

Chapter Five

Intentional fallacy and its slipstream – on New Critics, intentionalists and poststructuralists

More than fifty years after its birth, W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's notion "intentional fallacy" still triggers articles and books with such titles as "The Intentional Fallacy: Defending Beardsley" (Dickie and Wilson 1995), "The Intentional Fallacy: Defending Myself" (Carroll 1997), "A Fallacy in the Intentional Fallacy" (Downey 2007), *The Varieties of Authorial Intention: Literary Theory Beyond Intentional Fallacy* (Farrell 2017) or "The Fallacy of 'Fallacy' and Its Implications for Contemporary Literary Theory" (Altieri 2017). Peter Lamarque (2009, 115) summarises: "The Wimsatt and Beardsley article stirred up an immense amount of debate which, perhaps distortingly, came to dominate philosophy of literature and which still rumbles on." Obviously, the concept is not only having a strong and lasting impact on debates on interpretation – it also has great potential to polarise and its evaluation shows many contradictory voices. Some speak of one of the "central documents" in the development of New Criticism, being "one of the clearest theoretical statements concerning the creation of a criticism in which the meaning of the work itself becomes the focus of critical attention, rather than investigations into the birth of the work in the personal experience of the author", as Anna Carew-Miller (1995, 399) holds in *The New Criticism and Contemporary Literary Theory*. Others however criticise the concept's lack of clarity, holding that the line of argumentation in the article cannot be reconstructed without difficulties (cf. Danneberg and Müller 1983, 106) or that its basic thoughts have been articulated by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks much more clearly (cf. Jancovich 2000, 212).

A possible explanation for this heterogeneous picture may be found in the complex and long coming-of-age story of the notion and the concept. The first contours can be found already in the early 1940s in an article by Wimsatt in which he writes about a "very serious fallacy, that of making the intention of the author equal to the intent or total design of the poem itself" (Wimsatt 1942/43, 142). The first co-publication with Beardsley on this matter was the entry "Intentionality" for an encyclopaedia (Beardsley and Wimsatt 1943), leading to the coining of the notion in the seminal article with the very title "The Intentional Fallacy" in 1946 (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946). This article was revised in 1954 in Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* and then reprinted many times, while also being the object of a careful retrospection by Wimsatt in 1968: "Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited" (Wimsatt 1968). All this amounts to a timespan of more than 25

years of academic attention for intentional fallacy by its spiritual fathers. Yet, on the other side again, Bernard O'Donoghue calls the article "least representative" for the work of Wimsatt (cf. O'Donoghue 2002, 143). Surprising in this regard, too, is that in *Literary Theory and Structure* (Brady et al. 1973) – the volume published in honour of Wimsatt's 65th birthday, with a very broad title, indeed – not a single contribution is devoted to intentional fallacy. It even cannot be found in its index under the – for the rest – very differentiated lemma "Wimsatt".

All these complexities and contradictions seem to call for a systematic reconstruction of the concept, its launch and its reception. As my point of reference I will take the article from 1946, mainly because the seminal notion "intentional fallacy" originates from there, but also for pragmatic reasons: the conceptual differences at specific historical moments can be shown easiest when taking the article in *Sewanee Review* as the frame.

Intentional fallacy as a radical break

In the preceding chapters, Wimsatt and Beardsley were quoted several times with their idea from 1946 that authorial intention is "neither available nor desirable". In its complete version, the sentence runs as follows: "The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 468). Some twenty years later, Wimsatt specified that, right from the start, the concept was meant to be not only about the evaluation, but also about the interpretation of a text. Therefore, according to him, the authors better should have written in 1946: "The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging either the meaning or the value of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt 1968, 222).

What Wimsatt and Beardsley meant by "success" was obviously "either the meaning or the value". This self-correction confirms only what one might have taken already from the argument of the whole article. Also the discussions following the publication of the article show no doubt that intentional fallacy addresses problems of interpretation – for most this was even *the* central focus of the concept. Having said that, what was meant then in 1946 by the sentence that in the interpretation of literary texts, authorial intention was "neither available nor desirable"? And how does this concept relate to the others discussed in the present book so far? I would like to answer these questions on three different levels, to be discussed subsequently: that of the literary work of art, that of the literary author and that of the literary critic.

To start with the level of the work itself: the concept intentional fallacy is closely related to a specific conception of what the literary work *is*, circling around MacLeish's "A poem should not mean but be" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 469). In consequence, Wimsatt and Beardsley's view on literature implies a turning away from ethical or other messages, away from the expression of feelings or personal views. Positively speaking, it focuses on the work of art as an artefact that is to a large degree autonomous with regard to the world surrounding it: "A poem can be only through its meaning – since its medium is words – yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant" (ibid.). This is seen by Wimsatt and Beardsley as what is specific for literature – as opposed to non-artistic utterings.

By the same token, the non-availability of authorial intention is for them not an empirical problem (for example in the sense of missing documents in which the author addresses his intention explicitly), but what they call a "theoretical-philosophical" problem. Whatever the author may have said outside the work of art about his intention will never come close to the riches of the autonomous work of art itself: "No better evidence, in the nature of things, can be adduced than the poem itself" – that is how Wimsatt explains in 1968 what was meant in 1946 by authorial intention being "not available" (Wimsatt 1968, 222). Without going into a debate at this point, one should add here at least that the phrasing may trigger misunderstanding. What Wimsatt and Beardsley present as a "theoretical-philosophical" non-availability in the end turns out to be the circular consequence of an autonomous conception of literature, focusing per definition on the work itself and not on the author – let alone on his teachings. When the axiom is that one should look at the work and the work only, then this implies that the author and his ideas are not at the focus of the critical enterprise. "Not available" plays with the air of critical description and fact, hinting at a problem or at being an argument concerning critical interpretation – but in the end it boils down to a normative view about what the work of art, of what literature *is*. In other words: it is about a specific view on poetics, an autonomist poetics to be more precise.

There is more evidence for the close connection between intentional fallacy and a specific poetics. On the circumstantial level, one might remember that for M.H. Abrams, MacLeish's phrase "A poem must not mean but be" is the prototypical expression of what he sees as an autonomist – in his terminology: "objective" – poetics (Abrams 1953, 27–28). In the article by Wimsatt and Beardsley itself, their affinity with and esteem for a poet such as T.S. Eliot, usually characterised as a representative of this autonomous poetics (cf. Menand 2000, 21–41), points in the same direction. They refer for example at length to Eliot's massive use of allusions in his poetry (often marked as such in notes) and state: "where-

as notes tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author's intention, yet they ought to be judged like any other part of a composition" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 484; cf. 482–487). In other words: the critic should deal with any part of a literary text published by a poet as part of the poem – including what some might read as paratexts giving information about an author steering the reading of his poem.

It is interesting to see what Wimsatt and Beardsley do when a poet is not strengthening the autonomy of the poem enough, for example when Eliot seems to regard his own authorial intention as important, according to his utterances about his own poetry (cf. Eliot 1963, 13–22). Then they criticise exactly this behaviour: "If Eliot and other contemporary poets have any characteristic fault, it may be in planning too much" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 485). Their ideas on the nature of the literary work or rather the poetics that Wimsatt and Beardsley defend, is one in which the author should play no role in interpretation of the poem at all – at least to a lesser degree than Eliot himself seems to think.

Evidently, intentional fallacy is related closely to an autonomist poetics. This poetics serves to legitimise the concept and its use in interpretation. The appropriate professional handling of literature is, at least to a large degree, connected to specific ideas on the nature, function and properties of literature. In comparison, the same can be said of course for the standard model of authorial intention or for Schleiermacher's better understanding. Both are intertwined with the dominant poetics of their times: variations of teaching-and-delight from antiquity to around 1800 or a form of genius aesthetics in the case of Schleiermacher. When the New Critics now practise their concept of intention in interpretation on the foundation of an autonomist poetics, then we must add, too, that they were not the first ones to do so – the interpretative practices of Russian Formalism, discussed in Chapter Four, can be regarded as a predecessor. Following that historical perspective a little longer, also in the US already long before the New Critics, one can discern conceptions of professional interpretation of literary texts that seem to be founded on an autonomist or "objective" poetics. Martin Wright Sampson, appointed in 1895 as head of the English department at the University of Indiana, described the ideal of academic teaching with letting the students "systematically approach the work as a work of art, find out the laws of its existence as such" (qtd. from Graff 2007, 123). But, as in the other cases touched upon above – T.S. Eliot, Russian Formalism – such a dedication towards a poetics of the literary work as autonomous does not entail a radical turning away from the author in interpretation as is expressed in "neither available nor desirable". In other words, conceptions of literature in which autonomy plays a dominant role seem to be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for Wimsatt and Beardsley's concept of intentional fallacy. What must be added?

The specific concept of the author in interpretation – our second level of discussing the topic – seems crucial in this regard. A good starting point is Wimsatt and Beardsley's polemic against "Professor Stoll" – Elmer Edgar Stoll – in "The Intentional Fallacy". Stoll had compared the literary critic with a judge who had to give a verdict about a will, a contract or the constitution. In such cases, what the judge and the critic would and should do is pay attention to "the author's meaning or intention", because as the legal texts do not belong to the judge, so the literary text does not belong to the critic. Wimsatt and Beardsley agree whose possession the poem is *not* (i.e., the critic's), but they strongly disagree with paying attention to authorial intention. For them, the poem neither belongs to the critic *nor* to the author: "it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it" (cf. Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 470). From this perspective, it is obvious that the author has no function at all in interpretation – in opposition to the standard model reconstructed above.

