, empathy, hope, and longing, for example.<sup>29</sup> These symptoms are often the result of a complex combination of physiological, intellectual, and emotional, and psychological states.<sup>30</sup> They are interrelated and dependent on one another. So, for example, a reader might feel a lump in his throat (physiological) due to him experiencing sadness (emotion), which is brought about by his interpretation of the linguistic meaning of literary text (intellectual). A reader's feelings are often elicited from the reading of the text. They are noticeable and recognisable, and we might describe them (sometimes poorly) by their physical manifestations. 'As I went along,' Housman writes of his process of composing poetry, 'thinking of nothing in particular, only looking at things around me and following the progress of the seasons, there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once, accompanied, not preceded, by a vague notion of the poem which they were destined to form part of'.<sup>31</sup> This kind of expression depicts the internal perspective of composition; we might equally describe it scientifically, taking into account Housman's vision and neurological processes, but it would only function as a description of our external observation of the brain.

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<sup>29</sup> Keith Oatley is particularly instructive in this area. Oatley's research follows two trajectories: a historicised and evolutionary account of the development of emotions within both local cultures and the field of neuroscience (*Emotions: A Brief History*, 'The Cognitive Science of Fiction', and 'Cognitive Approaches to Emotions'); and the effects of reading fiction on a reader's emotional empathy (*Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*, 'Fiction: Simulation of Social Worlds', and 'Communications to Self and Others: Emotional Experience and its Skills', for example). This combination, which is by no means unique to Oatley, advances literary readings as the product of our neurobiology, while also indicating that the study of both trajectories provides a pragmatic application for our literary experiences (psychologically, culturally, socially, and educationally).

<sup>30</sup> 'Physiology' refers to the physical sensations and feelings of the body. 'Intellect' refers to the individual's capacity for reasoning and understanding, and includes the assigning of ideas and meaning to abstractions and physical sensations (but which itself does not constitute an overt action or thought). 'Psychology' is the behaviour, both external (intentional actions) and internal (subjective thoughts), of the subject. Intellect and psychology are similar, but not interchangeable. So, for example, we might say that a person's psychology determines how he will act and respond to a situation. The intellect, though, determines the meaning that a person ascribes to a situation, which then can be processed by his psychology, thus resulting in an action or behaviour. So psychology does have an intellectual basis (for our psychology is shaped and based on our ideas), whereas the intellect is more of a logical basis from which to determine the meaning of the situation or object.

<sup>31</sup> A.E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (Cambridge: Readers' Union and Cambridge University Press, 1939), p. 49.

How we *feel* when reading a text, then, is the formation of a subjective experience, which denotes how we perceive and internalise our interactions (physiological, emotional, and intellectual, and includes the meaning or interpretation which flows from a feeling) with the literary work.

Alternatively, a ‘neurological description’ refers to empirical descriptions of the neurological processes of which we are indirectly aware. We know that light hits the cornea, is focused by the lens onto the retina, and that it is then communicated to the brain. We know this from our scientific observations of the brain’s function relative to vision. And we also know this (albeit not with such scientific finesse) through the occurrence of the event itself; the fact that we are able to perceive visual images is a testament to the existence of this specific neurological event.

### **Housman, Richards, and Leavis**

Why focus on Housman, Richards, and Leavis? Why not a combination of other critics, like Arnold, Empson, Eliot, Graves, Saintsbury, Woolf, or Frye? It is true that any other selection of these critics would most probably produce similar revelations about physiology and phenomenology, and about the reader’s place therein. In fact, one potential outcome of this thesis is, hopefully, a renewed interest in these earlier critics due to them having something valuable to offer twenty-first-century literary criticism in the form of a prehistory to the modern neurocritic.

The rationale for examining Housman, Richards, and Leavis together revolves around their focus on the phenomenological experience of the reader. Housman’s affective theory of reading and writing poetry (a distinctly physiological occurrence) elevates the body of the reader. Richards’ interest in the ‘meaning’ of poetry (a distinctly, but not exclusively, intellectual occurrence) focuses on the thought-processes of the reader. And Leavis’ fascination with the behaviour of characters, and their realistic portrayal in prose, emphasises the psychology of the reader. In this sense, we might consider these three to be different, as they each reflect on different aspects of reading (physical, intellectual, and psychological). Nevertheless, they together share the common thread of subjective experiences of reading, which becomes obvious when they are collectively compared to the empiricist neuroscientist.

Each has also proved a significant influence on scholarly developments in modern criticism. Housman was influential for maintaining a romantic-expressivist theory of poetry

that struck modernists as archaic but which still holds sway today.<sup>32</sup> Richards' impact on the refinement of literary empiricism and close reading significantly influenced the New Criticism. His systematic, scientific approach to student reader responses established a practical approach to both the interpretation and reading of poetry, from which we can trace the rise of cognitive stylistics – the combining of linguistics, literary studies, and cognitive science to produce a linguistic analysis of literature at a cognitive level.<sup>33</sup> Lastly, Leavis remains a controversial figure.<sup>34</sup> His contributions to the refinement of the expected standard of literature solidified him as an authority on literature's nature and purpose, and his life's work helped define and redefine the high quality against which literature should be assessed. His pedagogical undertakings are equally important, with his revaluation of the English Tripos establishing a new direction towards humanist literary studies. However, his creation of what C.P. Snow would later deride as the 'literary intellectual' caused notable rifts between himself and the then-prevailing University establishment (especially those academics who believed that Oxford and Cambridge carried too much unearned literary influence) about the inclusion and exclusion of literary texts of a higher or lower quality to and from the English syllabus.<sup>35</sup>

The chapters of this thesis examine and compare the respective approaches of Housman, Richards, and Leavis in order to demonstrate the different applications of phenomenological and physiological ideas to the study of literature, and from which we can then observe the importance of phenomenology in contextualising and, indeed, giving purpose to physiological sensations.

Chapter One investigates Housman's affective interpretation of poetry, and his theory of meaning as a function of physiological transmission wherein the poem's text operates as an extension of the poet's nervous system (along which is transfused emotion from poet to text to reader). Contemporary critiques of Housman's verse and his philosophy of poetry have been

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<sup>32</sup> Emma Mason and Jonathon Herapath, eds., *Nineteenth-Century Poetry: Criticism and Debates* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 245-6.

<sup>33</sup> David West, *I.A. Richards and the Rise of Cognitive Stylistics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, David Ellis, *Memoirs of a Leavisite: The Decline and Fall of Cambridge English* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 139-144.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-6. See also Ellis' chapter 'Teaching in the UK' in *Memoirs of a Leavisite*.

kinder in the second half of the twentieth century than in the first half.<sup>36</sup> In the latter half of the twentieth century and extending into the twenty-first century, his poetry has come to be seen as a soulful depiction – ‘soulful’ in the sense that it strives to evoke emotional sensations of love (occasionally unrequited), longing, hopelessness, and bravery, but without purely intellectual interpretations – of the human experience.<sup>37</sup> Housman, in *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, argues that ‘meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not’ and that the primary purpose of poetry is the elicitation of feelings, emotions, and physical sensations.<sup>38</sup> This is not to suggest that the transmission of intellectual ideas is impossible, but that poetry’s foremost engagement is with the reader’s physiology, and any transmission of ideas is only secondary or accidental. In doing so, Housman places the phenomenological experience as the basis from which to assess the physiological sensations; the reader’s feelings are ascribed meaning from within an internal and subjective perspective. It is through the subjective experience that poetry’s fullest effect is felt, and it is only from within this subjective context that the physiological sensations make sense. For Housman, poetry is an act of intuition: it is not something that can be taught (for pedagogy instructs the mind), but something which is instantly recognised by the physiological symptoms which it provokes in the reader. To separate the physiological from the phenomenological, or the phenomenological from the physiological, produces for Housman an inaccurate, incomplete description of poetry’s truer form. Given this reasoning, I argue that Housman is not an impressionist, but that he is an empiricist – ‘empiricist’ in the sense that he

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<sup>36</sup> Donna Richardson, ‘The Can of Ail: A.E. Housman’s Moral Irony’, in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 48, no. 2 (Summer 2010). See also *The Housman Society Journal*.

<sup>37</sup> For example, see contemporary critiques of Housman: Zachary Hutchins, ‘Finding Faith in Housman’s “The Carpenter’s Son”’, in *The Explicator*, vol. 65, no. 4 (July 2007), George Monteiro, ‘Traces of A.E. Housman (and Shakespeare) in Hemingway’, in *The Hemingway Review*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Fall 2008), Peter Howarth, ‘Housman’s Dirty Postcards: Poetry, Modernism, and Masochism’, in *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 3 (May 2009), Andrew Hudgins, ‘Housman, My Housman’, in *Northwest Review*, vol. 49, no. 1 (February 2011), Darrell Sutton, ‘A Reader’s Notes & Marginalia’, in *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 19, no. 1 (March 2012), Richard Gaskin, *Horace and Housman* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Fred C. Robinson, ‘The Pleasures of Passé Poets’, in *Sewanee Review*, vol. 121, no. 2 (Spring 2013), Florian Gargaillo, ‘W.H. Auden and A.E. Housman’, in *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2 (June 2014), Jasmine Jagger, ‘Tongue-Tied and Contorting: The Comic Body in A.E. Housman’, in *Literary Imagination*, vol. 17, no. 3 (August 2015), Jeffrey Meyers, ‘Tormented Housman’, in *Style*, vol. 50, no. 1 (February 2016), and Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, ‘The Laureate of Repression: A.E. Housman’s Poems Leave Us with the Impression of Fire that Has Been Carefully Wrapped in Ice’, in *Spectator*, vol. 331, no. 9801 (July 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 39.



derives his experience of poetry from his senses – whose interest is in understanding how poetry elicits these feelings from the reader.

Chapter Two examines Richards' intellectualisation of feelings, the scientific literary revolution in which mass quantitative investigations presented an empirical means by which to assess textual meaning, and the nature of literary meaning within a systematic, scientific paradigm that prides itself on the generation of inductive data. Richards' work reveals how poetry (and, by extension, most types of literature) can have dual functions, specifically in terms of the transmission of intellectual ideas and physiological impulses; it is the balancing of these two that is central to Richards' investigation. And there has been a flurry of recent interest in Richards because of his perceived connection to the empiricist neuro-critic, and whether or not a quantitative foundation of interpretation and literary assessment might contribute to twenty-first-century cognitive evaluations.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to Housman, Richards, in *Practical Criticism*, argues that the function of poetry is the transmission of meaning – 'meaning', for Richards, being the conveyance of ideas and, to a lesser extent, feelings and impulses through the text's language. 'The *original* difficulty of all reading,' Richards writes, 'the problem of *making out the meaning*, is our obvious starting-point'.<sup>40</sup> For Richards, the transmission of ideas requires a degree of intellectualisation, for ideas are not merely physiological impulses or primitive feelings, but something more complex. The reader wants to ensure that the ideas he ascribes to the poem are warranted by the poem's text. So ideas require careful and intense consideration because rarely are they immediately knowable in their fullest form. Despite this, Richards does not denigrate physiology, or disparage its discussion

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<sup>39</sup> For example, see the following contemporary scholarly research: Craig Morris, 'Practical Criticism in Perspective: A Journey from Cambridge to Reading', in *English Teaching*, vol. 5, no. 3 (December 2006), Chanita Goodblatt and Joseph Glickson, 'Conversations with I.A. Richards: The Renaissance in Cognitive Literary Studies', in *Poetics Today*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2010), Joseph North, 'What's "New Critical" about "Close Reading"? I.A. Richards and his New Critical Reception', in *New Literary History*, vol. 44, no. 1 (Winter 2013), David West's *I.A. Richards and the Rise of Cognitive Stylistics*, David Ward, *Coleridge and the Nature of Imagination: Evolution, Engagement with the World, and Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Benjamin Kohlmann, *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-Wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Helen Thaventhiran, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1930), p. 180. Italics in original. This quotation is taken from the start of Richards' 'Analysis'.

when referring to literature. However, he notes that it is important to differentiate between overwhelming / underwhelming emotional reactions (what he defines as ‘sentimentality’) and properly composed feelings; Richards’ ‘sentimentality’ refers to feelings, emotions, and physical sensations that are either too extreme or too underdeveloped. But whereas Housman considered poetry to primarily stimulate physiology, Richards believed that poetry can stimulate multiple parts of the reader. This is because meaning, for Richards, is an inherent state of the text. It is ‘inherent’ because it is not created by the reader, but uncovered through the transmission of the ideas and, to a lesser degree, impulses. Thus poetry is capable of conveying not only a physiological experience, but also an intellectual experience. Most importantly, Richards discusses poetry from the phenomenological experience of the reader (the whole of ‘Documentation’ is a prime example of his interest in the phenomenology of the reading act). In fact, the entire purpose of *Practical Criticism* is to demonstrate the pitfalls of interpretation. The identification of the problems that student readers encounter when attempting to read a poem is intended to reveal the deficiencies of pedagogical methods. Reading poetry is, for Richards, nearly never an act of intuition, but a skill that is taught and refined: ‘Doubtless there are some who, by a natural dispensation acquire the “Open Sesame”! to poetry without labour, but, for the rest of us, certain general reflections we are not often encouraged to undertake can spare us time and fruitless trouble’.<sup>41</sup> The point here is that the distinction between Housman and Richards is superficial, but important. It is superficial in the sense that both Housman and Richards are unknowingly appealing to a neurophysiological basis: the intellect and the physiology of the body, as we know today, are entwined. But it is nevertheless an important distinction because it so greatly influenced their perceptions of the reading and writing of poetry, from being a primarily (but not exclusively) physiological event to being a primarily (but not exclusively) intellectual event. And they are able to present their respective approaches only because they view the physiological and intellectual events from the subjective perspective of the reader.

Chapter Three discusses Leavis’ psychological investigation into the construction and interpretation of the English novel (both from the perspective of the novelist and from the perspective of the reader), and the role that fictional prose plays in creating literary realism. Recent criticism of Leavis focuses on a contemporary evaluation of his novel theory, his

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

critique of Snow's 'two cultures', and his position as a moral formalist and liberal humanist.<sup>42</sup> Leavis, in *The Great Tradition*, argues that the great English novelists are those who are able to blend a sustained psychological interest with a realistic depiction of character: the 'subtlety and refinement' of the 'personal relations of sophisticated characters' occurs through 'an original psychological notation corresponding to the fineness of [...] psychological and moral insight'.<sup>43</sup> An analysis of Leavis shows how the phenomenological experience of the reader may be influenced by the psychology of literary characters, which is itself an indication of whether or not the literary reality is authentic. Like Housman and Richards, Leavis draws on a phenomenological approach to the study of literature: he approaches the literary work from the perspective of the reader, and attempts to discern the text's success on the basis of how it represents, in his mind, an accurate and authentic realism. For Leavis, fictional prose offers the artist an appropriate medium with which to depict the psychology of characters, and to construct an in-depth and detailed environment which those characters may inhabit (in the words of Leavis, 'poetry, we know, idealizes and seeks a higher truth', which increases the risk of 'explicitly "significant" vaguenesses').<sup>44</sup> The great English novelists are, according to Leavis, those who are able to use fictional prose to produce not only accurate, but insightful, depictions of characters, and to utilise the potential of prose to demonstrate their reactions to the series of events that unfold within the confines of the novel. And this is important to the phenomenology of the reader because, for Leavis, the success of a novel is determined by its ability to produce in the mind of the reader a reality not unlike our own, wherein the psychology and actions and

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<sup>42</sup> For more background on Leavis' approach to the study of literature, particularly in relation to subsequent theories of novel and the 'two cultures' debate, see: Guy Ortolano, 'F.R. Leavis, Science, and the Abiding Crisis of Modern Civilization', in *History of Science*, vol. 43, no. 2 (June 2005), Chris Joyce, 'Meeting in Meaning: Philosophy and Theory in the Work of F.R. Leavis', in *Modern Age*, vol. 47, no. 3 (Summer 2005), Genevieve Abravanel, 'English by Example: F.R. Leavis and the Americanization of Modern England', in *Modernism / Modernity*, vol. 15, no. 4 (November 2008), Brian Crick and Michael DiSanto, 'D.H. Lawrence, "An Opportunity and a Test": The Leavis-Eliot Controversy Revisited', in *Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2009), Christopher Hilliard, *English as a Vocation: the Scrutiny Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), and David Hopkins, 'Dr Leavis's Seventeenth Century', in *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>43</sup> F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York: George W. Stewart, Publishing Inc., 1950), p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 187.

reactions of the characters are not seen as fiction, but as real and instructive. This occurs internally and subjectively, and is based upon the reader's knowledge and experience of reality.

Finally, Chapter Four argues that Housman, Richards, and Leavis allow for a reconceptualisation of the 'two cultures debate' that began with C.P. Snow and has continued with contemporary discussions of phenomenology, authorship, and neurophysiology. The reconceptualisation of the of the 'two cultures debate' eventuates from Snow's belief that 'intuition' is problematic for the sciences because it can misguide the scientist's observations. For Snow, intuition, which refers to the ability to understand something instinctively, indicates an absence (or, more accurately, a lessening) of empiricism. An argument based on intuition alone is, within a scientific paradigm, worthless; there is no possibility for it to be substantiated or proven false because it occurs at a subjective level. For Leavis, intuition is important to the reader because it reflects the capacity for the reader to forge a connection with the literary work. And this is paramount to the reading act due to its inherently subjective nature. The reconceptualisation of the 'two cultures debate' occurs by way of a redefining of these two types of practitioners. Instead of the empiricist scientist and the 'literary intellectual', we might better conceive of that debate in terms of the perspective advocated for the reader: the former sees the reader as an objectivist whose approach to the study of literature is wholly empirical and quantitative; whereas the latter sees the reader as a subjectivist whose approach to the study of literature is only partly phenomenological and intuitive (with another part being the physiological).<sup>45</sup>

### **Reader-Response Theory**

Given that so much has been said about the subjective experience, it seems only logical to here align phenomenology with Reader-Response Theory. In doing so, we might draw Housman, Richards, and Leavis into the twenty-first century, and allow for them to intervene in contemporary critical discussions, especially those which focus on the role of the reader in interpreting the literary text. In particular, the burgeoning fields within the neurohumanities that have begun to focus on a quantitative, scientific, empirical, systematic assessment of the neurophysiology of the nervous system during the reading of a literary text are suitable grounds

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<sup>45</sup> Snow uses 'literary intellectual' as a pejorative term. In that context, it referred to an unworthy elitist who often spoke from a self-imposed position of intellectual, moral, cultural, and literary superiority.

in which to recognise the continuing importance of the subjective experience.<sup>46</sup> But before I discuss the twenty-first century, it might be wise to begin with the twentieth century, so that we can trace some of the possible trajectories that Housman, Richards, and Leavis may take to reach us.

The reader is not an unbound agent, but rather he is an agent who exists within a particular set of unique historical, critical, political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances.<sup>47</sup> The phenomenological experience, then, is not merely either a physiological or intellectual condition, or a combination of the two, or any other rendering of additional qualifiers (psychological, moral, or ethical, for example). Rather, it incorporates elements of the sociohistorical context in which the reader exists, creating a deeply complex and exclusive sequence of private, internalised events.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the critical classification of these phenomenological experiences are themselves steeped in sociohistorical contexts; a physiological account, or an intellectual account, forms a part of the history of its own critical

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<sup>46</sup> Lisa Zunshine and D.H. Whalen are most instructive on the potential application of fMRI to describe the neurophysiological features of the brain. In fact, Zunshine is interested in the phenomenology of mind-reading (see *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, for example), although she has an evolutionary explanation for why we like reading and a neurophysiological explanation as to where ‘mind-reading’ happens in the brain.

<sup>47</sup> Etymologically, the *Oxford English Dictionary* states that the noun *reader* is formed in English from the derivation of the verb *read*, which itself is cognate with several Central European terms: *rēda* (Old Frisian; ‘to advise, to deliberate, to help’), *rāden* (Middle Dutch; ‘to advise, to suggest, to convince, to devise, to guess, to think’), *rādan* (Old Saxon; ‘to advise, to plan, to arrange’), *rātan*, *rāten* (Old High German; ‘to advise, to deliberate, to assist, to plot’), *rāpa* (Old Swedish; ‘to advise, to deliberate, to rule, to determine, to deal with, to interpret’), *rathæ* (Old Danish; ‘to advise, to deliberate, to rule, to comprehend’) – probably from the Sanskrit *rādh* (‘to succeed, accomplish’). In Old English and Middle English, *read* was attested with a wide range of senses, including ‘to advise’, ‘to deliberate’, ‘to think’. While cognates corresponding to ‘interpret’, ‘advise’, and ‘deliberate’ are found in other Germanic languages, the sense ‘to scan a written text’ is current only in the English ‘read’. *Read* is also associated with *rede*, which was a common English form of *read* prior to the sixteenth century, and which means ‘to rule, direct, or guard’ and ‘to guide or direct (a person) to or into a place, state, condition’. Etymologically, *read* is strongly connected with the ideas of deliberation, comprehension, advice, and rulings. *Reader*, in its most basic form, is an individual engaged in the deliberation and comprehension of the text, and who (from its association with *rede*) has the power to make a ruling with regard to the nature of the text.

<sup>48</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. In this book, Bourdieu argues that a person’s aesthetic taste is determined by the social, cultural, economic, and political elite, and that the historical period in which a person lives greatly determines the value that they will impose upon an artwork.

discipline. Housman's, Richards', and Leavis' theoretical approaches are each a part of their own tradition, and belong to a unique set of sociohistorical conditions, which means that the subjective conceptions of the role and function of the reader vary from critic to critic. The conception of the 'reader' in Housman's context is different to the conception of the 'reader' in Richards' context, and so on and so forth. In discussing the phenomenological experience, this leads to a curious point of interest: we need to understand that each critic belongs to a particular contextual standpoint (a point belaboured in Reader-Response criticism). The definition that we apply to the term 'reader', then, is not only a lexicological exercise, but it is also one which draws on the critical history of its use. We may contextualise their approaches according to several other famous Reader-Response Theorists who dominated the twentieth century. Below is a short analysis of these theorists, which should assist in recognising how Housman, Richards, and Leavis conceptualised the reader. And as these theorists are mostly writing after Housman, Richards, and Leavis, they afford for us a clearer, more decisive description of potential readers than advanced by those three critics.

In 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' (Chapters Five to Twelve from *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, first published in 1967), Hans Robert Jauss argues that the dispute between the Marxist and Formalist methods had left unresolved the problem of literary history, and that their methods 'conceive the *literary fact* within the closed circle of an aesthetics of production and of representation'.<sup>49</sup> Russian formalists (including literary critics and language critics, such as Boris Eichenbaum and Roman Jakobson) believed that literature was a special use of language that could be studied scientifically. Marxist methods considered writing to be dependent on a historical materialism, in which the economic base of a society determines the superstructure of ideas and form, including those found in literature. The problem with this, Jauss asserts, is that both the Marxist and Formalist methods exclude the notion of a text's reception by an audience, which is crucial in assessing literature's social function and aesthetic character.

In doing so, they deprive literature of a dimension which unalterably belongs to its aesthetic character as well as to its social function: its reception and impact. Reader, listener, and spectator – in short, the audience – play an extremely limited role in both literary theories. Orthodox Marxist aesthetics treats the reader – if at all – the same way as it does the author; it inquires about his social position or describes his place within the structure of the society. The formalist school needs the reader only as a perceiving subject

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<sup>49</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', in *New Literary History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Autumn, 1970), p. 7. Italics in original.

who follows the directions in the text in order to perceive its form or discover its techniques of procedure. It assumes that the reader has the theoretical knowledge of a philologist sufficiently versed in the tools of literature to be able to reflect on them. The Marxist school, on the other hand, actually equates the spontaneous experience of the reader with the scholarly interest of historical materialism, which seeks to discover relationships between the economic basis of production and the literary work as part of the intellectual superstructure.<sup>50</sup>

Jauss positions himself in opposition to the ‘widespread scepticism that doubts that an analysis of the aesthetic impact can approach the meaning of a work of art’, and argues that reception theory allows the critic to avoid the ‘pitfalls of psychology’ if it describes the reader’s experience from within the expectations of the historical framework.<sup>51</sup> According to Jauss, literary texts and their genres do not appear as ‘absolutely new’ creations; they draw on a reader’s predisposition to textual strategies, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit illusions. A reader’s expectations of a text are formed long before his acts of reading, which leads Jauss to argue for a ‘horizon of expectations’ within which different historical readers function – it is, essentially, a social horizon to which groups of readers of a historical period subscribe.<sup>52</sup>

A horizon of expectations provides a foundation from which the reader can determine the scope, alteration, and reproduction of the structure of the literary genre. This is akin to the idea advanced by Jonathan Culler in *Structuralist Poetics*, in which he suggests that this kind of phenomenon might be taken as part of the continuing development of new modes of analysis which, having passed through an initial naïve period of refinement and into a subsequent period of radical critique, may then emerge in revitalised forms. A reader’s expectations of genre and of a text’s meaning are perceived by Jauss to be social products of historical periods, and hence multiple readers can come to expect similar aesthetic readings when sharing social conditions:

The question of the subjectivity of the interpretation and the taste of different readers [...] can be asked significantly only after it has been decided which transsubjective horizon of understanding determines the meaning of the text.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

A 'transsubjective horizon' is simply a study of literature from a historical perspective in which the aesthetic experiences of readers are unified by their shared social situation. Different expectations are correlated to different historical periods. Jauss' thesis is therefore concerned with the historical relativism of the reader, and with how the reader's social conditions influence the reception and impact of the literary text. In this sense, there is no 'correct' or 'better' interpretation of literature that supersedes all other interpretations. There is only a history of literature within which the reader's situation informs his aesthetic experience of the text, and which leads the reader to a history-based meaning – that is, a 'meaning' as understood from the perspective of the social conditions of the historical period. This places the reader as the integral participant in the reading of the text.

In 'The Reading Process' (1972), Wolfgang Iser argues that the literary work must lie halfway between the text and the reader. The author's role is minimal. The reader produces the literary work, and it is during the reader's interaction with the text that literature finds its 'existence'.

The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text. [...] The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.<sup>54</sup>

The realisation of the text by the reader is what produces meaning. The text by itself does not contain meaning; to Iser, a text's meaning can only exist once it enters into the consciousness of the reader. So when Iser writes that 'the text only takes on life when it is realized', he is describing a symbiotic relationship between the text and the reader wherein meaning is the sum product of these two parts. Without the text, the reader cannot exist. The individual who would have become the reader still exists, but the reader as an agent engaged in the reading of a text does not. And without the reader, the text cannot be realised – it exists only as a physical object (similarly to how a tree or flower might exist), and signifies nothing more. Yet *konkretisation* must also include not only that which is written in the text, but also that which is unwritten. An

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<sup>54</sup> Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', in *New Literary History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (January 1972), p. 279.



absence of imagination renders the reader obsolete because the function of the reader is nil ('a text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself').<sup>55</sup> The text, then, is not just what is written on the page, but what is also left 'unwritten' and which takes its form through the reader's imagining.<sup>56</sup>

According to Iser, the time-sequence of reading experiences determines, in part, the nature of the reader's interpretation. 'Time-sequence' refers to the temporal process by which the reader engages the text. Some readings precede other readings, while other readings succeed some readings. This leads to the modification of future reading experiences, whereby a flow-on effect (the prior readings) influences the reader's interpretation of the text in each subsequent reading of the same text. The second or third reading may not be 'truer' than the first, but they are always unique and different from the first. An interpretation arises out of the linking of the different phases of the text together, which results in an anticipation and retrospection of the text. This, in turn, transforms the physical copy of the text into a virtual, phenomenological experience.

In every text there is a potential time-sequence which the reader must inevitably realize, as it is impossible to absorb even a short text in a single moment. Thus the reading process always involves viewing the text through a perspective that is continually on the move, linking up the different phases, and so constructing what we have called the virtual dimension. This dimension, of course, varies all the time we are reading. However, when we have finished the text, and read it again, clearly our extra knowledge will result in a different time-sequence; we shall tend to establish connections by referring to our awareness of what is to come, and so certain aspects of the text will assume a significance we did not attach to them on a first reading, while others will recede into the background.<sup>57</sup>

We can extend these principles further so as not to be restricted solely to the multiple readings of a single text. Instead, one might say that when studying a single text, it is prudent to take into consideration the accumulative effect that arises from all other readings (both of that text and of different texts). In this sense, the reader's conviction is not produced from a single reading of a single text, but it is rather the sum of all prior readings. But Iser is not arguing that a literary work's meaning arises from all other texts that precede it. Rather, Iser suggests that a reader's conviction is the product of the experiences that he has had during his application of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 285-6.

his literary methods to other, different literary texts. The more ingrained and unchallenged a reader's literary approach, the stronger the belief that it yields a correct interpretation. 'Literary methods' and theoretical approaches seem to be the source of conviction because they are the elements which contribute most to the practical interpretation of a literary work. If the reader is not encouraged to have a new outlook on his technique then he cannot grow as a reader, and he is at risk of repeating the same interpretational mistakes. This presumes that readers do not begin with the appropriate skill required to make insightful, accurate readings of a literary work.

Inspired by Laurence Sterne's remarks in *Tristram Shandy* about the literary text as an arena for both the author's and reader's imagination, Iser suggests that literature contains two interrelated components: the written text, and the unwritten text. The written text is the words that appear upon the page. It has an external form, and functions as a stimulus for the cognition of the reader from which is then produced a phenomenological experience. In contrast to this is the unwritten text, which has no physical form and instead stimulates the reader's creative participation and imagination. In his analysis of Virginia Woolf's study of Jane Austen (see Woolf's *The Common Reader*), Iser writes:

The unwritten aspects of apparently trivial scenes, and the unspoken dialogue within the 'turns and twists,' not only draw the reader into the action, but also lead him to shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situations, so that these take on a reality of their own. But as the reader's imagination animates these 'outlines,' they in turn will influence the effect of the written part of the text. Thus begins the whole dynamic process: the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy, but at the same time these implications, worked out by the reader's imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own.<sup>58</sup>

What the reader *thinks* a text means is a combination of both the written text (the external stimulus) and the unwritten text (the creative imagination of the reader in which he perceives, with conviction, an inherent meaning of the text). The 'outlines' which influence the written and unwritten texts are not self-sustaining or even inherently existing, but are rather imposed upon both types of text by the reader.

The reader, then, is an integral component of the theory of phenomenology because he (in the capacity of his agency and the sociohistorical conditions that surround him) shapes the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 280-1.

phenomenological experience. Phenomenology is not unbound, but rather it is bound to the reader; and the reader exists within a particular set of unique circumstances that influence and determine the nature of the reading experience.

One might argue that the more frequently an interpretation occurs across multiple readers, the more likely it will be considered correct by that reading group – ‘correct’ is here a contextual term, and refers foremost to the correctness of an interpretation within a community of readers, and not, for example, to an objective notion of a correct interpretation inherent to the text. Stanley Fish’s ‘interpretive communities’ is instructive in reader-based notions of ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’. However, as Cleanth Brooks’ notes in ‘The Primacy of the Reader’, this is itself problematic because if some readings are ‘*better* than others’ then it must be because of an external, non-subjective truth, or else ‘better’ would be a relativist term with no tangible, authoritative meaning:

Although I accept the fact of diversity, I must thus insist that some readings are *better* than others, and I trust that a nearly correct or adequate reading of the ‘Ode,’ or of any other poem, is not just a will-o’-the-wisp: if the search for a correct reading is really hopeless, I see little point in continuing literary studies at all; if there can be no proper reading, one would have to counsel each reader to do what he likes and let the devil take the hindmost; if there is no substantive difference that distinguishes A’s reading from B’s, we would seem to be reduced to a rather stale relativism.<sup>59</sup>

‘Correct’ and ‘incorrect’ become arbitrary terms established and defined by readers, as opposed to being established and defined by the linguistic elements of the literary work (as is the case in Hirsch’s *Validity in Interpretation*). As Brooks suggests, such an approach falls victim to the whims of the reading audience. An acceptable interpretation today may tomorrow be unacceptable, and vice versa. Of course, whether or not this is beneficial is entirely dependent upon the desires of the reader. Fish, in the chapter ‘What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?’ in *Is There a Text in this Class?*, suggests that an agreement amongst readers is a suitable indicator of the acceptability of an interpretation because ‘disagreements cannot be resolved by reference to the facts, because the facts emerge only in the context of some point of view [...] disagreements are not settled by the facts, but are the means by which the facts are

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<sup>59</sup> Cleanth Brooks, ‘The Primacy of the Reader’, in *The Missouri Review*, vol. 6, no. 2 (December 1983), p. 193. Italics in original.

settled'.<sup>60</sup> For Fish, literary facts are contextual; a fact is not an isolated object free from subjectivity, but is rather produced by the reader within his reading community.<sup>61</sup> Hence, for Fish, an inescapable bias exists within any interpretation of any literary work because we can never truly know the meaning of the author. This is an Anti-Intentionalist approach, in which the author's intentions are either successfully realised in the text, in which case the interpreter need not refer to them, or the author's intentions are not successfully realised, in which case reference to them is insufficient to justify a related claim about the work's meaning.<sup>62</sup> And due to the inescapability of this bias, any interpretation of any literary work is foremost a sole creation of the reader, as opposed to being formed through either the author or the text: 'What I am suggesting is that formal units are always a function of the interpretive model one brings to bear; they are not "in" the text, and I would make the same argument for intentions. Intention is no more embodied "in" the text than are formal units; rather an intention, like a formal unit, is made when perceptual or interpretive closure is hazarded; it is verified by an interpretive act, and I would add, it is not verifiable in any other way'.<sup>63</sup>

Of course, it would be unfortunate to focus so intensely on only the reader without saying anything about the author, and indeed, the three critics I discuss are highly relevant for contemporary debates about the author's role, function, and intention.<sup>64</sup> For the issue of

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<sup>60</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 338.

<sup>61</sup> This logic is not unique to the field of literary studies. It also appears in the field of historiography, for example. Edward Carr, a British twentieth-century historiographer, argued that the historian, like Fish's critic, determines which facts are important. Carr's famous example is Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon. Carr argues that thousands of people crossed the Rubicon, but only Caesar's specific instance is recorded in exceptional detail. So the historian has determined that Caesar's crossing is a historical fact while the crossings made by others are not worthy of the status. Carr still believed that facts existed in some objective form, but that they were foremost subject to the biases and arbitrations of the historian. See E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. R.W. Davies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 7-30. Carr discusses Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon on pp. 10-1.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Paisely Livingston, *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> Fish, 'Interpreting the *Variorum*', p. 478.

<sup>64</sup> The classic pieces in this well-known area include: William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 54, no. 3 (July 1946), William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Affective Fallacy', in *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 57, no. 1 (Winter 1949), E.D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (Chelsea: BookCrafters, 1967), Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of*

authorial intention is in constant tension with the issue of the reader's interpretation, and by seeing the reader-response tradition in a particular way (in a phenomenological and neurophysiological setting), we gain a new insight into the role and function of the author. For example, Housman's thesis – that the function of poetry is the transfusion of emotion, and that meaning is of the intellect but poetry is not – imagines the literary text as a kind of non-biological nervous system: the emotions and affective consequences experienced by the reader in this scenario become equated to the emotions and affective consequences felt by the poet, with the poem's text functioning as a type of surrogate nervous system. Hence the physiological reactions of the poet's nervous system are mirrored in the physiological reactions of the reader's nervous system; ergo the reader's emotions and physical sensations are the same emotions and physical sensations that were initially experienced by the poet. By discussing the reader's phenomenological experience, and its relation to neurophysiological research, we draw into the discussion the author's role in producing these experiences, and deepen our understanding of the relationship between author, text, and reader – a topic that will be further addressed in Chapter Four.

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*Poetry* (London: Methuen & Co., 1968), Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976), Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), Brooks' 'The Primacy of the Reader', and Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

## Chapter One

### A.E. Housman

#### ‘Meaning is of the Intellect, Poetry is Not’

On 9 May 1933, the elderly poet-scholar Housman delivered one of his final public lectures at the University of Cambridge as a part of the prestigious Leslie Stephen Lecture series.<sup>1</sup> Entitled *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, it set out to establish the physiological nature of reading and writing of verse, its central thesis being that ‘meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not’.<sup>2</sup> Aged seventy-four at the time, Housman was seen by I.A. Richards, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot as an ancient relic whose physical approach to the study of poetry was outdated and misinformed.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite this denigration, Housman’s lecture demonstrated a compelling insight into the duality of the mind and body, in which he argued that the peculiar function of poetry is not to transmit thought, but to transfuse emotion.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter discusses a number of topics: Housman’s theory of verse as a physiological construct; the prioritisation of emotion over the intellect in the reading and writing of verse; the historical roots central to the development of Housman’s theory of verse (specifically his

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Housman’s life, see Martin Blocksidge’s *A.E. Housman: A Single Life*.

<sup>2</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ezra Pound’s *ABC of Reading* (1934) was published a year after Housman’s *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, and although not written in response to Housman’s lecture, it nevertheless provides evidence of the type of climate in which these critics operated. ‘We live in an age of science and of abundance,’ Pound begins, before then delving into the famous anecdote ‘Parable of the Sunfish’ in which he advocates for an empirical approach to the study of art. Without empiricism, we recede into ‘a region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction’ in which our discussion becomes increasingly removed from concrete ideas. Relative to Housman’s notion that poetry appeals to something latent and obscure (an animalistic impulse), there existed at the time of Housman’s lecture a significant disparity between scientific literary thinking and emotional literary thinking. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. 17, 19. Similarly, Richards’ *Practical Criticism* was composed under the belief that an empirical approach is best suited to the generation of inductive data with which to assess and analyse the reading habits of student readers (Richard Aldington’s *A.E. Housman and W.B. Yeats: Two Lectures*, p. 11, provides an anecdotal account of Richards’ displeasure with Housman’s lecture, claiming that it stifled the progress of an empirical theory of the study and reading of poetry). And Eliot, as I shall discuss later in this chapter, believed that Housman’s neglect of his contemporaries produced an isolated and unconnected comprehension of poetry (see Eliot’s ‘Housman on Poetry’).

<sup>4</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 12.

allusions to David Hartley's *Observations on Man* and to Newtonian theory of vibratory motion); the relationship of these historical roots to questions of authorial intention and physiology; and how Housman's approach leads to a further comparison with others in his context (first with T.S. Eliot and then later I.A. Richards). These evaluations might be best summarised under the notion of *how does poetry exert its influence over the reader?* For Housman, poetry's function is foremost a 'transfusion' of emotion from poet to text to reader – 'meaning', as Housman argues, is less important than the feelings elicited by the poem because poetry's nature is found primarily in its physical manifestation.<sup>5</sup> As I shall show, the perceived distinction between Housman and Richards is the product of a contextual issue inherent to their period, as opposed to a fundamental difference in their respective theses. Both Housman and Richards argue two different sides of the same coin: Housman is physiological, Richards is intellectual and psychological. To them, these spheres appeared unrelated and separate: a dualist conception of the body and mind was most predominate. But today this is recognised as a fallacy, for the monist conception (backed by twenty-first-century neuroscientific research) suggests that the body and the mind are not merely interrelated, but are the same object. The debate surrounding Housman and Richards is therefore important because it demonstrates that both their approaches are required to answer the prior posed question: how does poetry exert its influence over the reader? The answer being: both equally via physiological and intellectual processes.

Housman believed that there is a limit to the intellectual comprehension (both in reading and writing) of poetry: 'That the intellect is not the fount of poetry, that it may actually hinder its production, and that it cannot even be trusted to recognise poetry when produced, is best seen in the case of Smart'.<sup>6</sup> By referring to the eighteenth-century English poet, Christopher Smart, whom he defines alongside William Collins, William Cowper, and William Blake as 'madmen', Housman intended to demonstrate that a sound mind is not necessary to produce excellent, high-quality verse: 'And what other characteristic had these four in common? They were mad. Remember Plato: "He who without the Muses' madness in his soul comes knocking at the door of poesy and thinks that art will make him anything fit to be called a poet, finds that the poetry which he indites in his sober senses is beaten hollow by the poetry of madmen"'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40.

For Housman, these poets demonstrate that poetry resides elsewhere within the body, somewhere beyond the intelligent mind, in a more primitive and impulsive form. It is from this basis that Housman claims that the function of poetry might be better understood through an appreciation of its affective elements.

One might query the selection of one short late work, given the breadth of Housman's writings. It is true that his classical scholarship on Manilius, Sophocles, and Aeschylus is not merely a remarkable effort of academic rigour and philological discovery, but also contains elements of his emotional and, to a degree, empathetic approach to reading. In 'On Certain Corruptions in *Persae* of Aeschylus', he rectifies several corruptions in the translation and reproduction of the original Greek text based on his keen observations of the development of the character's feelings.<sup>8</sup> His notes on Latin poets reveals a particular curiosity about the 'sense' of the verse (a term which appears in many of his other works on classical scholarship, and which is occasionally contrasted against the term 'nonsense') – not strictly the sense of meaning, but something which also incorporates the sense of correctness through feeling.<sup>9</sup> And his writings on textual criticism often request the presence of moral qualities in philology: 'I do not desire to exclude morality from textual criticism; I wish indeed that some moral qualities were commoner in textual criticism than they are'.<sup>10</sup> However, many of these texts merely offer us a manifestation of Housman's principles, and are unfortunately without further intellectual development. *The Name and Nature of Poetry* provides a detailed account of not merely the outline of these principles, but the reasoning behind their importance. Although an imperfect and incomplete expression of his critical theory (though more complete than what is revealed in his classical scholarship), *The Name and Nature of Poetry* provides insight into the private

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Housman concludes 'On Certain Corruptions in the *Persae* of Aeschylus' with a brief analysis of the oath exchange between Pylades and Iphigenia, which ends with him claiming that 'Pylades cannot without absurdity beg of Iphigenia that if the letter is lost his oath shall not be *performed*; that is *ex hypothesi* certain. What he must ask is that his oath shall not be *considered incumbent on him to perform*, that he shall be held guiltless though he does not perform it'. A.E. Housman, 'On Certain Corruptions in the *Persae* of Aeschylus', in *The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman: Volume 1, 1882-1897*, eds. J. Diggle, and F.R.D. Goodyear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 20. Italics in original.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see *The Classical Papers of A.E. Housman*: 'Notes on Latin Poets [I]' (pp. 106-9), 'On Soph. Electr. 564, and Eur. I.T. 15 and 35' (pp. 10-3), 'Persius III, 43' (pp. 110-1), and 'Conjectural Emendations in the *Medea*' (pp. 112-9).

