

ABSTRACT

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COGNITION AND THE PUZZLES OF
MODERNISM

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The fundamental claim of this project is that the mechanics of social cognition—how we think intersubjectively and process social information—are highly relevant to the study of literature. Specifically, it presents a theory of literary discourse as the emergent product of a network of joint activities and joint attention. Research on joint attention frequently focuses on contexts in which this aspect of social cognition is not fully developed, as in autism and early childhood. The study of literature, on the other hand, is continually engaged with circumstances in which joint attention is relevant, highly developed, and complex. Here, linguistics and cognitive science provide the basis for specific and particularizing claims about literature, while literary texts are used to support broader theoretical work about language and the mind.

The focus is on modern literature in English and its reception. Many of these texts exploit systematic egocentric biases in social cognition and communication to produce effective ironies and narrative surprises. Further, both detective fiction and

experimental Modernist fiction frequently dramatize problems of joint attention that can be traced to the ultimate relation between author, reader, and text. Extended analysis, with special attention to Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, demonstrates the importance of this joint attentional trope. In these texts, the external and perceptible serve not only as triggers for the events of a single consciousness, but as a locus for the potential for intersubjective experience, both inside and outside the text. A case study of the publication and reception history of Marianne Moore's "Poetry," finally, demonstrates the utility of a cognitively realistic approach to textual criticism. These literary activities also serve as an important proving ground for the claims of cognitive science, demonstrating complexities of and constraints on shared viewpoint phenomena.

LITERARY JOINT ATTENTION: SOCIAL COGNITION AND THE PUZZLES OF
MODERNISM

By

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Dedication

For Steve.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Literary Joint Attention

One of the goals of cognitive linguistics, broadly speaking, is to investigate what language reveals about the mind: not what one person's language reveals about her own mind, but what patterns and universals of linguistic phenomena reveal about the workings of human minds in general. Scholars of literature tend to have very different goals, investigating historical, political, and symbolic patterns in order to cast light on particular works of literature, authors, audiences, and genres. But any complete theory of language and the mind should be able to account for what is going on when a person reads a novel. This is a daunting prospect, to say the least: the number of things that are "going on" is immense and little of it is easily accessible through direct observation. This project is an attempt to present an account of literary communication that fits in with existing usage-based accounts of face-to-face discourse, and furthermore to demonstrate that such an account can yield rich new insights into individual texts.

Holding a conversation would seem as if it ought to demand a great deal more work than producing or understanding a monologue: Conversation involves coping with unpredictable twists introduced by your conversational partner, making sure that what you say is presented in a way that takes your partner into account, and dealing with fragmentary and elliptical utterances, all very rapidly. Yet most people find it

much more difficult to deliver or even listen to a lecture—let alone to read one—than to carry on a conversation. This observation, among others, suggests that that humans or language, or both, are optimized for thinking in interaction with each other. I take the position that conversation is a joint activity (Clark 1996) that capitalizes on our special abilities of social cognition.

A fundamental underpinning of this kind of communicative coordination is the ability to engage in sustained scenes of **joint attention**. Some time around their ninth to twelfth months of life, children begin to engage in a number of new activities that involve not just themselves and an object nor just themselves and another person, but themselves, an adult, and objects in their environment toward which both infant and adult direct their attention. Before this age, infants engage in dyadic behaviors—interactions between themselves and an adult, or themselves and an object—but around their first birthday, they begin to flexibly and reliably coordinate their activities within a referential triangle of themselves, an adult, and an object or event towards which they're sharing attention. This ability seems to be a crucial ingredient in language acquisition. Early signs of linguistic communication co-occur with the emergence of these joint attentional activities; some findings indicate that the amount of time spent in joint attention activities in the first year is predictive of vocabulary at 18 months.¹

Researchers who study joint attention frequently apply the framework to cases such as autism and early childhood, in which people's ability to understand

¹ For reviews of the many studies that support these claims, see Carpenter, Nagell, and Tomasello 1998 and Tomasello 2000. The specific correlation between frequency and duration of joint attentional behaviors and childhood vocabulary is discussed in detail in Tomasello and Todd 1983.

themselves as part of these scenes is not fully developed. The study of literature, on the other hand, is continually engaged with circumstances where joint attention is relevant, highly developed, and complex. In this study, linguistics and cognitive science provide the basis for specific and particularizing claims about literature, while literary texts are used to support broader theoretical work about language and the mind.

The fundamental claim of this project is that social cognition—how we think intersubjectively and process social information—is highly relevant to the study of literature. Theoretical analyses of discourse processing often assume that texts in general and published fictional narratives in particular should be thought of as a form of interaction between the author and the reader, in which writers and readers occupy the positions of speaker and addressee, while many theorists engaged in the humanistic study of texts object to treating them as examples of communication at all. This study presents a theory of literary discourse as the emergent product of a large and complicated network of joint activities and scenes of joint attention. This theory then generates concrete and specific insights about textuality, the nature of participation in literary discourse, and the interpretation of individual texts.

Overview of Chapters

In its broad structure, the dissertation is organized as follows. In the following chapter, “Preliminaries,” I introduce and define several crucial technical concepts, particularly attention, joint attention, communicative intention, and joint intentions. Next, I consider the question of who, if anyone, in the literary situation can properly

be understood as involved in any kind of “joint” engagement with one another. This discussion addresses a number of classical theoretical objections to treating literary texts as examples of communication or speculating about the communicative intentions of authors and readers. I argue that these models of language use, which separate intention and meaning, are not satisfactory, and instead endorse a model in which language use is fundamentally an activity performed jointly by participants in a discourse. This theory, based primarily on the work of Clark (1996) and Lewis (1969), is here explained in detail.

The remainder of chapter three is an argument for treating literature as a complex of multiple joint activities, some fictive and some not. I argue that there are at least four kinds of intersecting joint activities involved in the discourse situation of a published narrative text, each of which is discussed in turn: (1) represented scenes of joint attention that take place between characters; (2) interactions among participants in the development and production of the published text: the credited author, editors, publishers, and others; (3) the relationship between historical authors and individual readers, sometimes mediated by their fictive counterparts; and (4) interactions in which texts themselves serve as objects of joint attention within reading communities.

Chapter four takes a closer look at the details of social cognition, including how, when, and how accurately we conceptualize the minds of others, and argues that these mechanics are of direct interest to literary studies. I claim that literature is in an important sense made out of scenes of joint attention, both in practice (the activities of the many real people involved in producing, reading, distributing, and responding

to texts) and in representation (the activities of literary characters and the encoding and manipulation of viewpoint in narration). To the extent that this is so, literature is bound by the rules and mechanisms of joint attention and, by extension, of social cognition—including biases in the system.

Here, I concentrate on just one such bias, the “curse of knowledge,” and show how it can give rise to two kinds of literary effects: On the one hand, texts can take advantage of readers’ tendency to align their own viewpoints with a represented embedded viewpoint, and then to fall prey to the curse of knowledge, failing to discount this additional information when imagining what others think. Texts that exploit this tendency can use it to engineer “rug-pull” endings, surprising readers with information that contradicts the over-generalized propositions. On the other hand, some texts prompt readers to recognize characters’ susceptibility to the curse of knowledge, showing them to be poor judges of the transparency of their own communicative intentions. The discrepancy between the way the characters understand their own situation and what the reader is given to understand the true situation to be is a species of dramatic irony. In recognizing the source of this discrepancy, readers “zoom out” to a more distant perspective on the characters’ perspectives, creating a sense of ironic distance and complicity with an implied author. Examples discussed in this chapter include Jane Austen’s *Emma*, E. Nesbit’s children’s novel *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, and Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

The second part of this study presents case studies of how work on joint attention and social cognition can open the door to new ways of reading individual

texts. These readings demonstrate, I hope, that this approach generates specific insights of interest to traditional literary criticism. Chapter five discusses the thematization of and structural reliance on scenes of joint attention to be found in both classic detective fiction, especially Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue," and British modernism, particularly Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. This analysis highlights the ways in which narratives of detection can in an important sense be "stream of consciousness" narratives themselves. It also reveals a number of peculiar isomorphisms between these genres' approaches to the relationship between intersubjectivity, meaning, and the perceptible physical world. In both cases it turns out that perceptibility itself is less important than shared perception, and that in both it is the quality of shared consciousness that gives our consciousness our shape.

In my final chapter, I provide a social-cognitive analysis of the stylistics and textual history of one of the most famously revised poems in modern English, Marianne Moore's "Poetry." I argue that the thematization of omission in "Poetry" is best analyzed as a joint construal both of the poem and of its history, built up together by author, editors, publishers, critics, and other readers. This framework helps to reconcile some problems that plague both the "final authorial intention" approach to textual criticism, associated with W.W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and G. Thomas Tanselle, and the "social text" approach, most famously associated with Jerome McGann.

The social text approach is philosophically appealing, in that it captures the complicated nature of authority and textual construction. It suffers, however, from its attempt to legislate a rationalist, anti-intentionalist approach to editing and reading.

Many of the people involved in the socially situated, socially constructed production and contextualization of a text will themselves be relying on intentionalist strategies of interpretation. A cognitively realistic approach that accounts for the real-world behavior and beliefs of readers, editors, and archivists serves to bridge the two approaches, and the mechanics of joint attention provide a productive framework for talking about these processes without obscuring either aspect of the facts on the ground. It also provides an opportunity to look at the longitudinal stylistics of a literary work as a discourse unfolding over time, and illuminates the connections between these literary acts and their counterparts in ordinary conversation.

Chapter 2: Preliminaries

Introduction

This chapter presents an introductory overview of concepts and phenomena that will be central to the analyses to follow. This project is an argument for the importance of joint attention and joint activities to the study of literary discourse; before I begin, then, I should at the very least provide the reader with an explanation of what these phenomena are, a sense of why they are important for things other than literary discourse, and what they have to do with language. Because these questions center on formulating shared communicative intentions and monitoring what we know and intend in common with other people, an introduction to joint attention must begin with an introduction to the kinds of problems that joint attention seems to solve.

Reading Minds

Humans are experts at understanding the behavior of themselves and others in terms of beliefs, desires, and intentions. We can ascribe mental states (which we recognize may differ from our own) to other people; we can predict how these mental states might change in response to various things; and we can use these ascribed mental states to predict or make sense of behavior. All of this comprises our everyday “mind reading” (Baron-Cohen 1995), sometimes called “theory of mind” (Premack

and Woodruff 1978) or “concept of mind”. Because we don’t have the advantage of direct telepathic access to one another’s thoughts, we have to make do with inferences based on a combination of our background knowledge and our observations of what people say and do. Autistic people have a lot of trouble with this; indeed, many clinicians treat impairment of this ability as a central characteristic of autistic spectrum disorders. If you’re a neurotypical adult, however, you do this kind of thinking automatically, all the time. It seems that most of us can’t help but think of other people in this way, any more than we can help recognizing a word in a language we know (cf. Stroop 1935).

The mechanism of this competence, however, is a somewhat contentious subject. First, there is significant disagreement over the question of when and how infants or children develop a “real” understanding of other people as psychological beings with mental states that may differ from their own. Meltzoff (1995) proposes that research on social-cognitive development should be understood as testing two different questions. On the one hand, we can investigate the development of mentalism: how and when children first begin to construe others as having psychological states that underlie their behavior. On the other, we can investigate the development of a representational model of other minds, that is, when children come to be able to formulate not just implicit or operational, but explicit representations of other people’s attitudes and beliefs, and when they understand mental states as active interpretations of the world.

The most stringent tests for social understanding concentrate on the latter of these two abilities, and most suggest that children acquire a representational theory of

mind sometime around their fourth or fifth year. The most famous of these tests is the false belief task (Wimmer and Perner 1983; Leslie and Frith 1988), which tests whether or not children will attribute false beliefs to others. In this task, the child is presented with a scene in which another person (let's call her Ana) sees a set of objects in a particular configuration and then leaves the room. While she's out of the room, the situation changes; for example, a marble may be moved from a closed basket to a closed box. The child is asked what will happen when Ana returns to the room: where will she look for the marble? To pass the test, the child must understand that Ana does not know what the child knows. Typically developing children under the age of four and most autistic children fail this test, wrongly claiming that the other person will look for the object in the second location, where the child knows it really is. Similar age effects are observed in tasks testing related skills, such as appearance-reality (Flavell, Green, and Flavell 1986), in which children are shown something like a familiar candy box that is revealed to be filled with something other than candy, and asked both "What does it look like is in the box?" and "What's really in it?" Again, three year olds consistently fail this kind of task, while non-autistic five year olds consistently succeed.

There is, however, some evidence that seems to complicate this developmental timeline. For example, Onishi and Baillargeon (2005) developed a nonverbal false belief task which children as young as fifteen months old seem to pass. In this test, infants were made familiar with a scene in which an adult actor hides and then retrieves a toy in one of two boxes. In the trials, then, the actor first hides the toy in one of the boxes. In the false belief condition, the actor then leaves

the scene. In the true-belief condition, the actor stays in the room, watching, as the object moves by itself from the original box to the other. Infants' apparent expectations about where the actor would search for the toy were tested by measuring their looking time under a variety of conditions, and the infants did indeed appear to expect the actor to look for the toy based on the actor's belief rather than the toy's actual location.

Indeed, in general, looking-time studies with infants and other tests of manifest rather than explicit social-cognitive skills suggest that at least some kind of implicit mentalist thinking arises a fair time before children can succeed at traditional false-belief tasks that require them to respond to explicit questions about the beliefs of others. Woodward (1998), for example, uses the looking-time paradigm to show that before even their first birthday, infants focus selectively on aspects of behavior that are relevant to the actor's underlying intentions, examining grasping and non-grasping reaching events. Meltzoff (1995) showed 18-month-old children conditions in which an adult either achieved some result on an object or tried but failed to achieve the same result and tested whether they would re-enact what the adult did or the adult's intended action. The infants produced the completed result as often in the try condition as in the success condition, suggesting that they saw the adult's behavior as goal-oriented in both cases. (Notably, they did not produce the target acts for a "try" condition when the actor was replaced by a mechanical device.)

Thus, even infants seem to understand, at least implicitly, quite a lot about behavior, and can make use of their observations of intentional behavior in many subtle and sophisticated ways. Whether this understanding includes any kind of

model of beliefs is less clear. It appears that understanding of intentions, especially implicit understanding of intention, arises much earlier than explicit reasoning about others' beliefs. This is also the level of social cognition that appears to be necessary for early language acquisition (see, for example, Tomasello et al 2004).

Another major line of disagreement (and there are many differences of opinion within these broad categories as well) in this area is between those who think that these inferences are made by reference to a real *theory* of other minds and those who think it relies primarily on running simulations of the mental processes we ascribe. The first group of researchers argue for the so-called "theory theory" (e.g. Morton 1980; Gopnik and Meltzoff 1997; Gopnik and Wellman 1994). This view holds that social understanding relies on reference to an internally held theory of what other minds consist of and what they can do. A prevailing version of this account argues that children develop their understanding of other minds much in the same way that scientists develop theories about other phenomena. That is, they generate abstract, coherent hypotheses and make predictions based on them. Then they test those predictions, gathering evidence through experimental explorations of the world. Sometimes this evidence confirms their theory; sometimes it is at odds with the theory, which can lead the child either to reinterpret the results in terms of their working theory or to seek a new theory that better fits the evidence. In the theory theory, then, understanding the thoughts and intentions of others involves an explicit representation of other people's mental states, based on an actual theory of how these other minds operate. This theory begins with a simple model and grows more complex and refined over time.

The primary alternative to this account is the simulation theory (e.g. Goldman 1992; Harris 1992). This view holds that when we interpret, explain, or make predictions about other people and their mental states, we do it not by reference to an internally represented theory but by simulating similar processes in ourselves. This account, some argue (e.g. Gallese 2007), accords with the large body of research on the role of simulation in people's understanding of other people's affective experience—that is, what happens when we watch, for example, someone else experiencing pain (Jackson et al 2005) or disgust (Wicker et al 2003). Perceiving and assessing these feelings in others is associated with activation of some of the same neural structures associated with the direct experience of that emotion. The claim in the simulation account of social cognition is that something very similar, not any reference to a general “theory” of mind, is what lies behind thinking about others' beliefs, goals, and other intentional states.

Still, most researchers can at least agree that people really do form inferences about other people's mental states. One of the things that we can do with this inferencing is to formulate an idea—implicit or explicit—of what is common ground between ourselves and the people with whom we interact.

Common Ground

Common ground refers to the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that interlocutors not only share but also recognize that they share. The discussion of common ground to follow is largely derived from the work of Clark (1996). This technical notion of common ground was first proposed by the philosopher Robert

Stalnaker as part of his discussion of the linguistic phenomenon of presupposition (1978). Stalnaker, arguing against semantic theories of presupposition in sentences like “My mother is tall” (which presupposes that the speaker has a mother), proposed a definition of presupposition that centers on speakers’ assessment of common ground. “To presuppose something is to take it for granted, or at least to act as if one takes it for granted, as background information—as common ground among the participants in the conversation” (Stalnaker 2002:701). Similarly, if the presupposed content was not in fact already part of the common ground, a presupposition trigger will (in most cases) prompt hearers to *accommodate* the presupposition by adding it to the common ground. This notion of common ground has its roots in older notions such as **common knowledge** (Lewis 1969) and undefined uses of the term in Grice (1967).

The position that I adopt in this study is that our assessment of what is or is not part of our common ground determines a great deal of what we choose to express and how we choose to express it.² The simplest example of how our assessment of common ground affects our linguistic choices is in the use of definite and indefinite articles (Clark and Marshall 1981).

² This claim, especially in the very volitional form I have stated it here, has its detractors. For example, there is plenty of room for debate about the amount and type of recipient design that is actually performed on-line in the quick, demanding circumstances of face-to-face conversation (c.f. Keysar et al. 1998). Thoughts differ as well on the question of how much of language production is mechanistic and pre-fabricated (c.f. Pickering and Garrod 2004). It is possible that many of these adjustments are so highly automated that a detailed mental model of common ground plays little part in their construction. Nonetheless, people’s behavior correlates to a substantial degree with expected accommodation of what they have reason to believe is and is not common ground. I will discuss some important divergences from this pattern in chapter three.

- (1) a. Have you read the book about squirrels?
b. Have you seen a book about squirrels?

(1a) construes the book in question as part of the interlocutors' common ground, while (1b) does not. But concerns of common ground shape our linguistic choices well beyond the choice between definite and indefinite reference. Clausal structure in general reflects a slew of choices of this kind that are often described under the umbrella of **information structure** (Chafe 1976, Lambrecht 1994).

Grammatical structures can reflect common-ground considerations such as whether an argument is discourse-old (given) or discourse-new (Prince 1981) or the need to establish focus on a particular entity or event (Lambrecht 1994). For example, cleft constructions, left-dislocation constructions, and topicalization constructions are all associated with different information-structural properties.

Further, considerations of common ground are reflected in language-level conversational choices such as what language to speak in, which register to adopt, and other such considerations. If I make an off-color joke during a conversation, that choice will hinge in part on my assessment of what my interlocutor and I mutually understand to be the nature of our relationship and the setting and type of interaction we mutually understand ourselves to be engaging in; it may also serve in part as an attempt to shape that mutual understanding. It may also, of course, misfire badly. When I am in Italy, it usually is a safe guess that a stranger on the street speaks Italian, but as a foreigner I will keep my eye out for signs one way or the other. If I want to speak in English, I will try to determine whether my interlocutor, like myself, is a member of the community of English speakers. (This may, of course, turn out to

be a matter of degree.) There are some conventional features of English that are common ground to all speakers of English, of any variety (see Lewis 1969 for a definition of linguistic conventions as common knowledge within a community of speakers; I discuss this in more detail in chapter 3). But there are also many lexical items whose use and meaning are conventional only within much smaller communities. Will it be appropriate and communicative for me to use the word *caesura* in conversation with Philip? Only if he is an enthusiast of the study of technical properties of scansion and prosody.

Clark (1996) identifies two kinds of common ground: communal and personal. **Communal** common ground derives from inferences based on evidence about the cultural communities, large or small, that people belong to. It includes beliefs and assumptions about norms of behavior, background knowledge, cultural frames, linguistic conventions and conventions for all kinds of other behaviors and situations, skill competencies, and more. If I find out that my interlocutor Beth is an English-speaking professor of eighteenth-century Portuguese literature living in Washington DC, I have identified her as a member of at least three different communities: the community of speakers of English, the community of professors of eighteenth-century Portuguese literature, the community of residents of Washington, DC. I can now make certain assumptions about what kinds of knowledge and expertise that I can expect her to have, based on her membership in these communities. I will expect that she knows basic features of the geography of Washington, for example, and that she has tacit knowledge of basic English vocabulary, phonology, grammar, and usage. Since I too am a member of these

communities, I can freely attribute the associated encyclopedias of information to our common ground and proceed accordingly, addressing her in English, for example, and giving directions that start at the Dupont Circle Metro station.

By contrast, I am not a professor of, expert in, or enthusiast of eighteenth-century Portuguese literature. If Beth and I establish the mutual belief that she is a member of the community of experts in this field and I am not, we are licensed to make a different set of assumptions about what is common ground between us. Where in the previous cases Beth and I had reason to take as common ground all “inside” (Clark 1996:101) information of the communities in question—all the information that members of a community assume to be possessed by members of that community—here we can only take “outside” information to be part of our common ground. Outside information is information about the *types* of information that people outside a community assume is inside information for members of that community; inside information is not just a matter of types but particulars. If I’m an outsider, Beth and I can *mutually* assume only that Beth knows the basic landmarks of the city she lives in. If I’m an insider, we can mutually assume that all manner of specific facts about those specific landmarks are part of our common ground.

We also make a number of assumptions about what is common ground between ourselves and other people based on the very broadest of community memberships, our membership in the human race and human society. I draw on my folk psychology or theory of mind for people in general to assume, absent evidence to the contrary, that other people have roughly the same kinds of sense experiences and mental states that I do. If, for example, something is visible to me, I expect that it will

be visible to other people in the same circumstances. I assume too (though I may be persuaded that this assumption was incorrect) that what is perceptually salient to me will similarly grab the attention of another person in the same circumstance: I will be surprised if you fail to notice the sound of a loud explosion. I assume that you share my familiarity with the basic laws of nature and biology—that we are mutually aware of gravity, of the need to eat and drink to sustain life, and mutually familiar with the experience of these necessities. I assume, too, that certain social universals are common ground between myself and well-nigh any person I meet: that we all take as given that people use language, have names and kinship relations, and so on.

Personal common ground is the common ground that arises from the personal experiences we share with another person or people. When my friend and I go to the museum and look at a painting together, or have a conversation about the time her mother learned to juggle, we are justified in inferring that what we saw or talked about is now part of our common ground. So too is the knowledge of our shared activity.

Over the course of a conversation, the things that we say enter our common ground. Things we have said to one another, done together, and experienced together in the past are also part of our personal common ground. Our mutually perceptible physical surroundings, too, are an important part of our common ground. Making use of these experiences as the basis for our assessments of common ground relies on communal common ground, and vice versa. I have to make assumptions about our common sensory capacities and attentional tendencies if I am to believe that I have any evidence about what we have seen or heard in common. I have to take a slew of

linguistic conventions and background information as common ground if I am to believe that you and I mutually understand your having said “My sister went outside” to mean that you have asserted that your sister Mary recently walked out of your house.

This brings us to the question of how, indeed, people do determine that a piece of information is in the common ground. This will turn out to hinge importantly on the mechanics of joint intention.

Shared Basis

A common objection (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1986) to the principle of common ground or mutual knowledge is the problem of infinite regress, the so-called “Mutual Knowledge Paradox”.³ One way of defining common ground is as a series of iterated propositions:

p is common ground for members of C if and only if:

1. members of C have information that *p*,
2. members of C have information that members of C have information that *p*,
3. members of C have information that members of C have information that members of C have information that *p*,
and so on, ad infinitum.

(Clark 1994:95)

The trouble is that this model clearly cannot accurately represent anyone’s actual mental state, because none of us have the infinite processing or storage capacity to run through the infinite regress of iterations.

³ For a fuller history of this debate, see Lee 2001.

One possible way of dealing with this problem is to propose that the above accurately describes the *logical* definition of common ground, while people's real psychological representation only runs through a few such iterations and declares itself satisfied—rather than actually running on ad infinitum, we simply form a representation of something like “and so on, ad infinitum,” and stop there. The main argument against these limited regression proposals, as seen in Clark and Marshall (1981), is that people seem to have very little trouble taking information to be common knowledge between themselves and one or more other people. Yet it is strikingly difficult for people to reason overtly about nested beliefs, and thinking explicitly about reciprocal knowledge is very hard indeed. This kind of thinking develops late in childhood: recursive reasoning even just two levels deep is difficult for children under twelve, and yet much younger children (between six and eight years old) seem to use definite references felicitously most of the time (Warden 1976). This discrepancy makes it seem as if something other than iterative recursive propositions are involved in the thought processes behind these common-ground assessments.

Furthermore, there is an alternative proposal that allows us to derive reflexive representations of our common ground with others, but does not rely on it. This is what Clark (1994:94) calls the **shared basis** definition, to wit:

p is common ground for members of C if and only if:

1. every member of C has information that basis b holds;
2. b indicates to every member of C that every member of C has information that b holds;
3. b indicates to members of C that p .

This means that we can short circuit the reflexive iteration process altogether as long as we have the basic capacity to understand ourselves as *jointly attending* to some shared referent, whether it is directly accessible in our shared visual field or some more abstract or remembered entity or event. Thus language serves both as a tool for *achieving* joint attention, in that it is a means of directing and shaping the attentions of one's interlocutor to bring them in line with one's own; and as a highly underspecified system *underlying* the joint activity of communication, which relies on the support of joint attention to function. On, then, to the nature of joint attention.

Attention

First, a very brief discussion of attention in general. William James (1890, reprinted 2007:403) famously observed, "Every one knows what attention is." Today it would be more accurate to say that everyone knows that modern studies of attention will repeat this quote in order to dispute it. Attention is not, it turns out, such a simple thing to pin down, and it's not clear that there really is a single psychological—let alone a single neurological—phenomenon of attending to something. Fortunately, the study at hand does not hinge on the more contested aspects of what attention might be. For our purposes, a working definition should suffice: To attend to something is to concentrate on some features of the environment or of a mental representation to the relative exclusion of others. Objects that we attend to in this sense are perceptually enhanced, and we respond more rapidly to changes to these objects, while our awareness of other aspects of our visual field is partially suppressed. This is the

concept of selectivity. At any given moment, a person's awareness includes only a tiny subset of the many, many stimuli bombarding his or her perceptual systems.

In addition to perceptual selectivity, there are other qualities that seem to define attention. For example, there seem to be limits to our attentional capacity; some things that are perfectly easy to do in isolation are difficult or impossible to do simultaneously, even when they aren't physically incompatible. These include thinking, remembering, analyzing new perceptual input, and planning motor activities—in some real sense we have a finite supply of attention that we can “pay” to these tasks, and when we've allocated it to one task or stimulus, there isn't enough “left over” for another. Questions therefore arise over whether attention has a single focus: can attention be split into multiple “spotlights”? If so, how many? How focused is that attention? We also have trouble filtering out certain stimuli—they seem to demand some degree of our processing capacity, even when we try to pay them no mind. Are interference effects like the Stroop effect, then, a product of unwanted stimuli demanding some of our attention as such, or do we want to say instead that they are simply some kind of effect on our attentional capacity or attentional experience? We could also ask what aspects of phenomenological experience should be considered effects of attention (as opposed to sheer products of higher order conceptual processes). Attending to an object or event affects how quickly it is perceived and whether it is perceived at all; does it also affect how we perceive it? And so on.

These questions and many others are real issues for defining attention and the study of its psychological and neural mechanisms. For our purposes, however, a

relatively simple notion of selectivity, that is, giving priority to some information over others, can serve as the defining feature of what it is to attend to something. Further, for the most part (though not entirely) we will be concerned with intentional selectivity.

Selective attention is classically understood to come in two basic varieties: passive and active. **Passive**, or spontaneous, attention occurs when some previously unattended-to stimulus captures our attention. Roughly speaking, passive attention is what happens when we notice something, as opposed to deliberately turning our attention to it. James (1890) observed that stimuli can of course elicit our attention based on their “immediate” sensory characteristics, such as high intensity, but also by “derived,” i.e. semantic, features. He illustrates this distinction by the example of a faint tap; in itself such a sound is not intrinsically salient—in many circumstances it will not stand out against the background mass of stimuli. However, if one is expecting some signal (a lover tapping on the windowpane, for example) even a very quiet sound will not go un-noticed. As I’ve already mentioned, one of the assumptions we tend to make about other people is that what is perceptible to us will be perceptible to other people in the same situation. Similarly, we tend to assume that what is noticeable, or salient, to us, will also catch the attention of another person in the same position.

Active attention is a more volitionally, or at least intentionally, directed process. (More on the distinction between *volitional* and *intentional* in a moment.) In the literature on joint attention as a foundational part of social cognition, attention is generally (see, e.g. Tomasello 1995:104) understood as “**intentional perception.**”

That is, the most important aspect of attention for these claims about social cognition and development is the fact that people attend to different aspects of their environment in significantly different ways depending on their goals. The proposal is that long before they are able to form explicit understandings of the beliefs of other people, infants are able to understand others as intentional agents in terms of appreciating their immediate, concrete goals and the sensorimotor, attentional behaviors they produce in the course of achieving those goals.

Finally, **attentional behavior** describes the externally perceptible actions that accompany the act of attending. Throughout this study, and generally in research on joint attention, attention will be understood primarily not as a “pure” mental state but as a both mental and behavioral activity of attending.

Joint Attention

What It Isn't

Joint attention is more than mere simultaneous attention to the same thing. For example, events in which some event or feature of the environment is salient to two entities and thus captures their passive attention do not in themselves qualify as examples of joint attention. If two cats are sitting in a room and both see a moth flutter by, they may both be attracted to the moth (as naturally interesting, tasty prey). However, while they will then most likely both look at the moth at the same time, they will have no sense that they are both doing so. Similarly, if they happen by chance to direct their active attention to the same object, there is no joint attention.

The cats are not monitoring one another's attention and have no knowledge of the shared attentional focus. Furthermore, gaze following alone does not qualify as true joint attention. Say that one dog is looking at a juicy piece of meat sitting on the kitchen counter. Another dog may observe the first dog's visual orientation and follow the direction of her gaze because he has learned that when he does so, he often sees something of interest. The attention is still not joint. Indeed, it is not even mutual; the first dog hasn't noticed anything about the attentional behavior of the second one.

What It Is

Joint attention criterially involves a shared intentional relation to the world. In its simplest form, it is an event in which two (or more) people engage in an interaction that is mediated by some object, while both participants continually monitor one another's attention to both the object and to themselves. Further, the participants must mutually recognize that the attention is shared. To be able to participate in a joint attentional scene, then, one must be able to understand both oneself and the other participant in some way "from the outside," as intentional agents. This kind of joint engagement, or triangulation of intentional perception, establishes a joint attentional frame (Tomasello 2000) within which communication may take place.

This frame is defined through the participants' shared understanding of the goal-directed activities in which they are jointly engaged. So, for example, if a child is playing with some blocks, she is also perceiving other things in her environment: the rug she is sitting on, her itchy shirt, the window through which sunlight is shining

into the room. If an adult comes into the room and joins her in playing with the blocks, the shirt, rug, and window will not be part of the joint attentional frame. If the adult had come into the room and helped the child remove her itchy shirt, the blocks would not be part of the joint attentional frame, and the shirt would—because the shirt is in this case part of what “we” are doing.

Figure 1-1, adapted from Tomasello (2003:29), shows how joint attention is implicated in the structure of a linguistic symbol. Any person can use a linguistic symbol to intend (bold lines) that her interlocutor follow her attention (thin lines) to some external entity, aspect of an external entity, or conceptual structure; that is, to share attention to it. In Figure 1-1, the person on the left is referring to a nearby squirrel.