Concerning the model connected with Schleiermacher, however, one might see some parallels, at least at first sight: for those in the tradition of understanding-the-author-better-than-he-understood-himself and for Wimsatt/Beardsley, an author is not able to *control* the meaning of his text. But within Schleiermacher's model, as within Stoll's, authors still were able to intend about their texts. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, that seems not to be the case, or at least: they claim that it is irrelevant. Since what happens when a text is published is that the rights of property change to the disadvantage of the author: "The poem belongs to the public". There are two reasons for this: one, the poem is made of language ("the peculiar possession of the public") and two, it is made by humans ("an object of public knowledge") (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 470). All that is left for the author is playing a role in the *production* of the linguistic artefact. In interpretation, he does not play any role for Wimsatt and Beardsley, because their programme is "not wishing to make the poet (outside the poem) an authority" (Beardsley and Wimsatt 1946, 471). In other words, "intentional fallacy" constitutes a new type within the range of concepts of authorial intention in interpretation discussed so far. It is a view that indeed differs radically from what we saw with regard to Schleiermacher or Russian Formalism, let alone compared to ideas of Greek and Roman antiquity or the standard model.

What exactly then is the role of the literary critic – our third level of exploration – within this concept? To start with, one must keep in mind that for Wimsatt and Beardsley, the expropriation of the author as shareholder in the interpretation of his poems is *not* aiming at the unlimited freedom of individual interpretations of individual readers – that would be another fallacy, the "affective fallacy" (cf. Wimsatt 1954). When Wimsatt and Beardsley say "public", as

quoted above, they mean an informed and professional public. Obviously, the argument that the poem “belongs to the public” primarily aimed at getting rid of every orientation towards the author in interpretation – not at defending the view that any reading of a poem by the public is a legitimate one. What the expropriation was about was in the end to give the floor to the professional reader as Wimsatt and Beardsley see him. They situate this professional reader on the same level as other scientists: “What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology or morals” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 470).

Accordingly, Wimsatt and Beardsley devote much attention to systematising arguments of method, most explicitly with regard to the distinction between “internal and external evidence for the meaning of the poem” (cf. Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 477f.). For them, there is (1) internal, public evidence on the basis of semantics and syntax or, more generally, “through all that makes a language and culture”; (2) external evidence of a private or idiosyncratic kind: “it consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem”; and finally (3) a kind of in-between evidence telling the reader “about the character of the author or about private or semi-private meanings attached to words or topics by an author or by a coterie of which he is a member”. The same threefold distinction had been used by Wimsatt and Beardsley already in their encyclopaedia article from 1943. At this point I am not interested in the vague difference between the types (2) and (3) – a vagueness Wimsatt and Beardsley themselves admit. Also the question whether type (2) is rightfully characterised as primarily “private” in character, let alone “idiosyncratic” (cf. Graff 2007, 188 – 192), is not crucial for the line of argument of the present book. What is crucial, though, is the conclusion that Wimsatt and Beardsley draw from their typology of kinds of evidence:

A critic who is concerned with evidence of type (1) and moderately with that of type (3) will in the long run produce a different sort of comment from that of the critic who is concerned with type (2) and with (3) where it shades into (2). (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 478)

What is called here “a different sort of comment” – in 1943 one could read “a vastly different sort of criticism” (Beardsley and Wimsatt 1943, 327) – is of course not a neutral choice. The article from 1946 is a passionate plea for the criticism of the first kind, that is: the critic should use evidence (1) and “moderately” (3). Especially the last lines of the article leave no doubt about their overall aim to bring about changes in criticism. While pursuing the question whether a certain verse of T.S. Eliot’s “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is an allusion to a verse by John Donne, the authors mention that the critic might ask Eliot himself while he

is alive (i.e. to gain evidence of type (2), one might add). After raising this possibility, “The Intentional Fallacy” ends with the following sentences:

Our point is that such an answer to such an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem ‘Prufrock’; it would not be a critical inquiry. Critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle. (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 488)

Only the first type of criticism mentioned above is professional literary criticism: the one that focuses on text internal, public evidence, and moderately adds evidence concerning the circles in which the poet participated. The critic who uses “private”, external evidence (type (2)) is not a professional literary critic at all. Therefore, “The Intentional Fallacy” must be seen as a manifesto for a certain type of literary criticism – in line with New Criticism – while basically excluding its opponents from the profession. Again, a high degree of circularity is visible. The claim that professional literary criticism does not deal with “private” evidence is used to legitimise the concept of intentional fallacy – and the other way round: taking the vow of intentional fallacy means not using private evidence. This boils down to the prescriptive norm for how a professional literary critic should fulfil his professional task: by not dealing at all with authorial intention in interpretation.

After having taken a closer look at the level of poetics, the author and the critic, I hope I have made it plausible that the programmatic ban on authorial intention is something new in the history of the concept. “1946” can be given a similar status as “1838”: a new concept of intention in interpretation establishes a new tradition of professional interpretation of texts. In “The Intentional Fallacy”, the conceptual milestone must be located in the radical dismissal of authorial intention in the professional interpretation of literary texts. Already in 1962, the East German scholar Robert Weimann – critically – claimed that Wimsatt and Beardsley, theoretically speaking, had destroyed the author in literary criticism (Weimann 1974, 85) – a declaration of the “death of the author” already five years before Roland Barthes, be it with less applause on the side of Weimann. Also Hans Bertens’ introduction to literary theory presents intentional fallacy as a ban on author-related activities by the literary critic (“The actual *text* should be our guideline, not what the author has perhaps wanted to say”), but he seems to favour that ban: “The text has become a freestanding object and the rest is up to us” (Bertens 2013, 23). He adds, obviously with one eye on the types of evidence presented by Wimsatt and Beardsley: “information about authorial intention or the direct occasion for a work of literature may be damaging rather than helpful”, because it could keep the reader on the level of distracting partic-

ularities (cf. Bertens 2013, 24). These are only two voices that confirm the view of intentional fallacy as being a radical break with the traditional role of authorial intention in interpretation, to which many others could be added (for more examples see Danneberg and Müller 1983). But there are also voices pointing in another direction, as we have touched upon in the introduction to this chapter.

Intentional fallacy and the traces of tradition

In his characterisation of New Criticism, Mark Jancovich departs from the view of some opponents who present New Criticism as a “form of bourgeois individualism and/or scientific positivism” (Jancovich 1993, 5). From the point of view of these opponents, the articles by Wimsatt and Beardsley on intentional fallacy claim that the individual text has “no relation to its conditions of production or consumption” (ibid.) – for possible examples of these opponents the reader might think of Weimann (quoted above), or of Paul de Man (1971, 24–27). “Unfortunately”, Jancovich continues, these views are wrong: “For the New Critics, the critic should concentrate on the formal processes of texts, formal processes within which both the intentions of the author and the responses of the reader were framed” (Jancovich 1993, 5). It is from these premises that Jancovich situates the articles “The Intentional Fallacy” and “The Affective Fallacy” by Wimsatt and Beardsley as follows:

It should be clear that they were not intended to disconnect the poem from its conditions of production or consumption, but to focus criticism upon the specificity of literary activity; to identify the textual processes in relation to which literary production and consumption were defined. (Jancovich 1993, 77)

Just to be clear: that is a completely different interpretation than the one given so far of intentional fallacy. To “frame” the intentions of the author within the “formal” textual processes is hardly compatible with the intentions of the author being “neither available nor desirable” in interpretation. The same goes for Jancovich’s claim that Wimsatt and Beardsley were not aiming at disconnecting the author from professional critical interpretation, which does not rhyme with “Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle”, i. e. the author. In order to understand what these contradictions and the view by Jancovich are about, a short detour must be taken that will bring us back in due time to the intentional fallacy article of 1946.

Jancovich locates “Wimsatt and Beardsley’s position [...] close to that of Brooks and Warren in *Understanding Poetry*” (Jancovich 1993, 5). In his contribu-

tion to the *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* on the New Critics, Jancovich even goes one step further when he first refers to Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy", and then holds that these concepts were "more clearly articulated" by Brooks and Warren (Jancovich 2000, 212) – as already quoted in the introduction to the present chapter. How did Brooks and Warren articulate their concept of authorial intention in interpretation? The best clues for an answer can be taken from Cleanth Brooks' 1951 essay "My credo – The Formalist Critics" in *The Kenyon Review*. While Wimsatt and Beardsley had excluded the use of "external" sources (for example private documents) from the activities of the professional critic, Brooks was much less strict in that regard:

There is no reason, of course, why we should not turn away into biography and psychology. Such explorations are very much worth making. But they should not be confused with an account of the work. (Brooks 1995, 47)

It is obvious that this is a different way of looking at authorial intention than that attributed to Wimsatt and Beardsley above. To start with, the range of legitimate evidence used by the professional critic is much broader in this view than in the one taken from the article "The Intentional Fallacy". Without any doubt, Brooks' priority is also on working with the text itself. But still, for Brooks, turning towards the biography and psychology of the author are legitimate activities of a professional scholar. The role that Brooks gives to authorial intention in interpretation is made explicit in the following remark. The professional critic must take off from the idea

that the relevant part of the author's intention is what he actually got into his work; that is, he assumes that the author's intention as realized is the 'intention' that counts, not necessarily what he was conscious of trying to do, or what he now remembers he was then trying to do. (Brooks 1995, 47 f.)

