Interpretation and the Implied Author: A Descriptive Project

1. The implied author argument

Theories of interpretation developed in the analytic philosophy of literature tend to be normative or prescriptive accounts. Specifically, these theories aim to offer a recommendation or policy for how we *should* interpret instead of a description of how interpretation actually proceeds. The main reason for taking this normative route is that a descriptive project is thought to be doomed to failure. This is because critical practice does not seem to be united by one single approach to interpretation (S. Davies 2007, 13; Carroll 2011, 132-3).

The normative route is usually combined with a theory of literary meaning and the ideal is to identify the interpretative aim with the search for work-meaning (Stecker 2013, 314). That is, the aim of the project is to demonstrate that we should interpret in accordance with what a work *actually* means. Carroll even goes so far as to claim that the metaphysical aspect of a theory of interpretation is indispensable (Carroll 2013, 10). However, this is not always the case. For example, it is unclear whether the value-maximizing theory, one of the contenders in the debate, has offered an explicit account of meaning, as its core claim is that we *ought to* favor the interpretation(s) that maximizes a work's value (S. Davies 2007, 166-90). That is, the maximizing view is ostensibly defended on normative grounds.

In this paper I take neither route. My aim is to explore the path less trodden: to attempt a descriptive account of interpretation. I will postpone its link to the interpretative policy to the last section and occupy myself first with the descriptive aspect. Nevertheless, the account to be

developed is not meant to be global. To be precise, I limit the applicability of the account to *current* theories based on the *utterance model*, which suggests we interpret a literary work in the same way we interpret an utterance.[1]

The utterance model claims that literary meaning is utterance meaning, suggesting that interpretation should be constrained by a work's identity-relevant factors in its context of production because a work, like an utterance, acquires its identity and content in part from its relations to that context. The utterance model is thus a *contextualist* model for literary interpretation.

This model is representative in the contemporary analytic philosophy of literature since it is the basis for most theories of interpretation under debate (S. Davies 2007, 166-68). My contention is that people who follow the current interpretative recommendations based on the utterance model are actually interpreting an implied author; that is to say, how interpretation proceeds in these apparently different cases can be *described* by a general account of the implied author. Certainly, this does not mean that the interpreter must be conscious of an implied author when interpreting; rather, the aim is to show that either the author appealed to will turn out to be implied in nature or such a theoretical construct will in the end be assumed. From now on, the domain of interpretative practice will thus be restricted to that based on the utterance model.

For convenience's sake, I will dub the implied author position, *hypothetical authorism*, to be distinguished from *hypothetical intentionalism*, which maintains that the interpreter should aim for the best hypothesis of the *actual* author's intention made by the ideal audience (Levinson 2010; see also Tolhurst 1979). By contrast, hypothetical authorism, in its normative version, argues that interpretation should be guided by the intention of the author implied by the work.

---

[1] The founding document of this model is Tolhurst 1979, while the term was first used in Meiland 1981.

Below I try to show that in its descriptive form, hypothetical authorism best describes what is going on in the process of interpretation. Here is a precise formulation of my argument:

The Implied Author Argument (IAA)

(P1) The implied authors of literary works are the authors we can make out from those works.

(P2) Appeal to an author is necessary for working out the right interpretation of a literary work.

(P3) In working out the right interpretation of a literary work, we need to appeal to an author whom we can make out from that work.

(C) Appeal to a work's implied author(s) is necessary for working out the right interpretation of a literary work.

There does not seem to be much to be argued about the validity of this argument. I shall thus focus on the premises and examine them one by one in the sections to follow.

2. What is an implied author?

Let us examine the first premise: *the implied authors of literary works are the authors we can make out from those works.*

The theoretic construct of an implied author traces back to Wayne C. Booth's account in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961 (second edition in 1983). The account has exerted a tremendous influence not only on literary studies but also on analytic aesthetics. Philosophers have proliferated terms referring to the same concept such as *apparent artist* (Walton 1976, 2008), *postulated author* (Nehamas 1981, 1986, 2002), *ideal author* (Nathan 1982, 1992, 2006), and

fictional author (Currie 1990). [2] All these variations share a common ground: the author concerened in interpretation is mainly constituted by work features (textual features plus social and historical context). I mention "work" and "context" because all the aforementioned philosophers supporting hypothetical authorism are contextualists. [3] This is something not characeristic of Booth's account. Hereafter I will use "work features" to mean textual features understood in the context of the work's production.

Simply put, the implied author in the present discussion is the author implied by a *work*, rather than by a *text*.[4] To be precise, such an author is constituted by a reasonably selected set of work features. The psychological traits expressed in a work, such as values, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and the like, when coherently grouped, constitute an author-image that does not necessarily coincide with that of the real author. Such divergences stem from accident, failure to realize intentions, or the actual author's intention to pretend.

Some might think that the above characterization of the implied author is just another way to delineate hypothetical intentionalism, provided we understand "the author implied by" as "the

---

[2] One analytic aesthetician who does not coin a new term but embraces the implied author account is Robinson (1985).