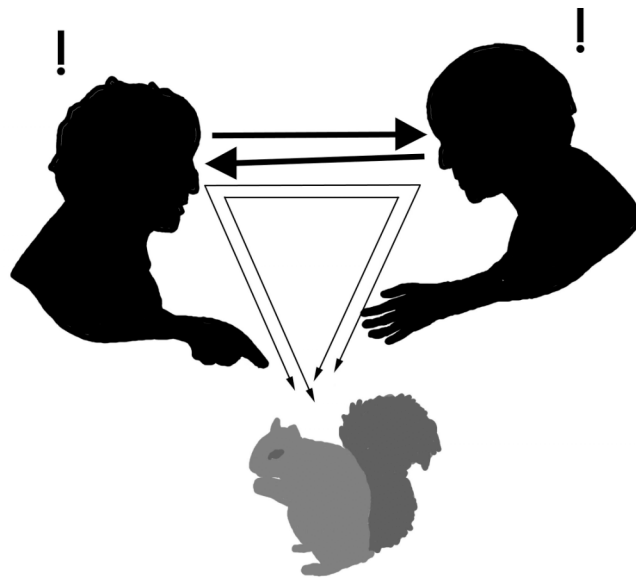


Figure 1-1: Joint attention and symbolic communication

The emergence of this particular kind of joint activity around the end of the first year of life is well documented (see, for example, Hay 1979; Bruner 1983; Bakeman and Adamson 1984) as is the support it provides for infants' first ventures in linguistic communication. As it is illustrated here, and in its earliest and most fundamental forms, this interaction involves reference to an object that is directly mutually perceptible to the participants in the communicative act. For most of us, the foundational experience of joint attention is specifically and centrally visual. The notion that there is a primary or basic experiential link between intersubjectivity and shared seeing will be important later on, in discussion of literary texts that use scenes of simultaneous seeing as signals of intersubjective experience.

It is nonetheless true that joint attention can also take place in the absence of vision. Congenitally blind children, for example, develop joint attention in infancy, though its emergence is delayed (Bigelow 2003). The difficulties that blind children have in attaining and especially in initiating scenes of joint attention confirm that vision is indeed important for and useful in establishing joint attention. But their eventual successes also affirm that vision is not absolutely required, even as a developmental starting point. And once language enters the picture, both blind and sighted people can abstract away from the basic joint attentional triangle with ease. Language frees us from our immediate shared perceptual setting, allowing us to coordinate attention to distal, remembered, imagined, or abstract objects and events.

The emergence of children's earliest skills of joint attention and intention-reading correlate highly with their earliest skills of language production and comprehension (see reviews in Carpenter, Nagell, and Tomasello 1998 and

Tomasello 2000). The rich context that comes with joint attention can provide children with the extra information they need to associate meanings with signals, and to evaluate and compare individual utterances in the course of drawing the necessary generalizations required to acquire a flexible set of abstract constructions and be able to produce and understand novel utterances. Children as young as 12 months, for example, will spontaneously check where a speaker is looking when she says a word that is new to the child, and link the word with the focus of the speaker's gaze (Baldwin 1993).

Intentions

At this stage, we also need a working definition of intentions, intentionality, and a few of the different varieties of intentions (cf. Gibbs 1998) that people can have, particularly those types that are particularly implicated in language use and communication. As with attention, intentions and intentionality appear to be intuitively straightforward concepts, yet they admit a great deal of debate and discussion in both philosophy and psychology. Some discussion and explication will thus be necessary.

Searle (1983) defines the concept of **intentionality** to refer to the quality of directedness or "aboutness" that may be a feature of any conscious mental state. In this sense, intentionality obtains for any mental state, or its expression, that refers to things in the world, or in an imagined version of the world. Intentions to act are particularly obviously and canonically directed in this way, but beliefs, wishes, desires, and percepts are also intentional in this sense. Still, not all mental experiences

accessible to introspection are intentional. Free-floating dispositions, for example, do not qualify as an intentional state. Thus, anticipating a particular event would be an intentional state, but a general sense of anticipation would not. To understand someone as an intentional being, then, in Searle's sense, is simply to understand them as having mental states that are directed to, or refer to, things in the world, or at least in their conception of the world. **Volitional** states are therefore intentional states, but not all intentional states are volitional.

Intentions, meanwhile, are mental states that are favorably inclined toward bringing about, preventing, or maintaining some state of affairs. Behaviors that are performed accidentally, then, would be those that are not preceded by a corresponding volition or intention, while a purposeful act is one done with the intention to do so. This distinction is perfectly useful in practical terms, but I should note that it is a source of some philosophical disputes of long standing (see, e.g. Ryle 1949) on a couple of points. The main argument is over an issue of regress, the dilemma being as follows: Volitions, or intentions to act, are themselves either voluntary or not. If they are not voluntary, it seems fruitless to say that the actions they cause are voluntary. However, if these intentions are voluntary, it seems that we must postulate for each one a volition to form that volition, and so on, ad infinitum. Another objection postulates that the definition succumbs to a Sorites paradox, due to the fact that many actions seem to happen at a level too automatic to be characterized in terms of intentional states, while still being voluntary and even intentional in the everyday sense—for example, putting one foot in front of the other while walking.

Happily, the question of whether, when, and how children come to understand other people as having intentions depends not a whit on whether the folk notion of “intention” is philosophically sound. For our purposes, this debate can be safely tabled, and we can proceed with a working and workable understanding of intention as a mental state in which one means to change (or prevent or sustain) some state of affairs, either in the world or in one’s own mind. More precisely, I will follow Bratman (1989) and Tomasello et al. (2005) in defining an intention as a plan of action that is chosen and committed to in pursuit of some goal.

Finally, note also that the use of “intentional” in the above-cited phrase “intentional perception” (Tomasello 1995) seems to be getting at something other than the Searlean sense of intentionality. It also seems to refer to something other than, say, any perception that is the direct result of an intention to perceive. Indeed, in work on joint attention, this phrase is used neither to embrace all perceptions that give rise to a mental state directed towards the world, nor simply to describe a deliberate (i.e. “active”) attention. Instead, it refers to any attentional behavior taken pursuant to enacting an intended goal. The idea is that someone who intends to climb a tree will attend to different aspects of the tree, in a different order, than someone who intends to sit underneath it. Someone who intends to pluck an apple from one of its branches will attend to it differently yet. Thus our visual attention is modulated in service of, and serves as an observable correlate to, our plans of action. This goal-oriented attending is what joint attention researchers call intentional perception.

I will now quickly define two particular sorts of intentions that will be important later on, namely communicative intentions and joint intentions. The technical notion of **communicative intentions** comes from the work of Grice (1967) and his attempt to distinguish between communication proper and other kinds of transfers of information. His distinction between natural meaning, as in “Those spots mean measles” and non-natural meaning, which is the kind of meaning involved in communicative acts, relies on postulating the existence of a special kind of intention. In Grice’s definition, communication consists of a circumstance in which the “sender,” or communicator, intends some recipient to think or do something, sheerly by getting her to recognize that the sender is trying to cause that thought or action.

In at least two different circumstances, then, I may get your attention by clearing my throat, but in only one will that act of throat-clearing count as communicative. If I incidentally clear my throat (because it tickles), causing you to notice that I’m in the room, your awareness of my presence is simply a natural consequence of a non-communicative event. However, if I clear my throat with the intention that you notice me and recognize my throat-clearing as an intentional signal for you to acknowledge me, it is communicative. More simply, “communication is a complex kind of intention that is achieved or satisfied just by being recognized” (Levinson 1983:16). You may decline to take up the thought or action that a communicative act is intended to produce; but as long as you correctly recognize it as the product of a communicative intention, it has been communicated. If you do not, it has not. Thus, a basic understanding of intentions would seem to be crucial to participating in communication.

Joint intentions are intentions that people form in coordination with one another to perform joint actions or to jointly bring about a certain state. There have been some attempts to formally define joint intentions within the framework of analytic philosophy, the most extensive of which can be found in Tuomela (2007), who ultimately proposes the succinct definition “The participants jointly see to it as a group that X” (p. 104). Shared intentionality thus refers to collaborative interactions in which the participants form some kind of shared commitment, or goal, and coordinate a plan of action for pursuing that goal. Joint actions can be simple or complex: shaking hands, going for a walk together, dancing a pas de deux, building a skyscraper, having a conversation. Bratman (1992) proposes that there are three defining characteristics that distinguish these kinds of activities from other kinds of social interaction. First, they require their participants to be mutually responsive to one another and to provide mutual support—that is, that one will when necessary take on actions that have as their only purpose the support of another participants’ sub-goals. Second, they involve a shared goal; each participant intends and takes it to be common ground between the participants that they are to do X together. Finally, joint actions and joint intentions to undertake them require that the participants must be able to take a step back from both roles in the collaboration. As Tomasello et al. (2005:681) put it, “collaborative activities require both an alignment of self with other in order to form the shared goal, and also differentiation of self with other in order to understand and coordinate the differing but complementary roles in the joint intention.” The ability to share intentions in this way is thus a very special and sophisticated kind of intentional understanding.

It is argued, following Tomasello et al. (2005), that this ability is a distinct level of social engagement, crucial for language use, implicit in true joint attention, and unique to humans. Many nonhuman primates understand quite a lot about intentional action; there is some evidence, for example, that apes understand the difference between trying to do something and failing, and refusing to do it (Call et al. 2004). Apes also seem to understand that others see things (Call et al. 1998) and that what others see may affect what they do (Hare et al. 2001). But there are limits to their understanding of intentions, and similarly there are quite strong limits on the extent to which they share psychological states with others, and most notably, on the degree to which they engage with others in shared endeavors, including basic declarative communication about third entities: no pointing at, showing, or active offering of objects to their conspecifics (Tomasello and Call 1997).

Developmental Timeline

My argument in this study is not only that the dynamics of joint attention are reflected in the structure and content of literary discourse, but also that joint attention constitutes a theoretically significant and useful concept for analyzing that discourse. Part of the justification for this claim is the fact that joint attention, especially joint visual attention, is a central ingredient in our primary experiences of intersubjectivity and reference from long before we are sophisticated enough to reflect self-consciously on those experiences. The experiences of referring, of thinking intersubjectively, and of gazing in concert with another person are connected in a profound and entrenched way from early in childhood development.

Infants engage in some forms of social coordination from an extremely early age. By their sixth or seventh week, infants regularly engage in **protoconversations**, a well-documented early form of prelinguistic, temporally synchronized interaction between infants and their caregivers. These interactions involve a back and forth exchange of facial expressions, bodily movements, and vocalizations, produced by both caregiver and child. Even in the first weeks of life, these interactions show systematic patterns (Bateson 1975; Trevarthen 1979; Bruner 1983) of turn-taking exchanges and an address-and-reply structure. The ability to fully participate in joint attention, however, depends on a suite of prerequisite skills on top of basic coordination with another person. These include the ability to detect and track the attentional behaviors of other people; the ability to direct or manipulate the attentional behavior of other people; and the ability to understand themselves as intentional agents, and other people as intentional agents like themselves. These skills emerge over the course of the first two years of life.

Tomasello argues that a crucial transition occurs around the end of children's first year of life, in which several linked behavioral changes appear in relatively tight synchrony, in the window between nine and twelve months of age (Tomasello 1995, 2003; Tomasello et al 2005). This stage in development, in which complex social and symbolic skills of imitative learning, declarative gestures, and social referencing (i.e., the use of another person's perception of some state of affairs for developing one's own understanding of that situation) appear nearly simultaneously, is argued to mark a qualitative change in the nature of children's behavior, reflecting a newfound ability to take the **intentional stance**. To say that a child has this ability does not require us

to make any strong claims about the nature of her mental representations of other people—there is no implied commitment to a particular position on whether, for example, she has any explicit theory of mind. Rather, following Dennett (1987), we can frame this claim somewhat more conservatively, to say that these young children evidence a predictive strategy of interpretation that presupposes that other people act intentionally.

Milestone developments in the development of the intentional stance include the progression from learning about natural affordances of objects to learning their intentional affordances, and eventually decoupling the two (as seen very clearly in pretend play where, for example, a child can “hammer” with a carrot). Children mimic adults’ behavior beginning in early infancy, but it is only around the end of the ninth month, generally, that they begin to reproduce an adult’s goal-directed actions on outside objects (Carpenter, Nagell and Tomasello 1998). This is a major leap forward.

Studies of children’s imitative behavior which control for the difference between genuine imitation of intentional behavior and simply reproducing an adult’s effect on some object suggest a two-stage developmental path. In emulative learning, i.e. simple mimickry, infants can see an adult manipulating some object and perhaps learn something about the physical affordances of that object that they didn’t know: for instance, that a box can tip over. In imitative learning, interactions with objects are understood in light of larger intentional relationships: an understanding of what an object is used “for”. Infants become true imitators soon after their first birthday, by around fourteen months of age. Carpenter, Akhtar, and Tomasello (1998), for

example, found that while children under eleven months old would reproduce an adult's novel, unusual action as long as it produced an interesting result, sometime between eleven and fourteen months the majority of infants began both to reproduce the action and to visually check for the interesting result in anticipation, suggesting a new understanding of behavior as goal-directed action. They also found that fourteen- to eighteen-month-olds distinguished between actions that seemed to be mistakes and those that seemed purposeful, reproducing "intentional" sequences about twice as often as "accidental" ones. Meltzoff (1995) found that by their eighteenth month, infants presented with demonstrations in which an adult tried but failed to achieve the end results of some target actions (say, trying but failing to pull two halves of an object apart) reproduced the target actions through to their conclusion, even though they had never seen the full target sequence, just as well as a control group who saw the adults perform it successfully.

Around this same age, infants also begin to engage in significant amounts of **coordinated joint engagement** (Bakeman and Adamson 1984), activities in which the child and an adult interact together with some object, and the child takes an active role in the interaction. Nine-month-olds often partake in "passive joint" activities—for example, taking an interest in a rattle that a caregiver is shaking for them—in which child and adult are actively involved with a single object at the same time, but the child evidences little interest in the adult's involvement in the scene. This is a notable contrast to the kind of shared engagement found at twelve to fifteen months, when children coordinate with the adult, directing adults' behavior and responding to their direction. Ross and Lollis (1987) also found that infants of this age responded to

an adult who paused in a shared activity by prompting her to re-engage, and sometimes by taking the adult's turn for her, suggesting that they have some sense of coordinating different roles in the pursuit of a single shared goal. In these interactions, children coordinate not just actions but perceptions with their partners; coordinating intentions and coordinating attention are closely tied together.

As with early social coordination, infants distinguish and react to others' visual attention when it is directed at them well before the magic age of nine to twelve months. Babies in their first few months of life already show a strong preference for faces and face-like arrangements, and evidence the ability to recognize and sustain eye contact. They generally engage in protracted sessions of mutual gazing with adults by the end of their third month, and from at least two months of age, infants smile more when adults are looking at them than when they are looking away, and the onset of mutual gaze is a reliable and powerful elicitor of infant smiles (Reddy 2000). It takes a few months more before infants begin to engage in gaze following. Six-month-old infants seem perhaps to do some very large-grained gaze following, looking to one side of the room or another depending on the orientation of an adult's head (Butterworth and Jarrett 1991), though Corkum and Moore (1995) find that before about 10 months of age, infants were as likely to respond to adult head turns by looking in the opposite direction.

The granularity and accuracy of gaze following improve over the next several months. These improvements are also accompanied by increasing interpersonal sophistication. Carpenter, Nagell, and Tomasello (1998) identified a three-stage presentation of joint attentional interactions, clustered around children's first

birthday, emerging in a very consistent order. Starting around nine months of age, children reliably check the direction of an adults' gaze. Following their mastery of this task, usually by the age of twelve months, children can reliably pick out the object an adult is looking at, as long as it is also within their field of vision, and their accuracy increases if the adult also points toward the object. Finally, in the first few months of their second year, they begin intentionally to direct the attention of others.

Early language production and related pre-linguistic declarative behaviors are linked to developing mastery of the joint attentional frame. New communicative skills arrive in a sequence demonstrating increasingly sophisticated manipulation of and direction of other people's attention. Acts of imperative pointing, when children point at an object when they want an adult to do something for them, first appear at the age of nine months (Baron-Cohen 1997), when infants are just starting to check the general direction of an adult's gaze. Much as nine-month-olds' gaze following is just on the cusp of significance, these first pointing gestures are ambiguously communicative at best. In their earliest uses, they seem not to reflect a desire to produce an effect in another person, but to serve as a way for the infant to orient herself toward an object she desires or that interests her. Some infants point when no one is in the room with them, for example; Franco and Butterworth (1996) find, too, that when many infants first begin to point, they do not monitor the reaction of adults who are in the room with them.

But as infants get more sophisticated in their gaze following, they also grow more sophisticated at incorporating it into their attempts at pointing communicatively. The infant begins by pointing and then checking the reaction of a nearby adult; some

months after that, in the first half of a child's second year, they begin to look at the adult first, to see if they have her attention, before pointing. Around the same time that they make this transition, children branch out from purely imperative pointing to making protodeclarative gestures. Protodeclaratives involve pointing at an object or showing it to an adult purely in order to draw the adult's attention to that object. These gestures typically appear about a month before the appearance of declarative words, usually around twelve months of age.⁴

As we have seen, adults rely on the dynamics of joint attention to support the inferences about common ground that underlie their construction and interpretation of utterances. In much the same way, children's ability to monitor the attention of others, in which they combine the overt indices of visual attention described above with an understanding of various additional dimensions of the communicative scene in which the attending takes place, allows them to make subtle and complex inferences about the referents of new words. A child learns new words not just when adults follow her own established focus of attention and explicitly name the object she is attending to, but in the course of all sorts of everyday activities. Her ability to monitor the attention of others, combining the overt indices of visual attention

⁴ There has been some disagreement over whether twelve-month-olds do in fact engage in genuinely declarative pointing. Franco and Butterworth's findings about gaze checking suggest that pointing at this stage constitutes a genuinely communicative act, intended to affect the adult in some way. Some skeptics (e.g. Moore and D'Entremont 2001) have argued that the child's intended effect in these cases is not declarative, but simply to draw attention to herself. However, studies such as Liszkowski et al. 2004, in which twelve-month-olds responded more positively and pointed more across trials when adults shared attention and interest by alternating gaze between child and object than when adults emoted while orienting only toward the child or only toward the object, suggests that these gestures really are attempts to share attention to the pointed-at object. In any case, they are usually followed very closely in development by the appearance of the declarative use of individual words.

described above with an understanding of various additional dimensions of the communicative scene in which the attending takes place, allows her to make subtle and complex inferences about the referents of new words.

Learning words is an activity that requires another person. Sometimes this happens in the context of a “naming game” in which an adult points out an object by holding it up or pointing to it, ensuring that the child is attending to it, then telling the child its name. But while this is a stereotypical scenario of new-word learning, it is not, in fact, the primary scenario in which most of a child’s new words are learned. Such activities are far less common in other cultures than it is in the homes of middle-class Westerners, and even in settings where they are common, they make up a tiny portion of the opportunities children have, and use, for learning words.

For one thing, words denoting things other than the labels of physical objects are not usually involved in these kinds of point-and-name games. Verbs, for example, occur far more frequently in contexts of directing or anticipating behavior, such as “Eat your squash,” uttered while directing a spoon toward the child’s mouth, or “Give me the ball,” uttered with a hand held out to receive it (Tomasello 1995). While there is assuredly rich context providing clues to the meaning of “eat” and “give” in these scenes, making sense of the relationship between these words and their referents clearly requires a nuanced and flexible understanding of intention and attention.

Studies by Dare Baldwin (1991, 1993), for instance, demonstrated that by the time they are at least nineteen to twenty months old, children appreciate the significance of line-of-regard in learning new words. When presented with a situation in which an adult looked at and named an object that the child was not looking at,

children of this age spontaneously looked up at the adult to check the direction of her gaze, and successfully learned the new word as the name for the object of the speaker's focus, rather than the original focus of their own attention. Infants of the same age performed equally well in the face of other competing cues for referentiality and learned new object labels correctly simply by noting which of several available objects an adult was looking at when she said the new word, even when the object was hidden, for example by looking into a bucket while saying the word (Baldwin 1993b).

Another study (Tomasello and Akhtar 1995) demonstrated the subtlety with which young children are able to combine gaze-monitoring with other social-pragmatic clues to differentiate whether a new word refers to an object or an action. In this study, an adult and a child began the experiment by playing a game on a merry-go-round and then moving on to some other activity. Later, they returned to the merry-go-round. In one condition, the adult first readied the merry-go-round for play and then held out an object to the child. While alternating her gaze between the child and the merry-go-round, the adult said, "Widget, Jason, widget." In the other condition, the adult held out the object to the child and alternated her gaze between the child and the object (not looking at the merry-go-round). In the first condition, the children treated *widget* as a request to use the toy with the merry-go-round, learning the word as the name for the action associated with the merry-go-round structure. In the second, the children learned *widget* as the name of the object, not the action.

Taken together, these findings suggest that joint attention and its underlying skills of social cognition are a crucial precursor to expressing and interpreting

communicative intentions. What's more, they illustrate that our foundational experiences of referring, of communicating, and of understanding other people as intentional, thinking agents like ourselves are inextricably bound up with the experience of jointly attending. For most people, this means that there is a strong and early experiential correlation among three things: "syncing up" our beliefs and intentions with another person, performing symbolic reference (that is, semiosis), and the act of simultaneous looking at some external object. As we proceed, we will find that literature, particularly modernist literature, taps directly into this close-knit association.

Chapter 3: Participants in the Literary Event

From Conversation to Literature

The capacity for joint attention lies at the very foundations of linguistic communication. The ability to think intersubjectively, in tandem with other people and about the outside world, is at the heart of not just the acquisition of language and understanding references to our immediate environment, but also our ability to express and understand imagined, remembered, or otherwise distant ideas. I claim, further, that literature capitalizes significantly on the fact that communication and understanding other people relies in some fundamental way on triangulating attention to concrete, perceptible objects. But concrete, mutually perceptible objects would seem to be noticeably absent from the literary event itself. In a situation where readers and writers are unknown to one another, can they really be said to interact? How do the dynamics of immediate, direct interaction bear on the experience of producing and consuming literary texts?

The phenomenon of joint attention gives us a new way to think about some old questions about the relationship between authors and readers—and perhaps some of the other participants in literary discourse as well. Who counts as a participant in this discourse? Is it appropriate to treat literature as the product of interactions between these participants? What kinds of roles do these participants inhabit, and how do those roles vary across times and cultures? How, if at all, do their considerations of one another—or their ideas of one another—affect the way they

compose and interpret literary texts? How much room for variation is there in these configurations?

Conversation analysis, gesture studies, linguistic anthropology and other investigations of the interactive dimensions of language have illuminated the degree to which meaning and linguistic structure in conversation are inextricable from the situated, interactive occasion of their production. In the words of Goodwin (1979: 98), sentences “emerge as the products of a process of interaction between speaker and hearer that they mutually construct the turn at talk.” This valuable insight into the role of collaboration in the construction of meaning runs into some trouble, however, when applied to the consumption of written, published texts. Writing and reading can be, and often are, understood as a sort of conversation between author and reader. However, the very insights into the role of interactivity in language that might make this model useful for theorists also render it problematic.

Readers, Authors, and “The Intentional Fallacy”

In the middle of the twentieth century, the nature of the relationship between those who produce certain kinds of linguistic output—authors of literature—and those who interpret or understand those utterances—readers—became a central topic of discussion in Anglo-American literary and philosophical circles. Influential work by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley (1942, 1954) argued that the intentions of an author were immaterial to the task of the reader, and particularly to the tasks of a special kind of reader: the critic. They coined the term “intentional fallacy” to dismiss the premise that critics' readings of literary texts should depend on any external

evidence about what an author “meant” when writing them. This anti-intentionalist stance became strongly associated with the later period of New Criticism, during its period of dominance in the American academy after the Second World War.

This approach to criticism had not only intellectual merits but also practical social and economic ones. Many (e.g. Graff 1987) have pointed out that institutional pressures of the period during which New Criticism flourished, especially in the United States, made particularly fertile soil for their approach to literary scholarship. The G. I. Bill and the expansion of the university system brought an influx of undergraduates who generally lacked the elite secondary educations of their predecessors. They also had different objectives for their university studies and fewer resources for leisurely scholastic pursuits. The notion that literary texts could, and indeed *should* be studied without demanding extensive historical and biographical knowledge, while preserving academic rigor, was an excellent match for the new demographics of post-secondary education in the post-war period.

The anti-intentionalism of “The Intentional Fallacy” was primarily an argument about what kind of evidence it was proper to use in academic and professional literary criticism, rather than a grander claim about the nature of meaning or linguistic reference. In Wimsatt and Beardsley’s view (1954, p. 10-11), critics should base their readings only on the evidence of the text itself, understood by reference to “public” linguistic and cultural information, “our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture.” The kind of information that was verboten was the “private and idiosyncratic,” such as “

revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem—to what lady, while sitting on what lawn, or at the death of what friend or brother.” In a hazy grey area came the kind of information they termed “semiprivate,” regarding such things as information about idiosyncratic meanings of words within an author’s coterie. One might justifiably draw on this kind of biographical knowledge in crafting a proper reading, as long as one constrained oneself to what Wimsatt and Beardsley deemed “linguistic facts,” taking care to avoid using biography as evidence of “what the author intended,” rather than “the meaning of his words and the dramatic character of his utterance.”

In its original form, the anti-intentionalist stance was mainly an argument about what one ought to do, not about what a text *is*, what meaning is, or what readers and authors really are, nor a descriptive claim about what readers or authors actually or normally do. It was also a claim primarily about a particular kind of reading, rather than reading in general: a template for behavior for people who would write or talk about texts in generating *academic criticism*, not for one’s personal, private comprehension, appreciation, and pleasure. Furthermore, the sort of academic criticism Wimsatt and Beardsley were addressing involved a different set of functions than are usual for the field today. Avoiding the intentional fallacy was not a program for how one ought to interpret a text, but specifically how one ought to interpret it for the sake of judging its artistic merits, these days a project consigned to reviewers more than scholars. Still, while “The Intentional Fallacy” was presented more as a statement of professional standards than as a theory of language, it necessarily relies on a model in which intention and meaning are separable.

The notion of the intentional fallacy is still alive and well in critical theory, though its import has changed somewhat, accompanying the decline of some of the context for Wimsatt and Beardsley's proposal. This is not to say that contemporary criticism is uniformly opposed to discussions of authorial intention. Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, in their articles "Against Theory" (1982) and "Against Theory 2" (1987), for example, take a radically intentionalist approach, claiming that a text means exactly and only what its author intends it to mean. Knapp and Michaels undertake this argument largely in support of a larger claim that the general project of literary theory is both misguided and a distraction from critics' proper job of interpreting texts: Theory "is the name for all the ways people have tried to stand outside practice in order to govern practice from without. Our thesis has been that no one can reach a position outside practice, that theorists should stop trying, and that the theoretical enterprise should therefore come to an end" (1982:742). While few are willing to adopt quite such a radically intentionalist and radically anti-theoretical position as this, critics and theorists of all stripes these days do tend to take at least a middle-ground approach to questions of authorial intention: certainly information about an author's disposition, larger projects, and other clues about an author's intentions are widely considered fair game for critical attention.

To be interested in the political, cultural, and ethical dimensions of literature, as cultural studies and postcolonial approaches urge us to do, requires critics to acknowledge and contemplate at least some aspects of intentionality. This line of critical interpretation takes the role of intention very seriously, but also tends to consider it only at certain levels of specificity. Theoretical questions regarding the

nature, importance, and consequences of different kinds of intentions are on the table in these critical traditions. The specific intentions of individuals may also come under discussion, but these are mainly of interest at the level of authors' general dispositions towards certain subjects, or regarding the nature of the larger project that a text was intended to fulfill. These often appear in narratives of the conflicted, hidden, shifting, and politically interesting underlying intentions that can be diagnosed from or taken to be informative for the interpretation of a given text. Thus, in this mode, one might discuss, with Edward Said (1975:153-158), the ways in which *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* reflects the divided purpose of its author, T. E. Lawrence, noting various features of the text can be explained via an analysis of Lawrence's conflicting goals, in which an impulse toward confession perpetually overrides the original or base project of a straightforward, impersonal history. Communicative intentions are not considered determinative of interpretations in this tradition, but their diagnosis, at least, can provide rich material for literary scholarship.

At the same time, the notion of the intentional fallacy has had a lasting influence on the kinds of arguments that critics make and the way that they make them, not to mention the way that we teach our students to talk about the texts that they read in our classrooms. In some approaches, the disavowal of authorial intention is more radical. In general, practitioners of cultural theory, literary criticism, and intellectual history who work in a "postfoundational" mode—that is, influenced by poststructuralist, postcolonial, and postmodern epistemology—are wary of ascribing any privileged role to authorial intention in discussions of texts and their meanings (see, e.g., the May 2002 special issue of *History and Theory*, "Forum on

Intentionalism in Intellectual History”). For deconstruction, texts necessarily elude any authorial control: there are no privileged points—neither authorial intention, convention, nor context—that determine the significance of a text, because the appeal to coherent meaning itself is a fallacy. Critics often take pains to sidestep the intentional fallacy by employing various practices of intellectual hygiene that allow the critic to avoid making presumably insupportable claims about the actual thoughts and intentions of an actual author. The “implied author” suggested by Wayne Booth (1961) is one such useful construct: not the actual flesh-and-blood person who wrote the work in question, but a hypothetical “second self” evoked by the text itself, to whom critics can freely attribute any “moral and emotional content” (p. 73) of a work that does not seem to originate with its narrator, without recourse to problematic claims about the author’s own thoughts.

Nor is this kind of attempt to insulate interpretation from appeal to authorial intention limited to the realm of academic criticism and aesthetics. The interpretation of legal statutes, for example, is a domain of textual analysis that typically has a great deal more immediate practical effect than literary interpretation, and its history is intimately tied up with questions of authorial intention.⁵ For most of the twentieth century, judges in the United States typically examined both a statute’s text and its legislative history in an attempt to determine the original intent of the enacting legislature. When confronted with circumstances that the drafters clearly did not or could not foresee, they attempted to approximate the general purpose or spirit of the

⁵ See DeSanctis (2004) for an extended discussion of the feasibility of New Textualist interpretation given findings in linguistic pragmatics regarding the role of intention in meaning construction.

statute. Indeed, a long line of Supreme Court decisions established a precedent that the “sole task” of the Court in such matters was to determine congressional intent or purpose (Eskridge 1990).

More recently, however, the U.S. judiciary has seen a movement away from intentionalism and toward a particularly stringent version of classic textualism, in which the judge’s goal is to apply a statute’s “plain meaning” (Eskridge and Frickey 1995:514). This “New Textualism” is identified primarily with United States Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and United States Court of Appeals Judge Frank Easterbrook, and rests on the premise that the law consists only of the ratified text of a statute. That text should be interpreted on the basis of no external sources beyond case precedent, established textual canons (a handful of rules of thumb of long standing for determining the meaning of words in a text), and “ordinary” use of the language, commonly determined by reference to dictionary definitions (Eskridge 1990).

Like Wimsatt and Beardsley, the New Textualists consider extra-textual evidence of the authors’ intentions (such as evidence of how the statute has been previously construed by the drafting agency) completely out of bounds. The presumption is that it is not only desirable but also possible to interpret statutory language independently from all consideration of authorial intent. Also like the New Critics, practitioners of New Textualism rely implicitly on a model of language use in which intention and meaning are detachable and discrete.

Intention and Meaning

As is no doubt clear by now, I do not concur with this model. A text does mean both more and less than its author intends, but this is just to say that there is more than one kind of meaning and more than one source of it. In linguistics, it is generally accepted that some elements of meaning are conventional, while other elements are context-dependent.