Compared with Wimsatt and Beardsley's view, Brooks differs substantially from the picture drawn above. Brooks distinguishes within the intention of the author a "relevant part" and claims that this is part of the literary work itself – ideas that are definitely not pointing in the direction of an expropriation of the author. Conversely, it reminds us at first glance of what has been called above the idea of an intentional continuity between author and text. But something else is dominant in Brooks' concept: the idea that the professional critic cannot be bound by explicit external intentional utterances of the author. In Brooks' reflections on this point, the crucial opposition is the one between plan and artistic realisation – with the latter as the primary object of the critic. So Brooks is rather close to a

model in the wake of Schleiermacher's professional progress: first understand the intention of the author, and then transgress it, if you can.

But this means also that Brooks still does regard the author as a relevant entity in interpretation. How far this goes can be taken from his presentation of "The Intentional Fallacy" in retrospect:

As with the intentional fallacy, I think Bill Wimsatt's essays [i.e. *'The Intentional Fallacy'* and *'The Affective Fallacy'*, RG] aim to guard us from moving too far away from the text. They are not saying that authors don't have intentions and that we cannot try to study them [...]. (qtd. from Spurlin 1995, 373)

Brooks is right that Wimsatt and Beardsley nowhere say that authors have no intentions – but what they do say is that these intentions are irrelevant ("neither available nor desirable") and a no-go area ("it would not be a critical inquiry") for the literary critic in interpretation. When Brooks presents the aim of the intentional fallacy article as "only" a reminder for professional critics not to turn too far away from the literary text, then "The Intentional Fallacy" could not be characterised as a milestone in our typology. It would become a lot more traditional – and that is exactly how Jancovich (1993, 2000) sees it, relying, as has become clear in the meantime, to a large extent on Brooks himself. But how do we get out of this contradiction? Is the Jancovich reading a plausible, clearer interpretation of intentional fallacy? Or is it a misreading? I think neither nor. When one takes the context of the debate in 1946 into account, what seem to be contradictory readings of the same concept can be explained as the effect of strategic behaviour among literary critics around 1946.

The strategic dimension of "The Intentional Fallacy"

When looking back from this point to the article "The Intentional Fallacy", one cannot deny that it offers some plausible arguments for Brooks' and Jancovich's reading. They might have pointed for example at the three types of evidence (see above: (1) internal, i.e. part of the text and public; (2) external, i.e. author-related information outside the artefact, "private"; (3) "intermediate kind of evidence about the character of the author or about private or semi-private meanings attached to words or topics by the author") – which, by the way, they do not do explicitly. Wimsatt and Beardsley admit that these types cannot always be separated from each other with absolute clarity. According to them, this applies "especially" for the types (2) and (3) (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 478). Taking into account, too, that the professional literary critic is allowed by Wimsatt and

Beardsley to make use of the half internal, half external evidence of type (3) – even though only “moderately”, whatever that may mean (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 478) – then a strict separation between text and author, as prescribed in other passages of the article, must fail. Accordingly, the line of argument at this point of their article is not easy to follow:

The use of biographical evidence need not involve intentionalism, because while it may be evidence of what the author intended, it may also be evidence of the meaning of his words and the dramatic character of his utterance. (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 478)

In other words: when two different literary critics do the same thing (taking “biographical evidence” into account in interpretation), it may *not* be doing the same thing. What receives the verdict “intentional fallacy” in one case, may in other cases be qualified as an effort to understand the text under scrutiny – that is what “need not” seems to say. Again, a systematic distinction cannot be made.

What is more, questions also arise when one neglects the reference to intentionalism and focuses only on what, following this quote, the task of the critic is. When one departs from the idea that authorial intention and intention attributed to the text may be the same (“it may also be evidence of”), but not necessarily so, then it would be plausible that especially in passages that are difficult to interpret, biographical evidence of the intentional kind should be looked for. Were it only to decide precisely what is “the meaning of his words and the dramatic character of his utterance”: whether it is in accordance or in difference with “evidence of what the author intended”. However, this possibility is not what Wimsatt and Beardsley allow. At the least, such an approach would contradict their professional ban on consulting the author (the “oracle”), and it would also oppose their intent of “not wishing to make the poet (outside the poem) an authority”. Meanwhile, arguments for why this should not be a professional critical approach are not given by Wimsatt and Beardsley.

To be brief: at least in parts, the article “The Intentional Fallacy” seems to play both sides. On the one hand it demands a text-centred interpretation in which the author can play a role – a reading that for example Brooks offers. On the other hand, many passages of the article deny that the author should play any role in the *interpretation* of literary texts. So must we conclude that Wimsatt and Beardsley had their naps, too – though it’s hard to tell in which passages?

The idea of all too human errors, in one direction or another, is not very likely, though, since there are no traces of a contemporary discussion of errors or of self-corrections among the main actors. What is more, when Wimsatt looks back

in 1968 on the launch of the concept in 1946, quite the opposite of an awareness of mistakes, internal discrepancies within the concept or only of a heterogeneous reception is articulated: "Mr Beardsley and I succeeded in formulating a clear, reasonable, and viable statement" (Wimsatt 1968, 195). What one does come across, though, are efforts by the New Critics in the wake of 1946 in which they apparently try to homogenise their positions.

This can be illustrated for example with Wimsatt's revisiting his concept in 1968. His plea for a text-oriented criticism – as opposed to a historical-biographical one – has not changed:

Artistic activity has produced a valued result. Some critics will wish to talk about just that result. Other critics, however, will not. These will be the critics who entertain an antithetic drive toward viewing the art work as mainly a token of its source, a manifestation of something behind it, that is, the consciousness or personality of the artist (or perhaps of the society in which he lived, or of himself as representative of that society). (Wimsatt 1968, 194)

Also his autonomist conception of literature has not changed, as he explains with regard to Thomas Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*: "the *Elegy* is not *about* the historic person Gray. The self-contemplative speaker remains anonymous. The poem itself, if it were anonymous, would be intact" (Wimsatt 1968, 204). But the role explicitly given to authorial intention in interpretation *has* changed, compared to 1946:

[...] the author's intention is sometimes said to have at least an 'advisory' force. This seems hardly a claim that ought to be debated. No doubt the author is likely to be a good guide. Yet it cannot be that on principle he is an infallible guide. As a commentator on his own works he enjoys no prescriptive, or creative, rights. If he says there is red in his poem, we will look carefully in the expectation of finding it. (Wimsatt 1968, 211)

Wimsatt is showing here quite some shifts: that authorial intention can "at least" provide advice for interpretation, that the author "is likely to be a good guide" and that this role is "hardly a claim that ought to be debated" – all this is very close to the position we have reconstructed above as Brooks'. But in the essay on intentional fallacy from 1946, none of these claims can be found. On the contrary: much of what Wimsatt and Beardsley said in 1946 contradicts the quote above. When Wimsatt restricts himself in 1968 to say that an author is not "infallible" and has no right to give "prescriptive" interpretations, then he is just saying what we have found at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the circles around Schleiermacher or in those around Russian Formalism. But saying that the author cannot control the interpretations of his texts is not a radical new position in 1946, let alone in 1968.

Wimsatt's weakening of the 1946 ban on legitimating one's professional interpretation with explicit statements made by the author is another case in point. As the quote above shows, the critic is now authorised to take into account "private" evidence: when the poet says, there is red in this poem, then the critic is not only entitled to use this claim in his interpretation, it would even be legitimate to expect this is indeed the case ("in the expectation of finding it"). To put it differently: according to Wimsatt in 1968, the critic should first try to understand the literary work as well as the author understood it.

Wimsatt's 1968 removal of the sharp edges of his concept of intentional fallacy is not an isolated phenomenon. It can be found already much earlier in a significant difference between the essay from 1946 and the revised version in *The Verbal Icon* from 1954. Maybe the most prominent passage that was deleted in 1954 was the one in which Wimsatt and Beardsley declared "not wishing to make the poet (outside the poem) an authority" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 471; cf. Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954, 5). In other words: the revision allowed one of the most radical claims from 1946 to disappear in silence, and by this deletion brought intentional fallacy closer to less radical concepts of authorial intention in interpretation. In this context, E.D. Hirsch's claim that the "careful distinctions and qualifications" of Wimsatt and Beardsley "have now vanished in the popular version which consists in the false and facile dogma that what an author intended is irrelevant to the meaning of his text" (Hirsch 1967, 11f.) is therefore beside the point. The publishing of a phrase like "not wishing to make the poet (outside the poem) an authority" in 1946 and its deletion in silence eight years later make the frontlines between a "false and facile" and a competent reading of Wimsatt and Beardsley less straightforward. In any case they become more blurred than Hirsch apparently wants them to be, having co-dedicated his book to Wimsatt – who also was his co-fellow for several months of research in London in 1960 (cf. Hirsch 1967, xii). It is telling in this regard that Hirsch takes as point of reference for his argument the 1954 version of the Wimsatt and Beardsley essay: the 1946 original is mentioned, but only followed by a laconic and misleading "Reprinted in" *The Verbal Icon* in 1954 (cf. Hirsch 1967, 11, n. 11).

The same orchestration of positions, be it on purpose or not, can be found on the other side, as a closer look at the different editions of Brooks and Warren's anthology *Understanding Poetry* shows. The frequently reprinted book was already quoted above by Jancovich, according to whom it explains much better what intentional fallacy was about than the essay by Wimsatt and Beardsley with the very same title. When reading Brooks and Warren's "Letter to the teacher" and the "Introduction" to the first edition, there is no doubt that this anthology is grounded on an autonomist poetics. In the first edition from 1938

(here quoted according to the 1943 print) Brooks and Warren start for example with a typical autonomist tautology that "if poetry is worth teaching at all, it is worth teaching as poetry" (Brooks and Warren 1943, iv). Consequently, the job of the literary critic is to analyse the literary text as a work of art made of language material. Concerning this aspect, there is little difference with what Wimsatt and Beardsley claim in 1946 or Brooks in 1951.