<sup>10</sup> A.E. Housman, 'The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism', in *Proceedings of the Classical Association*, vo. 18 (1921), p. 76.



cognitive processes of the poet-scholar during both his creation of verse and his reading of poetry. The affective response of the body was a central focus for Housman, and the anecdotal narration of his personal encounters with verse serve to demonstrate his understanding of how poetry should function as an emotional conduit for feelings and physiological sensations. An intellectual interpretation (or, in another sense, an intellectual paraphrase) has its limits in what it can uncover about a poem. For example, it does not fully account for the strictly physiological response. For Housman, there exists an element in poetry that is a deep unequivocal sensation more akin to an animalistic impulse than to the intellectual rigour of the academic, and he ‘could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat, but that I thought we both recognised the object by the symptoms which it provokes in us’.<sup>11</sup>

Housman’s detractors (including T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and I.A. Richards) viewed him as an archaic and obsolete figure, whose scholarly and critical approach to poetry was not only misinformed, but harkened to what they perceived to be an out-of-date methodology. Eliot’s review of Housman’s lecture in *The Criterion*, for example, claimed that Housman had ‘naughtily neglected to take cognizance of current critical theories’.<sup>12</sup> This response echoes Richards’ and Pound’s criticisms of Housman, in which they claimed that Housman was so ignorant of then-contemporary critical theory (specifically of an empirical and scientific nature) that it devalued anything he might have to say about poetry.<sup>13</sup> Thus Housman’s thesis seemed to suggest a complete lack of understanding of the important advancements in the empirical theory of poetry, with Ezra Pound going so far as to issue a damning report on how out of touch the aged Housman was: ‘During the twenty-five years wherein my acquaintance with letters has been anything but casual and my observance of English production far from disinterested, I have barged into no single indication that Mr. Housman was aware of the world of my contemporaries’.<sup>14</sup> Pound, who was forty eight at the time of Housman’s *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, attempted to undermine Housman’s authority through the claim that Housman was not intellectually acquainted with the ‘world of my contemporaries’. Pound, by contrast,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Housman on Poetry’, *The Criterion*, vol. 33 (1933), p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> For Richards’ criticism of Housman, see Richard Aldington’s *A.E. Housman and W.B. Yeats: Two Lectures* (1973), p. 11. According to Aldington, Richards left Housman’s lecture muttering ‘this has put us back ten years’.

<sup>14</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Mr. Housman at Little Bethel’, in *Criterion*, vol. 13 (January 1934), p. 216.

suggested that he himself, with his ‘anything but casual’ observance of English production, was more capable of understanding the true trajectory and importance of then-contemporary literary studies. This dispute resulted in a deep distrust of Housman amongst Richards and Pound, and they were suspicious of a study of poetry which either neglected scientific empiricisms or which attempted to define poetry through obscure feelings, latent and embryonic ideas, and romanticisations. And in their eyes, that is exactly what *The Name and Nature of Poetry* attempted to do: not only to justify, but to elevate the animalistic, emotional impulses of the human body via obscure, self-fulfilling anecdotes.

The value in revisiting Housman is found in his phenomenological account of the physiological reaction to poetry. The literary expressions that Housman uses to describe his physical sensations, and how he then correlates them to specific emotional states, provide a new perspective on the internal cognitive renderings of poetry’s elicitations: poetic experiences are phenomenological, which (due to its inherent nature) draws on both an intellectual and a physiological process. Although Housman is homing in on his physical ‘symptoms’, the cognitive processes by which he is able to enunciate his experience are distinctly intellectual – or, rather, the physiological *is*, as the monist might assert, intellectual, and vice versa. Although modern science has not entirely solved the dualism problems faced by Housman and Richards, the continually decreasing gap between the intellectual and the physiological requires a discussion on how we internalise these experiences.

### **A.E. Housman**

The exact origin of Housman’s thesis (‘meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not’) is difficult to place. Born in 1859, he enjoyed academic success during his younger years and won scholarships to King Edward VI Grammar School, and later to St. John’s College, Oxford, where he received a First Class in classical Greek and Latin language and literature.<sup>15</sup> However, in 1881 he failed to obtain a passing grade in his final examinations on ancient history and philosophy; he left Oxford without a degree. This has been attributed to several reasons: arrogance, a religious crisis (he became an atheist at the age of twenty one, a year before he failed), or a romantic rupture with his greatest friend and rumoured lover, Moses John Jackson

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<sup>15</sup> E. Christian Kopff, ‘Conservatism and Creativity in A.E. Housman’, in *Modern Age*, vol. 47, no. 3 (Summer 2005), p. 229.

(whom he called, in private, his dear ‘Mo’).<sup>16</sup> Housman shared lodgings with Moses and Alfred Pollard, but whereas Housman and Pollard were studious Classical scholars, Moses was a Science scholar and competent sportsman. For a decade after his academic failure, Housman worked at the Patent Office by day, while at night he wrote articles for classical journals – he was rewarded for his efforts in 1892, when he was elected to the Chair of Latin at University College, London. He was somewhat an eccentric (he often tore up his lectures, page by page, in front of his students), with an austere outward appearance that belied his true emotions beneath. Often the subject of several unwanted efforts to lionise him as a poet, he was on his most defensive when dealing with sycophants, and it was his habit to keep them at a distance by means fair or foul.<sup>17</sup> His association with the Literary Society at University College London produced at least six (somewhat satirical) lectures on an array of topics, including the Spasmodic School, Erasmus Darwin, Robert Burns, Tennyson, Swinburne, and Matthew Arnold.<sup>18</sup> He had a particular soft spot for Arnold, whom he ranked highly as both a critic and a poet, and whom he grouped with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. As a Professor of Latin at University College London and then later Cambridge, he produced authoritative works on the Roman poets Manilius, Juvenal, and Lucan. Also a frequent contributor to *The Classical Quarterly*, his scholarly work encompassed a range of topics, including prosody, linguistics, etymology, lyricism, and translations.<sup>19</sup>

Housman’s poetry was itself notable for covering death, love and romance, and patriotism. The most famous, *A Shropshire Lad* (a collection of sixty-three poems published in its entirety in 1896), received a lukewarm response upon its initial publication, but gained a broader, more receptive audience during the Great War. Housman attributed this to several factors, including a popularity amongst English soldiers. In a personal letter to Moses Jackson, Housman reveals a hint of pride for the increasing success of *A Shropshire Lad* (although his tone is more tongue-in-cheek than pure boastfulness):

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<sup>16</sup> Housman’s letters to Moses, in A.E. Housman, *The Letters of A.E. Housman*, ed. Archie Burnett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 516.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Blocksidge, ‘Chapter Five: Out of the Gutter’, in *A.E. Housman: A Single Life* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2016), p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> P.G. Naiditch, *A.E. Housman at University College, London: The Election in 1892* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), p. 144.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Housman’s ‘Attamen and Ovid Her.’, ‘Notes on *Thebais* of Statius’, ‘Lvciliana’, and ‘Prosody and Method’ in *The Classical Quarterly*.

The cheerful and exhilarating tone of my verse is so notorious that I feel sure it will do you more good than the doctors; though you do not know, and there are no means of driving the knowledge into your thick head, what a bloody good poetry I am. In order to intimidate you and repress your insolence I am enclosing the review and the leader which the *Times* devoted to the subject. I may also inform you that the copy of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of my other immortal work which I gave you is now worth £8 or more if you have kept it at all clean; and that the average annual sale is over 3000 copies. This is largely due to the war, because so many soldiers, including at least one V.C., carried it in their pockets, and thus others got to know of it and bought it when they came home. But it does not seem to stop bullets as the Bible does when carried in the pocket, so I have been disappointed of that advertisement, probably through the jealousy of the Holy Ghost.<sup>20</sup>

Even within Housman's casual letters, there is a physiological dimension: 'The cheerful and exhilarating tone of my verse is so notorious that I feel sure it will do you more good than the doctors'. For Housman, verse is not simply something which is to be read and thought about, but something which penetrates deep inside the body. With the success of *A Shropshire Lad*, Housman's reputation as a poet was solidified amongst his readers. But beginning in the 1930s, a selection of his followers began to consider Housman's poetry an archaic expression of a bygone era.<sup>21</sup> This is largely due to Housman's attempt to write verse of a similar nature as that which he had published during the Great War.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, he was seen as failing to capture the present mood of the country: his poems were filled with sentiments that were no longer applicable to the then-modern reader. And so Housman's poetry was perceived to occupy the past, whereas other artists and critics (such as Richards and Pound) saw themselves as attempting to break new ground with their scientific ideas and empirical theories for the study and writing of verse.

A clue to the division between Housman and Richards may be found in Housman's appreciation of Matthew Arnold. Arnold's 'touchstones' were salient examples of concentrated poetry, in which the lines of verse could be detached from their contexts and yet still be the

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<sup>20</sup> A.E. Housman, 'To Moses Jackson', *The Letters of A.E. Housman*, pp. 516-7. When Housman writes of 'the copy of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of my other immortal work which I gave you', he is referring to an inscribed copy of the first edition of *A Shropshire Lad* which he had presented to Jackson on its publication in 1896. This copy was sold at Sotheby's on 6 November 2001 for £48,500.

<sup>21</sup> Clarence Lindsay, 'A.E. Housman's Silly Lad: The Loss of Romantic Consolation', in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Fall, 1999), p. 349.

<sup>22</sup> Cyril Connolly, 'A.E. Housman: A Controversy', in *The Condemned Playground, Essays: 1927-1944* (London: Routledge, 1945), pp. 47-9.

purest form of poetry.<sup>23</sup> Whereas Richards argued that the distinction between good and bad poetry could be inculcated through the intense training of the mind, both Arnold and Housman considered poetry to be recognised by an unspoken, unintellectual intuitiveness:

Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. *Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside it.*<sup>24</sup>

One might anticipate that Arnold's 'touchstones' are proof of Richards' inculcation of poetry. However, Arnold is suggesting that great poetry is recognised, not through a systematic application of rules, regulations, and techniques, but rather by holding it up to poetry already known to be great, and assessing whether the tested poetry produces a sensation similar to the great poetry. Similarly, Housman believed that only a minority of readers have an intuitive ear for poetry. And this manifests itself in a physical sensation deep within the pit of their bodies (a deep-seated, almost animalistic impulse), which originates from years of experience, unconscious knowledge, and a comprehensive understanding of emotion. Its appreciation, according to Housman, is not something that can be learnt or acquired by a reader, but something which lies dormant within certain individuals; others, the majority, are simply without this ability to be as receptive of poetry. Housman's 'touchstone', then, is not simply an indicator as to which examples of verse are 'good' and which are 'bad', but rather functions also as a motivator to bring forth the 'obscure and latent' feelings that may lie dormant within a reader. If the most powerful and purest forms of verse cannot do this in a reader then Housman might be inclined to judge them as having no ear for poetry.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', in *Essays in Criticism* (New York: A.L. Burt, 1865), p. 287.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. My italics.

<sup>25</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, pp. 11, 46.

## David Hartley's *Observations on Man*, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

A potential source of inspiration for Housman's thesis comes from the English philosopher David Hartley's *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (1749). In particular, Housman's assertion that the function of poetry is the transfusion of emotion is most likely influenced, through the intermediary of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, by Hartley's theory of vibratory motion and the Associationist school of psychology: 'I think that to transfuse emotion – not to transmit thought but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer – is the peculiar function of poetry'.<sup>26</sup>

Housman's use of the word 'vibration' recalls David Hartley's discussion on Sir Isaac Newton's principle of motion by attraction and repulsion, in the capacity that a *sensation* causes a minute *vibration*.<sup>27</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Housman directly read Hartley – any such claim would be speculative and rely foremost on the similarities in language ('vibration'), which are themselves by no means a part of a vocabulary special to only Hartley. There appears to be no reference to Hartley in Housman's poems, lectures, classical scholarship, or private letters. However, a strong case may be made on the basis of Housman's familiarity with Coleridge. Coleridge was initially an ardent supporter of Hartley's system wherein the transcendent (God), the external (nature), and the internal (man) are collapsed, forming a single

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<sup>26</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 12. Another potential intermediary is William Wordsworth, of whom Housman was clearly aware (Housman concludes *The Name and Nature of Poetry* with a reference to Wordsworth's ideas about poetry, p. 48). Wordsworth's interest in psychology (he wrote, in the Prospectus to *The Excursion*, that 'the Mind of Man' was 'My haunt, and the main region of my song', p. xii) was potentially influenced by Hartley's *Observations on Man* during the late 1790s, and he wrote in a private letter in 1808 that Hartley was among the 'men of real power, who go before their age' (p. 266). But as John Hayden acknowledges, Wordsworth's dependence on Hartleyan systems is often exaggerated. And there is particular difficulty in determining whether Wordsworth's psychological interests were based on medical and psychological theory or on his own personal musings. For the purpose of this section, Coleridge provides a much clearer and obvious intermediary. William Wordsworth, 'Preface', in *The Excursion: A Poem* (London: Edward Moxon, 1853), p. xii. William Wordsworth to Richard Sharp (September 27, 1808), *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, arranged and edited by Ernest de Selincourt, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised by Mary Moorman, Vol. II, *The Middle Years, Part 1, 1806-1811* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 266. See also John Hayden, 'Wordsworth, Hartley, and the Revisionists', in *Studies in Philology*, vol. 81, no. 1 (January 1984), pp. 94-5ff.

<sup>27</sup> David Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), pp. 20-1.

coherent whole.<sup>28</sup> As Archie Burnett observes, Housman occasionally rewrote (not in parody, but more in the sense of revision or adaptation) lines of verse written by other poets: Rudyard Kipling's *Heriot's Ford in Songs from Books*, Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.<sup>29</sup> So Housman was familiar with Coleridge's poetry. The implication is thus: we know from Housman's private letters that he read Coleridge's poetry (specifically *Rime*); *Rime* was written during a period in which Coleridge was known to have admired Hartley's work; it is quite possible, then, that certain poetic elements within *Rime* subtly, or directly, convey Hartley's principles; Housman, by reading *Rime*, and given his reputation as an exceptional private scholar, would most probably have researched the embryonic ideas that inspired Coleridge's versification.<sup>30</sup> There is therefore good reason to believe that Housman, if he did not read Hartley, became familiar with his ideas and vocabulary through Coleridge, who was one of Hartley's major populariser.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Coleridge named his first son after David Hartley (Hartley Coleridge, 1796-1849, who was a poet and biographer). It was some time after this and before the publication of *Biographia Literaria* in 1817 that Coleridge changed his opinion of Hartley. See Andrew Keanie, *Hartley Coleridge: A Reassessment of His Life and Work* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 25. Coleridge also wrote extensively about Hartley's doctrine of vibrations and law of Association in *Biographia Literaria*: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Chapter 5: On the Law of Association – Its History Traced from Aristotle to Hartley', in *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 67ff.

<sup>29</sup> Archie Burnett, 'Poetical Emendations and Improvisations by A.E. Housman', in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 36, no. 3 (Fall 1998), pp. 289-91. Burnett composed the 2007 edition of Housman's letters (*The Letters of A.E. Housman*), which should not be confused with Henry Maas' *The Letters of A.E. Housman* (1971).

<sup>30</sup> Several articles and book chapters are devoted to the unravelling of Hartley's influence on Coleridge's poetry. For example, Alexandra Neel argues that Coleridge used 'early photographic experiments, and particularly the metaphor of the camera obscura, to critique David Hartley's theory of association'. From this, Neel explores how Coleridge defines associationism in *Biographia Literaria*, and how Coleridge 'punning on the homonym I/eye, posits the Ancient Mariner as a kind of poetic dramatization of the Hartleian passive agent'. Alexandra Neel, "'A Something-Nothing out of its Very Contrary": The Photography of Coleridge', in *Victorian Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Winter 2007), p. 208. See also M.J.-M. Somnez, 'Archaisms in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"', in *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, vol. 9 (December 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Of course, the theoretical development of Hartley's principles extends far beyond Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Housman. Joseph Priestley, perhaps one of the more influential philosophers to deal with Hartley (the others being Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill), published an abridgment of *Observations on Man*, with the intent of making Hartley's theory of the human mind better known: 'he [Priestley] believed that Hartley's book would have been more widely read and the ideas accepted, had Hartley not clogged his work "with a

Hartley's idea of 'vibrations' arises from Newton's theory of vibratory motion:

Now that some powers of attraction or repulsion, or rather of both at different distances, reside in the small particles of the medullary substance, can scarce be doubted after so many instances and evidences, as Sir Isaac Newton had produced, of attractive and repulsive powers in the small particles of various bodies, *Optics, Query 31*, meaning, as he does, by attraction and repulsion, a mere mathematical tendency to approach and recede, be the cause what it will, impulse, pressure, an unknown one, or no physical cause at all, but the immediate agency of the Deity. [...] And thus we seem to approach to all that is probable in the received doctrines concerning the nervous fluid, and the animal spirits, supported to be either the same or different things, and all the arguments which *Boerhaave* has brought for his hypothesis, of a glandular secretion of a very subtle active fluid in the brain, may be accommodated to the *Newtonian* hypothesis of vibrations.<sup>32</sup>

Considered a revolutionary work in the eighteenth century, *Observations on Man* asserted a direct connection between nature, the physiology of the body, and the consciousness of a person. In doing so, Hartley argued that the distinction between God, nature, and man was non-existent: God is nature, man is not apart from nature because his body is itself natural, and so God is a part of man. However, a degree of caution was carried over from Newton to Hartley, whereby neither Newton nor Hartley expressly committed themselves to the 'causation' of God; it is merely listed, both in Newton's *Optiks* and Hartley's *Observation on Man* as a possible alternative cause.<sup>33</sup>

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whole system of moral and religious knowledge" and with a mass of anatomical disquisitions concerning the function of vibrations in the nerves[...]. Although Priestley's deletions proved popular enough, it was his addition of a short, three-page section near the conclusion of *Observations* that radically altered the logical end to Hartley's writings on 'free will' – for Hartley, all sensations, emotions, and ideas are reducible to vibrations in the nerves, and so man cannot initiate vibrations but may only partake in an ongoing and unending chain of events which sprung forth from God Himself. Priestley's alterations (and the new addition to the conclusion), though, focus Hartley's conclusion towards mysticism and self-annihilation, wherein man has not the free will to choose for himself any set of action, and hence this, for Priestley, accelerates man towards a paradisiacal state, the end result being a new type of mysticism that would readmit men to 'the tree of life' (an almost cyclical relation with life and death, and with God and nature). Ronald B. Hatch, 'Joseph Priestley: An Addition to Hartley's *Observations*', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 36, no. 3 (July, 1975), pp. 548, 550.

<sup>32</sup> Hartley, *Observations on Man*, pp. 20-1. Italics in original.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on the issue of the 'immediate agency' of God, see Richard C. Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 384.



The physiology of the body, specifically the nervous system, was considered by Hartley to provide an almost flawless flow from the external to the internal; from nature to body to consciousness. As a practising physician and psychologist, Hartley recognised the significance of the human brain in the process of thought and intellect. He acknowledged that if the brain were to function within its environment then it would require the ability to ‘feel’ its surroundings – to ‘sense’ the vibrations that occur in nature. The nervous system begins and ends with the brain, from which physiological symptoms are discerned and interpreted by the consciousness of the individual, and from which the psychology of the person then arises. Hence *Observations of Man* is an attempt to combine the psychological theory of the Association of Ideas with a physiological, empirical, scientific account of the neurological and cognitive processes of the brain, and to recognise the role that the nervous system plays in transfusing external, natural occurrences through the body and into the brain so that it might be realised by the consciousness of the individual.

Drawing on Isaac Newton’s mathematical principle of vibratory motion and hypothesis of ‘aether’, Hartley created a doctrine of association in which the core principle was the sensation of vibrations. For Newton, ‘vibratory motion’ described the interaction between different types of bodies, from planets to particles to the inner essence of a person.<sup>34</sup> The Three Laws of Motion, for example, resulted from Newton’s work on a ‘Spirit’ (gravity) which permeated all objects, and demonstrated how the natural world was not a set of isolated occurrences. Rather, every natural thing was connected and followed an inherent, natural logic; a kind of entropic decay where future events are associated with prior events, and their coming into existence is predicated on the occurrence of that prior event. ‘Aether’ is a now-disproven concept in which space is saturated with an invisible material. This material was used to account for the flow of light in a vacuum and the perceived elasticity of gravity. For Hartley, vibratory motion was not merely a means by which the natural environment elicited a physiological response. It was a

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<sup>34</sup> Isaac Newton, *Newton’s Principia: The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Motte (New York: Daniel Adee, 1846), p. 507: ‘And now we might add something concerning a certain most subtle Spirit which pervades and lies hid in all gross bodies; by the force and action of which Spirit the particles of bodies mutually attract one another at near distances, and cohere, if contiguous; and electric bodies operate to greater distances, as well repelling as attracting the neighbouring corpuscles; and light is emitted, reflected, refracted, inflects, and heats bodies; and all sensation is excited, and the members of animal bodies move at the command of the will, namely, by the vibrations of this Spirit, mutually propagated along the solid filaments of the nerves, from outward organs of sense to the brain, and from the brain into the muscles’.

process in which the natural environment began a sequence of events that then became the intellectual thoughts of individual. This meant that nature, for Hartley, was a part of the psychological process which produced Associationist acts of thought:

Sensation causes vibration, setting in motion the infinitesimal particles making up the solid substance of the nerves. These particles move with amazing ease and rapidly through the medium of that subtle fluid called in Newtonian physics the 'aether'. Thus vibratory motion passes a sensation along the nerve instantly to the medullary particles of the nerve-endings at appropriate locations within the brain. Having reached the brain, the single sensation is realized in the consciousness and remains as a 'vestige' of itself for a short time. Or, if the vestige is reinforced by repetition of the sensation, it becomes a 'simple idea' remaining permanently to help form 'complex ideas' by association. The repeated sensation produces a miniature idea of itself, a 'vibratiuncle,' which is intellectual by nature rather than sensible, or 'preternatural' instead of 'natural'. By the process of association, the miniature ideas of any given 'synchronous' or 'successive' sensations, lodged contiguous in the brain substance, exhibit a peculiar inherent power to recall one another when one of them is excited. And further, these miniatures may cluster into compounds, and the compounds may be further compounded, until that 'vast variety of complex ideas, which pass under the name of ideas of reflection, and intellectual ideas,' has been built up in the individual consciousness. Hartley concludes that all our most abstract and even spiritual ideas are reducible to 'the simple ideas of sensation' and are traceable ultimately to gross sense experiences.<sup>35</sup>

For Hartley, the mind was merely a theatre, or at best a passive spectator, of the mechanical processes of the natural world; in this sense, the intellect was not truly free, but it was instead determined by and reactive to external vibratory motions. Hartley's doctrine of vibrations fell from favour after the publication of the Michelson-Morley experiment in 1887, which disproved the existence of the Newtonian aether, thus dismantling a major component of Hartley's theory.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, certain elements of Hartley's theory persisted within the literary field in the form of Coleridge's writings.

Coleridge is not the sole connector between Hartley and Housman. Other important developments of the nineteenth century undoubtedly contributed to the refinement of these theoretical approaches, especially those which sought to cultivate physiological theories pertaining to the reader's experience: Nicholas Dames' *The Physiology of the Novel*, for

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<sup>35</sup> Theodore L. Huguelet, introduction to *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and His Expectations*, by David Hartley (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), pp. ix-x.

<sup>36</sup> Albert A. Michelson, and Edward W. Morley, 'On the Relative Motion of the Earth and the Luminiferous Ether', in *American Journal of Science*, vol. 34, no. 203 (November 1887), pp. 333-45.

example, recognises the significance of empirical, physiological approaches during the Victorian era. But Coleridge's interest in Hartley is an important indicator of the early importance of physiology on the study of poetry. Coleridge believed that Hartley provided scientific evidence for the unification of the poet with his environment; poetry, then, is an extension of this unification. Housman's understanding of the function of poetry is partly indebted to Coleridge's conception of poetry under Hartley's system as an extension of this unification. The reader, in reading poetry, is not faced with an Aristotelian idea of mimesis (a *copy* of nature), but with a poetic manifestation of nature itself. The distinction here is subtle: a 'copy' is a degree away from the reality; a 'poetic manifestation' is of the exact same reality as the event that inspired its creation. We can observe this in Coleridge's 'Religious Musings' (1794), a poem published in *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796), in which he reveals Hartley's impact, not just in the field of poetry, but in the fields of science, psychology, and philosophy. Hartley's tracing of the mental processes from sensation to association to self-annihilation gave Coleridge and his contemporaries (in the 1790s) a scientific foundation from which to approach the operation of poetry and poetry's relation to its environment.

From Hope and firmer Faith to perfect Love  
 Attracted and absorbed: and centered there  
 God only to behold, and know, and feel,  
 Till exclusive consciousness of God  
 All self-annihilated it shall make  
 God its Identity: God all in all!  
 We and our Father one!<sup>37</sup>

In 'Religious Musings', these lines of verse are accompanied by a footnote in which Coleridge praises the efforts of Hartley in freeing poetry from the 'charge of Mysticism': 'See this *demonstrated* by Hartley, vol. 1, p. 114, and vol. 2, p. 329. See it likewise proved, and freed from the charge of Mysticism, by Pistorius in his Notes and Additions to part second of Hartley on Man, Addition the 18<sup>th</sup>, the 653<sup>rd</sup> page of the third volume of Hartley, Octavo Edition. *Note* to line 44, 1797'.<sup>38</sup> Coleridge's emphasis on '*demonstrated*' indicates that Hartley's observations were revolutionary in how man might associate himself with God's 'paradise'

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<sup>37</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Religious Musings', in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E.H. Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), pp. 110-1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110. Italics in original.

(the natural world).<sup>39</sup> Hartley's demonstration of the scientific connection between the external environment and the man's internal brain provides, according to Coleridge, a more thorough understanding of man's direct relationship with God. In terms of the spirituality of man, it moves him closer to God Himself, in which the degrees of separation between God, His 'paradise', and man's body are collapsed upon each other – Hartley's revelations no longer put man as a separate entity within God's paradise, but as an actual part of it. 'God its Identity: God all in all! We and our Father one!', for example, reveals Coleridge's logic: God is Nature, Nature is Man, therefore God is in Man, and 'We and our Father one!'. If the natural world (that which is external to man) is the product of God, and it is hence His 'paradise', then the demonstration of man's intimate and physiological association with nature brings us, according to Coleridge, closer to God. For this, Coleridge elevates Hartley to a status befitting the great scientists of the era.

The mighty Dead  
 Rise to new Life, whoe'er from earliest time  
 With conscious zeal had urged Love's wondrous plan,  
 Coadjutors of God. To Milton's trump  
 The high groves of the renovated Earth  
 Unbosom their glad echoes: inly hushed,  
 Adoring Newton his serener eye  
 Raises to heaven: and he of mortal kind  
 Wisest, he [David Hartley] first who marked the ideal tribes  
 Up the fine fibres through the sentient brain.  
 Lo! Priestley there, patriot, and saint, and sage,  
 Him, full of years, from his loved native land  
 Statesmen blood-stained and priests idolatrous  
 By dark lies maddening the blind multitude  
 Drove him vain hate. Calm, pitying he tired,

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<sup>39</sup> For Coleridge's verse on 'paradise', see *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, p. 122, lines 345-51:

When in some hour of solemn jubilee  
 The massy gates of Paradise are thrown  
 Wide open, and forth come in fragments wild  
 Sweet echoes of unearthly melodies,  
 And odours snatched from the beds of Amaranth,  
 And they, that from the crystal river of life  
 Spring up on freshened wing, ambrosial gales!  
 The favoured good man in his lonely walk  
 Perceives them, and his silent spirit drinks  
 Strange bliss which he shall recognise in heaven.

And must expectant on these promised years.<sup>40</sup>

Coleridge places Hartley between Newton and Priestley. For Coleridge, the importance of these three as the ‘Coadjutors of God’ is in their capacities for discerning man’s relationship to his environment, and, by extension, to God Himself. The spirit of man is a part of nature, and is shaped and formed by its Laws, but the fundamental, scientific underpinnings which provide a direct connection between man and his environment were, to Coleridge, previously unknown; for example, the stanza ‘Life is a vision shadowy of Truth;’ is an allusion to the sublime system of Berkeley (lines 395 to 401), and suggests that the complexity of life was, for Coleridge, never obvious or clear.<sup>41</sup> By associating the psychology of man with the nervous system (which was based on Newton’s vibratory principles), and equating the nervous system to nature, Hartley collapsed the separation between consciousness and environment: ‘Up the fine fibres through the sentient brain’. Even Coleridge, in his verse, recognised the connectivity that Hartley established. Coleridge’s selection of words, for example, convey a distinct sense of movement. ‘Up the fine fibres’ and ‘through the sentient brain’ are suggestive of the transportation of a physiological reaction. Furthermore, this reaction begins externally and is then internalised. We might interpret the line of verse as chronologically charting the journey. An event occurs external to the body, which proves the catalyst for the physiological reaction. The nervous system (a network of ‘Nerves’ that lead ‘into the medullary substance of the brain, by means of the denser aether lodged in those cavities’) is the first to encounter it – the experience of touch, for example, might begin with our hands.<sup>42</sup> From the fingertips, the reaction moves ‘up the fine fibres’ and to the brain. But it does not conclude here, and instead moves ‘through the sentient brain’ and onwards. For Hartley, it then becomes an intellectual thought, which is capable of staying within the brain for a prolonged duration.

The distinction between a mimetic copy of nature and a transfusion of emotion is important. The Aristotelian idea of mimesis presumes the existence of two states: an original and a copy. The original is what we conceive as our reality. The copy is one degree removed from the original. Copies of copies are further removed from the original by whichever power the copy happens to be: a copy is once removed; a copy of a copy is twice removed; a copy of a copy of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>42</sup> Hartley, *Observations on Man*, p. 44.

a copy is three times removed, and so on. In this paradigm, all copies are traced back to the original; they are not, by contrast, traced back only to the preceding copy on which the succeeding copy is based. A copy, then, is an imperfect, non-identical reproduction of the original. And because the copy is intended to be a copy, it does not itself become a self-serving natural object. Art, in this Aristotelian idea of mimesis, is a reproduction of nature, and it is hence removed from nature. So an artwork does not constitute the original. This is vital for our understanding of how ancient philosophers separated the physical object from its mental conception. But this was challenged by Hartley's system. For Hartley, the physiology of the physical body, and its association with the brain, meant that the mental conception of a physical object was not 'removed' in the traditional sense. Rather, the mental conception of a natural object and the natural object itself were both identical – 'identical' in the sense that the mental conception was not a copy of nature, but it was an internal experience that was directly correlated to the external form of the natural object. The physiology of the nervous system was a part of nature, which meant that the mental conception (brain), the body's physiology (nerves), and the external environment (nature) were considered to be of the same physical state. The degrees of separation that occur in mimesis are unnecessary; to define cognition as separate from a natural nervous system would require some justification as to why it is 'different'. But as a physician, Hartley believed that the connection between cognition, the nervous system, and nature was so strong that to separate them would misrepresent their functions.

The point here is that we can find similarities between Aristotle's theory, Hartley's theory, and Housman's poetry. For Housman, poetry functioned as a medium through which the emotions of the author can be transfused into the reader. This 'transfusion' might better be thought of as a 'flow' of emotion, whereby the poet infuses within his poetry the qualities of the emotion that he wishes to elicit in his readers.<sup>43</sup> The reader, then, is not creating anew a series of emotional reactions, but he is rather coming into contact with the poet's original emotion. The flow of emotion is natural and at no point does it become removed from the

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<sup>43</sup> I refer to Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's term 'flow': 'Flow is a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself. It is what we feel when we read a well-crafted novel or play a good game of squash, or take part in a stimulating conversation. The defining feature of flow is intense experiential involvement in moment-to-moment activity'. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi and Jeanne Nakamura, 'The Concept of Flow', in *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology* (New York: Springer, 2014), p. 230.

original. And this is only possible if the poet's cognition is considered 'identical' (in a loose sense of the word) to the poet's nervous system, which, in turn, must be considered a product of nature and is therefore itself inherently natural. The poet's and the reader's cognitions of a natural object are not copies of said object, but are themselves synonymous with the natural object.

The roots of Hartley's influence on Coleridge can be observed in Chapter Four, 'Of the Six Classes of Intellectual Pleasures and Pains', in *Observations on Man*. Here Hartley discusses the various arts and their purposes, with an emphasis on how they relate to Associationism: 'to inquire particularly into the rise and gradual increase of the pleasures and pains of imagination, ambition, self-interest, sympathy, theopathy, and moral sense; and to see how far these can be deduced [...] by means of the general Law of Association'.<sup>44</sup> On poetry, Hartley writes:

The pleasure which we receive from the matter of the poem, and the invention and judgment of the poet, in this respect, arises from the things themselves described or represented. It is necessary therefore, that the poet should choose such scenes as are beautiful, terrible, or otherwise strongly affecting, and such characters as excite love, pity, just indignation; or rather, that he should present us with a proper mixture of all these. For, as they will all please singly, so a well-ordered succession of them will much enhance these separate pleasures, by the contrasts, analogies, and coincidences, which this may be made to introduce. In all these things the chief art is to copy nature so well, and to be so exact in all the principal circumstances relating to actions, passions, i.e. to real life, that the reader may be insensibly betrayed into a half belief of the truth and reality of the scene.<sup>45</sup>

Hartley's use of the word 'copy' might appear to align him with the Aristotelian idea of mimesis. However, it is important to qualify his use of the phrase 'to copy nature' with his description of what copying nature entails: 'to be so exact in all the principal circumstances relating to actions, passions, i.e. real life, that the reader may be insensibly betrayed into a half belief of the truth and reality of the scene'. The distinction here is one of perspective. As stated above, a copy of nature that is intended to be a copy cannot become a self-serving natural object in itself because it will forever be traced to the original. But Hartley is not suggesting that poetry is a copy of nature – his use of the word 'copy' is purely semantic. He is suggesting the opposite: that poetry, in its highest form, produces verse so inseparable from the real experience that it makes the reader believe that the poem's reality is true. The quotation is a 'half belief of

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<sup>44</sup> Hartley, *Observations on Man*, p. 416.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 430-1.

the truth and reality of the scene', which is an important qualification about the operation of the brain because it suggests that a belief which is a 'half belief' is only entertaining half of the brain. If we interpret a 'half belief' to refer to the function of the brain, as opposed to a belief being 'half' because it is a degree removed from the original, then a part of the brain must be concentrated on the production of the truth and reality of the scene.<sup>46</sup> The other half, though, must find itself concentrated on something else: either the poetic language, the senses, or a combination of the two. So Hartley recognises that 'verses well pronounced affect us much more than when they merely pass over the eye'.<sup>47</sup> This suggests that natural scenes which engage only the eyes (or only the senses) do not necessarily penetrate deep into the heart of the observer. For Hartley, poetry and its poetic language have the potential to work on a much deeper and profound level of the human psyche, and directly appeal to the fundamental impulses which direct our intellect. So a 'half belief' is so named because half of the reader's brain is focused on the imagining of the poem's scene (a phenomenological occurrence), while the other half is engaged with the understanding of either the poetic language, the senses, or both (an intellectual occurrence). And because the reader is drawn into a 'half belief' of the truth and reality of the poetic, the highest poetry cannot be, for Hartley, traced to an original source because it is so impeccably crafted that it appears to the reader to be itself original.

Housman's thesis that poetry is more 'physical than intellectual' can therefore be attributed to his perception of poetry as an extension of the nervous system. The transfusion of emotion occurs as a 'flow' because, first, the poet constructs a 'beautiful, terrible, or otherwise strongly affecting' scene that copies nature 'so well' as to be indistinguishable from it, second, the text itself merely appears a two-dimensional, self-contained object from an objective perspective but, in actuality, harbours a connection to the poet, and, third, the reader, during his engagement with the text, senses the poet's feelings through the poet's words, which produces a scene so life-like as to deceive the reader into believing that it is real and eliciting within him the poet's emotions. A 'flow' is an unbroken chain, wherein the text is an extension of the poet's nerves; the poetic work reaches out, like the nervous system, to bring the poet's emotions to the reader. The operation of such a system appears physical, not intellectual. But as Hartley suggests, the organs and the nervous system lead the sensations to the brain, and it is then within the brain

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<sup>46</sup> I take this interpretation to be accurate because the alternative would conflict with Hartley's idea that the chief art of poetry is to 'be so exact in all the principal circumstances relating to actions, passions, i.e. real life'.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431.



that an intellectual idea may arise. So intellectual ideas can occur through the reading of poetry. However, Housman believes that any intellectual idea that may arise through the reading of poetry can only arise because the verse has triggered within the reader a series of emotional reactions. Hence any intellectual idea that does arise from poetry is, for Housman, the result of poetry's transfusing of emotion. In other words, intellectual ideas are by-products of emotional reactions and are not, by themselves, a primary function of poetry.

### **T.S. Eliot: the Metaphysics of Poetry**

Housman was not alone in believing the importance of emotions in literature. T.S. Eliot, for example, placed similar importance on the emotions, albeit with much more restraint: 'You can, in fact, put together heterogeneous parts to form a lively play; but a character, to be living, must be conceived from some emotional unity. A character is not to be composed of scattered observations of human nature, but of parts which are felt together'.<sup>48</sup> From Eliot's metaphysics of literature, we gain insight into the competing approaches for the affective theories that existed during the earlier part of the twentieth century.

In *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, Housman writes that poetry's function is 'to transfuse emotion – not to transmit thought but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer'.<sup>49</sup> For Housman, the distinction between emotion and thought is valuable in understanding the potential effects of verse upon the reader. On the one hand, poetry can engage the reader's mind and transmit to him an idea. On the other hand, poetry can engage the reader's body and provoke within it a physiological response: the shedding of a tear, the wince of an empathetic pain, a shudder of despair, or a joyous laugh, for example. Emotion is a physiological response because it is foremost manifest within the reader's body; it is not an intellectual process that requires intense periods of thought and sustained concentration, but it is a bodily reaction to a set of conceived circumstances. Thought, by contrast, is an intellectual creation that utilises complex neurological processes with which to assess and understand a particular situation. So, according to Housman, poetry's primary function is not the

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<sup>48</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), p. 120. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* provides several essays on literary emotion: 'The Perfect Critic' (pp. 4-6), 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (pp. 49-53), "'Rhetoric" and Poetic Drama' (pp. 74-7), 'The Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe' (p. 79), 'Hamlet and His Problems' (pp. 91-3), 'Ben Jonson' (pp. 100-6), 'Philip Massinger' (pp. 120-4), and 'Dante' (pp. 145, 149, 150-3).

<sup>49</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 12. My italics.

communication of intellectual ideas, but rather the provocation of physiological, emotional sensations within the reader. This being the ‘peculiar function of poetry’ does not necessarily rule out the transmission of intellectual ideas, but, rather, that Housman believed poetry’s function is innately attuned to the body’s physiology, and not to the intellect. His claim is that poetry engages the body first and the mind only accidentally, or secondarily. To this end, Housman would consider the intellectualisation of poetry to constitute a lesser form of poetry, or to not be ‘poetry’ at all. Any attempt to discuss the function of poetry without taking into consideration the reader’s phenomenology of his physiology fails to grasp the function of poetry.

There are similarities between Housman and T.S. Eliot – specifically, their conceptions of the function of poetry.<sup>50</sup> Housman’s approach to poetry during the 1920s was not an isolated incident, but it was rather a part of a set of philosophical theories pertaining to the phenomenological experience of the reader. Eliot is important because, first, his beliefs about the sensory and unintellectual nature of poetic language are strikingly similar to Housman’s observations, and, second, he believes that the function poetry is derived from the association of language with experience. For Eliot, the poet must create experiences that elicit familiar emotions. However, neither these experiences nor these emotions are ‘real’ in the sense that they are unadulterated events; for Eliot, a distinction must exist between the emotion conjured through verse and the actual emotion of a real event:

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express: and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’ is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from

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<sup>50</sup> In doing so, I should note that my focus is here purely on the function of poetry. I am not, at the present time, considering Eliot’s notions about authorial intention. However, it should be made clear that a distinction exists between Housman and Eliot as to whence the emotion originates. For Housman, emotion stems from the author. For Eliot, it originates from within the written words of the text. See, for example, Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ in *The Sacred Wood*, pp. 51ff.

concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. [...] Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.<sup>51</sup>

When Eliot writes that ‘poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion’, he is making a subtle distinction between the overflow of emotion and the refined, selective appreciation of what it means to be emotional (the whys, hows, and wheres, for example). The ‘whys, hows, and wheres’ should not be interpreted as an intellectualisation of emotion, but rather as an acknowledgment of the most basic, primitive, and fundamental elements required to be emotional. For Eliot, emotion in poetry is not simply *emotion*. Poetic emotion is as much about the sensory organs as it is about the reason for its being. This statement might initially appear at odds with the thesis that poetry is more physical than intellectual, or that Eliot’s purpose for poetry was to ‘bypass the deadly abstractions of rationalist thought and seize its readers by the “cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts”’.<sup>52</sup> However, it is inevitable that the emotions of poetry, in their most physiological state, must eventually come to the attention of the reader’s consciousness. And even if poetry’s function is not to equate its language with ideas, the emotional elicitations that do arise will not go unnoticed by the reader. Eliot’s observation that poetic emotion is, in actuality, the expression of ‘feelings which are not in actual emotions at all’ is a salient example of Eliot’s distinction between ‘emotion’ and *emotion*. *Emotion* (what we might call raw, real emotion) is not conjured by Eliot’s poet, and its reason for being, if not entirely irrelevant, is a far second to its overwhelming nature. In contrast to this is ‘emotion’, or poetic emotion, in which Eliot advocates a restrained and controlled sensation, wherein the emotion is not so overtly powerful as to reduce the reader to an uncontrollable state, but merely strong enough to have the reader feel it within his sensory organs.<sup>53</sup> The function of poetry for Eliot, then, is as a reminder of the state of life, without being so overwhelming as to make that life inoperable.

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<sup>51</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, pp. 51-3.