[3] Nehamas is not a self-proclaimed utterance theorist. However, he is no doubt a contextualist, as he exhibits contextualist commitments throughout his writings. Though he does not explicitly draw the analogy between works and utterances, his core claims have that implication. For example, he accepts that interpreting a text is to capture a contextualized meaning by construing an expressive act. This act could well be a speech act.

[4] For a detailed discussion on the distinction, see Currie 1991. Though the implied author is designed to account for fictional works, what counts as such works remains controversial. Tentatively, I incline to the view that nonficitonal works also have implied authors, but will not argue for that here. Therefore, in my argument I will use "literary work" instead of "fictional work." Even if this stronger view fails, my central argumentation still covers fictional works, which constiue a major part of literay works.

author most plausibly hypothesized on the basis of." In that case, there will be no theoretical difference between these two positions, let alone difference in practice.

I agree that in practice the author implied by the work will be identical with that most plausibly hypothesized on the basis of the work, and this is exactly what I want to argue in my project. But as I see it, the referents in question (authors) are indeed theoretically different. Some philosophers do think that the two positions on interpretation diverge in theory and hence face different objections (D. Davies 2007, 84-7; cf. Stecker 2010, 158-60). The author that concerns hypothetical authorism is *hypothetical* in nature; the position identifies utterance meaning with the meaning ascribed by a well-backgrounded audience to a postulated utterer as what she intended. However, the author targeted by hypothetical intentionalism is the *actual* author; the position ascribes meaning obtained by the appropriate audience to the real author. This crucial divergence in theory is accurately captured by Levinson, the leading hypothetical intentionalist:

[…] my version of HI does not invoke *hypothetical authors*, and thus is not subject to any qualms one might have about hypothetical entities generally; rather, the *actual author* is the object of interpretive hypotheses seeking to arrive at work meaning. (Levinson 2010, 141, emphases original)

As said, part of my aim in this paper is to argue that, though these two accounts of interpretation differ in theory, they do not differ in practice. More accurately, IAA aims to show that the current contextualist theories of interpretation, despite their theoretical differences in the target of interpretation, *effectively* yield an implied author when put into practice.

Now, the first premise of IAA is obviously true by definition. The implied author is the author the interpreter makes out from the work, and this is the standard construal of what an implied author is.

One point needs to be clarified before we move on. The present position does not imply interpretative monism. One can be a hypothetical authorist and yet hold critical pluralism in regard to interpretation. Better put, the account does not need to exclude the possibility of non-equivalent but equally plausible interpretations (Currie 1990, 101). The plausibility of an interpretation partly depends on the interpreter's value concerns and background assumptions (Currie 1993, 424-26). This means that a work could have more than one plausible interpretation based on different implied authors. This point will prove useful when I address a worry later.

3. Interpreting an utterance

The utterance model assimilates a literary work to an utterance, namely, a text *used* on a particular occasion. Literary works, according to this model, are texts of various lengths used by authors in different contexts.

This contextualist assumption is often used to support the suggestion that interpretation should not misidentify a work; that is, the interpreter should pay attention to the work's contextual factors that are identity-relevant, such as the work's title, genre, style, and facts about the author's oeuvre, social elements to which the work makes reference, and the artistic and linguistic conventions in place when the work was produced (S. Davies 2006, 68-71). Ignoring these identity-conferring factors leads the interpreter to consider a different work; in that case,

the interpreter is not treating the work *as authored*.[5] Nonetheless, theorists disagree about whether or not the actual author's semantic intention is among the relevant factors. This is a debate between actual intentionalism on the one hand, and anti-intentionalism, hypothetical intentionalism and the value-maximizing theory on the other.[6]

Needless to say, actual intentionalism and hypothetical intentionalism agree that the author's intention is *relevant* to interpretation. For the former, interpretation should be guided by the actual author's intention; for the latter, interpretation should be guided by the appropriately backgrounded audience's best hypothesis of the author's intention. In either case, appeal to an agent or subject in determining the right interpretation is indispensable.[7] By contrast, the anti-intentionalist seeks the interpretation best secured by linguistic convention, and the value-maximizing theory advises us to look for the interpretation that maximizes the work's value.[8] In neither suggestion is the author explicitly invoked.

Now, the second premise of IAA asserts that *appeal to an author is necessary for working out the right interpretation of a literary work.* Note that this claim says nothing about the nature of this author, so the answer is left undecided for the moment. Apparently the claim holds with actual intentionalism and hypothetical intentionalism, but does it hold with anti-intentionalism or

---

[5] When the distinction between work and text is drawn, "work" already implies contextual considerations in place and hence an author. I will use "work" to mean "work as authored" or "work as of its author" hereafter.

[6] There have been controversies over whether anti-intentionalism, as represented by Beardsley, is textualist or contextualist. More will be said about this in § 3.1. For views treating anti-intentionalism as a contextualist position, see Currie 1990, 109-11; Nathan 1992; S. Davies 2005; Livingston 2005, 141; D. Davies 2007, 72-3.