It is perfectly correct to observe that whatever Humpty Dumpty may say he means by “glory,” “a nice knock-down argument” is not what it *properly*, or conventionally, means. Conventions do not depend on the individual intentions of a particular speaker; instead, they are emergent functions of a larger community: regularities in behavior that are at least partly arbitrary (other linguistic communities could and do have different conventions to deal with the same thing) and are common ground for the members of that community. Speakers of English or a given dialect of English know we use the word “dog” to talk about dogs (Lewis 1969; Clark 1996). And yet when we are confronted with a speaker who seems to intend something other than what convention would suggest her utterance should mean, we still generally take an interest in figuring out what she was “trying to say” as well as what the conventional entailments of the uttered string of linguistic material might be.

Furthermore, believing that language use relies crucially on understanding communicative intentions doesn't mean that we have to repudiate the notion that utterances can have significance that their utterer does not intend as well as the significance that she hopes to convey. Utterances can be symptoms, in other words, as well as communications. Grice (1957) draws a distinction between these two types of

significance by proposing two categories of meaning: **natural meaning**, as in *These spots mean measles* and **non-natural meaning** or **meaning-*nn***, in which a speaker (S) *means-*nn** something (*z*) under the following circumstances:

S *meant-*nn** *z* by uttering U if and only if:

(i) S intended U to cause some effect *z* in recipient H

(ii) S intended (i) to be achieved simply by H recognizing that intention (i)⁶

The idea here is that the communicative part of utterance meaning—which is just one component of the broader category of meaning, or significance—consists of a particular kind of intentional action, which is satisfied simply by being recognized.

There are several reasons to believe that there is no way for people to understand texts without *some* recourse to thinking about the communicative intentions that motivated their production. As Gibbs (1999: 16) put it,

Our interest in communing with the intentions of others is so deeply a part of how people construct meaningful interpretations... that we sometimes feel that the search for intentions is optional and therefore can be abandoned if desired. Yet an explicit search for the psychological underpinnings of human action will reveal the fundamental importance of communicative intentions in many aspects of meaningful experience.

In order to make sense of much of what goes on in a conversation, one must think of one's interlocutor as someone with intentions much like one's own. For example, when I say "It's hot in here," my addressee may well be able to successfully recover my communicative intentions on multiple different levels, using her knowledge of the

⁶ This is a slight reformulation of Grice's definition, taken from Levinson (1983: 16).

conventions of English, of the social conventions of the various communities to which we both belong, our surroundings and circumstances, of what I am likely to reasonably assume about her own thoughts, beliefs, and attention, and so on. She is likely to understand that I made these noises deliberately, with the intention that she recognize them as English and directed to her. She may also correctly understand that I intend for her to adopt my belief that the room is warmer than is comfortable, and that I further intend to induce her to open a window.

It is also of course possible to make mistakes about the intentions of one's interlocutor. Sometimes these misunderstandings can be repaired. In the example above, for example, my addressee may take me to mean that I would like her to open a window, while I meant only to make an observation. Her response to my remark will tell me something about the way she construed it. Suppose she says, "I'm so sorry!" and rushes to the window. I can correct her about my intentions: "Oh, I didn't mean you needed to do anything." Or I can change my mind about what my utterance should be taken to mean, and just say "Thank you." Either way, we are both making some effort to discern the intentions behind the other person's utterances, and both expecting to be treated as if our communicative intentions were an important part of our contributions to the conversation.

Theoretical Commitments: Language Use is a Joint Activity

The General Idea

If a model of language use that separates intention and meaning is not satisfactory, we will need something else. The model I endorse is one based on

research in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, and philosophy of language, especially the work of Clark (1996) and Lewis (1969). The central claim of this theory is that language use is an activity that is performed *jointly* by interlocutors.

Joint actions are performed by ensembles of two or more people in coordination with one another. Ballroom dancing, playing a duet, shaking hands, and running a race are all joint activities. The agents participating in a joint activity are all doing something more than performing their individual actions. Each one is acting not autonomously, but in concert with the other participant or participants. Clark (1996: 19) calls these individual actions *participatory actions*, as opposed to the *autonomous actions* that one might take on one's own. This is the difference between, for example, playing a sonata on the violin, and playing as part of a string quartet. The latter performance is not best described as four individuals each playing a piece of music, but as a quartet playing a concerto together.

People engage in joint actions in order to carry out joint projects. Shaking hands, for example, is a small joint project. Jane may extend her hand to Michael while she has his attention, marking the entry point of the joint project of shaking hands. As long as Michael has the necessary background knowledge to understand that she is initiating a handshake, Michael has any number of options for how to respond. For example, he can simply comply, taking up her proposal by shaking hands with her. He can respond with an alteration, say, by extending his left hand instead of his right, or grasping her hand and pulling her in for a hug. He can decline her proposal, perhaps by saying something or by showing her that his hands are full. Or he can withdraw, perhaps by giving her the cut direct.

Linguistic symbols are inherently collaborative in that learning to use them requires role-reversal imitation, using them towards others the way others have used them towards you (see, e.g. Tomasello et al 2004). Language use is also inherently collaborative in the sense that it involves establishing a joint goal between interlocutors: to reorient (at least some of) the listener's intentions and attentions so that they align with the relevant intentions and attentions of the speaker.

The communicative function of language is not carried out unless both—or all—participants in a conversation act jointly to bring it off. To the degree that they are communicating with one another, interlocutors, even those who on other levels disagree fervently, collaborate in pursuit of this goal. They do this by, for example, expressing their communicative intentions in ways that that they believe their interlocutor will understand, and clarifying their intentions when necessary. Similarly, they try to make appropriate and relevant inferences based on what they know about the speaker's background and knowledge. But speakers and hearers cannot read one another's minds, which means that settling on mutually acceptable shared construals is a **coordination problem** that they must try to solve.

Any time that two or more people have interests or goals in common, and the actions they must take to achieve those goals are interdependent, they have a coordination problem. Thomas Schelling introduced this type of problem to game theory in his 1960 study, *The Strategy of Conflict*. An example of a very simple coordination problem would be a game in which two players are each given \$100 and told that they must divide it into two piles, without communicating with one another. If both players divide the money in the same way, both get to keep the hundred

dollars; if the two sets of piles differ, neither gets anything. Another would be a situation in which you are meeting someone on a given day, but have made no arrangements about what time you're meeting and have no way of communicating with him beforehand. Schelling devised a number of such games, and found that people tended very strongly to settle on the same responses. 88 percent of people playing the money game, for example, put the money into equal piles of \$50 each. "Virtually all" players, in the absence of any other compelling information, said they would go to the meeting place at noon.

These situations require something other than a simple prediction of what one's partner will do. After all, the partner is also trying to figure out what the first person will do, and so on, apparently endlessly. Instead both partners have to analyze the situation that they have in common and identify some kind of mutually recognizable clue that they can use to coordinate their expectations. For example, if the players are presented with three red blocks and one blue block and told to choose just one, the blue one will probably strike both of them as the most salient and noteworthy block. It is a good bet that the other person will also consider the blue block the most noteworthy, and so choosing it is a (likely) winning strategy. Schelling called this kind of clue, or coordination device, a "focal point" and observed that successfully co-identifying a solution frequently relies "more on imagination than on logic; it may depend on analogy, precedent, accidental arrangement, symmetry, aesthetic or geometric configuration, casuistic reasoning, and who the parties are and what they know about each other" (57).

Lewis (1969) had the insight that conventions, including linguistic conventions, are a community's solution to recurrent coordination problems. Say that you and I frequently want to meet for lunch. We might coordinate our plans by guesswork, relying on the fact that there is only one cafeteria in the building where we both work, and that noon is the most noteworthy time of day, not to mention the canonical time for lunch. Or we might coordinate by explicit agreement, agreeing to meet at the café across the street at 12:30. If we make the same arrangements every time we have lunch together, after a while we may stop being explicit about them. We can simply agree to have lunch and go to the café at 12:30, confident in our mutual expectation of one another's behavior. We have evolved a convention between the two of us. Larger communities and whole societies also have evolved conventions to deal with commonly occurring coordination problems.

Clark (1996: 71) summarizes and adapts Lewis' definition of a convention as follows (with slight modifications of phrasing). A convention has five properties:

1. It is a regularity in behavior
2. That is partly arbitrary
3. And common ground in a given community
4. As a coordination device
5. For some recurrent coordination problem.

For example, the widespread use of English word *dog* is a convention that is used as a coordination device for talking about dogs. This is a regularity in behavior among English speakers—using *dog* to speak of dogs is common, widespread, and reliable. This regularity is common ground for the members of the English speaking community. It is arbitrary in that *chien*, for example, works just as well for speakers

of French. (It is also partly non-arbitrary—for example, *dog* uses English phonology while *chien* uses French phonology.)

Lewis and Clark both argue that language systems—the phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic rules of a language—are a special kind of conventional basis for joint actions, a tour de force example of what Lewis calls **signaling systems**. Signaling systems give rationales for a particular kind of joint action, in which a speaker produces a signal based on the state of affairs she wants to communicate, and the hearer takes the signal to mean something, based on the conventions of the signaling system.

At the same time, the conventions of a language alone are not enough to make communication work. Conventions specify some of the potential uses of a linguistic construction, but the conventional content of a linguistic expression generally underspecifies its construal in context. Every example of language in actual use raises some non-conventional coordination problems. Many references are indexical: their referents cannot be resolved without some knowledge of the discourse participants' current common ground, as when I say “That one was George.” Which one? Which George? We must rely on non-conventional coordination devices to decide.

Interlocutors must also resolve ambiguities—expressions typically have more than one conventional meaning, and speakers often go beyond even these conventional meanings to generate nonce constructions that depend on context and background for their interpretation. These may rely on background knowledge that is broadly common ground in the culture, such as “She’s a regular Houdini,” or something far more idiosyncratic. Clark and Clark (1979) provide an amusing

example of the latter: if Ann tells Bill, “Max went too far this time and teapotted a policeman,” she is relying on the fact that she and Bill share knowledge of Max’s odd habit of sneaking up on people and rubbing them with teapots.

In person, people get immediate feedback about whether they have succeeded or failed in their communicative intentions. There are also a host of visual cues that help us to keep track of the immediate attentions of our interlocutors, and this knowledge provides important information about what is appropriate to consider part of the common ground underlying a conversation.

Application to Textual Discourse

Models of language use that emphasize this interactional factor tend to treat texts as communicative acts that are very much like conversation, in which authors play the part of speakers and readers play the part of hearers. In this account, authors and readers have to do some extra imaginative work that ordinary conversations may not require, but they are still in some fundamental sense interacting with one another. For example, Clark (1996) suggests that the authors and readers of fictional texts “jointly pretend” that the communicative acts depicted by a text are really taking place. Bruce (1981) writes of a “social interaction between author and reader” in which readers understand authors to be depicting a communicative interaction between an implied author and an implied reader, which itself depicts an interaction between a narrator and a narratee.

There are some obvious limitations to this analogy. For example, the production and comprehension of literary texts lack most of the concrete

opportunities for direct interaction that are available in face-to-face communication. The readers of published works generally have no way of confirming what they have understood or asking for clarification, and authors have no way of modifying their contributions on the fly in response to the reactions of their readers. At the same time, there are many excellent reasons to believe that the same kinds of conceptual work that underlie language use in conversation are crucially involved in the production and interpretation of novels, screenplays, essays, and any number of other uses of language in “nonbasic” settings (Clark and Brennan 1991).

An enormous amount of work in cognitive linguistics has argued convincingly that the language of literature and the language of everyday conversation are expressions of the same cognitive mechanisms. All of these cases involve human beings with the same social and cognitive capacities and limitations, using a hugely overlapping set of linguistic resources: lexical, semantic, grammatical, and pragmatic. A published story or advertisement can use indexical expressions, generate implicatures, and trigger presuppositions. It can do rhetorical work and perform a variety of speech acts: it can exhort, request, perhaps even promise.

Furthermore, it is exceedingly common for authors and readers to act as if reading a novel has a great deal in common with being on the hearing end of a conversation, and as if writing one has a great deal in common with speaking to someone. Readers use what they know—or think they know—about an author in generating inferences and making judgments about what a text ‘means’ (see, for example, Nolen 1995 and Gibbs 1999). Similarly, readers often draw or attempt to draw explicit inferences about authorial intent as they read: does the author *mean* for

this to be ironic? Is this *supposed* to be funny? There is clearly some significant relationship between meanings that are generated in face-to-face conversation and those associated with literary texts; the question, of course, is what exactly this relationship might be.

Theoretical Commitments II: On the Nature of “Texts” and “Discourses”

Text

I have been acting so far as if the main salient difference between the sort of language use exemplified by face-to-face conversations and the sort that is exemplified by the novel is that the latter is written. The primary distinguishing feature of this kind of discourse might seem to be that it has authors and readers, rather than speakers and hearers. The questions to be answered appear to be: Is reading really like being on the receiving end of a conversation? Is writing really like talking to someone?

This is not an uncommon way of defining the problem. Dixon and Bortolussi (2001: 1), for example, criticize the application of conversational models to text processing by arguing that there are crucial ways in which “many forms of written discourse” are “unlike oral communication” and like one another. Chafe (1994: 224) writes of “the desituatedness of writing” and observes that “[t]he writing situation is itself unreal in its detachment from the co-presence and interaction which are normal for conversational language.”

However, I want to pause here to point out that while many of the discourse types at issue here are indeed written rather than spoken, the sheer fact that they are

writing is not the most important thing they have in common. Instead, I want to draw attention to the fact that texts are broadcast, or published. The questions above have unstated assumptions. They might be more explicitly phrased: Is reading *published texts* really like being on the receiving end of a conversation? Is writing *for publication* really like talking to someone? I believe that this is the more important distinction to draw for the theoretical questions at hand.

It is worth noting that people can be unambiguously engaged in direct, conversational interaction in written media. For example, my neighbor and I can scribble notes to one another during a colloquium. When we do this, we are clearly addressing our written utterances to one another. We can also see one another, and share a visible and audible, jointly accessible shared environment. We can immediately provide both linguistic and non-linguistic indications of whether we are attending to and understanding what the other person is writing.

Conversations conducted via instant messaging, another written arena of conversational language use, usually lack some of these features: typically the participants are not visible to one another and do not share a common perceptual ground. They are, however, known to one another in the same way that any ordinary participants in a conversation would be. They may be strangers, but they understand themselves and one another to be directing their utterances to a specific individual or individuals. They can also respond to one another immediately. They can interrupt, ask for clarification, take up or reject proposed construals, and modify what they say quickly and flexibly in response to one another's contributions.

Private letters lack the conversational qualities of co-presence and simultaneity. Nonetheless, if all goes well, and the letter is delivered and read as intended, I think most analysts would agree that the writer and addressee are engaged in a real, if distant, interaction with one another. Anyone who intercepted the letter before it reached its intended destination, or who happened across the letter after the fact, is plainly a bystander to the original interaction.

The discourse types that I have been calling “texts,” by contrast, generally lack both immediacy and participant transparency. When an article is written for publication, its author has no idea who, in particular, will be reading the magazine in which it is published; nor does she have a sense beyond an educated guess about when or in what contexts it will be read—and this aspect of the discourse situation is something that the author understands to be the case as she is writing.⁷ The same is true for any text produced for public media: comic strips, films, radio broadcasts, or novels. I will continue to use the terms *text*, *author*, and *reader* to describe this kind of public discourse types, their producers, and their audiences. However, I will freely include examples from discourse genres other than written narratives, and will exclude directly conversational genres, even if they are conducted in writing.

Discourse

As for “discourse” itself, it too is a tricky term that means different things to different people. Scholars may use it to mean anything from “units of language which

⁷ There are several interesting edge cases. Durable works originally created for private settings may be later disseminated to a wider audience, or as was common in sixteenth-century manuscript culture (as well as in many contemporary online communities), works may be created for semi-public distribution within a relatively well-defined reading community.

are larger than single sentences” or “language in context” (Stubbs 2001: 5) to the entire complex of symbolic activity and power relations within a given social institution, as in Foucault’s “The Order of Discourse” (1971) and *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972). In critical theory, social theory, and related branches of philosophy, the word and its variants appear most often in the context of the study of very large social structures and their origins.

In this latter context, “discourse” and its relatives enjoy a wide currency in cultural and literary studies; a quick search of the JSTOR digital journal database, for example, turns up many hundreds of articles featuring the phrases “discursively constructed” and “discursive construction.” This usage roughly follows Foucault’s terminology and preoccupations: a “discursive formation,” in Foucauldian terms, is a matrix of intersecting, often contradictory, ways of representing and thinking about a given set of social realities, which together actually constitute the social realities that they represent. Critical attention is thus directed to the question of whether a particular institution, ideology, or societal construction can be held to exhibit the property of “discursiveness”, and the implications of possessing (or not possessing) this quality.

Other social-theoretical approaches use the term to describe a particular relationship between language and power, as in the work of Marxist theorists such as Louis Althusser (1970) and Fredric Jameson (1981) and feminists such as Judith Butler (1990), all of whom are interested in the way that prevailing “discourses” can promote inequality and marginalize those who differ from the status quo. Here

“discourse” broadly refers to an institutionalized way of thinking, speaking and writing that reinforces hierarchies by defining the limits of what is appropriate.

All of the above schools of thought refer to very large and diffuse entities when they speak of a “discourse”, and tend to focus on the relationship between culture-wide conventions of linguistic behavior and other features of that culture. I propose a narrower and more concrete use of the term. When I say that literary texts are examples of discourse, this means I am treating them as:

1. Slices of human action and interaction, rather than bare assemblages of linguistic constructions;
2. Examples of language *use*, rather than simply examples of language;
3. Dynamic rather than static: built up, disseminated, and experienced over time;
4. Something that is at least potentially collaboratively constructed; and
5. Possessed of settings.

By this last item, I mean that instances of language use occur in a time and place. They invoke and are governed by an assortment of cultural norms that are specific to the time and place of their construction and reception. They have varying purposes and objectives. They have participants and culturally-agreed-upon roles that those participants can fill. Their participants understand them as instantiations of any number of distinctive pre-existing categories of activity—what Erving Goffman (1974) calls “interaction frames”. They can be transacted in different media, such as speaking, gesture, sign, handwriting, print, or various mixtures thereof. All these

factors are elements of the discourse setting or discourse situation of a given piece of discourse.

The questions I am addressing here are: How and to what degree do the discourse activities and discourse settings of texts work according to the same rules as conversation? How do they make use of social cognitive abilities that seem to be grounded in direct interpersonal contact in some very concrete ways, including the opportunity to see and hear another person and their surroundings?

Common Objections to the Conversation Model for Texts

A variety of objections are frequently raised to the idea that reading may be usefully understood as a collaborative, or conversational, activity. These fall into two broad categories: complications that arise from the separation of readers and authors in space and time, and complications that arise from the difference between the ostensible speaker of a literary text and the real, historical author or authors of that text.

Authors and Readers are not Physically Co-Present

Authors are not present during the comprehension of a text, nor are readers present during a text's creation. This is the objection underlying Wimsatt and Beardsley's "Intentional Fallacy," the New Textualist approach to legal interpretation, and more radical post-structuralist arguments (e.g. Barthes 1977) that the very concept of the author should be considered defunct. Concretely, there are several ways in which this lack of co-presence makes for significant disanalogies with

basic conversational interaction: The discourse situation of the published text means that author and reader have no shared perceptual and referential common ground in which the discourse is situated. They have no access to the usual physical cues regarding their interlocutor's interest, comprehension, and visual attention. Most importantly, perhaps, they have no opportunity to engage in the immediate feedback loop that is so crucial to conversation.

Readers cannot ask authors for clarification; they cannot confirm their understanding or contribute new ideas. Authors cannot modify their contributions on the fly in response to an individual reader's responses. What's more, there is no shared interaction between a reader and an author leading up to the production and comprehension of a narrative. Narratives in conversation normally emerge out of the ordinary give and take of conversational turn taking; they are locally occasioned (Jefferson 1978), their progress is shaped by audience contributions over the course of many turns (Goodwin 1986), and conversation generally continues after the narrative is complete. There is rarely any comparable preliminary and consequent interaction between the author and the reader of a text.

Who Is Speaking?

Dixon and Bortolussi (2001), among others, argue that the text communication model is rendered fatally problematic by the fact that the speaker or narrator of a literary text is not the author. Readers typically have even less access to the intentions of an author than the mere lack of co-presence would suggest, because the real person who wrote a given text is not speaking as herself, and readers are often in a very poor position to tease apart the author from the speaker. This complication is

especially obvious in the case of texts with overt narrators (Booth 1961) who clearly diverge from the beliefs, feelings, and biographical details of the author. However, it is also importantly true even in cases such as expository texts in which the narrator appears to be identical with the author, or narratorless and dramatic texts, such as narrative films, radio plays, comics, and other kinds of sequential art.

Where one is available, readers often focus more on the narrator than on the real or implied author of a text. Indeed, they will often make unsupported or faulty assumptions about the author based on information provided by a narrator or focalizing character. For example, readers tend to assume that the author of passages in which perceptual information is attributed to a male focalizer is also male, and that passages in which perceptual information is attributed to a female character were written by a woman (Dixon and Bortolussi 2001).

Graesser, Bowers, Olde, and Pomeroy (1999) suggest that even third-person narrators are generally not nearly as accessible in memory as first-person narrators and other characters. Perhaps this is why readers often conflate the expressed beliefs of narrators and even nonnarrator characters with those of the author or implied author of a text. Take, for example, the assertions in (2) and (3):

(2) Robert Frost said good fences make good neighbors. He never knew John Ames and Perry Brooks. [The *Washington Post*, May 22, 2005]

(3) Robert Frost said, “Good fences make good neighbors,” and he was right. [*EzineArticles*, January 28, 2007]

As it happens, Robert Frost said no such thing; even these sophisticated consumers of texts are conflating Frost, the author of “Mending Wall” (1915), with a character from that poem. The character himself is only parroting an already well-established

adage, and the speaker, or narrator, of the poem is quoting the neighbor in order to criticize him:

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors".

It is not clear that these mistakes defeat the general claim that readers take the author of a text to be their interlocutor, and that they infer an author's intentions as they interpret a text. Readers who are familiar with the conventions of Western-style fictional narratives do understand that the author of a text created its narrator, and can draw inferences about the narrator based on what they know or assume about the author or implied author. For example, knowing something about the character, publication history, and contemporary social norms of Jonathan Swift can help us to recognize the irony in "A Modest Proposal," and we can seek out more specific information about his expressed beliefs in trying to sort out what is and is not meant to be ironic in *Gulliver's Travels*. Readers also commonly wonder whether inconsistencies in a text are deliberate or accidental, which similarly requires appeal to the real author's communicative intentions.

Where the divergence between the implied or apparent author of a text and the real author becomes more problematic for the text-as-communication model is in the pervasive assumption of unitary authorship. In order to read the narrative as a narrative, readers must act as if the communicative intentions behind the text are coherent. Yet a single work is often not—perhaps even usually not—a unified performance of just one person's communicative intentions. For one thing, any

extended narrative may be the work of several years. It is hard to imagine that an author's intentions don't shift over the course of that writing, and the order in which various parts were written is not at all visible to most readers. Films and television are of course the product of many different people's communicative intentions: screenwriters, producers, directors, cinematographers, actors, and editors. It is frequently difficult, if not impossible, to recover the individual contributions that comprise the final product. If ordinary readers cannot and do not sort out what elements of a text were contributed by what real agent and when, surely they are not interacting in any meaningful way with those agents. This is not a fictive interaction with a real author, but a fictional interaction with an imagined author.

Proposal: The Literary Event Consists of Multiple Joint Activities

Pascual (2002) points out that all sorts of discourse invoke varieties of 'fictive interaction', conceptualizations that are underwritten by a particular and pervasive conceptual blend (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) in which a situation is imaginatively reconstructed in terms of a canonical conversation frame (Fillmore 1982). The result is discourse that invokes or relies on an imagined interactional structure that diverges significantly from the observable communicative situation. Certainly both authors and readers understand what they are doing at least in part by means of this fictive interaction blend. As we will see, however, many of the concrete interactive experiences that characterize face-to-face communication do literally, or *factively* (Talmy 1996) take place as part of the interpretation of texts.

There are at least four kinds of intersecting joint activities involved in the

discourse situation of a published narrative text:

1. Represented scenes of joint attention that take place between characters (discussed in more detail in chapter five);
2. Interactions among participants in the development and production of the published text: the credited author, editors, publishers, and so on (discussed in more detail in chapter six);
3. The relationship between historical authors and individual readers, sometimes mediated by their fictive counterparts; and
4. Interactions in which texts themselves serve as objects of joint attention within reading communities.

I will take the last of these first, beginning with the conversations that readers have with other readers. These interactions draw on many of the concrete resources of immediate conversation that authors and their readers cannot share, putting the text into the stream of talk and requesting or suggesting glosses, fresh interpretations, and alternate construals as they go. As we will see, these communities of readers can then take their texts as objects of extended joint attention in order to build up new—sometimes quite radical—conventions of interpretation.

Inter-Reader Interactions

Collaboration in Conversation

If texts genuinely and crucially involve joint activities, we should be able to see evidence of that collaboration in their production, dissemination, and reception.

When speakers and hearers interact, they engage in what Clark (1996: 212) calls **joint**

construal: ‘For each signal, the speaker and addressees try to create a joint construal of what the speaker is to be taken to mean by it.’ Sometimes this happens smoothly and without incident, but it always requires actions on the part of both speaker and hearer. In Clark’s terminology, the speaker *proposes* a joint project and the hearer *takes it up*. The uptake response provides evidence that the hearer understood the speaker’s utterance, and also of the way that the hearer is construing that utterance. For example, if Ann says to Bill, ‘Eat some spinach,’ each of the responses in (4) would suggest a different construal of that utterance:

- (4) a. Yes, ma’am! [*an order*]
- b. Thanks, I’m fine. [*an offer*]
- c. What a good idea! [*an advisory*]

If the displayed construal matches Ann’s original intentions, she can proceed on that basis, which allows Bill to understand that this construal is now jointly held between them. If the construal doesn’t match, she can correct it (‘I’m not asking you, I’m telling you!’) or leave Bill’s construal unchanged and revise her own intentions about what she should be taken as doing.

Construals can be also revised or corrected over the course of multiple conversational turns, as illustrated by the following example, taken from an exchange on an Internet discussion board (Unfogged.com 2006):

(5) *Revised construal*

1BL: To the extent that your project here is instead just to emphasize that I, personally, am a bad person (because your contracts professor and I took some of the same classes in college), I disagree with you. At least in this respect.

2LB: No, no, I think you're a bad person for entirely different reasons.

3BL: Such as?

4LB: Crap, I'm such a wimp. I was considering pasting a "just kidding! :-)!!!" on the end of that, and decided not to, but now I have to. No, I don't think you're a bad person at all, not in the slightest. I just saw a straight line and took it.

Here the revised construals pertain to the affective content of the speaker's meaning.

LB's utterance in turn 2 seems to be construed by BL in turn 3 as an insult; in turn 4, LB adopts that construal and apologizes, proposing a clarifying revision to her earlier remark.

References, too, can be worked out over the course of several conversational turns, as in the following example, from the Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English (MICASE OFC150MU042):

(6) *Clarifying reference*

S3: yeah yeah that's (right) and, remember like Lana Lane or some or Lana something

S1: Lois Lane? [*suggestion*]

S3: no no it's Lois Lane but no there's another girl Lana right? [*partial rejection, partial acceptance*]

S7: yeah that takes over the paper [*confirmation and continuation*]

S3: yeah [*acceptance*]

Collaboration in Text Interpretation

Authors and readers are not in a position to engage with one another in the kinds of exchanges found in (5) and (6). However, co-present readers of the same text certainly are, and this is exactly what they often do, putting the text into the stream of talk and requesting or suggesting glosses, fresh interpretations, and alternate construals as they go, using all the usual resources of face-to-face communication.

Narayan (2007; in preparation) provides an excellent example of how co-present interpreters of texts make use of the resources afforded by face-to-face

interaction, including gestures, posture, and gaze management. In this study, pairs of subjects sat facing one another, positioned so that one participant could see panels from various comics projected on a screen, while the other could not. The task of the first participant (here, P1) was to describe each panel until both participants agreed that the second participant (P2) understood what was being depicted.

In this example, P1 has difficulty coming to the canonical explanation of what the panel depicts—a car pulling across traffic to nab a parking spot, while the car’s driver triumphs and the driver of the car he has cut off honks his horn in anger. P1 has repeatedly described the car as “pulling out of a spot,” and once as “tryna pull out into the road.” P2 is able to recognize that there is something wrong with P1’s interpretation, and over four and a half minutes and several dozen turns of conversation, the two work to revise P1’s original construal, arriving eventually at a mutual understanding of the image that matches the canonical one.

(7) *Revised construal*

- P1: The car parked behind the bug is so hard to see, could even be a taxicab, it’s just a yellow car, um...
It’s hard to see because the word honk
Um
Is basically over the top of it.
- P2: It’s interesting that it says SCORE, maybe what it means is he actually got the spot, as opposed to...
looks at P1
- P1: Ohhh! Yeah!

Here P1 and P2 have generated much the same kind of revised construal seen in (X). P2 uses his gaze to check P2’s comprehension, prompting her to confirm that she agrees and will adopt his revised construal. While they may have no opportunity to

interact meaningfully with the creator of the original text, their interpretation of the text is highly interactive, and relies crucially on cues from one another's gestures and gaze as well as from their talk. They are active co-participants in this interpretive conversation.

Readers can also collaborate in establishing and clarifying references in an existing text. In the following example, from an undergraduate classroom discussion on Philip Roth's novel *The Ghost Writer*, a student, S4, combines quotation of the text with a variety of conversational resources to signal her own comprehension and confusion to the instructor, S1. For clarity, I have used italics to mark the words and phrases that the speakers are reading from the novel. Otherwise I have retained the transcription conventions of the original, in which punctuation indicates prosodic rather than grammatical features.

(8) *Clarifying references* (MICASE LES300SU103)

- S1: um, can you start *too late mother*. page one-oh-six? and, read loud enough so that everybody can, hear you.
- S4: *too late mother, didn't you read the ten questions from, Nathan Zuckerman? dear, i did possess a copy, and the letter too the big three mama um, strikers?*
- S1: mm, they're those these are two Nazi um, officials. (actually) [S4: and i,] they were both, they both were involved in Nazi propaganda.
- S4: *and your son what about um, the judge's um, humility? where is his modesty? uh he only e- he only meant what happened, to the Jews in Europe not in Newark. we are, no- we are not the wretched of, Belsen who is Belsen?*
- S1: Belsen uh Bergen-Belsen is a concentration camp and this is the camp where Anne Frank died.

S4's reading aloud here does far more than simply restating the words of the text. She uses intonation, pauses, restarts, and inserted requests for clarification to bring the advantages of face-to-face communication to bear on her understanding of the text.

S1 does not have to guess where S4 would benefit from her greater knowledge of the background information necessary to make sense of various references in this passage—instead she customizes her contributions and clarifications based on S4’s performance. Roth’s text is being used as a discursive element reframed in S4’s own voice, allowing her to signal what she does and does not understand. Because we understand multiple performances of the same words as being representations of the “same” text, readers can and do use both spoken quotations and multiple physical copies of a book as a way to treat the text itself as an object of joint attention.

Collaboration and Change Within Reading Communities

We can also step back and see these kinds of joint interpretations taking place on a larger scale, distributed over both time and space. On the basis of a shared history of many such interactions, larger groups of readers can and do form eccentric, insular interpretive communities, generating interpretations that may well be wholly or largely impenetrable to readers outside the group. One illustrative example of this kind of reading community is a particular set of fans of the Sherlock Holmes detective stories written by Arthur Conan Doyle.

From the first publications of Sherlock Holmes stories in the late 1880s, readers, editors, advertisers, and wags have spoken of Holmes as if he were a real person. For some of these people, this belief was purely sincere. Doyle biographer Martin Booth (1997) reports, for instance, that the British post office had received letters addressed to Holmes until at least 1950. As early as 1890, Doyle marveled that a tobacconist in Philadelphia had written to his editor, J. M. Stoddart, to inquire ‘where he could get a copy of the monograph in which Sherlock Holmes described

the difference in the ashes of 140 different kinds of tobacco' (Green 1986: 4). Booth also tells an anecdote of his own which, even if he romanticizes slightly, indicates the widespread and continuing nature of this belief. When Sherlock Holmes came up in conversation at a hotel where Booth was lodging at Naini Tal, in the Himalayan foothills of India,

“Ah, yes!” [the proprietor] exclaimed. “Shur-luck Homes! You know he came to Naini Tal?”