<sup>52</sup> Terry Eagleton, ‘The Rise of English’, in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> In *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, for example, Housman’s physiological examples of emotional reactions are often refined and controlled: the shedding of a tear, the bristling of hair,

Eliot's conception of poetry focused upon its connection to the physical body, not only as a means by which it might stimulate the nerves, but also as an attempt to draw attention to the place of man within his changing environment. For Eliot, poetry had become too feminine due to its overflow of emotion, and it had become a 'mawkish, womanly affair full of gush and fine feeling'.<sup>54</sup> This kind of poetry, for Eliot, was far more sentimental than serious; an observation shared by Richards in *Practical Criticism* with regard to the sentimentality of certain readers who were at risk of being so exceptionally emotional at the slightest, unemotional provocation. Sentimental poetry was, to Eliot, counter-productive in achieving the real force of poetry: the potential for it to work upon the consciousness and unconsciousness, with subtle manipulations to the reader's most primitive 'nerves' and 'impulses'. In doing so, poetry could then reach the basic, underlying physiology shared by both man and woman alike, making its verse applicable to every human being. As Terry Eagleton observes, Eliot hoped to reconnect poetry with the physical world, so that it might not remain stale and unprofitable in its industrial society:

The advantage of a language closely wedded to experience, for Eliot, was that it enabled the poet to bypass the deadly abstractions of rationalist thought and seize his readers by the 'cerebral cortex, and nervous system, and the digestive tracts'. Poetry was not to engage the reader's mind: it did not really matter what a poem actually *meant*, and Eliot professed himself to be quite unperturbed by apparently outlandish interpretations of his own work. Meaning was no more than a sop thrown to the reader to keep him distracted, while the poem went stealthily to work on him in more physical and unconscious ways. The crudité Eliot, author of intellectually difficult poems, in fact betrayed all the contempt for the intellect of any right-wing irrationalist. He shrewdly perceived that the languages of middle-class liberal rationalism were exhausted: nobody was much likely to be convinced by talk of 'progress' or 'reason' any more, not least when millions of corpses lay on the battlefields of Europe. Middle-class liberalism had failed; and the poet must delve behind these described notions by evolving a sensory language which would make 'direct communication with the nerves'.<sup>55</sup>

The 'cerebral cortex, and nervous system, and the digestive tracts' quotation is taken from Eliot's 'The Metaphysical Poets', which was first published as a review of Herbert J.C. Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* in *The Times Literary Supplement* (October, 1921). To Eliot, Grierson was the 'only writer whose authority both in

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the shiver down the spine. These are not emotional elicitations which render the individual into an unthinking, uncontrolled, unfeeling mess.

<sup>54</sup> Eagleton, 'The Rise of English', p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. Italics in original.

scholarship and taste I could never question’, and Eliot referenced him extensively during his composition of the Clark Lectures for Trinity College Cambridge on metaphysical poetry.<sup>56</sup> But what is fascinating about this quotation is that Eliot uses it to refer to those seventeenth-century metaphysical poets who focused on strained imagery, paradox, novelty, incongruity, muscular rhythms, and elaborately extended metaphors (also known as ‘conceits’): ‘Those who object to the “artificiality” of Milton or Dryden sometimes tell us to “look into our hearts and write”. But that is not looking deep enough; Racine and Donne looked into a good deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts’.<sup>57</sup> A ‘dissociation of sensibility’ – Eliot applied this term to seventeenth-century Metaphysical Poets who separated intellectual thought from the sensation of feeling – persists not only amongst those poets, but continued to impinge on poetry in the twentieth century: ‘The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; no less nor more than Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Guinizelli, or Cino. In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered’.<sup>58</sup>

For Eliot, it became necessary to distinguish the relevant role of the ‘heart’ – the heart being the personification of the emotions, with its associations of sentimentality, love poetry, and so on, and not the literal physical heart muscles – and the ‘intellect’ so that they might be applied appropriately to his industrialised English society. We see this in his essay on Ben Jonson, in which Eliot compares Jonson’s works to his seventeenth-century contemporaries (Shakespeare, Donne, Webster, and Tourneur). In doing so, Eliot asserts that Jonson’s contemporaries have a depth, a third dimension, which Jonson lacks: ‘Their words have often a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires’.<sup>59</sup> To Eliot, Jonson’s works were ‘of the

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<sup>56</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Letter to H.J.C. Grierson, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1926’, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 166.

<sup>57</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, in *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p. 250.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>59</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Ben Jonson’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), p. 105.

surface'; they failed to penetrate into the heart of the reader.<sup>60</sup> Of course, to write from the heart is no guarantee that the poetry will penetrate the reader's heart. In order to penetrate the reader's heart, the author must infuse his writing with a set of emotions, feelings, and sensations so that the written text will then elicit a physiological reaction in the reader. Note that this does not equate the 'heart' (in its sentimental sense) with a physiological event, but rather Eliot intended to demonstrate that the 'heart' can be influenced by physiology:

The creation of a work of art, we will say the creation of a character in a drama, consists in the process of transfusion of the personality, or, in a deeper sense, the life, of the author into the character. [...] Now, we may say with Mr. Gregory Smith that Falstaff or a score of Shakespeare's characters have a 'third dimension' that Jonson's have not. This will mean, not that Shakespeare's spring from the feelings or imagination and Jonson's from the intellect or invention; they have equally an emotional source; but that Shakespeare's represent a more complex tissue of feelings and desires, as well as a more supple, a more susceptible temperament. [...] It is obvious that the spring of the difference is not the difference between feeling and thought, or superior insight, superior perception, on the part of Shakespeare, but his susceptibility to a greater range of emotion, and emotion deeper and more obscure.<sup>61</sup>

To write only from the heart is one approach, but Eliot here advocates a style of writing which depicts both the heart *and* the sensations that arise from within the author's body during his heartfelt writings. To 'look into our hearts' is much more an intellectual process (what do we truly care about, what do we hold dear, and what are the principles by which we live our life, for example) than a physiological process. It is here that Eliot and Housman share a common thread: not to merely understand what we have inside our hearts, but to understand why and how these principles act upon us in terms of our physiology. As Housman astutely observes in *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, the difference between 'positive and lively' verse and 'perfect' verse is its ability to not overpower the reader, but to make the reader realise his own existence: 'Here it is not lofty or magnificent or intense; it does not transport with rapture nor overwhelm with awe; it does not stab the heart nor shake the soul nor take the breath away. But it is poetry, though not in the highest, yet in the highest definable sense'.<sup>62</sup> For Housman and Eliot, an

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 108-9.

<sup>62</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, pp. 12-3. Housman is referring to two extracts of verse, one from John Logan's 'To the Cuckoo' and the other from Samuel Johnson's 'On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet'.

emotion, a principle, an intellectual thought, by itself, does not move us. To move us, these events must impact upon our physical bodies. But the impact must not be so great as to render the individual incapable of making sense of the feelings, emotions, and sensations. For if this were to happen then the reader would gain nothing from his reading of a poem beyond an intense physical reaction. And if poetry is to be as influential as Housman and Eliot believe then some part of the physical reaction must penetrate into the psychology of the reader so that he becomes aware of whatever latent, obscure, primitive impulse the verse has triggered. Incidentally, Eliot's and Housman's approaches are not synonymous, and each has his own set of logical processes involved in defining the function of poetry. But certain core elements – such as an appeal to the body / heart / nerves – do persist amongst them. Of course, their respective dealings with these ideas vary, but it nevertheless demonstrates that both Eliot and Housman believed that the function of poetry resonated somewhere within the body of the reader.

It may be queried as to why Eliot disliked Housman's lecture, since they seemed to agree on so many principles regarding the function of poetry. The primary cause of this rift was Eliot's belief that Housman's lecture was not representative of Housman's poetry, and therefore Housman's theory was poorly constructed.<sup>63</sup> Housman and Eliot were not only familiar with one another, but that they had a pleasant artistic relationship (compared, for example, to the hostilities aimed at Housman by Richards and Pound). Furthermore, Eliot's private letters reveal a degree of respect and admiration for Housman's extensive knowledge and creative insight: 'It has been one of my ambitions since becoming an editor to publish a really authoritative and final essay on Wilkie Collins. Several people have intimated to me that it is a subject about which you know everything, and that if I could induce you to write a paper on Wilkie Collins, I should be performing a public service and proving my own editorial ability'.<sup>64</sup> The disagreement between Eliot and Housman, then, is based primarily in Eliot's inability to reconcile Housman's seemingly outdated approach with his own and that of his contemporaries.

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<sup>63</sup> See Eliot's 'Housman on Poetry', pp. 151-3.

<sup>64</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Letter to A.E. Housman, 1 April 1926', in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot. Volume 3: 1926 – 1927*, eds. Valerie Eliot and High Haughton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 122.

## The Poet's Intention

For Housman, poetry creates a physiological connection between the reader and the poet. Whereas someone like Richards might say that poetry is a self-contained, self-referential object that does not rely on the poet's existence except as a principle of generation, Housman's transfusion of emotion from poet to reader requires the poet to first infuse the verse with emotion. This observation comes from Housman's assertion that poetry must 'set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to *what was felt by the writer*'. For Housman, the reader's physiological, emotional experience is a reverberation of the poet's physiological, emotional experience. It is not, by contrast, an emotional experience created anew by the reader.

This raises several questions. Foremost, if poetry's function is the transfusion of emotion, and said emotion must correspond to 'what was felt by the writer', then does Housman's thesis provide a means by which we might value and judge poetry? Is a successful poem one which not only captures the poet's emotions, but one which is also able to communicate and reproduce those emotional reactions within the reader? Is emotion intended by the poet, or is it a by-product of the poet's portrayal of the scene? Or, for that matter, is the emotion felt by the reader actually the poet's emotion? And underpinning all of these questions is the most fundamental question of all: is it even possible to infuse emotions into poetry and to then transfuse them to a reader? The issues that arise from Housman's transfusion of emotion are of a similar nature as the issues that arise in the transmission of meaning. We might find guidance in the fields of Intentionalism, Implied Authors, and Reader-Response Theories as to how we might approach and answer these questions. The theories of Intentionalism, Implied Authors, and Reader-Response Approaches demonstrate that the logic governing the application of meaning to a text shares certain similarities to the logic governing the infusion and transfusion of emotion.

We must begin by carefully defining 'infusion' and 'transfusion'. The act of infusion is, for Housman, a process through which the poet selects the most appropriate words that best represent his experience.<sup>65</sup> A highly-skilled poet will be able to put together a series of words that reproduce his emotions almost exactly, whereas a lesser-skilled poet may struggle to incorporate his emotions into verse. A successful poem might be perceived as that which accurately and wholly captures the poet's emotions. As Eliot suggests, the greatest poets are

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<sup>65</sup> Housman does not explicitly discuss the idea of 'infusion', but it seems to be pivotal to his overall concept of transfusion. Housman's comparative study of verse, and the selection of words, can be seen in *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, pp. 23-8.



those who write not only what is within their hearts, but who also delve deeper into the nervous system.<sup>66</sup> We might think of infusion as the defining of a specific sequence of words which the poet feels is representative of his physiological reaction.<sup>67</sup> The more talented, experienced poets will not only be capable of discerning which linguistic sequences produce their emotions, but will also be capable of gauging the physiological impact of the verse on the reader (an agent external to himself). And this ‘gauging’ of impact occurs by the poet recognising the limitations and parameters imposed by the linguistic construct; it is of a similar nature as Stuart Hall’s encoding and decoding principles.<sup>68</sup> Obviously infusions, and the poet’s prediction of the impact of each individual infusion, are far from ideal, for if they were ideal then every poem would be a perfect transparent transfusion of the poet’s emotions, which itself would result in little to no dispute regarding the feelings elicited from within the reader. And, as Arnold suggests, the appreciation of poetry is foremost a natural talent; infusion is as much about the understanding of emotion as it is about the understanding of poetic language.

The act of transfusion is more complicated. Let us, for the moment, presume that the poet has successfully infused his emotion into poetic language. Whenever he reads his poem, he feels within himself the emotions that he felt when he wrote the verse. The reader is a different agent to the poet, and so there is presumably no guarantee that the reader will have the same experience as the poet. This line of argument is of a similar principle as that which arose during the middle of the twentieth century with regard to the author’s meaning. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., for example, describes this in his ‘In Defense of the Author’. Hirsch here is outlining the opposition’s argument, not his own stance on authorial meaning:

Since we are all different from the author, we cannot reproduce his intended meaning in ourselves, and even if by some accident we could, we still would not be certain that we had done so. Why concern ourselves, therefore, with an inherently impossible task when we can better employ our energies in useful occupations such as making the text relevant to our present concerns or judging its conformity to high standards of excellence? The

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<sup>66</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Ben Jonson’, pp. 108-9.

<sup>67</sup> In a sense, the sequence of words act as an extension of the poet’s nervous system. A correct sequence allows the emotions to flow undiluted and freely, but an incorrect sequence, or a less correct sequence, causes the emotions to be compromised.

<sup>68</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Encoding, Decoding’, in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 90-103.

goal of reproducing an inaccessible and private past is to be dismissed as a futile enterprise.<sup>69</sup>

For those theorists who opposed Hirsch (Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, W.K. Wimsatt, and Monroe Beardsley, to name but a few), their argument was that it would be impossible to know what the author was thinking during the creation of his literary work.<sup>70</sup> And even if by some miracle we came to a conclusion which we believed to represent the author's intention, we would have no ability to test and determine whether or not it was accurate. This is due to the perception that 'meaning' must not only be an exact replication of the author's meaning (anything less would make 'meaning' become a part of a reader-constructed interpretation), but that to know that it is the author's meaning requires us to be able to measure it against the author's meaning (and this, currently, is a very difficult, if not occasionally impossible, operation). Furthermore, the meaning of the author may have no relevant impact on how the reading community interprets the literary work; if we cannot know the author's intention then any interpretation might be correct. So for these theorists, our energies would be better spent assessing the relevance of a literary work within interpretive communities because these can be tested and validated. For Hirsch, this produced a chaotic literary state in which interpretations are random, inconsequential events. Like Cleanth Brooks, who suggested that we need not study literature if interpretations are merely 'will-o'-the-wisp' incidents, Hirsch considered such a state of raw triviality untenable: 'If criticism is 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'.<sup>71</sup> For Hirsch, objectivity in literary criticism provides a foundation from which all readers are equal in their discussion of the literary work. Value judgements then become a question of the closeness of an interpretation to the author's intention, as opposed to the value imposed upon a literary work by an interpretive community. So Interpretation A is better because it is closer to the Author's intention. Or, by contrast, Interpretation B is better because its experience for Interpretive Community B is more

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<sup>69</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Iser's 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class?*, and William K. Jr. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy'. I further discuss Hirsch, Wimsatt, and Beardsley, and their ideas of authorship and authority, in Chapter Four, 'The Author as a Stimulant'.

<sup>71</sup> Brooks, 'The Primacy of the Reader', p. 193, and Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 210.

fulfilling. Or, Interpretation C is better because Interpretive Community C is most dominant. In the first example, an objective basis exists for the literary work (the author's intention), and all readers determine the value of said literary work through that objective basis. The point to which our interpretation aspires is singular and unchanging. The author's intention at the time of writing is frozen in time and space, and the literary text will be the same for Reader A and Reader B (presuming that it is from the same copy and edition). In the other two examples of value judgements, the point to which our interpretation aspires is multiple and fluid. For Hirsch, there can be an infinite number of Interpretive Communities, and what is deemed an acceptable interpretation today may not be an acceptable interpretation one hundred years in the future. In such a scenario, there is no objective basis and so the meaning of the text becomes a historical, cultural, social, political, and so on, issue, as opposed to being a literary issue.

Hirsch, like Housman, is adamant that certain elements of literature can be treated objectively and can have a universal application. The poet's intention, and the emotions that he hopes to transfuse from himself to the reader, seem to be treated by Housman as an objective event. However, a cursory reading of Housman's thesis may initially lead us to believe that Housman favours a subjective experience, not an objective experience – this, for Richards, would undoubtedly appear as a contrary effort to his own scientific, empirical theories of literature. In fact, in *Practical Criticism*, Richards goes so far as to suggest that sentimentality ('a response is sentimental if it is too great for the occasion'), or a 'heightened emotional susceptibility', can be problematic because it distorts the meaning of poetry, and it can make its interpretation a 'qualitative', not 'quantitative', issue.<sup>72</sup> In *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, the physiological response may appear to be a subjective event. Housman's narrative of his private experiences with poetry certainly does nothing to dispel this initial perception.

Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act. This particular symptom is accompanied by a shiver down the spine; there is another which consists in a constriction of the throat and a precipitation of water to the eyes; and there is a third which I can only describe by borrowing a phrase from one of Keats's last letters, where he says, speaking of Fanny Brawne, 'everything that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear'. The seat of this sensation is the pit of the stomach.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp. 258, 259.

<sup>73</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 47.

These reactions are the physiological manifestation of Housman's emotions. For someone like Richards, it distils the meaning of verse to its most basic, primitive, unintellectual state. It consists of rudimentary observations pertaining to bodily functions, and then uses these observations to justify the thesis that poetry is 'more physical than intellectual'. It has an appearance of quasi-empiricism: all readers will have a physiological response, but these responses will range from nothing to something. So, for example, Housman's skin may bristle. But another reader may salivate, or blink, or tense his fingers. And yet another reader might have some other, completely different, response. From this perspective, it appears easy for Richards to dismiss Housman's approach as overtly subjective.

Housman does not consider transfusion to be a subjective event. Rather, Housman approaches poetry in a similar manner as Arnold: that the appreciation of poetry is a natural talent. This is because Housman asserts that he could no more define poetry than a dog could a rat, but that he might recognise it by the symptoms which are provoked within him. And as the literary work functions as a type of surrogate nervous system which connects the reader to the poet, the physiological reactions that are elicited during its reading have a singular origin (the poet) – much like how, for Hirsch, meaning can be traced to the author's intention. The manifestation of these emotions may, for different readers, arise from different bodily locations. But the underlying, fundamental cause of these physiological reactions is a universal, inherent quality. For Housman, the emotions of poetry 'find their way to something in man which is obscure and latent, something older than the present organisation of his nature'.<sup>74</sup> There is an animalistic impulse within all readers that can sense poetry. For Housman, this is 'obscure and latent'. But for the twenty-first-century theorist, it is a neurological feat that can be traced to the limbic system.

This approach influences Housman's close analysis of verse. The New Critics (Richards, Brooks, and especially William Empson) focus intently on deciphering the meaning of excerpts via a close reading. Housman, by contrast, tends to focus upon the emotional reaction that he experiences during his reading of verse. Although the Leslie Stephen Lecture was an oral performance, this alone does not entirely account for the intense physiological focus that Housman presents. Housman's quotations are generally a few lines in length. The formula for Housman's excerpts is: a short quotation is selected, which is intended to convey the emotion,

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

idea, or spirit of the poem; Housman then draws out the emotional and physical experience of the verse in his critical prose.

Then further there is verse which gives a positive and lively pleasure arising from the talent and accomplishment of its author.

Now Gilpin had a pleasant wit  
And loved a timely joke,  
And thus unto the Callender  
In merry guise he spoke:  
I came because your horse would come;  
And, if I well forbode,  
My hat and wig will soon be here:  
They are upon the road.

Capital: but no one, if asked for a typical example of poetry, would recite those verses in reply. A typical example need not be any less plain and simple and straightforward, but it would be a little raised.

Come, worthy Greek, Ulysses, come,  
Possess these shores with me:  
The winds and seas are troublesome,  
And here we may be free.  
Here may we sit and view their toil  
That travail in the deep,  
And joy the day in mirth the while,  
And spend the night in sleep.

There we are ceasing to gallop with the Callender's horse and beginning to fly with Pegasus. Indeed a promising young poetaster could not do better than lay up that stanza in his memory, not necessarily as a pattern to set before him, but as a touchstone to keep at his side. Diction and movement alike, it is perfect. It is made out of the most ordinary words, yet it is pure from the least alloy of prose; and however much nearer heaven the art of poetry may have mounted, it has never flown on a surer or a lighter wing.<sup>75</sup>

Housman uses these quotations to illustrate the difference between high poetry and low poetry. The critical prose rarely contains an analysis of the meaning of the verse. Instead, it is a commentary on the verse's nature. It references 'diction', 'movement', and 'ordinary words'. Together, they stir the emotions of the reader. Housman treats the poems as affective objects, which may inspire a physical and emotional response. These experiences are further modified and refined through Housman's descriptive prose: 'There we are ceasing to gallop with the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-11. The poems referenced by Housman are: William Cowper's *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*, and Samuel Daniel's *Ulysses and the Siren*.

Callender's horse and beginning to fly with Pegasus'. An audience's attention is drawn to the experience of the verse, which is reiterated in the prose: 'we', 'ceasing', 'gallop', 'with', 'horse', 'beginning', 'fly', 'with', and 'Pegasus'. It is the reader (and not just Housman) who is galloping and flying, it is the reader who is with Callender's horse and with Pegasus. It is in examples like these that we see the 'half belief of truth and reality of the scene' of which Hartley spoke. These types of terms and phrases used by Housman focus on distinctly physiological sensations, not on an intellectual reading.

With a better grasp of Housman's 'infusion' and 'transfusion', we might now turn our attention to the old questions of transmission. Does it matter if the poet felt what we feel? Could the poet have been mistaken in his feelings, and the poem's text be a misrepresentation of emotions? Or, for that matter, if we do know what the poet felt, and it is not what we feel, then does that invalidate our own response? Why should the poet's emotion be the authority on the correctness, or incorrectness, of an interpretation? Alternatively, if we do feel as the poet felt, or if we do feel as the poet intended us to feel, then what might this say about the phenomenology of poetry? Is it truly a phenomenological experience, a unique emotional event? Or are we merely experiencing a reiteration, a mimetic reproduction, of an emotion that belongs to another person? Can we even claim ownership of the emotions that we encounter during our reading of poetry, especially when we know that those emotions have been intentionally constructed for us by another person? If these emotions belong to someone else then is our private, subjective experience less significant than we think?

These are inherently difficult questions to answer because they require a clear clarification of terminology (what do we mean by 'reproduction', or 'invalidate', or 'misrepresentation', for example). And the definition of these terms can alter depending on the perspectives of both the asker and the answerer. Intentionalists would argue that the poet's emotions and feelings correspond, in part, to the poet's intention, and are hence paramount to comprehending the meaning of the poem (meaning being what the poet intended to say). Reader-Response theorists, by contrast, are more interested in the reader's subjective experience than in whether or not the poet's intention is successfully realised. Textual critics only care about whether or not the text itself succeeds in conveying *something*.

For Housman, emotions can be transfused through poetry. The operation by which he believes this occurs has been outlined above. It is a physiological process, in which the literary text functions as an extension of the reader's and poet's nervous systems. For Housman, the better poets are those who are able to produce an accurate poetic representation of their

emotions. And 'better', as a qualifying adjective, is determined by Housman to be an innate ability, a talent, as opposed to a learned, refined skill.

Does it matter if the poet felt what we feel? For Housman, the answer is 'yes'. For him, the peculiar nature of poetry is the transfusion of emotion, and so it is paramount to poetry's function that what is felt by the poet is also felt by the reader, and vice versa. Any deviation from this indicates either a textual failure (wherein the verse itself fails to successfully communicate the poet's feelings) or a misinterpretation by the reader.

Could the poet have been mistaken in his feelings, and the poem's text be a misrepresentation of emotions? For Housman, the answer to this question depends on the nature of the poet. The great poets (Housman identifies a few of them as Collins, Smart, Cowper, Blake, and Shakespeare) would not be mistaken in their feelings, and they would not miscommunicate or misrepresent the emotions that they felt. This is because Housman believed that they had a natural talent for poetry, and so their texts accurately captured their feelings. But lesser poets, due to what Housman might call a lack of affinity with the true nature of poetry, would be prone to mistakes. For Housman, it is not merely what is said in poetry, but *how* it is said through the poem's rhetoric and form; an element of Formalism exists, for example, in his brief analysis of Shakespeare's 'Take, O, take those lips away', in which Housman proclaims that 'Shakespeare, who had so much to say, would sometimes pour out his loveliest poetry in saying nothing'.<sup>76</sup> So the better poets are, first, able to accurately gauge their own emotional reactions, and, second, replicate their emotions through their verse.

If we know what the poet felt, and it is not what we feel, then does this invalidate our own response? For Housman, the poem's text is not an isolated object, but an extension of the poet's nervous system unto the reader's nervous systems. If the poem tells us what the poet's emotion was when he wrote the text then it follows that we must also be capable of feeling said emotion when reading the text. For it is impossible to conceive of the transfusion of emotion as belonging to an unbroken nervous system if the emotions we read in the poem's text are unaligned with emotions we feel when reading. So, yes, if we are aware that the poet felt something different to what we feel when reading the poem then a misinterpretation has occurred, and our response, although perhaps not completely invalidated, is not a correct representation of the poet's and poem's emotion.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

Why should the poet's emotion be the authority on the correctness, or incorrectness, of an interpretation? For Housman, the function of poetry is the transfusion of emotion. Emotion is transfused from the poet to the reader via the text. 'Transfusion' itself refers, not to a mimetic reproduction (which suggests an entity different from the initial, copied object), but a flow of emotion from A to B via C. The emotion experienced by the reader *is* the emotion experienced by the poet. It is not a copy, or a representation, or a reconfiguration. So, for Housman, the poet's emotion is the authority for the correctness, or incorrectness, of an interpretation because the reader's emotion *is* the poet's emotion. In fact, the term 'interpretation' is a misnomer in this particular case. For Housman, correct readers do not interpret poetry ('interpretation', by definition, suggests a subjective element), but rather feel as the poet felt.

If we do feel as the poet felt, or if we feel as the poet intended us to feel, then what might this say about our subjective experience? Is it a unique emotional event? Or are we merely experiencing a reiteration of an emotion that belongs to another person? Housman believes that the reader's phenomenological experience is not unique, but that it is rather synonymous with the phenomenological experience of the poet. So the reader's phenomenological experience is replaced with the poet's phenomenological experience, so that the poet's experience becomes the reader's experience. For Housman, this occurs because of the nature of poetry: emotions are transfused from poet to reader via the text; the emotions experienced by the reader are synonymous (not mimetic reproductions) with the poet's emotions; the reader's experience, then, is the poet's experience.

However, there is a problem with this process. In practice, it is most likely that the reader's experience, which Housman classifies as being the same as the poet's experience, is in fact a unique phenomenological experience. This is due to the individual distinctions between the poet and the reader, which produces two separate agents.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, if the reader realises that his emotions, feelings, and his phenomenological experience belong to the poet then surely such a realisation must alter the context in which the reader experiences the poet's emotions.

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<sup>77</sup> Emotions are not merely dependent upon physiological impulses. Rather, emotions are influenced by such things as culture, society, politics, religion, ethics, and personal experiences, to name but a few examples. So different readers, with different personal experiences, may have different emotional reactions. This observation is supported by social psychology. See, for example, Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel Rose Markus, *Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 1994), David Matsumoto et al., 'Culture, Emotion Regulation, and Adjustment', in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 94, no. 6 (June 2008), and Mick Smith, *Emotion, Place and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012).



For if the reader becomes aware that his emotions are not *his* emotions, but are rather stimulated into existence by someone else's emotions, then the context of his reading changes: it is not his experience, but someone else's experience to which he just happens to be privy. And so, this means that he is a reader who is experiencing the experience of experiencing someone else's emotions. In this sense, the phenomenological experience of the reader is potentially unique, as opposed to being synonymous with the poet's phenomenological experience. Of course, a reader may be so taken by the poem that this issue becomes a non-issue. Housman edges towards this line of reasoning in *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, in which the question of the authenticity of the reader's feelings ceases to exist because the reader is so captivated by the verse that he simply does not think about the exact nature of the experience.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that the reader may become aware of the nature of the experience indicates that the reader's experience may become unique.

Can we claim ownership of the emotions that poetry elicits from us, especially when we know that these emotions have been intentionally constructed for us by the poet? For Housman, emotions are not 'owned'. Poetry has the potential to tap into an underlying, primitive impulse, which is present (to varying degrees) in every reader. So two readers who are moved to tears by the line 'Nymphs and shepherds, dance no more' are experiencing the same sadness, and not two different types of sadness. The emotion of the first reader is the same emotion as the second reader, and both their emotions are the poet's emotion. The idea of 'ownership', or of an original emotion, does not exist for Housman. In this sense, all emotions elicited from poetry (and which are aligned with the poet's emotions) are authentic. Furthermore, no emotion belongs to a single individual. There is no such thing as an original, unique, isolated, one-person-only emotion – a concept that is probably inspired by Hartley's assessment of the biology of the human body. All emotional states, then, retain their significance, whether they originate within ourselves or within the poet. However, a more realistic and contemporary approach might suggest that while emotions inspire similar physiological and neurophysiological reactions in a reader, the specific underlying reason for these reactions may vary slightly from reader to reader, or, to put it another way, the thought-processes involved in the reading of poetry are different for each individual reader, despite the potential for a similar emotional outcome.

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<sup>78</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 35.

For Housman, the transfusion of emotion is a physiological process. By understanding these underlying operations, we might better comprehend the power that poetry has to move a person. More importantly, Housman's thesis provides insight into a potential physiological relationship between poet, poem, and reader. The idea that the poem is not a text in the common sense, but perceived by Housman to be an extension of the nervous system, is an interesting notion regarding the transfusion of emotion. It suggests that psychologically and physiologically, the association between poet, text, and reader is not as disconnected as Reader-Response Theorists tend to treat it. The focus upon the reader's response is obviously vital, but to ignore or force into submission the presence of the poet so that he is either disregarded or denigrated is misrepresentative of the practical role of the poet. If Housman's insights are even remotely correct, and the literary work fulfils, in part, a physical function as opposed to a purely intellectual function, the dismissal of the author and of his intention is likely to remove from our horizon a crucial element; we need to be aware of the poet if we are to approach literary works as being a part of a physiological network because they begin the chain of events with which we are engaged.

### **Housman and Richards**

At the beginning of this chapter, the claim was made that the perceived division between Housman's affective, emotional approach and Richards' scientific approach was the product of a contextual problem, and not due to a fundamental difference in their respective theses. I want to conclude this chapter with a brief comparative analysis of Housman and Richards. The purpose of this is twofold: first, to establish a direct connection between Housman's and Richards' theories of poetry, so that my next chapter can build upon the discussions presented in this chapter; and, second, to suggest that the disagreements between Housman and Richards are the result of a misunderstanding about the interrelation of the body and mind.

The inability to unify Housman's seemingly archaic theory of an affective poetry with Richards' apparently progressive theory of the intellect created significant friction between the two scholars and culminated in the perception of Housman being an archaic poet-scholar.<sup>79</sup> Housman considered an intellectual reading of poetry to ignore certain fundamental physiological qualities, without which it would be impossible to correctly interpret poetry. Richards, on the other hand, believed that a philosophy of poetry that devalued the intellect in

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<sup>79</sup> See Richard Aldington's *A.E. Housman and W.B. Yeats: Two Lectures*, p. 11.

favour of physiology would render inert the then-contemporary studies in psychology.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Richards considered Housman's ideas about poetry, and, more importantly, about life itself, to be out of date.<sup>81</sup> Housman was an eminent Victorian, and (from Richards' perspective) his ideas needed to be dismantled so that progress might be made with a scientific, psychological approach to the study and writing of verse. The younger, twentieth-century, science-literate critic combating the ancient, out-dated, and altogether incorrect Victorian poet is the narrative that was often imposed upon these two critics (and that Richards held to himself too).<sup>82</sup> One might dismiss these incongruities as being unavoidable symptoms of different historical contexts, or of different intellectual *zeitgeists* that encapsulated their respective studies of verse. However, I believe that this disparity between Housman and Richards is not historical, but that it is rather theoretical. Not only was the life lived by Housman of a similar nature as Richards (socially, culturally, and educationally, for example), but Housman's thesis, although undoubtedly influenced by Victorian precepts, has the same biological, neurological basis as Richards' thesis. Both Housman and Richards demonstrate certain uniform themes pertaining to their evaluation of psychology, the nervous system, the brain, and the reader's consciousness. So, superficially, they might perceive themselves as belonging to different historical eras. But by examining these two critics against twenty-first-century knowledge concerning neurology, physiology, and psychology, we can see that Housman's appeal to the physical senses and Richards' appeal to the intellect are, in fact, two necessary parts that are required to answer the question: how does poetry exert its influence over a reader?

A physiological approach and an intellectual approach are associated by way of the neurological processes. The distinction between what is physiological and what is intellectual is not necessarily irrelevant, but it is certainly less profound than either Richards or Housman

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<sup>80</sup> See, for example, I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden, 'First Steps in Psychology', in *Psyche*, vol. 2, no. 1 (July 1921), p. 78.

<sup>81</sup> B.J. Leggett, 'The Limits of the Intellect', in *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1 (March 1971), p. 58. Leggett provides an interesting account on Housman, especially his reception by Richards and Pound. One particular anecdote recited by Leggett, which is borrowed, in two different forms, from Richard Aldington's *A.E. Housman and W.B. Yeats* and J.P. Sullivan's 'Review: The Leading Classic of His Generation: A.E. Housman, Selected Prose by John Carter' (in *Arion*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1962), is that the reaction to Housman's lecture was particularly hostile, with numerous accounts of certain members of his audience lamenting the damage that Housman had done to the progress of then-contemporary literary studies.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

believed. This is because both Housman and Richards anticipated the physiological and the intellectual as belonging to two different faculties (the former physical, the latter abstract and mental). Housman's 'meaning is of the intellect, poetry is not', for example, suggests the belief that poetry is 'more physical than intellectual' and thus requires the critic to appeal to parts of the body not associated with the intellect. In *Practical Criticism*, Richards suggests a clear distinction between the intellect and the emotions. In Chapter VII, 'Doctrine in Poetry', he discusses the issue of theological beliefs held by poets and the need for the reader to either temporarily abandon their own beliefs and adopt the poet's theology, or not be able to read the poem at all. In doing so, Richards notes two kinds of thinking: intellectual beliefs, and emotional beliefs.

In the first place the very word 'assumption' is unsuitable here. Ordinarily an assumption is a proposition, an object of thought, entertained intellectually in order to trace its logical consequences as a hypothesis. But here we are concerned very little with logical consequences and almost exclusively with emotional consequences. In the effect of the thought upon our feelings and attitudes, all its importance, for poetry, lies. But there are clearly ways in which we may entertain an assumption: intellectually, that is in a context of other thoughts ready to support, contradict, or establish other logical relations with it; and emotionally, in a context of sentiments, feelings, desires and attitudes ready to group themselves around it. Behind intellectual assumption stands the desire for logical consistency and order in the receptive side of the mind. But behind the emotional assumption stands the desire or need for order of the whole outgoing emotional side of the personality, the side that is turned towards action.<sup>83</sup>

The quotation, and the whole of the chapter, refer specifically to beliefs (often theological). What drives a person to believe, or disbelieve, a theological argument? This is the type of question which concerns Richards. In debating such an issue, the distinctions that he applies to an 'intellectual belief' and an 'emotional belief' reveal the perceived division between these two faculties. The intellect is thoughtfulness based in logic. The emotions, by contrast, are the 'sentiments, feelings, desires, and attitudes'; the most basic sensations and reactions to a situation. To put it simply, Richards believes that the intellect requires skill, knowledge, training, and refinement to function at its fullest capacity – and when it does, it is capable of being exceptionally critical. The emotions, for Richards, are notably of a more basic nature, wherein an untrained, unskilled, unprepared 'primitive man' who has thrust upon him a 'ready

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<sup>83</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp. 273-4.

outlet to emotion or points to a line of action in conformity with custom' will quickly and without scrutiny accept the authenticity and accuracy of the source of the emotion.<sup>84</sup>

The most striking element of Richards' account is the clear reversal of the order of operation of the function of poetry. For Housman, poetry reaches to the emotions first. And then, taking Hartley's lead, the emotions may stir up an intellectual thought. But the point here is that emotions come first and pre-exist intellectual thoughts, and so they operate as the primary function of poetry. Intellectual thoughts, then, are merely by-products of the reader's physiology. For Richards, the reverse is true: 'The intellectual exploration of the *internal* coherence of the poem, and the intellectual examination of the relations of its ideas to other ideas of ordinary experience which are *emotionally* relevant to it, are not only permissible but necessary in the reading of much poetry[...].'<sup>85</sup> The intellectual thought precedes all other considerations, and it is the intellect which appropriates the emotional experience. So, for Richards, the intellect dominates because it is only through intellectual thoughts that we become capable of assessing the emotions of a poem.

Housman's affective approach is, in essence, a primitive form of neurological science. Specifically, his interest in the emotions elicited from poetry foreshadow twenty-first-century research in the cross-discipline of literary studies and neurology. In the twenty-first century, Reader-Response Theorists and Intentionalists have turned their attention to the neurological aspects of reading and writing, and have rendered the 'affective fallacy' almost untenable.<sup>86</sup> From the affective nature of literary themes ('[themes] form real affective inputs in the literary reading adventure and, that unlike what we might think, themes are not just words on the page but also about neurons in the brains') to neurocognitive poetics ('the transdisciplinary empirical investigation of and theorizing about (poetic) literature reception by eye or ear including its neuronal underpinnings'), contemporary Reader-Response Theory focuses on cognitive science, the relationship between aesthetics and the brain, affective emotions and the neurology behind their creation, and the importance of character and reader psychology to the interpretation of literature, to name but a few.<sup>87</sup> We might characterise this as a type of practical

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 277. Italics in original.

<sup>86</sup> For the 'affective fallacy', see William K. Jr. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Affective Fallacy', in *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 57, no. 1 (Winter 1949).

<sup>87</sup> Michael Burke, 'The Affective Nature of Literary Themes', in *Literary Reading, Cognition and Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 119. Arthur M Jacobs, 'Neurocognitive Poetics:

criticism inspired by Richards' scientific, empirical pursuit of truth in poetic interpretation. The idea that literary interpretations can be measured, quantified, and analysed certainly finds its most prominent ancestor in Richards' *Practical Criticism*. But, by the same token, Housman's identification of affective reactions is an appeal to what we now know to be the same physiological foundation of the intellect: the brain, by way of the limbic system. Many current Reader-Response Theorists today, for example, are now deeply fascinated by the emotional and affective possibility of poetry, both in terms of its neuroscientific implications and in terms of its therapeutic benefits. The questions and observations raised are often of a similar nature as those raised by Housman in *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, albeit they do utilise a far stronger scientific basis from which to assert their claims than Housman could ever hope to achieve.

When I spoke of a 'contextual problem', I was referring to how Housman and Richards both believed that intellect and emotion belonged to two separate faculties. For Housman, the emotions of a reader complement the physiology of the reader, but they are not necessarily synonymous with one another, although they can be positioned (as he does within *The Name and Nature of Poetry*) as being in opposition to the intellect. It is not that Housman's and Richards' theses are incompatible with each other, but that they were unaware that, neurologically speaking, the intellect and the emotions are relatively symbiotic, and exert a degree of influence upon each other. With this in mind, we can see how both the emotions and the intellect need not be separated, and, in fact, are dependent upon one another if we are to understand how we conceptualise and comprehend poetry.

Lastly, Housman's idea that poetry functions as an extension of the nervous system is valuable in understanding how we, as readers, might conceptualise the role of the poem's text. Rather than it being merely a separate, external entity through which we encounter the poet and his poem, it might be more prudent to think of it as non-biological extension of the nervous systems of both the reader and the author. In doing so, not only does this elevate the poem's text, but it also elevates the role of the poet: as discussed in the previous section, Housman believed that the poet's emotions are the reader's emotions, and vice versa. And this is important if we are to understand Housman's transfusion of emotion, from poet to reader, in a twenty-first-century scientific, literary discipline.

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Methods and Models for Investigating the Neuronal and Cognitive-Affective Bases of Literature Reception', in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 9, article 186 (April 2015), p. 2.

## Chapter Two

### I.A. Richards

#### Poetry and the Intellect

In Chapter One, I ended by suggesting that the perceived disparities between Housman and Richards were of a contextual nature, as opposed to a fundamental issue in their respective theses. In doing so, I positioned Housman, not as an Impressionist, but as an Objectivist whose poetic considerations incorporated elements of a primitive understanding of neurological and physiological phenomena. The purpose of this was to demonstrate that Housman and Richards were, in fact, arguing two different sides of the same coin. It might be more appropriate, then, to consider Housman, not as the antithesis of Richards, but as a budding empiricist sympathetic to Richards' intellectual analysis of reader response; the only difference is that Housman elevates the physiological aspects of his response, not the intellectual.

Chapter Two assesses Richards' intellectualisation of physical sensations, the scientific literary revolution in which mass quantitative investigations presented a new means by which to assess textual meaning, and the nature of literary meaning within a systematic, scientific paradigm that prides itself on generating inductive data.<sup>1</sup> 'Intellectualisation' retains its meaning from the Introduction and Chapter One (the reader's capacity for assigning ideas and meaning to physical sensations). A secondary discussion centres on Richards' and Housman's conception of poetry as a monosemantic object. 'Monosemantic' is a state in which the transmission of a text's meaning, emotion, or feeling is static and unchanging.<sup>2</sup> For Housman, the poem is monosemantic because it functions as a proxy surrogate nervous system for the transfusion of emotion (the reader's emotion is the poet's emotion). For Richards, the poem is monosemantic because reading is not a will-o-the-wisp occurrence, but rather predicated on the linguistic structures of the text. So, for Housman, the focus is upon the transfusion of

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<sup>1</sup> For current scholarly discussions regarding these issues, see: Morris' 'Practical Criticism in Perspective: A Journey from Cambridge to Reading', West's *I.A. Richards and the Rise of Cognitive Stylistics*, Ward's *Coleridge and the Nature of Imagination: Evolution, Engagement with the World, and Poetry*, Kohlmann's *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-Wing Literature in the 1930s*, and Thaventhiran's *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers*.

<sup>2</sup> Although monosemantic traditionally refers to the semantic meaning of language, I want to here extend its definition to include feelings and emotions.

emotion from poet to reader, but for Richards the focus is upon the transmission of meaning from text to reader. This subtle alteration is due to Richards' belief that the recognition of poetry – 'recognition' in the sense of identifying something of poetic quality – is a taught skill, as opposed to an intuitive, innate ability. Furthermore, the belief that poetry is a taught skill is one of the primary reasons for Richards' interest in pedagogy, and in the creation of a set of pedagogical methods to teach students how to navigate and interpret poetry.<sup>3</sup> To this effect, Richards was working with the outcomes, if not the methods or assumptions, of modern cognitive science, and his systematic and quantitative analysis of reader responses is representative of early Reader-Response Theory.<sup>4</sup>

Early Reader-Response Theory such as that advanced in the 1960s and 1970s by Stanley Fish ('Interpreting the *Variorum*' and *Is There a Text in this Class?*) and Norman Holland (*Poems in Persons* and *5 Readers Reading*) advocate meaning as the product of the reader, defined and confined by the linguistic parameters of the reader's nuanced language: 'how easy it is to surrender to the bias of our critical language, and begin to talk as if poems, not readers or interpreters, did things'.<sup>5</sup> Poststructuralists (such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida), Russian Formalists (Victor Shklovsky), and the Constance school (Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss) also tend to approach the reader as a phenomenological experiencer, in which his cognition sets forth to awaken the inherently dynamic character of the literary work. Iser, for example, writes that 'the reader often *feels* involved in events which, at the time of reading, seem real to him, even though in fact they are very far from his own reality'.<sup>6</sup> A more recent off-shoot of this is contemporary cognitive Reader-Response Theory, such as that advanced by Lisa Zunshine, D.H. Whalen, Paul B. Armstrong (*How Literature Plays with the Brain*), and Patrick C. Hogan, who lean towards the neurophysiology of reading. Norman Holland's recent book *Literature and the Brain* (2009) also delves into the brain's function and form, with a

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<sup>3</sup> This is a classic new critical position concerning reading and writing. See, for example, Cleanth Brooks' *The Well-Wrought Urn* and 'The Primacy of the Reader'.

