

*Intention Revisited:
Towards an Anglo-American
“genetic criticism”*

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THIS PAPER REVISITS THE CONCEPT OF INTENTION in order to consider its potential as an interpretive focus and theoretical underpinning for the study of poetic process and the coming-into-being of a literary work. It does so from a position informed by recent German and French theories, particularly the French *critique génétique*, but moves on from these to define a distinctive Anglo-American “genetic” or “compositional” criticism.

French “genetic criticism” emerged in the 1970s, with its focus firmly on the *avant-texte* (“pre-text”) as representative of “production”, in opposition to the text as published. Where the published text is a fixed and limited entity, the “pre-text” is fluid and representative of multiple possibilities: “The process of writing is of a different nature than the written word” (Hay, “Does Text Exist” 73). Like the German theory of textual versions, French genetic criticism finds its underlying principles, ethos and concept of the text in the principles of structuralism and semiotics (specifically the work of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva). As a natural consequence of such origins, both French and German approaches are bound to follow a strongly “text-based” approach, one which distinguishes sharply between the *avant-texte* and the Text and seeks to detach both from

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a notion of authorship. French genetic criticism defines itself in just such terms:

La critique génétique . . . est une méthode d'approche de la littérature qui vise non pas l'oeuvre finie, mais le processus d'écriture.¹
(Grésillon, "La critique génétique, aujourd'hui et demain" 9)

Nonetheless, although the French and German debates superficially seem to dispense with authorial intention altogether, or try to do so, this is not really possible when dealing with compositional material. Recent French theorists, such as Daniel Ferrer, are moving towards a teleological model of the textual process in which strongly authorial elements are brought into play at a fundamental level; in the use of a writer's own ideas about his or her poetics, for example, or in the recognition that each author is unique, even if the author is described as the "writing subject" (Hay, "Does Text Exist?" 74).² In many ways French genetic criticism is deeply "authorial" but it always seeks to reduce and control this element by maintaining a strong centre of interest in the textual material and so attempting to create a depersonalised approach. Such a method leads to more cleanly critical and analytical responses than might be the case in an approach which allows for a degree of authoriality.

At first sight it seems as though there is an absolute division between two major positions here. On the one side there is an intentionist approach in which the author is given authority; conceived of as creator and originator. On the other, a post-structuralist, deconstructive criticism views the author only as a product of what is already written. In his discussion of intention in *Theories of the Text*, D. C. Greetham gives a very clear account of the distinction between an editorially intentionist position which validates the author and a deconstructive position which does not. Of the former he states:

Whenever intention as a motivating textual ethic appears . . . it arises out of what is essentially a speech-act theory conferring meaning retroactively on the inferrable psychic unity of a speaking voice, the author, historically garbled or muted by the corrupting influence of the actual documents. (170)

¹ "Genetic criticism . . . is a method of approach to literature which is not directed at the finished work, but the process of writing".

² Daniel Ferrer, "Clementis's Cap: Retroaction and Persistence in the Genetic Process," *Yale French Studies: Drafts* 89 (1996): 223-236.

This is a clearly idealist, Platonic notion of the text as a poor second to the expressed thoughts of the living man. Intention provides a link back to the uncorrupted source by means of “inferred ideality” (Greetham 171). From such a perspective, “the intentionalist editor’s job [is that] of rescuing the author from the effects of transmission” (Greetham 173). We are, however, not concerned with the use of intention for editing purposes, but in relation to the study of a process, a study which is not concerned with the need to somehow “revisit” or “reconstruct” the originary moment but which is equally not able to participate fully in the deconstructive denial of process present in the claim that “the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (Barthes 142).

One underlying question, then, for this paper (and for a compositional criticism) is whether there has to be an absolute “either-or” situation in terms of text as a “field without origin—or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins” (Barthes 146), or the text as the authorised product of a single mind. At first sight any middle ground would seem to be impossible: if you have asserted the “death of the author” you can’t also resuscitate him. But is the author really, fully “dead” when it comes to *compositional* material? The instabilities of textual process stand in contradiction to the smooth assumptions of a deconstructive view of the Text. Can the author not be allowed some sort of half-life here?