“You mean,” I corrected him, “Arthur Conan Doyle came to Naini Tal?”

“No, sahib. It was Shur-luck Homes.”

When I asked why he had come, the proprietor did not know. It had happened before the war, before he was born. His father had told him about it. (1997: xi)

There is also a lively tradition of intentional “believers” in the existence of Holmes and Watson. These fans, who call themselves “Sherlockians”, adopt for playful purposes the pretense that they believe that Holmes was a historical figure, and Watson his real biographer and author of the tales. They produce a vast quantity of mock-scholarly articles under this conceit. The Sherlockians comprise a discourse community in the sense proposed by Swales (1990): they have common public goals, they have mechanisms for communication and information exchange among their members, they make use of community-specific genres and specialized terminology, and members of the group share a high general level of relevant expertise.

An interesting thing has happened over the course of many years of Sherlockian practice. The performance of this shared idiosyncratic construal of the texts has become routinized within the community, and as a result (Tobin 2006) it has

undergone some changes that look very much like the ways that the meanings of individual words can shift over time.

In lexical semantics, the routinization of an expression (Haiman, 1994; Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Hopper and Traugott, 2003) is associated with signal simplification and semantic bleaching. For example, the English word “goodbye” has undergone both kinds of changes since its origins in the phrase *God be with you*. Its form is reduced phonetically, and the meaning has become more abstract; some of the original semantic content of the phrase has been ‘bleached’ away. Similarly, as the Sherlockian community dedicated to producing and disseminating works that adopt this stance has solidified its institutional status, the explicit ironies and parodies that were the original *raison d’être* of the form have faded away. As the Sherlockian style and attitude becomes entrenched in the discourse of the Sherlockian community, the ironic dimension of the stance seems often to become increasingly de-emphasized or abandoned altogether. These readings invoke a historically ironic frame that has been bleached of much of its ironic meaning.

The task of the Sherlockian is to adopt a mixture of the methods of Sherlock Holmes and those of an academic historian to analyze the stories. Inconsistencies, omissions, and offhand remarks provide the grounds for their investigations, the goal of which is to determine the “facts” of Holmes’ life and related fictional matters. Popular topics include the question of what college Holmes attended, the name and number of Watson’s wives, the details of Holmes’ drug use, and the location of Watson’s war-wound. To the uninitiated reader, the resulting essays can be difficult to distinguish from sincere confusion over the veracity of the tales. The very first

Sherlockian essays, however, fit clearly into a genre that was very familiar to most relatively sophisticated readers: the academic parody.

A famous early example, widely cited in today's Sherlockian community as the foundational work in the genre, is Ronald Knox's lecture "Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes" (1911/1968). Knox's essay is primarily a parody of the analytical style of the Biblical "higher criticism" associated with David Friedrich Strauss, Ferdinand Christian Baur, and Ludwig Feuerbach, among others. This approach to theological criticism sought to apply Hegelian theories of history to biblical criticism. It aspired to determine the sources of the various books of the Old and New Testaments, and eventually to authenticate or discredit each one. The amusement value of Knox's essay lies largely in the satirical substitution of such a frivolous subject as Sherlock Holmes for such elevated theological objects.

Later Sherlockian writings put far less, if any, emphasis on spoofing the preoccupations and stylistic mannerisms of academic prose, and far more on the particulars of the Holmes texts. More and more references are internal to the extended discourse within the Sherlockian community, and markers of non-seriousness such as hyperformality and represented intonational exaggeration are far less frequent. For example, a typical recent article in the *Baker Street Journal*, Darak (2000), focuses on the question of what Holmes did with himself during the period between his retirement in 1903 and the publication of "The Problem of Thor Bridge" in 1922. This subject is not a means of targeting some object of parody, as were the arguments of "Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes". Instead, it is more importantly connected to a real, ongoing discussion taking place within the Sherlockian

community. The author of this article gives credit for competing theories among his fellow Sherlockians, and all citations are of the stories themselves or of other analyses published in the pages of the BSJ, where Knox's citations are patently made up and overtly parodic.

This increasing seriousness makes sense within the history of the increasing institutionalization of the Sherlockian stance and the discourse community where it might be indulged. Originally, the community of Sherlockians was small and intimate, and the earliest Sherlockian essays were published in settings where a sizeable portion of the audience was likely to be unfamiliar with the form. The Knox article was published at Oxford as a one-off spoof; essays by the original small cohort of the Baker Street Irregulars, in the 1930s, were often published in the pages of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, where the founder of the club, Christopher Morley, was an editor. Under these circumstances, there was limited opportunity for the stance to get heavily routinized outside of a small circle, continually in the position of enacting it for audiences who would find it novel. The society had only moderate institutional reality.

In the 1940s, however, Edgar W. Smith took over the leadership of the Baker Street Irregulars and began the publication of the *Baker Street Journal*, which has been publishing continuously since. Today there are dozens of societies dedicated to this particular mode of Holmes appreciation. Now there is a pre-existing framework in which all Sherlockian writing makes sense; it doesn't have to be a joke in order to avoid being cast out as an error. For its practitioners, the stance has become unremarkable, and need not be accompanied by any markers of a sarcastic or

otherwise unserious attitude on the writer's part; indeed, there is no requirement of facetiousness for current practitioners of the form. As in ordinary conversation, the successful production and comprehension of any one these narratives does not stand alone, but as part of a longer stream of interactions.

This is all very well as long as both readers and authors are active participants in the ongoing discourse. But as the Baker Street Irregulars have become more institutionalized, Sherlockians have also come to inhabit multiple roles within the matrix of joint activities that I outlined earlier in this chapter. They are readers of the Holmes stories, engaged in building up shared interpretations of these stories with their fellow readers. But they are also reading and producing published texts, which may be encountered by readers who do not share the Sherlockian common ground. This brings us back to the question that opened this chapter: Are readers and writers in a conversation with one another?

Back to Readers and Authors

Even in ordinary conversation, not all hearers are addressees. The experience of reading has several points in common with the experience of being an overhearer, rather than the addressee, of a face-to-face conversation. Authors and readers alike behave in many ways as if readers were ratified bystanders, for whose benefit the ostensible speech acts of a text are displayed.

Hearers come in a number of different varieties: for instance, one may be an addressee, a deliberate or accidental eavesdropper whom the speaker is not aware of, or a bystander whose access to a piece of talk is perceivable by those who are doing the talking. Bystanders can be ratified participants in an encounter (cf. Goffman 1981:

131-137) as when a professor answers one student's question during a twelve-person seminar, or not, as when diners at different tables in a restaurant expect one another to engage in the polite fiction that they cannot hear one another. The degree to which speakers are aware of their bystander listeners can vary, as can the degree to which they take their needs into account.

Gerrig (1993: 110) proposes that readers do indeed correspond to one particular kind of non-addressee hearer commonly involved in ordinary face-to-face conversation. In his account, both authors and readers typically 'behave as if readers are side-participants'—not overhearers—to the discourse of a narrative text, and 'in that role, authors intend readers to be genuinely informed by narrative utterances.' While overhearers have to try to make sense of utterances that were produced with no attempt to ensure that they share the speaker's perspective, Gerrig argues, authors conceptualize their readers as intended, ratified participants in the narrative discourse, whose needs must be taken into account.

The side-participant account has the merit of explaining some common ways in which narrative texts tend to defy verisimilitude. For example, we often see a character or narrator using nominals that correspond to a much lower degree of accessibility (Ariel 1990) than one would expect given the supposed state of shared knowledge between the represented speaker and her ostensible addressee. Striking examples of this phenomenon are common in serial narratives, in which a mere handful of represented conversational turns may be published over the course of many days or months. The first panels of daily comic strips are full of them. (9), for example, is from a recent installment of the soap-opera strip *Mary Worth*:

- (9) Dawn: My father wouldn't approve of my dating Drew! He wouldn't be able to overlook the age difference!

Mary: Give Wilbur more credit, Dawn!

Stilted though this dialogue may be, it does some useful work anticipating the needs of many of the strip's likely readers. Mary Worth is a daily comic with a wide variety of secondary characters. Readers, even those who frequently read the comic strip but have not been following the current story arc, may be unfamiliar with who Dawn's father is, despite Dawn and Mary's knowledge. The side-participant hypothesis explains this sort of usage nicely.

At the same time, there are important ways in which readers are more like overhearers of a text's author than they are like co-participants of any sort. Overhearers have access to the utterances that make up a stretch of discourse, but lack the opportunity to participate in the negotiation of meaning and exchange of clarifications. This missed opportunity has real effects on their ability to understand what speakers are saying, even when they can hear every word and see every gesture. Because they have no chance to collaborate in establishing a shared perspective, they are slower to comprehend a stream of discourse than direct participants in that discourse (Schober and Clark 1989). Readers of published texts are in much the same position: no matter how thoroughly an author's communicative intentions are directed towards generating particular interpretations for a text's real readers, readers are at a major disadvantage in comparison to any co-present interlocutor.

Similarly, authors can end up as overhearers of the interpretive conversations that go on among the readers of their own work. I am told (Lellenberg, personal

communication) that Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, reacted to samples of Sherlockian writing with confusion and distaste. Meanwhile, today's popular culture supports a multitude of similarly idiosyncratic reading communities for all kinds of novels, television shows, comic books, and other texts, producing enormous quantities of collaborative interpretations and alternative "replottings" (Gerrig 1993). It is common to find the authors of the source texts expressing a certain amount of bewilderment about these discourses, even if they are ultimately flattered by the attention and sympathetic with their readers' desire to find a creative outlet. J. K. Rowling, author of the wildly popular *Harry Potter* series, spoke of this experience in an interview (2006).

For a long time I never looked. People used to say to me, "Do you ever look at the fan sites or see what people have said online?" I was truthful; I said I didn't. Then one bored afternoon, I googled "Harry Potter." Oh... my... God. I had NO idea.

What we see happening here is a process in which authors are neither part of nor entirely oblivious to the kinds of extended, highly participatory, interpretive discourses taking place among communities of their readers. Instead, they become overhearers of their own readers' interpretive conversations.

Summary

Theoretical analyses of discourse processing often assume that texts in general and published fictional narratives in particular should be thought of as a form of interaction between the author and the reader, in which writers and readers occupy the positions of speaker and addressee. While these analyses are right to look for

interaction in the literary event, they are wrong to seek it primarily in a direct relationship between author and reader. In functional terms, readers act primarily as overhearers, rather than as addressees, of authors' textual utterances. In this role, they engage in side conversations with other readers, treating the texts as the objects of their joint attention. These interactions between readers draw on many of the concrete resources of immediate conversation and shared visual attention that authors and their readers cannot share. Indeed, authors who encounter the product of these interactions often find themselves inhabiting the role of overhearers—even eavesdroppers—themselves.

These observations do not undermine the notion that participation in literary discourse is shaped by the same kinds of interpersonal and cognitive demands as conversation. Quite the contrary: the standard objections to treating texts as examples of interactive, communicative discourse can largely be explained by taking account of the several different sites of interaction that textual discourse affords. Further, as we will see in the next chapter, the mechanics of social cognition are directly implicated in formal features of literary texts. That is, the structure of published fictions reflects the fact that authors and readers treat texts communicatively, and often exploits the peculiarities of our intersubjective minds.

Chapter 4: Effects of Egocentrism

Social Cognition and Literary Criticism

In this chapter, I take a closer look at the details of social cognition, including how, when, and how accurately speakers, hearers, and readers conceptualize the minds of others. I argue that those mechanics are directly implicated in the reading experience. There is a growing interest in literary studies in the relationship between fiction and a cognitive capacity known as “theory of mind”. These studies are just beginning to appear in print (Zunshine 2003, 2006; Herman 2006), but the subject has been a popular one of late at conferences (e.g. Mancing 2006, Green 2006 and Bronshteyn 2006) and an entire conference dedicated to “Theory of Mind and Literature” convened at Purdue University late last year (2007).

Broadly speaking, the term “theory of mind” is used in the cognitive sciences to refer to any ability to understand that other people have minds like one’s own, with thoughts, beliefs, desires, and intentions that may be different from one’s own mental states, and to the ability to hypothesize accurately about what these mental states might be. However, as mentioned in chapter two, there is a great deal of debate within cognitive and developmental psychology over what a “theory of mind” consists of. Most researchers agree that the ability to see others as intentional agents who possess mental states is a key competence of human beings, but the mechanism of this competence is far less settled. For this reason many prefer the more neutral term

“concept of mind” to describe the capacity. Some researchers have argued for a so-called “theory theory” (e.g. Morton 1980; Gopnik and Wellman 1994; Gopnik and Meltzoff 1997). In this view, understanding the thoughts and intentions of others involves an explicit representation of other people’s mental states, based on an actual theory of how these other minds operate. This theory is built up over time, beginning with a simple model that grows more complex and refined over time. Others (e.g. Goldman 1992; Harris 1992) have argued for a simulation account in which our ability to understand others is based in a process of role taking: simulating others’ thoughts and feelings rather than theorizing about them.

Many of the applications of research on concept of mind, or theory of mind, to literary studies come at it from the perspective of “theory” theorists, and more specifically a subset of this school of thought as seen in work by Simon Baron-Cohen (particularly Baron-Cohen 1995) claiming that the human mind has a specialized “theory of mind module”. I do not subscribe to this view myself, but also find that this difference of opinion has only moderate bearing on most of the above-cited literary applications. These are mainly concerned with the simple fact that people do form representations of other people’s beliefs, rather than the mechanics of how these representations are constructed.

Lisa Zunshine, for example, one of the most prominent literary theorists working in this area, has written extensively on the notion that readers formulate a “Theory of Mind” with respect to fictional characters (2003, 2006). Her work focuses on the connection between this Theory of Mind and the human capacity for metarepresentation: embedding clauses or representations several layers deep. In her

account, the major repercussion of literature's ability to challenge and exploit the human readiness to posit mental states can be found in the way that fiction leads to multiply embedded representations—"Peter thinks that Clarissa notices that Richard wants..."—which grow increasingly difficult to maintain in active consciousness. This is certainly an interesting observation connected to conceptualizing other people's minds, but it is not one that draws greatly from the details of how that conceptualization occurs.

I would like to suggest that it is very much worth looking at the details of social cognition, including how, when, and how accurately we conceptualize the minds of others, and that those mechanics are of direct interest to literary studies. I have been arguing that literature is in an important sense made out of scenes of joint attention, both in practice (the activities of the many real people involved in producing, reading, distributing, and responding to texts) and in representation (the activities of literary characters and the encoding and manipulation of viewpoint in narration). To the extent that this is so, literature is not created out of joint attention but created of it. Literature is bound by the rules and mechanisms of joint attention and, by extension, of social cognition. This includes biases in the system, the shortfalls of our intersubjective talents.

Even quite young typically developing children have striking intersubjective skills; as described in chapter 2, they generally begin to coordinate their interactions with objects and other people in a joint attentional way by their first birthday. By the time they're toddlers, they can express and respond to communicative intentions in impressively sophisticated ways, producing and understanding demands, assertions,

and questions that reflect a flexible implicit recognition that other people's intentions can differ from their own and may be influenced by their behavior. But young children are also substantially worse at keeping track of what other people believe than adults and older children are.

One of the best-documented limitations of young children in this regard is the difficulty they have with a group of activities known as "false-belief tasks". The standard false-belief task, first developed by Heinz Wimmer and Josef Perner in 1983, works as follows: the subject is shown a cookie box containing pencils instead of cookies. Then they are asked what another child, shown the closed box, will think is inside. Starting somewhere between 3 and 5 years of age, typically-developing children are able to work out that the correct answer is "cookies." They understand that the other person will have a false belief about the contents of the box, a belief that they do not share. Younger children, however, fail this test and others like it, and they all fail in the same way: by claiming that the other child will also believe there are pencils inside.

A common interpretation of these findings is that young children lack a theory of mind: that they cannot predict others' behavior in this kind of scenario because they don't yet have a concept of what a belief is, or, more generally, because they don't yet understand that other people have mental representations of any sort. But as we have seen, even though adults don't have the trouble with false-belief tasks that three-year-olds do, they too are far from perfect at keeping track of differences between others' beliefs and their own. A number of cognitive, social, and developmental psychologists (e.g. Birch and Bloom 2003; Keysar, Lin, and Barr

2003; Birch 2005) argue that false-belief findings with children and curse-of knowledge findings with adults reflect a single fundamental bias in social cognition, one that persists across development but is more severe in children, perhaps because they have less inhibitory control than adults do (Leslie and Polizzi 1998).

For adults and children, alike, then, “theories of mind” are imperfect, and the direction in which they are off-kilter is predictably self-centered. The things that are highly salient in our own minds—the tune of the song we are tapping out on the table, our own beliefs and knowledge about the topic of conversation—tend to seep into our notions of what others know or have noticed, or our notions about the obvious characteristics of objects in our environment. Because our own intentions and privileged information about the intentions of others stand out in our own minds, it can be hard to remember how much less apparent they may be to others.

Certain discourse circumstances seem particularly vulnerable to substantive misunderstandings caused by the curse of knowledge. Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, and Gilovich (2004) demonstrates that time pressure, for example, increases curse-of-knowledge biases. So too does the absence of paralinguistic cues such as intonation and gesture. This latter fact seems to make written discourse generally more vulnerable than face-to-face communication. Many people have observed that electronic communication seems even more vulnerable yet (Epley and Kruger 1994; Kruger, Epley, Parker and Ng 2005). Usage guides are full of cautions against using sarcasm in email and other online conversations because writers have trouble appreciating just how ambiguous they can be in the absence of the visual, prosodic, and contextual cues of face-to-face conversation.

Despite these frequent warnings, people persist in overestimating the transparency of their communicative intentions, and not just in writing. Allbritton, McKoon, and Ratcliff (1996) found that both professional speakers and untrained college students failed to provide sufficient prosodic cues to allow other speakers to guess which of two possible meanings they were trying to convey in uttering syntactically ambiguous sentences like *They rose early in May*. The trained speakers did manage to make the necessary prosodic distinctions when given explicit instructions about the two possible interpretations of a sentence and asked to pronounce the sentence twice, once for each meaning, but neither group did it both spontaneously and reliably. The non-professional speakers, though, failed to produce prosodically disambiguated utterances for most sentences even with these explicit prompts.

Given these findings, it's not surprising that researchers who study curse-of-knowledge effects tend to treat the bias as a dangerous trap. Camerer, Loewenstein and Weber (1989: 1246) see their research as “grounds for pessimism” about our ability to learn from either personal experience or the advice of others. Keysar and Henly (2002: 212) emphasize the ways in which our assessments of the transparency of our communicative intentions provide “a systematic source of miscommunication.” Birch (2005: 29) concludes that “future research needs to address exactly how and why knowledge is a curse, and explore potential antidotes for dispelling this curse.” Indeed, the curse of knowledge does lead us to misunderstand one another, often quite badly. Literature, however, can turn this curse into a blessing.

The Curse of Knowledge

Language use is a collaborative endeavor. In order for utterances to succeed as communication, language users must engage with and keep track of the perspectives of their interlocutors. Humans are generally excellent at divining information about other people's knowledge, attention, and intentions, and they manage that information in all kinds of subtle ways. They try to express their communicative intentions through actions that their listeners will understand, and try to understand speakers by making appropriate, relevant inferences. The appropriateness of these contributions and inferences rests not only on what is said but also on what the listener knows about the speaker's thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, intentions, and attentions.

People adjust what they say based on differences between what they know and what they have evidence to believe their interlocutors know. In a classic demonstration of this phenomenon, when Harvard student Douglas Kingsbury approached pedestrians in Cambridge, Massachusetts and asked in a local accent, "Can you tell me how to get to Central Square?" the responses he received were brief and direct, suitable for a local who could be expected to know other facts about the area, such as where the nearest subway entrance was (Krauss and Glucksberg 1977). However, when he prefaced his question with the remark, "I'm from out of town," the directions became more elaborate and explicit, including information about landmarks he would encounter on the way and how to recognize his destination when he got there. Kingsbury was able to elicit similarly detailed instructions when he signaled his probable lack of familiarity with local geography by adopting a rural Missouri accent. Other implicit signals of a lack of relevant expertise, such as

carrying a map, or even looking particularly lost and puzzled, can have a similar effect. An alert traveler seeking directions would do well to keep these elements of her self-presentation in mind, even to the point of saying straight out that she's a visitor to the city if she wants to be sure to get the out-of-town version of directions.

Humans are more skilled than any other animal at discerning what others perceive, want, believe, and intend, although other mammals, and especially other primates, do seem to understand more about intentional action and clues to others' perceptions than we once thought they did (see, e.g. Kaminski et al 2005). Humans also have unique skills of cultural collaboration: we engage in all kinds of collective activities structured by material and symbolic artifacts, as well as complex social institutions. These cultural artifacts and cultural institutions alike rely on our ability to understand other people as intentional agents like ourselves, but with ideas of their own, who can voluntarily direct our actions and attentions to outside entities (Bloom 1996; Searle 1995; Tomasello 1999).

And yet, despite all our impressive skills of "mind reading," and all the ways that successful communication requires us to perform expertly at sharing the perspectives of others, we also fall down on the job surprisingly often, and in predictable ways. For example, if we want to make ourselves understood with any degree of sophistication, we ought to avoid overestimating either how much our addressees already know or how obvious and transparent our intentions might be. That is, assuming we want to be of real help, we'd like to avoid giving the poor out-of-town visitor a terse response like "third stop on the tramway," when he has no idea where to find this supposed tramway, what line to take, which direction to go,

whether or not the driver sometimes goes past stations without stopping, how to request a stop, how to navigate the four blocks from the station to his final destination, or how to recognize it when he gets there.

On a more fundamental level, we similarly want to avoid referring to things in ways that make sense to us, but no sense at all to our interlocutors; otherwise all of our conversations would be as flawed as the exchange in (10), which was produced in a study of social language in nursery school children (Krauss and Glucksberg 1977: 104). The task in this study required two people to sit on either side of an opaque barrier. One, the “speaker”, was given an ordered set of unfamiliar, hard-to-describe designs. They appeared in a transparent dispenser holding six blocks, each inscribed with one of the designs. She was also given a peg on which the blocks could be stacked. The “listener,” on the other side of the barrier, had her own peg and duplicates of the blocks, but in his case the blocks were arranged randomly on the table. The job of the speaker was to take one block at a time from the base of her dispenser and place it on the peg, then tell her partner which block she should stack on her own peg, with the object of creating two identical stacks. Adults did well at this task, giving detailed descriptions the first time through, abbreviated increasingly as both speaker and listener became more familiar with the designs, the descriptions, and one another. Young children, however, had more trouble taking their partner’s perspective into account in their conversational forays. Thanks to the opaque barrier, neither of the four-year-olds could see the other child or the other child’s blocks, but there’s no sign of that on either side of the conversation in (10), in which each

contribution is meaningful to the person who speaks it, but not to anyone who doesn't share her knowledge and perspective:

- (10) Speaker (referring to one of the geometric figures): "It's a bird."
Listener: "Is this it?"
Speaker: "No."

Adults certainly do better than four-year-olds at taking the perspectives of others into account. Still, as it turns out, they don't outgrow these egocentric tendencies altogether. People who already know the outcome of an event overestimate what other people know about it and how easily should be able to predict it (Fischhoff 1975). They tend to believe that their internal states are far more transparent to others than they really are (Gilovich, Savitsky, and Medvec 1998) and that others pay more attention to their appearance and actions than they really do (Gilovich, Medvec, and Savitsky 2000, Gilovich, Kruger, and Medvec 2002). Their intuitions about the transparency of idioms like *kick the bucket*, *to go by the board*, and *the goose hangs high* vary according to what they think those idioms mean—once they learn a meaning for an idiom, they tend to believe that meaning is conveyed transparently by the linguistic constituents of the phrase (Keysar and Bly 1999), while people who haven't explicitly learned that definition don't find it transparent at all. They underestimate how ambiguous their own utterances can be and overestimate the helpfulness of their attempts at disambiguation (Keysar and Henley 2002).

In fact, given the right circumstances, adults can be every bit as oblivious to the opacity of their communicative intentions as Krauss and Glucksberg's four-year-olds. A nice illustration of our foibles in this direction can be found in the "tapping

study” conducted by Elizabeth Newton (1990), which has the pleasant benefit of being easy to try for yourself at home or in the classroom. Adult participants were asked to tap the rhythm of a well-known song and then assess how likely it was that a listener would be able to identify the song. The discrepancy between the expectation of comprehensibility and reality was considerable: while tappers expected that about half the listeners would be able to identify the song, the actual success rate was only 3%.

In 1989, three economists gave a name to the bias underlying this pattern of mistakes, which they described in the context of economic interest, market forces, and financial transactions: “Better-informed agents are unable to ignore private information even when it is in their interest to do so; more information is not always better” (Camerer, Loewenstein, and Weber 1989: 1233). In real-life economic transactions, they observed, asymmetries in information are common. Most sellers are better informed about the true value of their products than buyers are, for example, but a knowledgeable collector of Northern Soul records may well be better informed about the true value of a copy of Frank Wilson’s “Do I Love You” than the seller who found it in a box in his parents’ basement. However, they found that although “[t]he conventional assumption in such analyses of asymmetric information is that better-informed agents can accurately anticipate the judgments of less-informed agents,” their research and that of many psychologists before them suggested that, even given financial incentives to do so and repeated feedback about the accuracy of their predictions, people were “unable to ignore the additional information they possess”—that is, they suffered from a “curse of knowledge.”

Shifting Viewpoints

Two kinds of narrative effects capitalize on the curse of knowledge. **Zoomed out** effects exploit our ability to recognize that other people are susceptible to the curse of knowledge, while remaining serenely unaffected ourselves. These effects can create dramatic and structural ironies—the kinds of irony that play a central role in *Tristram Shandy*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Mansfield Park*, or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. **Zoomed in** effects, on the other hand, work through readers' own susceptibility to the curse. These effects serve as the source of aesthetically pleasing narrative surprises, the kind that pull the rug out from under you and leave you retracing your steps, trying to figure out how you were so misled.

Both kinds of effects have to do with shifting focus between viewpoints in a multi-level structure of mental representations. As Michael Israel and I have argued elsewhere (Israel and Tobin 2006; in preparation), understanding irony involves a dynamic reconstrual of a slice of discourse, or a represented situation, in which attention “zooms out” from the focused content of one mental space (Fauconnier 1985, 1997) to a higher viewpoint, from which the original viewpoint is reassessed. To achieve the rug-pull effect, meanwhile, a text must lead a reader to “zoom in” on a lower-level perspective, losing sight of the higher-level perspective from which the eventual rug-pulling revelation will come.

First, consider how this kind of cursed perspective taking works with a very brief and relatively unsophisticated kind of story. Keysar (1994) presents a series of experiments probing the question of how people keep track of what information counts as common ground between characters in a story they are reading—how much

and what kind of attention they pay to the question of “who knows what about whom,” in the words of one related study (Lea et al. 1998). In one of these experiments, participants read a short narrative in which one character, June, recommends a restaurant to another character, Mark. After eating at the restaurant, Mark leaves a note for June saying, “About that restaurant, it was marvelous, just marvelous.”

The participants who read a version of the narrative in which they’re told that Mark hates the restaurant tended to believe that June would take him to be sarcastic, while participants who read a version in which Mark loves the restaurant tended to believe that June would take him to be sincere, even though in both cases June has no access to the privileged information about Mark’s intention. What’s more, when asked why they believed what they did about June’s plausible reaction, participants tended not to point to their knowledge about Mark, but rather to features of Mark’s utterance, such as the repetition of “marvelous.”

The vantage of the narration in this case is of the type that Genette (1980) calls “nonfocalized,” in which the narrator provides more information than any single character knows, explaining with authority both June’s and Mark’s feelings about the restaurant, but with a certain flavor of “external focalization,” to borrow Genette’s terms once again. The latter kind of narration takes a purely external view of its characters, revealing nothing of their inner states. The Mark and June narrative is not forthcoming in any explicit way about the characters’ thoughts or intentions; instead it restricts itself to descriptions of their actions and their attitudes.

Mark and June are (supposedly) interacting with one another in the way that any real people would do, but the participant in the study has access to their interactions only through the mediation of a narrative that presents everything there is to be known about Mark, June, their actions, and their thoughts, as illustrated in figure 3-1.

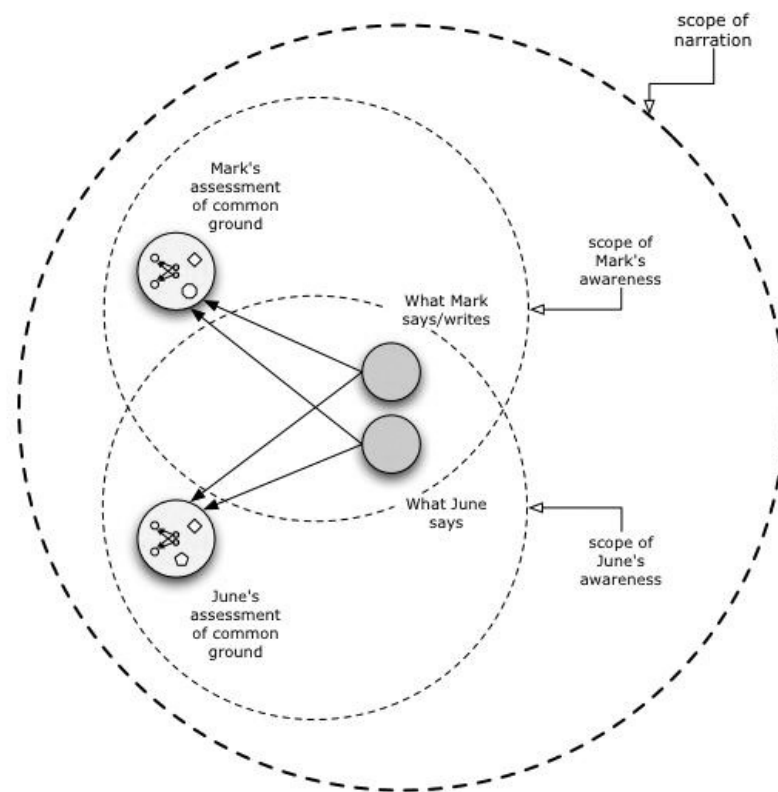


Figure 3-1: Scope of awareness and common ground in Mark and June narrative

Here we see that the scope of Mark's awareness encompasses his own actions, thoughts, and intentions, as well as many but not all of June's narrated experiences. June's awareness, similarly, encompasses her actions, thoughts, and intentions, and a subset of Mark's actions and experience. The scope of the narrative, meanwhile,

encompasses everything in the passage, which includes everything that we can know about what either one of the characters knows, plus some information that one or the other of the characters is not aware of. And because Mark and June only exist insofar as they have been narrated, the whole of what they “know” is entirely contained within the larger purview of the narrative as a whole. Competent readers are *supposed* to be able to keep track of both the boundaries of these perspectives and their relationship to one another; Keysar’s study demonstrates that they don’t always do so.

The relationship between the perspectives that a reader has to navigate in interpreting this brief narrative—Mark’s, June’s, the reader’s, the narrator’s—can be represented in terms of the “mental spaces” (Fauconnier 1985, 1997; Cutrer 1994) that a reader might construct in constructing an interpretation of the text. Mental spaces are structured mental representations that can be reflected in and prompted by linguistic structure, “partial structures that proliferate when we think and talk” (Fauconnier 1997: 11).