<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting that Richards was a Reader-Response theorist, or even a proto-Reader-Response theorist. It is clear from his devised pedagogy that he believed the meaning of a text to be intrinsic to the text itself. Rather, I am suggesting that Richards' sustained focus on the reader in *Practical Criticism* provided a foundation for later Reader-Response Theory.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Fish, 'Interpreting the *Variorum*', in *Critical Enquiry*, vol. 2, no. 3 (April 1976), p. 477. See also Fish's 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', p. 283. My italics.



particular emphasis on the distinct neurophysiological differences between reading and everyday life, but with the caveat that literature is not the result of an evolutionary process and is instead something we pursue because we enjoy it: ‘All human cultures have had some form of literature. Shall we conclude that we are innately programmed to do literature? Does literature confer an evolutionary advantage? Some literary theorists think so. I think not. Why do we do literature? My answer is simple and not evolutionary: we do literature because we enjoy it. We enjoy it because of the way our brains deal with it. Our brains on literature function differently from our brains in ordinary life, but in some ways the same’.<sup>7</sup> In these more recent cases, ‘reading’ is quantified to a sub-set system of cognitive processes, which are then directly correlated to the neurolinguistics of the left frontal lobe (Broca’s area).<sup>8</sup> Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and Electroencephalography (EEG) scans of the brain during acts of reading and writing constitute an assessment of the body’s physiological response. Readers engaged in these experiments have no control over how their brain functions during such an exercise, and so we might think of this kind of investigation as purely neurophysiological – it is without the reader’s active expression of the subjective experience.<sup>9</sup>

However, the initial Reader-Response Theorists (Holland, Fish, Jauss, Barthes, Iser, for example) are fundamentally different from those twenty-first-century Reader-Response Theorists who specialise in the neurophysiology of reading. This separation is mainly to do with subtle differences concerning the definition of a reader. For Fish and his contemporaries, readers are intellectual agents of experiential cognitive action: ‘it is the structure of the reader’s experience rather than any structures available on the page that should be the object of description’.<sup>10</sup> But for classic cognitive scientists (whose primary domain is the fMRI and EEG laboratory), the reader is conceived as a reactive object: ‘the neural pathways in the brain of

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<sup>7</sup> Norman N. Holland, *Literature and the Brain* (Gainesville: PsyArt Foundation, 2009), pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> For example: Carolin Shah et al., ‘Neural Correlates of Creative Writing: An fMRI Study’, in *Human Brain Mapping*, vol. 34, no. 5 (May 2013), and R.M. Willems, and A.D. Nijhof, ‘Simulating Fiction: Individual Differences in Literature Comprehension Revealed with fMRI’, *PLoS ONE*, vol. 10, no. 2 (February 2015).

<sup>9</sup> For example: Michael Burke, ‘The Rhetorical Neuroscience of Style: On the Primacy of Style Elements During Literary Discourse Processing’, in *Journal of Literary Semantics*, vol. 42, no. 2 (September 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Fish, ‘Interpreting the *Variorum*’, p. 468. Fish is here advancing his own theoretical approach after a highly critical appraisal of Formalism.

the avid literary reader will be stimulated and shaped by repeated exposure to certain style-figure structures during acts of engaged literary reading, resulting in a plausible neural mirroring of the essential structure of a certain scheme'.<sup>11</sup> The sentiment of Burke's sentence should be clear: it is not about how the reader feels, or of his inward experience of the text, but how his brain functions. There is an implicit vagueness surrounding classic cognitive science, in which the results gathered from non-invasive brain scans are often obscure and require significant effort to correctly interpret: 'it is not always clear what the results of scans mean[...]. The results of brain scans are not simply self-evident. They require interpretation, and the interpretation is never certain[...]. A neuroscientific account cannot explain everything about any cultural phenomenon, literary or otherwise'.<sup>12</sup> So the distinction between the first generation of Reader-Response Theorists (Holland, Fish, Jauss, Barthes, Iser) and classic cognitive Reader-Response Theorists is the role the reader fulfils in the course of the investigation: either as a phenomenological subject in the former or a neurophysiological object in the latter. The initial Reader-Response Theorists attempt to discern a reading experience from within the mind of the reader, while the classic cognitive Reader-Response Theorists attempt to discern a reading experience from within the brain of the reader.<sup>13</sup> The mind is often approached from a phenomenological, psychological consideration, whereas the brain is approached from a scientific, neurological consideration.<sup>14</sup> At times, these can become

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<sup>11</sup> Burke, 'The Rhetorical Neuroscience of Style: On the Primacy of Style Elements during Literary Discourse Processing', p. 211.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 297, 299.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, Zunshine is also interested in the phenomenology of mind-reading, but this is approached from a scientific perspective. She has an evolutionary explanation for why we enjoy engaging in literary acts (including both creative and critical, and as readers and authors), and a neurophysiological explanation that attempts to correspond the physical brain with the different aspects of reading. See Lisa Zunshine, *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahvi's *The Phenomenological Mind* provides a revealing account of the 'mind', noting that a discussion on it requires an understanding of multiple broad fields: 'What the mind is, and how it works are currently the topics of many complex debates that span a number of disciplines: psychology, brain science, artificial intelligence, philosophy of mind – disciplines that belong to what is generally referred to as the cognitive sciences'. Furthermore, any investigation into the inner workings of the mind (from either a psychological or neurophysiological approach) will inevitably involve the nature of 'consciousness', which is itself a difficult idea to define without drawing upon various other disciplines. Consciousness is a state of awareness, and it involves intricate neurobiological

interrelated, so that what is psychological and phenomenological might be correlated to what is neurological. Yet even in such cases, this subtle distinction between experience and physiology remains: there is a gap between intellectualising the brain's functions and intellectualising how we feel (in terms of an emotional, physiological, phenomenological experience). And this gap is a successful way of distinguishing phenomenology from physiology.

This section focuses on Richards' *Practical Criticism*, which is an important text because of its focus on the student readers' subjective experience. *Practical Criticism* demonstrates that the intellectual expressions of a reader's phenomenological experience are underpinned by varying degrees of conviction. Richards makes this clear when he writes the following: 'The rapidity with which many readers leap to a conviction as to a poem's general intention, and the ease with which this assumption can distort their whole reading, is one of the most interesting features in the protocols'.<sup>15</sup> His 'Documentation' provides insight into the emotional provocations of poetry that may prove to be beneficial to the Reader-Response Theorist's consideration of how readers experience literature. The strength of a reader's conviction determines the extent to which he believes that his interpretation is correct. It imposes upon the subjective interpretation a conception of truth (from the reader's perspective). Student readers, due to their inexperience and lack of technical skill, often reach a conclusion regarding the meaning of the poem within their first few initial readings. In doing so, the student becomes convinced that this initial interpretation is correct, and then acts to express it as a truth.<sup>16</sup> This observation about the potential conviction of student readers is something which Richards' analysis reveals, but it is not a concrete law concerning acts of reading. Certain student readers, for example, recognise their readings as provisional. A degree of modesty presents itself in these rare and humble acknowledgments, accompanied by an expression of uncertainty

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processes and a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be aware of ourselves and our environment. In this sense, the mind approach via consciousness shares elements of the neuroscientific approach. Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahvi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1, 45-68.

<sup>15</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 206.

<sup>16</sup> See Richards' 'Documentation' in *Practical Criticism*, which contains hundreds of examples of this.

regarding the accuracy and validity of the reading.<sup>17</sup> That said, most of the student readers who appear in Richards' 'Documentation' posture an air of authority.

In a systematic, scientific analysis of literary interpretations, the imposition upon a text of a correct interpretational state is secondary, if not altogether unimportant and irrelevant, to an inductive conclusion (formed from inductive methods of analysis in which quantities of data are produced for analysis). The issue of what the text says is, for the Reader-Response Theorist, not as important as either the frequency of types of reader interpretations or the neurological characteristics to which these interpretations appeal, express, and activate. An analysis of Richards' discussion on the convictions of readers will provide a firmer understanding as to why the phenomenological, emotional experience of readers is not merely an important consideration for the Reader-Response Theorist, but that the convictions and emotions of readers (both experienced and inexperienced) is an inherent quality of interpretational acts that has been documented in the critical literature as early as the 1920s. So a part of this chapter is devoted to a revision of Richards' conception of the emotions, and the role that they play in producing a phenomenological literary experience.

### **The Aesthetics of Richards' *Practical Criticism***

I begin by identifying the aesthetic principles of Richards' *Practical Criticism*. The nature of meaning for Richards is such that it is, in part, a psychological issue. Psychology is here defined as an empirical manifestation of the raw, underlying intellect of the reader.<sup>18</sup>

The methods, structure, and style found in *Practical Criticism* are the result of several years of intense deliberation by Richards about the aesthetic nature of verse and prose.<sup>19</sup> The aesthetic takes into account the senses and the emotions, and Richards' approach to the study and writing of poetry is far more akin to that of the objectivist than to the impressionist: an ideology in which reality exists independent of the observer, and so the aesthetic quality of verse is separate

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<sup>17</sup> For example, see Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines psychology as 'the scientific study of the nature, functioning, and development of the human mind, including the faculties of reason, emotion, perception, communication, etc.; the branch of science that deals with the (human or animal) mind as an entity and in its relationship to the body and to the environmental or social context, based on observation of the behaviour of individuals or groups of individuals in particular (ordinary or experimentally controlled) circumstances'.

<sup>19</sup> David West, 'Practical Criticism: I.A. Richards' Experiment in Interpretation', in *Changing English*, vol. 9, no. 2 (October 2002), pp. 207-13.

from the phenomenological experience that the reader has of the poetic object. According to Richards, it is the reader's duty to come as close as possible to an aesthetic judgement of verse that matches the inherent aesthetic quality of the poem, and that the skills required to do so can be taught to the reader – a classic new critical position. In this sense, the study and writing of poetry is, in fact, a learned skill; it is not, as Matthew Arnold suggested, a rare talent inherent in only a few lucky readers.<sup>20</sup> Housman, by contrast, takes the opposite view (poetry is not a skill; it is something dormant and latent that lies beneath the surface of the body and mind). But we must look beyond this, for if we do not then we will fall into the trap of assessing Richards and Housman as being too different and contrarian. Rather, we can align their aesthetic theory through their appeal to an aesthetic objectivism. Poetry, for Housman, is a direct conduit with the poet, whereas poetry, for Richards, operates on a set of linguistic structures. In both these cases, there exists an external object against which to test the authenticity of the poem's experience: the poet for Housman, and the inherent construct that is language for Richards. By recognising these points of reference, we can see how Richards' *Practical Criticism* appeals to the same sort of psychological, physiological, and aesthetic objectivist principles that are found in Housman's thesis.

When Richards wrote *Principles of Literary Criticism*, which was published in C.K. Ogden's monographic series *International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method* in December 1924, he did so as an attempt to answer the question: 'What is the value of the arts, why are they worth the devotion of the keenest hours of the best minds, and what is their place in the system of human endeavours?'<sup>21</sup> For Richards, no aesthetic or artistic theory had been able to present a plausible explanation for the value of art, for its study and critical examination, or for why art should have a vital function within its society.<sup>22</sup> The absence of such a theory was, in part, due to a lack of methods that could suitably gauge the affective responses of readers, and account for the individual's subjective consciousness during his engagement with a literary work of art. Theoretical approaches (beginning with Kantian aesthetics on 'disinterestedness') frequently assumed that aesthetic judgements relied on a

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', in *Essays in Criticism* (New York: A.L. Burt, 1865), pp. 283-4, 289.

<sup>21</sup> Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> David W. West, 'Psychologies of Art and Literature: A Comparison of the Work of I.A. Richards and L.S. Vygotsky', in *Changing English*, vol. 8, no. 1 (March 2001), p. 18.

unique cognitive process that was separate from the most fundamental emotional, physical sensations: ‘the assumption that there is a distinct *kind* of mental activity present in what are called aesthetic experiences’.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the value of art was often conceived as having an explanatory basis in ethical or metaphysical ideas with regard to its form and place within a society. But Richards disagreed, and instead believed that the cognitive process involved in the judgement of aesthetic values was, in fact, an extension of primitive underlying experiences of sense and ordinary emotion.<sup>24</sup> In order to understand the relationship between aesthetic values and the emotional and physical senses, Richards turned to the burgeoning field of psychology because, to him, critical remarks were merely a branch of psychological remarks. The significance of psychology led Richards to proclaim (in an essay published in 1921) that it would be difficult to find ‘any branch of human activity upon which psychology cannot throw fresh light’.<sup>25</sup> Richards believed that psychological terms would allow for an intellectual structuring of the subjective mind of the reader, which could then provide a framework against which to discriminate between those aesthetic experiences which are valuable and those which are not. Richards’ theory of art, then, was grounded in non-ethical and non-metaphysical principles, and instead draws upon principles which are precise, materialistic, and scientific, while treating the literary artwork as a self-contained, self-referential object from which the reader observes its meaning and value.

In *Science and Poetry*, which was published in 1926 with the help of C.K. Ogden’s psychological journal *Psyche*, Richards turned his attention to scientific methods and how their application in the field of literary studies might reveal new ways of textual thinking. Heralding science’s arrival as the potential catalyst by which the reading habits of man might be thrust into the future, he alerts us to the startling and somewhat alarming fact that ‘we think very much as our ancestors thought a hundred or two hundred generations ago’.<sup>26</sup> For Richards, contemporary literary criticism was simply another reiteration of the same intellectual and

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<sup>23</sup> Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 7. Italics in original.

<sup>24</sup> This is a major tradition in English criticism, beginning with Shaftesbury and finding a major exponent in Hume (*A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*). So while Richards’ approach is distinctly non-Kantian, it does have links to Hume. But Hume’s tradition was much less prevalent than Kant’s tradition at the time Richards was writing.

<sup>25</sup> I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden, ‘First Steps in Psychology’, p. 78.

<sup>26</sup> I.A. Richards, *Science and Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1926), p. 3.

aesthetic processes that had governed critical thinking for hundreds of years. Compared to the relative precision of science, the ideas from a hoary antiquity offered no new insight into how poetry operated. In fact, the sciences were most appealing to Richards because they approached the issue of poetry from an objective, non-metaphysical perspective.<sup>27</sup> To the scientist, the literary work has only one manifestation, and that is the manifestation of its objective representation: a self-contained, self-referential artefact.

In nearly all poetry the sound and feel of the words, what is often called the *form* of the poem in opposition to its *content*, get to work first, and the sense in which the words are taken is subtly influenced by this fact. Most words are ambiguous as regards their plain sense, especially in poetry. We can take them as we please in a variety of sense. The sense we are pleased to choose is the one which most suits the impulses already stirred through the form of the verse. The same thing can be noticed in conversation. Not the strict logical sense of what is said, but the tone of voice and the occasion are the primary factors by which we interpret. Science, it is worth noting, endeavours with increasing success to bar out these factors. We believe a scientist because he can substantiate his remarks, not because he is eloquent or forcible in his enunciation. In fact, we distrust him when he seems to be influencing us by his manner.<sup>28</sup>

The value of science is the potential to ‘substantiate’ the critic’s remarks. For the scientist, the superficiality of eloquence, form, and enunciation has the potential to detract from the essence of the verse. But the poet and the literary critic realise that verse can sometimes rely on its eloquence and form to transmit the poet’s meaning. In fact, the Formalists argued that the eloquence and form of verse are what distinguished it as a type of literary material, and Richards did not disagree: ‘In its use of words poetry is just the reverse of science[...]. Very definite thoughts do occur, but not because the words are so chosen as logically to bar out all possibilities but one[...]. But because the manner, the tone of voice, the cadence, and the rhythm play upon our interests and make *them* pick out from among an indefinite number of possibilities the precise particular thought which they need’.<sup>29</sup>

For Richards, a reading of a poem will often reveal more about the reader than about the studied literature – *Practical Criticism*, for example, is an entire book demonstrating how

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<sup>27</sup> There was a tradition amongst philosophers, most notably Kant, to position ethics within the objective sciences; ethics and morality were an inherent quality of human nature, and hence subject to empirical evaluation.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24. Italics in original.

readers read, and how those student readings (or, rather, mis-readings and misunderstandings) are often the product of intellectual discrepancies. For this reason, it is the field of psychology which Richards believes will deliver to the critic an ‘understanding of human nature’ by honing in on the mind and its capacity to interpret literature: ‘It has long been recognized that if only something could be done in psychology remotely comparable to what has been achieved in physics, practical consequences might be expected even more remarkable than any that the engineer could contrive’.<sup>30</sup> Yet if Richards advocates a scientific reading then he must also confront the ‘extraordinary claims’ which have often been made for poetry, but which do not necessarily conform to the reality of its existence.<sup>31</sup> Richards points to Matthew Arnold’s ‘The Study of Poetry’ as a salient example of the generally eccentric and enthused conceptions of the future of poetry, and notes that although they are undoubtedly astonishing, they have so far failed to comprehend a realistic, materialistic function of verse in modern life: ‘Extraordinary claims have often been made for poetry – Matthew Arnold’s words quoted at the head of this essay are an example – claims which very many people are inclined to view with astonishment or with the smile which tolerance gives to the enthusiast. Indeed a more representative modern view would be that the future of poetry is *nil*’.<sup>32</sup> This ‘nil’ state is due to nineteenth-century poets and critics (Richards specifically references John Keats, along with Thomas Love Peacock’s *The Four Ages of Poetry*) believing that the ‘inevitable effect of the advance of science would be to destroy the possibility of poetry’.<sup>33</sup> Richards disagrees with these disparaging remarks, and instead allies himself to Arnold’s grand claims, albeit he does so with a positive outlook for the role of science in the study of poetry, believing that both can co-exist due to science’s inherent limitations: ‘For science, which is simply our most elaborate way of *pointing* to things systematically, tells us and can tell us nothing about the nature of things in any *ultimate* sense. It can never answer any question of the form: *What* is so and so? It can only

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. The quotation that appears at the start of Richards’ essay is taken from Matthew Arnold’s ‘The Study of Poetry’: ‘The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything’.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



tell us *how* so and so behaves'.<sup>34</sup> '*What* is so and so' is an allusion to Arnold's 'ideas' to which poetry attaches itself. Science, then, allows Richards to account for the practical, materialistic function of verse, while reserving for poetry the exploration of the question '*What* is so and so'. For Richards, these questions are reserved for poetry because of the poem's form, and it is for this fact that Richards writes the following conclusion: 'And if science cannot answer these pseudo-questions no more can philosophy or religion. So that all the varied answers which have for ages been regarded as the keys of wisdom are dissolving together'.<sup>35</sup> And through this process of 'dissolving together', the elements to which they correspond coalesce: the mind, the intellect, the physical body. So Richards' justification for the continued livelihood of poetry has a physiological basis: 'In nearly all poetry the sound and the feel of the words, what is often called the *form* of the poem in opposition to its *content*, get to work first, and the sense in which the words are taken is subtly influenced by this fact'.<sup>36</sup> Richards is not claiming that the sense of a poem is predicated on its form, but merely that sense can be subtly influenced by the form.

In *Science and Poetry*, the value of poetry is as a response with which we might combat the 'persistent mental imbalances [that] are the source of nearly all our troubles'.<sup>37</sup> Conflict, Richards concludes, can be avoided or overcome by one of two ways: 'By conquest and by conciliation. One or other of the contesting impulses can be suppressed or they can come to a mutual arrangement, they can adjust themselves to one another'.<sup>38</sup> Unresolved conflicts between different impulses are, according to Richards, 'the greatest evils which afflict mankind', and their resolution is paramount to the securing of a mental balance within the reader.<sup>39</sup> This psychotherapeutic function of literature is of a similar idea as that which is advanced by Robert Graves in *On English Poetry* (1922), in which he writes that poetry is a 'form of psycho-therapy [...] homoeopathically healing other men's minds similarly troubled'.<sup>40</sup> And in *Poetic Unreason* (1925), Graves draws on the psychologist W.H.R. Rivers'

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<sup>34</sup> Richards, *Science and Poetry*, pp. 52-3. Italics in original.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Graves, *On English Poetry* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 85.

*Conflict and Dream* to discuss the natural conflict inherent to poetry, describing it as a virtual ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ occurrence: ‘In the period of conflict, poetry may be either a partisan statement [...] of one side of the conflict; or else a double statement of both sides of the conflict, one side appearing in the manifest statement [...] the other in the latent content’.<sup>41</sup> Both Richards and Graves agree that by overcoming conflicts of impulse, the reader can become a ‘new individual’ out of the conflicting sub-personalities: ‘Hyde and Jekyll co-exist in an individual as possibilities, but in relation to any given situation only one will appear at a time while the conflict continues. If a situation occurs in which they *can* sink their differences, the action of the individual will be neither Hyde-ish nor Jekyll-esque but of such a nature that [...] a single individual will emerge not predominately Jekyll or Hyde [...] but a new creation making the continuance of the conflicting elements unnecessary’.<sup>42</sup> Graves was averse to Richards’ devotion to science, and Richards frequently criticised Graves as a critic and a poet; but here, Richards ‘found himself systematizing and saying better many things that Graves said first’ with regard to the psychological dimensions of the writing and reading of poetry.<sup>43</sup> To Richards, the inclusion of scientific thinking reshaped the function of poetry so that it became psychotherapeutic in nature. It is here, in the psychology of the reader, that poetry can affect the mental organisation for the better, while simultaneously rendering conflicting impulses less troubling. Richards believed this to be an important quality of verse because ‘far more life is wasted through muddled mental organization’ than in any other sphere.<sup>44</sup> In poetry, the structuring of physical and emotional impulses allows the reader to have the fullest freedom of experience: ‘The best life [...] will be one in which as much as possible of himself is engaged (as many of his impulses as possible). And this with as little conflict, as little mutual interference between different sub-systems of his activities as there can be. The more he lives and the less he thwarts himself the better’.<sup>45</sup> In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Richards associated a psychoanalytical interpretation of literature with ‘the gravest dangers’ – this being

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Graves, *Poetic Unreason* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1925), pp. 52-3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52. Italics in original.

<sup>43</sup> Donald J. Childs, *The Birth of New Criticism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013), p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> Richards, *Science and Poetry*, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

the difficulty of assessing unconscious processes because they are inherently unverifiable.<sup>46</sup> But in *Science and Poetry*, the psychoanalytical approach and the psychological function of literature (including both its organisation of human impulses, and the socially progressive development it encourages) were revered by Richards.

By 1928, Richards was heavily involved in the research of interpretive strategies. Driven by a desire to produce a new form of documentation and psychoanalysis with which to assess the interpretational capacity of undergraduate University students, he devised a set of inductive methods to generate significant quantities of data on readers' responses to poetry. *Practical Criticism* was touted by Richards as a scientific experiment in which the evidence brought forward in his documentation was entirely verifiable by the 'sons and daughters of other Universities'.<sup>47</sup> And like all experiments, his was designed to answer a particular set of questions. Outlined in the first paragraph of his 'Introductory' chapter are the three aims that he intended to pursue: 'First, to introduce a new kind of documentation to those who are interested in the contemporary state of culture[...]. Secondly, to provide a new technique [...] to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry[...]. Thirdly, to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read'.<sup>48</sup> The reasoning behind these questions was first articulated by Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*, written with C.K. Ogden and published in 1923, which was also the same year that he first conceived his experiment for *Practical Criticism*. In *The Meaning of Meaning*, Richards and Ogden make a clear distinction between the mind of the interpreter, the sign written upon the page, and the meaning for which the sign stands. 'Interpretation, or what happens to (or in the mind of) an Interpreter,' Richards and Ogden argue, 'is quite distinct both from the sign and from that for which the sign stands or to which it refers'.<sup>49</sup> This relationship between sign, interpreter, and meaning is similar to the idea formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Cours de Linguistique Générale* was published posthumously in 1916 (but not in English; Richards and Ogden's idea developed independently from Saussure). For Saussure, the signifier and the

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<sup>46</sup> Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>47</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 310.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Keegan Paul, 1923), p. 21.

referent mean nothing by themselves, and only gain meaning when someone (the Interpreter) makes use of them. Similarly, Richards and Ogden, in *The Meaning of Meaning*, turn their attention to the significance of the mind of the Interpreter. By creating a three-point system of interpretation, with each point representing either the symbol (the signifier), the thought and mind of the Interpreter, and the referent (the signified), Richards and Ogden are able to place ‘what happens to (or in the mind of) an Interpreter’ at the apex. Without this middle-point to mediate between the signifier and signified, the meaning conveyed by a symbol cannot come into existence. And this middle-point is exclusively psychological; it is the internalisation of thought within the mind of the reader. Alternatively, both end-points are external, with the signifier being the words written upon the page while its signified is a linguistic and social construct. But although Richards’ focus may have been on the development of this middle-point (one commentator goes so far as to suggest that *The Meaning of Meaning* ‘did more than anything else to keep Saussure out of British and American universities until after the Second World War’), its existence hinges equally on the presence of those two other end-points.<sup>50</sup> And as Richards and Ogden acknowledge in *The Meaning of Meaning*, language and meaning are never a purely psychological occurrence: ‘To speak of a reference is to speak of the contexts, psychological and external, by which a sign is linked to its referent’.<sup>51</sup>

### **Intellect and Feelings**

Distinguishing ‘what a reader *thinks* about a poem’ from ‘what a reader *feels* about a poem’ is the first step towards understanding the then-perceived distinction between the intellect and the emotions. In doing so, the cognitive processes associated with the act of reading are discovered, and it is from this discovery Richards was then able to develop a series of pedagogical tools to instruct readers in the most correct interpretation of the text.

Richards divides meaning into four forms: ‘Tone’, ‘Feeling’, ‘Sense’, and ‘Intention’.<sup>52</sup> Tone and feeling both refer to primitive, reactive experiences. Sense refers to the linguistic meaning of the text. And intention refers to what the poet wanted to say, and assists in providing

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<sup>50</sup> V. Cunningham, *In The Reading Goal: Postmodernity, Texts, and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Richards and Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning*, p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 353. Richards does not exclude further kinds of meaning. Rather, these four are the most prominent kinds in his assessment of the student protocols.

the reader with a suitable balance of the four forms. All four components play vital roles in contributing to, or detracting from, the aesthetic value of poetry.<sup>53</sup> They are interrelated, and not isolated causes: ‘Sometimes all four fail together; a reader garbles the sense, distorts the feeling, mistakes the tone and disregards the intention; and often a partial collapse of one function entails aberrations in the others’.<sup>54</sup> ‘Intention’ (Function 4) ranks highly because it tends to dictate the state of feeling and tone: ‘the furtherance of intentions [...] is unmistakably predominant. Its instruments are Function 2, the expression of feelings about causes, policies, leaders, and opponents, and Function 3, the establishment of favourable relations with the audience’.<sup>55</sup> ‘Sense’ (Function 1) also ranks highly because it is through the linguistic meaning of the verse that the poet speaks ‘*to say something*, and when we listen we expect something to be said’.<sup>56</sup> Most notably, these four kinds of meaning are reliant on the genre of the text, and are susceptible to different configurations depending on the needs of the author: ‘A man writing a scientific treatise, for example, will put the *Sense* of what he has to say first, he will subordinate his *Feelings* about the subject or about other views upon it and be careful not to let them interfere to distort his argument or to suggest bias. His *Tone* will be settled for him by academic convention[...]. It will be well if his *Intention* [...] be on the whole confined to the clearest and most adequate statements of what he has to say’.<sup>57</sup> For Richards, all four components, whether they are intellectual or affective in their own right, must be intellectualised if they are to be discussed critically: ‘For handling Feeling we have nothing at all comparable. We have to rely upon introspection, a few clumsy descriptive names for emotions, some scores of aesthetic adjectives and the indirect resources of poetry, resources at the disposal of a few men only, and for them only in exceptional hours’.<sup>58</sup> Of course, Richards’ sentiment here is that introspection often fails to fully grasp an emotional experience, and correctly conveying the emotions to language is an extremely difficult task. Nevertheless, the underlying assertion made by Richards is that if emotions and feelings are so difficult to

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 181. Italics in original.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 183-4. Italics in original.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

describe then in their raw form they are especially uncommunicable (and even unrecognisable). It is only through our attempts to convey them with our words, through an intellectualisation of our emotional experience, that they gain critical substance.

Richards provides extensive clarification concerning poetry's use of these four kinds of meaning. For Richards, a poem's feeling and tone are often dependent on the sense of the verse. Throughout his clarification, Richards makes a notable distinction between what is physiological and what is intellectual. For Richards, the physiological reactions inspired by literature are not synonymous with the intellectual processes of the reader, although there is a degree of interrelatedness between the two. For example, Richards' discussion of the aural quality of verse separates the physical sensations of pleasure and the sense that the word itself conveys. The aural quality is physiological and reflects auditory vibrations within the ear. The sense of the verse, however, is distinctly intellectual, and, furthermore, is noted by Richards as having a form unique from its aural quality.

Let us set one complication aside at once. The *sound* of a word has plainly much to do with the feeling it evokes, above all when it occurs in the organised context of a passage of verse. Let us postpone – so far as we can – all consideration of this whole *sensuous* aspect of words (including their character as products of the speech-organs and their associated dance-movement) until the following Chapter, where the difficulties of the apprehension of poetic form must be tackled. In practice, of course, the sound is very important, as one of the causes (together with the word's history, its semantics, its usual applications and contexts and its special context in the poem) of the feeling it carries. But here let us confine our attention to the relations between sense and feeling and to the ways in which the feeling may be, in various degrees, dependent on the sense. And let us be careful to remember that we are concerned, firstly, with the feeling actually aroused by the word in the poem, not with feelings the word might have in other contexts, or the feeling it generally has, or the feeling it 'ought to have', though these may with advantage be remembered, for a word's feeling is often determined in part by its sense in other contexts.<sup>59</sup>

According to Richards, there are three types of interrelation between sense and feeling.<sup>60</sup> Type I is where feeling is generated by and governed by the sense of the word. Type II is the reverse of Type I, where the sense is derived from the feeling aroused by the word. And Type III depends on the contextual relation between sense and feeling. In Type II, although sense is derived from feeling, the feeling itself is derived from either the linguistic meaning of the word

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 209-10. Italics in original.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 210-2.

(an intellectual premise) or the rhetoric and form of the word. In this paradigm, Richards' process for Type II is: *sense {feeling {linguistic sense / rhetoric}}*.<sup>61</sup> In all three cases, the word is the foremost generator of sense or feeling. According to Richards, we must focus our attention on how feeling is dependent on the sense of the word because, for Richards, a word does not simply convey a feeling to the reader, but it rather conveys a feeling via the reader's sense of the linguistic meaning of the word. Sense is logical, intellectual, and capable of a direct and predictable assessment. Feeling, in contrast with sense, is described by Richards as being a 'will-o'-the-wisp'.<sup>62</sup> Because of this, sense is a relatively easier idea to define and intellectualise than feeling:

How actually do we enquire into the feeling a word (or phrase) carries? How we inquire into its sense is not so difficult to make out. We utter the word or phrase and note the thoughts it arouses, being careful to keep them in the context of the other thoughts aroused by the whole passage. We then attempt, by a well recognised and elaborate technique, to construct a definition, choosing from among several methods to suit our purpose and the situation. If we still have any difficulty in distinguishing the precise sense, we can put definite questions, we can substitute other words – which the dictionary will supply – that in part arouse the same thoughts. We note the samenesses and differences and plot the position of the thought we wish to define with regard to these other thoughts.<sup>63</sup>

For Richards, making sense of poetry is an intellectual, logical, almost-deductive process. It involves recognising the association between the linguistic meaning of a word and the thoughts that said meaning arouses in the reader. This is further refined by the context of the literary work, wherein Richards encourages the reader to keep in mind the 'whole passage' when locating the correct thought to associate with the word. The 'plotting' of the position of the thought relative to other thoughts suggests an intricate and complex literary machine, in which poetry is capable of eliciting multiple senses (some in agreement and some contradictory) throughout the course of its reading. There is also an element of control, in which the reader is able to make precise the word's sense by comparing and substituting it with other words in the

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<sup>61</sup> Housman, by contrast, argued that poetry was physical, and hence the intellectual element was irrelevant. The verse directly connected with the nervous system and elicited a physical reaction without requiring direct input / output from the conscious mind; the physicality of the verse came first, and the intellectual process came second.

<sup>62</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 217.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

dictionary and by ‘choosing from among several methods to suit our purpose and the situation’; certain philosophical, philological, phenomenological approaches, for example.

This is notable because it portrays the reader, in his pursuit of the sense of the verse, as a bloodhound searching for the most appropriate thought. It is the complete opposite of a will-o’-the-wisp occurrence. The language used to describe the sense of a word is pure and whole – that is, it is capable of defining concretely a type of linguistic meaning of the word. This is because sense, for Richards, corresponds primarily with a linguistic, grammatical function of language. Feeling, by contrast, is more of an abstraction. And it is an abstraction because its primary function is non-linguistic and non-intellectual, and it is instead physiological. Yet Richards is adamant that language might assist us in defining feeling, at least to some small degree.

There are the names of the emotions and of the emotional attitudes – *anger, fear, joy, sorrow...*; *hope, surprise, discouragement, dread...* And the derivative adjectives, verbs and adverbs, *enthusiastic, passionate, tender...*; *startle, delight, distress...*; *mournfully, eagerly, gaily...* Moreover, we have the special apparatus of the aesthetic or ‘projectile’ adjectives. We express our feeling by describing the object which excites it as *splendid, glorious, ugly, horrid, lovely, pretty...* words which really indicate not so much the nature of the object as the character of our feeling towards it. Thus we obtain an indirect notation for our feeling by projecting them rather than describing them. But we use this notation in a very unsystematic fashion, though a very curious and interesting order may be sometimes glimpsed behind it. [...] But our power to take advantage of this linguistic reflection of our emotional constitution is at present very limited – perhaps because so little work has been done upon this subject.<sup>64</sup>

Richards goes on to state that a qualification of a feeling may occur in metaphorical expressions. However, Richards considers metaphorical expressions to be troublesome because of their inexact nature. They attempt to convey to the reader a roundabout sense of feeling, and they frequently are vague and prone to misunderstandings: ‘But often the resemblance or analogy is remote and will not bear pressing. It is hard to be certain what is being said when a feeling is described as *profound, or vital*’.<sup>65</sup> ‘If you call a man a swine,’ Richards writes later, ‘it may be because his features resemble those of a pig, but it may be because you have towards him something of the feeling you conventionally have towards pigs, or because you propose,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 220-1. Ellipses, unless noted by brackets, appear in original.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 221.



if possible, to excite those feelings'.<sup>66</sup> In essence, the attempt to provide an intellectual description is fraught, for Richards, with difficulties because of the inherent non-intellectual occurrence of the physiological feeling. Of course, it is possible to have some linguistic description of a feeling, but, as Richards suggests, it is far less accurate than the description we might have for the sense of the word. This indicates that Richards conceived a distinct separation (at a linguistic level) between an intellectual comprehension of verse and a physiological reaction to verse; they are not synonymous with each other.

We find a complementary assessment of the four components of meaning (feeling, tone, sense, and intention) at the end of *Practical Criticism*. In 'Appendix A: Further Notes on Meaning', Richards provides the following description of their functions and their interrelatedness.

Function 2 (feeling) and Function 3 (tone) are probably more primitive than either Function 1 (sense), or the more deliberate explicit forms of Function 4 (intention). Originally language may have been almost purely *emotive*; that is to say a means of expressing feelings about situations (the danger cry), a means of expressing interpersonal attitudes (cooing, growling, etc.), and a means of bringing about concerted action (compare the rhythmical grunts that a number of individuals will utter while pulling together at some heavy object). Its use for *statement*, as a more or less neutral means of representing states of affairs, is probably a later development. But this later development is more familiar to us now than the earlier forms, and we tend, when we reflect upon language, to take this use as the fundamental use. Hence perhaps in a large degree our difficulty in distinguishing clearly between them. And when we are expressing feeling and tone in a comparative purity we are usually not in a mood to make abstract inquires into our other uses of language. This is another difficulty.

[...]

But thought governed by emotive classifications is still thought, and with words so used Function 1 (sense), though not in the most obvious way, may still be dominant. [...] In poetry, Function 2, rather than Function 3, is usually responsible for this abrogation, this reduction of what looks like sense to nonsense.<sup>67</sup>

One might initially interpret the above quotation as lending weight equally to both physiology and intellect: 'In much poetry – as has often been remarked – language tends to return towards a more primitive condition: a word like *iron*, for example, exciting, in poetry, a set of feelings rather than thoughts of the physical properties of that material'.<sup>68</sup> Or, rather, that both

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 353-4. Italics in original.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

physiology and intellect have an equal role to play in the analysis of poetry. However, several sentences indicate an underlying emphasis on the intellect of the reader. While Richards certainly does express an interest in the physiology of the reader, the cognitive and psychological aspects of reading underpin, dictate, and dominate the emotions. For example, in Richards' discussion of the relationship between the 'sounds and movement' and the sense of a word, he writes that 'this correspondence probably gives them an important power of bringing their sense concretely before our minds, of making us "realise" what they mean – this realisation, however, being very largely an awakening of feelings'.<sup>69</sup> Now, in this particular sentence the conclusion of a reading experience is the 'awakening of feelings'. This suggests a physiological, emotional event. Yet the awakening is predicated on the 'power' that sense exerts over feelings, the power for sense to bring a thought 'concretely before our minds'. And it is this process – a process in which the physiological is parsed through the intellectual – that awakens the feeling; it defines and outlines the exact nature of the emotional feeling. So the feeling of a word corresponds with the word's sense. Furthermore, we see that Richards conceives of 'thought' as a purely intellectual event: 'But thought governed by emotive classifications is still thought, and with words so used Function 1 (Sense), though not in the most obvious way, may still be dominant'. Even if we have an emotional feeling, the 'sense' of the word that elicited the feeling is still important. Yet 'important' is a misnomer, for Richards suggests that the sense is often 'dominant'. The sense, then, appears to be, for Richards, the factor that determines the feeling. The point here is that the sense of the word must always, for Richards, have a role in the clarification and classification of the 'feeling' of the word; but the reverse is not always true. Whereas Housman asserted the reverse (that 'feeling' leads to 'thought'), Richards suggests that it is through our intellectual 'thoughts' that our 'feelings' take legible form.

It is not that 'emotions' in general are responsible for misinterpretations. Richards never devalued tone, feeling, rhetoric, or form. An emotional reaction to poetry does not necessarily create bad criticism. Rather, it is a certain type of emotion that draws Richards' ire: raw, impulsive, unthinking emotion. These types of overwhelming emotion will blind the reader and cause him to disregard an objective and intellectual understanding of the literary work.

In Richards' scheme, the evolution of language follows a trajectory in which the emotions are ranked as the lowest form (the earliest, most primitive, most inchoate type of

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

communication), while the more deliberate explicit form of intentional statements is of a higher rank.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Richards' conception of an evolutionary language system means that more evolved forms of language are directly correlated to an intellectual prowess. This is because, for Richards, primitive language forms are purely physiological reactions to environmental circumstances, whereas more evolved forms are based in intellectual deliberations and appeal to logical, rational thought-processes: 'There is a big difference between controlling and conveying feelings and talking about them'.<sup>71</sup> This is a contradiction of Housman's affective approach to the study and writing of poetry. Like T.S. Eliot, Richards believes that the meaning of a poem arises from within the text. The poet's identity is an irrelevant variable, and serves no purpose beyond being the initial agent responsible for the creation of the poem. Richards considers the author to be a classificatory system. This 'classificatory system' is similar to that which is outlined in Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?'. For Foucault, the name of an author allows sets of texts to be grouped together and systematised, which, in turn, provides the semblance of context (specifically about the period of production of said texts).<sup>72</sup> In *Practical Criticism*, the poet's identity fulfils a similar role as Foucault's notion of 'authorship'.<sup>73</sup> Hence, in Richards' experiment, he removes the names and titles of the poems so as to ensure that his readers cannot contextualise the verse on the basis of the author's identity. For Richards, interpretations must be purely verse-based if they are to reflect the essence of the poem, as opposed to being influenced by other factors external to the poem's text. Uncontrolled and inappropriate emotions present a potentially unstable reader-based characteristic that can distort the meaning of the text.

Although both Housman's and Richards' theses share as a fundamental basis the physiology of the reader, the methods, structure, and style intrinsic to their approaches are the primary contributors to the belief that they are discussing two unrelated elements of poetry (the intellect and the body). The term 'intrinsic' is intended to indicate that theoretical approaches

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<sup>70</sup> 'Lowest form' should not be interpreted as meaning 'less valuable'. It refers to the complexity of the language.

<sup>71</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 353.

<sup>72</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1998).

<sup>73</sup> The author is a classificatory object that can influence a reader's perception of the text.

are inherently associated with certain critical and subjective qualities.<sup>74</sup> By shedding light on how methods and structures can shape interpretations, one can draw attention to the potential for twenty-first-century criticisms (developed through Intentionalism, Reader-Response Theory, neuroscience, psychology, and so on) to influence how readers interpret literature. This ‘influence’ arises, not solely from the individual perspective, but from the precepts, methods, and ideologies that are established within the sub-fields of the critic’s specialisation. A critic’s interpretation is, in part, a symptom of his field, as opposed to being wholly a projection of his intellect, his physiology, or a combination of both. The methods, structure, and style utilised by a critic in his interpretation are not conjured anew by the critic, but are rather expressions and re-expressions of the fields and sub-fields in which he specialises.<sup>75</sup>

For Richards, literary interpretations are not arbitrary reactions created through exposure to an external stimulus. They are cognitive processes that depend on the reader’s comprehension, understanding, and intellectual deliberation of the literary work. For Richards, to classify acts of interpretation as purely physiological events would require the acknowledgment that each reader is foremost a product of his biology (either static or fluid, in the sense that genes may predispose a reader to a specific set of readings, or that one’s reading might be affected by poor nutrition or the loss of a limb). Differences in interpretation would be categorised on the basis of the reader’s biology rather than on his skill, training, and experience. In such a paradigm, the conviction of the reader would be unchallengeable because it would not be a matter of opinion and literary comprehension, but rather a hard-coded biological response to the text. No reader would ever be capable of improving his literary ability

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<sup>74</sup> Amanda Anderson’s *The Way We Argue* is particularly instructive, in which she argues that different critical frameworks have an associated attitude or ethos. See, for example, her chapter ‘Argument and Ethos’, in which she discusses the subjective dimensions of the tradition of practical criticism; the ‘character or ethos’ of ‘characterological terms’ that we associate with theory debates (a ‘smug’ pragmatist, or a ‘defensive and uptight’ rationalist’). Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 134. See also Rita Felski’s *The Limits of Critique*, which argues that the art of critique is inherently limited to a series of parameters established by its method.

