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A preliminary theory of literary valuing

In the preceding chapter, I argued that literary value – in the guise of the 'ghost of judgment' – continues to serve as the structuring centre of Chaucer studies. But rather than offer an explanation for what constitutes literary value in that context, I suspended the question in favour of the pragmatic option of conceiving literary value 'first as a placeholder in an institutionalised system of scholarship and teaching, prior to whatever content this placeholder may contain'. This was in fact a strategic suspension of the question in addition to a merely convenient one. For I will argue in this chapter that this manner of approaching the problem of literary value, with some elaboration, provides an alternative to the dialectical ping-pong match between the antithetical (which is to say, complementary) approaches that, as I mentioned in this book's introduction, characterises much of the Anglo-American treatment of the problem over the last several decades. After describing these approaches with some additional detail, I will suggest – without thereby derogating them – what both exclude and hence the rationale for developing an alternative. I will then attempt a systematic definition of this alternative, a theory of literary valuing that I call 'preliminary' because the relatively scanty definition that I provide is rather more along the lines of a schema than a full-blown theory. But it will serve, I hope, to anchor the chapters that follow and connect them back to the first chapter's initial pedagogical conundrum and the issues that it raises.

To summarise this preliminary theory succinctly, if at this point necessarily with some obscurity, this approach to the problem of literary value is pragmatic in orientation and takes as its basis the evident, pervasive valuing of literature that occurs – as recognised

at the end of the previous chapter – both inside and outside of the academy. It understands literary value as emerging by means of an activity coextensive with its conception as a quality, an activity performed by actors within a network that shapes all individual instances and an activity that is a social fact integral to the phenomenon of the literary and yet – as also recognised at the end of the previous chapter – neither singular nor necessarily stable in character. This approach seeks to offer a middle way of conceptualising literary value that escapes some of the difficulties of existing approaches and that may also, as I will explore in the next chapter, eventuate in a framework for the study of literature – of any historical period, in any of its myriad facets – that recognises the centrality of value but does not in itself predetermine a specific attitude toward value, even though some such attitude is in practice ultimately inevitable.

Such an inclusive framework will necessarily be a rather abstract one, and thus much of what follows may seem far removed from the sort of actual critical and pedagogical practices that informed the preceding chapter. To help clarify this framework's application here at the outset, then, let me briefly situate it in relation to an example of my own critical practice, which will serve as an illustration of one of the common stumbles provoked by literary value. In particular, as I argued in Chapter 1, the continued operation of literary value within critical approaches that otherwise disclaim or simply ignore it may manifest as conceptual lacunae. One such lacuna resides within my 2007 study of fifteenth-century English poetry, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt*. Presented as an exploration of how a commingling of poetry and politics altered the form, transmission and conception of English literature at the very moment in which a self-conscious tradition of this literature was emergent, this study – as typical of historicist approaches – seeks to adopt a kind of aesthetic agnosticism about its subject poems. Yet the book is nonetheless manifestly a reclamation project of the most aesthetically denigrated poetry in English literary history, and consequently it is rife with such crypto-evaluative assertions as 'mid-century Lydgatean poets are not opportunistic mindless imitators, but rather discover … a powerful strategy with which (or against which) to position themselves in respect to their particular historical circumstances'.[1] That there is an implicit argument about literary value in such statements, one which never receives full articulation,

is evident in some of the reviews of the book, which find precisely this implicit – and hence undefended – argument the most difficult aspect of it to accept.[2] By not articulating the evaluative assumptions upon which, despite its putative historicist neutrality, the book depends, I left myself open to critique on traditional aesthetic grounds for which I offered no replacement.

As with my pedagogical bad faith that prompted the preceding chapter, I am vain enough to believe that this conceptual and methodological gap is not merely the result of my own incompetence but rather more generally symptomatic of the problematic status of literary value in the field. This chapter, then, along with the next, seeks to provide a framework for understanding and responding to this gap. The previous chapter, in 'conceiving' of value as a 'placeholder', insinuated a fuller account of literary value, one that would take exactly this suspension of 'content' as its point of departure. In this chapter, I will seek to elucidate how content is an effect of action: acts of valuing are the condition of an actor's registering of a text as literary, whether that actor is a critic, an edition, a poet or any number of other mediators of value. The next chapter will explore, among other things, how a specification of the relations among such valuing actors is what may both fill the evaluative lacunae in studies like *Poetry and Power* and reconcile disparate literary critical efforts.

Ontology and genealogy

In this book's introduction, I described how, since about the mid-1990s, numerous studies have been devoted toward countering what they perceive as diminishment within the field of literary studies of the emphasis, or even merely attention, given to a distinctive literary, to literary value or to the aesthetic. To cite just one relatively recent example, Charles Altieri positions his 2015 book-length study against those who 'tried to align literary studies with the disciplinary focus of various social sciences', thereby seeking to preserve 'some of the discipline's traditional emphases on close reading but focus those skills on practical rather than aesthetic concerns'. He claims, 'One would be hard pressed to find in elite programs of literary study even two younger critics concentrating

on aesthetic values or even the importance of the plural, contemplative sympathies traditionally characteristic of aesthetic attitudes.' In contradistinction, Altieri's book builds a case – primarily by way of Wittgenstein – for the value of a distinctive literary, one that answers such questions as, 'How can we treat literature as both a distinctive cultural enterprise and one that is arguably central to the quality of social life for everyone, or at least potentially central for enough people that this would make a substantial difference in the quality of collective life?'[3] And in his final chapter, 'Appreciating Appreciation', this emphasis on the value of literature as a category entails prescriptive reflections on the value of valuing particular literary works.

What advocates for literary value such as Altieri, those mentioned in my introduction and many others share – despite sometimes stark differences in theoretical affiliation and sophistication, generic and period focus, nature of argument and intended readership – is the tendency to conceive of value as some kind of historical constant, even if – as for those influenced by Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* – that constant is in fact the multi-temporal dynamic of history itself. From his reading of Adorno, for example, E. Dean Kolbas concludes that the value of literature (and art in general) resides in its 'unique cognitive content, its capacity for being a valid form of *knowledge*, revealing certain historical truths about this world that other forms of knowledge, such as scientific or empirical forms, either inherently cannot provide or would approach in qualitatively different ways'.[4] Derek Attridge, guided more by Derrida and Levinas than the Frankfurt School, arrives at a similar conclusion:

> the revelation [provoked by the introduction of 'otherness into the field of the same' by literature or art in general] of the hidden costs of a culture's stability, the bringing to fruitfulness of seeds that had lain dormant, the opening-up of possibilities that had remained closed, is – however risky – a good in itself, particularly when the process is a continuous one, allowing no permanent settling of norms and habits, and therefore no single structure of dominance and exclusion.[5]

In all such views, literary value – whether conceived of as a quality of a text or, more commonly, of the experience of apprehending a text – maintains a basic character regardless of its specific contexts. Although it would be an overstatement thus to denote this entire

diverse body of advocacy as essentialist or universalist (despite some instances that are indeed one or both of these), as a whole it does display a tendency in this direction. For convenience, therefore, I will group these studies together under the label *ontological*, by which I do not mean to connote any specific philosophical orientation but simply to indicate their common tendency to focus on what the value of literature *is* more so than how it has been *made*.