Historically, the lack of full and free exchange between French, German and Anglo-American positions meant that, from a Continental point of view, Anglo-American editorial practice and criticism seemed to have buried its head in the sand, clinging on to New Critical methods and requirements as literary theory advanced around it in the latter part of the Twentieth century. Such a position is no longer strictly true, however, since Anglo-American theory first questioned the status of the text as a single authorial product by placing emphasis on social elements (Gaskell, McGann, Shillingsburg)—in part because of the influence of German editing theory—and, more recently, has made considerable advances in seeking to make active connections between textual and literary theory and in engaging directly with the work of editors such as Hans Walter Gabler. However, although editorial theory (and to a lesser extent editorial practice) has become increasingly open to wider influences there has as yet been no serious attempt to define a critical method for the exploration of compositional material in Anglo-American scholarship.³

³ The American critic, Hershel Parker, draws closest to such a critical method in

The subject of a compositional method, as I see it, is the whole creative process, from the pre-writing stage onwards, exploring draft material through all stages of written development. In order to develop such a method, my aim is to look back to the concept of intention which so informed Anglo-American textual and literary debate in the mid-twentieth century. However, it would certainly be unprofitable to attempt to establish a new critical model by adhering to an outdated set of critical principles. Instead, the objective is to develop a more sophisticated model of authorially-distanced intention—intention as a sequence of mental states and acts—which is fundamental to the *process* of composition. To some extent this acknowledges the French position, but it allows considerably more space for the author as designing cause, and for a degree of interplay between compositional material and “fixed” text, and the critical activities required for the study of each of them.⁴

Another problem in terms of attempting to define a compositional method is raised by the French insistence upon manuscript “uniqueness” (which a more authorially-inflected position might allow to be the individuality of the author). French genetic criticism makes clear again and again the impossibility of defining any kind of universal model for the study of manuscript material:

Writing subjects are always unique, and this uniqueness constantly causes us entanglements in the generalising tendencies of literary criticism . . .

(Hay, “Does Text Exist?” 74).

This paper is well aware of such a “generalising tendency” and the dangers of trying to outline a universal model. Nonetheless, it is necessary to attempt to establish some broad starting points, some common ground, for the study of compositional material which can then be responded to, refuted or redefined.

The term to be used for the kind of work I am proposing in an Anglo-American context might be a “compositional criticism” which I would not want to view as a distinct critical activity divorced

Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons: Literary Authority in American Fiction (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1984). He successfully critiques the New Critical position but places considerable weight on biography and the privileging of first full composition of a text rather than on an exploration of the full process.

⁴ The question of when, if ever a text is finally “fixed” is problematic. I would generally take this to apply to the first published text (which is fixed at that point in time, space, and reception of it) but of course for many works such a state is not achieved.

from that of mainstream literary criticism; my aim is to integrate the two. In what follows I will therefore attempt to put forward a “compositional method” which seeks to provide literary critics with a means of making use of compositional material either in relation to the fixed text or independently. In part I am using such a term to distinguish Anglo-American work from its continental counterparts, but also because the term “genetic” seems to place undue emphasis on the “birth” of a work, rather than the entire process of composition. The term “compositional material” is adopted, rather than the French term “writing” (*l’écriture*) in order to allow for the inclusion of non-textual acts—such as mental and oral composition—which are otherwise not encompassed within the terminology (and thus within our understanding of compositional process).

Intention Revisited: i. Editorial Intention

There are three approaches to intention under consideration here each of which uses intention for a different purpose and each of which has some bearing upon our understanding of intention in the creative process. Firstly, the Anglo-American editorial debate in relation to intention has tended to focus on “final intention” because the core concern for the editor is traditionally with the establishment of the authority of a single text, and authorial intention seemed, for some time, to provide a good means of establishing such authority. Secondly, the literary-critical debate has as its focus the activity of the *critic* and is therefore concerned with intention in relation to evaluation, interpretation and the locus of meaning within the text. At the heart of the traditional literary-critical debate is the question of whether authorial intention provides the most stable “norm” for interpretation (Hirsch) or whether literary meaning is “intrinsic”—residing within the text alone (Wimsatt and Beardsley). Thirdly, philosophical debate about intention is concerned with the relationship between the workings of intention as a mental state and its involvement with fundamental elements of human existence: action, meaning, language. All of these approaches are relevant to the consideration of the role of intention in a compositional method and it is necessary to engage with each in turn.