[7] For absolute actual intentionalism, see Knapp and Michaels 1982. For modest versions, see Stecker 2003, Livingston 2005, and Carroll 2013.

[8] For anti-intentionalism, see Beardsley 1981a.

the value-maximizing theory? My impression is that in literary criticism most of the time the author is explicitly referred to. I claim that even if the author is not explicitly mentioned, the implied author is nevertheless implicitly invoked to determine the correct or acceptable interpretation.

3.1 A note on anti-intentionalism

Including anti-intentionalism in my project may be controversial, because the position is not normally seen as based on the utterance model. For example, Stephen Davies does not include anti-intentionalism in his representative framework for contextualist theories of interpretation (2007, 166-69). It is true that Beardsley—the central figure of anti-intentionalism—draws the analogy between literary works and utterances (Beardsley 1981a, 237-38), but to qualify his position as the kind of utterance model as construed in the present discussion calls for further justification, for Beardsley is often treated as a formalist rather than a contextualist, given his affiliation with New Criticism movement (Dowling 2017). Since the utterance model under current discussion resists a formalist conception of utterances, it should not be a vice to rule out anti-intentionalism from my project in this paper.

For all that, my inclination is to treat anti-intentionalism as contextualism-based and as covered by IAA. I prove these two points elsewhere (Lin 2016, 2018). Briefly speaking, I argue that Beardsley is actually a contextualist and has a continued emphasis on appeal to a fictional agent of intentionality when dealing with the issue of literary interpretation. If this makes sense, the second premise of IAA would then be true for anti-intentionalism as well. My conclusion here can be further backed up by how Beardsley's followers defend their position. For example,

Nathan has put a great emphasis on assuming an (implied) author for interpretation. Nathan's stance is broadly anti-intentionalist, but he argues that we must appeal to an utterer when interpreting an utterance. Otherwise, the project of interpretation cannot even get under way (Nathan 1992, 195). This agrees with Beardsley's emphasis on presupposing an ultimate speaker for every fictional utterance (Beardsley 1981b).

I do not see it as out of place to exclude anti-intentionalism from the current discussion, given the concern mentioned two paragraphs back, but the reader should keep in mind that IAA could potentially cover anti-intentionalism.

3.2 Interpreting an utterance: the value-maximizing theory

It is high time that we consider the case of the value-maximizing theory, according to which, to seek the interpretation(s) that maximizes the value of a work, the interpreter should consider the literary meanings a work can sustain within the limits set by convention and context. I do not think there would be a big difference in meaning if, in the previous sentence, we replace "can sustain" with "appears to have." If so, the maximizer might not be able to avoid assuming an implied or *apparent* author.

To articulate my point, let us see how the maximizer characterizes her position: "[…] our interest in art rests on a recognition of its *intentionality*, but not necessarily as a result of a recognition of the artist's intentions." (S. Davies 1982, 66, my emphasis) In another key passage, Davies writes: "[…] the maximizing theory can interest itself in the *appearance of intentionality* whether or not the relevant features were intended in fact. In this, it falls into line with hypothetical intentionalism." (S. Davies 2006, 124, my emphasis)

Note that in his discussion Davies identifies hypothetical intentionalism with hypothetical authorism, because, as he sees it, both positions are concerned with imagining an author (and her intention) on the basis of the work. In that case, in maintaining that the maximizing view falls into line with hypothetical intentionalism (and hence with hypothetical authorism), Davies implicitly acknowledges the connection between apparent intentions and the imagined author. After all, the apperance of intentionality seems to presuppose the appearance of an author; otherwise the agent of intentionality would be lost. In other words, one cannot talk about an apparent intention without presuming its agent.

For example, if a work appears to criticize capitalism, then the maximizer would say that there is an apparent intention to criticize capitalism. It would be odd to deny that in this case the intention in question is intended by someone, namely, an apparent author, since any meaningful utterance would require an implied utterer if we choose to analyze the work's appearance intentionalistically.

However, the case of figurative language needs to be handled with care, for in this special case the maximizer does not stick blindly to apparent intentions. Actual intentionalists maintain that, to analyze figurative features, appeal to the actual author's intentions are essential. This will be the case for irony, quotation, allusion, metaphor, symbolism, etc., namely, for features that many people think need to be analyzed intentionalistically. As a matter of fact, Davies claims that the above features must be analyzed on an intentinalist basis, but with subtlety (S. Davies, 2007, 177-8). He suggests we distinguish between two cases: the case where the said features are identity-relevant and the case where they are not. In the former, those features are more categorial than semantic; therefore, they will be accepted as involving categorial intentions.

However, when the said features are not identity-conferring, the interpreter is free to consider their appearance.