Mental spaces have **contents**, consisting of one or more entities, or participants, each of which can be associated with one or more roles (for example, “mother”). **Frames**, schematic understandings of aspects of the world and its workings, provide structure for these contents. For example, when a financial transaction is under discussion, speakers can refer to “the seller” with confidence that others will understand the reference with respect to a generally understood model of the typical participants, roles, and dynamics of such a transaction. A space also has *status* with relation to other spaces. These relative statuses can be hierarchical: mental

spaces can contain other mental spaces. They can also be epistemic: one space can have the status of fact with respect to another space, for example, or prediction. They can be temporal: a space can be figured as past with respect to one space and present with respect to another. Finally, mental spaces are also potential objects of joint attention, as speakers and hearers try to coordinate their mental representations and share attention to various aspects of those representations.

These spaces are linked together in networks that are built up dynamically in working memory and can be stored in episodic memory. One mental space leads to another, and mental spaces can inherit structure from other spaces. These networks can be configured in a variety of different ways: event-chaining configurations that represent the conceptual structures invoked by the expression of tense, aspect, or causation; world-structuring configurations involved in the conceptualization of beliefs, possibilities, and stories; narrative configurations involved in understanding narrative embedding or free indirect discourse; frame-structuring configurations such as those involved in analogical thinking, and so on. The chain of (some of the) mental spaces and inherited structure involved in a narrative like the one presented in the Mark and June task would look something like figure 3-2. Solid lines represent the trajectory of conceptual structures that are inherited “correctly”: it is not a mistake by any lights to assume that an author knows what her characters know. Dashed lines represent the “illusory” propagation of information.

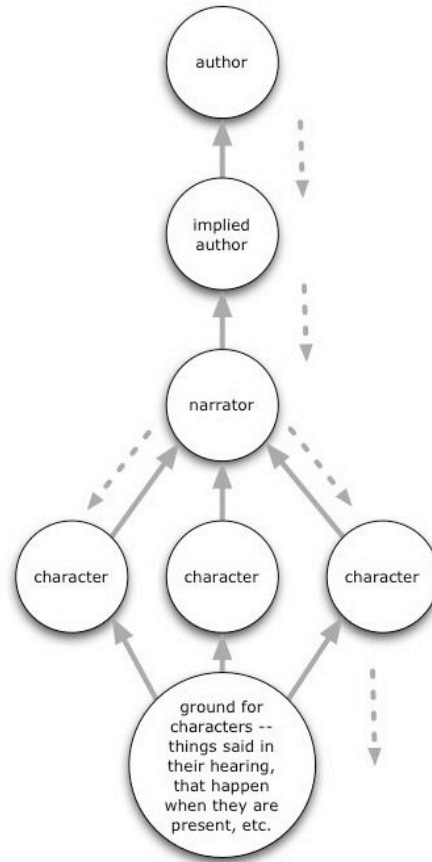


Figure 3-2: A narrative configuration of mental spaces

Each of these spaces contains a representation of the knowledge and attitudes of some player in the narrative situation. These mental spaces, like any others, will inherit some of their content from other spaces in the network. Propositions such as *The food at the restaurant Venezia is bad* can thus propagate through the network. What we might call “non-illusory” transparency, then—the unproblematic assumption that, for example, an author *must* know whatever she tells us that one of her characters knows (otherwise, how would we ever have heard about it?)—is the projection of structure up the chain. “Illusory” transparency—projection that seems to arise from the curse of knowledge—is the projection of structure down the chain.

Though Mental Spaces Theory does not claim to model cognitive biases like the curse of knowledge, it does have a theoretical apparatus to account for other ways that structure tends to flow from one mental space to another. Structure is projected automatically down the line via a principle called **space optimization**: “relevant structure not explicitly contradicted is inherited within the child-space” (Fauconnier 1997:112). For example, the statement “Sarah’s so nice, I wish she were my sister” sets up two spaces: the Base space of the speaker’s reality, and a “wish” space in which Sarah is the speaker’s sister. Relevant properties of Sarah that obtain in the Base and which are not dependent on the familial connection at issue—for example, Sarah’s appearance, age, and niceness—transfer to the wish space even though they are not themselves explicitly wished-for qualities.

Structure is often projected automatically in the opposite direction as well, through a principle called *presupposition float*. Some words and grammatical structures carry *presuppositions*; for example, both (11) and (12) presuppose that there is a king of France, thanks to the use of the definite description “the King of France”.

(11) The King of France is bald.

(12) The King of France is not bald.

Other presupposition triggers include factive verbs such as *realize*, change of state verbs such as *stop*, clefts and pseudoclefts, non-restrictive relative clauses, and iteratives. Presuppositions hold up under negation, as illustrated by the King of France example, but it is more difficult to predict when presuppositions of embedded

clauses will give rise to presuppositions of an entire sentence, or of a multi-sentence piece of discourse (see Levinson 1983:191-225). For example, the definite reference in “Mary wanted the King of France to visit her” does normally give rise to an interpretation including the presupposition that there is a king of France, but this presupposition can be cancelled in a way that doesn’t work when the reference occurs in a non-embedded clause. Hence (13) is felicitous, while (14) is not.

(13) Mary wanted the King of France to visit her, but there is no King of France.

(14) #The King of France is bald, but there is no King of France.

In Mental Spaces Theory, the difference between these cases is explained by the following rule: A presupposition floats up until it meets itself or its opposite (Fauconnier 1997: 61). In other words, the default state of affairs is for certain kinds of structure to propagate through a network of mental spaces, only stopping when it runs into a space where the contents actually contradict it.

In addition to projecting contents from one space to another, we can shift our *attention* within these configurations, moving our viewpoint from space to space. Every mental space configuration includes a **Base**, a **Viewpoint**, an **Event** and a **Focus**, although a single space can serve as more than one of these at the same time. The Base space serves as the subjectively construed ground of interpretation. The Viewpoint space is the space from which conceptual content is accessed. The space in Focus is the space on which attention is concentrated. The Event space is the one in which an event takes place.

Our awareness of and susceptibility to the curse of knowledge can be manipulated to prompt particular kinds of shifts of viewpoint with respect to these other spaces. These shifts create distinctive experiences of surprise, suspense, and irony.

Zooming In: Immersive Fiction and the Narrative Rug-Pull

The Twist Ending

The Mark and June example presents a classic curse of knowledge situation, in which the “cursed” reader has privileged information and forgets that other people might not have access to that information. This section addresses a slightly more complicated variation on this scenario, in which the affected reader or viewer is presented with what will eventually turn out to be incorrect information which she forgets is associated only with a particular, limited viewpoint. The revelation that this was an error, that the facts that the audience thought obtained at the base level of a narrative were only the belief or representation of characters within that narrative, can create a very satisfying sort of surprise. At its best, this kind of twist pulls the rug out from under the hoodwinked reader; some of her most basic assumptions about the truth of what’s going on are transformed in a sudden revelation, requiring the re-evaluation of many of her interpretations of previously represented events.

In the famously rug-pulling movie *The Sixth Sense*, for example, the young protagonist, Cole, has the unique ability to see dead people, who walk unseen among the living. For most of the movie, he struggles with this second sight with the help of

a sympathetic child psychologist, Malcolm Crowe, who is struggling with demons from his own past. The revelation that Dr. Crowe is one of the dead people that only Cole can see is the major surprise of the film, requiring naïve, first-time viewers to re-assess many of the events of the film in ways that differ radically from their original apparent significance. To drive home both the surprise and the fair play, this revelation is followed by a rapid replay of the many moments when Crowe's ghostly qualities were on display, but (the movie presumes) overlooked, so that the intended viewer can appreciate both aspects of the rug-pull at once.

To achieve this effect via the **zoomed in** gambit, a narrative must seduce readers into staying immersed in the story to a fault, locked into a relatively limited perspective and projecting the assumptions of that perspective through the entire mental space network. If the gambit works, the reader falls prey to the curse of knowledge, taking what she knows, or thinks she knows, and assuming that it is *just so*, that this view of events is coextensive with the whole story, and failing, at least for the time being, to allow for the possibility that the perspective she's been presented with isn't the only possible one.

The first step, then, is to establish a particular viewpoint unambiguously as belonging to some individual *within* the world of the text, and then to entice the reader to adopt this perspective as her own. The structures of language itself encode perspective in a variety of ways. For example, some lexical items, such as *tomorrow*, *later*, or *upstairs*, incorporate a particular vantage in space or time as an inherent part of their meaning, but there are many other ways, as well, in which linguistic structures reflect a particular construal of a given scene (Langacker 1987). You might

say that lexical and grammatical structures *reveal* a particular viewpoint, or that they *betray* it: it is impossible to express much of anything without imbuing that expression with a particular perspective. Consider, for example, the difference between (15) and (16):

(15) The lanes diverge at Sixth Street.

(16) The lanes merge at Sixth Street.

In Langacker's terms, these two expressions represent a difference of perspective involving *mental scanning*. The two sentences describe the same scene; their difference resides in the direction of the conceptualizer's mental path through that scene.

The perspective invoked by a given utterance can also vary according to whether the conceptualizing agent—or focalizer, to use the corresponding term from narratology—is or is not represented explicitly (Langacker's *objective* vs. *subjective* construal). In both (17) and (18), for example, the position of the squirrel “high above” invokes a vantage point close to the ground below; in (17) the vantage holder is construed objectively—from the outside—while in (18) it is construed subjectively, in that we are simply invited to consider the squirrel from this vantage ourselves.

(17) The cat spotted a squirrel perched high above.

(18) A squirrel perched high above.

(18) thus seems more readily to invite its reader to identify directly with the perspective with respect to which the squirrel is “high above”. But the reader of either

one may employ what Brian MacWhinney (2005) calls the “enactive mode” of processing, in which she adopts the presented perspective as her own. What’s more, it seems that people are more likely to process utterances “enactively” when they occur in the context of an extended narrative discourse. “The longer and more vivid our experiences,” MacWhinney observes, “the more they stimulate enactive processes in comprehension.”

To reiterate:

1. Narrative offers a range of possibilities for conveying embedded perspectives, such as the viewpoint of a self-conscious narrator, or the reported/quoted perspectives of non-narrator characters.
2. The more an embedded perspective dominates the narrative,
 - the more the addressee will align her perspective with the embedded perspective;
 - the more the addressee will be affected by the Curse of Knowledge, that is, by the additional information she possesses but should ignore when imagining what others think; and
 - the more the addressee will be vulnerable to a narrative rug-pull.

The narrative trick of pulling the rug out from under the addressee requires a masterful balance if it is to be satisfying: the rug-pulling revelation must be genuinely surprising, but it’s no good if the narrative simply tells you one thing, then another. A narrative that seems merely inconsistent may indeed make the reader feel like the rug has been pulled out from under her, but on a different level—not intentionally, not

pleasurably, but through a failure of the text. The rug-pull that satisfies as a rug-pull builds up a set of expectations only to undermine them in a flash, while maintaining a sense that the undermining has all been done in a spirit of fair play. Specifically, a rug-pull is successful if

1. it is unexpected; and
2. it does not, in retrospect, conflict with the information otherwise presented.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

Ordinarily, we are not supposed to bamboozle our friends and expect them to enjoy and applaud our efforts, but classic “clue-puzzle” detective fiction aims at precisely this goal. One of the features that distinguishes the clue-puzzle mystery from the broader category of crime fiction, as well as from sister and predecessor genres such as the thriller or the sensation novel, is a particular pair of constraints on what counts as appropriate, “fair,” or cooperative. These two constraints and the tug of war between them have long been recognized, described decades ago by eminent practitioners of the form:

The body of the work should be occupied with the telling of the story, in the course of which the date, or ‘clues,’ should be produced as inconspicuously as possible, but clearly and without ambiguity in regard to their essentials. The author should be scrupulously fair in his conduct of the game.” (Freeman 1924)

The reader must be given every clue—but he must not be told, surely, all the detective’s deductions, lest he should see the solution too far ahead. Worse still, supposing, even without the detective’s help, he interprets all the clues accurately on his own account, what becomes of the surprise? How can we at the same time show the reader everything and yet legitimately obfuscate him as to its meaning? (Sayers 1929)

The big surprise in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is that the narrator, Dr. Sheppard, is the murderer. At the end of the novel, Sheppard himself crows over the narrative's compliance with both of the genre's prime constraints on fair play:

I am rather pleased with myself as a writer. What could be neater, for instance, than the following:

"The letters were brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone."

All true, you see. But suppose I had put a row of stars after the first sentence! Would somebody then have wondered what exactly happened in that blank ten minutes?

In this case, the surprise goes against not just one, but two sets of expectations. One arises from structural consequences of the fact that Sheppard is the narrator. His embedded perspective dominates the narrative, encouraging the reader at every turn to align her own perspective with it. What's more, there are conventions of the genre that reinforce this reading. Sheppard is also serving as the detective Poirot's sidekick and amenuesis. That is to say, he is not just any narrator, but a temporary Watson, making him one step further immune from suspicion. Indeed, these factors led to a certain amount of disagreement over whether this maneuver really did count as fair play.

"The trick played on the reader in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is hardly a legitimate device of the detective-story writer" (Wright 1927)

“...[T]his opinion merely represents a natural resentment at having been ingeniously bamboozled. All the necessary data are given.” (Sayers 1929)

This dispute depends on the degree to which the reader is able, after the fact, to take back the conflation of narrator with author. There is something especially unsettling about the revelation that a trusted narrator has been unreliable. It is so easy to succumb to the curse of knowledge in this way that it happens invisibly; readers felt not just fooled, but downright betrayed by the way Christie had disguised her most crucial clues. This kind of twist ending can thus be especially exhilarating or especially infuriating (or simply tiresome, depending on how often one encounters the same technique). Perhaps this quality is the reason that the ending of *Roger Ackroyd* could feel so fresh and daring, even though similarly structured revelations were common enough in other genres, Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) being perhaps the most famous example.

Another reason that Christie’s version of this twist was so effective and surprising, of course, was the way that it played on other conventions of the genre. One way that this kind of surprise can be deployed is by exploiting the range of narrative conventions for lively exposition. Authors and readers have a contractual arrangement according to which authors must provide exposition, but without being tedious. The conventions that have arisen to accommodate this requirement provide a convenient opportunity to set readers up to believe a piece of information is “true” at the base level of a narrative, when in fact all that they know is that one character believes it to be true, or has said that it is true. This technique provides abundant opportunities for narrative twists that capitalize on the curse of knowledge, since it is

when we overpopulate possible viewpoints with what we know (or think we know) that we are vulnerable to these sorts of rug-pulls.

Many kinds of fiction are popular for their presentation of rich detail about an unfamiliar world and its workings. This world may itself be fictional, but need not be; James Clavell's *Shogun* or Patrick O'Brien's Aubrey/Maturin series are widely acclaimed for their attention to the mechanics and trappings of their historical settings. But regardless of whether the information in question is historical, technical, fantastical, or science-fictional, the *Moby Dick* technique of simply inserting pages of supplementary material is often viewed as intrusive (deliberately so, in some experimental works) or old-fashioned. Essayist and science fiction writer Bruce Sterling (1996) refers to these insertions of lengthy "info-dumps" in the authorial voice as "stapledons," after British philosopher and novelist Olaf Stapledon, whose seminal works of speculative fiction are more widely admired for the scope and innovation of their ideas than the dynamism of their prose.

But if a novel's plot hinges around an intricate technicality of Victorian inheritance law, the behavior of Chinese ghosts, or the tensile strength of nanobot-engineered diamond, this background must be conveyed to the reader somehow. One common technique is to have characters discuss the facts with one another, what Sterling calls "As You Know Bob" or "maid and butler dialogue". This approach can be managed more or less deftly, of course, and less skillful examples are often the subject of comment and parody. Regardless, this convention is deployed so frequently that readers grow very much used to the idea that lots of information about the basic facts of the setting will arrive in the mouths of characters.

Similarly, the narrator of *Roger Ackroyd* fills a familiar role, that of the faithful Watson character. This character serves as the detective's assistant and amanuensis, and as the reader's proxy. Watsons abound in classic detective fiction, from the prototype unnamed narrator in Poe's Dupin stories, to Watson himself, and Hercule Poirot's own usual sidekick Arthur Hastings. The Watson character serves his own conventional purpose: He gives the reader access to all the relevant clues, and to tantalizing hints about the detective's superior lines of deduction, without revealing too much about their conclusions until the proper time. This convention reinforces the zoomed-in effect; while one can often overcome the curse of knowledge given the opportunity to consciously reflect on the possibility that it might be a mistake, the conventional role of the Watson character helps to discourage readers from doing so.

Zooming Out: Irony and the Curse of Knowledge

The flip side of the zoomed-in phenomenon is the range of literary effects that arise from the representation of the curse of knowledge and its consequences. Our familiarity with the tendency of others to fall into the traps of these egocentric biases can be exploited to create a sense of ironic distance. The presentation of fatally clashing viewpoints, constructed around curse-of-knowledge failures on the part of characters, prompts the reader to "zoom out" to a higher-level perspective, from which the lower-level viewpoints may be seen ironically.

The kinds of phenomena that have been described as varieties of irony are so varied and numerous that it is not always clear whether they have anything in common at all. In cognitive science, it is common (Sperber & Wilson 1981, 1998; Clark & Gerrig 1984; Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989), to restrict studies of irony to “**verbal ironies**” such as blame-by-praise (cf. Knox 1961), or cases such as “This is just lovely,” said bitterly of something particularly squalid. Sarcasm is the paradigm case of concise verbal irony, and Swift’s “Modest Proposal” is the classic extended example. Verbal ironies typically can be “decoded” by understanding that the speaker’s position and the speaker’s sarcastically adopted position differ in crucial ways. Swift’s narrator proposes that Irish babies should be bred and slaughtered as meat for human consumption. The successful interpreter understands that the implied Swift himself proposes no such thing; instead he is presenting a savage and satirical criticism of the cruelty of the English landlord class.

In other domains, irony may more frequently refer to a peculiarly sophisticated or detached attitude, such as the ironic enjoyment of camp (cf. Sontag 1964) or the simultaneous appreciation of several mutually exclusive explanations of the world that Schlegel described as the ironic mental posture of Romanticism.

Situational ironies, meanwhile, hinge on the direct opposition of actual outcomes to intended outcomes or the means by which they are pursued. An action intended to prevent some circumstance actually brings it about, or an action intended to bring about some circumstance directly prevents it, as depicted in O. Henry’s “Gift of the Magi,” in which a young wife sells her hair to buy a chain for her husband’s watch, while he has sold the watch to buy her combs for her long hair, or Somerset

Maugham's "Appointment in Samarra," in which a young man flees the figure of Death only to end up in the city where their appointment had been scheduled all along. **Dramatic ironies** arise from critical disparities between a character's limited knowledge of his situation and the reader's or audience member's greater understanding, giving Huck Finn's "All right, then, I'll *go* to hell" a special significance and poignancy, and adding a special *frisson* to watching Oedipus woo Jocasta.

All of these kinds of irony have in common a particular kind of interpretive experience or attitude that comes from a doubled viewpoint, a sense that one has "stepped back" or zoomed out from one viewpoint to another, more sophisticated view, from which one can gaze, smugly or sympathetically, down upon the original.

Wayne Booth describes the experience in this way:

...the process is in some respects more like a leap or climb to a higher level than like scratching a surface or plunging deeper. The movement is always toward an obscured point that is intended as wiser, wittier, more compassionate, subtler, truer, more moral, or at least less obviously vulnerable to further irony. (Booth 1974:36)

The experience of irony in the sense described here arises when an expressed proposition conflicts with the content of a focused space in a way that leads the conceptualizer to adjust the entire mental space configuration. In order to count as ironic, an expressed proposition in some focus space must conflict with the content of an implicit or presupposed proposition in a higher viewpoint, as illustrated in Figure 3-3.

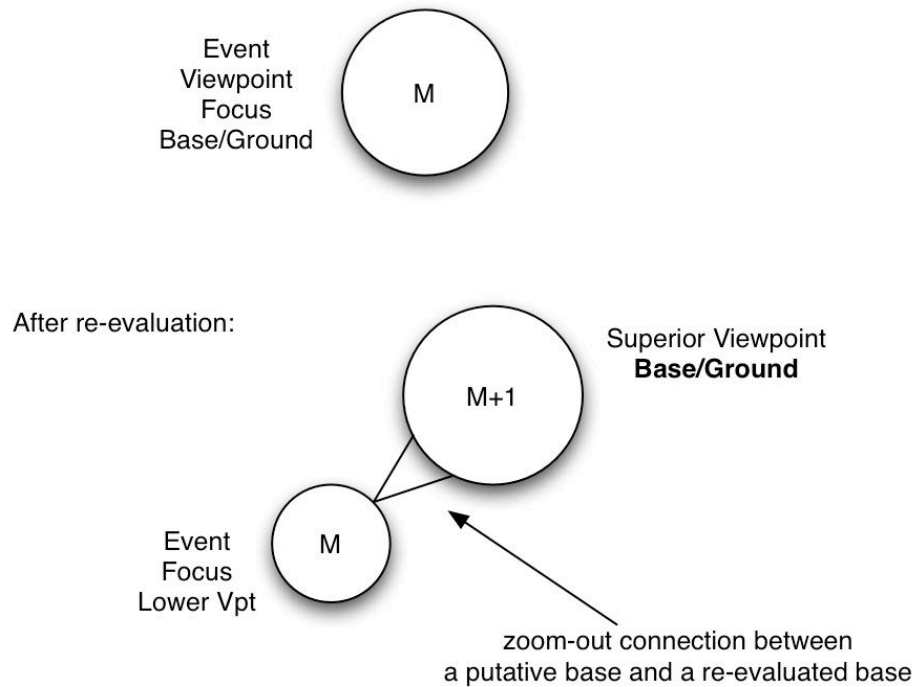


Figure 3-3: Zooming out

This means that irony depends on the availability or construction of a new Viewpoint space from which one can re-access a prior Focus space and its Viewpoint at the same time, creating a “view of a viewpoint”, or distinguishing between what John Haiman (1998:80) calls “the difference between a behaving and a scrutinizing self.”

The proper kind of clash at a lower level of a narrative configuration can prompt a reader to “zoom out” to a higher level of the narrative discourse structure. This zooming out both provides the experience of ironic “distance” and, often by tapping into features of the existing discourse situation, a sense of complicity between the interpreter and some real or imaginary interlocutor. Figure 3-4 illustrates a simple zooming-out scenario for a classic example of verbal irony. “Nice weather we’re having,” says one person to another, as dismal rain pours down upon them. In order to

achieve the ironic interpretation of this statement, the hearer constructs two spaces: a Focus space with the proposition that the weather is nice, and a new Ironic Viewpoint, which is distinguished from an ordinary observation that the weather is, in fact, *not* nice, by being set up as a view of the pretended or represented view that the weather is nice. This viewpoint space represents a new ground and a new potential common ground for communication between the interpreter and some real or imaginary interlocutor: the object of their joint attention.

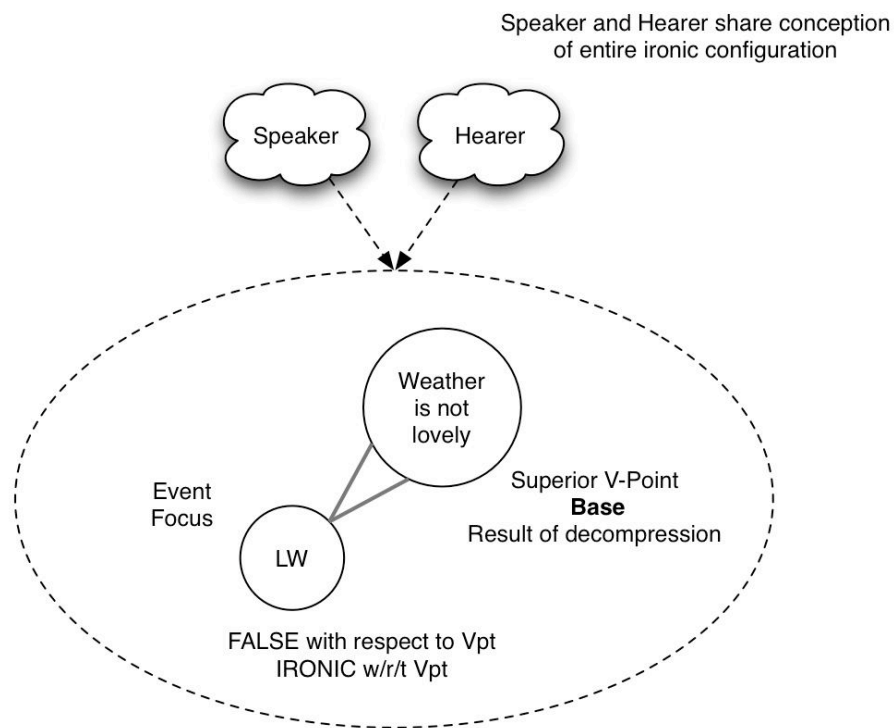


Figure 3-4: “Lovely weather”

The zoom-out effect of irony in this way involves a kind of alienation from the participants associated with the lower-level space. The higher-level common ground from which one views those participants, meanwhile, is often already built into the discourse situation or genre in which the irony is presented. Since the

discourse situation of a novel operates on at least three levels—the level that a reader shares with an implied author, the level of the narrator or focalizer, and the level of the narration itself—the ironic zoom-out puts the reader freshly in line with the implied authorial viewpoint, providing a potential sense of complicity with the author.

Because of these pre-established higher-level viewpoints and the way that information spreads through a mental space network, depictions of narrators and characters falling prey to the curse of knowledge provide an excellent means of prompting readers to zoom out in this way. The resulting ironies may be subtle or broad, gentle or cruel, nuanced or coarse, depending on the manipulation of the character's cursed thinking, its context, and whether or not the character ever awakens to the biases that serve as the basis for generating the ironic effect.

To illustrate how this works, let's turn first to a curse-of-knowledge irony in which the character falling prey to the curse is sympathetic, but still very much the *victim* of the resulting irony and the butt of a joke that the implied author and perceptive readers share. This example comes from a children's novel by E. Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899). The novel is narrated by one of six siblings, Dora, Oswald, Dicky, Alice, Noël, or Horace Octavius. Very early on, this narrator observes, "It is one of us that tells this story—but I shall not tell you which: only at the very end perhaps I will. While the story is going on you may be trying to guess, only I bet you don't."

For the attentive reader, however, this mystery doesn't last long. Excerpts (19), (20), and (21) come in quick succession over the first few pages of the book:

(19) It is one of us that tells this story—but I shall not tell you which: only at the very end perhaps I will. While the story is going on you may be trying to guess, only I bet you don't.

(20) Dora and Dicky did not look pleased, but I kicked Noël under the table to make him hurry up, and then he said he didn't think he wanted to play any more. I told Noël to be a man and not a sniveling pig.

(21) “Whichever it is,” [Noël] added, “none of you shall want for anything, though Oswald did kick me, and say I was a sniveling pig.”

Once a reader appreciates that the narrator is clearly Oswald, despite his attempts to hide it, and his oft-demonstrated conviction that he *is* hiding it, the conceit provides a good deal of humor and dramatic irony for the remainder of the novel. Every time the narrator makes flattering remarks about Oswald's bravery, kindness, and, above all, modesty, as he does frequently, the reader can enjoy another chuckle at his expense.

Perhaps one of the most important conventions at work here is the convention that the characters in a novel are, from their own point of view, “real”—as a participant in the events of the novel, the first-person speaker of these utterances has the same status as the other characters he describes. As a self-conscious narrator, he is subject to all sorts of expectations basic to the conventions of a particular discourse type, many of which are general to our basic model of ordinary conversation. For example, we expect that, in the absence of any explicit signal otherwise, the same speaker will obtain across the entire narrative.

We expect, too, that we can use general Gricean standards of cooperative language use to guide our interpretation of his utterances: we take him to be

consciously taking his audience into account, to have the intention for that audience to recognize his meaning and his intention that they recognize that meaning; we expect him to adhere (or at least believe himself to be adhering, or intend for his audience to believe him to be adhering) to principles of relevance and quality; and so on. But the conventions of the genre also tell us that we have appeal to a higher common ground, and that there is a level of narration from the point of view of which the narrator, characters, and events of the story are mere fictions, subject to the intentions of the implied author.

Convention provides ample basis for readers to situate the narrator Oswald in a narrative situation that includes an implied audience and the assumption that the focalizer is articulating the narrative for the purpose of making his intended meaning evident to that audience. So when Oswald declares that he plans to conceal his identity, and proceeds to make several utterances that clearly indicate which of the six children he must be, we are aware not only that Oswald has made a “mistake” but also that there is a more fundamental level on which these moves are not a mistake at all.

A reader who is enjoying the ironic interpretive experience here is aware of the ways in which what she understands about the discourse situation diverges from what Oswald intends her to get. His vision of his addressee is different from that of the “real” or Nesbit-implied reader. If we take it that the implied Nesbit intends for her reader not only to construct model 2, as illustrated in Figure 3-5, but to recognize the clash with model 1, partaking of this view of a viewpoint provides an experience of ironic distance, and aesthetic, perhaps even moral, pleasure.

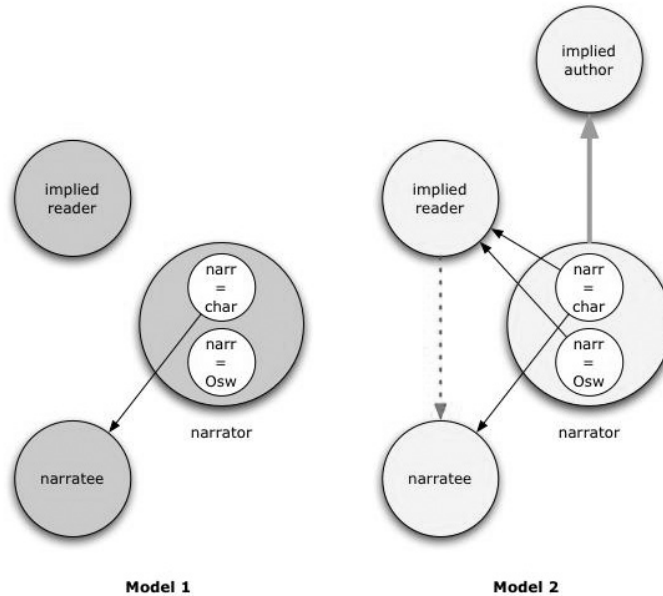


Figure 3-5: Clashing models in *Treasure Seekers*

This kind of ironic construction centered on a character’s inability to distinguish between his or her own beliefs and those of others is not rare, nor need it be deployed as broadly as it is in Nesbit. Consider, for example, the ironies of egocentrism at the heart of Jane Austen’s *Emma*. *Emma* is a novel in which self-awareness slowly dawns upon a character whose delightful, but fatally limited, view of events is for the most part the focalizing perspective of the narrative. How is it that Austen immerses, or seems to immerse, readers in a perspective whose most striking quality is its lack of self-awareness, while allowing the same readers to appreciate both that lack and its eventual abeyance? The answer, again, is to play on the curse of knowledge in order to prompt the reader to “zoom out” to a higher-level perspective. Readers can then shift between this ironic viewpoint, where they stand with the implied author to cast a critical eye on Emma’s view of her own actions, and the sympathetic and subjectively construed perspective of Emma herself.

A fine illustrative example of the way that Austen makes use of the curse of knowledge to create ironic distance can be found in the episode of Mr. Elton's love note. At this point in the novel, the "handsome, clever, and rich" Emma Woodhouse has befriended Harriet Smith and taken her under her wing. Harriet is sweet and pretty, but possessed of limited talents and intelligence. Harriet's parentage is also unknown, and her social standing is therefore murky at best. These facts do not stop Emma, who is stoutly loyal as well as frequently unwise, from embarking on a series of ill-fated schemes to prove Harriet's worth and marry her off to a man suitable to what Emma believes to be her proper station in life, a belief that, as it turns out, no one but Emma will share. It is to this purpose that Emma begins an extended campaign to bring Harriet into frequent contact with the gentleman Mr. Elton, with Emma herself on hand as facilitator and chaperone.