The converse, antithetical or complementary tendency to this one, as I described in the introduction, is that which initially emerged in the aftermath of the 1970s canon debates as a critique of the presumed literary value of canonical texts and that persists in various forms to the present, sometimes in direct confrontation with the ontological tendency. For example, in a 2005 essay John Frow asserts,

> Any attempt now to define the literary as a universal or unitary phenomenon necessarily fails to account for the particular institutional conditions of existence which underpin its assumptions, and falls thereby into the fetishism of a culture of social distinction and of the marketing regime which it supports.[6]

What studies such as Frow's share with later and earlier ones[7] is an anti-essentialist orientation to literary value and an interest in disclosing the elements with which and mechanisms by which value is constructed. As different as their focuses, methods and conclusions may be, as a group they emphasise the constructedness, relativity and instrumentality of literary value. Despite these studies' diversity (and, indeed, outright antagonism in some cases), I name their common tendency *genealogical*, by which I do not so much mean to invoke Foucault as simply to signal an emphasis on how literary value is *made* prior to considering what it *is*.

This characterisation of these two tendencies in treatments of literary value is likely familiar, as what I have denominated *ontological* and *genealogical* correspond in general ways to more elaborated and theorised label pairs proposed in surveys covering similar critical terrain. They more-or-less align, for example, with Steven Connor's *absolutist* and *relativist*, Peter McDonald's *enchanted anti-essentialist* and *skeptical anti-essentialist*, Rita Felski's *theological* and *ideological* and John Fekete's 'post-Marxist, post-Existentialist' and 'neopragmatist post-liberal'.[8] Indeed, at the

most reductive level, one may see in the tension within each pair the ancient debate between the claims of the timeless and the time-bound – and this point underscores what I hope has been evident in my description of the ontological and genealogical approaches as *tendencies* rather than separate pigeon holes into which studies may be sorted *in extenso*.[9] For inasmuch as all accounts concern them-selves in some fashion with both the timeless and the time-bound, they display both tendencies, albeit (obviously) to varying degrees. Hence, for example, George Levine, in an appreciative response to a nuanced ontological case put forward by Satya Mohanty, reluctantly demurs from full acceptance, remaining 'in the bind of constructionism, relativism, skepticism'. Yet he concludes by advo-cating a kind of semi-disenchanted Kantianism, a valorisation of 'the particular and embattled but disinterested space that art and the beautiful occupy in our cultures'.[10] And to formulate this pos-ition, Levine draws on the conclusion of the otherwise thorough-going genealogical account of value in John Guillory's *Cultural Capital*.[11] In the latter, after completing his trenchant demystifying analysis of literary value's historical determinations, Guillory some-what surprisingly concludes his study by allowing for a specific, irreducible aesthetic experience, albeit one never occurring in a pure state within existing socioeconomic conditions.

However, the very proximity between Guillory's and Levine's positions, as well as the manoeuvres that each scholar undertakes to arrive at his, makes evident that ontological and genealogical approaches, while very frequently cohabiting, remain distinguish-able, both in comparisons of different studies and in respect to any individual study's internal argumentative development.[12] Indeed, for Connor it is precisely the ceaseless dialectical pivoting between these positions – what I named pinging-ponging in my introduc-tion – that marks the limits of axiological discourse itself: 'As in all paradoxes (rather than contradictions), the absolute opposites of absolutism and relativism both follow from and are implied by each other.'[13] Partly for this reason Connor has more recently called for the abandonment of the discourse of aesthetic value altogether (if not necessarily also that of the more specific discourse of lit-erary value).[14] Yet, whatever the benefits of the particularist, object-oriented approach that he recommends instead, the ontological and genealogical positions, however much locked in a ceaseless dialectical

wrestling match (to vary my game metaphors), remain important, ongoing literary theoretical projects. Ontological articulations of literary value serve as salutary efforts towards supplying the field of literary studies with some measure of conceptual cohesiveness, even if faltering and partial, and at the very least enable the authorship of such practically needed documents as the MLA 'Report to the Teagle Foundation on the Undergraduate Major in Language and Literature' (or departmental mission statements) to proceed in something approximating good faith. Conversely, analyses of the genealogy and instrumentality of value help to dispel our inevitable self-justifying self-delusions, assisting us in the ceaseless process of aligning our critical practices with our intentions. Nonetheless, both positions have conceptual and practical limits, which have been rehearsed at length in the publications defending one against the other, and which have hampered their efficacy.

Here I will just mention, for ontological approaches, the limits of definitional scope and practical demonstration.[15] By definitional scope, I mean the conundrum that these approaches face – as famously in the case of Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* – when the value that they define *for* literature turns out to be not much in evidence in many of the texts that in actual literary history have been defined *as* literature, resulting in an account of value that becomes unaccountably narrow. Conversely, the value of literature may be defined so broadly that it ceases to be legible as specifically literary value. By practical demonstration, I mean the difficulty ontological accounts face in demonstrating that a work of literature in fact possesses the value so ascribed to it in anything more than an idiosyncratic instance of experiencing it (typically that of the study's author). Hence, for example, in his book *Literary Interest* Steven Knapp accepts as a distinctive quality of literary texts something close to what Attridge describes, and yet, as Knapp observes, 'The trouble … is that it isn't obvious why bringing thoughts, values, and objects into new relations, which are therefore unlike the ones they had before, should be thought to enhance our knowledge of these matters as they obtain outside the literary representation.' This quality of literature may 'enhance our knowledge' in this fashion, but whether the history of responses to literature testifies to this effect in fact and – more problematically – in general, remains an open question. Knapp comes to a largely negative

conclusion: 'Whatever may be the specific benefits of particular literary works in particular social contexts, the right conclusion to draw about the ethical and political benefits of literary interest *in general and as such* seems to be, so far, that there may not be any.'[16]