<sup>75</sup> Michel Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* argues the same point (that what we see is determined by the institutions that govern how we see): ‘Knowledge is to be found not only in demonstrations, it can also be found in fiction, reflexion, narrative accounts, institutional regulations, and political decisions’. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pp. 183-4.

due to the fact that he would be confined to parameters and limits imposed upon him by either his genetics or whatever other unfortunate ailment might befall his physical body.

Richards discovered that his students often lacked a fundamental understanding of several elements that he believed were necessary to correctly read and write poetry: making plain sense of the poem (its meaning), sensuous apprehension (the natural rhythm), and comprehending the visual imagery. Similarly, he identified frequent problems of interpretation: intense focus on mnemonic irrelevances, ‘Stock Responses’ (presupposed readings produced from cultural and social conditioning), sentimentality (overwhelming, uncontrolled emotional responses), inhibition, and doctrinal adhesions.<sup>76</sup> In identifying these flaws, he produced a set of systematic, scientific, quantitative tools that he used to assess the inferior interpretational capacities of his students, and which might then be utilised to correct these imperfections. This led to Richards asserting that the comprehension of poetry is foremost a skill (as opposed to an innate ability), and that the frequency of misinterpretations can be reduced through education: ‘But the effort to separate these forms of meaning is instructive, and can help us both to see why misunderstandings of all kinds are so frequent, and to devise educational methods that will make them less common’.<sup>77</sup> In this sense, Richards’ *Practical Criticism* is a combination of determining which misinterpretations are most prominent, recognising the cognitive and psychological processes responsible for their origin, and devising a set of pedagogical tools which might treat and reduce their frequency.

### **Convictions of Inexperienced Readers**

Richards’ inductive approach reveals a fascinating insight regarding our perception of literature: literary texts appear polysemous due to the breadth of interpretations. I use the term *appear*, as opposed to *are*, because I do not want to suggest that the text is one thing or the other when it seems, to me, to be a combination of the two states, and the degree to which a text is a combination of these states is influenced by the intent of the reader. Regardless of my personal stance, Richards approached the text as a monosemantic object, but his documentation of responses suggested that the text is a polysemous object.<sup>78</sup> The reason for this disparity is

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<sup>76</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp. 13-7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209. In this quotation, Richards is referring to two of the four components of meaning: ‘Feeling’ and ‘Sense’ (the other two being ‘Tone’ and ‘Intention’).

<sup>78</sup> There has been debate as to whether or not Richards correctly interpreted his data. Colin Martindale and Audrey Dailey, in ‘I.A. Richards Revisited: Do People Agree in Their

that incorrect interpretations, or less correct interpretations, produced multiple different readings. There are infinitely more ways to incorrectly interpret a text than there are correct ways. Furthermore, Richards believed that these deviations were the result of the student readers misinterpreting the true meaning of the text – so the text was monosemantic in reality, but that poor skill and inexperience resulted in an array of incorrect interpretations. By appearing polysemous in the documentation of student responses, Richards produced evidence of the extent to which readers believe their own interpretations to be correct.

In ‘Documentation’, student readers have exceptionally strong, often unearned, convictions regarding their provisional interpretation of the poem’s meaning. This conviction results in the reader’s private belief that his interpretation comes from within the text (as opposed to being a subjective creation). But this cannot be true because of the overwhelming disagreement amongst the majority of respondents featured in ‘Documentation’. For if all their interpretations came from within the text then their criticisms would be similar, and not so divergent. Richards asserts that the strength and frequency of readers’ convictions are not enough to justify whether or not an interpretation is correct, less correct, or incorrect. Rather, Richards wants us to appeal to the meaning inherent to the text (to the intention of the ‘thinker’) when determining the accuracy of an interpretation.<sup>79</sup> For Richards, incorrect, or less correct, interpretations are the products of unrefined, unskilled, inexperienced readers, which render said amateur readers incapable of correctly realising the inherent meaning of the literary work. So the text has an inherent or objective meaning, such that the trained reader will be able to spot it; this indicates that meaning exists independently of any readers, just in an unrealised state, while also hinting at the monosemantic nature of the text. Only once a reader becomes skilled in the techniques

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Interpretations of Literature?’ (1995), argue that a close analysis of the student responses reveals highly significant inter-subject agreement with regard to their favourability judgements – which, it should be said, does not reflect Richards’ assessment of the protocols. The suggestion made by Martindale and Dailey is that, collectively, groups of individuals often find agreement when rating artworks (notably paintings and music), and so a similar occurrence might possibly arise during the rating of literature. Although this is a fascinating discussion on the perils of interpretation and data analysis, one must wonder whether or not ‘meaning’ is synonymous with (or even similar to) ‘favourability’. It seems, then, that the type of research conducted by Martindale and Dailey is only applicable in the vaguest, most generalised forms of assessing reader responses – a point seemingly acknowledged by the authors, who state that ‘there is no easy way to quantify such open-ended responses’. C. Martindale and A. Dailey, ‘I.A. Richards Revisited: Do People Agree in Their Interpretations of Literature?’ in *Poetics*, no. 23 (1995), p. 302.

<sup>79</sup> Richards and Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning*, p. 9.

of interpretation will he be able to correctly interpret the text, at which point the meaning of the text becomes realised.

Richards argues that literary works have correct interpretations. 'The most correct reading of them,' he writes with regard to the meanings of several of the poems that he reproduced in his experiment, '[is] the reading which most accords with the impulses that gave them being'.<sup>80</sup> The qualifier 'most' indicates degrees of correctness. For Richards, the meaning of a poem is neither black nor white. Rather, there exist *more correct meanings*, *less correct meanings*, and then *incorrect meanings*. The distinction between these variations is dependent upon what Richards defines as the 'four kinds of meaning', which we have seen to include 'Sense', 'Feeling', 'Tone', and 'Intention'.

Innumerable cross influences and complications between these four kinds of meaning are possible, and frequently present in what may appear a quite simple remark. A perfect understanding would involve not only an accurate direction of thought, a correct evocation of feeling, an exact apprehension of tone, and a precise recognition of intention, but further it would get these contributory meanings in their right order and proportion to one another, and seize – though not in terms of explicit thought – their interdependence upon one another, their sequences and interrelations.<sup>81</sup>

'Intention' is not the sole determiner of whether or not a poem's interpretation is correct. Rather, Richards believes that a 'perfect understanding' requires a balance of these four kinds of meaning, in the right sequence and with the right degrees of emphasis. These qualities are what Richards defines as 'impulses' (which are of a similar notion as the process behind Housman's transfusion of emotion), as opposed to only the intention of the poet. Impulses are not only the cognitive aspects of the poet, but are rather the set of circumstances that produced the poem's form. In a footnote, Richards offers more clarification on the idea of impulses in relation to the 'aim' of the poem, which, according to him, comes first and is the sole justification of its means: 'Roughly the collection of impulses which shaped the poem originally, to which it gave expression, and to which, in an ideally susceptible reader it would again give rise. [...] I do not mean by its "aim" any sociological, aesthetic, commercial or propagandist intentions or hopes of the poet'.<sup>82</sup> The focus, then, is not wholly on what the poet

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<sup>80</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 244.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

intended to say in his poem, but whether or not the poet's 'impulses' are successfully communicated through the verse. This is a notably unintellectual conception of the poet's role in the construction of his poem, and suggests that Richards' intellectualisation of poetry is a reader-based phenomenon. The poet's intellect plays a minimal role in determining whether or not the reader's interpretation of the text is correct. In fact, Richards suggests that, based on his 'Documentation', it is far more probable for a reader to have an incorrect interpretation than a correct interpretation. This is likely because a correct interpretation is such a specific thing, whereas there is an infinite number of possible incorrect interpretations. A 'specific thing' refers to Richards' assertion that a 'perfect understanding' requires an extraordinarily specific set of balance regarding the sense, feeling, tone, and intention of the poem's creation:

We must see in the mis-readings of others the actualisation of possibilities threatened in the early stages of our own readings. The only proper attitude is to look upon a successful interpretation, a correct interpretation, as a triumph against odds. We must cease to regard a misinterpretation as a mere unlucky accident. We must treat it as the normal and probable event.<sup>83</sup>

Richards is adamant that the pursuit of actual meaning is not only desirable, but that it is the only appropriate approach to the study of poetry. This is obvious from his desire to produce a set of educational methods with which to teach students the correct cognitive processes for the understanding of a poem's impulses. Yet Richards also recognises that misinterpretations and misunderstandings are the common states for the subjects of his experiment, and that correct interpretations require significant intellectual effort in order both to attain the meaning of the poem and to overcome the chief difficulties inherent to acts of reading.

It is here that the division between Richards and Housman appears most pronounced: whereas Housman believed that the extended nervous system (the transfusion of emotion from poet, to poem, to reader) was mostly infallible due to only certain readers containing the necessary predisposition for the appreciation of poetry, Richards considers interpretations as inherently fallible acts which are more likely to be incorrect than to be correct. For Housman, the perfect understanding of emotional elicitation is a talent. For Richards, the perfect understanding of a poem's meaning is an intellectual skill. Whether or not 'meaning' and 'emotion' are synonymous is difficult to say, but they do appear to function in a similar capacity. This is because meaning is an intellectual understanding of a poem, while emotion is

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 336.



a physiological understanding of a poem. As suggested in Chapter One (A.E. Housman), contemporary Reader-Response Theory and cognitive neuroscience suggest that both the intellect (the mind / brain / psychology) and the physiology (the nervous system) are interrelated, if not symbiotic. It may be true that physiological elicitations are more readily available to readers than intellectual understandings, especially if intellectual understandings require a degree of higher thinking – or, as Richards’ puts it, if intellectual statements are a more evolved form of raw emotions. The ease by which Housman’s transfusion of emotion occurs can coincide with Richards’ difficulties of understanding poetic meaning if we consider them distinct, yet interrelated, biological parts.<sup>84</sup> In this context, it is true that physiological elicitations are a part of an intellectual comprehension of a literary work. And vice versa: the intellect is required to process the physiological and emotional reactions that readers encounter during their acts of reading. The theses of Richards and Housman are not separate, unrelated conceptions of poetic experiences, but rather take into account two interrelated symptoms of reading. Due to Richards’ intellectual statements requiring a higher degree of thinking, it stands to reason that these are more difficult to correctly understand compared to the less evolved, raw emotions of Housman’s thesis. However, one notable difference does persist between the theories of these two critics, but it is one which can be easily reconciled. For Richards, it is quite possible for the reader to get the raw emotions wrong, which can arise through various ways of misreading. *Practical Criticism*, for example, frequently demonstrates incorrect emotional reactions (such as ‘sentimentality’). For Housman, poetry functions as the transfusion of emotion, and hence there is no strong distinction between the reader’s emotions, the poet’s emotions, and the emotions conveyed through the text. This may be interpreted as Richards challenging the authority Housman gives to feelings. But it is possible to reconcile these two seemingly opposite approaches to emotions by introducing the idea of ‘skill’ and ‘talent’. As mentioned earlier, Housman considered the recognition of poetry to be an intuitive talent, whereas Richards considered it to be a skill. We might say that this is where skill and talent combine: that the person who has talent has the correct feelings, just as the person who has skill has the correct interpretations. By blending these two qualities, Housman’s and

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<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Michelle Maise, ‘How can Emotions be both Cognitive and Bodily?’, in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Science*, vol. 13, no. 4 (December 2014), and Keith Oatley and P.N. Johnson-Laird, ‘Cognitive Approaches to Emotions’, in *Trends in Cognitive Science*, vol. 18, no. 3 (March 2014).

Richards' approaches can be unified, with the result being a state in which both talent and skill interrelate.

Conviction in *Practical Criticism* is characterised by an overwhelming (and occasionally defiant) belief that the interpretation advanced by the student is logically sound, adheres to the linguistic meaning of the text, and is representative of both his fellow readers' interpretations and the author's original intention. This takes the form of a strong statement, which is uttered in such a way as to leave little room for another interpretation of the text: 'A stimulating thought well expressed. The Author protests against half-heartedness. The theme, dealing with the true way of living, is naturally of a lofty character, and *blank verse* suits the subject-matter with peculiar felicity'.<sup>85</sup> Such proclamations are almost always portrayed as being axiomatic, as if they are revealing something inherent to the text. The student's conviction is clear, and the truth of his sentiment is wholly conveyed in his utterance. He has encountered textual evidence that he perceives to indicate a certain interpretation, and so he *believes* that his interpretation is supported by the literary work. Such explicit statements are not pluralist; at no point in the sentence 'a stimulating thought well expressed' does there exist the idea that the thought is poorly expressed. To prove to the student that the 'stimulating thought' is not 'well expressed', or that the author does not protest against 'half-heartedness', requires the student to perceive contrary textual evidence. The student believes that he writes from the perspective of a literary truth.

Richards attributes the general misunderstandings of his student readers to a lack of skill, inexperience, and poor technique. This leads to the two most prominent issues uncovered by Richards: misunderstandings as to the 'plain sense of poetry' (the linguistic meaning of the text); and the problem of sentimental readings (an unwarranted, extreme overflow of emotion). As students are inexperienced and less trained than their professional counterparts, they are unable to recognise the deficiencies in their methods. This often results in a reactive interpretation, which is less intellectual and more physiological. The student is either so captivated by or so repulsed by the poem that his emotional response supersedes an intellectual comprehension. See-sawing interpretations amongst multiple readers, embodying both the best and worst of the poem, are a frequent occurrence in Richards' 'Documentation'. And almost all are conveyed with such conviction that we might be led into believing that their

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<sup>85</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 23. Italics in original.

interpretation is the true representation of the text's meaning. Consider, for example, one of the more explicit instances of this in the responses to Rev. G.A. Studdert Kennedy's 'Easter'.

The very features which are the worst offence to one group are the poem's crowning glory to the other. The critical maxim 'When in doubt reflect whether the most glaring fault is not the prime virtue, and *vice versa*', could hardly receive a better practical recommendation.

The antiphony continues. Those for whom the assurance given above is insufficient to guarantee the authenticity of the protocols will certainly accuse me of over-reaching myself at this point. But not a syllable has been added or changed.

4.14. This is such poor stuff that it is hardly worth the trouble of criticizing. *The rhythm is a meaningless jog-trot, which doesn't vary or change with any change of feeling. The metaphors are taken from the usual hackneyed and most obvious forms of Nature, not always even appropriate as in stanza three. Sentimentality takes the place of feeling, and falls to the limit of bathos in the last verse. It has the true cheap-magazine tone.*

But the next writer is so persuaded to the contrary that he is able to certify the absent one's affections.

4.15. There is nothing of silly sentimentalism in the lines but they show the love of one true heart for another.

4.16. This piece alone of all the four got me straight away. It is very effective indeed – obviously sincere and very pleasant to read. The theme, though somewhat obvious is one that can never be hackneyed, especially when so originally and pleasantly treated as in this case. The ending is very good and strong which always is a great point. It has a *lilt* in it which is *very pleasant when reading provided it is not overdone*.

Such exact correspondence of opposing views is strong testimony to the poem's communicative efficiency. It is indeed extraordinarily successful in 'getting there'. Sometimes when widely different views are expressed we receive the impression that, through some twist or accident in communication, different poems are being judged. But here it is evidence enough that the same poem (the same primary modification of consciousness) has penetrated into these different minds. It is at a *comparatively* late stage of the response that the divergence begins.<sup>86</sup>

For Richards, these responses are indicators of 'different minds', with contrasting reactions brought about by different cognitive processes. A few pages later, he asserts that such 'Jekyll and Hyde' transformations are instructive for the simple fact that they reveal how we may be

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-5. Italics in original.

persuaded to interpret a text one way or the other on the basis of how we perceive the textual evidence.<sup>87</sup> Polarising interpretations are not simply differences in taste, but are rather moral, intellectual, and physiological distortions which contort the poem's meaning. For Richards, these distortions make the reader believe that his interpretation is correct because he sees within the literary text certain evidentiary qualities which he believes confirms his reading. How else is it possible for one student to convince himself that 'poor stuff' is a suitable description, while another student praises the same poem as being 'very pleasant' and instructive of 'the love of one true heart'? These convictions must arise under the guise of truth, whereby each reader believes that he or she is correctly interpreting the literary work. And an important source of this conviction is 'sentimentality'.

### **The Problem with Sentimental Interpretations**

Sentimentality, in its most refined sense, is either an overabundance of raw, unchecked emotion or an absence of emotion; that is, the emotional response of the reader is mismatched with the presumed emotion elicited by the poem. Sentimentality is important for two reasons: first, when used as a method by which to assess the emotional correctness and incorrectness of reader responses, it indicates the presence of a quantitative system of ranking (Interpretation A is better than Interpretation B because it is closer to the emotions of the poem's text); and, second, it demonstrates that *how* readers read can be fundamentally different from *what* the text has to say. This second reason is notable for aligning Richards with a cognitive science approach to the reader's phenomenological experience, wherein the internal, psychological, and intellectual processes is potentially so vast and diverse that it provides neither homogeneity nor hegemony.

In the study of sentimentality, we also find another reason for the perceived disparity between Richards and Housman. For Richards, sentimentality refers to emotions which are either too easily stirred or not stirred enough: 'A response is sentimental when, either through the over-persistence of tendencies or through the interaction of sentiments, it is inappropriate to the situation that calls it forth'.<sup>88</sup> The former is prone to unwarranted, excessive emotional elicitation. The latter has too little emotion, and sees life in 'too specialised a fashion and

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>88</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 261.

responds to it too narrowly'.<sup>89</sup> Emotions themselves are not an issue for Richards, and, indeed, he contends that emotions are an inescapable bias: 'Pure ideas, that reflect only features of the object, are to be found only in some of the sciences – where centuries of careful testing have reduced the effects of our partiality to a minimum. All our ordinary ideas about objects that matter to us, that are, as we say, *interesting*, are coloured by our emotional and practical relations to them'.<sup>90</sup> According to Richards, readers are often blind to their own subjective colouring of an issue, yet are readily and acutely aware of their neighbours' potential discriminations. In this context, one might be inclined to suggest that Housman's emotional approach to the study and writing of poetry embodies Richards' idea about sentimentality. In *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, Housman's discussions about specific emotional elicitations of verse are often excessive and overwhelming: 'What exuberant beauty and vigour! and what nature! I believe that I admire that passage more heartily and relish it more keenly than Pope or Johnson or Dryden's own contemporaries could'.<sup>91</sup> It is these kinds of utterances which caused Ezra Pound to proclaim his disdain for the 'bathos, slop, ambiguity, word-twisting' of Housman's lecture.<sup>92</sup> For Richards, Housman's emotional excessiveness is inappropriate because it confines itself 'to one aspect only of the many that the situation can present'.<sup>93</sup> A calmer, more thoughtful and collective approach to the study of poetry appeals to Richards. It indicates to him that the reader is not taken away by his own emotions, but has provided an intellectually-rigorous study of the poem. It appropriately balances Richards' four kinds of meaning (sense, feeling, tone, and intention), and does so in the right sequence and with the right degrees of emphasis.

But where are we, and where is our personality, amid such dizzying kaleidoscopic transformations of the moral world? We may perhaps steady ourselves a little with 4.25, which is rather more objective and has opinions upon pretence, upon love, and upon vowing.

4.25. Conveys a uniformly artificial impression – verse has no adequate volume of sound to impart a strong emotion and no cadences to express

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 247. Italics in original.

<sup>91</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 28.

<sup>92</sup> Pound, 'Mr. Housman at Little Bethel', p. 218.

<sup>93</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 261.

a deep one, *such as is pretended to be conveyed*. Altogether too jaunty an effect, with a most annoying regular jig-jigging rhythm. *Sentimentality mistaken for the deeper passion of love – one does not*

‘vow that my life lies dead’

*in quite such a perfunctory way.*<sup>94</sup>

The ‘poor stuff’, ‘limits of bathos’, ‘cheap-magazine tone’, and ‘hackneyed’ metaphors of 4.14 are absent, as too are 4.15’s and 4.16’s ‘silly sentimentalism’, ‘love of one true heart’, ‘got me straight away’, and themes that are ‘never [...] hackneyed’. Instead of describing the reaction of the reader, 4.25 describes the text itself. Although the rhythm of the words is not necessarily independent of an emotional response, the expression of such an opinion can be accomplished without the student losing himself to his emotions. For Richards, a more ‘objective’ appreciation of the work can be achieved this way, wherein the poem is given the full attention of the reader as opposed to him only focusing on the emotions that the poetry provokes in him.

Sentimental interpretations of verse are the result of inappropriate emotional reactions.<sup>95</sup> Richards makes the distinction between those readers who are narcissistically sentimental, and those readers who are sentimental because they know no better. Of the former, Richards considers them unreachable due to elements of their personality and an inability to learn from experience. The product of such readers are inappropriate stock responses, often washed with melodrama and dramatisation.

The erratic individual cannot himself see that his responses are inappropriate, though others might tell him. When he misreads a poem, no practical consequences arise to teach him his folly; and, similarly, if he mismanages his emotional relations with his fellow-beings he can readily persuade himself that *they* are at fault. I have been describing a type of reader – familiar to every teacher concerned with poetry – whose interpretations have a quality of wilful silliness which matches well the obstinacy and conceit that are the primary traits of the character. Often considerable mental agility is shown, enough to support an affectation of ‘brilliance’, but in time a striking monotony, a repetition of the same forms of response is equally apparent. Though fundamentally some disorder of the self-regarding sentiment – a belated Narcissism perhaps – must be at the root of these afflicting phenomena, their approximate cause is certainly withdrawal from experience through the day-dream habit.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 57. Italics in original.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 250-1. Italics in original.

Richards suggests that the only corrective is ‘a closer contact with reality, either directly, through experience of actual things, or mediately through other minds which are in closer contact’.<sup>97</sup> For Richards, this is a chief issue concerning the interpretation of poetry because such extreme emotional reactions (whether outbursts or lack of emotion altogether) circumvent the true meaning of the text. Richards asserts that emotions are a part of the ‘Feeling’ component in his four kinds of meaning: ‘Under “Feeling,” I group for convenience the whole conative-affective aspect of life – emotions, emotional attitudes, the will, desire, pleasure-unpleasure, and the rest. “Feeling” is shorthand for any or all of this’.<sup>98</sup> However, Richards also offers a more specific description as to the actual function of emotion in human psychology and in language. In this description, emotion is a primitive impulse, and although language can convey emotion, doing so is unintellectual and harkens to language’s most basic form: ‘Originally language may have been almost purely *emotive*; that is to say a means of expressing feelings about situations (the danger cry), a means of expressing interpersonal attitudes (cooing, growling, etc.), and a means of bringing about concerted action (compare the rhythmical grunts that a number of individuals will utter while pulling together at some heavy object)’.<sup>99</sup>

A reader who is blind-sighted by sentimentality focuses inwards and not outwards. This results in the failure to advance a critical interpretation about the poem’s meaning, and instead circumvents the meaning of the text by supplanting it with the reader’s own private experience. In 4.14, we learn how the poem has a dull and boorish effect – the reader finds it to be ‘poor stuff’, with numerous other deficiencies in its rhythm, metaphor, and theme. But this only tells us of the reader’s reaction. In 4.25, we gain a better, less subjective, insight which encapsulates the ‘perfunctory way’ the poem conveys the loss of love. ‘There’s wailing of wind in the chimney-nook / And I vow that my life lies dead’ is a rather lame depiction of an event that would be worthy of leaving one’s life dead. The reader in 4.25 does not convey a sense of anger, sadness, happiness, or joy; he is stating what he perceives to be fact based on an intellectual interpretation. He is thinking about what the lines say, and how they are said, rather than how he reacts to them. It is a clear and straightforward response, and the ideas conveyed

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 353. Italics in original.

by the student are not muddled by confusion as to whom or what they represent. Alternatively, consider the responses that Richards identifies as being either humble or arrogant:

Whether the next writer is alluding to the heroine of the poem or the author is not made clear.

4.6. The 'sweet but faint solace' floating with foolish optimism on metaphorical winds fills me with a sense of superiority and contempt. I cannot and will not give any more attention to *this effeminate weakling*.

His arrogance may contrast, finally, with the humility of 4.61.

4.61. As

- (1) I am only 19.
- (2) I have never been in love.
- (3) I do not know what a dog-rose is.
- (4) I consider that spring has no rapture.
- (5) I consider the alliteration is bad and unnecessary.
- (6) I consider this symbolism utterly worthless.

I will declare the whole poem to be sentimental rubbish. More detailed criticism would be foolish and futile. One reading gave me this opinion. I never hope to read it again.<sup>100</sup>

'Arrogance' and 'humility' are terms which Richards uses to describe a state of mind; they are foremost descriptors that identify the nature of the reader. As Richards correctly observes, the distinction between what is poetry and what is the reader's emotional reaction is often blurred, and this can make difficult any attempt to extrapolate, or distinguish between, a reader's emotional response and a latent truth hidden within the poem's text.<sup>101</sup> This often results in ambiguity in the reader's interpretation, especially if the reader is unskilled and inexperienced. According to Richards, interpretations which are based solely, or mostly, on an emotional reaction tend to centre on the reader, not on the poem's text. In 4.6, the identity of the 'effeminate weakling' is vague. It may be the author, or it may be the heroine's persona, or it may be some conflation of both. The reader is so interested in his own displeasure that his reaction is entirely self-serving and seeks only to justify his discontinuation of reading. In 4.61, the humility expressed by the reader may appear to be initially instructive, but it too is self-serving. Again, the attention is on himself: we learn that he is nineteen, has never been in love, has limited horticultural knowledge, and of his narrow judgment pertaining to certain elements

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 61. Italics in original.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 340.



of the verse. For a nineteen year old to know so little and to be so inexperienced is unsurprising, but for him to then have the conviction to declare the whole poem ‘sentimental rubbish’ on the sole basis of these personal deficiencies demonstrates the blindness that he exhibits towards his own bias. He *thinks* that his interpretation is correct because he perceives it within the literary text, but this is illusory and conjured from within the reader’s own mind. The reality is that the student’s interpretation is distorted by his inexperience and lack of skill. To this end, Richards’ educational methods are positioned as a means by which the reader can be taught to lessen the breadth of potential interpretations, and to offer up a more balanced form of reading.

### **Poetry as a Monosemantic Art**

By refining the breadth of potential interpretations of a poem’s text, Richards is inevitably suggesting that poetry is monosemous. Furthermore, the monosemantic nature of poetry is not readily or easily available to the reader – for if it were then all readers would immediately and without much thought recognise the true meaning of the poem (whichever ‘true’ meaning that may be; textual or authorial, or a combination of the two) – and instead requires a degree of training and experience. Provisional readings by student readers, including those outlined in the previous sections of this chapter, exemplify the possibility for misinterpretations. Furthermore, if poetry is monosemous then the association between poet and reader is such that one might collapse their respective, isolated functions into the poem’s text. The physiological properties ascribed to the poem’s text by Housman are of a fundamentally-similar nature as the intellectual properties ascribed by Richards; the relationship between poet, reader, and text is uniform in nature, producing a concurrent form of meaning. The meaning sought after by the reader must align with the poet’s meaning if it is to be accepted as correct (so far as Richards’ pedagogical and critical paradigm is concerned). We know from the experiment conducted by Richards that, upon an assessment of the compiled data, readers conceive of the poem’s meaning as monosemous – that there is only one correct meaning, albeit the humble student might recognise the provisional nature and inexperience in his own reading. But when we conduct a comparative analysis of the multiple responses, we find that the data support a breadth of potential readings: the initial, cursory conclusion from this is that poetry is polysemous. According to Richards, the reason that poetry appears polysemous in this context is because an inordinate number of misinterpretations are occurring: ‘And when a systematic publicity is given to these ordinary phenomena of misinterpretation that usually remain so cunningly hidden, the stoutest self-confidence is shaken. [...] The wild

interpretations of others must not be regarded as the antics of incompetents, but as dangers that we ourselves only narrowly escape, if, indeed, we do'.<sup>102</sup> Richards' desire to produce a new set of pedagogical methods is predicated on the idea that poetry is monosemous, and that his devised educational teachings might allow for student readers to be better equipped for the purpose of interpreting poetry. And in doing this, Richards has aligned himself with Housman. For just as Housman's 'nervous system' of poetry condenses the roles of the poet, reader, and text into one cohesive and singular entity, so too does Richards' approach to the intellect.

Richards hoped to devise a new set of pedagogical methods for the teaching of the reading and writing of poetry. His goal, then, was to produce close readings of the poems, which he could then assess to determine the chief difficulties encountered by the readers. So Richards' emphasis is foremost on the reader, with the text given secondary (but still significant) importance. The students depicted in the protocols may be responding to the poems, but both Richards' 'Documentation' and 'Analysis' focus exclusively on their cognitive and interpretive processes. Furthermore, Richards acknowledges that a too orderly analysis is problematic purely because of the sheer diversity of interpretations: 'The astonishing variety of human responses makes irksome any too systematic scheme for arranging these extracts'.<sup>103</sup> The proclamation that the variety of human responses is 'astonishing' suggests that Richards was initially unprepared for the degree of divergence amongst his students. On the one hand, it indicated that the educational methods taught to students during the early twentieth century were flawed, and that they needed immediate replacement or refinement. On the other hand, it demonstrated that understanding a poem's meaning was a far more nuanced and complex matter. The diversity of responses suggests that the poem is polysemous. But Richards, in his desire to produce educational methods with which to overcome the chief difficulties of reading, is motivated by the belief that poetry should be approached as a monosemantic object. A practical assessment of Richards' data depicts a polysemantic object (hundreds of readers with hundreds of different interpretations), but the application of skill and talent to the reading of verse indicates a monosemantic object (that there is, for example, only a single, not infinite, interpretation, and it requires considerable knowledge, training, and expertise to reach). The kind of analysis conducted by Richards in *Practical Criticism* becomes an issue concerning *how* readers read, as opposed to what the text has to say. And when we assess *how* readers read,

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<sup>102</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp. 335-6.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

we realise (as Richards did in *Practical Criticism*) that the diversity arises from both a deep-seated conviction as to the accuracy of the reader's interpretation and the belief (as opposed to an objective truth) that said interpretation originates from within the literary text.

Although Richards' approach uses a systematic, scientific, empirical set of methods to generate data-driven metrics about a group of readers' interpretations, there are certain phenomenological elements present in the data of his investigation. Specifically, the belief by readers that their interpretations are not only correct, but justified by the text. It is not merely Housman who operates outside of the impressionist characterisation that has been applied to him. Richards, too, may appear to utilise an objectivist approach, but the data that this approach produces suggests elements of impressionism within readers' interpretations. In other words, both Housman and Richards must be brought to some middle-ground. Housman is not as impressionistic as we might initially believe. And, by the same token, the objectivist research conducted by Richards finds elements of impressionism in the protocols of reader responses. The point here is that we should be seeking the middle-ground between skill and talent, which arguably existed between these two figures but have not been acknowledged or recognised. And this middle-ground takes the form of a combination of skill and talent to produce an interpretation that is partly based in our literary knowledge and partly based in our gut feelings towards the verse. In doing so, we gain an interpretation (or rather an understanding) of the verse in both an intellectual and physiological sense. Similarly, we can see that the phenomenology of the reader is paramount in discussing and comprehending the reading act, for the function of poetry hinges on its subjective influence.

## Chapter Three

F.R. Leavis

### Psychology and the English Novel

In Chapters One and Two, I introduced the idea that Housman and Richards are not as fundamentally different as one might conceive upon first viewing their respective theses. I argued that, from a twenty-first-century retroactive application of our current understanding of neuroscience and cognition, both critics share a compatible basis for their analyses of the reading and writing of poetry: the neurological origin of the physical and the intellectual. Or, in other words, there is a distinct neurological foundation within the brain that governs both intellectual expressions and physiological sensations. Housman's appeal to the affective consequences of poetry concentrated primarily on their physical manifestations. Richards, by contrast, believed that physiological reactions required intellectualisation prior to their verbal expression; an understanding of an emotion, by the very definition of the phrase, requires an element of cognition. Neither Housman nor Richards disparaged a reader's intellect or physiology, but rather each had their own conception of the role that these qualities played in the interpretation of poetry. The distinction between these two critics is not a theoretical or practical incongruity in their theses, but rather a contextual issue pertaining to their respective understandings of the interrelatedness of physiology and the intellect. Today, we understand that the intellect is not purely intellectual, but relies upon and, indeed, can affect the physiology of the body. Alternatively, the emotional is not only physiological, but it is a part of the limbic system and, as such, associated with behaviour and long-term memory; these neurological (physiological) processes are arguably important components in the formation of an intellectual idea.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter Three focuses on three areas: first, the Victorian novel tradition that preceded, and helped shape, Leavis' *The Great Tradition*, both in terms of the critical debates that it established and the application of empirical theories to the study of the novel; second, Leavis' humanist interest in the psychology of literary characters ('humanist interest' refers to the agency of the individual, and by extension the novelist's capacity to replicate said agency in

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Marco Catani, et al., 'A Revised Limbic System Model for Memory, Emotion, and Behaviour', in *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, vol. 37, no. 8 (September 2013).

prose), which requires the novelist to maintain a sustained and intense observation of the moral and psychological state of society and, to a lesser extent, culture, from which a phenomenological approach to novel theory can be made (in the sense that the novel has the potential to function as a representation of life, not ideals, and through which readers can experience a not unreal set of circumstances, scenarios, plots, characters, and reactions); and, third, Leavis' belief that fictional prose is inherently suited to the depiction of life, or, rather, that it is better suited than verse to the real representation of fictional occurrences.<sup>2</sup>

Leavis' definition of psychology, and how psychology takes the place of the other major concerns expressed in Housman's and Richards' writings, both extended these earlier approaches but also reshaped them by putting them into a new set of contexts relative to other matters and topics. For Leavis, 'psychology' refers to exhibited behaviour, although his use is more often than not applied as reference to a literary character's behaviour, and whether or not the behaviour depicted in a novel is a valid representation of real life. It is neither a skill nor a talent, but a combination of the two: it is something which arises through an intense and sustained observation of life and human nature, and which is also a part of an innate 'intuition' (at least, in its more striking and truest form).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, his psychological approach to the study of the English novel is predicated, not on an empirical, physiological, philosophical, or scientific understanding of how readers read, but on a humanist conception of the role and function of the literary character in a work of fiction. Leavis is often viewed as a 'formalist' critic in the 'liberal-humanist' tradition, who had 'concerned himself with "close reading" of literary texts and their formal properties against an assumed background of broadly shared values'.<sup>4</sup> 'I am not a philosopher', Leavis wrote in a letter to Eugenio Montale (1973), the implication being a distrust of abstract considerations that may have no reflection of the world and its various socio-historical interactions.<sup>5</sup> And in *Thoughts, Words, and Creativity: Art and*

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<sup>2</sup> Contemporary discussions of these areas can be found in: Ortolano's 'F.R. Leavis, Science, and the Abiding Crisis of Modern Civilization', Abravanel's 'English by Example: F.R. Leavis and the Americanization of Modern England', and Hilliard's *English as a Vocation: the Scrutiny Movement*.

<sup>3</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Joyce, 'The Idea of "Anti-Philosophy" in the Work of F.R. Leavis', in *Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 1 (March 2009), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Eugenio Montale (1973), quoted in G. Singh, *F.R. Leavis: A Literary Biography* (London: Duckworth, 1995), p. 212.

*Thought in D.H. Lawrence* (1976), Leavis wrote: ‘I think of myself as an anti-philosopher, which is what a literary critic ought to be’.<sup>6</sup> Leavis’ sentiments should not be construed as a desire to destroy philosophy, or to disparage its research. Rather, it is an observation made by Leavis about the state of philosophy and its potential contributions to the field of literary studies. In his own words, he noted that ‘philosophers are always weak on language’, whereas creative fiction utilises the entirety of language to produce, at its most proficient levels, works of exceptionally original exploratory thought.<sup>7</sup> The form of the novel, its structure, its rhetoric, its ‘orderly composition’ (to borrow Lord David Cecil’s phrase from *Early Victorian Novelists*), relies on a mastery of language with which the psychological considerations of the characters might be drawn out. Philosophers are, for Leavis, notably lacking in linguistic proficiency that would allow for them to describe, assess, and, at times, construct accurate representations of the psychology of real-world individuals – philosophy is, for Leavis, an abstraction of thought that is, to some degree, more detached from (or less representative of) both the physical world and the phenomenological experience than the novel.

*The Great Tradition* advocates a humanist psychology (coalescing the affective approach of Housman and the cognitive approach of Richards) to develop an understanding of both the intentions of the ‘great English novelists’ and the reception of the ‘psychology that the conventional cultivated reader immediately appreciates’.<sup>8</sup> To this end, Leavis’ *The Great Tradition* is his own indirect take on both Housman and Richards, but with its application being directed towards the study of the novel. We should not conceive of *The Great Tradition* as a critical text uniquely separate from either *The Name and Nature of Poetry* or *Practical Criticism*, but as a critical work that uses a similar psychological, physiological, intellectual foundation for its liberal humanist critique. In Leavis’ own words, the association between the study of the great poets and the study of the great novelists boils down to the ‘human awareness they promote’: ‘And as a recall to a due sense of differences it is well to start by distinguishing the few really great – the major novelists who count in the same way as the major poets, in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the

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<sup>6</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Thoughts, Words and Creativity: Art and Thought in D.H. Lawrence* (New York: Random House, 2011), p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Eugenio Montale (1973), p. 212.

<sup>8</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, pp. 1, 23-4.

possibilities of life'.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Leavis' study of the English novel deals with the same issues regarding form, construction, and substance as Housman's and Richards' studies of poetry. For Leavis, fictional prose is an extension of the sorts of values typically associated with verse – of life and of the ideals (ethical and moral in particular): 'It is in the same way true of the other great English novelists that their interest in their art gives them the opposite of an affinity with Pater and George Moore; it is, brought to an intense focus, an unusually developed interest in life. For, far from having anything of Flaubert's disgust or disdain or boredom, they are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity'.<sup>10</sup>

The inclusion of Leavis in this thesis may seem eccentric. Richards and Housman are firmly defined by both their interest in poetry and the supposed contradictory stances of their respective theses. Leavis, by contrast, is relatively unconnected to either of these framing themes. Of course, Leavis does have certain direct associations with Richards: Q.D. Leavis, a noted literary scholar and wife of F.R. Leavis, was Richards' doctoral candidate. Her paper, which was published as *Fiction and The Reading Public* (1932), offered an account of the decline in literary standards amongst the reading public. And Leavis himself was mentored by Richards during the late 1910s.<sup>11</sup> But these instances are hardly worthy of drawing Leavis into the fold already occupied by Housman and Richards. One might classify Leavis as a critic who embodies the teachings and ideology of Richards, and is hence an extension and refinement of Richards' theoretical approach to the reading, writing, and study of literature. In fact, Carol Atherton, in *Defining Literary Criticism*, identifies Leavis (like Richards) as an educator who was interested in reforming academic courses so as to include a more general appreciation of literature amongst the public: 'Leavis shared Richards's distaste for a form of literary criticism that was directed entirely towards the needs of academia, and felt that the 1926 reform of the English Tripos encouraged little more than a "narrow academicism"'.<sup>12</sup> For Leavis, criticism should not form the basis of a specialised discipline accessible only to the highly educated.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> For Leavis' life and education, see Ian Mackillop, *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London: The Penguin Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Carol Atherton, 'F.R. Leavis: The University and the Sage', in *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarships, Scholarship, and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1880-2002* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 143.

Rather, criticism should offer ‘the best possible training for intelligence – for free, unspecialized, general intelligence, which there has never at any time been enough of, and which we are particularly in need of today’.<sup>13</sup> In this context, Leavis’ work can be conceived as a second iteration of Richards’ work and ideology (specifically in terms of the psychological and pedagogical aspects underpinning a literary interpretation).

However, the reason for Leavis’ inclusion is his psychological focus. It is because of this focus that we find an insightful application for the phenomenological experience of the reader – this is arguably an unrecognised element of Leavis’ work. In its capacity to depict a character’s behaviour and to compare and contrast it to real life, the psychological approach is best benefited by a phenomenological paradigm, wherein the reader attempts to understand the actions and reactions of a fictional character in terms of authenticity (‘authenticity’ refers to the accuracy of the fictional elements of a novel to real life). This is because a phenomenological approach produces in the reader a type of empathetic reasoning that allows him to rationalise a character’s behaviour. If we take, for example, Leavis’ acute assessment of Henry James’ *The Portrait of a Lady*, specifically Leavis’ appraisal of Lord Warburton’s keen observation about Isabel Archer’s nationality and, hence, her cultural sensibilities, we will find that the finesse with which James handles the situation is manifest within the sharp, almost subtle, dictation of cultural and social norms from the perspective of their adherents. We understand, for example, that when Lord Warburton issues his frank request to light Isabel Archer’s candle, he does so because of his judicious perception of Archer as an American woman, and it is this observation which allows him to make such a forward advancement (as opposed to the more stringent English formalities that would usually restrain such speech): ‘Warburton would not have used this tone to an English girl. Perceiving that she has the American freedom where the English *convenances* are concerned, he immediately classifies her as “an American girl”, and slips into a manner that would have been in place with Henrietta Stackpole, the bright young journalist who habitually “walks in without knocking at the door”’.<sup>14</sup> Leavis’ analysis of this scene ends with him asserting that it ‘shocks’ us more than it shocks Isabel, for it reveals to us an ‘obtuse complacency, in assuming which for a moment Lord Warburton seems to reveal the spirit of the “system” he belongs to’.<sup>15</sup> This elevates our

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<sup>13</sup> F.R. Leavis, ‘The Literary Mind’, in *Scrutiny*, vol. 1, no. 1 (May 1932), p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 149. Italics in original.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



phenomenological considerations of the psychological, and firmly recognises our perceptions (especially our potential for ‘obtuse complacency’) as the true reach of the novel.

### **The Victorian Novel: an Empirical Approach**

I begin by drawing attention to Nicholas Dames’ *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (2007) for three reasons: first, to recognise the narrative surrounding the English novel in the mid-nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries; second, to sketch out a selection of critical debates that preceded Leavis’ *The Great Tradition*; and, third, to recognise the shift from poetry to the novel and the subsequent psychological distinctions it invites. The purpose of this first section, then, is the demonstration of how we might move from the study of poetry to the study of the novel, while still being able to apply the physiological and intellectual principles discussed in the previous chapters.