Since the maximizer holds *thin* conventionalism, she is not committed to the view that a work can appear in only one salient manner.[9] Take irony for example. If a work, constrained by convention and context, appears to be ironic, then irony will be an acceptable interpretation of the work, regardless of authorial intent; however, for the same work, if it is also reasonable to say that, within the constraints imposed by convention and context, it does not appear ironic, then a non-ironic reading would be legitimate. The point here is that, for the maximizer, the impact exerted by convention and context on a work's appearance is not robustly construed; therefore, a work can be taken to appear in more than one way. Then, saying that appearance should be analyzed intentionalistically would mean that, to use the above example again, there is an apparent intention that the work be ironic, or an apparent intention that it be not.

The issue here is whether we can avoid any notion of an author when interpreting. It is true that the maximizing view acknowledges the author's categorial intention, but that is a move concerning work-identity rather than interpretation. As Davies claims, the maximizing position is intentionalist on the ontology of literary works, but anti-intentionalist on literary interpretation (S. Davies 2007, 15). Indeed, from Davies' characterization of his position, the author and her intention do not seem to be a necessary ingredient in interpretation: [10]

---

[9] Since the maximizer is committed to critical or interpretative pluralism, she has to allow that conventions may not be sufficient to generate one salient meaning.

[10] Note that the attributions in this paragraph to the maximizing view are not necessarily general, but apply specifically to Davies' position. For example, Goldman, another important maximizer, disagrees with Davies in the following respects: first, he does not have a contextualist commitment; second, he incorporates actual authorial

The *value-maximizing theory* maintains that the conventions of language and art in place when the work was created are sufficient to secure its meaning. This last variant focuses on "utterance" rather than "utterer's" meaning, while recognizing that the meaning intended by the actual author usually identifies at least one of the meanings the work will sustain. Typically, more than one meaning can be put on a work within the limits set by the relevant conventions and practices, but meanings that cannot be reconciled to these cannot be attributed legitimately to the work. (S. Davies 2007, 151, emphasis original)

According to this construal, convention (plus context) is sufficient to secure legitimate interpretations, among which there is *usually* one intended by the author. This means that appeal to the notion of an author is not necessary when deciding legitimate interpretations, which is the core claim of conventionalism. But the maximizing position, as characterized above, construes works as utterances. Since for any utterance there has to be an utterer, I question whether utterance meaning can be determined without reference to an utterer.

Note that the maximizing view seeks what an utterance could mean. This will be the epistemic sense of "could," namely, there is a possibility relative to the evidence (Stecker 2003, 66). In other words, the maximizer seeks *possible* meanings an utterance bears, given textual and extratextual evidence.

Now, it seems to me what an utterance could mean is just another way of saying what the utterer could mean by that utterance. Consider the claim made by Knapp and Michaels, that

---

interpretations into the broad anti-intentionalist framework; third, he does not build categorial intention into the ontology of literature. See Goldman 2013, Ch.2 and 3.

intention and meaning are inseparable. According to them, even recognizing a sequence of symbols as a sentence,

[…] we must already have posited a speaker and hence an intention. Pinning down an interpretation of the sentence will not involve adding a speaker but deciding among a range of *possible* speakers. […] as soon as we attempt to interpret at all we are already committed to a characterization of the speaker as a speaker of language. We know, in other words, that the speaker intends to speak; otherwise we wouldn't be interpreting. (Knapp and Michaels 1982, 726, my emphasis)

On the same page they continue: "[in the case where] we have less information about the speaker […], […] the relative lack of information has nothing to do with the presence or absence of intention."

If the point they make is convincing, the maximizer cannot reach meanings without reference to a speaker and her intention. And since it is an apparent/possible intention that is under scrutiny, the agent responsible for this intention will be an apparent/possible speaker. I conclude that the maximizer would need to presuppose an apparent author responsible for the possible meanings her literary utterance bears.

4. Interpreting the implied author

It seems that there are only two options regarding the nature of the author invoked in interpretation: either she is the implied author or the real author. The third premise of IAA asserts that the author in question will be an implied author.

In the case of the value-maximizing theory, the author implicitly assumed is just the implied author because what is implied in a work is what the work appears to be (Walton 1990, 370). Since the maximizing position focuses on a work's appearance and involves presupposing an apparent author, its followers are actually interpreting an implied author. But how do things stand with actual intentionalism and hypothetical intentionalism that target the actual author? Let us first examine the case of hypothetical intentionalism.

4.1 Interpreting the implied author: hypothetical intentionalism

An interpreter practicing hypothetical intentionalism will hypothesize the actual author's intention with the help of publicly available information about the author found in the context of the work's production (Levinson 1992). The best hypothesis in this case is mainly based on textual and contextual evidence. This requires ignoring all evidence about the author's semantic intention.

Some might feel tempted to say that there will be virtually no difference between the evidence that constitutes the author for hypothetical intentionalism and that for hypothetical authorism, for the interpreter following either position is constructing an intention based on the same resources. This claim seems problematic because not all hypothetical authorists put emphasis on the actual author's oeuvre as Levinson does, which produces a crucial difference in interpretative resources

by which the interpreter constructs the intention to be attributed to the author.[11] However, some hypothetical authorists such as Nehamas do include consideration of the actual author's oeuvre as a constraint on interpretation, and there is nothing in my argument requiring that hypothetical authorism as a general label must refer to a specific version.