But within this text-centred approach, there is room for more than the text alone: "the biographical and historical background may do much to clarify interpretation, but these things should be considered as means and not as ends" (*ibid.*). The author may be a stepping stone for a professional interpretation, but the critic's goal must be something else: analysing the structural elements of the poem in their organic relation, so that "the total intention" of the poem may become clear (*ibid.*). When we step out for a moment from the argument in the first edition from 1938: so far these thoughts are completely compatible with what Brooks claimed in 1951 and Wimsatt in 1968. But the point that is most relevant for our analysis of the strategic actions of New Criticism comes immediately after this quote. There, Brooks and Warren explain that the "Organic Nature of Poetry" is conceptualised as a whole, and that whole is – the intention of the author:

The question then about any element in a poem is not whether it is in itself pleasing, or agreeable, or valuable, or 'poetical,' but whether it works with the other elements to create the effect intended by the poet. (Brooks and Warren 1943, 18f.)

Such a view on authorial intention shares its main features with what was reconstructed above as the standard model, oriented in the end towards "the effect intended by the poet". This view is not compatible with the concept of intentional fallacy launched by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946, neither in its radical nor in its moderate version. Consequently, it will come as no surprise that it was exactly this passage that was erased by Brooks and Warren from their second edition of 1950 – without any comment on this specific point (Jancovich, by the way, uses the 1960 edition for his argument, with no further explanation). At the same time, the preceding and the following passage on the organic character of the artwork remain basically the same. Such a redecoration of one's argument makes it very likely that it was part of a strategic action trying to harmonise relevant utterances by New Critics on intention.

In order to put it more generally: since the publication of "The Intentional Fallacy", two concepts of intention in interpretation can be found within the group of New Criticism. On the one hand there is a concept that has evident parallels with Schleiermacher's model of understanding-the-author-better-than-he-

understood-himself, showing in its early stage traces of the traditional standard model, too (Brooks and Warren). On the other hand there is the concept of intentional fallacy that to a certain extent uses ideas that are familiar from the circles around Schleiermacher, but primarily claims radically different conceptual choices, especially in its principal turning away from the author as a relevant authority in the interpretation of literary texts. However, this conceptual tension does not become a subject of discussion within the circles of the New Critics. Instead, all actors keep up the idea that their own basic ideas on this topic remain unchanged, while at the same time they erase all-too-evident discrepancies with their allies and occasionally take over some of the phrases of the other side.

The sensitivity of the New Critics concerning the strategic dimension of their actions can be illustrated exemplarily with an anecdote that Cleanth Brooks tells in passing in an interview in October 1993 – Brooks died one year later, aged 87. In that interview, Brooks states among other things: “Critical debates are not necessarily resolved by consulting the author” (qtd. from Spurlin 1995, 380). In isolation, one could take this sentence as a descriptive, mild (“not necessarily”) version of the order: “Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle”, the last sentence of the “The Intentional Fallacy”. But what immediately follows reminds us of the fact that there is a quite substantial difference between the ideas of Brooks and those launched in 1946 by Wimsatt and Beardsley:

Years ago, in 1937, I wrote an account of Eliot’s *Waste Land*. I wrote a letter to Eliot asking him to read and to comment on it if he had the time. He wrote back and said that he thought my account was very good and that it was a good way to handle the poem. I decided not to print that letter because I did not want to bolster my interpretation by having the approval of the author. I also, quite honestly, didn’t want to appear to be a young man riding on the coat-tails of this great poet. Many people still disagree with my reading of *The Waste Land*, and, for what it’s worth, I’ve got the approval of the author. (qtd. from Spurlin 1995, 380)

This passage reveals two things that are important for the point I want to make. First, it confirms that Brooks as a critic attributes to the author in matters of professional interpretation more authority than Wimsatt and Beardsley allowed for in 1946. What the professional critic Brooks had done in 1937 was exactly what Wimsatt and Beardsley had banned as non-professional in “The Intentional Fallacy”: to ask the author about interpretations “would not be a critical inquiry”. Second, the quote shows that this normative discrepancy around 1946 was not made part of a discussion that aimed at bringing a conceptual debate closer to a consensus. Instead, the different views were kept inside the family so to speak – for strategic reasons. The only explanation that Brooks offers for his silence on Eliot’s authorial approval is that he, as a young critic, did not want to

make the impression to be a fellow traveller on the ticket of a successful poet. Seen from the perspective of the present book: the impression that Brooks wanted to make was one of a high degree of scholarly autonomy. This implied that professional interpretations should stand on their own feet according to the rules of the discipline and that they did not need the author for their interpretation, at least not in the public-professional sphere. Still, Brooks' late confession does not change the fact that around 1940 and in private, he *did* regard Eliot's approval as a relevant legitimization – and still at present, since he mentions the letter now as an argument against all those who "still disagree" with his interpretation of *The Waste Land*, "for what it's worth".

It has turned out that the self-presentation of key figures of the New Critics was based to a large extent on incidentally erasing, modifying or not telling their views on authorial intention. The effect were quite some discrepancies and different accents with regard to the group's concepts of intention in interpretation. The heterogeneous reception of intentional fallacy obviously must be explained to a large extent from this strategic dimension of the launch of the concept and the activities of the New Critics. At the same time, the picture reconstructed here shows clear efforts to smoothen the sharp conceptual edges. New Critics evidently worked hard to avoid disputes within New Criticism.

Another central figure of the New Critics, John Crowe Ransom, made explicit at the time the strategic self-consciousness of the activities analysed here. In a letter to his former student Allen Tate in 1937, he tries to convince him to become a co-editor of the new *Kenyon Review*. According to Ransom, the professorial scholarly establishment is

in an awful dither trying to reform themselves and there's a big stroke possible for a small group that knows what it wants in giving them ideas and definitions and showing the way. (qtd. from Graff 2007, 157)

The pressure on established scholarship to change things, at the time, had different sources, among which "influential educators [...] aggressively questioning the value of liberal education" as a leisure class idea out of time in a democracy, as well as a rapidly expanding social science and the decline of the relative size of literature departments: "Each of these interrelated developments helped to undermine the institutional position of philological scholarship, eventually opening a space in the profession that allowed criticism to enter" (Wilson 2002, 77). That space is where the strategically launched and orchestrated "big stroke" of the New Critics aimed – successfully, as we know by now. But which role did the radical version of the concept of intentional fallacy play in that context? How can one explain why it was launched in 1946 as a radical

break in terms of authorial intention in interpretation, when at least some New Critics tried to dim that radicality in the decennia to come afterwards?

Concepts on authorial intention in interpretation around 1946 in the US

An important factor for explaining the positions on intention taken by New Critics and their strategic behaviour is how widely the text-centred approach was shared in the US already around 1940. The differences in textual orientation in interpretation at the time of “The Intentional Fallacy” were not as great as the New Critics would like us to think, I will argue. To start with, many adherents of the standard model in the US in the first half of the twentieth century did not show the slightest doubt that the road to what the author intended leads through an area of very careful interpretation of the text itself. An early example can be found in the ideas of the already quoted Martin Wright Sampson of the University of Indiana. In 1895 he held that the literature curriculum at university should guarantee that students were taught “face to face with the work itself”, as opposed to “fill the student full of biography and literary history”. Important claims of New Criticism such as turning towards the text and turning away from the biography of the author were institutionalised already at the end of the nineteenth century (cf. Graff 2007, 123). The range of this consensus around 1946 can be demonstrated when taking a closer look at the criticism of Wimsatt and Beardsley directed against E.E. Stoll in “The Intentional Fallacy”. At the same time, this will illustrate how narrow the space was for alternative positionings of the New Critics concerning intention in interpretation.

As mentioned above, Wimsatt and Beardsley quote Stoll at the beginning of their essay with the question “Is not a critic [...] a judge, who does not explore his own consciousness, but determines the author’s meaning or intention, as if the poem were a will, a contract, or the constitution? The poem is not the critic’s own.” Arguing against this view, they write:

He has diagnosed very accurately two forms of irresponsibility, one which he prefers. Our view is yet different. 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. (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 470)

Stoll’s orientation towards the author that Wimsatt and Beardsley criticise as “irresponsibility” turns out from our perspective to be a variation of the standard model of interpretation. In the quoted essay (“The Tempest”) from *PMLA* from

1932 – of which only the quote above has made it into “The Intentional Fallacy” – Stoll argues *against* the claim that Shakespeare should have written *The Tempest* deliberately as his last play. Stoll summarises: “As for the play proper, apart from the objection that the interpretation does not fit the text, there is the other that it is alien from the spirit of Elizabethan popular drama, and of Shakespeare” (Stoll 1932, 704) – an exemplary illustration of the intentional unity of text, context and author, from our perspective. This concept of intentional unity is made even more explicit in the passage where Stoll argues against the many allegorical and symbolic interpretations of Prospero and Caliban: “And most of that we could have been spared if the critics had observed their primary, self-evident duty of regarding the author’s meaning, of reading the text” (Stoll 1932, 720). There is no doubt that the final aim of professional interpretation is the intention of the author. But it is as obvious that the only way to get there is a careful interpretation of the text under scrutiny. Especially this latter point is highlighted in many other parts of Stoll’s essay on *The Tempest*, for example in his claim that arguments for interpretations have to be found in the text itself: they should be “derived from the text” and not “imparted to it” (Stoll 1932, 699). Accordingly, Stoll criticises “the critic’s not reading but reading in” (Stoll 1932, 723). With regard to textual orientation in interpretation, there is hardly any difference to be found between Stoll and the New Critics.