One of the principal effects of McGann’s work, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, was to explode the notion of final intention as the sole means of deciding upon the authority of the copy-text, although McGann’s own stated position is that he does not

dismiss the authority of final intention altogether in the *Critique*.⁵

Nonetheless, the ideology underlying his text-critical position is fundamentally at odds with the author-centric model at the heart of the CEEA's *Statement of Editorial Principles and Procedures* and McGann's shift of emphasis to a sociological model for the authority of the text clearly seeks to reduce the significance of the authorial role to a considerable degree.

Peter Shillingsburg makes some interesting observations upon this. He states of McGann that "he fails to note the role authorial intention plays in his own concept of the editorial problem" (32) and goes on:

works of literary art are not only initiated by an author but typically grow to fruition under the control of the author, whose original writing, revisions, and reactions to suggestions are usually filtered through his own consciousness. This commonsense conception of authoring explains, though it may not justify, the growth and prevalence of the authorial orientation in scholarly editing.

(Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age 32)

What this quotation suggests is that McGann's principles are most problematic, and least straightforwardly applicable, in the area of compositional material, where the concept of "authorial intention" may still have some value and importance.

The concept of *final* intention is not particularly helpful to the study of compositional material. As long as the critic is responding to such material from a standpoint dominated by this idea, then compositional material is always going to be viewed as secondary and of minor importance, because it will be viewed as preparatory work for the final product. This encourages a strongly linear reading of any compositional material, which narrows response to it. When the structure of a critical edition is deeply influenced by the concept of final intention this implicitly suggests that the act of composition is itself structured in such a way—as a process of creation and rejection and a movement through a series of ever more finely refined intentions culminating in final intention.⁶ In itself, this is a fair assumption, but the problem with it (for a compositional criticism)

⁵ See, for example, McGann's "Appendix" to the 1992 edition of *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992) in which he concludes of the author's intentions that "It is only one of many factors to be taken into account, and while in some cases it may and will determine the final decision, in many others it cannot" (128).

⁶ The model given below does correspond to such a structure and is teleological (it

is that such a term strongly privileges the moment of publication and further suggests that all material is *only* of interest or value in relation to achieving this point. The shadow of the “final” text is thrown backward onto the work which preceded it and the field of consideration, and reasons for exploring the earlier material, is in danger of being narrowed by a model which is too heavily dependent on final cause.

One response to the limitations of editorial “final intention” is to try and reduce, as far as possible, the authorial element within the compositional process. McGann attempts this in his early articulation of a socio-historical basis for editing in “The Monks and the Giants” when he outlines the full stages of a textual criticism on such lines, the first stage relating to compositional material:⁷

The Originary Textual Moment

The originary textual moment comprises the following:

1. Author
2. Other persons or groups involved in the initial process of production (e.g., collaborators, persons who may have commissioned the work, editors or amanuenses, etc.)
3. Phases or stages in the initial productive process (e.g., distinctive personal, textual, or social states along with their defining causes, functions and characteristics)
4. Materials, means, and modes of the initial productive process (physical, psychological, ideological).

(“The Monks and The Giants” 192–193)

McGann seeks as far as possible to place the process of composition within a social nexus in quite literalistic terms of production. At the same time such an attempt is necessarily limited when we focus explicitly on the composition of a work because, whilst the *production* of a literary work may take place socially, the *creation* of it is less likely to do so. McGann phrases his list in such a way

assumes that the process is shaped towards an end). However, the temporal dimension of the model is intended to allow for non-teleological usage of it for a writer who does not work in this way.