At this juncture, hypothetical intentionalism faces the challenge that it is arbitrary to exclude *only* evidences about the author's semantic intentions from all the contextually relevant factors. The hypothetical intentionalist does not seem to offer any argument justifying the present theoretical choice. If it is the actual author whose intention we hypothesize, then why should we ignore her semantic intentions, while we consider all other evidences about her, such as that concerning her categorial intention and oeuvre? Of course we have the claim made by the hypothetical intentionalist that semantic intention does not determine meaning (Levinson 1992, 232-3). This is because hypothetical intentionalism derives from the theory of meaning that bases meaning on the audience's *uptake* (Tolhurst 1979, 9-10). In that case, meaning is not to be analysed by reference to the actual speaker's intention. The question becomes whether the theory of meaning endorsed here is convincing. But that is something on which consensus can hardly be reached. Hypothetical authorism can get away with all this because it does not target the actual author. Evidence about the actual author's semantic intention can be ignored because the subject of interpretation is the implied author, not the actual author.

Some philosophers have suggested that hypothetical intentionalism is in danger of collapsing into hypothetical authorism (S. Davies 2007, 183-6; Livingston 2010, 409). Here I cite passages explicitly indicating Levinson's commitment to the implied author position. When elaborating

---

[11] Currie and Nathan are hypothetical authorists in this respect. A discussion on how hypothetical authorists construct authors bearing different degrees of resemblance to the actual author can be found in S. Davies 2007, 180.

hypothetical intentionalism, Levinson says: "a work of art says what, on the basis of the work contextually construed, it would be reasonable to impute to its artist as a view that he or she both significantly held and was concerned to convey." (Levinson 1995, 188) This is the standard characterization of hypothetical intentionalism. On the same page, Levinson continues: "Some have thought to capture the drift of the preceding reflections in terms of the notion of an *implied artist* or *author* […]" (emphases original). On the next page Levinson soon distinguishes between two kinds of implied author. The first kind is called the "thinly" implied author: "this is roughly the mind you would infer is behind a work on the basis of the work alone, given only general information about the period of creation, genre conventions, and prevailing language involved." Obviously, Levinson here is referring to Beardsley's position, and his interpretation of Beardsley supports a claim which I do not have space to pursue in § 3.1: anti-intentionalism is actually based on an implied author.

   The second kind of implied author Levinson has in mind is the "thickly" implied author: "this is roughly the mind you would infer is behind a work given the work and the aforementioned minimal historical context, but also the author's previous works, his public self or image, and the specifics of his situatedness in relation to his surrounding culture and society […] So does a work say what it seems to when we project its implied author thinly or thickly? The latter, I suggest." The interpretative method described here is precisely the standard version of hypothetical intentionalism offered by Levinson himself, except that the "author" referred to is construed as an implied author. This confirms that the author that the hypothetical intentionalist has in mind is the implied author, not the actual author.

In his latest defence of hypothetical intentionalism, Levinson insists that the position targets the actual author, rather than the hypothetical or implied author (Levinson 2010, 140-1). Nevertheless, in their reply, Stecker and Davies seem right to say:

> We do not think talk of hypothetical authors is out of place in this context given that it is not the full-blooded author (private diaries and all) who is considered. It is appropriate to talk of a hypothesized author who shares with the actual author his public persona. And this is more plausible than insisting that the interpretation considers the actual author, given that HI rejects as irrelevant the actual author's intentions at the point where they come apart from what his public persona is most likely to have intended. (Stecker and Davies 2010, 308)

Indeed, it seems that the concept of "appearance" mobilized by hypothetical authorism explains the relevant interpretative resources better than the concept of "hypothesis" endorsed by hypothetical intentionalism. After all, there is nothing implausible in saying that what hypothetical intentionalism targets is the apparent author's intention (what is apparently said by the work as made out by the audience), as Levinson himself admits in his last quotation.

A defender of hypothetical intentionalism might object that what Levinson means in the passages cited is not to conflate the target of projection with the result of such projection. That is, my interpretation of Levinson conflates what he says the hypothesizing is about (the actual author) and what the hypothesizing effectively yields (a thick implied author). But what the objector says is something I can totally agree with. As noted in § 2.1, my ultimate goal is to argue that hypothetical intentionalism and other contextualist theories of interpretation effectively yield an implied author in the process of interpretation. The point is not whether the

interpreter has the actual author in mind or not; rather, it is the impliedness of this author for which I have been arguing.

4.2 Interpreting the implied author: actual intentionalism

The case of actual intentionalism is complicated by the fact that there are two versions of it: the extreme version and the moderate version. The only advocates of the extreme version seem to be Knapp and Michaels, who hold that work-meaning is to be identified with the author's intended meaning. Their account is usually read as a Humpty-Dumpty theory of meaning: the author can mean whatever she intends the work to mean (Carroll 2016, 311). The upshot is that failed intention is impossible on this account, which creates cases where the third premise of IAA will not hold. This is because the presumable case of failed intention is a case in which the author intends her work to mean something the work cannot possibly appear to mean. It follows that the author appealed to in this case cannot be the implied author.