In contrast, genealogical accounts of value are often quite persuasive in their application to the actual history of literature and its reception. Indeed, a principal problem that they face is with the consequences of this very success. For most genealogical accounts compel us to accept, in some fashion, that many of those who value literature – in some accounts the vast majority of such valuers, except for a few literary theorists – turn out to be, in some way and to some degree, mystified. Frow, for example, offers a striking contrast between his anti-essentialist conception of value (e.g., 'no object, no text, no cultural practice has an intrinsic or necessary meaning or value or function') and that which is 'alive and flourishing in the great world':

> In the café culture of upmarket bookshops, in the cultural promotion apparatus of festivals and chat-shows and prizes, and in Hollywood's version of the art movie, Literature remains a timeless product of genius and feeling, directly apprehended in the heart by the empathetic reader.[17]

While perhaps many within the academy would be comfortable enough with this charge of mystification in respect to the sort of readers whom Frow describes, the position becomes more awkward in respect to authors. For even the most tortured, self-doubting writers will, when pressed, usually grudgingly confirm at least a provisional value for literature generally, while the majority, when asked, are typically willing to assert this value in the strongest, most absolute terms.[18] As Jan Mukařovský long ago observed, '[E]very struggle for a new aesthetic value in art [by artists], just as every counterattack against it, is organised in the name of an objective and lasting value.'[19] For Pierre Bourdieu and the many literary scholars whom he has influenced, such struggles necessarily entail the artists' misrecognition of the full nature of artistic value in order to sustain the very belief in the 'objective and lasting value' that constitutes the field of cultural production.[20] Hence, while genealogical accounts may provide convincing explanations for the diversity of literary history, they must assume some degree of authorial mystification to explain the existence of literary history per se.

In respect to authors, therefore, genealogical literary analysts are thus cast into a position uncomfortably like that of nineteenth-century ethnologists. To make matters more awkward, in this case the 'primitives', with their beliefs in literary magic, reside alongside us in ever-burgeoning creative writing programs, in which a basic premise is, obviously, that authors may somehow make their writing *better*. At the very least, this analogy suggests that the genealogical approach possesses a blind spot in respect to its own categories of belief and the unacknowledged assumptions of historically con-stant values that may undergird them. Connor succinctly describes one instance of this familiar analytical boomerang effect: 'it is impossible to choose plurality without making a non-contingent commitment to the value of plurality'.[21] Moreover, if authors and the public at large somehow did all become thoroughly convinced by, say, Guillory's argument about value, we may wonder what – in lieu of the Utopic socioeconomic transformation he imagines – such universal demystification would entail. Perhaps, since the successful operation of cultural capital requires some degree of misrecogni-tion, literary value, once fully recognised, would cease to be of any value. And indeed some commentators have suggested that aca-demic literary study's very success at self-demystification is, at least in part, responsible for its institutional decline, a line of argument that, as I indicated in this book's introduction, I find overblown.[22]

There are of course within both approaches various strategies to overcome these problems. I seek here only to make the point that, as Connor has observed, each position in its very limits tends to implicate the other: some ontological conception of literary value seems necessary for there to be literature at all, while any such conception, in consideration of the actual history of litera-ture in all its breadth, tends to falter. As I have suggested, the con-sequent ping-ponging between positions does not decrease their importance. They remain urgent literary critical projects. Yet their dialectical self-containment does point to a conceptual and prac-tical limit that they share, which is that both have normative force. Simply put, both positions specify how we *ought* to understand the nature of literary value and hence also, at least implicitly, how we ought to value literature (if at all). This observation perhaps goes without saying for ontological approaches, but it may raise some eyebrows among the genealogically inclined, who may understand

their projects as socially and historically descriptive and hence precisely not normative. Yet, when, say, Frow asserts, 'Literary criticism remains an important part of a marketing system and of a highbrow taste culture which it blindly serves', and that 'literary studies … has become lost in irrelevance', he is clearly accusing literary scholars of an improper understanding of the nature of literary value (as evident in, e.g., the 'negative theology in deconstruction'), one which ought to be corrected.[23]

As antithetical orientations towards their subject, therefore, the two positions predictably produce one another, but in their shared normative self-containment, they together *a priori* eliminate consideration of a vast array of manners in which literature has been, in fact, valued, especially outside the research domain of the academy. For, regardless of what the real nature of literary value may be, literature has always been valued by diverse actors for diverse reasons: by journalists, middle-school students, book-club members, mystery writers, dialectologists, executives of large publishing houses, politicians running for positions on state legislatures, copyeditors, rare book collectors, independent bookstore owners and others, *ad infinitum*; or, looking backward toward the Middle Ages, by professional scribes, royal patrons, abbots, and so on. In regard to these actors' perceptions of literary value, both ontological and genealogical accounts imply that inasmuch their perceptions do not correspond to the nature of value specified by the account, they must somehow be mistaken. They either fail to appreciate the primary value of literature (as defined by ontological accounts), whether for appropriate or inappropriate reasons, or they misrecognise the manner in which value is determined and functions (as defined by genealogical accounts), perhaps thereby enabling value's continued operation. Construed with such normative force, both positions *a priori* place under the heading *error* a great proportion of the actual valuing of literature – that is, much, if not most, of the collective experience of literature in any given society (including, of course, that of many academics when not concerned with issuing critical accounts of value).

This presumptive move is typically more implied than articulated, since in the age of cultural studies academics have become rightfully self-conscious of the elitism that attends accusations of philistinism. Hence, we rarely encounter a comment as unguarded as one

of Mukařovský's in his mid-1930s *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Fact*, which presciently anticipates many strands of both ontological and genealogical arguments current today.[24] Pausing briefly to consider those who 'value the novel only insofar as it is educational or arouses the emotions', he remarks dismissively, 'Their view of art is inadequate and cannot constitute the norm' – even if, presumably, their view *was* the norm, demographically.[25] Nonetheless, as suggested by Frow's remarks about 'café culture' – or, for ontological accounts, by Attridge's comment, 'We rightly value the works belonging to the tradition of literature for a number of different things they are capable of being and doing, most of them not strictly literary' – such exclusionary normative sentiments in accounts of value persist, however formulated and however much explicitly articulated.[26] As Rita Felski explains, it is precisely this persistent critical normativity that motivates her *Uses of Literature*, an 'un-manifesto' in which she takes to task both 'theological' and 'ideological' literary critical styles of reading. The literary critical establishment, Felski argues, needs to take seriously how literature is valued outside its gates: 'There is no compelling reason why the practice of theory requires us to go behind the backs of ordinary persons in order to expose their beliefs as deluded or delinquent.'[27] Rather than (only) serving as mystifications, such beliefs, such experiences of literary value in all their diversity, may collectively – or, as I will shortly propose, in their abstract totality – contribute to a more capacious account of literary value than the ones provided by the ontological and genealogical dialectical pair alone, as compelling as many of those have been.