To start with one of Dames’ observations about the duration of Victorian novel theory is most appropriate: the Victorian physiology of the novel had a final brief efflorescence between 1917 and 1924, before then withering and disappearing.<sup>16</sup> For Dames, this period marked the occurrence of two notable events. First, the development of a scientific, physiological criticism of poetry. This was championed by Richards, who eventually formed in *Practical Criticism* a set of scientific methods for the study of poetic interpretations, which had no empirical capacity to study the form of the novel – the novel, for Richards, was too vast and unwieldy. For Dames, Richards represented an important deviation away from the nineteenth-century physiological approach to the study of fictional prose (the English novel), which hastened its demise and which saw it supplanted by the empirical study of verse. And, second, the reformation of the English Tripos at Cambridge saw it detached from the Medieval and Modern Language Tripos into its own Honours course of study, resulting in a more intense focus on literary readings. Richards, who would later be at the centre of the push for a closer study of poetry, was originally selected by Mansfield Forbes, a fellow in history and teacher of Old English, to deliver the initial lectures for the new English Tripos on the contemporary novel. The result of Richards delivering these lectures was an attempt to apply the empirical, intellectual, and scientific approaches to fictional prose. However, Richards soon found it too difficult to include the cumbersome amount of prose into a systematic and scientific consideration of the novel’s

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Dames, ‘Coda: I.A. Richards and the End of Physiological Novel Theory’, in *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 248.

form, and abandoned this pursuit in favour of the simpler, more manageable form of verse. The combination of these two events facilitated, for Dames, an environment that was initially receptive of a physiological inquiry into ‘reading, cognition, and literary form, as well as to fiction in general’, but which then later moved to exclude the novel on the basis of its complex (what Richards would probably define as its verbose, unnecessarily long) form.

The title of Dames’ text, *The Physiology of the Novel*, refers to a set of nineteenth-century empirical theories about the ‘physiological effects’ of the Victorian novel. However, for Dames, these approaches have been largely overshadowed by the twentieth-century scholarly belief that no coherent novel theory existed prior to Henry James’ polemic essay ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884), and that the birth and efflorescence of novel theory occurred in the 1920s with the ‘twin masterworks of, respectively, Continental and Anglo-American novel theory, Georg Lukács’ *The Theory of the Novel* (1920) and Percy Lubbock’s *The Craft of Fiction* (1921)’.<sup>17</sup> James’ ‘The Art of Fiction’ is an important text because it is a pivotal review and dismissal of Walter Besant’s ‘The Art of Fiction’ (also published in 1884). In it, James provides a historical account of novel theory: prior to the publication of his essay, there had been no established structure of novel theory of which to speak. Contrasting his observations against Besant’s essay, James identifies core weaknesses with the latter’s work: Besant’s rules of fiction are vague and unrefined, his writings on the moral purpose of the novel are bland, and his advice on narration approaches self-parody.<sup>18</sup> In conjunction with this self-proclamation regarding his own innovation of novel theory, James’ ‘The Art of Fiction’ provides an assessment of the nineteenth-century critical attitude towards the novel’s aesthetic function. James, for example, alludes to the foreign and Transatlantic conception (which he considers to be a misconception) of the novel as a seemingly simple, self-effacing, easily identifiable aesthetic medium. He asserts that little critical thought has been given to the intellectual discussion of the novel, and that it has, for the majority of the nineteenth century, been assessed on its face value alone.

During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable, good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it. But within a year or two, for some reason or other, there have been signs of returning animation – the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened. Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views, the comparison of standpoints; and there

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

is a presumption that those times when no one has anything particular to say about it, and has no reason to give for practice of preference, though they may be times of honour, are not times of development – are times, possibly even, a little of dullness. The successful application of any art is a delightful spectacle, but the theory too is interesting; and though there is a great deal of the latter without the former I suspect there has never been a genuine success that has not had a latent core of conviction. Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilising when they are frank and sincere. Mr. Besant has set an excellent example in saying what he thinks, for his part, about the way in which fiction should be written, as well as about the way in which it should be published; for his view of the ‘art’, carried on into an appendix, covers that too. Other labourers in the same field will doubtless take up the argument, they will give it the light of their experience, and the effect will surely be to make our interest in the novel a little more what it had for some time threatened to fail to be – a serious, active, inquiring interest, under protection of which this delightful study may, in moments of confidence, venture to say a little more what it thinks of itself.<sup>19</sup>

James positions himself as an innovator of novel theory. It is the aesthetic, intellectual theory that elevates fiction above its basic standards, and it is this same theory which is responsible for the novel’s creation (‘I suspect there has never been a genuine success that has not had a latent core of conviction’). Furthermore, James considers novel theory to be the process by which the novel itself becomes ‘a serious, active, inquiring interest’, without which the novel might stagnate and fail to grow as an aesthetic discipline. James’ observation that an increased effort in novel theory will have the effect of making our ‘interest in the novel a little more what it had for some time threatened to fail to be’ (‘a serious, active, inquiring interest’) suggests that he considers there to be a notable absence of significant novel theory preceding ‘The Art of Fiction’. For Dames, James, Lukács, and Lubbock constitute in academia an enabling rhetorical gesture in which these three novel theorists assert that ‘no theory of the novel pre-existed them, and that therefore no serious debate with any predecessor was necessary by way of ground clearing’.<sup>20</sup> The result being that ‘the most otherwise acute and suspicious of historians of literary criticism have failed to rebut these claims to origin and, despite evidence to the contrary, have tended instead to reinforce our picture of a *fin de siècle* heroic age’.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Henry James, ‘The Art of Fiction’, in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Volume C: Late Nineteenth: 1865 – 1910*, ed. Paul Lauter (Boston: Wadsworth, 2010), p. 299.

<sup>20</sup> Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel*, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. ‘*Fin de siècle*’ is French for ‘end of the century’, similar to the English idiom ‘turn of the century’.

Dames' 'evidence to the contrary' takes the form of an earlier protean strain of novel theory. Although inchoate in its initial form (it shifted between the novel's cognitive effects on the reader's physiology and a civic notion of literary consumption), it nevertheless was an attempt by Victorian proto-scientific novel theorists to produce a positivistic and experimental approach to the study of the novel. Its goal was to understand the novel in terms of the peculiarities and specific features of its consumption relative to a set of analytic categories – the focus was on the Victorian reader's interaction with the text, and the processes involved in the production, dissemination, consumption, and evaluation of the novel within its society. It is, in essence, an alternative intellectual approach in which mass observations of reader habits and of the structures of civic literary consumption are elevated above the academic considerations of the lone critic (such as that which might be found in the works of James, Lukács, and Lubbock). For Dames, these earlier novel theorists pre-date James' 'The Art of Fiction', and they advocate a study of the novel that is empirical, scientific, observational, reader-centric, and psychological (cognitive) in nature.

That earlier strain of novel theory sought to determine the 'physiological' (what we might now call 'cognitive') dimensions of the response that a given form elicits, and as such engaged in a serious effort to link the aesthetic distinctiveness of the novel with the habits of mass reading. The head-in-hands obliviousness that Valéry dismissively evokes is central to nineteenth-century novel theory – it is, in fact, the datum from which it begins; and therefore the delineation of what Valéry calls 'récit ordinaire' must find the tools to describe a *lecteur ordinaire*. Such is the embedded methodology of nineteenth-century physiological novel theory, which can be detected scattered across Western European writing on the novel, but that had its moment of greatest concentration from roughly 1850 to 1880, when a host of eminent proto-scientific theorists – G. H. Lewes (1817 - 78), Alexander Bain (1818 - 1903), E. S. Dallas (1828 - 79), Hippolyte Taine (1828 - 93), and Émile Hennequin (1858 - 88) most notably, followed later in the century by Vernon Lee (1856 - 1935) – as well as influential critics such as R. H. Hutton (1826 - 97), Geraldine Jewsbury (1812 - 80), and Margaret Oliphant (1828 - 97), produced the variety of novel theories and critical practices that took novel-reading as their inspiration, and consumption as their primary analytic category. Envisioning novel theory before James necessitates describing an intellectual task so different in its emphasis – positivistic, experimental, relatively non-judgmental about the habits, tendencies, or social effects of the expansion of literacy, largely neutral on the merits of various novelists and novelistic schools – that its invisibility is almost guaranteed.<sup>22</sup>

The physiology of the Victorian novel is distinct from the novel theory and aesthetic theory advanced by both James and the early twentieth-century critics that followed him. It focuses

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-8. Dames is referring to Paul Valéry's lecture 'Propos sur la poésie' (1927).

primarily on the reading of literature, and how that literature might impact on its audience – by contrast, the Jamesian approach is largely based in ‘the merits of various novelists and novelistic schools’. And this focus on the reading audience leads Dames to assert that the Victorian notion of the ‘physiological’ is, in fact, ‘cognitive’. And cognition, for Dames, is essentially psychological, ergo the physiological is psychological: ‘As we shall see, working out the characteristics of the *lecteur ordinaire* led inevitably to working out the social function of ordinary reading, or the ways in which ordinary reading was already creating new forms of social organization. This is the significance of the physiological-critical school which Hennequin named “esthopsychologie”: an attempt to place the solitary reader at the very heart of modern social interaction. And at the center of that reader was a nervous system upon which everything – including the novel itself – hinged’.<sup>23</sup> It is a monist conception of the relationship between the physical, the cognitive, and the psychological, wherein each is dependent on the other to function and, hence, they together form a single entity. The reader is an agent of literature, of society, of his own nervous system, and of his cognition and psychology – all three function together to produce a unique reading experience.

The positivistic novel theory advocated by the proto-scientists of the Victorian era utilised a primitive understanding of the biology of the reader.<sup>24</sup> To the Victorian anatomist and psychologist, this approach would have appeared substantial and conclusive. Dames’ assertion regarding the ‘nervous system’ is, in fact, a retroactive application of our twenty-first-century neurological comprehension. Dames recognises that the relatively simplistic anatomical and neurological ideas of the proto-scientists formed an inchoate, protean novel theory. And this inchoate, protean novel theory preceded what subsequent critics such as Lubbock and Lukács conceived as the novel’s true theoretical, intellectual, and aesthetic form. Due to these characteristics, post-Jamesian critics would not have recognised the validity of the physiology of the novel (its ‘invisibility is almost guaranteed’) because its primitive anatomical description would have appeared unaligned with the intellectual, novelistic methodology of their novel theory. ‘A positivist physiological psychology met aesthetic theory,’ Dames writes, ‘which in turn linked up with a sociology of a mass reading public to produce a remarkably consistent, if locally varied, approach to theorizing the novel form’.<sup>25</sup> The Victorian novel theorists that pre-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Primitive’ based on our contemporary standards.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

dated the Jamesian tradition were acutely aware of the potential social and neurological implications of literature (including, but not limited to, their nervous system, their emotions, their physiology, their psychology, and their cognition). The ‘positivist physiological psychology’ that Dames references is important, not merely because of its union with both ‘aesthetic theory’ and the ‘sociology of a mass reading public’, but because it classifies the psychological underpinnings of the Victorian novel theory as being interrelated with the physiology of the reader.

Psychology, then, was important to the Victorian novel theorist because it allowed him to produce an empirical, experimental, positivistic analytical structure with which to assess the civic consumption of the literary text.

For Dames, the Victorian era’s psychological process of novel-reading is important today because Intentionalism and Reader-Response Theory both attempt to recruit elements of psychology into contemporary debates about literature and civic virtue. The application of the psychological process of novel-reading to literary theory may potentially assist in the unravelling of the function of the reader in the twenty-first century: ‘the reading practices that we have come to see as characteristics of intellectual seriousness and even civic virtue – elongated attention spans, careful, slow comprehension, alertness at every moment – bore very different values in Victorian literary theory and practice, as signs of class or economic oppression, as instruments of subjection, as elite tastes’.<sup>26</sup> The physiological experience of the Victorian reader conveyed complex ideas about his place and status within his society. However, Dames does not advocate for a reactivation of the Victorian novel criticism’s protocols: ‘Physiological novel theory was [...] too limited in its historical reach, and too antique in its scientific tools, for anyone to wish its reanimation’.<sup>27</sup> In essence, Dames’ work is a re-evaluation of these nineteenth-century empirical theories via a twentieth- and twenty-first-century understanding of cognition and neurology. It is from this vantage point that Dames intends to address the issue of authorship and author-centred novel theory of the past century, in which the Intentionalist’s emphasis on the author’s meaning and on the author’s psychology have restricted the critical study of the physiology and function of the reader (E.D. Hirsch’s *Validity in Interpretation*, for example). Of course, Dames is not ignoring Reader-Response Theory and its developments, but rather he is focusing on critical theory pertaining to author-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

centred novel theory (in particular, psychoanalytic criticism which elevates the psychology of the author). In doing so, he suggests that the practices of physiological novel theory ‘reveal cultural zones – nineteenth-century debates over the novel’s role in shortening attention spans, diminishing the temporary reach of cognitive effort, and dangerously accelerating textual consumption – where the reach of the novel as a cultural technology is both profound and as yet little understood, today every bit as much as in the nineteenth century’.<sup>28</sup> So the physiology of the Victorian novel is not merely an account of how Victorian readers engaged in the reading of the novel (or what simply transpired in the mind and body as the reading occurred), but it is also a history of a theory of reading as well as a history of reading itself. From this, Dames hopes that we might be able to both trace novel theory and recognise that formal changes may be made to literature on the basis of the ‘scientized methodologies of the period’s critics’.<sup>29</sup>

A notable lull in the physiological, empirical study of the English novel occurred in the 1920s. The status that the English novel had during the nineteenth century slowly gave way to the elevation of the physiology of poetry. This might initially appear incongruous with Dames’ original sentiment about a Victorian set of empirical theories. For if, as Dames suggests, the physiology of the novel slowly fell from favour during the late 1910s then this must have been caused by either a change in the novel itself or a change in the empirical theories utilised by critics. How else, for example, might a Victorian set of empirical theories concerning the effects of literature on a reader be superseded by Richards’ ideas about psychology and the intellect of the reader? One would surely conceive of the two as being more similar than different, at least at a theoretical level. The theoretical principles underpinning the Victorian theories of empiricism are of a similar logical process as the theoretical principles behind the psychology in Richards’ ‘Documentation’ and ‘Analysis’. Richards’ quantitative, empirical investigation in *Practical Criticism* draws on the cognitive aspects of reading; the mode of consumption experienced by the reader determines the affective, physiological, and psychological response inspired by the poetry’s form. The principles of the nineteenth-century empirical theories about the effects of literature on readers and the principles of Richards’ investigation in *Practical Criticism* appear to be fundamentally aligned. However, Richards’ desire to refine the methods and techniques of an empirical study of poetry is, for Dames, the reasoning behind the shift from novel theory to poetry theory. The underlying principles may

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

be similar, but the practical execution of them is what separates Richards from the Victorians. We might recognise this distinguishing feature as Richards' pursuit of a far more thorough, systematic, and scientifically-accurate account of the interpretational process. So in order to accurately gauge Leavis' role in this literary tradition, we need to navigate the relationship between the principles of Victorian physiology of the novel, Richards' empirical theory about the interpretational capacity of poetry readers, and Leavis' psychological assessment of English novelists and their novels.

So why, specifically, did Richards elect to study poetry instead of the novel? What is the reasoning behind his decision to ignore, disparage even, the empirical study of the novel? Richards was initially interested in novel theory and the novel, producing both criticism concerning its theory and a manuscript for a novel which was never published. But as he progressed through his research in the early 1920s, Richards began to deviate from the novel. His focus turned to poetry, which initially produced *Principles of Literary Criticism* and eventually cumulated in the publication of *Practical Criticism*. Dames argues that this deviation can be traced to three possibilities: first, Richards believed that a physiological or neurological approach was inapplicable to the novel; second, a personal distaste for the novel that stemmed from its increasing quantity while equally lowering quality; or, third, a combination of the previous two in which Richards' distaste for the novel arose from its inability to be assessed physiologically and neurologically.<sup>30</sup> For Dames, the increasing size of the novel proved to be the 'stumbling block' for Richards' set of empirical methods. The execution of *Practical Criticism* certainly appears to support this observation: short poems, no more than a page in length, are the elicitors of the student protocols. Richards' reasoning for their selection is equally demonstrative: 'It is that most poetry needs several readings – in which its varied factors may fit themselves together – before it can be grasped'.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Richards details the number of 'attacks' that each student makes on the poems (he had, upon conducting his initial experiment, requested that each student record the number of readings attempted on each poem). Of this, he writes that 'the opinions expressed were not arrived at lightly or from one reading of the poems', and that 'few writers gave less than four attacks to any of the poems'.<sup>32</sup> For Richards, this provided a significant basis from which to assess the physiological

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 250-1.

<sup>31</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 190.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 4.



and intellectual reaction to a poem's text, so much so that he states that 'it is fairly safe to assert that the poems received much more thorough study than, shall we say, most anthology pieces get in the ordinary course'.<sup>33</sup> And it is from this thoroughness that Richards believes that the student protocols reveal a sort of 'definite expressible opinion' which can be empirically assessed, and to which a systematic and quantifiable positivism might be applied in order to uncover patterns of interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

For Richards, both the poem and the novel were a type of literary machine. 'A book is a machine to think with,' Richards famously wrote in the preface of *Principles of Literary Criticism*, 'but it need not, therefore, usurp the functions either of the bellows or the locomotive'.<sup>35</sup> The 'bellows' and the 'locomotive' referring, of course, to the intellect, with the implication being that a book may draw forth certain ideas, but it will not, and cannot, supersede or replace the reader's mind.

For Dames, Richards' conception of a 'literary machine' implies that literature has a mechanical function. To this end, Dames believes that Richards' idea of the literary machine embodies elements of Victorian novel theory: 'At the end of *Practical Criticism* Richards gestures to a standard *topos* of Victorian criticism – the similarity of novel and machine, the novel's status as a technology – in order to separate literary criticism from a host of interrelated concepts, including "information", diffused consciousness, wide circulations of ideas, and (by implication) prose fiction'.<sup>36</sup> So Dames contextualises Richards' approach to the study and writing of literature as a physiological process, in which the intellectual outcome arises from a set of mechanical events. The metaphor of the literary machine is further extended by Richards to the physical apparatus of the reader: 'We have a marvellous apparatus of inter-engaging and overlapping symbols for handling and elucidating sense, a logical machine of great sensitiveness and power, equipped with automatic safety devices and danger signals in the form of contradictions'.<sup>37</sup> In the same sense that David Hartley conceived an input / output relationship between the nervous system, the brain, and intellectual thought, Dames interprets

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. vii.

<sup>36</sup> Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel*, p. 254.

<sup>37</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 217.

Richards' 'literary machinery' to be an indication of a physiological approach in which the reverberations of a poem's text are felt, first, within the body and then, second, within the mind. And, as discussed in Chapter Two, Richards believed that it is only through the mind that the bodily sensations (emotions, tone, and sentimentality) are intellectualised. The reader's cognition must first parse all physiological experiences in order to intellectualise and ascribe to them a type of psychological meaning. To this effect, Dames states the following:

The aim of literary machinery, as Richards argues, is instead a 'modification' of our experiences, a modification created by 'a diffused reaction in the organs of the body brought about through the sympathetic nervous system', or by 'extensive changes in the visceral and vascular systems'. In intent and vocabulary these assertions are in essential agreement with mid-Victorian novel physiologies. They imply that a study of the physicality of reader response and a neurologically based epistemology of how reading occurs are essential for any developed critical account of literature. As Richards puts it, 'enough is known for an analysis of the mental events which make up the reading of a poem to be attempted. And such an analysis is a primary necessity for criticism'.<sup>38</sup>

Dames goes on to clarify that the 'poem' is the crucial adjustment in Richards' approach, and that this signals 'his significant break with the Victorian theorists whom he elsewhere echoes so closely'.<sup>39</sup> Just as Housman conceived poetry as a 'transfusion' between nervous systems (with the poem's text functioning as a surrogate, non-organic nervous system), Richards' 'literary machinery' posits the physiology of the reader as an integral, mechanical part of the reading process. The intellectualisation of the phenomenology of physiology is not restricted to either Housman's or Richards' study of verse, but rather that it is a notion which can be traced back to mid-nineteenth-century proto-scientist literary critics. These Victorian literary critics (such as Hutton, Jewsbury, and Oliphant) applied empirical theories to the study of the novel, which produced their inchoate novel theory on the physiology of the reader and on civic consumption. Richards' disparaging remarks about the futility of an empirical study of the novel are not the result of an inherent inability to assess the novel, but rather indicate the difficulties of assessing the novel in conjunction with a reader-centric focus – it was impractical for Richards to document how readers responded to full-length novels. But as the Victorian critics demonstrated, it is possible to empirically assess the novel, albeit in a relatively simplified, non-reader-centric, psychological approach.

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<sup>38</sup> Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel*, pp. 250-1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

And this is the importance of Leavis. A psychological assessment of the English novel shifts the focus away from the reader and, instead, towards the psychology of both the author and literary character. This has two effects. First, it makes possible the empirical assessment of lengthy pieces of prose (including those ‘damned 400-page novels’).<sup>40</sup> This is an ‘empirical assessment’ because psychological considerations are often neurocognitive, physiological considerations, albeit from a phenomenological perspective. There exists an intellectual association between Leavis and the Victorian positivists, which is based in the neurocognitive and psychological habits of authors. And, second, Leavis’ psychological assessment brings forth a new form of critical literary inquiry, which is not only an evolution and extension of Richards and Housman, but which is also of value to us today because of its potential to reveal the phenomenology of psychology. Psychological considerations are themselves intellectualised, and it is this process of intellectualising psychology that makes Leavis a valuable addition to contemporary critical theory pertaining to the sub-fields of Reader-Response Theory and Intentionalism. To this end, Leavis’ *The Great Tradition* demonstrates the extent to which psychological considerations can influence our comprehension of both the production and interpretation of a literary work of art. This is not to suggest that Richards was not also interested in psychology, or that he was not, in some way, a psychological critic, but that Leavis’ *The Great Tradition* takes this psychological approach a step further: it defines the English novel, and the English novelist, in terms of their psychological observations (whereas Richards was more interested in the psychological observations made of the reader).

### **The Function of Fictional Prose**

Due to the prominence of psychology in Leavis’ approach, a great deal of energy is directed towards understanding the successful creation of a character. Character creation, in its most basic form, involves the development of the ‘personal relations of sophisticated characters exhibiting the “civilization” of the “best society”’ via an ‘original psychological notation’.<sup>41</sup> For Leavis, a ‘sophisticated’ character is brought about through an intense and deep psychological comprehension of the motives, emotions, and ideas that drive the character’s actions. The ‘psychological notation’, and its intense and sustained preoccupation throughout

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<sup>40</sup> This quotation comes from a private letter from I.A. Richards to Mansfield Forbes, August 1919, in which Richards discusses the problems of lengthy prose texts.

<sup>41</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 15.

the novel, is the source of what Leavis believes to be the literary genius of the great English novelists. By focusing on the psychology underlying the character's creation, the moral and ethical practicalities of the character's existence are revealed to the reader.

Prose is important to Leavis' process of character creation. A character's creation is inseparable from its textual form, so that the language used to describe a character is akin to its psychological description. Thus 'character creation' refers to both the textual formation of the character (a concrete, empirical textual activity), and what one might call an abstract conception of the character's psychology (which is equally conveyed through the language, but experienced by the reader as a phenomenological phenomenon). Prose, for Leavis, affords the author a more thorough medium in which a realistic, practical depiction of the character is possible. Verse, by contrast, 'idealises and seeks a higher truth' that is not necessarily representative of a practical reality.<sup>42</sup> So prose, for Leavis, is able to produce a descriptive setting in which the constructed reality of the literary work is a mimetic reproduction of the phenomenological experience of life itself.<sup>43</sup>

In *The Great Tradition*, Leavis rarely mentions poetry. In total, there are no more than thirteen direct references to 'poetry', 'poems', and 'verse', with half of these occurring in quotations taken from both critical texts and English novels authored by writers other than Leavis. A handful of other references to specific poems exist in *The Great Tradition* (the relationship between Conrad's *The Shadow Line* and Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, for example), but these largely focus on the prose form. The reason for such an obvious observation ('obvious' in the sense that *The Great Tradition* is a critical text about the novel, and not about poetry, and hence one would not necessarily expect to encounter a deluge of poetry descriptions) is that when Leavis does speak of verse and of poetry, he does so with a notable emphasis on its relation to fictional prose. In particular, the distinct functions of these respective styles produce, for Leavis, different intellectual and physiological ideas.

There is, for example, one particular quotation in which Leavis reveals the potential for prose to confer to its reader a sense of realism and truth. This provides an important insight into the respective functions of prose and verse because it demonstrates that a reader's

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Obviously not any type of prose will, without fail, create such a setting, but rather that it is a product of exceptional prose, the kind which Leavis considered to be the creation of the great English novelists.

phenomenological experience of a literary work can often be correlated to the nature of the text: how a reader feels when reading literature is often the product of what is being read.<sup>44</sup>

The above-mentioned quotation occurs in Leavis' discussion on George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876). For Leavis, *Daniel Deronda* is a peculiar combination of Eliot's literary abilities: 'In no other of her works is the association of the strength with the weakness so remarkable or so unfortunate as in *Daniel Deronda*'.<sup>45</sup> Her literary strength is embodied in Gwendolen, who reveals Eliot to be 'a very intelligent woman [...] unlimited by masculine partiality of vision, and only the more perceptive because a woman, to achieve a much *completer* presentment of her subject'.<sup>46</sup> This 'presentment of her subject' being, for Leavis, a literary character whose psychological description inspires and mirrors Henry James' Isabel Archer. Leavis considers the respective portrayals of Gwendolen and Isabel as being, in part, dependent on the psychology of the author (gender included), leading him to proclaim the following: 'there seems no need to insist further that there is point in saying that Isabel Archer is Gwendolen Harleth seen by a man – or that Gwendolen is Isabel seen by a woman'.<sup>47</sup> Gender and its psychology will be discussed later in this section, but for now we must focus on Eliot's literary weaknesses. For it is because of her prose weaknesses that Leavis draws attention to the function of prose in relation to verse and to the psychological, sympathetic depiction of the literary character. Specifically, the relationship of prose and verse to reality, and how these different forms can elicit different phenomenological experiences in a reader – the former a practical reality, the latter seeking a higher, more abstract truth. For Leavis, Eliot's literary weaknesses in *Daniel Deronda* appear in the 'mass of fervid and wordy unreality', and that this quality of her writing 'absorbed most of the attention the book has ever had'.<sup>48</sup> The quotation is:

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<sup>44</sup> For further discussion, see Leavis' *New Bearings on English Poetry*. This was an influential work that challenged the role of poetry in society, opening with its famous line: 'Poetry matters little to the modern world'. What follows is an account of poetry that attempts to position it as a potential purifier of the moral decays experienced in the wake of the Great War, including such modernist poets as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.

<sup>45</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 79.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87. Italics in original.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

George Eliot was too intelligent to be able to offer herself the promptings of Comtism, or of the Victorian interest in race and heredity, as providing the religious exaltations she craved – too intelligent, that is, to offer them directly as such. But imaginative art provided her with opportunities for confusion; she found herself licensed to play with daydream unrealities so strenuously as not to recognize them for such. Author-martyr of *Romola*, she pretends, with painful and scholarly earnestness, that they are historical and real; but the essential function of the quasi-historical setting is one with that of the verse form: it is to evade any serious test for reality (poetry, we know, idealizes and seeks a higher truth).<sup>49</sup>

Leavis' statement about the 'verse form' is brief and without further development. Rather, Leavis' criticism focuses on the 'Zionist inspiration' of *Deronda*, and on the spontaneities of sentimentality that Eliot produces in her writings on him. For Leavis, *Deronda* constitutes the bad part of Eliot's novel because his existence and function is motivated by social and cultural expectations, as opposed to being a product of Eliot's pure literary genius. Citing James' critique on *Daniel Deronda*, Leavis writes that 'the difference between the strong and the weak in George Eliot [is] one between "what she is by inspiration and what she is because it is expected of her"'.<sup>50</sup> These insights are undoubtedly important influencers of a reader's experience of her novel. Leavis' brief remark about prose being associated with a pragmatic reality, and verse being associated with the ideal, is important because it is by analysing this particular issue that we find evidence of how the structural forms of literature, its genre, and its style can influence the phenomenological experience of the reader; that prose is not always *prose*, and verse is not always *verse*, and that the relationship between these two forms is not purely black and white. Prose has the potential to carry the tone of verse, and verse has the potential to carry the tone of prose. The qualities attributed to verse / prose can occasionally appear in prose / verse, creating an unusual and unexpected phenomenological experience.

Why is this important? When distilled to its raw elements, Leavis' thesis concerning Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* is about *realism*. Or, more specifically, his thesis is about an intense psychological authenticity, in which the literary characters are mimetic reproductions of cognitive processes. The believability of the character's situation stems from the author's ability to describe a realistic set of environmental circumstances and, once adequately accomplished, to then produce a set of psychological character functions that correspond to real-world cognitive processes. The character must find herself or himself within a set of

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

realistic situations, while also realistically responding to those situations. To illustrate this, we might observe Leavis' reference to Leslie Stephen's analysis of Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy* (a poem first published by Eliot in 1868). When Stephen writes about the heroine's predicament in *The Spanish Gypsy* – 'why place the heroine among conditions so hard to imagine' – he does so by assessing the likelihood of the event occurring naturally.<sup>51</sup> And if the situation is implausible then, logically, it follows that any psychological function undertaken by the literary character may be at risk of missing the mark. For both Stephen and Leavis, the premise of *The Spanish Gypsy* is an example of Eliot's inability (her weakness) to construct a character and a setting that are authentic. Leavis' summation of *The Spanish Gypsy*, for example, draws attention to the seemingly outlandish and unrealistic expectations placed upon the heroine: 'The heroine, when on the eve of marriage to her lover, a Spanish noble, is plunged into a conflict between love and duty by the appearance of a gypsy who (to quote Leslie Stephen's summary) "explains without loss of time that he is her father; that he is about to be the Moses or Mahomet of a gypsy nation; and orders her to give up her country, her religion, and her lover to join him in this hopeful enterprise"'. So fanciful is the scenario that it defies belief, and hence the heroine's actions (particularly the resolution of the conflict) are dubious at best.

To compare this to the 'strong' section of *Daniel Deronda* reveals the psychological significance of the author's gender. According to Leavis, Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth presents an insightful psychology of the female cognitive process, which is readily appreciated by Leavis as being more realistic than Eliot's portrayal of the male character Daniel Deronda. In praise of this, Leavis writes the following: 'Henry James wouldn't have written *The Portrait of a Lady* if he hadn't read *Gwendolen Harleth* (as I shall call the good part of *Daniel Deronda*), and, of the pair of closely comparable works, George Eliot's has not only the distinction of having come first; it is decidedly the greater'.<sup>52</sup> Harleth is, for Leavis, a superior literary character because Eliot, as a woman, is more capable of reproducing the female psychology in the literary form; James, by contrast, produces his female version of Harleth from the male perspective. The outcome being that James' Isabel Archer is not as accurate a depiction of the female psychology as Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth. And this is also why Leavis takes issue with the unrealistic portrayal of the character Daniel Deronda: he is a male character seen by a

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

woman, but Eliot (in a similar fashion as James' relative shortcomings with Isabel Archer) cannot wholly portray the male psychology.

Now, the issue of prose and verse is important because it indicates that certain forms of writing pre-dispose us to specific phenomenological experiences. Obviously this is not an ironclad rule concerning literary forms, but merely an observation that certain forms are capable of eliciting specific physiological and intellectual reactions. If Eliot's femininity assured her an accurate literary reproduction of female cognition then the heroine in *The Spanish Gypsy* should be an authentic depiction – but, as both Leavis and Stephen observe, this is not so. The most probable answer is one of a simple mistake: Eliot overshot her depiction of the heroine in *The Spanish Gypsy*, and produced a character of a less-than-realistic quality. This is suggested by Leavis when he writes that Eliot's 'imaginative art provided her with opportunities for confusion; she found herself licensed to play with daydream unrealities so strenuously as not to recognize them for such'. This indicates that the creative construction of the psychology of a fictitious character, along with the world in which he or she inhabits, requires a degree of restraint on the behalf of the author; Eliot cannot let her imagination run wild because the result is the potential for self-delusion, resulting in 'daydream unrealities'. But there is another reason behind Leavis' selection of *The Spanish Gypsy*, and that is its verse form. Verse, as Leavis suggests, aspires to something greater than a pragmatic truth – it aspires to ideals. And ideals are often intellectual conceptions of perfection. But perfection rarely embodies a pragmatic truth; rather, it frequently elevates itself to an unreachable, albeit guiding, standard. As Matthew Arnold stated in his Introduction to *The Hundred Greatest Men*: 'for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact'.<sup>53</sup> For Arnold and for Leavis, poetry and verse have the potential to function as the harbingers of the intellectual ideal. The apparent conceptual quality of verse (as Leavis asserts in *The Great Tradition*) serves as an appropriate forum within which to communicate a non-pervasive, non-pragmatic idealisation of the idea. Of course, this is not to suggest that poetry is incapable of being pragmatic, but rather that poetry's structure, style, and form more readily facilitate the fanciful than prose. Verse is more able to deal with the ideal than prose because verse is inherently vaguer than prose. It lacks the directness and concreteness that can otherwise be achieved by prose. And this is one of the

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<sup>53</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Introduction to Book One: Poets-Dramatists-Novelist', in *The Hundred Greatest Men*, eds. Wallace Wood and Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1885), p. 3.



reasons for Leavis' selection of Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy*: Eliot's weaknesses of character and setting demonstrate the potential for verse to confuse and misrepresent (or, rather, omit) the intense psychological qualities that Leavis finds so integral to the great English novels. In drawing attention to this, Leavis indirectly demonstrates that the prose form allows a more concrete description, a more thorough psychological profiling, and a more realistic, pragmatic construction of both character and setting than verse.

The claim that verse is vaguer than prose may be contentious. However, this assessment is based on a point that Leavis raises in a later chapter of *The Great Tradition*. Extending on the qualities of prose, Leavis writes in relation to Joseph Conrad the following observation:

In *The Shadow Line*, also in common recognition one of Conrad's masterpieces (it is, I think, superior to *Heart of Darkness* and even *Typhoon*), we have the same art. It has been acclaimed as a kind of prose *Ancient Mariner*, and it is certainly a supremely sinister and beautiful evocation of enchantment in tropic seas. But the art of the evocation is of the kind that has been described; it is not a matter of engendering 'atmosphere' adjectivally, by explicitly 'significant' vaguenesses, insistent unutterablenesses, or the thrilled tone of an expository commentator, but of presenting concretely a succession of particulars from the point of view of the master of the ship, who, though notably sensitive, is not a Marlow, but just a ship's master; an actor among the other actors, though burdened with responsibilities towards the crew, owners, and ship. The distinctive art of a novelist, and the art upon which the success of the prose *Ancient Mariner* essentially depends, is apparent in the rendering of personality, its reactions and vibrations; the pervasive presence of the crew, delicately particularized, will turn out on analysis to account for the major part of the atmosphere.<sup>54</sup>

We have here a comparison between a well-known poem (the *Ancient Mariner*) and Conrad's *The Shadow Line*, in which the latter is contextualised as a prose form of the former. We also have a distinction being made by Leavis regarding the art of the novelist, in which he focuses extensively on the pragmatism of the prose form. This 'art of the novelist' arises from Leavis' contrasting of verse against prose. Verse, for Leavis, engenders "'atmosphere" adjectivally, by explicitly "significant" vaguenesses, insistent unutterablenesses, or the thrilled tone of an expository commentator'. One of the potential functions of verse is the crafting of an unreality in which the ideal appears in a realistic form ('realistic' relative to the unreality constructed within the verse form). In doing so, the perfectionisms underpinning the intellectual ideal are given a pragmatic authenticity, but only within the dimensions of the unreality. The end result

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<sup>54</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 187.

being that the ideals in poetry appear attainable because the unreality constructed by the verse supports them.

The novel, though, has the potential to provide a different set of phenomenological experiences. For Leavis, these experiences originate from the concrete presentation of 'particulars' through the prose form. Prose is capable of 'concrete presentations' due to its ability to extensively render complex scenarios, emotions, psychological reactions and states, character interrelations and personalities, and civic observations. Alternatively, the verse form better facilitates the 'vaguenesses', 'unutterablenesses', and adjective 'atmosphere' of the poet's unreality. According to Leavis, the benefits of the prose form arise from its ability to construct a mimetic reproduction of real-life phenomenological experiences: 'The distinctive art of a novelist, and the art upon which the success of the prose *Ancient Mariner* essentially depends, is apparent in the rendering of personality, its reactions and vibrations; the pervasive presence of the crew, delicately particularized, will turn out on analysis to account for the major part of the atmosphere'. This quotation demonstrates that, for Leavis, the 'distinctive art of a novelist' is dependent upon the 'reactions and vibrations' of the 'rendering of personality'; the significance being that any such concrete rendering must require an extensive outlay of the prose to accurately and insightfully produce the required phenomenological effect. Failure to do so may result in the prose taking on certain aspects of verse: it may become a vague and ideal literary construction that does not pass the 'serious test for reality'. So, for Leavis, the phenomenological effect of the prose is one that rests on the confirmation of pragmatic truths, rather than ideals. By extension, the literary representation of pragmatic truths allows the critic to assess the literary work's psychological considerations. This is because pragmatic truths correlate to our practical lives. Anything less, or more, than a pragmatic truth has, as Leavis observes, the potential to produce an unreality in which the characterisation of the hero or heroine fails to adhere to real-world principles of psychology (such as in Leavis' example of *The Spanish Gypsy*). Such an occurrence would render the psychological insights of the author moot for the simple reason that the character's personality is unrelated to, and arguably detached from, the world beyond the novel.

Whereas Richards believed that the verbosity of the English novel would hamper his empirical and scientific investigation (due to his inability to account for extensive quantities of reader input / output), that same lengthy prose form is what allowed Leavis to study and critique the intense psychological considerations of the English novelist and his or her literary characters. The increased length of the novel is hence correlated to Richards' inability to accurately and efficiently assess mass reader responses. At the same time, this increased length

can be equally correlated to Leavis' success in assessing the effectiveness of the psychological considerations of the English novelist. For Leavis, the novel functions as a means by which the novelist can communicate, in its entirety, the intense psychological processes of the literary character – achievable through the extensive detail allowed by the prose form. And the 'great English novelists', as Leavis calls them, are those authors who are capable of portraying, with 'unprecedented subtlety and refinement', the 'personal relations of sophisticated characters' through 'an original psychological notation corresponding to the fineness of [...] psychological and moral insight'.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Phenomenology of Psychology**

Leavis' function of fictional prose is thus: a literary character's cognition and psychology must appear realistic to the reader. In doing so, the formulation of the character's textual presence (the conveyance of the character's cognition and psychology through written language) is likely to inspire an empathetic association between reader and character, elevating the character above and beyond a mere creative force – the character becomes a living entity.

The phrase 'the phenomenology of psychology' refers to the reader's phenomenological experience when encountering a psychological rendering of a literary character – it is an empathetic event, in which the reader places himself in the shoes of the literary character. The notion of 'empathy' is intrinsic to the reader's comprehension (and, by extension, the believability) of a literary character's psychological disposition. Empathy is defined as a 'psychological construct [which] denotes a sense of similarity between one's own feelings and those expressed by another person'.<sup>56</sup> It has an underlying physiological form, and this form is distinctly neurocognitive. Research on empathy has revealed that parts of the brain are responsible for mimicking observed actions: 'Whenever we look at someone performing an action, beside the activation of various visual areas, there is a concurrent activation of the motor circuits that are recruited when we ourselves perform that action. Although we do not overtly reproduce the observed action, our motor system becomes nevertheless active *as if* we were

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 1, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Jean Decety and Philip L. Jackson, 'A Social-Neuroscience Perspective on Empathy', in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 15, no. 2 (April 2006), p. 54.

executing that very same action that we are observing'.<sup>57</sup> In terms of a literary empathy, a similar effect is observed in readers of fiction. Suzanne Keen, in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), writes that 'empathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading. It need not be a conscious response: the neonates who cry at the sound of other babies' cries are almost certainly unaware of their primitive empathy. Equipped with mirror neurons, the brain appears to possess a system for automatically sharing feelings, what neuroscientists call a "shared manifold for intersubjectivity". More complex cognitive responses to others' mental states layer atop this initial spontaneous sharing of feelings. Mirroring what a person might be expected to feel in that condition or context, empathy is thought to be precursor to its semantic close relative, *sympathy*'.<sup>58</sup> Keen later suggests that 'if empathy can be learned or developed then novel reading might contribute to the cultivation of empathy', she suggests a potential correlation between a reader's psychological state and said reader's observance of a literary character's psychological state.<sup>59</sup> Regarding empathy and sympathy, Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* discusses the issue of involving the reader in the analysis of the psychology of the literary character: '*If an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them then the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will help him*'.<sup>60</sup> The potential for a reader to empathise with a bland character depends upon the author's ability to construct a 'psychic vividness of prolonged inside views'. The author, then, is the source of the empathetic relationship between reader and literary character, which is based in the author's ability to replicate and make believable within the parameters of the novel a series of real-world psychological states.

The psychological rendering of the literary character, and its importance in Leavis' psychological approach to the study of the English novel, revolves around the function of fictional prose. For Leavis, fictional prose facilitates extensive descriptive language allowing a pragmatic telling of both character and plot. The more realistic the 'composition', the more

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<sup>57</sup> Vittorio Gallese, 'The Roots of Empathy: The Shared Manifold Hypothesis and the Neural Basis of Intersubjectivity', in *Psychopathology*, vol. 36, no. 4 (July 2003), p. 174. Italics in original.

<sup>58</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 377-8. Italics in original.

believable are the actions, reactions, and thoughts of the literary character. And the more believable the literary character, the more probable that the reader will empathise with said character.