⁷ McGann tangentially refers to the use of compositional material on a number of occasions in *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, usually with the words “One may note in passing”. He notes that pre-publication intentions may well be more tentative and quite different from intentions towards the published text (33, 40) and describes the production of literary texts as involving: “the translation of an initially psychological phenomenon (the ‘creative process’) into a social one (the literary work)” (63).

as to mitigate against this, talking always in terms of “stages” of a “productive process” rather than in terms of the workings of an individual mind. However, authorship is not a social activity from the outset—as McGann’s use of the single word “Author” (to cover all early solitary creative activity) suggests.

Whilst McGann’s approach has been the dominant one in recent times, other textual critics have made good attempts to redefine intention, not by making it social and plural, but by trying to distinguish different elements within it (as I will also go on to do, though in relation to compositional criticism rather than editing practice).⁸ These approaches defy the idea of final intention by means of a “documentary” response to textual material, in a way strongly reminiscent of German editing. In “Document and Text”, Paul Eggert distinguishes between “semantic intention” (authorial) and “graphic intention” (inscribed meaning) (3) in a discussion which distinguishes between “document” as material object and “text” as the locus of socialised meaning for the reader. For Eggert, works are “document-centred” (10) and the ideal editorial approach would be “an authorially-based intertextuality” (24). In *Scholarly Editing and The Computer Age*, Peter Shillingsburg distinguishes between “intention to mean” and “intention to do” (137) and goes on:

Theorists have tended to think of authorial intention as having a single goal. They have tended to de-emphasize both the development of intention through stages towards completion, on the one hand, and the change or contradiction of intentions on the other (33).

Such a position—emphasising change and contradiction within conflicting intentional positions—can be seen to inform my own understanding of creative intention outlined below.

Finally, James McLaverty’s work also seeks to free the editor from the dominance of final intention by allowing a work to possess a changing identity over time, so that we could perhaps “regard the text as the score of the work” (“The Concept of Authorial Intention” 127). Using the philosophical idea of Theseus’ ship he argues that:

A history of the literary work constructed on the same basis as that of the ship would not, therefore, be one of discrete stages; it would be one of overlapping versions and of coexisting rival claimants to be the work.

(“Issues of Identity and Utterance” 141)

⁸ For an excellent consideration of all positions see D. C. Greetham, “Intention in the Text,” *Theories of the Text* (Oxford: OUP, 1999): 157–205.

McLaverly's conception of the changing nature of the edited work is sympathetic to my own approach in relation to critical analysis of textual process. Interestingly, he goes on to make a comment directly relevant to the study of composition: "I am tempted to go further and challenge the notion that preutterance stages of the work, the process of composition, are part of the work at all" ("Issues" 141). Such a suggestion reminds us of a more fundamental question for compositional criticism, one also raised by D. C. Greetham's demand that we ask "the ontological question of what is, or is not, a work of literature" (161).⁹

Intention Revisited: ii. Literary-Critical Intention

Alongside editorial "suppression" of compositional material as a consequence of the dominance of final intentions, we need also to consider the ways in which literary-critical arguments have tended to marginalize or discount such material in the Anglo-American tradition. This occurs largely as a result of Wimsatt and Beardsley's influential essay on "The Intentional Fallacy", and their later writings related to such ideas. In engaging with this sizeable debate I will be considering it primarily in terms of its consequences for the study of compositional material.

In "The Intentional Fallacy", Wimsatt and Beardsley set out to:

establish a doctrine of critical impersonality, disassociating its procedures from those of literary biography, its concerns from those of psychology, and authorial voice from the notion of the persona or speaker in a lyric poem . . .

(Patterson 141).

Although they allow that the presence of an author stands as a designing cause, the "fallacy" of the title lies in the mistaken belief of the intentionist critic that there is a direct relation between authorial meaning and the meaning of a text. In the essay they thus affirm that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (3). This suggests that the fallacy only applies to evaluation of a work (i.e. it is fallacious to value the work on the basis of whether or not the author achieved his intentions) but Wimsatt's

⁹ This is a question that I will attempt to address, in relation to compositional process in the final chapter of my forthcoming book, *A Compositional Method: Wordsworth, Tennyson, Dickinson* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

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later rewording of the core statement makes it clear that the fallacy applies to interpretation as well as evaluation:

The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging either the meaning or the value of a work of literary art.

("Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited" 222)

The authors' (New Critical) concern is that the poem itself should constitute the focus of literary criticism and thus all material outside the poem is defined as being in some way beyond the correct limits of critical enquiry.

Alongside the core argument—that intentional criticism assumes a false causal relationship between author and text in the pursuit of meaning—is a second one of accessibility:

the closest one could ever get to the artist's intending or meaning mind, outside his work, would be still short of his *effective* intention or *operative* mind as it appears in the work itself and can be read from the work.

("Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited" 221–222)

In other words, it is safer to stick with what you can see and know (the poem) than to speculate about what you do not know (the author's mind).

The apparent absoluteness of Wimsatt and Beardsley's core statements has resulted in many responses which attempt to redefine the extent to which the author's intention should or should not be removed from the field of critical enquiry.¹⁰ For the purposes of this study we can see that their position fails to allow for any real complexity in the consideration of intention in relation to composition.

The intentional fallacy only really applies if the focus of the critic's activity is criticism of the poem. If however, the focus is on intention itself, say, or on creative process, then it need not be fallacious since the critic is not bound into any model of cause and effect when he, or she, considers the relationship between text and author. Some such position is suggested by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in their discussion of poetic composition when they state that,

¹⁰ For an excellent, if exhausting, range of responses to Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay see David Newton-De Molina's edited collection *On Literary Intention* (Edinburgh at the University Press, 1976).

What we can learn about the origin of a poem may, if we do not confuse origin and poem, enlarge our understanding and deepen our appreciation. (515)

However, in Wimsatt and Beardsleys' terms such an approach would still be of little value because the critic would be, "directing his inquiry toward a non-existent object. He is neither criticizing a poem nor, actually, practising literary criticism" (140).

On the other side of the debate, trying to make a case for authorial intention as the basis of meaning, is E. D. Hirsch. The broad aim of Hirsch's book, *Validity in Interpretation*, is to assert a normative principle for interpretation, which he locates in authorial meaning. He argues that there can be no perfect method of interpretation but instead that the interpretative act is founded on a "logic of validation" (207). From this he concludes that:

the goal of interpretation as a discipline is constantly to increase the probability that they [our guesses] are correct. . . . only one interpretive problem can be answered with objectivity: 'What, in all probability, did the author mean to convey?' (207)¹¹

Although, in fundamental ways, Hirsch's and Wimsatt and Beardsleys' positions are radically opposed, when they each consider the possibility of any kind of "genetic criticism" they unite in opposition to it. At the heart of the literary debate over intention is a concern with the location of meaning; in the author, in the text, or in the reader (which neither side wants). Critics on both side of the debate are centrally concerned with developing what they see as an "objective" criticism and thus are united in a desire to eradicate any hints of subjective judgment by the critic. Hirsch supports the Wimsatt and Beardsley opposition to Romantic notions of the author: "post-romantic fascination with the habits, feelings, and experiences surrounding the act of composition were very justly brought under attack" (3) and disagrees with any suggestion of biographical material coming into play "too many interpreters in the past have sought autobiographical meanings where none were meant" (16).¹²

¹¹ There are some near-contradictions in Hirsch's position—not least in trying to establish an objective argument on the basis of the author's subjective experience. For criticism of Hirsch's book see particularly the special edition of *Genre* 1 (July 1968) which contains a series of papers responding to, and critiquing, it. Hirsch then responds to these criticisms in "The Norms of Interpretation—A Brief Response," *Genre* 2 (1969): 57–62.

¹² Hirsch does, however, immediately go on to qualify this in his own terms "The

The literary-critical debate over authorial intention is helpful in terms of defining the potential dangers and weaknesses of an authorially-centred compositional method, and these are worth re-considering. One major concern, already touched upon in relation to Hirsch, is that expressed by Wimsatt and Beardsley when they affirm that “the intentional fallacy is a romantic one” (*The Verbal Icon* 6). An interest in the early draft material of an author reflects a Romantic attitude towards the literary product, idealising the author and placing him at the centre of study, rather than releasing both text and reader into a consideration of meaning in the text itself. It is also dangerously solipsistic if it reduces meaning to the personal experiences of a particular author. A quasi-Romantic approach only holds, however, if we are studying compositional material for what it tells us “about” the composing author. We can release this material from authorial extremes if we make the focus of study primarily the *process* rather than the *person*. The author is an essential element in the process, as creative agent, but he, or she, now becomes of secondary, rather than primary, importance.¹³