The same goes for what Stoll calls “the insidious biographical fallacy” – that is, the idea that Prospero would stand for Shakespeare himself: “Most of us read biography rather than poetry, and if poetry, to find the poet” (Stoll 1932, 726). To avoid misunderstandings: this line is a criticism on those who read that way, and it is a criticism authored by Stoll. Stoll is not heading for biography, but for the literary text, and he is opposing those who do not understand how much more the professional reader can bring to light “in keeping not only with the man as we know him but with the poetry which is highest” (ibid.).

Yet, there can be no doubt that Stoll’s credo of textual scrutiny is situated within a model of intention that is close to the standard model, of which the final point of orientation is the intention of the author. Keeping that in mind, the quotes above show at the same time how limited Wimsatt’s and Beardsley’s room for manoeuvring and for distinction within the established concepts of authorial intention was. Seen from that point of view, only a radical turning away from any role or authority for authorial intention in the interpretation of literary texts is a viable route towards claiming clear differences with the professional establishment – of which E.E. Stoll was part. The place that René Wellek for example gives to Stoll (together with Joseph Warren Beach or Morris W. Croll) in his *History of Modern Criticism* is that of “conventional literary historians” – though they started daring to move in the 1920s “beyond strictly positivist academic

scholarship” (Wellek 1986, 68–70). But concerning textual orientation or highlighting the difference between character and author, there are no significant differences between the ideas of the New Critics and someone like Stoll.

It is against this background that Wimsatt and Beardsley’s radicalisation of Stoll’s warning for “biographical fallacy” must be placed: banning the author altogether from interpretation. Only when the author is not allowed to play any role in the interpretation of his texts, can the interpretative activities of Stoll and others become the target of *fundamental* criticism. If Wimsatt and Beardsley had instead situated themselves within the conceptual tradition of the “1838”-better-understanding – the only other possible route for distinction in terms of concepts of authorial intention in 1946 – this would have made a sharp distinction towards the established professional critics difficult. Someone who proposes reconstructing authorial intention as a necessary initial guideline in interpretation (followed by, under specific circumstances, an interpretation that understands the author better than he understood himself) should have regarded critical works like those of Stoll at least as a welcome first step. Consequently, setting aside Stoll’s view as an “irresponsibility” would have been impossible from a conceptual basis close to Schleiermacher’s “better understanding”. Looked at from this perspective, one can concede that there is quite some strategic plausibility in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s choice for the 1946-concept of intentional fallacy. But to what extent can this choice be analysed as institutionally functional?

The institutional context of literary scholarship in the US around 1946

The fight for positions within American academic literary criticism around the middle of the twentieth century has been analysed thoroughly among others by Gerald Graff in *Professing Literature. An Institutional History* from 1987 and in parts of the volume *Disciplining English. Alternative Histories, Critical Perspectives* (Shumway and Dionne 2002). Two factors are especially relevant. First, there is the increase in institutional autonomy of university departments since the founding of the first research university Johns Hopkins in 1876. This relative autonomy meant among others the right to make nominations for new appointments or promotions, propose new curricula etc. The sum of these institutional rights made departments enter into a competitive relationship with each other (cf. Shumway and Dionne 2002, 2–7). The rules of this fight for prestige and influence were shaped at the end of the nineteenth century in a way that still is at the heart of academia today.

Second, it must be highlighted that the number of literary departments at universities increased, as did the number of students and staff from around 1940 onward. The background was the rise in the overall numbers of students in higher education. From those who were formally entitled to visit a college, in 1900 only 4% actually did. In 1940 the rate had more than tripled (14%), only to rise further after a “quantum leap” to 40% in 1964 (Graff 2007, 155). Furthermore, in addition to the growth in numbers, the General Education Movement gave a new role and importance to the humanities, including literary studies, with its aims of compensating disciplinary specialisation and focusing on the canonised cultural heritage that should offer something of value to students and to society (Graff 2007, 162–179). The result was not only a growing number of appointments in the academic literary departments, but also a growing number of courses on modern literature in English (Graff 2007, 196 f.). To cut a long story short: at many English departments in the US around 1940 there were heavy fights going on for many new university jobs and for a new curriculum to match the numbers and demands of a vastly growing number of students (Williams 2002, 117–119).

This is, with very raw brushstrokes, the relevant context for the institutional consolidation and the strategic behaviour of the New Critics around 1940, when among others Ransom, Tate and Wimsatt attained their university appointments. Graff (2007, 153) states in this respect that “many of the first critics to achieve a foothold in the university did so on the strength of their poetry rather than their criticism”. With the effect that the newly appointed academics, once inside the institution, felt the pressure to develop scholarly activities alongside and in competition to those of the established staff which already “had established a certain conception of methodological rigor as a condition of professional respectability” (Graff 2007, 145). This competition was still on the mind of René Wellek in 1978: “I still remember vividly the acrimony of the conflict between criticism and literary history at the University of Iowa, where I was a member of the English Department from 1939 to 1946” (Wellek 1995, 59). In this context, the radical elimination of authorial intention in interpretation as “neither available nor desirable” is a formula with which the “critics” shared professional norms of “methodological rigor” with the establishment, combined them with a new model of intention in interpretation, and turned this formula against the established “scholars” (Williams 2002, 122; Graff 2007, 145–227). This competition took place in an arena that was filled “by a widespread desire at the time to bring the humanities within the epistemic authority of the sciences” (Altieri 2017, 191) – a desire that Wimsatt and Beardsley tried to match with their claim for “the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology or morals” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 470).

Intentional fallacy was functional in the academic setting in another way, too. As we have seen, the kind of radical textual orientation of the New Critics diminished the relevance of the author and his historical context – to say the least. The precondition for a professional academic way of dealing with literary texts therefore was no longer a long-term investment in accumulating historical-philological or biographical knowledge. Instead, the New Critics' approach promised that students – *and* newly appointed teachers – without much propaedeutic effort could become professional readers rather quickly, if they committed themselves to the methodological rigour of New Criticism. The concept of intentional fallacy with its methodological legitimization of leaving behind biographical and/or historical knowledge played a key role in that regard. Gerald Graff remembers:

It is also true that techniques of "close reading" were peculiarly suitable to the needs of an expanding American university in which literary works had to be taught to masses of undergraduates who knew little about their historical contexts, and often by instructors who knew only a bit more about those contexts. Speaking [...] of my own experience as a teaching assistant in the early 1960s, I noted that in these circumstances recourse to "the text itself" had been my salvation. (Graff 1995, 126; cf. Graff 2007, 179)

More theoretically speaking: the promise of a professional dealing with literature that could be systematically taught and learned served expectations of professionalisation directed towards technical control of teaching at universities, which can explain the success of text-centred close reading in many literary curricula in the second half of the twentieth century (cf. de Vriend 1996):

Institutionally, the move to 'criticism' and the methods of close reading offered a transferable technique for the newly expanded, post-World War II university, a technique that was far more amenable and adaptable pedagogically than the older, more cumbersome memory and fact-based model of historical scholarship and philology. (Williams 2002, 121)

A final institutional function of intentional fallacy relates to the professional publications of the New Critics: there is more space for new and original interpretations of canonical texts when one is not restricted by the normative orientation towards authorial intention and historical context, as in established scholarship. Highlighting the unique autonomy of the literary text itself also has the effect of opening up many more roads to interpretation that can be professionally regarded as legitimate (cf. Livingston 2008, 194). Along these roads, professional autonomy and institutional autonomy went hand in hand: "The autonomy that the New Critics ascribed to literature had been reproduced in the institutional autonomy of the English department" (Graff 1995, 126).

Summarising, one can claim that the “vastly different kind of criticism” Wimsatt and Beardsley aimed at was functional within the institutional context of substantial staff recruitment in the United States around 1946 in three regards: as facilitating a sharp distinction between traditional and historically-oriented, established competitors in the fight for academic positions in expanding universities; as a way of shaping a curriculum in times of mass universities that was up to date regarding autonomist conceptions of literature and ideas of controllable teachability; and finally as opening up a professional trajectory towards more, and more individual, legitimate interpretations of relevant texts. It does so by presenting itself as a break with established concepts of dealing with authorial intention in interpretation – primarily taking the standard model as its sparring partner.

Again, comparable to the launch of the better-understanding model at the beginning of the nineteenth century, intentional fallacy had its rise in an institutional context where the demand for professional critics was significantly growing and individual positionings of critics could be rewarded with unprecedented numbers of professional positions in academic institutions. Furthermore, the concept “intentional fallacy” was not only functional in the fight for positions, but also as a kind of trigger for increasing distinction between professional interpreters in terms of presenting original interpretations of texts. As such, it can be seen as the foundation of the wealth of professional interpretations of literary texts as we know them today, in academia, in schools and among readers that are not institutionally bound.