By focusing on the psychological aspects of the novel, Leavis finds himself drawn into the early-twentieth-century discussion regarding the physiology and intellect of both the reader and the author. For Housman, the phenomenology of the reader's physiology encapsulated the emotional; the 'transfusion' of emotion from poet to reader via the surrogate nervous system of the poem's text created a mimetic circuit of subjective experience, in which the reader's phenomenology is directly correlated to the poet's phenomenology. For Richards, the phenomenology of the reader's intellect incorporated elements of the physiological; the physical experience must first be intellectualised if it is to be cogent, with each intellectual experience being dependent upon the successful deciphering of the poet's meaning. For Leavis, the phenomenology of psychology combines both the intellectual and physiological aspects of the reader. The psychological is not merely an abstraction, but it is rather a concrete product of the reader's physiological cognition (the neurological processes involved at a biological level) and the reader's intellectualisation of the subjective experience. In terms of the literary work, the psychological manifests itself in the author's ability to convey to the reader a set of intellectual and emotional principles that underlie the function of the literary character. The literary character's *raison d'être* is relative to the setting and plot – which, as discussed in the previous section, must occur within a near-as-possible replication of our real-world if it is to have any success in persuading the reader as to the sincerity of the character's actions. As Leavis writes in *The Great Tradition*, an unrivalled 'human awareness of the possibilities of life' is what distinguishes the great English novelists from their lesser contemporaries.<sup>61</sup> And this 'awareness' is represented in literature through the accurate presentation of a literary character's psychological reactions and cognitive thought-processes. So the great English novelists are, for Leavis, those few, rare authors who are, first, capable of identifying and recognising, with exceptional fineness and insight, the psychological processes of day-to-day individuals and, second, who are then able to produce in their literary characters a mimetic reproduction of that same real-world psychology.

The believability of the reality portrayed in a fictional novel is almost entirely dependent upon the author's ability to tap into the physiological and intellectual (including psychological)

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<sup>61</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 2.

conditions of the reader. This is not to suggest that all literature achieves this, or, indeed, that all authors aspire to achieve this rendering of character, setting, and plot. Rather, within the scope of Leavis' tradition of the English novel, the great English novelists are not only aware of the possibilities of life, but are able to accurately recreate these circumstances within their literary works. The novel's success in transmitting the psychological circumstances of its literary characters to the reader is, in other words, dependent upon the phenomenological experience of both the reader's physiology and intellect. Leavis is not an isolated critic advancing an independent and unrelated abstract theory, but rather he is a liberal humanist who is building upon a physiological comprehension of the body to produce a pragmatic understanding of the interrelations between the author, the novel, the literary characters, and the reader. And so this means that the relationship between Housman, Richards, Leavis, and twenty-first-century criticism is recognised in the relationship between the phenomenology of emotions, intellect, and psychology, in conjunction with the neurocognitive and neurological rendering of the functions of the brain.

Leavis' theoretical approach is therefore one of both unity and separation. Contemporary critical theory treats the brain as an independent, positivist, concrete object that can be measured and assessed independently of the observer through the use of an empirical set of methods. The execution of Leavis', Housman's, and Richards' respective approaches adheres to a similar type of positivistic ideal, wherein each attempts to attain meaning via an assessment of either the physiological, intellectual, or psychological processes of the reader. Furthermore, in hindsight we can find parallels between contemporary brain science and early twentieth-century literary criticism, but this is largely a retroactive application of our current knowledge, rather than a revealing of some deep-seated inquisition into the brain advanced by these three critics. Nevertheless, we do find certain similarities between the conceptions of prose and poetry by Housman, Richards, and Leavis. This includes Housman's description of the physical sensations of his body, Richards' systematic quantification of reader responses, and Leavis' psychological pragmatism. These embryonic approaches, with their latent neurological implications, demonstrate that an understanding of the phenomenological experience need not appeal only to the empiricist neuroscientist, but that we might investigate such areas through a sustained study of the reader's subjective experience. Contemporary renderings of the brain (fMRI scans, computerised tomography scans, and quantitative positivistic experimentations, for example) are not necessarily indicative of the phenomenological experience of the reader. We know, for example, that the 'subcortex has motivational and homeostatic functions (e.g., governing thirst)', and that 'emotions such as anger are largely a function of subcortical

regions'.<sup>62</sup> An empirical description of these processes often depicts the flow of blood to these regions of the brain, signalling an increased state of neurological activity (fMRI scans are particularly useful for this type of neurological investigation). But the individual to whom this event occurs does not encounter a phenomenological experience that matches the scientific description; he may feel thirst or anger, but he does not feel the flow of blood to the subcortex region. So the correlation between the brain's internal neurocognitive function and either an emotional state, or an intellectual idea, or the development of a psychological order may be scientifically sound, but the empirical dictation of these cognitive functions is not representative of *how* the reader feels during his practical engagement with the literary work – and we find evidence supporting an alternative approach to the study of the felt texture of a literary experience in Leavis' interest in a literary authenticity.

For Leavis, a great English novel is produced through the novelist's acute awareness of life. 'Life' here takes its definition from Leavis' use of the term in the first chapter of *The Great Tradition*. For Leavis, it manifests, and is realised, through a distinct and intense preoccupation with the psychological, moral, social, cultural, and political interests of the individual – the 'individual' being a generalised, but not simplified, notion of the members of the English population. By being a 'highly conscious and intelligent servant of life', the English novelist is capable of exceptional literary genius: "One must speak for life and growth, amid all this mass of destruction and disintegration." This is Lawrence, and it is the spirit of all his work. It is the spirit of the originality that gives his novels their disconcerting quality, and gives them the significance of works of genius'.<sup>63</sup>

The idea of 'life' is a pivotal element in Leavis' description of the great English novelist. The insightfulness of the novelist's scrutiny of life's function is the ultimate determiner of whether or not said novelist is capable of embodying within his or her literary characters an intense, sustained, and accurate psychological rendering. Yet the reason for Leavis' deliberation of the idea of 'life' is itself a fascinating exploration of the novel theory against which he positions himself, and it is hence an important aspect to discuss due to its contribution to the formation of Leavis' tradition of the English novel. As an educator, Leavis frequently encountered examination-papers and undergraduate essays that contained the statement that

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<sup>62</sup> Patrick C. Hogan, 'Literary Brains: Neuroscience, Criticism, and Theory', pp. 293-4, 295.

<sup>63</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, pp. 24, 26.

‘George Eliot is the first modern novelist’.<sup>64</sup> Leavis believed this to be untrue, and was instead convinced that Jane Austen created the archetypal narrative structure of the English novel; to her did all succeeding great English novelists owe their existence. Baffled by the constant inclusion of this claim in undergraduate papers, Leavis took it upon himself to track down its origin. In doing so, he intended to identify the prevailing English novel theory responsible for the elevation of George Eliot. His search proved fruitful, and he soon found its source: ‘I finally tracked it down to Lord David Cecil’s *Early Victorian Novelists*. In so far as it is possible to extract anything clear and coherent from the variety of things that Lord David Cecil says by way of explaining the phrase, it is this: that George Eliot, being concerned, not to offer “primarily an entertainment”, but to explore a significant theme – a theme significant in its bearing on the “serious problems and preoccupations of mature life” – breaks with “those fundamental conventions both of form and matter within which the English novel up till then had been constructed”’.<sup>65</sup> Cecil’s advocacy of Eliot as the ‘first modern novelist’ is predicated on her formation of a novel tradition in which the novelist’s duty is the extrapolation and assessment of the ‘serious problems and preoccupations of mature life’ via a well-structured textual form. This new tradition is contrasted against what Cecil conceived to be a prior novel tradition filled with ‘entertainment’ value. And, for Cecil, Jane Austen belonged to those group of writers who produced texts with eminent ‘entertainment’ value because her characters and plots appeared less well-tamed and more chaotic than Eliot’s. For as Leavis observes, ‘she [Austen] creates delightful characters [...] and lets us forget our cares and moral tensions in the comedy of pre-eminently civilized life’.<sup>66</sup> One might interpret this statement to indicate that Austen had no interest in producing a mimetic reproduction of ‘life’. Rather, one might interpret it to mean that Austen’s novels occupied a space within an unreality, in which the ‘cares and moral tensions’ are circumvented in favour of a falsified, comedic overtone. But, as Leavis proceeds to explain, Austen’s fascination with the comedic, almost ironic, values of her characters allows her to produce a psychological study that is more akin to the reality of life than to Eliot’s phenomenological perception of a structured and predictable existence (which Eliot projects through her calculated novels).

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.



Cecil's conception of Austen is arguably of a psychological nature, whereas his conception of Eliot is of a formalist nature. 'Life is chaotic, art is orderly', Cecil writes.<sup>67</sup> Leavis takes this quotation, along with Cecil's associated comparison between Austen and Eliot, as a point of origin from which to discuss the literary genius, and historical importance, of Austen. In doing so, Leavis identifies a key element in Austen's literary works: her formalist rendering, or rather her 'composition', of the structure of the novel implores the reader to consider Austen's moral preoccupation from an impersonalised perspective, producing a self-reflective art form in which the author comments, not on her own unique observations (which may or may not be misleading), but on the nature of 'life' in general. Eliot, by comparison, produced orderly compositions that were structurally magnificent, yet did not necessarily capture the chaos of life and were hence, for Cecil, of an alternative literary nature to Austen's literature. This, in the opinion of Cecil, solidified Eliot as belonging to a new tradition of English literature ('the first modern novelist'). And furthermore, it suggested to Cecil that Austen's literature was not only structurally chaotic, but that this chaos was her attempt at producing a mimetic reproduction of 'life' itself. 'Structurally chaotic' is not to suggest that Austen's novels are without structure, but rather that her structure is more representative of life's unpredictability than Eliot's restrained plots – Cecil, in his analysis of Eliot in relation to Austen, writes that Eliot's 'plots are too neat and symmetrical to be true'.<sup>68</sup> Austen, by contrast, utilises plots that are essentially messy in their execution, and which are without a straightforward resolution: the issue of Elizabeth Bennet's changing perspective of Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* is an example of Austen's ability to replicate the psychological chaos encountered by real-world individuals.

Take, for example, Leavis' analysis of Cecil's criticism:

Jane Austen's plots, and her novels in general, were put together very 'deliberately and calculatedly' (if not 'like a building'). But her interest in 'composition' is not something to be put over against her interest in life; nor does she offer an 'aesthetic' value that is separable from moral significance. The principle of organization, and the principle of development, in her work is an intense moral interest of her own in life that is in the first place a preoccupation with certain problems that life compels on her as personal ones. She is intelligent and serious enough to be able to impersonalize her moral tensions as she strives, in her art, to become fully conscious of them, and to learn what, in the interests

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<sup>67</sup> Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists* (London: Constable, 1963), p. 322.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

of life, she ought to do with them. Without her intense moral preoccupation she wouldn't have been a great novelist.<sup>69</sup>

This account of her would, if I had cared to use the formula, have been my case for calling Jane Austen, and not anyone later, 'the first modern novelist'.

For Cecil, Austen's composition 'satisfies' us more than Eliot's composition because it contains a balance between the artistic novel form and the chaotic nature of life. In achieving this, Cecil credits Austen with a 'superiority' over Eliot due to Austen's 'freedom from moral preoccupations'. Eliot's composition, by contrast, is more art than imitation ('she sacrifices life to art') – her 'composition' indicates a careful and deliberate process, which belies a 'convincing picture of life', but which also hints at her intense Puritan heritage (this, for Cecil, indicated her stringent adherence to moral protocols).<sup>70</sup> And according to Cecil, it is these qualities that established Eliot as the 'first modern novelist': by constructing her works as 'orderly compositions', she portrays the novel as a thoroughly conceptualised art form, wherein the novel could function as a platform for civic and moral commentary. Of course, Cecil believed that this civic and moral commentary would be carefully deliberated by the novelist, as opposed (as in the case of Austen) a chaotic, unabridged, unedited, uncensored rendering of life. So, for Cecil, the 'modern novelist' is a well-defined artist who deals in the 'composition' of the novel. And the artist's text is arranged to appear as if it is replicating 'life', which is accomplished through the particularisation of specific settings, plots, and characters within a stringent structural scaffold. The result being that the modern novelist produces a literary work that appears to have been 'put together deliberately and calculatedly like a building'.

It is important to consider one of Leavis' examples of Austen's moral composition. This will hopefully shed light on her place within his great English tradition, and, with regard to this chapter, demonstrate the mimetic quality that underlies the 'phenomenology of psychology'. My particular interest is in the discussion initiated by Leavis regarding the composition of novels in which the literary characters are preoccupied with intense moral issues. For Leavis, the distinction between structural composition and an intense preoccupation with 'life' is best displayed in Austen's *Emma*. In this work, Austen demonstrates a 'formal perfection' of the 'moral preoccupations that characterize the novelist's peculiar interest in life'. According to Leavis, the aesthetic matter of the novel, or the 'beauty' of its composition, does not account

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<sup>69</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>70</sup> Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelist*, p. 322.

for its perfection or form; it is only when we consider Austen's 'vital capacity for experience' and her 'marked moral intensity' that an 'unusually developed interest in life' is revealed.

The great novelists in that tradition [Cecil's tradition] are all very much concerned with 'form': they are all very original technically, having turned their genius to the working out of their own appropriate methods and procedures. But the peculiar quality of their preoccupation with 'form' may be brought out by a contrasting reference to Flaubert. Reviewing Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, D.H. Lawrence adduces Flaubert as figuring to the world the 'will of the writer to be greater than and undisputed lord over the stuff he writes'. This attitude in art, as Lawrence points out, is indicative of an attitude in life – or towards life. Flaubert, he comments, 'stood away from life as from leprosy'. For later Aesthetic writers, who, in general, represent in a weak kind of way the attitude that Flaubert maintained with a perverse heroism, 'form' and 'style' are ends to be sought for themselves, and the chief preoccupation is with elaborating a beautiful style to apply to the chosen subject.

[...]

Lord David Cecil, attributing this way to Jane Austen, and crediting her with a superiority over George Eliot in 'satisfying the rival claims of life and art', explains this superiority, we gather, by a freedom from moral preoccupations that he supposes her to enjoy. (George Eliot, he tells us, was a Puritan, and earnestly bent on instruction.)

As a matter of fact, when we examine the formal perfection of *Emma*, we find that it can be appreciated only in terms of the moral preoccupations that characterize the novelist's peculiar interest in life. Those who suppose it to be an 'aesthetic matter', a beauty of 'composition' that is combined, miraculously, with 'truth to life', can give no adequate reason for the view that *Emma* is a great novel, and no intelligent account of its perfection or form. It is in the same way true of the other great English novelists that their interest in their art gives them the opposite of an affinity with Pater and George Moore; it is, brought to an intense focus, an unusually developed interest in life. For, far from having anything of Flaubert's disgust or disdain or boredom, they are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity.<sup>71</sup>

For Leavis, Gustave Flaubert's technical proficiency, and his intense and sustained attention to aesthetic detail and textual form, allowed him to produce extraordinary literary works that captured a life-like reality – at least, in so much as it replicated provincial life. Flaubert's masterpiece, *Madame Bovary* (1856), brilliantly displayed his ability to re-create in his literary works a literary realism that described, not just an intimate environment, but the underlying spirit of provincial northern France. Yet, for Leavis, Flaubert's preoccupation with 'form' resulted in an insufficient 'preoccupation with human value and moral interest'.<sup>72</sup> Flaubert

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<sup>71</sup> Leavis, pp. 7-8, 8-9.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

lacked an awareness of the moral concerns of his subjects, producing literature that, in contrast to Leavis' English tradition, abstained from a 'mature valuation' of human nature: 'It was James who put his finger on the weakness in *Madame Bovary*: the discrepancy between the technical ("aesthetic") intensity, with the implied attribution of interest to the subject, and the actual moral and human paucity of this subject on any mature valuation'.<sup>73</sup> It is not that Flaubert was uninterested in life, or that he made no attempt to capture it in his literary works. Rather, it is that Flaubert's obsession with the aesthetic form of the novel precluded a natural, or chaotic, realisation of an unstructured rendering of life. Lawrence's observation that Flaubert 'stood away from life as from leprosy' suggests an attitude in which the novelist dictates the flow of life, as opposed to recording its natural function; the former producing an artificial (and less satisfying) account of life. So Leavis' English tradition, beginning with Austen (and exemplified in *Emma*), is a contrasting example in which the novelist's preoccupation is not with the textual form, but with life itself, and it is from this preoccupation with life that an inherent compositional form arises.

The issue of 'composition' is one in which the novelist's psychological and moral interest allows the novelist to produce a text that replicates his or her social observations, producing through the novel a phenomenological experience in which the reader believes that the reality of the novel (in its plot, setting, and characters) is a mimetic reproduction of the real world. For Leavis, the reader's 'belief' in the reality of the literary work is not predicated solely on the structural form of the novel, but requires also a psychological understanding of the novel's substance – its characters, plots, settings, and various other elements all contribute to the reader's empathy. To paraphrase Cecil, a phenomenological experience of a psychological interest requires the reader to feel as if the characters and the plot have 'grown naturally from their situation like a flower'.<sup>74</sup> Anything less than this results in a novel that is unrelated to reality; the psychological aspects of the character become irrelevant because the unreality of the novel provides no logical, real-world, positivistic foundation against which to assess their actions and motivations.

If the characters in a novel are to provide significant psychological insight then we require said characters' cognitive processes to mimic our own cognitive processes. Of course, this is not to suggest that the character's cognition must be *identical* to the reader's cognition (such

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-3.

<sup>74</sup> Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelist*, p. 322.

an occurrence is highly improbable), but rather that the character's cognition must have the hallmarks of familiarity in rationale and logic. This is not to suggest that all aspects of a novel must replicate the real world. This is clearly false, as there exist entire genres devoted to extraordinarily fictitious and outlandish worldly renderings. Fantasy novels, for example, are set far apart from our own reality, and have their own unique physical laws, distinct histories, conjured cultures, magical systems, and so on. But fantasy novels do make for an interesting case study. For if, as Leavis suggests, the composition of a novel relies on elements beyond the mere structuring of the text then the central pillar that binds a novel to our reality must be the cognition and psychology of the characters. Obviously other qualities play a role, such as a setting and plot that make sense to our own rationale and logic; but these directly appeal to the reader's cognition, and hence stem directly from what the reader believes is realistic. And this is significant because it suggests that the author's ability to replicate an accurate rendering of the character's mind is what determines the believability of the literary work. So the cognition of the character is paramount in creating a realistic world; how the character thinks, interacts, feels, responds, reacts, and interprets his or her surroundings, for example, contributes to the believability of the novel. And it is from the novelist's successful portrayal of a realistic series of cognitive processes that readers get the notion of a plot and setting that 'flowers' into existence, as opposed to one which appears to have been haphazardly put together without prior thought to the effects that it might have on the characters (plots which are 'too neat and symmetrical to be true').

## Chapter Four

### C.P. Snow's Three Cultures

#### **The Humanities and the Sciences: Divisions and Common Ground**

Housman, Richards, and Leavis are staunch literary critics, eminent literary scholars, and, at least for Housman and to a lesser extent Richards, artists. But contemporary literary theory, especially of the Reader-Response variation, tends to include an element of the scientific: a neurological understanding of the functions of the human brain, for example. Relative to the neuro-critic, Housman, Richards, and Leavis are antiquated, misinformed, primitive interlocutors. So how might we make the leap from Housman, Richards, and Leavis to our current comprehension of the neurology of the brain, and what do these three critics have to offer that particular discussion? In order to draw these three writers into the twenty-first century, we must review the theoretical developments that followed them. In doing so, we can see how their period of critical enquiry influenced the critical periods which followed them, and so on and so forth until we arrive at the current day. To this end, we might speculate that current critical theory – at least, the critical theory pertaining to phenomenology and neurophysiology – is, in some subtle ways, indebted to these three writers.

C.P. Snow's and Leavis' series of debates during the early 1960s over the 'two cultures' provide some guidance.<sup>1</sup> To Snow and Leavis, the distinction between science and literary studies was profound: its manifestation and, indeed, what it meant to be either a 'scientist' or a 'literary intellectual' (a term that has since become known for its disparaging and negative connotations) was 'sharpened in this country by the passion to find a new snobbism wherever possible, and to invent one if it doesn't exist'.<sup>2</sup> For Leavis, Snow represented the 'technologico-Benthamite plight': Snow was a technocrat, a spokesperson for the reduction of human experience to the quantifiable, the measurable, the manageable, the simplistic and unartful medium in which the focus is firmly on *how* and not *why*, and in which the human condition of man is ignored.<sup>3</sup> This is an important debate to centre on because it provides a foundation

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<sup>1</sup> See Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* and Leavis' *Two Cultures?: The Significance of C.P. Snow*.

<sup>2</sup> C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Nor Shall My Sword* (New York: Chatto & Windus, 1972), p. 122.

from which we might assess the relationship between literary criticism and science pre-1960s, and to then compare and contrast it to our current situation.<sup>4</sup> Snow's prediction of a third culture (predicted by Snow in a later revision of his lecture in 1963) encompasses practitioners who belong to neither science nor literary criticism, but to a third culture which is 'on speaking terms with the scientific one'.<sup>5</sup> For Snow, this third culture acts, not as a bridge between the scientist and the literary critic, but as an altogether new type of class to which belong the social sciences. According to Snow, economists, criminologists, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, social artists (architects, for example), and social historians did not share the same distinct repulsiveness of the sciences as the 'literary intellectuals', but they were also not steeped in the scientific tradition of chemistry and physics. To this end, the 'third culture' incorporated elements of a socio-humanist approach to society ('all of them are concerned with how human beings are living or have lived'), while also being open to scientific ideas and scientific methods of analysis.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Snow's third culture has as its foundation a non-scientific field, after which are then introduced elements of the scientific; a psychologist, for example, is predominately a scholar of psychology, not of science, yet he is able to introduce scientific method to his studies when and where he deems necessary. In the twenty-first century, certain aspects of literary criticism and neurocriticism can be classed as belonging to this 'third culture'.<sup>7</sup>

On 7 May 1959, C.P. Snow, an English physical chemist and novelist, delivered his lecture on the 'two cultures'. Established by the public as a trustworthy authority on both literary and

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<sup>4</sup> I am aware that Leavis was driven by his belief that there was an absence of humanist considerations in science. However, his criticisms were supported, and extended upon, by the American literary and cultural critic Lionel Trilling. Although Trilling was initially dismissive of Leavis' tone, it soon became clear that he believed that Leavis was more correct than incorrect in his assessment of Snow's 'two cultures': 'It can of course be said that literature has some part in the management of the Western world, a part which is limited but perhaps not wholly unimportant'. See Lionel Trilling, 'Science, Literature, and Culture: A Comment on the Leavis-Snow Controversy', in *Higher Education Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 1 (November 1962), p.17.

<sup>5</sup> Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Lisa Zunshine's 'Style Brings in Mental States' briefly references both the interpretation of characters in *Ulysses* and *The Da Vinci Code* (using Alan Palmer as inspiration) and the neurological functions of the brain via fMRI scans. Also Zunshine's *Getting Inside Your Head: What Cognitive Science Can Tell Us about Popular Culture* addresses the cognitive processes involved in the interpretation of popular culture.

scientific matters, his speech touched on several cornerstones pertaining to both the literary critic's and the scientist's perceptions of one another. These cornerstones were pre-figured a century earlier by Huxley and Arnold, whose own discussions concerning the effects of industrialisation on society 'symbolised the ways in which social and institutional snobberies clustered' around the topic of scientific and literary education.<sup>8</sup> Stefan Collini artfully describes the scene of Snow's lecture:

The title of Snow's lecture was 'The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution'. The 'two cultures' he identified were those of 'the literary intellectuals' (as he called them) and of the natural scientists, between whom he claimed to find a profound mutual suspicion and incomprehension, which in turn had damaging consequences for the prospects of applying technology to the alleviation of the world's problems. But in broaching this topic to his Cambridge audience, Snow was thrusting into the spotlight of public discussion themes which found an echo across the globe and which have continued to preoccupy and provoke. For in effect Snow was doing more than asking what the relation should be between the two cultures he believed he had identified, and doing more even than asking how the curricula of schools and universities should be arranged to give people an adequate education in both branches of knowledge. Beyond those pressing and consequential questions, he was asking what Britain's place was to be among the leading countries of the world; he was asking how (not whether but how) the rich countries should help the poor; he was asking how the planet was to be fed and what hopes for mankind the future held.<sup>9</sup>

For Snow, the Rede Lecture was an opportunity to identify the 'gulf of mutual incomprehension' that existed between the literary intellectuals and the physical scientists.<sup>10</sup> But it was not merely the passing fancy of a rudimentary observation about the different intellectual and academic cultures that spurred him into action. Underlying the two cultures was a serious problem concerning the scientific revolution of industrialised countries: 'the people in the industrialised countries are getting richer, and those in the non-industrialised countries are at best standing still: so that the gap between the industrialised countries and the rest is widening every day'.<sup>11</sup> For Snow, the incomprehension that the literary intellectuals had for the physical scientists (and vice versa) had the potential to lessen, or altogether cease, the

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<sup>8</sup> Stefan Collini, 'Introduction', in C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. xv.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

<sup>10</sup> Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 41.



industrialisation of developing countries. The author, for example, had the power to convey to the layman the seriousness of the state of affairs, and yet an incomprehension of science and of scientific revolution meant that, for Snow, the literary intellectual failed to portray the true world. Instead, the author is confined to his own fictitious and narrow world-view. It is for this reason that Snow perceived literary intellectuals to be ‘natural Luddites’, and as such they had a degree of resistance to both scientific revolution and to scientific thinking.<sup>12</sup> Their literary criticisms (and, when applicable, their creative writings of novels and poetry) incorporated elements unbecoming, and oftentimes altogether misrepresentative of, the early-twentieth-century cultural environment in which they found themselves – this, for Snow, dictated a state of heightened self-awareness and exaggerated self-importance, with the result being a notable lack of consideration given to the broader lifestyles of other, non-literary figures. ‘Almost everywhere,’ Snow wrote while referring to nineteenth-century Europe and North America, ‘intellectual persons didn’t comprehend what was happening. Certainly the writers didn’t. Plenty of them shuddered away, as though the right course for a man of feeling was to contract out; some, like Ruskin and William Morris and Thoreau and Emerson and Lawrence, tried various kinds of fancies which were not in effect more than screams of horror’.<sup>13</sup> Of course, Snow here identifies past figures as opposed to contemporary ‘literary intellectuals’; his purpose being to demonstrate the historical literary traditions (both creative and critical) that contributed to the state of then-contemporary literary-critical studies (and the rise of the early-twentieth-century literary intellectual). The distinction between the scientist and the literary intellectual can hence be conceived as the progressive versus the regressive – these terms are used, not in an objective sense, but as a characterisation of the feelings that Snow probably experienced during his journey between the two cultures. For him, the scientist was a progressive force, heralding a scientific revolution upon which rode the industrialisation of nations. Substantial (and disproportionate) wealth was created, with the quality of life rising. It was now, according to Snow, the duty of the scientist to transfer his skills to the developing world so that wealth might be created for them: ‘This is why scientists would do us good all over Asia and Africa’.<sup>14</sup> The literary intellectual, by contrast, regressed into himself. In order to explore his new industrialised world, the author positioned his environment, his art, as a part

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

of the existential movement. And in doing so, it led the literary intellectual into a state of self-reflection in which the individual sensations and the individual emotions of the author superseded the experiences of men and women from other, alien predicaments (developing nations in particular). Snow believed that it was this ‘gulf’ between the progressive and the regressive that produced a significant amount of distrust between the two cultures.

The non-scientists have a rooted impression that the scientists are shallowly optimistic, unaware of man’s condition. On the other hand, the scientists believe that the literary intellectuals are totally lacking in foresight, peculiarly unconcerned with their brother men, in a deep sense anti-intellectual, anxious to restrict both art and thought to the existential moment. And so on. Anyone with a mild talent for invective could produce plenty of this kind of subterranean back-chat. On each side there is some of it which is not entirely baseless. It is all destructive. Much of it rests on misinterpretations which are dangerous.<sup>15</sup>

The cause of such distrust is, in part, due to a lack of common ground. For Snow, both parties have ‘destructive’ misconceptions concerning the function and the philosophy of the other side. However, Snow believed that the fault of the matter was largely created by the literary intellectual. Not that the literary intellectual is alone with his faults; the scientist, too, has much to learn. But, for Snow, the literary intellectual was far less well-versed with scientific ideas, theorems, and scientific thinking than the scientist was with matters of a literary nature:

They [literary intellectuals] give a pitying chuckle at the news of scientists who have never read a major work of English literature. They dismiss them as ignorant specialists. Yet their own ignorance and their own specialisation is just as startling. [...] Once or twice I have been provoked and have asked the company how many of them could describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The response was cold: it was also negative. Yet I was asking something which is about the scientific equivalent of: *Have you read a work of Shakespeare’s?*<sup>16</sup>

This disillusionment was the product, in part, of a British educational system that extravagantly rewarded the humanities (in particular the classics such as Greek and Latin) at the expense of the sciences. The literary intellectual, at the turn of the twentieth century and throughout its earlier part, was, for Snow, an elitist who prided himself on the belief that the ‘traditional

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-5. Italics in original.

culture is the whole of “culture”<sup>17</sup> Snow considered this attitude to breed short-sightedness and indifference to scientific matters, leading to a degree of scientific understanding amongst literary intellectuals that was no more advanced than their ‘neolithic ancestors’.<sup>18</sup>

Four years later, in 1963, Snow published a refined edition of his lecture, in which he incorporated extensive annotations so as to clarify his original thoughts. Titled *The Two Cultures: A Second Look*, he offered a more thorough assessment of the sciences and the humanities. Reflecting on four years of personal contemplation and, to a greater extent, the reactions of the ‘literary intellectuals’ he had so vigorously chastised, Snow diplomatically discussed certain stringent dichotomies that had shaped his initial Rede lecture (the use of the phrase ‘the two cultures’, for example, caused a stir of emotion amongst his critics who considered ‘culture’ a misnomer).<sup>19</sup> Most notably, he suggested the coming of a third culture, one in which some common ground might be found between its practitioners.<sup>20</sup> For Snow, this third culture was just beginning to take form: he uses as his example the social historian, who is on ‘speaking terms with scientists’ to produce insights vital to our ‘intellectual and moral health’.<sup>21</sup>

For Leavis, Snow’s lecture was an attack on the Classics, and it was made all the more puzzling for Leavis by the supposed ignorance of its perpetrator. In *Two Cultures?: The Significance of C.P. Snow*, Leavis takes offence with Snow’s seemingly self-imposed literary authority. ‘The judgment I have to come out with,’ he writes regarding Snow’s literary qualifications, ‘is that not only is he not a genius; he is intellectually as undistinguished as it is possible to be’.<sup>22</sup> Leavis cites a particular sentence from Snow’s lecture as being the root of this judgement: ‘The only writer of world-class who seems to have had an understanding of the industrial revolution was Ibsen in his old age: and there wasn’t much that old man didn’t

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> C.P. Snow, ‘The Two Cultures: A Second Look’, in *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Two Cultures?: The Significance of C.P. Snow* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 54.

understand'.<sup>23</sup> For Leavis, this betrays Snow's ignorance and lack of genius concerning literature; it demonstrates a short-sightedness produced through Snow's cultural conditioning, while Snow's tone conveys an unearned sense of authority ('the *only* writer'). But the true cause of Leavis' lambasting is due to a section of Snow's lecture in which Snow attempts to describe his movement from one field to the other, all the while presuming to have, not merely acceptance within both fields, but a good deal of respect amongst the respective practitioners. Ibsen merely represents a specific example in which Leavis perceives Snow's ignorance. The reason that Snow even utters such a proclamation about Ibsen is because he believes that he is a literary authority. Consider, for example, the qualifications with which Snow announces himself.

All that I need to say is that I came to Cambridge and did a bit of research here at a time of major scientific activity. I was privileged to have a ringside view of one of the most wonderful creative periods in all physics. And it happened through the flukes of war – including meeting W.L. Bragg in the buffet on Kettering station on a very cold morning in 1939, which had a determining influence on my practical life – I was able, and indeed morally forced, to keep that ringside view ever since. So for thirty years I have had to be in touch with scientists not only out of curiosity, but as a part of a working existence. During the same thirty years I was trying to shape the books I wanted to write, which in due course took me among writers.

There have been plenty of days when I have spent the working hours with scientists and then gone off at night with some literary colleagues. I mean that literally. I have had, of course, intimate friends among both scientists and writers. It was through living among these groups and much more, I think, through moving regularly from one to the other and back again that I got occupied with the problem of what, long before I put it on paper, I christened to myself as the 'two cultures'. For constantly I felt I was moving among two groups – comparable in intelligence, identical in race, not grossly different in social origin, earning about the same incomes, who had almost ceased to communicate at all, who in intellectual, moral and psychological climate had so little in common that instead of going from Burlington House or South Kensington to Chelsea, one might have crossed an ocean.<sup>24</sup>

Although no direct assertion to his authority explicitly exists (Snow never once states in any clear terms that he is an 'authority'), the implication is clear: his private experiences have led him to identify, with overwhelming clarity and serious belief, the presence of two polar

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<sup>23</sup> Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, p. 25. Snow is referring to Henrik Ibsen, who was a nineteenth-century Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. One of his most revered works, *A Doll's House*, criticised nineteenth-century marital and social norms.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

groups.<sup>25</sup> The brief anecdotal narration of his earlier life serves as a qualifying statement regarding his authority to discern and discuss the respective domains of the scientist and the ‘literary intellectual’. And it is this subtle suggestion – a suggestion which indicates that Snow has the insight, experience, knowledge, and wisdom with which to define the notions of the literary critic – which Leavis finds disagreeable.

Literary criticism is not ubiquitous to all mankind. ‘Whether the faculty of literary criticism is the best gift that Heaven has in its treasures I cannot say,’ Housman states in the opening of *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, ‘but Heaven seems to think so, for assuredly it is the gift most charily bestowed’.<sup>26</sup> And Leavis agrees, for his harsh assessment of Snow is predicated on the simple fact that Snow is incapable of conducting a serious literary-critical analysis. Literary-critical endeavours are hard work, and they require years of knowledge and many more years of training to accomplish successfully. Leavis’ point is this: a literary critic is someone who has devoted his life to the study of literature, just as a scientist is someone who has devoted his life to the study of the empirical sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, and so on). Anyone can give an inchoate opinion when reading a text, but only the devout literary critic has the insight to position it (both in genre and interpretation) relative to the other great, or less great, works of literature. A scientist who complains about the ‘literary intellectual’ is likely to be no more valid than the literary critic who complains about the scientist; they are from different domains and have different skills, different sets of knowledge, and different expectations. This is important because it means that Snow’s ‘third culture’ allows the practitioner to retain his expertise and authority within his specialised domain. The literary critic, for example, remains a literary critic who just happens to utilise scientific methods – we see this in Richards’ *Practical Criticism*, wherein Richards maintains his authority as a literary critic while using inductive empirical methods to generate and compile protocols. And we continue to see this today, where twenty-first-century literary critics are literary critics first, and, if necessary, scientists second. So the goal of the literary critic is the evaluation of literature using the tools

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<sup>25</sup> I would not expect Snow to make such a statement concerning his own authority, nor anyone else for that matter – except, of course, those academics who are speaking to laymen (who would not know that the speaker is an authority). Housman, for example, went far out of his way to clarify his *lack* of authority concerning critical matters of poetry. The term ‘authority’ is often hinted through veiled references and stylistic tones. But it is rarely self-imposed, and instead it is often a label assigned (either favourably or unfavourably) by colleagues of equal, or superior, intellectual merit.

<sup>26</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 6.

at his disposal; science is one such tool, but it is not the only tool. To focus too much on the scientific will be at the cost of other areas of enquiry. And we are beginning to see one of those costs play out: namely, the movement away from a phenomenological understanding of the reading experience, in favour of a more scientific assessment of the brain. This does have its benefits – we do gain considerable insight into how the brain operates – but a balance must be struck between the reading experience and the scientific description. In doing so, we will find a more complete picture of the function of literature, both in terms of its physiological, neurological function and in terms of its phenomenological function.<sup>27</sup>

This notion is made clear during Leavis' attack on Snow's literary qualifications. In matters of literature, Leavis considers Snow's analysis of the literary critic to be perfunctory. The phrase 'matters of literature' is itself a superficial notion. In a simple sense, it refers to one's knowledge of literary works and authors. But Leavis is suggesting far more than a mere lack of knowledge of titles and author's names. Rather, Leavis is accusing Snow of lacking a fundamental critical understanding of the role of literature in culture and in society; in other words, Snow has no expertise in literature. According to Leavis, Snow has an inability to grasp the ramifications of literature on the significance of the human state, human creativity, and human morality. Following his reference to Snow's statement about Ibsen, Leavis unleashes a torrent of criticism to this effect:

Clearly, there is still less Sir Charles Snow doesn't understand: he pays the tribute with authority. We take the implication and take it more surely at its full value because it carries the *élan*, the essential inspiration, of the whole self-assured performance. Yet Snow is in fact portentously ignorant. No doubt he could himself pass with ease the tests he proposes for his literary friends with the intimation that *they* would fail them, and so expose themselves so deplorably less well educated in respect of science than he, though

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<sup>27</sup> In the field of phenomenology and neurophysiology, endeavours have been made to identify the distinctions between neurophysiological description and phenomenological experience. However, these approaches sometimes position phenomenology as the product of a series of neurophysiology routines. In this sense, the subjective experience is treated by those neuroscientists as primarily (if not purely) a neurophysiological experience. See, for example, the following: Lothar Spillmann, 'Phenomenology and Neurophysiological Correlations: Two Approaches to Perception Research', in *Vision Research*, vol. 49, no. 12 (June 2009), Yuval Nir and Giulio Tononi, 'Dreaming and the Brain: from Phenomenology to Neurophysiology', in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 14, no. 2 (February 2010), Hans Pedersen and Megan Altman, eds., *Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology* (Dordrecht: Springer Science and Business Media, 2015), and Stephen D. Edwards and David J. Edwards, 'An Integral Investigation into the Phenomenology and Neurophysiology of Christian Trinity Meditation', in *HTS Teologiese Studies*, vol. 68, no. 1 (2012).

a scientist, can claim to be in respect of literature. I have no doubt that *he* can define a machine-tool and state the second law of thermodynamics. It is even possible, I suppose (though I am obliged to say that the evidence seems to me to be against it), that he could make a plausible show of being inward with the Contradiction of Parity, that esoteric upshot of highly subtle experiment which, he suggests, if things were well with our education, would have been a major topic at our High Tables. But of history, of the nature of civilization and of the history of its recent developments, of the human history of the Industrial Revolution, of the human significances entailed in that revolution, of literature, of the nature of that kind of collaborative human creativity of which literature is the type, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Snow exposes complacently a complete ignorance.<sup>28</sup>

The distinction between the ‘literary intellectual’ and the scientist is based not merely in a disagreement between two cultures, but that it is rather a *misapplication* of each culture by the other. Snow touches on this in his lecture, in which he states that both sides have ‘misrepresentations’ of each other. The ‘non-scientists’ consider scientists to be ‘shallowly optimistic, unaware of man’s condition’, while the scientists believe that the literary intellectuals are ‘totally lacking in foresight, peculiarly unconcerned with their brother men, in a deep sense anti-intellectual, anxious to restrict both art and thought to the existential moment’.<sup>29</sup> However, this assessment is from a specific vantage point in which each respective practitioner is looking out from within his own domain. The scientist, from his scientific domain, has a certain idea about the literary intellectual, and vice versa. Yet Leavis’ response suggests something more: neither the scientist nor the literary critic function in isolated spheres. It is false to conceive of their interactions as a dichotomy, with science at one end and literary studies at the other. Instead, Leavis and Snow represent a dialectic method of investigation, in which both cultures are brought together in order to determine humanistic truths. The problem, though, is that neither Leavis nor Snow are capable of assessing the other side correctly; in fact, any movement between the two cultures immediately qualifies the practitioner as belonging to Snow’s third culture. And this has the effect of producing an entirely new set of circumstances, interactions, ideas, notions, beliefs, and understandings of the original two cultures. In framing Snow and Leavis’ discourse this way, we can reconceive of their

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<sup>28</sup> Leavis, *Two Cultures?: The Significance of C.P. Snow*, pp. 53-4. Italics in original.

<sup>29</sup> Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, p. 5.

interaction as being a misapplication.<sup>30</sup> So, for example, Leavis' assessment is not an assessment of science, but it is rather the *literary critic's* assessment of science – or, to be specific, the literary critic's assessment of what Snow defines as the quintessential test to identify a scientifically-literate person. Alternatively, Snow's understanding of the function of literary criticism (and, indeed, its execution) is significantly modified by his experience, not only as a physical chemist, but in his interactions with his fellow scientists.

Why do Leavis and Snow have such different opinions about the functions of the scientist and the literary critic? This is an important question because, by returning to the 'third culture', it reveals a fundamental principle which governs how these respective practitioners perceive, or, indeed, conceive of, their own function. And that is the principle of intuition. In the context of the two cultures debate, the literary critic conceives 'intuition' as an important component of literary assessment because it allows a psychological, intellectual, emotional comprehension of the circumstances surrounding the literary character. The scientist, by contrast, conceives 'intuition' as a problematic issue in which the scientist's senses can mislead and produce incorrect observations about the physical world. Obviously contemporary critics in the twenty-first-century (especially those dealing with cognitive science and neurophysiology, such as Zunshine and Whalen) would think intuition less important. To be able to validate or, at the least, support a supposedly intuitive assessment requires evidence, and the mere introduction of evidence removes 'intuition' and replaces it with evidence-based claims – we cease to speak in terms of intuition, and instead veer towards a positivistic comprehension of natural phenomena. But for Leavis and Snow, the concept of 'intuition' was an important idea that dictated the development of their respective approaches (and their perceptions of each other).

For Leavis, psychology at its best is 'a striking achievement of intuition'.<sup>31</sup> Intuition, for Leavis, reflects a deep-seated, experiential approach to the observations that novelists may make about their real-life subjects.<sup>32</sup> It is, in other words, a combination of insight and skill,

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<sup>30</sup> We see this in Richards' *Practical Criticism*. Richards may have exercised certain empirical and scientific parameters throughout his investigation, but these parameters fall firmly within the domain of the literary critic.