A second fear is that “extrinsic” material will be used to impose meaning upon the text rather than such meaning being discovered by close analysis of “the text itself”. Such fears have largely been exploded by the widespread application of theory to text and by principles of intertextuality or reader-response theory which radically re-define the borders and limits of textual meaning. However, the use of external material relating to composition, which has a very distinctly personal bearing upon a text, does still need to be considered. It is clearly helpful to know about the individual habits of particular authors when one is studying their draft material, and such knowledge will, and must, affect response to the material.¹⁴ This information might come in the form of letters about a work during the writing of it, recorded conversations and memoirs, as well as all the information provided by the physical text—the manuscripts, the order in which they are written, and so on. Some engagement with the individual author as creative agent needs to occur in order

fallacy in such interpretations is not that the inferred meanings are private, but that they are probably not the author’s meanings” (*Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967]), 16.

¹³ The charge of a “Romantic” concern with origins can never be totally denied, however.

¹⁴ Quentin Skinner considers such issues in his useful discussion concerning the value of knowledge of the writer’s motives and intentions: “Motives, Intentions and Interpretation,” *On Literary Intention*, 210–221.

to clarify specific individual characteristics of composition or to illuminate characteristics of a particular form. Again, I would argue that there is no need to dismiss this material so long as the focus of study is not so much “What did the author mean?” as “How did the text come into being?” or “How does the understanding of creative process advance our understanding of the nature of a literary text?” My position is close to that of French genetic criticism, but does not depersonalise the authorial presence to the same degree. The focus of interpretation is thus not that of authorial meaning but is concerned with analysis of process. At the same time, though, the full understanding of text as process demands knowledge of authorial meaning because elements of motive and intention emanating from the individual bear directly upon the nature of that process.

It should be emphasised that a compositional method, whilst it may need to draw upon the structures of intention, is *not* an intentionist method. Wimsatt defines an intentionist approach as using “the author’s meaning outside the poem as a key to his meaning inside the poem” (“Genesis” 210) but intention applied to the compositional material of a text need not work in such a self-evidently limited way. We cannot divorce the compositional material entirely from reference to a particular creative individual, and I see no need to do so. But we can study intention as a key element in the creative act without compelling ourselves to consider it *only* in relation to the author’s intended meaning.

The Anglo-American literary-critical debate over authorial intention—when also considered in the light of German and French principles—serves to clarify that the focus of interpretation for any compositional method must be the process of composition itself. This includes a concern with the text in a chronological sense (How does it come into being? How does it develop and advance?) and a concern with analysis of particular strategies and acts that are unique to composition, or to the composition of a particular form. We need to ask questions as to what kind of critical acts can be performed with this kind of material (When we analyse it, what are we analysing it for?) and we need to be constantly asking the core question that must underlie this whole area of study: How does the exploration of compositional material enlarge or advance our understanding of the literary work? How does it problematise our understanding of what is meant by “the literary work”?

Intention Revisited: iii. Philosophical Intention

In order to go on to define the kinds of intention at work in compositional material, it is necessary at this point to distinguish clearly between a philosophical sense of intention and an “authorial” or “literary” sense.¹⁵ Wimsatt and Beardsley define intention simply as “design or plan in the author’s mind” (4) whilst Hirsch distinguishes between the two kinds of understanding in a footnote:

As used by literary critics the term refers to a purpose which may or may not be realized by a writer. As used by Husserl the term refers to a process of consciousness.

(*Validity in Interpretation* 218n.)

Annabel Patterson, in an excellent article on “Intention” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, resists offering any real definition, concluding instead that:

much of the heat generated by the intentionalist controversy could have been avoided if the participants had observed the semantic distinctions between different uses of “intention” as a term. (146)

Undoubtedly a significant part of the problem in achieving any higher literary understanding of the term is the common assumption that we all know what we mean by “authorial intention” and that it can be easily recognised, understood (and thereby dismissed).