The network of valuing

As alternatives to the academy's styles of reading, Felski proposes four 'modes of textual engagement' that she believes are widespread – common ways that literature is experienced as valuable. Through what she calls her hybrid phenomenological description of these modes,[28] she in effect offers accounts of four non-prescriptive norms of literary value that have social currency in contemporary Western culture, positioning herself in respect to these not as Victorian ethnographer but instead

as participant-observer. While one might readily extend this important project by including additional socially current (or formerly current) norms, in the remainder of this chapter I will instead push the motivating idea of Felski's study to its furthest reach and consider how a comprehensive set of such norms, for any particular society in any particular time, might operate. That is, I will consider the operation of the abstract totality of the ways in which literature is valued.

As is evident in my initial formulation for this operation below, the description that emerges at this high-altitude level of abstraction resembles the seminal demystifying 1980s accounts by Stanley Fish, Terry Eagleton and Barbara Herrnstein Smith. But in addition to the formulation's important differences from these accounts in wording and subsequent development, it differs in its basic purpose, in that it is not a critique. It neither argues for one view of the nature of literary value against others nor seeks to disabuse mystified readers and writers. Instead, it is an attempt at a pragmatic description of how literary value is socially operative, regardless of what literary value may actually be or how it is actually determined. In its focus on how value is operative at any particular moment and place, it neither precludes nor depends on ontological or genealogical claims, but rather brackets them (to adapt that useful phenomenological term).

Readers will notice that this initial formulation appears especially to echo Eagleton's well-known 1983 definition of literature as any 'highly valued kind of writing' (although in fact my stronger influence is Smith).[29] As in Eagleton's phrasing, it does not offer a definition of literary value per se but rather a repositioning of value as an activity prior to a quality, or as 'a process and not a state', as Mukařovský puts it.[30] In this way it offers most basically just a reversal of the common conception of literary value as a function of the nature of the literary, proposing instead that the category of the literary is a function of the activity of valuing (thereby making literature, in John Dewey's terms, a *valuable*).[31] I first give the formulation in the simplest terms possible, and then I will develop it by excavating those terms' underlying complications:

> We register a text as literary when we ascribe value to some aspect of its perceived manner.

To begin with potentially the most misleading term, by the pronoun *we* I do not mean an implied consensus or ideal or typical reader, but rather any specific actor, human or nonhuman, individual or collective, in temporally discrete acts of registration and value ascription as well is in more durable forms of agency, such as English department curricula or critical editions. Moreover, the two instances of *we*, along with the third instance implied by the past participle *perceived*, do not necessarily refer to the same actor. Hence, for example, the first *we* may register a text as literary because some other *we* has ascribed a specific value to an aspect of its manner, an aspect that has been perceived and transmitted by a third *we*. This situation may actually be highly typical, as in the undergraduate classroom in which a student registers a text as literary because the instructor (or an anthology) has ascribed value to an aspect of its manner, an aspect that the tradition of literary criticism has delineated and transmitted to the instructor in graduate school. All three actors participate in what is thus both a temporally discrete and distributed activity of valuing, but they do so at different, inter-implicated relations to the text at hand.

By the phrase *register a text as literary*, I mean the social act of recognition or discovery considered pragmatically. Thus I am claiming that the practical experience of the literary as such requires an act of value ascription, but as indicated above I am not also claiming – ontologically – that such acts form, or are even necessarily relevant to, the actual essence of the literary, whatever that may be. Nor am I claiming that an act of value ascription necessarily entails registration of a text as literary but rather that whenever we do register a text as literary, we are ascribing value to its manner. (In other words, ascribing value to manner is a necessary but not sufficient condition for registering a text as literary, and thus ascribing value to manner may in some cases result in registration of the text as something else than literary.) I am claiming, however, that this operation of registering a text as literary is transhistorical, encompassing the whole array of past, present and future constructions of the category. Hence, in respect to periods prior to the currency of the term *literary* as we commonly understand it, I am implicitly referring to whatever cognate categories were then current (for Chaucer, for example, the categories of *makyng* and *poesye*).[32] These cognates were of course neither conceptually nor empirically identical to our

literary, but their social registration, I claim, was nonetheless likewise tied to an ascription of value to manner.

By the phrase *ascribe value* I mean an activity that is distributed across a network of actors that extends indefinitely through time and space, and furthermore an activity that is both among and within actors always multiple, various and potentially contradictory. It is also an activity of relative degree, and hence, unlike in Eagleton's formulation of 'highly valued kind of writing', an ascription of little – or even negative – value may be just as efficacious as an ascription of great value in registering a text as literary.[33]

My notion of network, as my terminology has already betrayed, follows loosely that of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as it has been developed by Bruno Latour, possessing its pragmatic basis, dynamism, simultaneously diachronic and synchronic extension, resistance to subject/object and human/nonhuman dichotomisation, and its aim to describe, rather than to diagnose or unmask, the fabrications that we name facts and essences. (Given the schematic nature of my theory, there will be no need to incorporate a fuller ANT apparatus, or to follow Latour's ramification of networks into 'modes of existence'.)[34] Within this network, individual ascriptions of literary value are always performed in some relation to (or, in Latour's terms, as translations or mediations of) some number of other actors' ascriptions of literary value. These relations extend in multiple directions, encompassing first those other actors most proximate (whether synchronically or diachronically) in the specific situation of valuing and stretching outward indefinitely to those that are indirectly implicated at potentially many levels of remove. Moreover, the particular constellation of relations and hence the character of individual value ascriptions are shaped by their institutional and systemic conditions – social, economic, political, racial, sexual, cultural, ecological, psychological, physiological, and so on – which, in other terminology, might be described as a complex set of overlapping institutional and material contexts. But since 'contexts' implies a false duality between internal and external relations, these contexts are better recognised as networks of other kinds of value (e.g., economic, social, spiritual, etc.), interlinked with the network of literary value and thereby themselves part of the armature of value mediation, forming, altogether, the valuing actor's infinitely receding axiological environment.[35] Admittedly,

this notion of interlinked networks puts pressure on the metaphor, given, say, the murky difference between linked networks and just one bigger network. As with Smith's similar idea of 'the continuous interplay among multiply configurable systems', the attempt here is to recognise, heuristically rather than categorically, the practical encounter with values in some relation to each other that none-theless register as different kinds and that, as such, appear to have distinguishably different channels of determination.[36] (The next chapter, digging a bit deeper into value theory, will revisit this meta-phor and its murkiness.)