To Emma, the import and object of these interactions could not be plainer. To Elton, meanwhile, they are equally obvious—but not the same. He knows his enthusiasm and compliments are directed at Emma, not Harriet, and as Harriet is not even a socially viable object for his affections, he sees no ambiguity. At last, in typical Regency fashion, he sends a coy, lightly coded "charade" of a love note, which does not explicitly name the object of his affections but should make her identity abundantly clear to anyone with any acquaintance with the affair. Emma reads it:

She cast her eye over it, pondered, caught the meaning, read it through again to be quite certain, and quite mistress of the lines, and then passing it to Harriet, sat happily smiling, and saying to herself, while Harriet was puzzling over the paper in all the confusion of hope and dullness, "Very well, Mr.

Elton, very well indeed.... This is saying very plainly, 'Pray, Miss Smith, give me leave to pay my addresses to you.'

...*Thy ready wit the word will soon supply.*

Humph--Harriet's ready wit! All the better. A man must be very much in love, indeed, to describe her so.

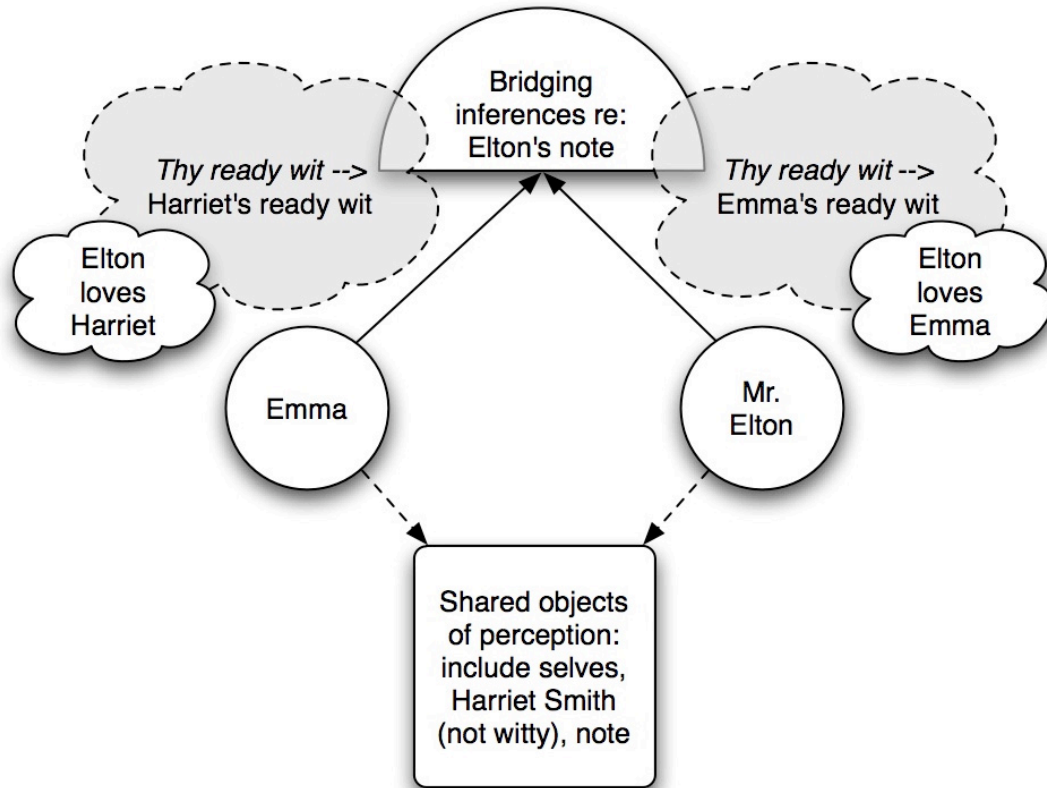


Figure 3-6: "Thy ready wit"

Despite all other evidence to the contrary, Emma resolves the reference of *thy ready wit* in light of her own understanding of the relationship at hand, reliant on her conviction that everyone shares and is aware of her intentions regarding Harriet and Mr. Elton. Because she assumes that everyone else shares her belief that Elton and Harriet are well suited to one another, and that they make a likely match, the note *must* therefore be addressed to Harriet. If the details of its description differ from

other facts, such as Harriet's relative verbal dexterity, those discrepancies must be explained away in some other way. Elton, meanwhile, has composed his letter with the full expectation that his own intentions and understanding are just as widely held as Emma believes hers to be. Both writing and reading are thus "cursed", as illustrated in figure 3-6.

Both ways of interpreting *thy ready wit* are vexed from the point of view of successfully coordinating Emma's and Elton's communicative intentions. Fortunately, the reader is not bound to choose one to the exclusion of the other. Instead, by re-construing the events from a higher-level viewpoint, as in figure 3-6, she can interpret *thy ready wit* as a source of confusion, and evidence of Emma's lack of self-awareness. The presentation of fatally clashing viewpoints, constructed around course-of-knowledge failures, thus prompts the reader to zoom out to a loftier perspective, and ironic distance ensues. By artfully managing this experience in conjunction with the "zoomed in" perspective of Emma's own subjectively construed experience, and a progression of increasing confluence between the two, the novel creates a nuanced portrait of a heroine both sympathetic and flawed, and a convincing arc of growing self-knowledge and character.

Summary

The dynamics of joint attention and perspective taking are crucial to the pragmatics of both conversational and literary discourse. However, they do not make communication a process of perfect coordination. Indeed, it is riddled with egocentric

biases such as those arising from the curse of knowledge. As we have seen, complex narrative discourses also incorporate these interpretive biases, and the apparent trap of these biases provides rich material for creative narrative and literary aesthetic effects.

The curse of knowledge gives rise to two kinds of literary effects:

1. **Zoomed-In Effects.** Texts can encourage readers to over-generalize from a limited perspective. Narrative texts, especially, offer many opportunities to present embedded perspectives, such as the reported beliefs of non-narrator characters, or the viewpoint of a self-conscious narrator. The more extended the reader's exposure to an embedded perspective, the more likely she is to align her own viewpoint with that embedded view, and then to fall prey to the curse of knowledge, failing to discount this additional information when imagining what others think. Texts can take advantage of this tendency to engineer "rug-pull" endings, surprising readers with information that contradicts the over-generalized propositions. These surprises qualify as satisfying twists because they are both unexpected and, in retrospect, consistent with the information otherwise presented in the text. Conventions that originally evolved to fulfill other goals, such as verisimilitude, allowing the reader to be privy to a detective's processes but not his conclusions, or circumventing tedious exposition—can be exploited to further facilitate these effects.
2. **Zoomed-Out Effects.** Texts can prompt readers to recognize characters' susceptibility to the curse of knowledge, showing them to be poor judges of

the transparency of their own communicative intentions. The discrepancy between the way the characters understand their own situation and what the reader is given to understand the true situation to be is a species of dramatic irony. In recognizing the source of this discrepancy, readers “zoom out” to a more distant perspective on the characters’ perspectives. A perspective that was first construed subjectively is in this way newly construed as an object of conceptualization. The ironic zoom-out puts the reader in line with the implied authorial viewpoint, providing a sense of complicity and the feeling of “looking down on” the object, or victim, of the irony.

Chapter 5: Puzzles of Joint Attention in Poe and Woolf

New Readings

Discussion of joint attention in the preceding chapters has focused largely on the ways that literature engages directly with the social-cognitive life and predilections of its readers. In this chapter and the next, I will turn to the question of how these concepts from cognitive science and social psychology can contribute to one of the primary goals of literary criticism: opening up spaces for new and interesting readings of individual texts. The work of interpretation is central to literary studies. Can all this talk of joint attention and social cognition add anything novel to the interpretive project, or is it just a matter of providing new terminology for old ideas? Why anyone should care about the “social cognition” of fictional characters at all? Being made of text rather than bone, blood, and neurons, they needn’t suffer from the same cognitive limitations as those who would read or write the narratives that describe them. Indeed, they do not cognize at all, socially or otherwise.

In this chapter I propose that the concept of joint attention opens the door to fresh interpretations of two texts: Edgar Allan Poe’s “Murder in the Rue Morgue” and Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. My major claim is that that a frequently cited affinity between two historical genres—the so-called “stream-of-consciousness” novel of British Modernism and detective fiction of the same era—can be traced in

part to similarities in the ways that two famous examples of these genres deploy joint attentional scenes. Armed with a theory of joint attention, we find in these texts not just a shared interest in the relationship between visual attention and mental states but shared methods for their depiction.

Poe and Woolf might seem to have little in common beyond lasting critical attention and a tendency towards stylistic pyrotechnics. But looking at joint attention in these texts reveals facets of each author that might otherwise be obscured. Poe turns out to be a theorist of consciousness, not just a psychological writer in general, but a social psychologist in particular. His attention to tracing the routes of others' thoughts displays a remarkably modern preoccupation with intersubjectivity and its material mechanics. Stripped of the fustian garb of his prose, "The Murders at the Rue Morgue" emerges as a surprisingly modernist work.

Meanwhile, Woolf's interest in the desperate and mostly doomed attempt to understand and connect to the minds of others is so surpassingly evident as to be almost not worth mentioning at all. Similarly, it is patently obvious that *To the Lighthouse* evinces a pervasive interest in seeing, modes of seeing, and the relationship between knowledge and perception. Indeed, its central character is a painter, and one of its most memorable passages centers on her attempts to "think of" and "see" a "kitchen table when it's not there." But the similarities between her novel and Poe's story, in the ways that both connect perception of external objects to the potential for intersubjective experience, dramatically underline the *connection* between these two tropes, seeing and connections with other minds. Again and again the two are figured together, through triangles of joint attention. Finally, a focus on

joint attention makes it clear that *To the Lighthouse* centers on a puzzle. “Think of a table when you aren't there” has the same structure as a Zen koan or child’s riddle, one whose answer, I will argue, depends not only on Ramsey’s philosophical debate over the relationship between existence and perception, but also on the crucial importance of shared experience. What does it mean to see something if no one is there to see it with you, or something that no one else can?

A reading of the two texts centered on joint attention illuminates the common ground between these two apparently very different writers. Poe, for whom I claim the status of a theorist of consciousness, and Woolf, the theorist of irredeemably internal subjective experience, both produce narratives not just of consciousness but of interconsciousness. In each, the internal and subjective are really about that which is external, triangulated upon, and intersubjective. The works and the characters within slowly piece together evidence to study the interior lives of others, mysteries that may or may not be solved.

The Modernists and the Detectives

Where the modernist novel renounces linearity, logical order, and the stability of the outer surface of reality, the detective story embraces and valorizes them. D. A. Miller’s seminal study *The Novel and the Police* (1988), for example, presents twentieth-century detective fiction as the inheritor of a textual trend that blossomed in the nineteenth century, in which the representation of crime and policing cemented the novel’s role as an oblique form of social control. The conventions of the detective

story are soothing, orderly, and contained; they assume that the world is rational and knowable. Surveillance is justifiable and temporary. Disruptions will be settled, transgressions will be located and remedied, crimes will be punished. In short, detective fiction carries water for the status quo. As such, the “ordered surface of life and reality” and “determination of an onerous plot” (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:393) that modernism rejected are precisely where detective stories are most at home.

And yet, as Gertrude Stein wrote in her 1935 essay “What Are Master-Pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them?” one might also call the detective novel “the only really modern novel form that has come into existence” (p. 2), and detective stories were certainly popular with many of the same readers who formed the primary audience for experimental modern literature. Some commentators (e.g. DiBattista 1996) explain this connection by arguing that detective fiction functioned primarily as an escape from what Marjorie Nicolson (1929) called the “crimes” of modernism, such as pessimism, uncertainty, and formlessness. In this characterization, detective fiction served as an antithesis of and antidote for overdoses of modernist dis-ease.

Others (McHale 1987; Irwin 1994) argue that the ritualization and formalism of the detective story and its epistemological preoccupations make it not modernism’s opponent, but its aesthetic ally. Indeed, a number of prominent Anglo-American modernist writers, most famously Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot, wrote seriously and approvingly on the subject of detective fiction. We might well ask, then, whether it is more illuminating to consider the two kinds of texts together or apart; if together, in opposition or in alignment; and on just what lines it is productive to compare them.

A classic reading of the modernist novel as exemplified by Woolf, put forward most influentially in Auerbach (1946), is that it innovates by inverting the Victorian novel's standard relationship between characters' internal states and the outside world. As this account would have it, the classic realist novel that reached its height in the nineteenth century took an interest in characters' motivations, thoughts, feelings, and desires primarily insofar as they served as explanations of or triggers for events in their world. These texts are often at great pains to impress upon the reader how everyone in a given situation has reasons for their actions, but this is different from treating actions as primarily of interest for their effects on the internal landscape. Even a novel like *Middlemarch*, which invests its characters with very rich inner lives that form the bulk of the novel's content and interest, the events and qualities of those interior lives are understood largely in terms of how they "prepare and motivate significant external happenings" (p. 538). The modernist move is to turn this causal relationship on its head, creating situations in which external objects and events are of interest primarily for the results they create in the mind of a character.

Attention to the mechanics of joint attention in "Murders in the Rue Morgue" reveals that, in fact, Poe too—inhabitant of the nineteenth century though he might be—turned this relationship back to front. It's easy to miss just how true this is, for several reasons. First, we are so used to thinking of this story primarily in its capacity as the mother of all detective stories that commonplaces about the genre adhere to it automatically; it is very difficult to step back and take it on its own merits. Furthermore, the events of the story are flashy and sensational, and they become the hook on which readers tend to hang their summaries of the tale: it's the one where the

monkey did it! What's more, it is common wisdom that crime stories are first and foremost about crimes, and motives are only of interest insofar as they contribute to the solution of the mystery. As Leonard Woolf wrote in 1927:

It is a curious fact that a crime, a mystery, and a detective will make almost any novel, however bad it may be in other respects, readable.... But the mystery's the thing, and the writer who starts a detective story must stick to the mystery. He cannot expect us to stop and complacently admire him writing like Henry James or Mr. Compton Mackenzie for a dozen pages while the story is forgotten. (727)

But on closer inspection, the real meat of "Rue Morgue" is not the crime; that is only of note because of the ratiocinative process it leads our detective to enact. The real subjects of the story are, first, an almost Joycean string of associations running through the mind of the narrator, and the way that Dupin is able to access and share in those thoughts; and second, Dupin's great chain of associations prompted by his observations of the Rue Morgue and its inhabitants. In both cases, external events and objects "serve to release and interpret inner events," as Auerbach said of Woolf's prose. And, as we will see, in both *To the Lighthouse* and "Murders in the Rue Morgue," the relationship between the external and the internal is more sophisticated yet; the external and perceptible do not just serve as triggers for the events of a single consciousness, but as a locus for the potential for intersubjective experience.

New technologies of forensic science that first appeared in the nineteenth century served in detective fiction as a powerful model for accessing the minds of others through attention to the physical world.⁸ Forensic investigation licensed a

⁸ For an excellent survey of the detective story and its connection to the development of both forensic science and the cultural authority with which it was invested, see Ronald R. Thomas' *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (2000). The rise of criminology as a discipline in the nineteenth century also reflected a profound

special kind of interpretive strategy in which the detective could “read” clues that were inscribed in the body and other physical traces of a suspect in order to reveal the solution to a mystery, including the motives and secret knowledge of the criminal mind. Freud, whose influence on Modernist literary fiction is well known and difficult to overstate, similarly presented the mind as something accessible through interpretive practices applied to external manifestations of the self. Dreams, denials, and slips of the tongue could be subjected to a specialized technology of interpretation that would reveal depths of the mind hidden even to the mind’s own possessor. Both methodologies thus emphasized a distinction between physical surface and mental depths and proposed causal relationships between the two in which a skilled practitioner could use the surface as a key to unlock the mysteries beneath.

The centrality of joint attention in communication means that items and events that are understood to be the subject of joint attention register as more salient, more memorable, and more important than other input. This suggests that there is a deep reason why external objects, properly contextualized, can serve so well as a means of conveying information about internal states. I suggest that what we know about the organization of social cognition reveals that classic detective fiction and modernist narratives that experiment with stream-of-consciousness interior monologues converge on a single kind of conundrum, a “puzzle of joint attention.” Both frequently present situations in which tracking a character’s gaze as it moves from

new interest in the idea of the “criminal mind” as a type, as well as the idea that the individual minds of individual criminals were both of interest and amenable to (and in need of) scientific elucidation.

object to object in his or her environment serves as the key that unlocks the hidden secrets of that character's inner thoughts. These puzzles and their solutions represent the amplification of a very real behavior.

In mystery stories, the detective is the possessor of this special access to and heightened understanding of the significance of his fellows' gaze. In the modernist novel of consciousness, it is the reader who is invited, first and foremost, to take the part of the attentional detective. Stylistic experiments present readers with their own puzzles in which they have access to a point of shared attention and are left to deduce or intuit the motivation behind the attending. Points of character, states of mind, and motivating transitions are to be filled in following the trail of the focalizing character's attention. This puts the reader in the position of the detective Dupin: following a chain of referents, one to the next, like a path of stepping stones leading to an inevitable conclusion.

Reading Minds in the "Rue Morgue"

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841, reprinted in Poe 1992) is widely recognized as the very first modern detective story. While "The Purloined Letter" has played a much more prominent role in the history of critical theory and poststructuralist discourse—providing a tantalizing metaphor for the relationship between language and the unconscious and serving as the jumping-off point for a particularly famous debate between Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida—the earlier story is arguably more influential in the domain of literature itself. It

contains the first instances of many tropes that were destined to become standards of the genre: the detective whose eccentricities are matched only by his powers of reason; the friend and companion who records his utterances and narrates the tale; the inept police whose actions throw the detective's brilliance into sharper relief; and, finally, the detective's astonishing chains of deduction which are explained step by step and invariably prove correct. Central to the detective mystique is the prerequisite that sound reasoning and solid facts back the detective's conclusions, even if only the brilliance of the detective is sufficient to recognize the facts and accomplish the reasoning.

One of the best-known passages in all of Poe's fiction comes from the opening of this story. In this scene, Dupin demonstrates his signature gift as a detective, the fame of which Sherlock Holmes admits and disparages in *A Study in Scarlet*, describing it with scorn as a mere "trick" to which he would never stoop. In any case, the narrator explains that Dupin had a "peculiar analytic ability": to Dupin, "most men... wore windows in their bosoms" (p. 144) that make their thoughts transparent to him.

The narrator then provides an example of this gift in action: The two men have been walking in companionable silence through the streets of Paris for some fifteen minutes. Suddenly Dupin pierces the narrator's reverie with a remark: "He is a very little fellow, that's true, and would do better for the *Théâtre de Variétés*." This comment is so perfectly calibrated with the narrator's train of thought that at first he simply agrees. But soon enough he realizes that he should be astonished, and duly expresses his amazement. He had indeed been thinking of an actor named Chantilly

and furthermore, as Dupin helpfully supplies, been thinking “that his diminutive figure unfitted him for tragedy” (145). How, the narrator marvels, was Dupin able to read his mind so uncannily and accurately?

Dupin is happy to explain the analytic method by which he penetrated the narrator’s thoughts. He reminds his friend of the fruiterer who ran up against him as they first entered the street, fifteen minutes before, knocking the narrator against a pile of paving-stones and causing him to slip and strain his ankle. This collision clearly set in action a train of associations, says Dupin, which he was able to reproduce through close observation of the narrator’s movements and a series of deductions based on what he knows of his friend’s interests and patterns of thought. To the narrator, perhaps the most astonishing aspect of this deductive feat is the “apparently illimitable distance and incoherence between the starting point and the goal” (146) that any chain of associative thought evidences upon reflection, even to oneself. How much more astonishing, then, that the detective could follow the thread from outside, as he did!

Of course this feat of mind reading *is* fantastic, a point which historically has irked many commentators. R. Austin Freeman (1924, reprinted in Haycraft 1976:16-17), for example, complained:

What claims to be a demonstration turns out to be a mere specious attempt to persuade the reader that the inexplicable has been explained; that the fortunate guesses of an inspired investigator are examples of genuine reasoning. A typical instance of this kind of anti-climax occurs in Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue” when Dupin follows the unspoken thoughts of his companion and joins in at the appropriate moment. The reader is astonished and marvels how such an apparently impossible feat could have been performed. Then Dupin explains; but his explanation is totally unconvincing, and the impossibility remains.

Yet however incredible the details of Dupin's methods may be, they are far from entirely divorced from the plausible, indeed commonplace, methods of "mind reading" that people use every day. Instead, they represent a kind of embellishment of these natural cognitive strategies, amplified to a preternaturally effective degree.

The physical observations on which Dupin hangs his implausible inferential leaps turn out to focus almost entirely on the direction of his friend's gaze. In immediate reaction to the collision with the fruiterer, Dupin explains, the narrator "turned to look at the pile," making it clear to Dupin that the paving stones were at the forefront of his companion's thoughts. As he walked away from the site of the collision, he "kept [his] eyes upon the ground -- glancing, with a petulant expression, at the holes and ruts in the pavement." By this, Dupin explains, he could see that the narrator "was still thinking of the stones" (146). Next, the narrator brightens upon seeing the different, experimental paving style of the Alley Lamartine. Dupin sees his friend's lips move, and infers correctly that he is making reference to the new pavement he is looking at so approvingly.

The basis for the detective's inferences then shifts momentarily away from his friend's eye movements to his own background knowledge about what kind of person his friend is and what ideas are likely to be prominent in his memory. From this foundation, Dupin can surmise that the particular word his friend would use to refer to the pavement is "stereotomy". Knowing his friend as he does, and remembering conversations they've had in the recent past, he can deduce further that "otomy" would call to mind "atomy"; atomies would call to mind the philosopher Epicurus; and the thought of Epicurus would call to mind their recent conversation about how

little support his theories have found in contemporary astronomy. Finally, having made this independent chain of deduction, Dupin is now ready to test it with a fresh empirical observation. Once again the object of his observations is the narrator's gaze: "I felt that you could not avoid casting your eyes upward to the great *nebula* in Orion, and I certainly expected that you would do so. You did look up; and I was now assured that I had correctly followed your steps..." (146).

Dupin's pyrotechnic display of associative logic, then, demonstrates not just any preternatural talent for mindreading—he is specifically a master of tracking and making sense of the direction of his companion's gaze. For Dupin, shifts in his companion's gaze through the landscape of objects that surround him are the symptoms by which his inner thoughts may be diagnosed, the clues to a puzzle which can be solved and whose solution can be explained to both the reader and to others within the world of the text. He is master of a model of social cognition based in triangulating attention to objects in the world.

In the terminology of social cognition and joint attention, *gaze-following* refers to the act of monitoring the direction of another person's line of regard and using this information as a basis for making assumptions about that person's mental state. Remember that the ability to engage in scenes of joint attention is evidenced in a suite of several different new interactional skills that emerge over the course of several months in early childhood, all of which demonstrate a newfound ability to "tune in" to other people's attitudes toward entities in the outside world. Gaze-following is one of the earliest of these skills to appear and provides important scaffolding for language acquisition in general and lexical acquisition in particular

(see, e.g. Bruner 1983; Baldwin 1991, 1993a). The ability to monitor the visual attention of others in this sophisticated way is not all there is to the social cognition and cultural learning upon which humans' unique skills in language rest. It is, however, a very well documented and powerful tool for coordinating understanding that is central to our social and linguistic development from very early in life.

All of this is to say that the demonstration of Dupin's ratiocinative prowess in "Rue Morgue" is intimately connected with some of our most basic means of generating meanings when presented with ambiguous or unlearned signs. Critics, following the lead of Lacan's seminal analysis in "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1966, reprinted in Muller and Richardson 1988), have historically turned to that tale as Poe's go-to allegory for the semiotic. But despite the central place that "Purloined Letter" holds for psychoanalytic and postfoundational theories of the sign, I would argue that "Rue Morgue" in many ways presents an even better parable for the semiotic experience. It resonates both with a contemporary cognitivist understanding of the relationship between language and the mind, and with a characteristically modernist approach to linguistic representation and the knowability of other minds.

Central to Dupin's analysis in the titular case is his insight into a striking feature of the depositions collected by the police: no one can agree on the question of what language the murderer spoke. Several witnesses have testified that on the night of the murder, they heard two voices "in contention" inside the house. One is gruff and can clearly be heard to say several things in French, including "mon Dieu." Every one of these witnesses assumes that the other voice also belongs to a human.

However, each one believes that this second person is speaking in a different language from any of those suggested by his fellow witnesses. The only point in common is that the language is both foreign and incomprehensible to the witness in question.

Dupin runs through the list (p. 155-6): One Frenchman believes that the voice belonged to a Spaniard and says that he “might have distinguished some words” if he only knew any Spanish. Another was “convinced by the intonation” that the language was Italian, a language, again, that he did not speak. A Dutch witness, testifying through an interpreter because he knows no French himself, claims that both voices were speaking French. An English tailor “does not understand German,” but thinks that the voice may have been speaking in that language. Finally, an Italian confectioner hypothesizes that it was Russian, though he has “never conversed with a native of Russia.”

Here, then, we see a Paris house transformed into a miniature tower of Babel: a modern jumble of mutually impenetrable signs emanating from a peculiarly modern jumble of multinational Parisian merchants. This turn of events points strikingly to a postcolonial reading in which language becomes cacophony, underlining anxiety about the encroachment of the foreign. Indeed, the revelation that the voice belongs not to a human, but to an orangutan, serves in no small part to link together, rather than differentiate, the foreign and the inhuman. Dupin wryly mentions, “You will say that it might have been the voice of an Asiatic—of an African. Neither Asiatics nor Africans abound in Paris” (p. 156). The one exception, apparently, can be found in the person of the bloodthirsty ape whose Asiatic, if non-linguistic, voice is so central

to the tale. In this way, the culprit's animal nature reflects not only on his species but also on his foreignness.⁹

Beyond these obvious identity-related implications of the linguistic confusion of the tale, the semiotics of this scene also demonstrate (in fact, take for granted) an even more deeply rooted impulse: the human inclination to look for communicative intentions and minds like their own wherever they can find them. Almost everyone in this little tale over-attributes intentions, particularly communicative intentions, to what turns out to be a creature who doesn't have them. These excesses serve to highlight how much of the semiotic experience rests on grasping at relative straws of behavioral evidence of other people's mental states and communicative intentions. In

⁹ Here, of course, I pass over many other relevant historical readings of "Rue Morgue". One that deserves at least brief mention is Elise Lemire's (2001) discussion of the many ways in which the orangutan's depiction serves as a titillating exploitation of the acute racial anxieties and related violence that formed the background context for Poe and his readers in 1830s America. By choosing an orangutan as his killer and by linking the primate's non-speech cries with the sound of an "African" voice, Poe taps into a set of well-established cultural tropes of his era (realized and reinforced in museum displays, cartoons, and commonplaces) in which black people were supposed to closely resemble simians in general and, often, "orang-outangs" in particular.

Lemire points out, further, that by arming the Rue Morgue's orangutan with a barber's razor, Poe was making this mapping inescapable for his American readers. Barbering was considered the signal profession of entrepreneurial free black men of the period, an association that neatly tied together anxieties over cultural and economic incursions into white society with more visceral, sensational fantasies of white vulnerability, in the form of the client's bared neck and the barber's shining blade. Thus in its depiction of a bestial escaped killer who invades the bedchamber of white women and slits their vulnerable throats, the story serves at least in part as a racially marked cautionary tale: a reactionary, sexually charged indulgence for readers who were inclined to make these connections. At the same time, this allegorical mapping can also be read as a critique of white Southerners' inability to recognize anger, agency, and the potential for rebellion in the African-Americans they enslaved, as the Maltese sailor underestimates and mistreats his simian charge. Poe's complicated political and rhetorical position on these matters thus is also an exercise in alternately exposing and indulging various problematic shared ideological perspectives: another kind of puzzle of joint attention.

“Rue Morgue,” the mark of the truly brilliant man is the ability to sort out what is and what is not a real sign of those intentions. The lesson is not that one should avoid this kind of thinking—quite the contrary, as per Dupin’s virtuoso performance on the cobblestones. Rather, the moral is that you should do it *well*.

Virginia Woolf would later imagine an exactly similar mechanism for her characters’ attempts to apprehend one another’s minds, organized around triangulated gaze and the sense that shared access to a single object of visual attention could or should serve as a crucial site of connection between consciousnesses. Where in Woolf this mechanism serves as a locus of the difficulty of sharing subjective experience, however, Dupin epitomizes the pinnacle of “effortless” mind reading that appears so commonly in the literature on intersubjectivity in modern cognitive science. The scientific study of how communicators understand one another will naturally tend to take the assumption that they usually do understand one another as given. In particular, I am thinking of the common notion in processing and psychological accounts of language use that, while misunderstandings and errors are easy to notice, a primary question for researchers should be to explain how we manage to get so much right with so little apparent effort.¹⁰

In this emphasis on ease, then, Poe is on the one hand extraordinarily up-to-date and on the other the product of a characteristically mid-nineteenth-century confidence in knowability, sharability, and the rational. Difficulties of communication appear as the results of either social obstacles or individual intellectual shortcomings

¹⁰ See, for example, Garrod and Pickering (2004), “Why Is Conversation So Easy?” For a contrary approach, see Taylor (1992), *Mutual Misunderstanding: Scepticism and the Theorizing of Language and Interpretation*.

(“without educated thought,” Dupin claims, even the most clever investigators will err “continually”), not as structural features of consciousness or language. The products of individual consciousnesses can always be measured against and deduced from a shared physical reality.

And so the semiotic logic of “Rue Morgue” depends upon divining attentions and intentions from the kind of physical symptoms of mental states we see in canonical scenes of joint attention. This is not only true for the scene on the cobblestones; it also resonates through the central mystery and its resolution, in which it is revealed that what was assumed to be a pair of murders were in fact the acts of a ferocious escaped orangutan. The semantics of “murder” both as a legal term and in its everyday folk usage are complex (see, for example, attempts in Maley 1985 and Langford 2000 to provide exhaustive analyses of the word and its meaning in use). Chief among the defining properties, however, in any analysis, are the intentions and intentional capacities of the perpetrator. One cannot ordinarily be murdered by a falling tree, a railway accident, or a charging bull.

Thus the title of the story itself is a play on the relationship between meaning and intention. There *were* no murders in the Rue Morgue, not because the result for the victims was any different than if they had been murdered, but because the correct reading of the events reveals that the agent of their demise could not have the kinds of intentions necessary to make their deaths count as murders. Again, Dupin’s great feat is to take a physical trace of another being’s focus of attention and use it not just to form a notion of what that agent did, but what he thought, or did not think. What’s more, in the world of the text, he is not remotely alone in this view. His peculiarity is

in his success, not in his approach. No less than Woolf, Poe is a theorist of consciousness, what it consists of, and how it can be apprehended. The consciousness at the heart of his theory is a shared one. And Woolf no less than Poe, we shall see, hangs her account of the intersubjective on triangulation at a distance through the concrete, perceptible objects of the physical world.

In To the Lighthouse

Shared Consciousness and Joint Attention

None of the characters in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927, Harvest edition 1981) shares Dupin's unerring gift. His talent for gaze-following as a tool for diagnosing consciousness is, as we have seen, not only far-reaching but preternaturally reliable. None of Woolf's characters are so fortunate. Yet *To the Lighthouse* is also structured in many crucial ways around the way that visual attention serves as a key physical manifestation of characters' mental states. As in "Rue Morgue," the connection between thought and sight requires triangulation through external objects; this is not the notion that "eyes are the window to the soul". Sharing attention to objects in the outside world is critical for Woolf's characters as an opportunity—even if a frequently fraught or thwarted opportunity—for closeness and sympathy. Characters repeatedly find themselves looking at the same object and experiencing a frisson of connection; they find themselves wondering about the degree to which they are transparent, or to which they can inhabit the thoughts of another.