***Intentio operis* versus intentionalists**

The enormous impact of intentional fallacy is indicated, too, by the large number of scholars that use it in interpretation or in theoretical models, with more or less extensive adaptations. An influential example is Umberto Eco’s concept of *intentio operis* which basically shares with the concept of intentional fallacy the turning away from authorial intention. *Intentio operis* is a type of interpretation that starts from the premise that one has to look in the text for what it says, regardless of the possible intentions of its author or authors. More specifically, the professional interpreter looks at what the text says with regard to its own textual coherence and with regard to the systems of production of meaning on which it is based, its “original underlying signification system” (Eco 1994, 51). Eco develops this type of interpretation in distinction from two other types: *intentio auctoris* and *intentio lectoris*. *Intentio auctoris* implies to look in the text for what its author wanted to say, *intentio lectoris* to look in the text for what the

reader wants to find by virtue of his own systems of expectations, wishes, preferences etc. (cf. Eco 1994, 50–52). This classification, however, is not a neutral typology. It is *intentio operis* that Eco as a semiotician regards as the adequate concept of interpretation for professional readers:

A text is a device conceived in order to produce its Model Reader. I repeat that this reader is not the one who makes the ‘only right’ conjecture. A text can foresee a Model Reader entitled to try infinite conjectures. The empirical reader is only an actor who makes conjectures about the kind of Model Reader postulated by the text. Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a Model Reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the Model Reader consists in figuring out a Model Author that is not the empirical one and that, at the end, coincides with the intention of the text. (Eco 1994, 58f.)

For Eco, intention is an effect that is produced by reading a text professionally. This textual strategy is applied without any reference to the author of flesh and blood and his intentions. Such a view probably would have found the acknowledgment of Wimsatt and Beardsley – if not terminologically, then at least conceptually.

Eco’s model is exemplary for the claim that many theoretical models of interpretation from the last decennia of the twentieth century turn away from the “concrete” or “empirical” author. As further examples one could think of Wayne Booth’s “implied author” (Booth 1961) or Wolf Schmid’s “abstract author” (*abstrakter Autor*; Schmid 1973). Despite the ongoing debates about these models and their shortcomings (cf. Nünning 1993; Kindt and Müller 2006), one aspect is beyond dispute in professional interpretation: that both concepts, implied and abstract author, try to do without the author as a historically situated individual. Both concepts are used to talk about literary works on a level that is different from that of the concrete author, since what professional critics should do, is interpret the text. Seen from this perspective, the allies of intentional fallacy can for example be found in large parts of the German *werkimmanente Methode*, the reader-response-criticism along the lines of Wolfgang Iser, structuralist approaches such as those of Michael Titzmann or empirical literary scholars such as S.J. Schmidt. There is one thing all these methods of interpretation and many others since the second half of the twentieth century do not do: focus on historically embedded authorial intention, be it as an overall goal or only as a primary step. Authorial intention is not or hardly relevant in interpretations in the wake of the approaches named above.

At the same time, the huge impact of intentional fallacy can also be gleaned from the number of its opponents. One of the fiercest is E.D. Hirsch Jr who articulated his views most elaborately in *Validity in Interpretation* from 1967 and *The Aims of Interpretation* from 1976. Comparable to Wimsatt, Beardsley, Eco and

many others, Hirsch departs from the idea that in principle the professional reader can choose whether his interpretation should be directed towards authorial intention or not. But the choice that Hirsch makes is one against “the theory of semantic autonomy”: “The reader should try to reconstruct authorial meaning, and he can in principle succeed in his attempt” (Hirsch 1976, 8). At the core of his theoretical effort to unravel the “faultiness of arguments” of his adversaries is his conviction that the saying of a text “has no determinate existence but must be the saying of the author or a reader” (Hirsch 1967, 13). For Hirsch, meaning is always “an affair of consciousness and not of physical signs or things”. This makes it an affair of “persons”, i.e. an affair of an author and a reader (1967, 23): “A text can represent only the *parole* of a speaker or author, which is another way of saying that meaning requires a meaner” (1967, 234). And the intention of this meaner is the only valid foundation of interpretations (in the sense of “objective probability judgments”), because for Hirsch, there is only one interpretive problem that “can be answered with objectivity: ‘What, in all probability, did the author mean to convey?’” (Hirsch 1967, 207). The foundation for this theoretical argument, in the end, is an ethical one according to Hirsch:

an interpreter, like any other person, falls under the basic moral imperative of speech, which is to respect an author’s intention. That is why, in ethical terms, original meaning is the ‘best meaning’. (Hirsch 1976, 92)

For his argument, Hirsch not only uses Wimsatt and Beardsley as sparring partners, but also more recent theorists such as Jacques Derrida whose approach, not surprisingly after the quotes above, he also rejects – I will come to Derrida soon. But first I will turn to an important ally for Hirsch: Friedrich Schleiermacher (cf. Hirsch 1967, 199 – 209 et passim). Hirsch is especially interested in those parts of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics in which he pleads for the reconstruction of authorial intention:

His preference for original meaning over anachronistic meaning is ultimately an ethical choice. I would confidently generalize from this example to assert that the normative dimension of interpretation is always in the last analysis an ethical dimension. (Hirsch 1976, 77)

Hirsch’s position within our typology can be most easily characterised in a negative way: it is clearly opposed to intentional fallacy. Positively speaking, the characterisation is more complicated. Hirsch uses Schleiermacher primarily as an advocate for the standard model: a hermeneutically and historically convincing reconstruction of authorial intention. For Hirsch’s position in the 1960s –

after Wimsatt and Beardsley's intentional fallacy and directed against it – this highlighting of authorial intention has been his primary concern, less so Schleiermacher's ideas on transgression of authorial intention. Consequently, nowhere in his books does Hirsch mention Schleiermacher's formula "to understand the text at first as well and then even better than its author" (qtd. from Mueller-Vollmer 2006, 83) – a formula that only could have been integrated into Hirsch's attack on intentional fallacy and other theories of "semantic autonomy" with difficulty. Only shades of such a conception can be discovered, usually in footnotes. I am thinking here of what Hirsch calls "the human author's willed meaning": if a professional critic remains within the boundaries of this "willed meaning", then his interpretation may go beyond what the author "consciously intends", and he stills acts ethically responsibly "so long as it remains within his willed type" (Hirsch 1967, 126).

Whom Hirsch does quote, though, is Kant with the same expression on understanding Plato better that he understood himself (cf. Hirsch 1967, 19–22). This leads Hirsch to the conclusion: "It is not possible to mean what one does not mean, though it is very possible to mean what one is not conscious of meaning" (Hirsch 1967, 22). A conclusion that seems to leave the critic primarily on the level of correcting inconsistencies or maybe even errors, while supposing that the author would approve in retrospect. The quote is another indication that Hirsch, typologically speaking, is close to the standard model of authorial intention. But, as mentioned before, in one respect Hirsch differs fundamentally from the standard model *and* from Schleiermacher's model: he recognises the possibility as fact that professional readers are *not* aiming for authorial intention – and then argues against making this choice, due to reasons of validity of interpretation and due to ethics. For the standard model and for Schleiermacher, there was no such choice.

This conscious choice from a number of competing options can be found by most participants in the modern debate. Hirsch's specific choice for authorial intention is not exceptional, at least not in the American context where the most recent branches of the concept run under the labels of hypothetical intentionalism and actual intentionalism. This is not the place to go into a very detailed discussion of different subdivisions such as extreme actual intentionalism, modest actual intentionalism, postulated author hypothetical intentionalism or actual author hypothetical intentionalism (cf. Irvin 2006; Irwin 2015), since this book aims at reconstructing major conceptual turning points, as was stated in the introduction. It may suffice to say here that adherents to actual and hypothetical intentionalism want to reconstruct the intentions of the author as an individual who is bound in history, in so far as these intentions are realised in the text. But there is at least one significant difference between both approaches: actual in-

tentionalism considers it reasonable to make use of sources such as private documents, diaries or retrospective remarks of the author that were not available for the informed contemporary readers (cf. Davies 2006, 229; Kindt and Köppe 2010, 221). This would sound compelling to E.D. Hirsch, for example, who together with scholars like Gary Iseminger (1996) can be situated under this label. For hypothetical intentionalism from William Tolhurst to Jerrold Levinson, however, the kind of evidence just mentioned would be a no go: they do not aim at “utterer’s meaning” but at “utterance meaning”. Accordingly, the author’s intention is “such intention as optimally *hypothesized*, given all the resources available to us in the work’s internal structure and the relevant surrounding context of creation, in all its legitimately invoked specificity” (Levinson 1992, 224).

At first glance, this quote comes very close to what has been described above as the standard model of authorial intention. But from the whole of Levinson’s argument, it is clear that he also argues for cases in which the professional reader can go beyond that standard model, i.e. cases in which the scholar reconstructs interpretations “*justified* with respect to a given historically positioned work, although not *accessible* to its author”:

Such perspectives might be considered justified, and thus the aspects of the work they revealed part of its literary content, if they can be shown to be rooted, abstractly or embryonically, in the concerns of the historically constructable author. (Levinson 1992, 231)

In the end, hypothetical intentionalism is typologically closest to the Schleiermacher model of better understanding of the author, with an emphasis on the professional possibility to go beyond actual authorial intention. Reconstructing the intention of the biographical author would then be at most a first step – while the hierarchy in the concepts of Hirsch or Iseminger is definitely different, with the intention of the actual author taking centre stage.