The network of literary valuing does not comprise a fixed system of definite, stable relationships. Although portions of it may have more-or-less temporal persistence, the network is constituted dynamically by the ascriptions of value performed by the actors themselves. Because these ascriptions occur in medi-ating relation to the ascriptions of other actors, they are in ANT terms 'translations' or 'displacements through other actors whose mediation is indispensable for any action to occur'.[37] They are also reciprocal, in that an ascription of value forges a mediating relation between actors that potentially affects both. At any given moment in any given place, the network consists of the collective traces of such mediations, which demarcate 'associations of mediators' within which there is always potential for 'discontinuity, invention, supplementarity, creativity'.[38] There is no necessary centre, begin-ning or end to the network, and no certain structure, although one's own position within it, and the institutional (or inter-network) constraints upon that position, will usually entail some sense of hierarchy, order and stability.

As an illustration of one sliver of one such network, taking for its initial point of consideration the author as actor (an arbitrary choice for the purposes of the illustration, but obviously not an insignificant one), we may imagine the situation of a lyric poet with a day job as an hourly-contracted web programmer.[39] To produce any verse at all, this poet must, however consciously, ascribe some sort of value to that verse, in the very act of choosing to write rather than not. This ascription of value will emerge as mediations of other ascriptions of literary value – say, for the particular chapbook with which the poet is currently occupied, mediations of Keats's nega-tive capability, which she had just encountered as marginal notes

in a writing group friend's college edition of Keats; her publisher's desire for something more straightforwardly confessional; and the writing group friend's own recent chapbook, which she finds rather shallow. These mediations will in turn be interlinked with mediations of ascriptions of other kinds of value – of, say, racial justice in relation to the recent removal of a Confederate monument and of the core beliefs of her Unitarian upbringing, which shape some of the themes and forms of the poems; of her sense of duty toward her pet kitten and to the environment (in the form of walking rather than driving to the supermarket), both of which she neglects while writing; and, perhaps most practically, of the time and energy that the poet chooses not to devote to her income-producing activity. This dynamic, even volatile blend of mediations of the ascriptions of other actors, human and nonhuman, and of literary and other-than-literary values, then receives is own translation (in the ANT sense) in the empirical object of the chapbook that the poet completes, itself subsequently to serve as actor within the network of literary valuing.

By the verb *ascribe* I mean to connote potential for doubt, indirection and indeterminacy, in that the value we ascribe may be one that we have more-or-less faith in, are more-or-less responsible for and are more-or-less conscious of ascribing; and that has more-or-less clarity in its pragmatic situation. The classroom situation again provides a ready illustration for this point, as well as for those of the preceding paragraphs. The undergraduate student might at first neither understand nor be responsible for the values ascribed to aspects of a text's manner. But nonetheless – through the mediation of the textbook's, teacher's and English major curriculum's ascriptions of value – she might register that those values have been so ascribed, and so accept the text as, say, canonical literature (that is, she ascribes the value of cultural authority). Later, the student might ascribe the value of pleasure to an aspect of the text's manner (say, to its use of lavish descriptive passages). In this case, she might enact her ascription through the mediation not of her teacher but of, say, an animated film adaptation. In turn, the makers of this adaptation might enact their ascription of value through the mediation of an illustrated version of the text adapted for children, which had been marketed as an expensive boutique item to upper-middle-class families, part of a 'great books for tots' series – thereby extending

the network of literary value into the network of economic value, among others.[40]

By the tricky, intentionally vague term *manner* I mean any aspect of a text that an actor may apprehend or convey in something other than a strictly communicative fashion (i.e., as other than the *matter* or *sense* of a text). By choosing *manner* to denote this idea rather than the more typical term *form*, I seek to encompass a broader category than the latter is sometimes felt to convey, one that includes all that falls under the rubrics *style* and *mode*, for example, as well as paratextual, bibliographical and codicological features – for the preprint era, everything that falls under the umbrella of the 'manuscript matrix', such as illumination, rubrication, *mise-en-page*, organisation of texts in a miscellany, and so on.[41] And, crucially, manner also includes aspects of what might otherwise be thought of as content or meaning, when the latter is apprehended as a distinctive referential effect, what Attridge has termed a 'mobilization of meanings' or 'the events of meaning: their sequentiality, interplay, and changing intensity, their patterns of expectation and satisfaction or tension and release, their precision or diffuseness'.[42] In this regard, much of what we call *theme*, at least in our more complicated applications of the term, may be understood as aspects of manner.

Finally, the adjective *perceived* indicates that aspects of manner are necessarily activated by ascribers in the dynamic process suggested by such terms as Attridge's *mobilisation*, his more general *staging*, Knapp's *literary interest* or Fish's (and many others') *framing*, to name just a few. And because I take material instances of texts, such as critical editions, as just other value-ascribing actors, I hope to avoid – following Latour – the dichotomisation between subject and object that may infect the verb *perceive*. I hope to avoid, that is, the dichotomy between what Antony Easthope, in a response to Steven Connor, terms 'textual realism' (the text has these inherent features) and textual constructionism (now you see them, now you don't, as the interpretive community decides)'.[43] This is, of course, one of the foundational problems that Russian Formalism and its heirs introduced into literary theory, if it had not already been a source of trouble ever since Plato and Aristotle.[44] My notion of manner, inasmuch as it overlaps with that of form, inherits this problem,

which I will return to in Chapter 5. For now, I will attempt to square the circle by recognising, on the one hand, that material instances of texts possess features independent of any reader, that that these features follow – just like readers do – representational protocols for ascribing value and that these protocols are actors in the network of literary valuing; while, on other hand, also recognising that the value ascribed by these protocols only enters circulation in the act of reading – which is also an act of value translation – and that the protocols do not prescribe exactly how they enter circulation, or even whether they do so enter.

Crucially – and in distinction with the above-mentioned accounts by other theorists – recognition of manner is a dynamic process that is coextensive with the activity of literary valuing, as some aspect of manner must necessarily be apprehended as such, to some degree, in the moment in which an actor ascribes value to it. In other words, we do not notice manner *as manner* unless we are ascribing value (whether positive or negative, great or small) to it, and, when we do so, we have effectively isolated manner from matter to some degree, which accomplishes the framing effect – which is to say that in this isolation manner is loosened from its role in the text's strictly communicative function.[45] This point, which may seem to put the value ascription cart before the manner-recognition horse, is merely to grasp literary apprehension as a motivated activity, in which there can be no fact/value dichotomy, even if the value ascribed is one of disinterest: in literary apprehension, to notice manner is to ascribe value to it, and vice-versa. Thus, when, say, Fish defines literature as 'language around which we have drawn a frame' and then conceives of literary value as an effect of the 'framing process', in which the 'formal signals' that trigger this process 'are also evaluative criteria', he astutely identifies the centrality of valuing in the recognition of the literary but misleadingly suggests a logical priority.[46] Instead, an actor's evaluation (or ascription of value) is inseparable from her recognition of 'formal signals' (or aspects of manner), and therefore the 'framing process' is a reflex of her mediation of literary value. To put this in simple semiotic terms, an aspect of manner is in effect a signifier of literary value, and thus just as signifiers are imperceptible as such absent their significations, to recognise manner as such is also to perform an ascription of value. For this reason, the very

phrase 'literary value' is in fact a redundancy, since 'value' is inextricable from that which 'literary' denotes.