This treatment of triangulated gaze, then, is a point of continuity between Woolf's modernism and Poe's romantic materialism, as well as a break from the major models of intersubjectivity found in classic realist fiction. The Victorian social novel, like high modernism, had no shortage of characters with difficulty understanding one another's minds, particularly their motivations and feelings. Those failures of sympathy, however, were typically rooted in confining social structures and individual stubbornness rather than the ontological division between the self and the external world that dominates *To the Lighthouse*. Under the correct circumstances, the correct people could overcome these obstacles through the combined application of humbleness, generosity, and physical contact. (Compare, for example, the climactic consummation of fellowship between Dorothea and Rosamond in *Middlemarch*, in which both emotional and intellectual understanding are precipitated by a physical embrace.)

For Woolf, it is in the act of looking that the self can most closely approach nakedness. One may on occasion find that the "shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye" (1942:22). The possibility of joint attention is thus also a source of anxiety, as when Lily tries to avoid looking at her painting while Mr. Ramsey is watching: "But so long as he kept like that, waving, shouting, she was safe; he would not stand still and look at her picture. And that was what Lily Briscoe could not have endured" (TL 17).

One interpretation of this moment is that she simply does not want Ramsey to see her painting and what the painting itself exposes of her self, and that she feels that that his having seen it will somehow change or ruin her idea of what the painting is. All this is certainly correct. But there is more to the scene than that. Importantly, Lily does not want to see him see the painting, or feel him see it, lest she be forced to acknowledge or experience the force of his thoughts. This scene has its partner in the third part of the book, after Mrs. Ramsey's death. Mr. Ramsey and Lily Briscoe still bridle at the thought of being forced, through the confluence of their gaze, into a confluence of the minds (p. 151). An "awful pause" follows Lily's resistance to making any expression of sympathy (though she is all too aware, and correctly, that this is what he wants). Both look at the sea. "Why," thinks Mr. Ramsey resentfully, "should she look at the sea when I am here?" He wants her to understand his thoughts and desires; he does not want to be impinged upon by hers. Lily, in her turn, has already been thus imposed upon. His "enormous flood of grief" and "insatiable hunger for sympathy" are all too palpable.

It is the thought of just such a moment of uncomfortable communion, made worse and more personal by the idea that her painting would be at the apex, that the younger Lily fears the most. To be confronted with Mr. Ramsey in such a way is the most alarming prospect, but the prospect of this kind of intimacy with almost anyone is too much to bear—if "Mr. Tansley, Paul Rayley, Minta Doyle, or practically anybody else" should come up behind her and look at it, she thinks, she would have to turn the canvas face-down on the grass rather than suffer through such a charged and intimate experience. But when William Banks walks up, she lets it be; and thus

the simple sentence “William Bankes stood beside her” (p. 17) conveys a quiet and touching empathy.

Indeed, most of the moments in which people do successfully understand one another in the novel can be found in these scenes of joint visual attention between Lily Briscoe and William Bankes. Some are described so that we know for certain that these moments of shared seeing are also moments of real mutual understanding, as when they walk to look together at the sea. “They both felt a common hilarity, excited by the moving waves; and then by the swift cutting race of a sailing boat... and then, with a natural instinct to complete the picture, after this swift movement, both of them looked at the dunes far away, and instead of merriment felt come over them some sadness” (p. 20). And because this novel is not populated with genius detectives but with Woolfian modernist subjects, Lily and William’s natural shared inclination to look at the dunes after the boat is not a Dupin-like parlor trick but instead a manifestation of their individual and unusual degree of natural commonality.

Other times the understanding that results from these occasions of joint attending is not explained, and the shared attention is instead simply presented as a signifier of a fleeting but real connection between two minds. These moments often appear in places of poetic emphasis, so that they are lent added weight. For example, chapter four of the first section ends with a breathless 153-word sentence that conveys something of Mr. Ramsey’s hectic but frozen response to having been discovered in a moment when he thought we was alone. After over a hundred words, the hiatus ends: “—he turned abruptly, slammed his private door on them; and, Lily

Briscoe and Mr. Bankes, looking uneasily up into the sky, observed that the flock of starlings which Jasper had routed with his gun had settled on the tops of the elm trees” (p. 25). The result is that we come to rest on this shared seeing; it stands against the vast and unsympathetic distance in their encounter with Mr. Ramsey. Its shared nature is uncontroversial—we are simply told that the two observe together. Note also that the success of this act of joint attending is in no way the result of any active or deliberate attempt to penetrate a distant consciousness.

The Reader as Dupin

While Woolf’s characters do, like Dupin, pay conscious attention to the attentions of their fellow characters, and strive to gain some understanding of one another’s inner thoughts thereby, the success of these endeavors for the characters themselves is limited at best. Instead, it is the reader who is the true Dupin of the novels, the reader alone who can appreciate the full sequence of ideas prompted or released by the external events that the characters see. But this experience of course is not true joint attention either. Joint attention must be, by definition, mutually manifest, and no character will ever appreciate that the reader is sharing her perspective.

On the one hand, the lopsidedness of this relationship is part of what makes it a strong parallel to the version of this dynamic that we saw in Dupin; it is what makes the reader a detective, and what makes these referential triangles puzzles rather than otherwise. But it also both underlines and breaks open the loneliness at the heart of the novel. These experiments in form are Woolf’s attempt to solve the problem she described in *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (1924:18) of how to impart “that vision to

which I cling” and “the appalling effort of saying what I meant”. The successful depiction of these characters’ loneliness and the failures of their attempts to share with one another the visions to which they cling, then, is a liberation, because it is a connection with what seems to be a real, or at least a convincing, other mind. And yet under the best of circumstances, the understanding goes only one way. The detective is a lonely figure too.

The disparity between the reader’s ability to close the intersubjective triangle and that of Woolf’s characters is illustrated at length in the dinner party near the end of “The Window,” in which Mrs. Ramsey devotes her considerable artistic talents for social choreography to all the members of her family and house guests at once, in a single gathering. In this sequence, the characters are simultaneously coordinated collaborators in the single achievement of a social event—”they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island” (p. 97)—and absorbed in their own disjunct individual projects. Lily, for example, devotes herself both to salvaging social disharmonies on Mrs. Ramsey’s behalf and to thoughts of her own half-finished painting. Mr. Tansley dedicates himself to the project of bolstering his own sense of importance and distance from the Ramseys, in defiance of his own sense of social inferiority.

Mrs. Ramsey, meanwhile, takes a keen interest in where the people around her are looking, and makes a number of hypotheses about their states of mind based on these observations. “There was Rose gazing at her father,” she notes, “there was Roger gazing at his father; both would be off in spasms of laughter in another second, she knew...” (p. 96). She similarly observes her daughter Prue’s attention to Minta:

“She kept looking at Minta, shyly, yet curiously, so that Mrs. Ramsey looked from one to the other and said, speaking to Prue in her own mind, You will be as happy as she is one of these days” (p.109). But these insights are unconfirmed and partial or fleeting. Soon enough, Mrs. Ramsey is wondering what “joke of their own” her children might be harboring: “What was it, she wondered, sadly rather, for it seemed to her that they would laugh when she was not there. There was all that hoarded behind those rather set, still, mask-like faces...” (p. 109).

Between these moments, Mrs. Ramsey notices that Augustus Carmichael and she have both been looking at the plate of fruit that Rose has arranged. Again she feels that the confluence of visual attention brings the lookers closer together:

...to her pleasure (for it brought them into sympathy momentarily) she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them. (p. 97)

But are they truly united, when he is clearly oblivious to her sympathetic feelings? Or is Lily more nearly right when she thinks, of Mr. Bankes: “She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that...” (p. 92)?

All of these false starts and thwarted attempts at coordination mean that the reader alone inhabits the privileged position of the successful detective, for only the reader is truly privy to the “inner movements” of the Ramseys and their guests. The flow of information for the reader in this passage is organized in much the same way as his companion’s thoughts are for Dupin. We know, for example, that when Lily “catch[es] sight of the salt cellar” on a particular spot in the pattern of the tablecloth, she is reminded of her inspiration to move the tree in her painting, and of all her

associated ideas about how her art “saved” her from the “dilution” of marriage (p. 102), but her fellow characters do not.

Gaze, again, is the organizing structure; the thread of the narrative is the shifting attention of the characters as their gaze settles on this or that element of their surroundings. In this way, in addition to the characters' attention to the attentions of one another, we trace their mutual and solitary movements of attention with respect to objects in the room. When characters' attention drifts away from the conversation, their thoughts still remain grounded in the visual apprehension of their physical surroundings. The focus of the text still follows the focus of their drifting gaze. “So they argued about politics, and Lily looked at the leaf on the tablecloth” (p. 94)—thinking, again, as she and the reader alone know, of her painting. Mrs. Ramsey “looked at the window in which the candle flames burnt brighter now that the panes were black, and looking at that outside the voices came to her very strangely... for she did not listen to the words” (p. 110).

The appearance of a single object can also kick off a sequence of associations that crosses from one character to another, as when the maid brings in a “huge brown pot” of *boeuf en daube*. The sight of it leads Mrs. Ramsey to think of the three days the cook had spent making the dish; of how she must be careful to choose a particularly nice piece for William Bankes; of how such a lovely dish will “celebrate the occasion,” prompting “a curious sense” to arise within her,

at once freakish and tender, of celebrating a festival, as if two emotions were called up in her, one profound -- for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death; at the same time these lovers, these people entering into illusion glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery, decorated with garlands. (pp. 99-100)

Meanwhile, for some uncertain majority of the diners, we see, the candles serve as a distraction from Mr. Ramsey's irritation over Augustus Carmichael's second plate of soup; the candles draw attention to the plate of fruit, to the reflections in the window, and to the faces around the table. Mrs. Ramsey looks at the bowl of fruit and notices Augustus; Augustus looks at the fruit and notices something to eat. The same fruit prompts Mrs. Ramsey to embark upon a more extended chain of associations: "of a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune's banquet, of the bunch that hangs with vine leaves over the shoulder of Bacchus (in some picture), among the leopard skins and the torches lolloping red and gold..." (p. 97).

This kind of passage has clear parallels in other experimental novels of the period. The "Calypso" chapter of *Ulysses*, for example, introduces the reader to Leopold Bloom, painting a compelling and intimate portrait of Bloom's internal landscape primarily through his chain of physical attentions and the associations to which they give rise: "He peeped quickly inside the leather headband" (p. 46); "He crossed to the bright side" (p. 46); "He approached Larry O'Rourke's" (p. 47); "He creased out the letter at his side" (p. 53); "In the bright light, lightened and cooled in limb, he eyed carefully his black trousers" (p. 57); and so on. Each of these narrated actions serves as the jumping-off point for a meditation prompted by a shift in Bloom's attention to some new object. They are followed always by a bare mention of some physical object, which we can take to be the current object of Bloom's attention, often but not always physically present—"Another slice of bread and butter" or "White slip of paper"—that sends Bloom and the reader together through a chain of associations, from an advertisement trumpeting a German company's plan to

plant eucalyptus groves in Palestine to thoughts of oranges, melonfields, and olive trees in in Jaffa through memories of Molly's tasting olives for the first time; from the thought of tissue-wrapped oranges in crates he moves by association to citrons, and by way of a pun to friends of his from an earlier time named Citron and Mastiansky, and so forth. Like Dupin tracing a glance at the cobblestones to his friend's thoughts on Orion and the actor Chantilly, the reader can see the connections between Bloom's glance at a newspaper and his memories of old friends, and between Mrs. Ramsey's sight of a platter of grapes and her thoughts of the god Neptune.

In its emotional valences, the detective stories to which *Ulysses*, if not *To the Lighthouse*, has the closest affinity are not the Dupin tales but the works of Arthur Conan Doyle. This connection was first advanced in an early article by Hugh Kenner, "Baker Street to Eccles Street" (1949, revised in Kenner 1956), which argues that the relationship between Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom a recapitulation and elevation of the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. "Holmes and Watson," Kenner observes, "epitomize humanity dissected into ratiocinative violence and sentimental virtue, the latter avid of absorption into the former" (p. 170). So it goes with Stephen and Bloom. But in its methods I have highlighted here, *Ulysses* is more like Woolf and, perforce, more like Poe. Dupin's cobblestones are the first link in a chain of supposition, the ancestors of Bloom's butcher-shop kidneys and passing clouds, as well as of Lily's ocean waves and kitchen tables.

This brings us back to the kitchen table in question, which I argue can be read in a new and interesting way in light of social cognition, joint attention, and narrative methods that thematize and capitalize on their mechanics.

A Kitchen Table When Only You Are There

Early in the novel, Andrew Ramsey tries to explain his father's work on "subject, object, and the nature of reality" to Lily Briscoe: "'Think of a kitchen table then,' he told her, 'when you're not there'" (p. 23). Mr. Ramsey is a philosopher whose lofty intellectual thoughts prove of little use to him in appreciating the human events in the house around him; but Lily, who is much more sensitive both to all the other minds around her and to the degree to which they are all isolated from one another, seizes on this image. It haunts her; it becomes a source for her art; in sum, it becomes something much more rich and compelling, in the framework of the novel, than Mr. Ramsey would ever know.

The standard reading of this image focuses on absence and domesticity. Mary Jacobus (1986), for example, ties these together in a feminist psychoanalytic framework, linking Melanie Klein's revision of the Freudian notion of "object loss" with a post-Oedipal narrative of gender relations. The kitchen table works in part as a figure of the things that are "not there," which echo poignantly through the book. First the lighthouse and then, after her death, Mrs. Ramsey, haunt the thoughts of every character, each one invested with all the more significance the less accessible it becomes. More immediately, in Andrew's phrase Mr. Ramsey's insistently masculine philosophy, in contrast to which "the folly of women's minds enraged him" (p. 31), is translated and transformed into something domestic, quotidian, and feminine. Kitchen tables are the domain of the Mrs. Ramseys of this world, not the philosophers.

I would go a step further to argue that the kitchen table presents a transformation of the solipsistic Ramseyan philosophy into something new and

different, constructed out of the mechanisms of joint attention, in which experiences gain meaning in being shared. The work of Ramsey's that Andrew is trying to describe to Lily with this phrase appears to be an entry in the epistemological and ontological debate over the role of perception and the importance of the observer for the nature of both knowledge and reality. Woolf's contemporaries G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell were hard at work on these very questions at the time *To the Lighthouse* was being written. Moore and Russell were largely working in response to the Idealist philosophy of George Berkeley, articulated in his 1710 *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. In Berkeley's formulation, all qualities of objects are no more and no less than sensory data, existing only so long as a sensate being perceives them. Color exists only through being seen, heaviness only through being hefted, and so on. The new Realist philosophy espoused by Moore and Russell shifted the emphasis to perceptibility, rather than perceiving; that which exists is amenable to perception. The objects of knowledge then become neither sensations nor sensible objects, but logical constructions built out of them.

Woolf herself was aware of and interested in these arguments. As Leonard Woolf wrote, "Through us and through *Principia Ethica* the four others, Vanessa and Virginia, Clive and Duncan, were deeply affected by the astringent influence of [G. E.] Moore... The colour of our minds and thought had been given to us by the climate of Cambridge and Moore's philosophy" (1964:26). Russell too was a friend and influence, mentioned often in Woolf's diaries and letters.¹¹ There is little doubt that

¹¹ See J. K. Johnstone (1954), *The Bloomsbury Group*, and Harvena Richter (1970), *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, for the seminal discussions of the influence of G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* and *Philosophical Studies*, respectively. For the role

this philosophy affected Woolf's writing, though there is some debate over precisely how and to what degree. Andrew McNeillie (2000), for example, argues that while Moore may have been important to the Bloomsbury group in general, he is far too prosaic to be considered a real influence on Woolf's work. Ann Banfield (2000:47), meanwhile, has argued that Woolf's fiction manifests a merger of the old and the new ontologies, adopting, as she puts it, "the new philosophical realism inoculated with Berkeley's Idealism".

I would suggest that what is most important for Woolf's aesthetic is not so much any one of these metaphysical positions as the elements around which the debate centers, and particularly the idea that there is a *problem*, a puzzle or enigma, surrounding the relationship between what is, what can be known, and what is perceived. This puzzle is more important than any of its solutions.

Further, now that we are armed with an understanding of the significance of triangulated attention and its implications for intersubjective thought, a close reading of Lily's "kitchen table" suggests a whole new set of associations in which it does not stand for the role of perception in being, but instead raises the possibility of a radical claim for the role of *interpersonal* perception and understanding for epistemological concerns. As is manifestly demonstrated by the many scenes above in which Woolf clearly hangs the elusive possibility of communication between our separate mental worlds on acts of mutually manifest shared attention to objects in the world, in *To the Lighthouse*, to see an object is also crucially to raise the possibility of genuine connection with another person. Not to see it is to remain alone.

of Bertrand Russell's philosophy in Woolf, see Ann Banfield (2000), *The Phantom Table*.

And so it should be unsurprising, in light of this reading, that Lily “sees” the table not when she is trying to apprehend the nature of knowledge or existence, but through and because of her attempt to appreciate and sympathize with what she imagines Mr. Ramsey’s very different mental life must be like:

now she always saw, when she thought of Mr. Ramsey’s work, a scrubbed kitchen table. It lodged now in the fork of a pear tree, for they had reached the orchard. And with a painful effort of concentration, she focused her mind, not upon the silver-bossed bark of the tree, or upon its fish-shaped leaves, but upon a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted, whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity, which stuck there, its four legs in air. Naturally, if one’s days were passed in *this seeing* of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table (and it was a mark of the finest minds to do so), naturally one could not be judged like an ordinary person. (p. 23, italics added)

There are several things worth noticing about this passage. First, Lily has completely abandoned—if she ever possessed—any thought of the original philosophical puzzle for which this kitchen table putatively stands. This means on the one hand that her attempt at understanding Ramsey is necessarily doomed from the start; on the other, it opens up the possibility that Andrew’s expression of the puzzle may serve to raise a new and perhaps superior, or at least more interesting, line of philosophical thought. Next, I would note that, despite this fundamental departure from Ramsey’s starting point, Lily is indeed attempting to construct a moment of sympathy with another person, and again this is figured as an attempt to *see* the same thing as that person.

This time the attempt to gain understanding via a shared object of visual attention is an even more ambitious task, as the potential shared object of attention is abstracted away from being an easily accessible shared basis for common ground

between Lily and Ramsey in a number of ways. The kitchen table is imaginary, not real. The phrase itself is Andrew's, not Ramsey's. Lily should know (if she thinks about it) that Ramsey is probably not really thinking of a kitchen table when he thinks about his work; his work is not about any kitchen table, much less a particular one. And yet the more intently she tries to capture for herself some sense of what it is like to think like him, the more vividly she imagines her phantom table. She elides, perhaps accidentally, perhaps involuntarily, perhaps just metaphorically, the original notion of imagining the general tenor of Ramsey's thoughts with the particulars of "this seeing"—this "reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table," which is, in fact, a product only of her own vivid visual imagination, and in its every detail a sign, moreover, of the kind of thinker that she is and that Ramsey is not. Indeed, there is no *reduction* of an evening to a table; for Ramsey, such a thorough and thoughtful contemplation of the table itself is not possible, and for Lily it is impossible to forget or ignore the beauty of the evening and its "flamingo clouds."

What we have in the image of the table is thus an impressive condensation of the double bind surrounding the communicability of internal consciousness that stands at the heart of the Woolf project as I see it. The intersubjective triangle of joint attention serves throughout the novel as a means by which characters can, however briefly, have real insight into one another's mental lives. But more often, characters who can see that potential are disappointed in practice; they fail to maintain a real understanding, or they find that when the intentions and desires of another person do become obvious, it is as much an imposition as an insight. Yet the novel itself and its

methods turn to the same mechanisms in a still-hopeful attempt to make the same connections work for the reader, if not for the characters being read about. The table is both a signifier of this intense drive to seek connection and a signal example of its failure. At the same time, it provides a signal success in the vivid portrayal of Lily's consciousness that it provides for the reader. And once again, the mechanism in play is (an attempt at) triangulated visual attention. What's more, the vigor and vividness with which Lily makes her attempt is salutary in itself—it does her good and speaks well of her that she should think this way. Thus, Lily's encounter with the kitchen table serves to transform the Russell-Moore-Ramsey question of the relationship between existence and abstractly defined perception into an assertion about the relationship between shared perception and shared existence, a crucial distinction that would be less visible without an understanding of joint attention.

Summary

As a theory ought to do, the framework of literary joint attention offers a genuinely new way of looking at individual texts. It allows us to understand the putatively internal and subjective elements in both Poe and Woolf as instead focused on the external, the triangulated upon, and the intersubjective. These readings suggest that stream of consciousness is not primarily a device for getting inside some subjective experience, but a method for and depiction of sharing experience, in which consciousness itself is something that exists not inside a person but in a physically

grounded intersubjective space. It is the quality of this shared consciousness that gives our consciousness our shape.

These observations invite several novel readings of these texts, both separately and together:

1. Attention to the mechanics of joint attention in “Murders in the Rue Morgue” reveals that Poe anticipates modernist experimentation in his use of external objects and events as triggers for internal states.
2. Even more interesting, it turns out that the internal states in question in both cases are intersubjective in nature, and that they are not incidentally but criterially formulated by ascribing special significance to shifts in visual orientation to the outside world.
3. In “Rue Morgue,” Dupin epitomizes the pinnacle of “effortless” mind reading familiar from the standard treatment of intersubjectivity in modern cognitive science. On the one hand, this makes the story a particularly compelling parable of the semiotic experience in a cognitivist age; on the other, this quality is a legacy of its own era. This illustration of certain points of congruence between contemporary scientific treatments of communication and a nineteenth-century genre associated with social control and philosophical naïveté may incidentally provide a bit of insight into why many humanists feel antsy about the prospect of bringing work in cognitive science to bear on traditional humanist subjects like literature or history.

4. Woolf, by contrast, concentrates on difficulty. But the central tropes and mechanisms of triangulated visual attention are the same.
5. This treatment of triangulated gaze, then, is both
 - a point of continuity between Woolf's modernism and Poe's romantic materialism; and
 - a discontinuity, for both Poe and Woolf, with some of the prevailing models of intersubjectivity found in classic realist fiction.
6. The framework of literary joint attention also yields a new reading of the "kitchen table" of *To the Lighthouse*. It now appears not as just an emblem of Realist philosophy or of the human yearning for that which is absent, but as an objective correlative of the intersubjective experience, in both its successful and failed versions. This reading is dependent on recognizing the importance of triangulated attention in the novel.

Chapter 6: The Editorial Conversation

Criticism in Practice

I move now from interpretive criticism to a discussion of textual criticism. Where the last chapter provided evidence that a social-cognitive framework can open up new readings of individual texts, this chapter will address the benefits that it can provide for curatorial considerations regarding a given text. Textual criticism concerns itself with the project of producing scholarly editions of texts. In formulating guidelines for how this should be done, what properly constitutes the task of the scholarly editor or curator, and what the desired form of the editor's product should be, it therefore grapples with underlying questions of what constitutes a text and its meaning.

I mean to criticize the justifying narratives that underlie both of the prevailing approaches to textual criticism, the "final authorial intention" approach to textual criticism, associated with W.W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and G. Thomas Tanselle, and the "social text" approach, most famously associated with Jerome McGann. This critique is a return to the theoretical questions addressed in chapter two of this study, applied to the concrete concerns of editorial practice. When people, whether members of the profession or of the laity, read, they have a working theory of what they are doing. There seem to be two primary theories available to them at the moment. The first is fundamentally romantic, and holds that there is a "real", fixed meaning that

they can rely upon and which can be located in the privileged intentions of an author or the privileged interpretations of an ideal reader. The other is fundamentally behaviorist, and holds that only the realized, physical, perceptible traces of a text are fair game; any supposition about the conceptions that lie behind it is as taboo as an appeal to introspection would be to behaviorist psychology. Both of these approaches are broken, because there is a real problem with the conception of meaning these theorists have to work with. Neither is faintly realistic if one believes in the reality of concepts and meanings; but they also run aground as long as one believes that *readers* frequently believe in these things.

The “eclectic text” or Greg-Bowers-Tanselle school of textual criticism, takes the fundamentally romantic view of the nature and meaning of a text, postulating the existence of an abstract, ideal “work” which is but brokenly reflected in the mere earthly expressions of that work that are realized in the world. The social-text approach, by contrast, takes a studiously behaviorist approach to the textual encounter, warning the prospective editor that it is impossible to curate a text without also interpreting it, but urging as much as possible that she pursue an understanding of texts as “a laced network of linguistic and bibliographical codes” (McGann 1991:13) which should be compiled as completely as possible to provide a comprehensive record of the history of a text.

The social text approach is philosophically appealing, in that it captures the complicated nature of authority and textual construction. It suffers, however, from its attempt to legislate a rationalist, anti-intentionalist approach to editing and reading. While there are excellent reasons to resist appeals to authorial intention for

constructing and reconstructing the meaning of a text, the reality is that many of the people involved in the socially situated, socially constructed production and contextualization of a text will themselves be relying on intentionalist strategies of interpretation. Further, practical exigencies mean that authorial intention and the work/expression framework will guide the decisions of editors and archivists for the foreseeable future. A cognitively realistic approach serves to bridge the two approaches, and the mechanics of joint construal provide a productive framework for talking about these processes without obscuring either aspect of the facts on the ground.

This chapter illustrates some shortcomings of these two approaches to the curatorial project through a social-cognitive analysis of the stylistics, textual history, and editorial reception of one of the most famously revised poems in modern English, Marianne Moore's "Poetry." While the capacity for revision is often considered a characteristic quality of written discourse, face-to-face conversation frequently involves revision and repair. I argue that the thematization of omission in "Poetry" is best analyzed as a *joint construal* of both the poem and its history, built up together by author, editors, publishers, critics, and other readers. This approach provides an opportunity to look at the longitudinal stylistics of a literary work as a discourse unfolding over time, and illuminates the connections between these literary acts and their counterparts in natural discourse.

Editing and Conversation

Written language's capacity for revision, or "working over," is often presented as one of the primary characteristics that distinguish it from spoken language (see, e.g., Chafe 1994)¹². But face-to-face conversation, despite its evanescence, also involves processes of revision, often enacted collaboratively between multiple discourse participants. Indeed, recent work in cognitive science suggests that language, human beings, or both are optimized for constructing meaning interactively and iteratively. What constitutes "authority" in conversation often turns out to be as complicated as the models of textual authority used by critical theorists and literary historians.

While the comparison of revision in talk and revision in print has interesting implications for the study of both literature and conversation, in this chapter I will concentrate mostly on the ways that this comparison can inform and enrich our reading of literary texts. Specifically, I will provide a detailed analysis of relevant aspects of social cognition as they play out over the textual history of one of the most

¹² The quality described in these works is a feature of the relatively non-ephemeral nature of written texts, not a unique consequence of their being written. Patterns of embedded repetition and parallelism ("ring composition") characterize many orally transmitted works, providing a fixed structure despite the lack of a physically fixed medium. These configurations can be extremely elaborate and strict in their arrangement. The Zoroastrian Gathas, for example, composed around 1200 B.C.E. and transmitted orally for hundreds of years, include pervasive and highly complex patterns of chiasmus and other concentric symmetries, described in Schwartz 1986 and Douglas 2007. The survival of this sort of poetic structure reminds us that the spoken modality can provide for enduring, and hence in this sense revisable, texts. Similarly, audio and video recordings can be "read," reviewed, and edited—"worked over"—by those who produce and disseminate them.

famously revised poems in modern English, Marianne Moore's "Poetry", and make a case for reading this history as a complex of multiple joint activities.

This approach provides an opportunity to look at the longitudinal stylistics of a literary work as a discourse unfolding over time. It also provides a new way of thinking about Moore's "thematization of omission" (Peterson 1990). This has been alternately treated as a loss or mutilation, as in Kenner (1967), an expression of ambivalence and alienation, as in Gregory (1996), or the source of a fundamental conflict between the author's "editorial wishes and the driving need to represent her work" (Schulman 2003:xxi). Close examination of the publication and editorial history of the poem reveals that these revisions were neither deletions nor ambivalent; they represent multiple turns of an extended discourse among multiple participants. It is as a discourse-level phenomenon—that is, as something that transpires over several turns of this editorial "conversation"—that certain features of the poem emerge, especially much of its wit. Further, this approach illuminates the role that reading editions, perhaps even especially the kind of reading editions that "social text" approaches to textual criticism typically abhor, play in creating the actual social text of a literary work.

Revision and "Poetry"

While Marianne Moore's productive years spanned the majority of the twentieth century, the poems first published between 1920 and 1935 are widely agreed to constitute her most successful and influential work. These fifteen years

embrace two distinct phases in Moore's oeuvre, divided by a gap of about six years in which her attention was largely devoted to editing the prominent literary and cultural magazine *The Dial*. Many of Moore's contemporaries were vocal in their praise of her work, including Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and T. S. Eliot, as well as her sometime editors H. D. and Wallace Stevens.

Moore's poems are known for their precise, concrete imagery, surprising juxtapositions, and syllabic stanza patterns, in which syllable count, rather than the number and arrangement of stresses, determines the length of lines. During the early 1920s she experimented briefly with free verse, but soon returned to the syllabic stanzas of her earlier career. The metrical regularity of these stanzas is not readily apparent to the ear, as it is counterbalanced by the irregular arrangement of stresses. Their patterns are, however, immediately evident on the page, where the idiosyncratic but repeating arrangement of lines of varying lengths is both made visible and reinforced by the deployment of indentation.

These syllabic arrangements were arrived at by a process in which the overall stanza form for any poem grew out of patterns that had emerged in an earlier, unplanned stage of writing (Holley 1984). A pleasing arrangement of lines would then serve as a template for other stanzas: "I never 'plan' a stanza. Words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure. I may influence an arrangement or thin it, then try to have successive stanzas identical with the first" (Moore 1969:34). Thus Moore's stanza schemes vary greatly from poem to poem, and across different versions of the same poem. The 1934 version of "The Frigate Pelican," for example, has five-line stanzas of the syllable pattern 15-12-11-9-9. The 1967 version changes

to four-line stanzas with much shorter lines, following a 7-9-7-6 syllable pattern. A similar range of variation obtains over her entire oeuvre.

Moore maintained that her unusual methods of stanza construction were intended at least in part to create “natural” or “conversational” effects (Schulman 1986; Moore and Schulman 1969). Despite Moore’s claims, however, many critics have seen her formal techniques as part of a deliberate effort towards obscurity. Gregory (1996:144), for example, writes that Moore’s poetry features “a slew of strange and estranging devices that she employs on purpose to make reading difficult.” These potentially alienating devices include not only her use of syllabic verse, but also “her constant revision of poems over versions (which makes it difficult both to determine what constitutes the poem and to possess it in memory).”

While it is far from clear that her purpose in doing so was always or even usually “to make reading difficult,” Moore was indeed prolific in her revisions. The most extensive and striking of these were those applied to the poem “Poetry”. It went through at least six major iterations and many dozens of printings over sixty-three years, shrinking from five stanzas to a single stanza of thirteen unrhymed lines, growing again to three stanzas and fifteen lines, and finally truncated to a mere three lines, with a variation on the original five-stanza version included in an endnote. Variations on the five-stanza version were published many more times in Moore’s lifetime than any other version, and she went on revising this longer version over this entire forty-eight year period, making various small adjustments right up until the final endnote version (1967:266-7), which reads:

POETRY (*page 36*)

Longer version:

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
it, after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are
useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand: the bat
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the
base-
ball fan, the statistician—
nor is it valid
to discriminate against “business documents and

school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
“literalists of
the imagination”—above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, “imaginary gardens with real toads in them,” shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, you are interested in poetry.

This five-stanza poem stands in stark contrast to the version that appears in the main
body of the collection (1967: 36):

POETRY

I, too, dislike it.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
it, after all, a place for the genuine.

Even more versions of the poem have appeared since Moore's death. These include scholarly editions that present partial or complete "variorum" overviews of the entire history of the poem, as well as numerous editions in anthologies designed for students and casual readers. The latter most commonly present a five-stanza version in the main text, sometimes accompanied by a footnote or endnote that includes the three-line version.