I do not dispute this counterclaim, but I suggest that extreme intentionalism be excluded from the present discussion. There are two reasons for this. First, it is doubtful whether this position is a viable theory of interpretation. Given its outlandish claims, I doubt that any sensible reader or critic would put this position into practice. As a theory of meaning, it does have its theoretic points to make; but it is difficult to imagine people doing Humpty-Dumpty criticisms. If extreme intentionalism is not viable in critical practice, I do not see any reason to include it in my project, which attempts to describe how people interpret.

Second, we may want to view the theoretic contribution made by Knapp and Michaels in a different way, given that it is not always crystal-clear that they really aim for a Humpty-Dumpty

theory of meaning.[12] They have been more successful in showing that *intention* is a necessary condition for a sequence of marks being a piece of language, namely, being something *meaningful*. Their argument is more convincing and makes more sense when construed as arguing for intentionality as a necessary condition for something being language (and hence meaningful), than when construed as arguing that intention is both a sufficient and necessary condition for work-meaning, and so infallibly confers meaning. I believe this is a reasonably charitable and constructive way to rethink their argument. Such being the case, our focus will be on moderate actual intentionalism.

Most of the time, the moderate intentionalist interprets in the same way that a hypothetical intentionalist does, that is, by making hypotheses about the author's intentions; however, a best hypothesis will be abandoned when there is independent evidence that overturns that hypothesis.

The most salient feature of modest intentionalism is that the author's intentions, to be taken seriously, are only the successful ones. A point to note first is that moderate intentionalists agree that, when the author's intention fails, meaning is fixed by convention and context alone. This is an anti-intentionalist move, because it is to acknowledge the possibility of failed intentions. Despite that, it seems that in this case there still exists a sense of authorial relevance, for the interpreter will not know that the author's intention is unsuccessful, so as to appeal to convention plus context instead, unless she appeals first to external evidence of the author's intention. This crucial difference does not exist in the account offered by the anti-intentionalist or the maximizer.

It follows that, to work out the right interpretation of a work in the case of failed intention, the interpreter still needs to appeal to the author, because what she aims for is what the author ends up saying. Once this subject is in place, the meaning reached in this case will be the same as that

---

[12] Such an interpretative hesitation can be seen in, for example, Carroll 2016, 311, and Lamarque 2007, 125-6.

reached by the hypothetical authorist, for in both cases meaning is construed in terms of how the work appears to be.

Next let us examine the case of successful intention. Although opinions differ about how to define whether an intention is successfully realized in a work, the success condition is typically measured by the strong or weak standard (S. Davies 2007, 170-1). Consider the strong standard first. This means that the intended meaning is the one apt to be recognized by the audience with the relevant contextual knowledge (Stecker 2003, 14). In this case, the intention that meets the success condition is no doubt that of the implied author. If an anti-war attitude is eminent in a work then it is going to secure the best uptake from the audience and hence qualifies as one part of the implied author. Every intention taken to be successful by the moderate intentionalist adopting the strong standard is already implied in the work.

The weak standard, roughly put, claims that an intention is successful just in case it is compatible with the work (Carroll 2016, 310). Carroll never elaborates this compatibility, which is done instead by Livingston in terms of the meshing condition:

The meshing condition applies to the relation between the content of the intention and the text's or structure's conventionally determined meanings as well as the explicit and implied ideational relations that give a work its coherence, such as rhetorical connections between its various parts. The meshing of intention and structure requires a high degree of coherence between the content of the intention and the display's rhetorical patterns. (Livingston 2009, 100)

This requirement of meshing rules out the strange case in which the intention in question could not possibly be discerned by any well-prepared audience, whereas it is not explicitly rejected by textual evidence. Livingston's example is this. Suppose the Japanese writer Natsume Sōseki actually intended the main character in his realist trilogy novels to be a Martian in disguise. Though no textual evidence explicitly rejects this reading, it does not meet the weak success condition because "[…] if no features of the novels' characterizations resonate with the Martian intention, the latter should be discounted." (Livingston 2005, 155) Since the meshing condition requires a high degree of coherence between the author's intention and textual structure, it seems plausible to assume that the successful intention could be discerned by an appropriately backgrounded audience without independent knowledge of authorial intent, that is, by a hypothetical authorist. If so, the intended meaning would be salient enough to be implied in the work. As Carroll himself admits, a successful intention is by definition within a work and discoverable by the reader (Carroll 1992, 160). The fact that the author is constituted by work features makes her implied.