To consider just one specific textual example, as long as we perceive the Declaration of Independence solely as, say, an act of rebellion, we apprehend it in a communicative fashion. We ascribe value to the *matter* of its political statement (which, if considered in its material documentary singularity, may seem, fetish-like, to carry the value of the nation that it imagines, as the 2004 film *National Treasure* rather crassly dramatises). But the moment that we also appreciate, say, its rhetorical elegance or its imaginative scope, and thereby ascribe value to its *manner*, we have apprehended it also as literary, framing its language in such a way that it would no longer be odd to place the document alongside other examples of such elegance or scope, regardless of their matter, or indeed of their historical actuality as documents. It would no longer be odd, that is, to regard the Declaration as to some degree an exhibition of its manner, and hence suitably placed in a catalogue of texts with like manners rather than like matters.[47]

As this example makes evident, and as literary history has made obvious, an actor may ascribe literary value to virtually any text, regardless of the intentions of its original producers or the specific characteristics of its manner. Yet this open-endedness hardly means that the categories of literature and literary merely reflect the whims of the valuing actor. For all activities of valuing occur, as I have described, within a network that enables that activity but also, by that same token, constrains it – in the sense that any specific activity occurs only as a mediation of other activities, whose character therefore prompts and shapes it, although not in any definitely determining fashion. Moreover, since valuing actors may be, say, critical editions, in practice the activity of valuing may seem to have an objective character. For example, as the preceding chapter observed, *The Riverside Chaucer* follows representational protocols that ascribe value to the manner of Chaucer's poetry.[48] Inasmuch as readers recognise such protocols, their own ascriptions of value to the manner of Chaucer's poetry – while not identical to those of the edition – are predictable, so much so that they may appear to be a quality of the object itself. This example also indicates (as book historians have for some decades been

pointing out) that there is no text outside of its set of variable and imperfect material reproductions. Thus, when we ascribe value to the manner of a text, we are translating (among other mediations) the value ascribed by the agency of a particular material instance of that text. Our translations may resist this agency, but they are nonetheless influenced by it. Of course, it is possible for the representational protocols of a material instance of a text not to be legible as such to a reader, in which case the translation may not occur at all, and hence, for that reader, the text would not be literary, unless value ascribed to manner is in some other way mediated. In sum, according to this chapter's preliminary theory, literary value, produced and maintained within a network comprising human and nonhuman actors, in pragmatic practice inheres neither in reader nor text, but in activities of mediation among these and other actors.[49]

Among the objections that this theory of literary valuing may provoke, three strike me as particularly urgent, and hence I conclude this chapter with brief responses to them, which will also supply pointers to topics in Chapter 3. First, as genealogically oriented critics especially may complain, my rather bloodless, highly abstract account of value appears to have exiled the realities of power, authority, gender, sexuality, race, ability, class, and so on that attend any experience of literature. In short, it lacks a consideration of the politics and ideology of valuing. To some degree, the latter may be less immediate in my account because my theoretical touchstone for value is (as I discuss in the next chapter) Georg Simmel rather than, say, Marx. But the primary culprits are my abstraction from the specifics of place and time, my apparent focus on the value ascriptions of individual actors rather than of trans-actorial institutions and my underdeveloped consideration of the relation of literary value to other kinds of value. In fact, the latter two culprits are, as I will consider in the next chapter, ultimately the same, and in that chapter I will seek to fill out somewhat this portion of my theory. But however highly distilled my account of literary valuing remains, I maintain that that does not make it irrelevant or useless, given the nature of the project at hand. I have sought to expose a kind of skeletal schema of the network of literary valuing in order to provide a

basic orientation to this network's features and operation. It will be from this position that in later chapters we will descend to consider more flesh-and-blood instances of the problem of literary value, reassessing the stakes and dynamics of them in the light of this framework.

The second objection, conversely, is one that I imagine may be strongly felt by those who take on ontological approach to literary value. Such readers may find that my account is not of literary value at all but simply of the relativism of such value. I might respond that such charges of relativism, as Smith has pointed out, are typically levelled from the vantage point of essentialism, but this would be overcompensating, since my approach is not in fact relativist. While it does not itself define a specific value for literature, it does not preclude the possibility that the nature of literary value may be so specific. I have emphasised the fact that actors ascribe different kinds of value to textual manner for different reasons, and I have argued that such ascriptions make texts socially registerable as to some degree literary. The question of whether the value that some actors ascribe to manner is more truly literary than that of other ascriptions is a normative one that I have bracketed – as I have the normative (genealogical) question of the actual nature of the value that actors, in a particular time and place, perhaps mistakenly take to be literary. My schema is thus neither affirmative nor demystifying. It leaves room for the believer, the atheist and the agnostic. As with ANT, it allows the ascriptions of actors to stand as they are, without necessarily endorsing them. Whether and how such bracketing of normative questions may be critically useful is another one of the topics that the next chapter, and indeed the remainder of the book, take up.

Finally, readers of any stripe may still object that my approach leaves literary value a curiously empty category. They may point out that despite my attempt at theorisation, literary value remains the placeholder of Chapter 1, which I have merely elaborated in order to develop an account of valuing as distributed across a network. Even if they grant the pragmatic utility of my avoidance of a single determination of literary value, they may suggest, as I earlier gestured, that I should have considered a range of specific kinds of literary value in the manner of Felski's identifications

of recognition, enchantment, knowledge and shock. I may have considered, say, complex formal unity, cultural exemplification, rhetorical mastery, *jouissance*, cultural capital, commodity fetish, ideological resistance, empathy with the Other, escape from instrumentality, alterity, hybridity, misprision, defamiliarisation, creative reconception of social codes, disinterest, the sublime, beauty, truth or Chaucer's version of *dulce et utile*, 'best sentence and moost solaas'.[50] I may have then, following Felski's lead, described the (nonexclusive) experiences of literature that these kinds of literary value condition. Yet the sheer extent of even this very partial list of possibilities for literary value reaffirms one of my basic motivations: the recognition that literary value has been, in practice, an unusually flexible category. Its emptiness in my account of its pragmatic operation is thus merely another way of denoting this practical flexibility. From the perspective of its pragmatic operation, literary value has no stable nature. This conclusion seems safely uncontroversial, even a truism. Yet it points us towards what has been a historically characteristic (if neither unique nor mandatory) feature of the activity of literary valuing, one that the chapter that follows will explore.