The long period over which these many printings and revisions appeared is often treated as a period in which Moore's degree of public renown and influence with other poets increased, but her own performance as a poet was in decline (cf. Molesworth 1990; Willis 1990). However, this characterization of her later output relies on problematic assumptions about what kinds of activities constitute "writing" or "doing" poetry. Even if one agrees that the poems first published in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s were lesser work, this judgment does not account for Moore's continual refinement of her earlier poetry. The revision and printing history of "Poetry" and several other well regarded poems that made their first appearance before 1935 are such that these poems were unfixed, changing, still-in-construction works until at least 1967, thirty-odd years after the first versions appeared in print.

Omissions Are Not Accidents (But They Aren't the Whole Story, Either)

The quantity and magnitude of Moore's revisions present a special challenge to scholars of her work. There are many authors for whom revisions are largely a

matter of editorial interest: a single definitive edition with a few explanatory footnotes is perfectly adequate for scholars not specifically concerned with publication history. But no one who hopes to write seriously about Moore's poems can ignore her revisions and re-revisions. They are simply too numerous and, in many cases, too dramatic to be glossed over. Furthermore, many of her poems take poetry and communication themselves as their subject, making the process of their construction particularly relevant to analysis of their structure and content. Little surprise, then, that critics agree that Moore's poetics are inextricably "entwined with their printing history" (Kenner 1969: 161).

Extremely detailed accounts of the complete publication history of these variants can be found in Honigsblum (1990) and Schulze (2002). Such a complete transcript would take up far more room than I have here; instead I provide a general overview in Table 5-1 (which is also indebted to Peterson (1990:237)), and will take a closer look at variations and patterns of variations as they arise. This chart covers all major appearances outside of anthologies and the first appearance of each version, with the total number of printings of each version in Moore's lifetime, according to Honigsblum (1990), noted alongside its first appearance.

This summary necessarily occludes many small variations. For example, there are many minor differences of punctuation across the fifty-five printings cited at variation D, below. However, it does give a good sense of two important facts about the poem's history: First, even in Moore's lifetime, variations on the five-stanza version were by far the most frequently printed. Second, while at first glance the overall trajectory of these revisions seems to be one of abbreviation, which is also

how the history is generally represented in critical responses to the work, the reality is significantly more complicated.

	<i>Publication</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Stanzas: Lines</i>	<i>Printings</i>
A.	<i>Others</i> , 5, No. 6.	July 1919	5:30	3
B.	<i>Others</i> for 1919	1920	5:30	
C.	<i>Poems</i> (reverts to 1919)	1921	5:30	
D.	<i>Observatons</i>	Dec 1924	5:29 (plus note)	55
E.	<i>Observatons</i>	March 1925	1:13	1
F.	<i>The New Poetry</i>	1932	3:15	5
G.	<i>Selected Poems</i> (Macmillan) (reverts to 1924)	1935	5:29	
H.	<i>Selected Poems</i> (Faber) (reverts to 1924)	1935	5:29	
I.	<i>Collected Poems</i>	1951	5:29	
J.	<i>Collected Poems</i>	1967	1:3 / 5:29	10
K.	<i>Complete Poems</i>	1981	1:3 / 5:29	
L.	<i>Complete Poems</i>	1994	1	
M.	<i>Becoming Marianne Moore</i>	2002	Variorum	
N.	<i>The Poems of Marianne Moore</i>	2003	5:29/variorum	

Table 5-1: A summarized edition history of “Poetry”

The publication history of the poem is distinctly marked not only by deletions but also by substitutions, additions, and reversions. Often neglected in both histories and critical editions of the work, for example, is the period between 1925 and 1932, in which Moore first abandoned and then reinstated a stanzaic structure. The 1925 edition is a free-verse version of just thirteen lines:

POETRY

I, too, dislike it:
there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
The bat, upside down; the elephant pushing,
a tireless wolf under a tree,
the base-ball fan, the statistician—

“business documents and schoolbooks”—
these phenomena are pleasing,
but when they have been fashioned
into that which is unknowable,
we are not entertained.
It may be said of all of us
that we do not admire what we cannot understand;
enigmas are not poetry.

It is unclear what led Moore to make this experiment in free verse, especially considering how vigorously she had defended her preference for syllabic stanzas over free verse in letters and her conversation notebook just a few years previously (qtd. in Honigsblum 1990:187), complaining of an acquaintance’s “narrow minded” preference for free verse, but demurring, “well—I’ve never written free verse and don’t know how to write it.” Perhaps this revision was an attempt to repair that state of affairs. If so, she did not seem to be long satisfied with the result. During the period before she became editor of the *Dial*, around the same time that she was producing the thirteen-line “Poetry,” she made similar revisions to other poems originally drafted in syllabic stanzas, for example “A Grave” and “When I Buy Pictures”. Afterwards, she turned away from free verse for the duration, and a mark of this rejection was the publication of a yet new version of “Poetry” (1932), this time with syllabic stanza structure both restored to and altered from the original:

POETRY

I, too, dislike it; there are things
that are important beyond all this fiddle. Reading it,
however, with a perfect contempt for it,
one discovers that there is in it, after all, a place for the genuine:
hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, hair that can rise if it
must,

the bat holding on upside down,
 an elephant pushing, a tireless wolf under a tree,
 the immovable critic twitching his skin
 like a horse that feels a fly, the base-ball fan, the statistician — nor
 is it
 valid to discriminate against business documents, school-books,

 trade reports — these phenomena
 are important; but dragged into conscious oddity by
 half poets, the result is not poetry,
 This we know. In a liking for the raw material in all its rawness,
 And for that which is genuine, there is liking for poetry.

Here we see the return not only of syllabic stanzas but also of the place for the genuine, the hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate, the raw material in all its rawness. Gone are the quotation marks around “business documents” and “school-books”; for the time being they are simply present, not spoken. Meanwhile, the stanzas of the original version have returned, but their form and line breaks are altered: from six lines they have been truncated to five; the changes to the syllabic-line pattern diverge from both extremes of the original. No line in this version is as long as the longest in the five-stanza version, and none as short as the shortest, so that the punctuation of the line breaks is less syncopated and more regular than that produced by the juxtapositions in the prior approach. Thus this revision features all three kinds of changes in plenty: some deletions, but also many additions and reconfigurations; over this period Moore is tweaking, altering, and restoring.

This fifteen-line, three-stanza version apparently satisfied Moore and her anthologists off and on through 1952; it appeared with her blessing in Harriet Monroe’s anthology *The New Poetry* in 1932, 1934, and 1935 editions, and Louis Zukofsky’s *A Test of Poetry* in 1948 and 1952. But toward the end of this same

period, in her 1951 *Collected Poems*, Moore returned to an even longer version, nearly identical to the 1924 edition. Thus the history of this poem and Moore's revisions to it comprise a trajectory that is not particularly accurately described as a diminution. Indeed, as Table 1 shows, the full history of the poem includes several cases of "restorations" of longer versions after the presentation of shorter versions. What's more, the shortest version of the poem never appears entirely alone. Nor do alterations of smaller kinds follow a simple path from verbosity to conciseness. The comma before "too" in line 1 of all versions, for example, comes and goes.

Yet it is undeniable that this narrative of progressive attenuation has taken hold in the critical consciousness, in part because of Moore's explicit encouragement. Following Moore's example, accounts of this history primarily focus on acts of diminution and exclusion. Critics have characterized Moore's edits variously as "revision by subtraction" (Willis 1986), "revisionary chopping" (Hicok 2000:493n37), or a series of "drastic fits of rectitude" (Kenner 1975:107). Moore seemed to take special pleasure in telling friends about the "drastic cut" (Gregor 1984) she had made for the 1967 volume, and savoring their shocked reactions. This attitude was reinforced concisely in her epigram to *Complete Poems*, "Omissions are not accidents." This line is expertly crafted to enforce a particular construal of the versions found in this edition; not only does it lay emphasis on those revisions that remove rather than add, it also characterizes those alterations (even, as we will see, some that might more accurately be described as additions) as omissions, as lacks, as empty spaces where something else "ought" to have been, encouraging readers to search for favorite poems and sections that do not appear.

An emphasis on acts of omission, rather than of commission, also harmonizes more satisfyingly with other recurring themes in Moore's poetry. She often took as her subject the small, the dispreferred, and the absent. The speaker of her 1924 poem "Silence," for example, reports that her father "used to say" that "The deepest feeling always shows itself in silence; / not in silence, but restraint." The poem itself seems to take these words to heart; all but two and a half of the fourteen lines devoted not to the speaker's own voice, but to quotation. The speaker offers no direction on how to take the father's lecture, restraining her commentary to only the three lines "My father used to say," "Nor was he insincere in saying," and "Inns are not residences". Similarly, "Poetry" itself presents a mystery of omission in its first line: "I, too, dislike it." With whom is the speaker allying herself? The reader? The many people who—disliking poetry as they do—will never be her readers? "Sensible people," as Kenner (1975:106) suggested?

Critical responses to "Poetry" thus often center on different approaches to this "thematization of omission" (Peterson 1981). There are three basic takes on the phenomenon. One is to treat the sequence of revisions as damages or losses, another is to treat them as additions or affirmative statements, and the third is to treat them as an expression of, or enactment of, ambivalence. Hugh Kenner is a particularly dramatic perpetrator of the first approach, referring for example to the five-stanza version as "the one scarred by all those revisions" (1967: 1432). In this conceptualization, many variations published under the title "Poetry" are compressed (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) into a single, concrete entity that the poet has altered many times. This entity is also metaphorically characterized as a living body, and the

alterations that remove material from that body as violent mutilations. In this way, even a new, intact printing of an earlier version can be “scarred” by the publication of shorter variations.

The notion that Moore’s revisions somehow damage or detract from the five-stanza version follows naturally from a highly pervasive way of thinking and talking about texts; one which, indeed, I have not been able to avoid completely myself in the discussion above. It is very common to compress analogies between many specific individuals into an identity relation, producing a unique individual in the resulting blend. Disanalogies across those specific individuals are then understood in terms of changes to that unique individual. Everyday language is full of expressions for compressing disanalogy into change in this way. “Every year my cell phone gets smaller and my bill gets bigger,” for example, presents a compressed blend in which there just two items, changing their size over time. Understanding the blend involves unpacking this compression, recognizing that there are several distinct phones and equally distinct phone bills.

Kenner’s characterization is thus understandable, but problematic. After all, nothing has actually been destroyed—many copies of the original printings of previous versions exist, and there is nothing stopping anyone from re-reading or even re-printing whatever version they please, and the very collection that presents the traumatizing three-line revision includes a complete instantiation of the “scarred” five-stanza version in every copy. What’s more, the variation that is surely most in danger of vanishing from readers’ experience is not the five-stanza version, but the thirteen-line version in free verse, which was apparently a one-time experiment

appearing only in the second (1925) edition of *Observations*. The three-stanza version has not fared much better, published only five times in Moore's life, in three editions of an anthology edited by Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, *The New Poetry* (1932, 1934, 1938) and two editions of Louis Zukofsky's anthology, *A Test of Poetry* (1948, 1952). Still, even these versions, which had all but vanished in the last decades of the twentieth century, do remain in print to some degree, quoted in critical essays and in the end notes of Grace Schulman's epic collection *The Poems of Marianne Moore* (2003), as well as Robin Schulze's (2002) variorum edition of Moore's early poetry.

A contrary line has been to take the history of revisions as a kind of accumulation. M. L. Rosenthal (1969:127) writes of a progression of affirmative statements that invite readers to appreciate the relationship between an extended poetic work and the sum of its parts. He suggests that the 1967 volume is "playing with the two versions" concurrently, "dramatiz[ing] the insistent fact that many poems are comprised of what we might call a kernel and a context, and that often, in fact, the kernel does reside in the first line or lines." Others take the sequence (again, generally concentrating on only the longest and the shortest variations) as an expression of, or enactment of, ambivalence. Bonnie Costello, for example, argues that "[t]he two versions stand not as original and revision but as two alternative statements.... Revision, whether within the text or between texts, is an essential part of Moore's aesthetic. It is motivated by an essential ambivalence about poetry's capacity to assert" (1981:25-26). This last view, I think, is more right than the position that new versions detract from or alter old ones; they may supercede earlier

versions, entirely or in part; or they may comment on them, or co-exist. But there are problems with all of these characterizations.

First, it is a vast simplification to talk about something that was enacted over the course of many years as either a unitary object or a simple set of tokens. The revisions are not independent of one another, nor were they constructed in isolation in the interpersonal sense. Instead, they are parts of an extended, multi-turn interaction. Further, it is only by taking a very selective view of the entire history of these revisions that this history appears to be solely or primarily a matter of omission, or even a collection of increasingly pared-down iterations. That view requires one to bracket the history very selectively, taking only Moore-initiated versions, and not even all of those, into account. The fate of the thirteen-line version, for example, represented a temporary paring down, followed by a return to the longer form of the five-stanza version. The latter persists in its relative maximalism across the entire publication history of the piece, and is reproduced in anthologies and other reading versions to this day.

And yet it certainly is true that omissions are increasingly highlighted in later versions of the work published in Moore's lifetime, as well as in posthumous versions. Moore's 1967 epigram of course profiles acts of omission, and she also often deployed notes and other paratextual materials that call attention to cuts in the text and downplay other kinds of revisions. Critical responses and editorial annotations follow suit. In the end, then, omissions *are* thematized, it seems, even if this thematization does not exactly reflect the "true" history of the poem. How best to account for this state of affairs?

Joint Construal and Revision in Conversation

It is tempting to say that the omission narrative that Moore, her editors, and her critics endorse is simply inaccurate. It selectively ignores real events in the manuscript and publishing history of the poem, and it suggests that both Moore's intentions and the material history of the poem have always been coherently "about" omission, even though a look at the full publication history makes it clear that the actual trajectory was much more vacillatory and complicated. All of this is true. But it would be a mistake, I think, to argue that critics should abandon this story of the poem. Instead, we should recognize the thematization of omission as a joint construal of "Poetry" and its history which the author, editors, publishers, critics, and other readers have built up together—a construal that Moore initiated, but which was cemented by all of these participants, including editors who constructed their own reading versions of the poem after her death.

The term **joint construal** comes from Clark (1996), and refers to the way that participants in a conversation try to establish a shared understanding of what the speaker of each utterance in the conversation "is to be taken to mean" by it (p. 215). Sometimes this happens smoothly and without incident, but it always requires contributions on the part of both speaker and hearer. In Clark's terminology, the speaker **proposes** a joint project and the hearer **takes it up**. The uptake response provides evidence that the hearer understood the speaker's utterance, and also tells the speaker something about how the hearer is construing that utterance. For example, if Emma says to Frank, "Have some pie," each of the responses in (22) would suggest a different construal of that utterance:

- (22) a. Yes, ma'am! [*an order*]
 b. No thanks, I'm fine. [*an offer*]
 c. What a good idea! [*an advisory*]

If the displayed construal matches Emma's original intentions, she can proceed accordingly. Her next turn, then, ought to reflect her sense that her proposed project has been successfully taken up, giving Frank cause to recognize that this construal is now jointly held between them, and so forth. If the construal doesn't match, she can correct it ("I'm not asking you, I'm telling you!") or leave Frank's construal unchanged and revise her own intentions about what she should be taken as doing.

Sometimes it happens that a number of conversational turns are required to establish a jointly accepted meaning. Both the original speaker and the hearer may contribute to the meaning being constructed, as in this example from the Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English, speaker labels altered for ease of reference:

- (23) 1D: so for thirty-three eighty-three, if I use these primers, and I use
 the twelve sixty-three A probe
 2C: you get right regulation [*continuation of 1 by hearer, C*]
 3D: right regulation [*acceptance of 2 via repetition*]
 4C: yeah [*acceptance of 3*]

(MICASE MTG400MX008)

In other cases, the joint construal that emerges by the end of a sequence is significantly different from the speaker's original intended or expressed meaning, or even from both the speaker's and the hearer's original construal of the joint conversation project. In (24), for example, three interlocutors work their way to an

entirely new shared construal over multiple turns of revision, incorporating contributions from all participants:

- (24) S1: access a culture, is, i don't quite know what that means.
S2: replicate would that be better?
S1: replicate is, replicate a culture, no. better expression, Ken?
S3: um, they might emulate it. i mean they're looking at the ge- the geography of te- of Ptolemy and Pliny the Elder at this point and going_ they they ex- they explained it in the past, they were right because they ruled an entire empire.
S1: so your suggestion is that, is that, we might say, that they, um... they looked, to the past, and they emulated, the example, of the past. now, let's just <P :05> <WRITING ON BOARD> emulate's a pretty good word

(MICASE DIS315JU101)

In these examples, neither the structure nor the meaning of an utterance is fixed by a speaker's original expressed intentions. Instead, construals are jointly negotiated over the course of the conversation. Joint construals of this sort are not merely the product of small, local slices of discourse such as those presented in these attested examples. Indeed, they multiply over more protracted discourse and larger discourse communities, as in the case of "Poetry". The thematization of omission in "Poetry" is not something that can be located in any single version of the poem. Neither does it arise out of the series of published revisions of the poem; it is not simply a fact or falsehood about the revisions that Moore enacted and published. Instead, the thematization is a construal of these "utterances" of the poem, one that has been worked out largely outside the textual history of Moore's revisions. There are three major avenues by which this construal has been solidified.

First, a number of individual extra-textual conversations in which Moore played a major role have been particularly influential by virtue of their frequent and

prominent repetition. A striking example is a story that Moore liked to tell about herself and her longtime editor at Viking Press, Edwin Kennebeck. This exchange is quoted, paraphrased, and reported on many times in print (e.g. Schulman 1969; Gregor 1984; Peterson 1990; Schulman 2003) and appears to have made the rounds in person, as well, so that it eventually became a classic story that one told about Miss Moore and her iconoclastic ways. Here is one version of it:

Grace Schulman: Have you changed many of the poems for this edition?

Marianne Moore: Yes, I have changed them somewhat. Edwin Kennebeck, Mr. Kennebeck, said, "Marshall Best [a senior executive at Viking Press] is going to fall dead when he sees 'Poetry' reduced to three lines"....

Mr. Kennebeck said, "Oh no. But I think some people are going to complain if you leave the whole thing out." But then he said, "Well, I thought of this: How would it be if we had an appendix and put that in the back, together with the other things you have reduced to nothing?"

"Well," I said, "that's fine. Then it saves the serious reader from looking up these things as they were."

(Schulman 1969: 160-61)

Note that this reported exchange presents a very particular understanding of what Moore "is to be taken to mean" by the 1967 revision, along with the suggestion that several different people concur in this construal. Marshall Best is expected to react dramatically when he sees that the poem has been *reduced* to three lines. Kennebeck proposes an appendix containing the five-stanza version, which is described as one of many "things" that have been *reduced to nothing*. Moore endorses this construal not only by repeating it for Schulman's ears but also in her own reported reply, in which she refers to the long version as an example of *things as they were*. This one passage

economically puts forward both a concise display of the omission narrative, complete with elision of many of the other stages in the revision history of the poem, and the suggestion that this understanding not only is held by the speaker, but is part of the common ground for many, perhaps everyone, in the small, informed group associated with the publication of “Poetry.”

The frequent retelling of this story connects to the most obvious means by which the omission narrative is performed and ratified: simply, by repeated displays of a certain understanding of the poem and its history. These are exhibited in critical essays like those surveyed in section three of this essay, as well as in editorial notes, biographies, and the like. The reiteration of a given construal is a common feature of the joint enactment of new or revised construals in conversation. In addition to the kind of word-for-word repetition that serves as a signal of confirmation in examples (23) and (24) above, this process is most reminiscent of conversational uptake responses. Utterances such as “Omissions are not accidents” and the Kennebeck story constitute a proposed joint project as much as any turn at conversation. When editors and critics respond, they are choosing whether or not to take up that proposal, to provide a counter-proposal, or to find some middle ground between the two.

Among the most interesting sites of interpretive construal are posthumously constructed reading versions of the poem, such as those that appear in the Norton anthologies of poetry and American literature, the *Oxford Anthology of American Literature*, and Schulman 2003. These typically present the five-stanza version in the main text of the volume, and the 1967 three-line version in notes, often in a (marked) footnote rather than an (unmarked) endnote. This approach creates an omission

narrative in miniature, in which the five-stanza version is repeatedly construed as the originary and “true” version, and the three-line revision is presented as a surprise second act. The relative status of these two versions is additionally reinforced by the fact that the most frequently quoted lines from the poem, such as “real gardens with imaginary toads in them,” can all be found in the five-stanza version, and are strikingly absent when the reader turns her attention to the footnote or turns the page to the endnote. Thus, editions for a more popular audience, which neither provide a full textual history nor provide one of the Moore-endorsed presentations of the poem—nor even presentations matching any created in Moore’s lifetime—participate significantly in the textual conversation, contribute to a public joint construal of the work, and conspire to reinforce and re-inscribe the thematization of omission.

Eclectic Texts and Social Texts

The perhaps surprisingly substantive role that idiosyncratic reading editions play in enacting the socially constructed meaning and composition of this poem connects to a larger debate in Anglo/American editorial scholarship over two influential approaches to the project of creating scholarly editions and how to think about “authority” in a text.

The first of these is the “final authorial intention” tradition associated with W. W. Greg and Fredson Bowers, in which the job of the scholarly editor is to create a single text that approximates as closely as possible “the form of [the author’s] work he wished the public to have” (Tanselle 1976: 167). That is, the object of the editor is

to come as closely as possible to producing a *definitive* text reflecting an author's final intentions. G. Thomas Tanselle's work grounds the Greg-Bowers methodology in a theory of texts that distinguishes between a "work" and "expressions" of it. The "work" is an abstract entity, the form of a piece of literary art that exists only as an ideal. Any realized instantiation of an artwork—in print, performance, manuscript, or otherwise—is merely an "expression" of that ideal. By its very nature, then, every reproduction is a mere approximation of the true, ideal work. In this school of textual criticism, the job of the editor is to approximate the ideal as closely as possible.

More recently, editorial theory within the academy has largely come to favor a "social text" approach, associated most famously with Jerome McGann (1983, 1991), in which authority rests not with a solitary author but in a social process of textual production involving editors, typesetters, proofreaders, censors, anthologists, and others. This approach differs from the former not only in its fundamental conception of the nature of a "text," but also in the final products that it aims to produce. The goal of editors working in the Greg-Bowers-Tanselle school of textual criticism is to construct a single, stable, and readable, authoritative edition. (McGann criticizes these editions as "eclectic texts" that have no historical counterpart.) Editors who favor the social text approach advocate, instead, a "variorum," an account of an unstable textual history, with attention to the social and material contexts of all the variants of a given work.

While the social text tradition rejects both the theory and methodology associated with Tanselle's work/expression distinction, that distinction is alive and well in the practice of both editors and librarians, as it is enormously useful for

practical purposes of cataloging, publishing, and teaching texts. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, for example, makes use of these categories in its *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (1998:16-18, italics in original): “A *work* is an abstract entity... Relating *expressions* of a *work* indirectly by relating each *expression* to the *work* that it realizes is often the most efficient means of grouping related expressions.” Similarly, publishers such as W. W. Norton in the United States do a booming business in commissioning and producing demi-scholarly editions of classic texts for the undergraduate market. These teaching editions typically hew very closely to the “final authorial intention” approach, for the simple reason that it is a tried and true way of packaging a text to make it amenable to reading.

My joint construal account is in substantial sympathy with the notion that literature is composed not of abstract “works” and their imperfect material “expressions,” but of a messy array of socially enacted textual productions. However, this analysis ascribes a much higher importance than the social text approach would grant to the kind of reading editions produced by editors and publishers working either explicitly or implicitly in the work/expression tradition. The differences become particularly evident on examination of McGann’s 1992 discussion of “Poetry,” which he takes to be an excellent illustration of the failings of the “final authorial intention” approach to textual criticism.

McGann points out, correctly, that while the 1967 three-line version of the poem evidently represents Moore’s “final intentions” towards the piece, “it is equally clear that the earlier and longer work will never be superseded by the

later revision; indeed, the peculiar force of the revised version depends in important ways upon our knowledge and recollection of the earlier” (1992:86). So far, so good. However, he goes on to argue that editors and readers would “probably do well to regard it as a new and separate poem rather than as a revision of the earlier work.” I disagree whole-heartedly with this characterization. The social text tradition would be better served by an understanding of the role that both their own analysis and that of the work/expression school play in forming a conversation around textual works; in the case of “Poetry,” the prominence of reading editions makes them perhaps the most important participants in the creation of a joint construal of the poem after the revisions and comments of Moore herself. The formation of a social text does not end at the point where those engaged in the process of textual criticism enter the conversation.

Thematizing Trouble, Thematizing Repair

Finally, I would suggest that a fuller appreciation of the dynamics of revision and joint construal that have characterized the publication, dissemination, and reception of “Poetry” clarifies more than the poem’s bibliographic history. It can also open up our reading of the poem itself. As it happens, there are features that persist across all versions of the poem that play not only with the notion of omission, but specifically with linguistic resources for revision in conversation, creating a special sense of both frustration and conspiracy between the reader and the speaking persona,

and highlighting the ways that poets and poetry both engage with and decline to engage with their readers.

In conversation analysis, the term of art *repair* is used to describe what happens when speakers identify something in a conversation as a source of “trouble.” In the seminal paper on repair in conversation, Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) note that sources of trouble are not limited to errors, and responses to trouble can take forms other than correction. For example, difficulties in word recovery often trigger repair sequences. One speaker may supply a word that is eluding the other, or a speaker might first search for a word and then supply it herself. In other cases, no noticeable error occurs at all, as in examples (23) and (24) above. In sum, the phenomenon in question is less one of “repair” per se than it is one of revision; conversation allows speakers to add to, subtract from, or make substitutions for elements that have already been introduced into the stream of talk.

Acts of revision in conversation can be usefully divided into two minimal parts, initiation and outcome. The participant who produces, or enacts, a revision is not necessarily the same as the one who initiates it. Repair initiation calls attention to, or “undertakes to locate” (Schegloff 2007:101) a “trouble-source” in a piece of talk, while repair itself undertakes (ideally) to eliminate the trouble.

Whatever version of “Poetry” we choose to start our reading, the very first line presents a striking trouble-source, namely, “I, too, dislike it.” Saul Kripke (1990) has observed that *too* is an example of a peculiar subset of presupposition triggers that are more demanding than most. Ordinary presupposing constructions can be used informatively; that is, they can carry presuppositions that are not already part of the

common ground and be felicitous nonetheless. For example, if I say, “I have to pick up a package for my husband” to someone who had no idea whether or not I had a husband, my interlocutor can easily accommodate (Lewis 1979) the presupposition triggered by *my husband* (namely, that there exists a person who fills this role), adding it to the common ground as it is introduced into the discourse.

Kripke points out that *too* does not seem to permit this kind of accommodation. The presupposition triggered by *too* does not apply only to the common ground but to facts about the conversational history itself. Consider the following example:

(25) John can't come tonight. *He's* having dinner in New York, too.

The expression *too* in combination with the appropriate prosodic structure in the second sentence of (25) triggers not only the presupposition that someone other than John is having dinner in New York tonight (which is trivially true) but also that someone salient to both interlocutors had dinner in New York last night. Furthermore, and most importantly, it triggers the presupposition that this fact was either mentioned explicitly in the previous discourse or is easily recoverable from it. This last aspect of the presupposition is what makes it “anaphoric.”

The literature on anaphoric presuppositions in philosophy of language and pragmatics naturally presents examples like (24) in terms of what they, or their hearers, cannot accommodate. This does not mean, however, that speakers never produce an anaphoric presuppositional trigger like *too* without first producing the prior utterance that should be required license it. Instead, when they do produce them

in the absence of their licensing context, they or their interlocutors are likely to initiate a repair sequence:

- (26) S4: Zack was [asking for grapefruit] too.
S6: what?
S4: you said you wanted some.
S6: no, i don't want any. i said it was a bad addiction that he was getting into.
S4: oh

(MICASE LES320SU085)

Similarly, the absence of an antecedent to the first line of “Poetry” serves to provoke the reader in ways that go beyond the more conventional deployment of, for example, definite reference or pro-form in the first line of a literary work. It is very common for Western literature to do the latter, with the effect of “conveying that [a given piece of information] *should be* mutual knowledge” (Hobbs 1987:7). The more exotic use of *too* in “Poetry” suggests that there *must be* utterances prior to this one, and in their absence these create a trouble source that cries out for repair. Thus the highly abbreviated three-line version, in preserving the “trouble” of the first line, while eliminating all but the briefest of elaborations, “with a perfect contempt for it,” functions both as a cutting witticism and a generous invitation. This version simultaneously shuts off avenues for engagement and emphasizes the role of the reader in the act of creating meaning. In this way, “Poetry” supports not only a first-order analysis of a poetics in which poem and printing history together thematize acts of omission, but also an illuminating second-order analysis, in which poem, revisions, and reception together make clear that the text is indeed a conversation.

Summary

An account of textual discourse that recognizes both the role of individual cognition and the degree to which meaning is an emergent property of interaction is not only interesting as a question of theory. It can also serve to enrich and regulate the practice of historical and editorial encounters with individual texts. The case of “Poetry” illustrates three central findings:

1. A cognitively realistic approach to textual criticism is long overdue. By introducing insights from the study of social cognition and its role in discourse, text, and meaning, editors and archivists can retain the practical methodology of the work/expression framework while also acknowledging the part that this framework plays in creating a “social text” of a literary work.
2. The mechanics of joint construal provide a productive framework for talking about these processes while obscuring neither the degree to which many readers of all stripes sincerely privilege authorial intention nor the social reality in which texts and their meanings are the product of the intersection of many minds.
3. This framework can also open up new readings for and curatorial approaches to individual works. The venerable tradition of identifying in “Poetry” a poetics in which poem and printing history together thematize acts of omission can now be expanded into an illuminating second-order

analysis, in which poem, revisions, and reception together enact a poetics of conversation.

The joint construal approach thus provides a number of benefits for the textual analyst. Within the realm of specific textual criticism, it illuminates several aspects of “Poetry” and its history that are otherwise opaque. First, it gives us a way to acknowledge that the critical narrative of omission is both compelling and analytically useful, despite being at odds with many apparent facts about the history of the poem. It also sheds new light on how “Poetry” functions conversationally, by revealing the poem’s deployment on many levels of the mechanics of revision in conversation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The problem of literary joint attention is the tripartite question of whether shared interpretations of texts exist, where they come from, and how they are achieved. Joint attention is difficult enough in face-to-face interaction; in the case of literature the problems of communication and coordination become more complicated very quickly.

I have argued that readers and writers do in fact unconsciously collaborate in constructing joint attentional scenes. These frames of joint attention are often both elaborate and incomplete, and in those elaborations and imperfections much of interest can be found. Appreciating the role that joint attention and social cognition play in literary discourse supplies a framework not only for talking about how texts in general work but also about the problems, kinks, and peculiarities of individual works—and, too, about the particular interactions within individual communities of authors, readers, and editors of those works.

It is difficult, in this kind of project, to serve the competing goals of theory and of interpretation. Theory calls for tidy systems that account neatly for all the messy diversity of individual artifacts and behaviors. But literature demands to be taken individually; it is most interesting and valuable in its particulars, and to make global claims about what literature is or how it works is to risk ignoring what makes literature worth caring about. The story I have offered here is an attempt to bridge the general and the specific.

This treatment of literary joint attention makes claims about how literary discourse in general can be accommodated in an account of communication that takes face-to-face communication as basic, foundational, and inescapably grounded in concrete interpersonal interaction. But it is also an exploration of the way that individual texts exploit and thematize these general facts, structured around particular puzzles of joint attention. Literature both appropriates and surpasses the limitations of face-to-face interaction. Modernist experimental narratives use joint attention to invite the reader into a character's consciousness; detective fiction capitalizes on joint attentional biases to tell stories that mislead and inform the reader in equal measure; poets and their editors direct one another's attention to particular aspects of a work and its history to create an emergent reading that could not exist without their repeated triangulations. Triangles of joint attention are thus repeated across the literary experience in small ways and in large, and an understanding of the joint nature of conversation works brings a new richness to our understanding of texts.

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