What both kinds of intentionalism – despite all their differences – have in common is that (1) the reconstruction of authorial intention is the primary goal of interpretation. At the same time, (2) both do not regard conscious authorial intention as a fixed boundary that must not be transgressed in interpretation, while in this regard the space that hypothetical intentionalism claims for its professional interpretive activities is broader (more the “1838”-type; see Chapter Four) than the one actual intentionalism claims (more the Kant type, see Chapter Four). Finally, (3) both strands are conscious of and in debate with competing contemporary concepts of intention that deny the relevance of authorial intention.

The last two points can be used to describe the difference with regard to the seminal views of Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels on authorial inten-

tion. Their article “Against Theory” from 1982, reprinted several times, influenced large parts of the American discussion on intention at the end of the twentieth century, holding that “the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning” (Knapp and Michaels 1992, 51) – contributing to Stanley Fish’s move away from anti-intentionalism to a view very similar to the one defended by Knapp and Michaels (cf. Fish 1989, 116–119). But in their view, and in opposition to Hirsch and others, this is not a choice between either going for authorial intention *or* for the intention as reconstructed from the text, as already their title (“Against theory”) indicates. They hold that the idea of a possible choice itself is the source of many misguided discussions:

The mistake made by theorists has been to imagine the possibility or desirability of moving from one term (the author’s intended meaning) to a second term (the text’s meaning), when actually the two terms are the same. One can neither succeed nor fail in deriving one term from the other, since to have one is already to have them both ... (Knapp and Michaels 1992, 51)

In other words, Knapp and Michaels articulate a modern version of what our typology has described as the standard model of authorial intention. What was the only concept of intention in interpretation available until the end of the eighteenth century obviously does not disappear when its undisputed dominance ends. What happens instead is that the possibilities for taking a position with regard to the role of intention in interpretation structurally only seem to show one tendency: addition. What has once been established by scholarly discourse, remains in principle on the table. This holds for the standard model, but also for the “1838”-model, for the radical version of intentional fallacy from 1946, and for the variations on these models. The range of possible choices grows, as does, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, the scholarly consciousness of this very space of choices – even if the legitimacy of this space is explicitly denied by some, as Knapp and Michaels do at the end of their argument in which they have previously engaged with the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur and with Wimsatt and Beardsley’s intentional fallacy.

Poststructuralism and intentionality

As we have seen, the impact of the concept of intentional fallacy from 1946 can hardly be overestimated. Therefore it comes as no surprise that its traces can be found in one of the most important developments in literary theory of the last decades: poststructuralism. These traces will be used as a starting point to discuss in rough lines the poststructural concept of intention in interpretation.

In *Blindness and Insight* (1971), the Flemish literary theorist from Yale and leading figure of American deconstructivism, Paul de Man, pays quite some attention to New Criticism. When taking stock of New Criticism and of its shortcomings, de Man especially looks at intentional fallacy because this concept, “better than any other, delimits the horizon within which this criticism has operated” (de Man 1971, 24). De Man’s conclusion is that the failure of New Criticism – which has not produced “works of major magnitude” according to him – “is due to its lack of awareness of the intentional structure of literary form” (de Man 1971, 27). In order to understand the argument, a little detour is necessary.

What is *not* the problem of New Criticism is its autonomist poetic preference (“most legitimate in itself”) nor its opposition towards authorial intention in interpretation, which also for de Man would be an “intrusion of crude deterministic systems, historical or psychological” in interpretation (de Man 1971, 24). De Man is convinced that “the relationship of the particular state of mind of the person engaged in the act of structurization to the structured object is altogether contingent” (de Man 1971, 25). Nothing meaningful can be said about the relationship between what the producer of the work of art wanted, on the one hand, and the artwork itself on the other. What is the problem, then? The mistake of New Criticism, according to de Man, is that Wimsatt and Beardsley, after having liberated the poem from authorial intention, have made the poem itself a thing, a “natural object”:

This is to ignore that the concept of intentionality is neither physical nor psychological in its nature, but structural, involving the activity of a subject regardless of its empirical concerns, except as far as they relate to the intentionality of the structure. (de Man 1971, 25)

Wimsatt and Beardsley got stuck half way in their liberation effort, because they made the poem into a kind of author substitute, one could reformulate this point. In doing so, they neglect the kind of structural intentionality that is key to the confrontation of language with the reader, regardless of the (im-)possible intentions of either the empirical author *or* the text in front of us.

What is mentioned here by de Man in direct polemics with the concept of intentional fallacy, is articulated more elaborately elsewhere by, among others, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida – comparable at least in terms of their vision on intentionality. The common ground can be identified with regard to two aspects: the views on the subject of utterance and on the context. Without any claim to do justice to the complexity of these topics in the thoughts of those mentioned, I will restrict myself to the relevance for the argument developed here.

A radically different view on subjectivity from that which we have encountered so far plays a central role in Julia Kristeva's often quoted, translated and reprinted essay "Bachtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman" from 1967, originally published in the journal *Critique* and translated into English as "Word, dialogue, novel" (Kristeva 1980). In that article, departing from Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, she develops her concept of intertextuality in which the author is removed from the centre of the processes that generate meaning. Authors are regarded as nodes in the web of texts, with as a result for each author that "he himself is no more than a text rereading itself as it rewrites itself" (Kristeva 1980, 87). When, from this perspective, all texts are "constructed as a mosaic of quotations" (Kristeva 1980, 66), a dynamic relationship *between texts* is put centre stage, replacing a dynamic relationship *between subjects*. In other words: intertextuality replaces intersubjectivity, and intentionality dissolves in a discourse that becomes "double" in the sense of an intrusion of history into the text and of the text into history. The consequence of this ambiguity resulting from Kristeva's broad notion of intertextuality is an infinite number of relations and combinations of meanings. This explosion of historically and textually marked meanings cannot be controlled. Therefore, the author and his intention migrate to the margins of this process, as does the text itself and its intentional dimension in so far it is conceived as a possible limitation of that process or as a kind of substitute for the author.

The same marginalisation of the author can be found in Roland Barthes' short essay "The Death of the Author" from the same year. In his article Barthes also attacks an outdated concept of authorship which neither from a systematic nor from a historical perspective was adequate, since the focus in the construction of meaning should be on the reader. When the author is dead, then he is first of all dead as subject of the production of meaning – not to mention his insignificance for the process of interpretation (cf. Barthes 1967). At least on this point there is a parallel, despite all differences, with the marginalisation of the author in Foucault's lecture "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" from 1969 (Foucault 1980). What Foucault calls in his discourse analysis the "author function", is also based on the "disappearance" and the "recent absence" of the author – resulting in a "plurality of egos" in which the author and his intention are just fragments in the discursive processes Foucault analyses:

The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities which give rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence. (Foucault 1980, 123)

This death of the author at the end of the 1960s has been spreading massively in literary criticism and philosophical debates. When at the beginning of the twenty-first century Jason Holt claims that the ideas of Barthes and Foucault, roughly outlined above, are still “largely defensible” (Holt 2002, 76), then he is more the exception though in comparison to the other contributions in the volume with the telling title *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?* (Irwin 2002). Book titles such as *Death and Return of the Author* (Burke 2004), *Rückkehr des Autors* (Jannidis et al. 1999) or *The Empty Cage: Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author* (Benedetti 2005) indicate that Barthes’ catchy phrasing in any case has put its mark on many discussions well into the new millennium, comparable to the impact of the concept of intentional fallacy.

Even without going into detail, it should be clear by now that from the perspective of the present book, around 1967 we have arrived at a new type of intentionality and at another break within the history of the concept of intention in interpretation. While intentional fallacy initially was about a radical turning away from the author as an authority in the interpretation of texts, the “death of the author” *sensu* Barthes and others addresses an even more radical dismissal of the author: not only with regard to the interpretation of his texts, but also with regard to their production. The Samuel Beckett quote at the opening and at the end of Foucault’s argument in 1969 claims exemplarily: “What matter who’s speaking?” (Foucault 1980, 115, 138). That indifference with regard to the author as producer of texts is not what we have found in New Criticism. At the same time, fundamental questions regarding the role of the subject in the process of production of meaning were not what New Criticism was about. But this is definitely the case in poststructuralism. Mieke Bal for example holds from the perspective of psychoanalysis:

Intentionality is at odds with psychoanalysis, which theorizes the conflicts and countercurrents within the subject that makes intention ambiguous. [...] More generally, the discovery of the unconscious complicated the very notion of intention. (Bal 1992, 367)

Questions about the subject and subjectivity in language and in other actions are key to poststructuralism. Because he no longer believes in the human subject as a relevant source for language utterances, the poststructuralist scholar shifts his attention towards the analysis of language processes, towards their production of hierarchies and to what they exclude. The author disappears not only as a relevant point of reference for the interpretation of the text but also as its producer – which is, from our perspective, what the metaphor of the death of the author is about.

Concerning the second aspect of the poststructuralist concept of intentionality in interpretation – context – I even can be briefer. Derrida's presentation of language utterings as being structurally exposed to infinite new contextualisations is fundamental for poststructural thinking. This concept of an unsaturable context is maybe less appealing for being picked up in discursive adaptations than the death of the author is, but it points in the same direction. Its most seminal explication can be found in Jacques Derrida's manifesto lecture "Signature Event Context" from 1971, that was reprinted and reworked several times. The relevant point of Derrida's philosophy for the present book is his concept of *différance*, "the irreducible absence of intention or attendance to the performative utterance" (Derrida 1993, 18 f.). This implies, among other things, that writing is not "the means of transference of meaning, the exchange of intentions and meanings [*vouloir dire*]" but "dissemination": a permanent splitting up of meanings that neither text nor author can limit or control since it is "absolutely illimitable" (Derrida 1993, 20 f.). This "structural non-saturation" of the sign and the text is based on "a force that breaks with its context [*force de rupture*]" of production and reception within language (Derrida 1993, 9). Because every written sign, text or part of a text is permanently placed into new contexts and itself came about in this very same process, meaning cannot be put on hold. Instead, a permanent release of new possible meanings is achieved.