Notes

1 Robert J. Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 131.
2 See, for example, Richard Firth Green, 'Rev. of *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt*, by Robert J. Meyer-Lee', *SAC*, 30 (2009), 387–9.
3 Charles Altieri, *Reckoning with the Imagination: Wittgenstein and the Aesthetics of Literary Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), pp. 2, 15, 1–2.
4 E. Dean Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), p. 86, emphasis in original.
5 Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 136, 137. Attridge has subsequently published a second book-length elaboration of these ideas: *The Work of Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
6 John Frow, 'On Literature in Cultural Studies', in Michael Bérubé (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005),

pp. 44–57. This study builds on Frow's earlier *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

7 For an example of each, see, respectively, Günter Leypoldt, 'Singularity and the Literary Market', *NLH*, 45:1 (2014), 71–88; and Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988).

8 Steven Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Peter D. McDonald, 'Ideas of the Book and Histories of Literature: After Theory?', *PMLA*, 121:1 (2006), 214–28; Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008); John Fekete, 'Introductory Notes for a Postmodern Value Agenda', in John Fekete (ed.), *Life after Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. i–xix (xiv).

9 I also hope that it is clear that I am not claiming that these two tendencies comprise all the scholarship on literary value. For example, among other approaches with some prominence in the field, there is that which is sometimes referred to as the New Economic Criticism, which is concerned with how the forms and concepts of economic value appear within literature, or, conversely, with how the forms and concepts of aesthetic value appear within economics.

10 George Levine, 'Saving Disinterest: Aesthetics, Contingency, and Mixed Conditions', *NLH*, 32:4 (2001), 907–31 (921, 929); Satya P. Mohanty, 'Can Our Values Be Objective? On Ethics, Aesthetics, and Progressive Politics', *NLH*, 32:4 (2001), 803–33.

11 John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

12 The studies that I am concerned with here are those that are explicitly focused on the question of literary value, but plainly the tendencies that I have identified are implicitly present (whether separately or together) in a much broader swath of research. A study of, say, the ethical implications of Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* may well be grounded on an ontological account of literary value, while a study of Chaucer's early modern construction as a proto-Protestant may rest upon a genealogical account. How these might all be gathered under one umbrella is a question that I address in the next chapter. Also, in the recent debates about reading methods, ontological and genealogical accounts of value are often in evidence, although there is no necessary correspondence between, say, the general categories of 'surface reading' or 'distant reading' and one account of value or another. Rather, while the problem of value is both prompting of and integral to these debates, its relation to them is oblique and various. I will return to this relation briefly in Chapter 5.

13 Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value*, 32. Forming neat exemplifications of Connor's view, some studies of value achieve a virtually exact inner balance between ontological and genealogical perspectives, which are nonetheless each distinctly voiced. See, for example, the otherwise quite different accounts in John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

14 Steven Connor, 'Doing without Art', *NLH*, 42:1 (2011), 53–69.

15 I draw on Connor, 'Doing without Art', 58–9, for some of the following points, although the criticisms are common ones.

16 Steven Knapp, *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 89, 97–8, emphasis in original.

17 Frow, 'On Literature', pp. 54, 50. Looking back on his own work in 'On Midlevel Concepts', *NLH*, 41:2 (2010), 237–52, however, Frow voices the very limit of this approach that I point out below.

18 In a micro-survey, I can attest that two talented self-doubting poets, David Dodd Lee and Benjamin Balthaser, have grudgingly confirmed this.

19 Jan Mukařovský, *Aesethetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, trans. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970), pp. 68–9.

20 Mukařovský, in fact, anticipates the general shape of Bourdieu's well-known account of the relation of artistic value and belief and the position of the analyst in respect to these. For Bourdieu, as he explains in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), the field-constituting belief in the value of artistic works is a product of forces and struggles specific to the semi-autonomous field of cultural production but also of the relations between that field and others, especially the enclosing fields of power and social class, which relations are necessarily misrecognised by cultural producers. Hence, the analyst must be on guard to avoid the mystification of belief, even while recognising that the mystification is sociologically essential.

21 Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value*, p. 32. For an account of this general problem as it pertains to the social sciences, see the discussion of 'Relativization' in Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 336–46.

22 But for a particularly nuanced and qualified consideration of this view, see James F. English, 'Literary Studies', in Tony Bennett and John Frow

(eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2008), pp. 126–44.

23 Frow, 'On Literature in Cultural Studies', pp. 50, 55.

24 For an appreciation of this prescience, see Michael Bérubé, 'Introduction: Engaging the Aesthetic', in Michael Bérubé (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 1–27. Bérubé calls for a 'fresh reading' (p. 15) of Mukařovský, one cognisant of but not predetermined by Raymond Williams's mediation of his work in *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

25 Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function*, p. 8 n. 5.

26 Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 4. Attridge goes on to mention such 'not strictly literary' values as giving 'comfort', providing 'a rich source of historical information', being 'instructive in the art of moral living' and 'ameliorating the lives of many individuals in unhappy circumstances' (p. 4). Although not simply dismissive like Mukařovský and Frow, Attridge must exclude these values *a priori* as 'not strictly literary' because non-instrumentality is crucial to his normative definition of literary value.

27 Felski, *Uses of Literature*, p. 13. For an effort to recalibrate the evaluative criteria of the novel in order to bridge exactly this gap between the literary predilections of academics and 'ordinary persons', see Cecelia Konchar Farr, *The Ulysses Delusion: Rethinking Standards of Literary Merit* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), although Konchar Farr's argument is also ultimately normative. For cautionary reflections on this trend of elevating the 'lay reader', see Tobias Skiveren, 'Postcritique and the Problem of the Lay Reader', *NLH*, 53:1 (2022), 161–80.

28 Felski, *Uses of Literature*, p. 17.

29 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 10.

30 Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function*, p. 64.

31 John Dewey, *Theory of Valuation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 4.

32 For the meaning of and distinction between these terms, see Glending Olson, 'Making and Poetry in the Age of Chaucer', *Comparative Literature*, 31 (1979), 272–90.