Some might object that the interpretation reached by the modest intentionalist adopting the weak standard might not be one that will be targeted by the hypothetical authorist. If so, hypothetical authorism cannot be said to really describe the interpretative practice suggested by moderate intentionalism. This is because there are two possibilities with respect to the strength of uptake: either the intended meaning is the most apt to be recognized by the audience or it is less

ascertainable (but not indiscernible, as indicated in the previous paragraph). It seems that the second case would escape hypothetical authorism.[13]

I doubt that the distinction between strong and weak uptake is absolute. What appears most saliently to one person may not appear so to another. This links back to a claim I mentioned at the end of § 2.1: different background assumptions and value concerns result in differently plausible author-images. One would assume that the modest intentionalist would not want to say that the interpretation reached by the weak standard could be implausible. Then such an interpretation could well be plausible for a hypothetical authorist with a particular set of assumptions and value concerns in mind.

5. Conclusion

If my argument (IAA) is convincing, probably all the positions based on the utterance model would end up interpreting the implied author. In the case where the actual author is thought to be invoked, it is actually the implied author that is in play; in the case where no author is explicitly appealed to, there is an implied author assumed. One final point I want to consider before ending this paper is the question of whether IAA, if sound, serves as a reason for us to favor hypothetical authorism as the best interpretative recommendation.

There is some degree of support for this view, I believe. If the interpreter is convinced that she is actually interpreting an implied author when following other interpretative recommendations,

---

[13] Here I point out one inconsistency in Carroll's account. He holds that the work is the best evidence for authorial intent (Carroll 2000, 77). If this claim is to be taken seriously, it is hard to reconcile it with the weak standard, because the weak standard may render the work *second* best evidence for authorial intent.
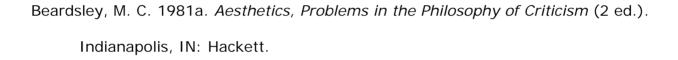
she might also be convinced that she should just adopt the implied author position on interpretation. For example, if an interpreter following actual intentionalism comes to believe that the author she has been appealing to is no different than the implied author, then there seems to be some plausibility in making things simpler, that is, having just one sort of author involved in the process of interpretation.

I agree that this will not be the chief support for favoring hypothetical authorism as the best interpretative policy. The main reason is this. All that my descriptive account claims is that all the current interpretative positions based on the utterance model end up interpreting an implied author; it does not make the further claim that all other positions will arrive at the same interpretation(s) as hypothetical authorism does. For instance, though the interpretation that maximizes a work's value is suitably attributed to the implied author, it is not necessarily the interpretation reached by the hypothetical authorist interpreting the same work. In other words, the descriptive account does not hold that the interpretation made by other positions endorsing the utterance model *must* coincide with that made by hypothetical authorism. The account at most implies possibility, but not necessity. That is, *every* interpretation reached in the former case is likely to be *among* the ones found to be possible under hypothetical authorism (particularly when it accepts critical pluralism). Further, a hypothetical authorist who is a pluralist will, on account of that pluralism, typically diverge from the interpretation of the actual intentionalist (who inclines toward monism). This is the best the descriptive account can claim in this respect. And the possibility of divergence in the results of interpretation could undermine the support IAA gives for hypothetical authorism as a prescriptive account.

Further arguments in support of hypothetical authorism await another occasion. My aim in this paper has been to show that hypothetical authorism best describes the critical practice suggested

by the utterance model. All the positions based on this model in the current debate end up appealing to an implied author when working out the right interpretation of a work. In the case of literature, it is doubtful that the interpreter can ever avoid interpreting the implied author, for it seems that a reasonable balance between utterer's meaning and utterance meaning would always commit us to an implied author.[14]

References

Beardsley, M. C. 1981a. *Aesthetics, Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (2 ed.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

———. 1981b. Fiction as Representation. *Synthese* 46(3): 291-313.

Booth, W. C. 1983. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2 ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Carroll, N. 1992. Art, Intentions, and Conversations. In *Intention & Interpretation*, edited by G. Iseminger, 97-131. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
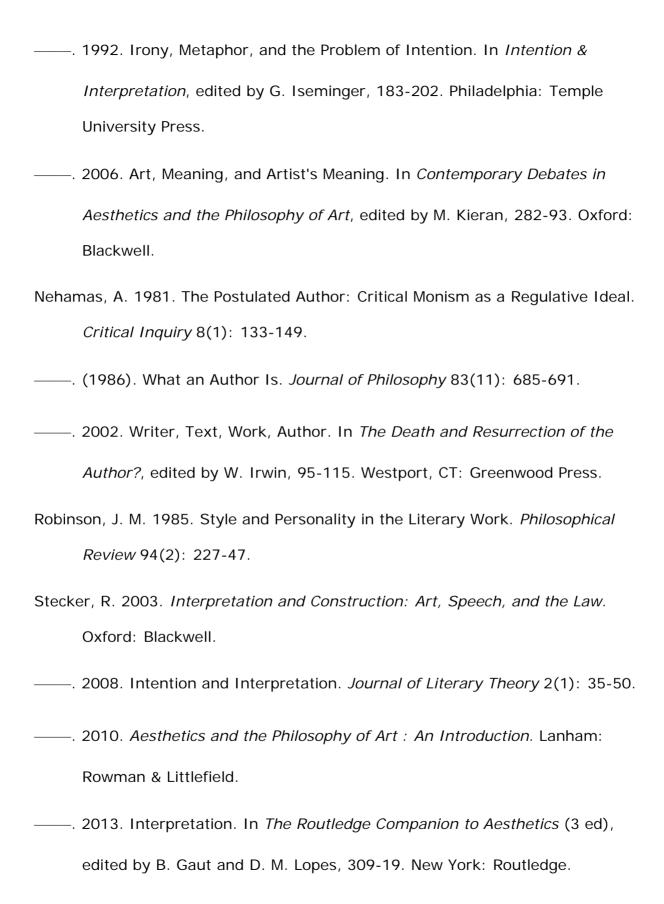
———. 2000. Interpretation and Intention: The Debate between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism. *Metaphilosophy* 31(1-2): 75-95.