<sup>31</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> Although 'intuition' makes only a rare appearance throughout *The Great Tradition*, Leavis does initially associate 'intuition' with 'psychology' (see previous footnote). But Leavis does not claim that 'intuition' and 'psychology' are synonymous, but that the qualities which render psychology an effective tool in understanding human behaviour are similar to the idea of intuition.



together which form an almost-abstract phenomenological sensation concerning the literary work's function. Both a serious psychological understanding of the literary process and the ability to transfer psychological observations to literary characters is, for Leavis, the distinction between an average novelist and an exceptional novelist. But Leavis' notion of 'psychology' has a specific definition. It refers, not to a neurological or scientific understanding of the brain, its nervous system, and the arousal of consciousness, but rather to an instinctive comprehension of the multiple facets of human life, often from a phenomenological perspective in which the natural impulses of human action are intelligently chronicled, contemplated, and disseminated within a fictitious setting. In his discussion on George Eliot, he makes this definition clear during his identification of Eliot's interests: 'There was nothing restrictive or timid about her ethical habit; what she brought from her Evangelical background was a radically reverent attitude towards life, a profound seriousness of the kind that is a first condition of any real intelligence, and an interest in human nature that made her a great psychologist'.<sup>33</sup> For Leavis, the literary psychology of the 1940s was characterised by an intense preoccupation with human nature and an ability to transfer both the external actions and the internal monologue (the impulses, emotions, and feelings, for example) of the subject onto the literary character. The infamous opening sentence to *The Great Tradition* ('the great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad') is predicated on each of these authors exhibiting a succinct genius and an intelligent judgement into the private, psychological happenings of their characters. This, in turn, provides a serious intellectual justification for the actions (whether physical or verbal) of those characters, and allows a platform from which Leavis may distinguish the 'great English novelists'.<sup>34</sup>

Snow, by contrast, viewed intuition as a problem. It was not a solution to understanding life and society, and it was certainly not an acceptable method of analysis. This was best expressed by Snow in his discussion of the scientific discovery of parity violation at Columbia by Yang and Lee in 1956 (for which they were both awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1957). Regarding this discovery, Snow wrote: 'It is a piece of work of the greatest beauty and originality, but the result is so startling that one forgets how beautiful the thinking is. It makes us think again about some of the fundamentals of the physical world. Intuition, common sense

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

– they are neatly stood on their heads’.<sup>35</sup> The notion of intuition, or what humans consider to be instinctive, is routinely overturned throughout the course of scientific study. But for Snow and his fellow scientists, intuition is a potentially misleading sensation that belittles critical and scientific thought by yielding it to a state of superstition and unsubstantiated belief:

Major scientific breakthroughs, and in particular those as closely connected to human flesh and bone as this one in molecular biology, or even more, another which we may expect in the nature of the higher nervous system, are bound to touch both our hopes and our resignations. That is: ever since men began to think introspectively about themselves, they have made guesses, and sometimes had profound intuitions, about those parts of their own nature which seemed to be predestined. It is possible that within a generation some of these guesses will have been tested against exact knowledge. No one can predict what such an intellectual revolution will mean: but I believe that one of the consequences will be to make us feel not less but more responsible towards our brother men.<sup>36</sup>

The physical world, for Snow, constitutes all that lies within it, including humans and their sociology, psychology, physiology, and their arts. Although Snow’s comment is in no way a direct attack on Leavis’ psychological considerations, it nevertheless demonstrates the nature of their misunderstanding. For Leavis, exceptional intuition (a psychological consideration) was the cornerstone of producing realistic, believable, intriguing, and literary characters of genius.<sup>37</sup> A character’s actions, experiences, and emotions in a fictitious event were produced from an ingrained, instinctive, intuitive essence within the novelist, as opposed to being the product of a purely rational, logical, empirical thought-process. For Snow, intuition would eventually lead us down to the wrong path; it would lead to a perception of the world in which our understanding is predicated on our relative position within (and hence perspective therein of) that world – it is not predicated on truth, but on belief.

The goal of intuition’s presence or absence is almost identical for both Leavis and Snow. For Leavis, psychological considerations (spurred by instinctive intuition) juxtapose ‘life’ and ‘art’ so as to offer an opportunity for reflection. This reflection then allows the reader to better understand the psychological states (and, hence, actions) of his neighbours: ‘the major novelists who count in the same way as the major poets, in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of the

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<sup>35</sup> Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 15.

human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life'.<sup>38</sup> For Snow, the absence of intuition allows a truer (empirical, objective) understanding of the world, in which we might then, through scientific and industrial revolution, aid the poorer countries, and provide a more equal quality of life for everyone. And yet, despite this simultaneous desire to create a better world, neither Leavis nor Snow (neither the 'literary intellectual' nor the scientist) can agree on the correct path to reach their same goal. My reasoning for drawing forth the respective diagnoses of 'intuition' is the demonstration of the nature of Leavis' critical conceptions relative to the strict empiricism of Richards' *Practical Criticism* and the more private, subjective, self-exonerating method of reading in Housman's *The Name and Nature of Poetry*. It is, in other words, a keyhole through which we might glimpse the underlying principles by which Leavis conducted his critical enquiries.

In drawing attention to Leavis' critique of the two cultures, we see that the notion of 'science' in the field of literary studies was, for the earlier and mid part of the twentieth century, confined to a specific conception adherent to structural literary-critical principles. Prior to this, it existed as an inchoate conception of rhetorical value-based judgements of literary works and their associated authors, which can be traced, in part, to Matthew Arnold's 'touchstone' theory in 'The Study of Poetry': the intuition of value (what the reader perceives as the inherent value of the work) began with the collecting of 'touchstones' that demonstrated exceptional poetic quality, but this then produced a systematic system (a more scientifically progressive form of analysis) of ranking poets and poetry in classes of quality. In the twentieth century, the earlier works of Northrop Frye (*Anatomy of Criticism*, for example) suggest that a scientific approach to the critical study of literature is not merely a possibility, but that it is inevitable because its function is inherent to processes involved in literary-critical studies: 'It seems absurd to say that there *may* be a scientific element in criticism when there are dozens of learned journals based on the assumption that there is, and hundreds of scholars engaged in a scientific procedure related to literary criticism. Evidence is examined scientifically; previous authorities are used scientifically; fields are investigated scientifically; texts are edited scientifically. Prosody is scientific in structure; so is phonetics; so is philology.'<sup>39</sup> But for Frye, although the application of critical theory to the study of literature is potentially scientific (he would say it

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 8. Italics in original.

is scientific, or rather that it is as close to a science as is necessary for it to be awarded the title of being ‘scientific’), the pragmatism by which the literary critic hopes his criticism will be disseminated and absorbed by the greater public was, at that point in time (the 1950s and 1960s), distinctly unscientific: ‘So to “appreciate” literature and get more direct contact with it, we turn to the public critic, the Lamb or Hazlitt or Arnold or Sainte-Beuve who represents the reading public at its most expert and judicious. It is the task of the public critic to exemplify how a man of taste uses and evaluates literature, and show how literature is to be absorbed into society’.<sup>40</sup> And this, for Frye, indicated a fundamental problem of literary-critical studies (specifically of a sociohistorical analysis of literature), wherein it lacks the ‘consolidating progress which belongs to a science’ – in other words, there is no clear progression of knowledge as one would expect to encounter in the fields of physics, chemistry, and biology.<sup>41</sup> The ‘public critic’ does not operate in terms of a scientific ‘progress’, but as an instrument of his society and culture; the Lambs and Hazlitts and Arnolds and Sainte-Beuve would not produce the same criticisms, nor would they hold the same opinions as they do, should they be plucked from their period and placed in another. Roland Barthes’ ‘An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative’ is another influential text that depicts a systematic and progressive assessment of the narrative forms. In doing so, Barthes focuses on a deductive scientific model of linguistics, wherein the structure of the narrative form is found within the narrative itself: ‘Many commentators, who admit the idea of a narrative structure, are nevertheless reluctant to cut loose literary analysis from the model used in experimental sciences: they boldly insist that one must apply a purely inductive method to the study of narrative and that the initial step must be the study of all narratives within a genre, a period, a society, if one is to set up a general model’.<sup>42</sup> Rather than an inductive approach (which linguistics tried and failed before turning to deductive models), the critic must appeal to a deductive analysis of narrative form. And a deductive approach requires a pragmatic theory under which a ‘hypothetical model of description’ takes shape: ‘and then to proceed gradually from that model down, towards the species, which at the same time partake and deviate from

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative’, in *New Literary History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Winter 1975), p. 238.

the model'.<sup>43</sup> Barthes' recommendation is for a systematic and scientific approach to the study of narrative form that incorporates elements of a classificatory system. Tzvetan Todorov's 'The Categories of Literary Narrative' also applies a structuralist perspective to the application of science in literature: 'One studies not the work but the virtualities of literary discourse, which make it possible: literary studies therefore can become a science of literature'.<sup>44</sup> Todorov emphasises the difficulties of recognising the correct elements to scientifically assess a literary work, stating that different parts of literature are either more or less receptive of a scientific approach, and that any criticism must be viewed as a product of the critic, not of the work: 'The interpretation of an element differs according to the personality of the critic, his ideological positions or his era. To be interpreted, an element is included in a system which is not that of the work but that of the critic'.<sup>45</sup> These critics exemplify the *discussion* and *use* of scientific principles, but without the actual conduct of science itself. From them, we begin to see how contemporary scientific literary criticisms (not just neurophysiological literary criticisms) arise: Franco Moretti's 'networks', for example, are based in a systematic and scientific analysis of the interrelations of literary characters, and producing a quantitative, physical representation, and which are based on the scientific and literary principles.<sup>46</sup>

So Richards' *Practical Criticism* is an example of how the literary critic conceives of the application of scientific empiricisms to the study of literature. It is a 'literary science', not in the sense that it is the science of literature, but that it is a reimagining of the function of science by the non-scientist. Although Leavis' *The Great Tradition and New Bearings in English Poetry* draw on the social sciences (psychology, for example), these elements are positioned as having been acquired and then modified by the literary critic – they cease to retain their scientific epistemology. In the case of Leavis, the psychological study of literature is, essentially, a part of a liberal humanist approach. So the application of the scientific method in the field of literary studies during the early twentieth century is the result of a phenomenological perception: it is not pure science ('pure' in the sense of Snow's physical sciences), but it is rather the critic's amalgamation of literature with what he considers to be

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>44</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Categories of Literary Narrative', in *Papers on Language and Literature*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Summer 2014), p. 381.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 382.

<sup>46</sup> Franco Moretti, 'Network theory, Plot analysis', in *New Left Review*, no. 68 (March 2011).

science. By making this distinction, the suggestion is that the scientific elements present in the works of Richards and Leavis are not, in fact, ‘scientific’ in any sense of the word used by Snow, but are rather the beginnings of a cross-pollination that led to our current, twenty-first-century union between literary studies, cognitive science, neuroscience, and neurolinguistics (to name but a few). Housman’s, Richards’, and Leavis’ works are the beginning of this cross-pollination by retroactively applying Snow’s idea of a ‘third culture’. The appearance, or, at the very least, the formation of this inchoate idea, occurred two or three decades earlier than Snow’s Rede Lecture, as early as the 1920s. Of course, various other origins might be put forward (the set of empirical methods utilised by critics of the Victorian novel or the discussions between Huxley and Arnold, for example). However, our current state of critical enquiry has been influenced, to some degree, by these three figures – that is, contemporary literary criticism and neurophysiological literary studies are closer to Housman, Richards, and Leavis than they are to the burgeoning ideas espoused by Matthew Arnold.

There has often been a type of ‘scientific’ approach within literary studies, and this has commonly been associated with philology. Gerald Graff’s *Professing Literature* explores the evolution of the English literary department from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century. In a sub-section titled ‘Anybody Can Teach English’, he discusses the distinct lack of a positivistic science in the field of literary studies (compared to, for example, philology), and the difficulties that this lack of methodology caused for early professors of English: ‘The generalist professors might be popular teachers, but as Applebee points out, they “lacked an adequate methodology to offer in place of the new-found rigor of philology,” and their lack of special expertise was a real liability in the fight for respectability being waged by the departments’.<sup>47</sup> Philology was more capable of adapting scientific approaches due to its inherent empiricisms, with its early failures being the result, not of its conduct, but of the high expectations held by its original practitioners: ‘In other words, philological study proved a dismal failure only in relation to expectations that few of its early proponents were attempting to meet or would have thought they could meet. On the other hand, the traditions of philology, like those of classical study, implied a larger cultural vision. René Wellek has written of the “useless antiquarianism, the dreary factualism, the pseudo-science combined with anarchical scepticism and a lack of critical taste” characteristic of the scholarship of the early professional era. But Wellek reminds us that such abuses “represent the decadence of a worthy ideal, that

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<sup>47</sup> Gerald Graff, ‘The Investigators: The Origins of Literature Departments’, in *Professing Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 67.

of philology conceived as a total science of civilization, an ideal originally formulated for the study of classical antiquity and then transferred by the German romanticists to the modern languages”<sup>48</sup> The association between the philologist and the scientist was commonplace, with Graff writing that ‘British Victorian philologists had similarly large pretensions, arguing that there was an “affinity between Darwin’s evolutionary hypotheses and the kind of patterns drawn by the philologists”<sup>49</sup> In particular, Friedrich Max Müller claimed that in order to know who we are ‘we have to learn how we have come to be what we are. Our very languages form an unbroken chain between us and Cicero and Aristotle, and in order to use many of our words intelligently, we must know the soil from which they sprang, and the atmosphere in which they grew up and developed’.<sup>50</sup> So, in this sense, literary studies has often had an element of the scientific: philology.

Today, Snow’s ‘third culture’ might be applied to certain schools of literary criticism (Reader-Response Theory and Intentionalism, for example).<sup>51</sup> Within these schools, the literary critic is able to engage in scientific methods of analysis, often with a neurological emphasis, while still retaining the study of literature as its core focus. However, it is important to acknowledge the need for balance. In the case of the ‘third culture’, the literary critic is involved in two disciplines: the original discipline of literary criticism; and the scientific discipline, which is often neurology. If we fall too far towards a particular discipline then the potential for distortions becomes larger. ‘Distortion’ refers to a state in which the primary discipline ceases

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-9.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Max Müller, *My Autobiography: A Fragment* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), p. 104.

<sup>51</sup> John Brockman’s *The Third Culture: Beyond the Scientific Revolution* (1995) offers a similar idea regarding the ‘third culture’, albeit from the distinct perspective of the scientist (or, more accurately, the empiricist): ‘The third culture consists of those scientists and other thinkers in the empirical world who, through their work and expository writing, are taking the place of the traditional intellectual in rendering visible the deeper meanings of our lives, redefining who and what we are’. Brockman’s definition posits that the practitioner is foremost a scientist, and that all of the practitioner’s endeavours are scientific and empirical in nature. Furthermore, Brockman’s ‘third culture’ replaces the literary critic with the empiricist. My definition attempts to retain the notion of the literary critic as ‘literary critic’ – he is foremost a student of literature, but also has the skill and knowledge to delve into the scientific and empirical. This distinction is important because it allows us, as literary critics, to retain some of our traditional and historical literary-critical identity. John Brockman, *The Third Culture: Beyond the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), p. 17.

to function in its traditional sense; experience is inevitably to address the subject. The principles underlying its foundation are distorted to represent something other than what it is. And this is problematic because we would then find ourselves returning to a pre-1960s state, in which science and literary criticism are separate entities, with their own laws and routines and traditions – and, in which, the practitioners of these respective fields are so distinct and separate from each other that there is little to no cooperation. Rather, we should attempt to find a suitable balance that incorporates the best of both, of the sciences and of the phenomenology of literature, so that we gain the fullest possible picture of the reading act.

### **The Author as a Stimulant**

The first three chapters of this thesis have focused almost exclusively on the reader. In discussing the phenomenological and physiological experiences that arise during our interactions with literature, it seemed only sensible to examine the source of their occurrence. To speak of a phenomenological experience is to inevitably address the subject wherein said experience takes place. The same is true for physiology and neurophysiology. But it would be misleading to suggest that the author is irrelevant, or even less relevant, than the reader. For Snow's 'two cultures' paradigm draws our attention, not towards the reader, but towards the author – or, rather, towards an authoritative agent who exists separate from our private, subjective phenomenology. According to Snow, the so-called literary intellectuals of the twentieth century dominated literary sensibility despite their own political wickedness.<sup>52</sup> The significance of this is that the 'literary intellectual' represents, for Snow, an authority beyond our own selves, wherein our subjective phenomenology might be instructed, or guided, by this other external authority. It is unlikely that Snow deliberately set out to interrogate the ideas of 'authorship' and 'intentionalism', but he certainly wanted to debate the role of authority in

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<sup>52</sup> Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, pp.7-8. To be specific, Snow recalls his cross-examination by an eminent scientist (whom Snow does not name): 'I remember being cross-examined by a scientist of distinction. "Why do most writers take on social opinions which would have been thought distinctly uncivilised or démodé at the time of the Plantagenets? Wasn't that true of most of the famous twentieth-century writers? Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, nine out of ten of those who have dominated literary sensibility in our time – weren't they not only politically silly, but politically wicked? Didn't the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?"' In the immediate paragraph after this, Snow finds himself in agreement with his colleague: 'It was no use denying the facts. The honest answer was that there is, in fact, a connection, which literary persons were culpably slow to see, between some kinds of early twentieth-century art and the most imbecile expressions of anti-social feeling'.



cultural, social, scientific, and literary issues. And herein is a valuable lens through which to reflect the issues raised thus far in this thesis: the phenomenological and physiological experiences are a symptom of something else. These experiences do not occur on their own, but are rather stimulated into existence by some other source (either the text or the author, for example).

So it seems only logical to recognise the role of the ‘author’ relative to Housman, Richards, and Leavis.<sup>53</sup> These three represent various positions in the debate on authorial intention (both in terms of a proto-Intentionalism and a proto-Reader-Response framework). The author is arguably a secondary focus, or even a tertiary focus, for Housman and Richards, whereas the author features in a more prominent role in Leavis’ *The Great Tradition*. Regardless of this, these three critics conceive the author in a distinct and specific role relative to their respective approaches. For Housman, the poet’s emotions and the reader’s affective consequences are synonymous; the intent of the poet, which takes its form through the transfusion of emotion, is not just knowable, but it is the primary function of poetry.<sup>54</sup> For Richards, the intellectualisation of the verse, and the reader’s subsequent critical analysis, is formed from a close reading assessment of the poem’s text; the intent of the poet is irrelevant in the production of an interpretation and in the generation of meaning.<sup>55</sup> For Leavis, the novelist is pivotal in creating (or, rather, recreating) the psychological conditions, and the cognitive thought-processes, of the characters within the novel (the Isabel Archers and Gwendolen Harleths, for example), which

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<sup>53</sup> What are we to understand by the term ‘author’? Etymologically, the *Oxford English Dictionary* states that the noun *author* derives partly from the French *auctor* (from Middle French; *auctour*, *autour*, *actour*) and partly from the Latin *auctor*. From the French *auctor*, it can be traced initially to c1150 Old French *actor* (often used in reference to ancient Greek and Roman writers), after which it developed into: ‘creator, originator, source, person or thing which gives rise to something’, ‘originally and frequently with specific reference to God as the creator of the universe’ (second half of the twelfth century); ‘the writings of an author collectively’ (first half of the thirteenth century); ‘authority, informant’ (c1235 in Anglo-Norman in an isolated attestation, 1546 in continental French); and ‘ancestor, parent’ (fourteenth century). The common theme in the French *auctor* is creator, producer, source, and authority, both with regard to literature and parenthood. The Latin *auctor* means ‘a person with authority to take action or make a decision, guarantor, surety, person who approves or authorizes, person who has weight or authority, spokesperson, representative, advocate [...] witness, expert, originator, source’. The etymology of *author* indicates that the term has referred to both the identity and authority of the writer, specifically with regard to a work externalised by him.

<sup>54</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p. 203.

are based in real-world observations, and which rely on the reader's acceptance of the fictitious scenario to be fully realised: both the reader and the novelist are, for Leavis, of near-equal importance.<sup>56</sup> The point here, though, is that the author is not a part of a binary system. The critic's definition, purpose, and perception of the author are not wholly defined by the critic's definition, purpose, and perception of the reader. Of course, the ideas ascribed to the reader will influence the ideas ascribed to the author (and vice versa), but the process is more complex than a binary relationship. Rather, it is the theoretical approach and, most importantly, the intention of the critic (within the parameters of his or her literary-critical investigation) that define the significance of the author within a literary-critical work.

By briefly analysing several important twentieth-century theories regarding the function of the author, we can identify the similarities and differences between the early-twentieth-century physiological tradition and contemporary Intentionalist theory. In particular, the potential to describe the reading process in terms of the interactions and interrelations between the neurophysiology of the author, the form of the text, and the neurophysiology of the reader provides a fascinating, and possibly revolutionary, insight into the act of reading. It positions the text, not as an isolated and self-contained object, but as a non-biological component in an otherwise enclosed neurophysiological circuitry (between the author and the reader). In this sense, the literary text becomes a type of surrogate nervous system, through which the author's emotions, ideas, and psychological observations can be transmitted to the reader.<sup>57</sup>

In 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946), W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley argue that Authorial Intention is unavailable because it can neither be communicated through the text nor apprehended by the reader through any other means. 'Intention' corresponds to what Wimsatt and Beardsley define as the 'design or plan' that arises from within the author's mind.<sup>58</sup> Intention is nearly synonymous with *meaning*, with the exception that intention determines the author's parameters for the text. The author intends to express an idea or an emotion, and this

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<sup>56</sup> Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, pp. 1-27.

<sup>57</sup> Much more research is required in this area, as well as significant improvements to non-invasive neuroimaging technology. The end goal being that, one day, we might be capable of observing whether or not the synaptic connections forged between neurons during the reading of a text mirror the author's synaptic connections forged during the construction of the text. See, for example, Giovanni Buccino, Ferdinand Binkofski, and Lucia Riggio, 'The Mirror Neuron System and Action Recognition', in *Brain and Language*, vol. 89, no. 2 (May 2004).

<sup>58</sup> William K. Jr. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 54, no. 3 (July 1946), p. 469.

leads him to use certain words that have the best meaning relative to his intention. But the intention of the author only reveals the extent to which his mental processes have been involved in the construction of his text. It is not a suitable indication as to either the success or the meaning of the literary work. Intention does not transcend the text, and it is not embodied within the text. Rather, it is ‘detached’ from the text and isolated within the author.

The poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge.<sup>59</sup>

Wimsatt and Beardsley identify three types of evidence for the interpretation of a literary work: (1) internal evidence, (2) external evidence, and (3) intermediate evidence. Internal evidence is public and shared, and it is discovered through the ‘semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries’.<sup>60</sup> It is everything which exists inside the text. External evidence is private and idiosyncratic. It is the paratexts and peritexts of a literary work, and includes all outside information pertaining to the text: the author’s personal statements (interviews, letters, reported conversations, journals, for example), and the relationship of the text to other texts. Intermediate evidence is contextual evidence, referring to the author’s private experience of public language: ‘private or semi-private meanings attached to words or topics by an author’.<sup>61</sup> It is a combination of both internal evidence (how the words are used in the text) and external evidence (why the author selected the words that he uses).

For the purpose of apprehending the meaning of the text, Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that (1) is best because it is free from the ‘intentional fallacy’; (1) reveals the text as it truly is, as opposed to (2) and (3) which elevates the author’s expectation. A preoccupation with (2) tells the critic about the author and his methods of composition, and about the historical conditions that surrounds both the critic and the author, but not about the text itself. And a preoccupation with (3) has the potential to distort the critic’s view of a poem by eventually disregarding the English language and instead prioritising the private evidence – intermediate evidence will, in

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 470.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 477.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 478.

the end, favour external evidence over internal. To say, as would be the case in (2) and (3), that a text means either X or Y on the basis of who the author is and what he has produced external to the text equates the text to the external evidence. Wimsatt and Beardsley disagree with this notion.

Perhaps a person who has read Bartram appreciates the poem more than one who has not. Or, by looking up the vocabulary of 'Kubla Khan' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, or by reading some of the other books there quoted, a person may know the poem better. But it would seem to pertain little to the poem to know that *Coleridge* had read Bartram. There is a gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem, but can never be and need not be known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition which is the poem.<sup>62</sup>

The distinction between what is knowable and what is unknowable is paramount in understanding the meaning in a literary work. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, the knowable constitutes only that which appears in the text: it is the 'linguistic fact' of the work.<sup>63</sup> A linguistic fact is objective; it is embodied in language and is 'the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge'.<sup>64</sup> Yet language can only describe what it sets out to describe. Wimsatt and Beardsley assert that the life which exists behind the composition of the text cannot be indirectly expressed through the work's language. This is because the text contains a public language, and a public language, when read in a specific context, is not prone to an absolute pluralism. The work's language indicates only the work itself, and not the life behind the work. Reading the text is the only way by which a reader can learn the true meaning of the literary work. And the 'true meaning' of the literary work is encapsulated only within the text.

In a response inspired, in part, by Wimsatt and Beardsley, E.D. Hirsch claims that verbal meaning is a shared affair, whereby meaning can be agreed upon by vastly different groups of readers due to the linguistic structures of the text. In 'In Defense of the Author' in *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), Hirsch argues that language leads the reader to the intended meaning of the author, and that only the author's intended meaning can justify and validate an interpretation of the literary work. Readers are able to construct interpretations that are vastly different from

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 479-80. Italics in original.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 477.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 470.

the author's intended meaning, and so there is nothing within the language of the text that imposes upon an interpreter the author's meaning as the normative ideal. Different motives will produce different interpretations of a literary work. But it is only by following the intention of the author that the study of literature can reach a shared understanding as to the meaning of the literary work. Authorial intention lends meaning to the text; whether the intent be the author's or the critic's determines the limits of the interpretation, and the correctness of a particular reading. For Hirsch, language transmits verbal meaning through the shared understanding of linguistic signs: 'Verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs'.<sup>65</sup> Language does not allow for the reader to venture into the private domain of the author's life because language's function is to say what the author wants it to say – only if the author expresses his private life will it become known to the reader.

I would like to make an observation about the subsidiary argument respecting the public and private dimensions of textual meaning. According to this argument, it would be a mistake to confuse a public fact – namely, language – with a private fact – namely, the author's mind. But I have never encountered an interpretation that inferred truly private meanings from a text. An interpreter might, of course, infer meanings which according to our judgment could not possibly under any circumstance be implied by the author's words, but in that case, we would reject the interpretation not because it is private but because it is probably wrong. That meaning, we say, cannot be implied by those words.<sup>66</sup>

For Hirsch, 'public facts' and 'private facts' are misnomers. The issue is one of a moral and aesthetic imperative, in which the interpreter pursues personal implications in formalised utterances at the expense of recognising and accounting for the conventions and limitations of genre. Whereas Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that the text cannot reveal anything about the author because language encapsulates only itself, Hirsch asserts that language embodies the intention and meaning of the author by being what the author intended to convey. In this sense, the language *is* representative of the author's intention in so much as it reflects the state of mind that produced the work. But it does not invoke his private life, and instead invokes only the meaning that he expresses in his actual writing.

By never encountering an interpretation that 'inferred truly private meanings', Hirsch is suggesting that language *is* what it is, and 'what it is' is also the author's intention. So Wimsatt

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<sup>65</sup> E.D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (Chelsea: BookCrafters, 1967), p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and Beardsley's claim that 'Coleridge had read Bartram' is irrelevant because it is an irrelevant concept; the 'gross body of life' never comes into existence in the author's language because it is not intended to exist. What does exist is the author's intention. And understanding that intention, and recognising the intention as being publicly available, is determined by how persuasive it is to readers.

Whenever an interpretation manages to convince another person, that in itself proves beyond doubt that the author's words *can* publicly imply such a meaning. Since the interpreted meaning *was* conveyed to another person, indeed to at least two other persons, the only significant interpretive question is, 'Did the author really intend that public meaning by his words?'. To object that such a meaning is highly personal and ought not to have been intended is a legitimate aesthetic or moral judgment, but is irrelevant to the question of meaning. That meaning – if the author did mean it – has proved itself to be public, and if the interpreter manages to do his job convincingly, the meaning can become available to a very large public. It is simply a self-contradiction for a member of the public to say, 'Yes, I see that the author did mean that, but it is a private not a public meaning'.<sup>67</sup>

The text must validate the interpretation. And if readers are persuaded by the text as to the correctness of an interpretation then Hirsch believes that this constitutes the presence of authorial intention. This leads Hirsch to identify the core problem in validating an interpretation. In 'Problems and Principles of Validation' (Chapter Five in *Validity in Interpretation*), Hirsch states that the self-confirmability of interpretations must be overcome if authorial intention is to be recognised, as failure to do so renders authorial intention inert relative to the reader's private interpretation and renders any interpretation, no matter how outlandish or obscure, a real possibility.<sup>68</sup> Meaning is not inevitable, and readers who become certain of their interpretation have become trapped in the hermeneutic circle; the circularity of the interpretive process (the text means X because I interpret it as X, hence it is X) can result in pluralism of language, when in truth there is no pluralism. Multiple contradictory interpretations can arise because there is no pursuit of intention, only of what the text appears to mean to a particular group of readers. The critic must resolve interpretations by examining the text in conjunction with the author's meaning, so that the meaning of the text is supported by what the reader considers to be the author's intention.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 15. Italics in original.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

‘The Intentional Fallacy’ and *Validity in Interpretation* both touch on the idea that intention is a construct wrought from the presence of three notable points: the reader, the author, and the text. Twenty-first-century theories pertaining to Intentionalism have diverged into multiple grey areas; the contemporary issue is no longer whether or not Authorial Intention exists, but rather the extent to which referring to said intention is relevant. In contemporary Intentionalism, for example, several sub-groups exist: Extreme / Actual Intentionalism (a work’s meaning and its maker’s intentions are logically equivalent), Modest Intentionalism (linguistic conventions may permit more than one meaning for a given work, in which case the author’s intention fixes the work’s meaning), Anti-Intentionalism (either the artist’s intentions are successfully realised, in which case the interpreter need not refer to them; or the artist’s intentions are not successfully realised, in which case reference to them is insufficient to justify the work’s meaning), Fictionalist Intentionalism (the interpreter seeks not to build the most realistic possible portrait of the author’s life and work, but to yield an interesting and rewarding interpretation), Hypothetical Intentionalism (a combination of intentionalism and conventionalism, in which the true identity of the author can never be known by the reader and, instead, he must posit a hypothetical intention that best reflects the meaning of the work; an informed audience postulates who the author is, rather than attempting to uncover his actual identity), and Moderate Intentionalism (the author’s attitude, logic, and intention is only responsible for some of the work’s content).<sup>69</sup> However, prior to this, the establishing of Intentionalism was black or white: either the author had his intention realised within his literary work, or his intention was

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<sup>69</sup> See the following works: Wayne Booth’s ‘The Author’s Many Voices’, Michael Burke’s ‘The Affective Nature of Literary Themes’, Timothy Burns’ ‘On Being a “We”: Edith Stein’s Contribution to the Intentionalism Debate’, Stephen Davies ‘Authors’ Intentions, Literary Interpretation, and Literary Value’, Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck’s ‘The Implied Author: A Secular Excommunication’, Patrick C. Hogan’s ‘The Multiplicity of Implied Authors and the Complex Case of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”’, Andrew Huddleston’s ‘The Conversation Argument for Actual Intentionalism’, Sherri Irvin’s ‘Authors, Intentions, and Literary Meaning’, William Irwin’s ‘Authorial Declaration and Extreme Actual Intentionalism: is Dumbledore Gay?’, Gary Iseminger’s ‘Actual Intentionalism vs. Hypothetical Intentionalism’, Alex Kiefer’s ‘The Intentional Model in Interpretation’, Jerrold Levinson’s ‘Defending Hypothetical Intentionalism’, Paisley Livingston’s ‘Intentionalism in Aesthetics’, Deidre Lynch’s *Loving Literature: A Cultural History*, Daniel O. Nathan’s ‘A Paradox in Intentionalism’, William Nelles’ ‘A Hypothetical Implied Author’, Robert Stecker’s ‘Moderate Actual Intentionalism Defended’, and Saam Trivedi’s ‘Surplus, Authorial Intentions, and Hypothetical Intentionalism’. In other words, the initial issue of meaning focused on either the author or the reader as the source; it has now become an array of positions that lie between these two ultimate angles, with critical theorists attempting to find every conceivable combination of meaning (from author, to reader, to text, and every variation therein).

impossible to recognise. For Richards, Housman, and Leavis, they were operating within a critical paradigm which elevated one point above the two others, with limited cross-pollination between them. Housman focuses upon the physiology of the self, Richards upon the psychology and physiology of the reader, and Leavis upon the psychology of the author. It is in the aftermath of this tradition that these concepts are further refined and outlined, and then slowly conflated in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Cleanth Brooks' *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947) and 'The Primacy of the Reader' (1983), Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy' and 'The Affective Fallacy' (1949), H.T. Lyon's *Keats's Well-Read Urn* (1958), Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation*, Georges Poulet's 'Phenomenology of Reading' (1969), Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), Mark Bevir's *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (2004), Stephen Davies' "'Authors" Intentions, Literary Interpretation, and Literary Value' (2006), and Isabell Klaiber's 'Multiple Implied Authors: How Many Can a Single Text Have?' (2011), for example. The evolution of Authorial Intention is from a field concerned with what the actual author thinks to a field concerned with how the *reader* envisions the author – a union of two points, and a greying of the roles involved. The physiological tradition to which Richards, Housman, and Leavis belong was established in a critical environment that elevated uniform ideas with regard to the author, the reader, and the text, and which was significant in determining the author- and reader-centric theoretical approaches of their studies. Today, it may be argued that the text is, in fact, a physical manifestation – an external construct – of the author's neurophysiological processes; the similarities between a literary text and a neuroimage are possible, albeit currently strained. The point here is that, under the physiological tradition of Housman, Richards, and Leavis, the author can be conceptualised as an important neurological component. Whether or not the reader is able to access the author's meaning is irrelevant. What matters is that the author existed, and his existence (by way of his neurophysiology) set in motion a series of neurochemical and electrical events, with ideas being created and sentences being formed and muscles contracting and relaxing, all working together to produce the literary text. The reader, then, receives the text, not as an isolated, free-floating, unbound object, but as a continuation of those initial neurophysiological activities. And the reader, upon reading the text, sets in motion another series of neurochemical and electrical events.



## Conclusion

What do Housman, Richards, and Leavis have to offer twenty-first-century literary-critical theorists? Why should we not consider them only as relics or antiquated forefathers to Reader-Response Theory and Intentionalism?

Together, Housman, Richards, and Leavis demonstrate that the phenomenological experience of the reader is developed from a combination of physiological, intellectual, and psychological processes. The distinction between Housman's affective reading and Richards' intellectual reading (which Leavis later evolved into the psychological) is representative of an early-twentieth-century duality: the intellect on one hand, and the emotional / physiological on the other. Since then, this duality has been apparently reconciled by contemporary, twenty-first-century neuro-literary theory, in which the neurophysiology of the brain is recognised as determining emotional responses, processing physiological sensations, and being the source of the intellect. However, this reconciliation is primarily scientific, and often emphasises the neurological, physiological connections between the different divisions of the brain. The emotions, impulses, and intellectualisations of the reader are commonly defined by the body's neurophysiology, and not by the internalised experience of the reader. In doing so, the issue of the phenomenological experience, and whether or not it directly correlates to the scientific descriptions of the neurology of the brain, has become an important issue. The experience that we have when reading a literary work *is not represented in the scientific descriptions of the neurology of the brain*. Rather, our experience is based on a phenomenological understanding of the intellect, the emotions, our psychology, and the interactions between these three components. To this end, Housman, Richards, and Leavis are important because we realise that phenomenology is a distinct and separate experience to the scientific descriptions of the body's neurophysiological form.

The phenomenological experience does not necessarily correlate to the neurological description. A scientific observation describes *how* the reader's neurological systems interact with each other to produce an experience. It does not, by contrast, describe *what* we feel – obviously 'what' we feel is implied by 'how' we feel, but in a neurological description this is mostly secondary or accidental. For example, a neurological description will describe the retina sending electrical impulses to the brain. But a phenomenological may omit this event because the reader does not actively feel the electrical impulses. The same may be said of our inability to differentiate the neocortex's integration of information in the occipital lobe from the

subcortex's arousal of emotion, and our inability to feel the Broca's and Wernicke's areas of the superior temporal gyrus and the inferior frontal gyrus process the language of the text. Clearly these descriptions are important because they reveal how the brain functions. And they are invaluable in depicting the physiological processes involved in the reading of literature. But these descriptions are rarely representative of our phenomenological experience of the reading act. They are overtly scientific in their nature, whereas the phenomenological experience generally transcends neurological considerations; the phenomenology of the reading act can be understood without a neurological explanation.

So certain physiological symptoms can be felt by the reader, while other symptoms remain undetected (but are equally present). An interesting question arises from this assertion: if our bodies experience numerous physiological symptoms, some of which are recognisable and some of which are unrecognisable, then should our assessment of the phenomenological experience of reading take into consideration only those symptoms which are recognised by our consciousness, or both? One possible answer may be as simple as this: that only those experiences recognised by the mind are a part of the phenomenological experience, while those experiences which are unrecognised and unfelt by the reader are inconsequential. This answer, however, overlooks a key point: the intellectualisation of a physical experience, whether that physical experience is recognisable or unrecognisable, can elicit a unique phenomenology. If we know that light passes through the cornea and is focused by the lens onto the retina then our phenomenological experience, with this knowledge, is slightly different to the experience that we would have had had we not known this information. Whether or not this impacts on the interpretation is dependent on the circumstances surrounding the interpretation; this physiological process may not even enter the mind of a reader. Yet if it does then it arguably constitutes a unique phenomenological experience. Furthermore, a reader who has no training in the operation of the eye may not be aware of the process involved regarding the cornea, the lens, and the retina. Despite this lack of awareness, the process still occurs. The same may be said of the transference of information from the retina to the brain: we do not feel it in the sense that we may feel a warm breeze on our skin, but we are indirectly aware of its existence because we re-create the visual images within our brain. Again, the same principle may be applied to the Broca's and Wernicke's areas. We do not feel them working in the same way that we might feel the bristling of skin (to borrow Housman's example), but the fact that we can understand a passage of text means that they are functioning. So we know that they exist, but we may not necessarily realise their existence during every reading act.

Why do we not often intellectualise the existence of these neurological functions during acts of reading? The answer is fairly simple: reading requires significant concentration, and if these physical sensations are unrecognisable then they are unlikely to enter into the mind of the reader. Anyone who has tried to carry a conversation while reading will note a reduced capacity to comprehend both the literary text and his interlocutor. When we read, we often focus our attention on the text. Our thoughts will be mostly confined to ideas inspired, or emotions elicited, by the text itself. Occasionally we might find that our mind wanders into other areas of thought, but these areas are vast and unpredictable, and they are certainly not restricted to only neurological descriptions of the brain. If we truly wish to make sense of the text then we will attempt to remove any distraction and focus our whole attention entirely upon the words written on the page. These ‘distractions’ may be external or internal. External, for example, might be loud noises, dangerous places, or other distracting elements. Internal might be unwanted thoughts, or pieces of information unrelated to the literary text. We attempt to remove these distractions so that we have the greatest opportunity to understand the meaning of the text. The phenomenological experience is therefore often the result of a prolonged, intense session of intellectual concentration on the text. And if that text contains no reference to the neurological process of the brain then it is unlikely that such considerations will be *actively* available to the consciousness of the reader. How many readers, for example, will read a poem while actively considering every neurological process unfelt by them? My guess is only those who specifically set that task, or who are interacting with the text for a reason beyond the enjoyment, or criticism, of its contents. For the average reader (and Richards’ protocols in *Practical Criticism* demonstrate this), the focus is on the text and on the ideas and emotions elicited by the text. It seems, then, that the phenomenological experience is distinct and separate from a neurological description of the brain’s functions, and that the unrecognised neurological events are rarely realised by the reader while reading (unless by rare chance or unless the text itself contains a reference to those neurological events).

The subjective internalisation of a neurological event is often vastly different to how a scientific observer might describe it. Housman, Richards, and Leavis can offer us an insightful depiction of the reader’s phenomenological experience, whether it be from a physiological perspective, an intellectual perspective, a humanist and psychological perspective, or, as is often the case, a combination of all three. Whereas scientific observations concerning the neurology of the brain are invaluable in providing insight into how the brain functions on a physiological level, those observations are not necessarily representative of how we internalise the experience within our own minds. A study of *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, for example,

provides a glimpse into the life of the poet-scholar, and into the internal processes of his versification; he describes for us the feelings that he experiences while he is engaged in the production of poetry. A study of *Practical Criticism* provides insight into the intellectual thought-processes of student readers; we see the logical progression unfold before us as a student reader attempts to understand a poem. A study of *The Great Tradition* depicts the attempt to comprehend the psychologies of both author and literary character; the effort to imitate the chaotic nature of life (the *hows* and *whys* of a person) through a controlled and ordered novel. In each of these cases, we transport ourselves into the mind of the poet, the novelist, the critic, the literary character, and we gaze outwards through their eyes – it is, in a sense, an empathetic phenomenology. A scientific observer, by contrast, attempts to describe a neurological event by looking at it from the outside. The distinction, then, is one of perspective, which requires us to determine which of the relative perspectives is most beneficial for the task that we set ourselves.

Individually, Housman, Richards, and Leavis give weight to different aspects of reading. For Housman, it is the emotional reaction elicited during the reading of a poem that is the peculiar function of poetry; the reader's primitive, affective impulses are aroused by a transfusion of emotion, from poet to text to reader. For Richards, it is the intellectualisation of the physiological, wherein all physical actions and reactions require processing through the intellect; only then, once the physiological becomes intellectual, can a reader realise his reading experience. For Leavis, it is the psychological portrayal of the literary character that determines the correlation between art and life, and, by extension, the extent to which the literary work affects the reader's sensibilities (moral, communal, social, cultural, or otherwise); the emphasis, for Leavis, is placed on the good that literature might do, or inspire, in its readers. We might say that how the critic views the function of literature is the primary determiner of his theoretical approach. Or, rather, the critic's understanding of the function of literature significantly influences how he reads and criticises the literary text, so much so that the theoretical approach advocated by each individual critic might be vastly different from the other – and, in fact, may be the source of hostilities, reconciliations, evolutions, or extensions between the critics themselves (as in the case of Housman and Richards, or Richards and Leavis).

In this thesis, Housman, Richards, and Leavis are not discussed solely in terms of their respective individuality. Although we can, and, as is often the case, do extensively study these figures on the basis of their individual merits, it is only through a coalescing of their approaches that we begin to see how they each help to unravel the phenomenological experience. And, in

doing so, we find a means by which they, as early-twentieth-century writers, might contribute to contemporary critical discourse: the reading experience is more than a scientific comprehension of the brain; it is an understanding of how the reader internalises his emotions, physiology, intellect, and psychology. Reading experiences, just like writing experiences, are unique and subjective, and to quantify them, or to distil them into their neurological forms, eliminates (or lessens the significance of) the subjective experience. ‘Wordsworth for instance says that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,’ Housman acknowledges near the end of his lecture, ‘and Burns has left us this confession, “I have two or three times in my life composed from the wish rather than the impulse, but I never succeeded to any purpose”. The production of poetry, in its first stage, is less an active than a passive and involuntary process; and if I were obliged, not to define poetry, but to name the class of things to which it belongs, I should call it a secretion’.<sup>1</sup> Although Housman is speaking of the creation of verse, the notion that the writing of poetry is a ‘secretion’ can be applied to the reading of all of literature; a secretion of ideas and emotions from the intellect and psychology of the reader, brought together within and by the neurology of the brain, all working together to produce an internal experience that may be best described as an ‘overflow of powerful feelings’.

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<sup>1</sup> Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, p. 48.

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