33 Eagleton later recognised the overly restrictive effect of 'highly' in his definition, and in *The Event of Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), he includes 'highly valued' as just one of five common 'family resemblance' (p. 25) features of literature (albeit one cutting across the others).

34 For ANT, I have drawn on Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Latour, 'An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto', *NLH*, 41:3 (2010), 471–90. See also Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); and, for a personalised account of the influence of pragmatism on ANT, Antoine Hennion, 'From ANT to Pragmatism: A Journey with Bruno Latour at the CSI', in Rita Felski and Stephen Muecke (eds), *Latour and the Humanities*, trans. Muecke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), pp. 52–75. By taking my concept of network from Latour, I do not mean to insist that ANT is the only viable model for such relations. Other candidates include Bourdieu's apparatus of fields and capital (to cite one that Latour deems antithetical to his own), the refinements of Bourdieu's model evident in Frow's 'regimes of reading' (for which, see Frow, *The Practice of Value: Essays on Literature in Cultural Studies* (Crawley: University of Western Australia, 2013)), Hans Robert Jauss's horizons of expectation, or Pascale Casanova's 'world literary space' (for which, see Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004)). But ANT, because of the features that I have indicated, lends itself more directly and robustly to the abstract totality that I seek to describe, and to my noncritical (but rather 'compositionist', to use Latour's term) motivations in doing so. It also more easily coordinates with Georg Simmel's theory of value, whose bearing on my formulations I take up in the next chapter. For a (friendly) critique of Latour, see, *inter alia*, Graham Harman, 'Entanglement and Relation: A Response to Bruno Latour and Ian Hodder', *NLH*, 45:1 (2014), 37–49. Felski has been among the most vocal proponents of ANT's usefulness for literary study. See e.g., Felski, 'Latour and Literary Studies', *PMLA*, 130:3 (2015), 737–42; and her introduction to Felski and Muecke (eds), *Latour and the Humanities*, 1–27.

35 The Latour-inspired suspicion of the notion of context I have taken from Felski, ' "Context Stinks!" ', *NLH*, 42:4 (2011), 573–91; see also Felski's elaboration in *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

36 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 31.

37 Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, p. 311.

38 Latour, 'An Attempt', p. 483.

39 This example I have elaborated from my first airing of it in *Literary Value and Social Identity in the* Canterbury Tales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), a book that considers the role of Chaucer's 'day jobs' in his ascriptions of literary value. The example came to me after meeting a poet with exactly the above described day job, although I do not intend definite reference to anyone. For a sociological consideration of the relays between days jobs and literary production that focuses on modern French writers, see Bernard Lahire, *La Condition littéraire: la double vie des écrivains* (Paris: Découverte, 2006), a translated excerpt of which appears in 'The Double Life of Writers', trans. Gwendolyn Wells, *NLH*, 41:2 (2010), 443–65. Lahire supplies a corrective to Bourdieu's field and habitus theory by recognising that actors are almost always simultaneously active in multiple fields, an idea that I have incorporated into my schema as interlinked networks. For elaboration, see Bernard Lahire, *The Plural Actor*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity, 2011). It is beyond the scope of my purposes to account in any theoretically elaborated way for the details of the processes of value mediation for any given kind of actor. There is, of course, a rich, diverse and very long philosophical tradition on this topic for the human actor. For just one example, see Agnes Callard, *Aspiration: The Agency of Becoming* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), a reference I owe to Sarah Buss.

40 As evident in this example, the way in which the value of same work shifts according to its material instantiation and the situations in which it is encountered resembles what Lucien Karpik has described as the market of singularities, especially what he calls the 'originality model' of singularity. See Lucien Karpik, *Valuing the Unique*, trans. Nora Scott (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 17–19. For an especially vivid example that is consonant with my understanding of the mobility of literary value, see his fictional anecdote of shopping for a recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (pp. 80–86). For a study that draws on Karpik's theory to consider the value mobility of particular works, see Günter Leypoldt, 'Degrees of Public Relevance: Walter Scott and Toni Morrison', *MLQ*, 77:3 (2016), 369–93.

41 See Stephen G. Nichols, 'Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture', *Speculum*, 65:1 (1990), 1–10. Obviously, therefore, I am not using *manner* in the narrow sense, evident in the art historical term *mannerism*, of a sort of hyperbole of a specific kind of style.

42 Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, 109.

43 Antony Easthope, 'Literary Value Again: A Reply to Steven Connor', *Textual Practice*, 5:3 (1991), 334–6 (335).

44 See, e.g., English, 'Literary Studies'; and Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1979).

45 For the formalists, this loosening has of course been most often described as a kind of self-referentiality or autotelic valence, with form conceived as a sort of force-field that turns external reference back inward, producing, say, the New Critical 'verbal icon'. New Formalists, in contrast, have found this view of the text semiotically impoverished, arguing that self-referential significance most often, if not always, depends on the continued viability of reference in general. Nonetheless, what Eagleton asserts about poetry continues to have traction in the field as a theory of the literary: 'Poetry is language in which the signified or meaning is *the whole process of signification itself*. It is thus always at some level language which is about itself.' Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), p. 21, emphasis in original. I will revisit this topic in the next chapter in light of the work of Mukařovský.

46 Fish, *Is There a Text*, pp. 108–9. One advantage of identifying framing with valuing is that it sidesteps some of the theoretical conundrums of the relation between frame and enframed famously explored by Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Frow's designation of framing as performed by literary regimes is similar to what I am attempting to describe, albeit his account is less abstract and more Bourdieuian; see 'On Literature in Cultural Studies', p. 52.

47 The somewhat farcical tenor of this illustration belies the often illuminating and rigorous – and, over the last four decades or so, various and voluminous – research that takes as a point of departure this very notice of manner in texts normatively categorised as nonliterary. See, for just one recent example, Jennifer Jahner, *Literature and Law in the Era of Magna Carta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

48 *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). McDonald supplies an especially lucid account of the general agency of an edition in this regard: 'each edition tends … also to identify the text as *Literature* in a strongly normative sense. It does so by associating the text with the publisher's reputation, project, and promotional strategies; by inserting it in a particular series or backlist, which functions as a cotextual (as opposed

to a paratextual) frame … Depending on the categories available at the time, these various factors … set it on a particular trajectory through the next series of cultural guardians, including booksellers, reviewers, prize judges, librarians, and academics, who then confirm, contest, or revise its identity in their own ways' ('Ideas of the Book', pp. 224–5).

49 Cf. Smith's formulation: 'For, like all value, literary value is not the property of an object *or* of a subject but, rather, *the product of the dynamics of a system*' (*Contingencies of Value*, p. 15, emphasis in the original).

50 *Canterbury Tales* I.798.