———. 2011. Art Interpretation. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51(2): 117-135.

——. 2013. Criticism and Interpretation. *Sztuka i Filozofia* 42: 7-20.

——. 2016. Interpretation. In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*,
   edited by N. Carroll, and J. Gibson, 302-12. New York: Routledge.

Currie, G. 1990. *The Nature of Fiction.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University
   Press.

——. 1991. Work and Text. *Mind* 100(399): 325-340.

——. 1993. Interpretation and Objectivity. *Mind* 102(407): 413-428.

Davies, D. 2007. *Aesthetics & Literature.* London: Continuum.

Davies, S. 1982. The Aesthetic Relevance of Authors' and Painters' Intentions.
   Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 41(1): 65-76.

——. 2005. Beardsley and the Autonomy of the Work of Art. *Journal of Aesthetics
   and Art Criticism* 63(2): 179-183.

——. 2006. *The Philosophy of Art.* Oxford: Blackwell.

——. 2007. *Philosophical Perspectives on Art.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dowling, C. 2017. Aesthetic Formalism*. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
   Accessed December 19, 2017. http://www.iep.utm.edu/aes-form/.

Goldman, A. H. 2013. *Philosophy and the Novel.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Knapp, S., and W. B.Michaels. 1982. Against Theory. *Critical Inquiry* 8(4): 790-800.

Lamarque, P. 2007. *The Philosophy of Literature.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Levinson, J. 1992. Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look. In *Intention &*
    Interpretation, edited by G. Iseminger, 221-56. Philadelphia, PA: Temple
    University Press.

———. 1995. Messages in Art. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 73(2): 184-98.

———. 2010. Defending Hypothetical Intentionalism. *British Journal of Aesthetics*
    50(2): 139-50.

Lin, S. Y. 2016. Beardsley on Literature, Fiction, and Nonfiction. *Journal of*
    Aesthetics & Culture 8(1). https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v8.29208.

———. 2018. Beardsley and the Implied Author. *Journal of Literary Theory* 12(1),
    170-92.

Livingston, P. 2005. *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study.* Oxford: Oxford
    University Press.

———. 2009. *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman: On Film as Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford
    University Press.

———. 2010. Authorial Intention and the Varieties of Intentionalism. In *A Companion*
    to the Philosophy of Literature, edited by G. L. Hagberg and W. Jost, 401-19).
    Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Meiland, J. W. 1981. The Meanings of a Text. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21(3):
    195-203.

Nathan, D. O. 1982. Irony and the Artist's Intentions. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art*
    Criticism 22(3): 245-256.

———. 1992. Irony, Metaphor, and the Problem of Intention. In *Intention & Interpretation*, edited by G. Iseminger, 183-202. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

———. 2006. Art, Meaning, and Artist's Meaning. In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, edited by M. Kieran, 282-93. Oxford: Blackwell.

Nehamas, A. 1981. The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal. *Critical Inquiry* 8(1): 133-149.

———. (1986). What an Author Is. *Journal of Philosophy* 83(11): 685-691.

———. 2002. Writer, Text, Work, Author. In *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?*, edited by W. Irwin, 95-115. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Robinson, J. M. 1985. Style and Personality in the Literary Work. *Philosophical Review* 94(2): 227-47.

Stecker, R. 2003. *Interpretation and Construction: Art, Speech, and the Law.* Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 2008. Intention and Interpretation. *Journal of Literary Theory* 2(1): 35-50.

———. 2010. *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art : An Introduction.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

———. 2013. Interpretation. In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (3 ed), edited by B. Gaut and D. M. Lopes, 309-19. New York: Routledge.

Stecker, R. and S. Davies. 2010. The Hypothetical Intentionalist's Dilemma: A Reply to Levinson. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50(3): 307-12.

Tolhurst, W. E. 1979. On What a Text is and How it Means. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 19(1): 3-14.

Walton, K. L. 1976. Points of View in Narrative and Depictive Representation. *Noûs* 10(1): 49-61.

———. 1990. *Mimesis as Make-Believe.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press .

———. 2008. *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.