In thinking about intention philosophically we need to be clear about the distinction between ordinary everyday intentions, (thoughts or states which result in events or acts), and a highly specialised concept of phenomenological Intentionality. The latter, in a Husserlian sense, concerns a theory of knowledge and purely mental intentions so that consciousness itself is defined in terms of “consciousness of ...”. Using Brentano’s idea that consciousness is directed at a real or ideal object, Husserl argues that consciousness is intentional. However, for him there is a strong distinction between everyday perception of ordinary objects and the phenomenologist’s perception of consciousness itself from a heightened vantage point. Somewhere between these two positions there emerges a philosophical exploration of intention in relation to speech and action—an “action-oriented account of intention” (Patterson, 137)—in the work of G.

¹⁵ See also Greetham, 183.

E. M. Anscombe and others, and later in speech act theory and the writings of John Searle.¹⁶

In philosophical accounts of intention and action a core division between two fundamental kinds of philosophical intention emerges, one of which involves conscious anticipation of the action, the other the performance of it. G. E. M. Anscombe, in her early work on intention, defines it primarily as a mental state “connected with ‘interpretative’ motive, or intention *with which*” (25). However, a distinction exists between the intention *with which* a man does something and what he actually does: “in general we are interested, not just in a man’s intention *of* doing what he does, but in his intention *in* doing it”(9).¹⁷ John Kemp in an article on “The Work of Art and the Artist’s Intentions” distinguishes between “Immediate Intention” and “Ulterior Intention” and states (of questions asked to a hypothetical man striking middle C): “The first question asked what his immediate intention was: the second is one way (though not the only way) of asking why he formed the intention that he did” (147–148). In each case there seems to be a distinction between a pre-planned and internally anticipated event and the more immediate putting of that aim or purpose into practice through action. The ulterior intention is thus more distanced from action than the immediate intention which either directly precedes, or somehow partakes of, the action.

Searle’s book, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, is interested in exploring “the relation between Intentional states and the objects and states of affairs that they are in some sense about or directed at” (4). Searle provides an explanation for the translation of a state into an act which is extremely useful for our understanding of intention in the creative process. As with the previous accounts of intention and action Searle makes an important distinction between “prior intention” and “intention in action”. The

¹⁶ Unfortunately, Searle himself does not clearly situate his concept of Intentionality in relation to phenomenology although it is clear that it draws upon ideas in Brentano and Husserl. For two attempts to establish a context for Searle see p. 220–225 of Wilhelm Baumgartner and Jörg Klawitters’ paper, “Intentionality of Perception: An Inquiry Concerning John Searle’s Conception of Intentionality with Special Reference to Husserl,” *Speech Acts, Meaning and Intentions: Critical Approaches to the Philosophy of John R. Searle*, ed. Armin Burckhardt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990) and Barry Smith, “Towards a History of Speech Act Theory,” (29–61) in the same book.

¹⁷ See also Jack Meiland who distinguishes between “He intends to” and “it is his intention to” on the grounds of non-purposive and purposive intention. Non-purposive intention cannot be changed by the agent or consciously carried out, purposive intention expresses the agent’s purpose (intention *with which*). See *The Nature of Intention* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1970) 7–11.

first of these occurs “where the agent has the intention to perform the action prior to the performance of the action itself” (*Intentionality* 84). Prior intention causes intention in action which in turn causes, and is bound up with, a bodily movement which will result in the satisfaction of the intention. Searle states:

We say of a prior intention that the agent acts on his intention, or that he carries out his intention, or that he tries to carry it out; but in general we can't say such things of intentions in action, because the intention in action just is the Intentional content of the action; the action and the intention are inseparable . . . (*Intentionality* 84).