As mentioned before, this rudimentary presentation of a very dense text has only one goal: to make plausible that for poststructuralism, intention is no longer relevant – neither for the production of texts nor for their interpretation. For poststructuralists, writing is not an "exchange of intentions". Nevertheless, in the analysis of dissemination, the concept of intention will not completely melt away into thin air: "it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance [*l'énonciation*]" (Derrida 1993, 18). Where exactly that place will be, however, is not as clear as its rejection and marginalisation in poststructuralism. What should be clear by now, though, is that poststructuralists defend a concept of intentionality and authorial intention that fundamentally differs from the types of concepts reconstructed so far. Its "place" in the margins of the production of meaning primarily must be characterised as the theoretical foundation for an exponential growth of new and divergent readings. François Cusset coined in this regard the metaphor of a "theoretical libido" in order to legitimate today's poststructuralism as part of

the ancestral prostitution of texts, their flirtatious glances moving along the sidewalks of history, seductions all the more promising in that they escape the control of their pathetic pimps, their official heirs, or their scholastic exegetes. (Cusset 2008, 338)

This is not the place to discuss the historicity of the vehicles of the metaphor, phrased in 2003, nor to discuss that this “*erotics* of thought, wayward and unpredictable” (Cusset 2008, 337f.) is as well a description of the object of Cusset’s study as the programme of the intellectual historian Cusset himself. What is relevant for the argument developed here, though, is the tenor of the metaphor. This tenor – “the issue” in terms of Cusset – is poststructuralism’s (and Cusset’s) aiming at

a lawless zone between the original appraisers of meaning and future owners, a zone formed completely of interstices, within which, far from the guardians of the Work, texts themselves will be put to work. (Cusset 2008, 338)

In other words: interpretation based on the poststructuralist conception of intention takes the evasion from control and limitation as its point of departure and as its overarching goal at the same time.

Some aspects of the institutional context of poststructuralism

This new type of legitimating interpretations grounded on the poststructuralist idea of intentionality was institutionally functional in a way similar to what was argued above in this chapter with regard to New Criticism. Speaking in terms of competition within an academic context, the poststructural concept of intentionality in interpretation could be used to present oneself as an academic with an up-to-date methodological rigour unprecedented until then (1); it could be systematically taught and learned at universities to every student willing to embark on it, without special preconditions in terms of knowledge or otherwise (2); it offered a professional trajectory opening up new space for original professional interpretation and positioning (3). These parallels come as no surprise, since the foundation for the institutional competitive surrounding at the end of the 1960s had been laid way before, as we saw above.

However, there is one crucial difference. While New Criticism was an answer to “the pedagogical need spurred by the massive infusion of new students into the post-World War II university”, poststructuralist theory rather “responded to the research needs” (Williams 2002, 121). According to Jeffrey Williams, in times “of fattened research dollars, Theory provided literature departments with a high-tech research agenda” (ibid). But that can be only part of the explanation, since for example narratology could have offered something similar around the same time, at least in terms of highly specialised terminological dif-

ferentiation and formalisation. What the sophisticated theoretical approach of poststructuralism offered on top was the promise of a break with the whole of the philosophical tradition since Plato and Aristotle (Derrida 1978). This included of course a radical break with all competing concepts in terms of intention and interpretation. What poststructuralism stood for was a new stage in offering theory from specialists in the humanities for specialists in the humanities.

On top of this, the theoretical design allowed in an unprecedented way for an unlimited and unlimitable (at least not by any reference to the author, his historical context or any other extra-theoretical authority) expansion of diverging interpretive statements within the discipline. What sophisticated terms and concepts such as “différance”, “dissemination” or “force de rupture” have in common is the very principle of “structural non-saturation”. This is constitutive not only for language and linguistic objects, but also for the work of the poststructural interpreter himself. While interpretations in the wake of Schleiermacher or New Criticism would hold also that there can be no fixation of meaning and that the interpreter will always be facing a vanishing point on the horizon moving away as he approaches, poststructuralism disembarks from this very idea of a journey towards some point by declaring language and meaning as “absolutely illimitable” – as are poststructural interpretations, giving way to a potential explosion of theory-based divergent readings of texts and other cultural products. The next level of the dispersion of legitimate interpretations is reached.

Finally, the theoretical focus *and* the rise of poststructuralism must be seen against the backdrop of the *decreasing* enrolments in the humanities studies and liberal arts colleges in the US in the 1970s. Courses in literature “were being chosen less and less, except when they ‘technicalized’ their program” – and, one may add, technicalised it with a completely new theoretical and international mindset – for which many of them turned to French Theory (cf. Cusset 2008, 46f.). By the same token, the poststructurally informed humanities in the “university of excellence” offered a framework that attracted students to feminist studies, to “research on ethnic or sexual minorities”, to “critique of ideology” and “the new discourses of opposition” – a very functional tool in a system of vast competition for students and research funding: “For it was necessary to develop the products that would sell best” (Cusset 2008, 45). Poststructuralism with its paradigmatic questioning of hidden power relations in language and society was actually a perfect methodological ally for “discourses of opposition” of any kind. In a time of intensified competition for the best students it did not aim at the masses, but especially at those critical towards authorities and tradition, contributing in turn again to the image of theoretical avant-garde and cutting edge specialism.

Summarising our argument so far, this study has reconstructed for the last 200 years a dynamics that gradually shifts authorial intention from the centre to the margins of the process of interpretation. What started at the beginning of the nineteenth century with a limited possibility for professional literary critics to go beyond authorial intention in some cases (on the basis of authorial intention as a necessary first step), turned around 1946, in the radical version of intentional fallacy, into a principled dismissal of the author as an authority in the interpretation of texts (while keeping alive the author as an authority for the production of his texts). Around 1967, even the relevance of the author for the production of utterings – including literary texts – is denied, let alone his relevance for interpretation. The author vanishes into the margins of infinite processes of language production and of the splitting up of meanings. To phrase the same observation differently: the professional behaviour of critics within our typology shows two norms in its development which are intertwined in an inversely proportional relationship, with poststructuralism at its extreme poles. On the one hand, there is a structural growth in the range of legitimate possibilities to present new professional interpretations of texts, while on the other hand there is a structural decline in the force of authorial intention to limit the number of legitimate interpretations, up to a point where the author is declared dead, in reception as well as in the production of literary texts.

This dynamics seems to have been fuelled over the last 200 years primarily by university scholars. Focussing more specifically the two types discussed in this chapter, there seems to be an acceleration of the introduction of new types. While the standard model had to wait some 2,300 years before being conceptually challenged at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the next coup was staged already about 140 years later, and between 1946 and 1967 lies only one generation. This acceleration can be taken to indicate an increasingly intense fight between growing numbers of competitors for positions at universities, legitimised in the humanities among other things with new concepts of intention and interpretation. The radical dismissal of conceptual predecessors in terms of intention that the last two types – New Criticism and poststructuralism – betrayed, points in the same direction of increasing pressure for strategic position taking within the academic part of the literary field, which has come to distribute a substantial amount of symbolic and economic capital.

Let me finish this chapter with a last speculative remark concerning the inversely proportional relationship mentioned above, which drives at the same time towards maximising the freedom for the professional interpreter, and towards minimising the role of the author in interpretation. Maybe a sidestep first: as we have seen, poststructuralism marks the far end of our typology in terms of a minimum of limiting force for the author. Imagining now, this book

would have been written some years before 1967, say in 1962, and it would have arrived at establishing a typology with three types of intention in interpretation until that year, exactly as reconstructed above. Would it then have been possible to predict in broad strokes which conceptual void left by the typology probably would have been filled with the next conceptual innovation concerning intention and interpretation: marginalising the author as the producer of texts? Assuming the inversely proportional dynamics reconstructed here, that was the last resort of the author with regard to his role in professional interpretation within the possible positions available. In other words, in the mid-1960s the space for possible positions left no other options for a rhetoric of radically breaking with the past in the domain of intention and interpretation than transferring the author to the margins of the process of producing meaning. But, as always, that is easy to say for those who know what actually happened. More interesting than this retrospective speculation therefore should be a prospective one.

If the typology reconstructed here and its underlying dynamics is appropriate, then poststructuralism marks the far end of a development reconstructed in the chapters of this book, as we have seen. On this foundation, I would claim that there is no space left for launching a radically new conceptual type of intention in interpretation in the years to come. If that is so, this would mean that the debate reconstructed here has reached a point where only conceptual relaunches and combinations are to be expected. The relative calming of the debate in the last decennia in literary studies, in connection with now already almost three generations of scholars since 1967 without such a radically new type, might be taken as pointing in the same direction. It seems as if the debate on intention and interpretation has lost its productivity for taking positions that do away with all or most of the predecessors. The interesting dimension of this speculation, if any, then, is that it can be proven wrong by literary studies in the years to come.

Whatever the result, the reconstruction of intention and interpretation from a historical perspective has reached a point now where the discipline literary studies itself has come into sight. But before exploring this line of thought further, and in order to be able to sharpen it, I will contrast the results so far from an interdisciplinary angle with what was already touched upon above in several places: intention in jurisprudence and legal interpretation.

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