Searle considers carefully the means by which intention is bestowed upon action. It operates through the need to satisfy the intention, “by intentionally conferring the conditions of satisfaction of the expressed psychological state upon the external physical entity” (27). Such an explanation of the means by which the internal state is externalised is very useful for any literary consideration of intention in relation to composition, not least because it overcomes the need for any absolute division between meaning “in the author” and meaning “in the text”. It allows us to apply a philosophical sense of intention directly to the literary act and thus to release the study of compositional material from an apparently necessarily author-centred model.¹⁸

Comparing Searle's account with the previous philosophical discussions of intention and action we can see that two clear elements emerge: a holistic aim, anticipated in advance and constituting a sense of purpose (which may or may not be achieved); and an immediate aim inseparable from direct action. These two positions have a clear temporal dimension, the first being concerned with a kind of long-term, foreseeing concept of intention, consciously experienced by the agent, and the second with an immediate, directly-experienced, acting-out of intention. As a consequence of this too, we can conclude with Searle that “the intention in action will be much more determinate than the prior intention” (93). That is, the prior intention will always exist at a more general level, whilst the intention in action will always be more specific to a particular task (the object of intention).

¹⁸ In his work, Hershel Parker also makes some use of Searle's model and adopts Searle's two kinds of intention in quite a broad sense—allowing prior intention to apply to actions “long prior to or momentarily prior to the act of writing” (*Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons* 23)—and viewing “intentions-in-action” as applying to “The actual composing process” (23).

Searle's work on Intentionality directly connects his ideas on the philosophy of mind back to earlier work on speech acts and the philosophy of language. In speech act theory, J. L. Austin and, after him, Searle, argue that a speech act consists of both what we say (utterance) and what we do (performance). Thus the entire speech act involves a locutionary act in the context of understood conventions and rules which are illocutionary. The locution bears with it the "force" of an illocution. The nature of an Intentional state as a "representative content in a certain psychological mode" (11) is thus seen to correspond to the nature of speech acts which contain a propositional content and illocutionary force. Searle himself makes this comparison explicit, in order to consider the ways in which the intentional state finds externalisation in meaningful acts: "How does the mind impose Intentionality on entities that are not intrinsically Intentional, entities such as sounds and marks?" (27). Such a question clearly has bearing upon the understanding of the creative process. Still comparing Intentionality with speech acts, Searle tells us:

There is a double level of Intentionality in the performance of the speech act. There is first of all the Intentional state expressed, but then secondly there is the intention, in the ordinary and not technical sense of that word, with which the utterance is made. Now it is this second Intentional state, that is the intention with which the act is performed, that bestows the Intentionality on the physical phenomena. (27)

There is, then, always a doubled nature for intention in Searle's account: it combines a state in the mind with the embodiment of that state as an event. This leads him to state that "every Intentional state consists of a representative content in a certain psychological mode" (11).

Such doubleness becomes particularly relevant to understanding literary texts when Searle discusses "meaning intentions" (163). Just as there is a doubled level for the speech act—in the performance of the act and in the intention to perform the act—so there is a doubled level of meaning in the externalisation of intention through meaning. Searle argues that:

There are therefore two aspects to meaning intentions, the intention to represent and the intention to communicate. The traditional discussion of these problems . . . suffers from a failure to distinguish between them and from the assumption that the whole account of meaning can be given in terms of communication intentions. (165–166)

In relation to authorial intention this seems to suggest that not only are there prior (conscious) and immediate (action-embedded) intentions for the writer of the work, but also there is a distinction *between* those action-based intentions themselves and what results from them (the embodiment of those acts in meaning within a text). The distinction can be understood in Searle's terms of "intention to represent" and "intention to communicate". The first kind of intention concerns an emphasis on getting what is within, out (for the author), and the second works in terms of an emphasis on getting what is out, understood (by the reader). The first term would thus seem to relate more to the creative agent's initial urge to externalise (and thus to the early stages of creative process) whilst the second might relate more to later re-workings of a text in preparation for a specific readership (although this is, of course, to simplify the distinction between two positions which might well be intertwined in complex ways). I think this is also what Greetham is referring to when he proposes that "the *direction* of mind toward the textual object as well as the volitional act of that mind within the object must both be considered in the elucidation of intention" (183).

Following Searle's account of two levels of intention in the speech act we can see that it suggests two primary kinds of authorial intention: the translation of cognitive activity into a physical action (entering words upon a page) and the "Intentional state expressed" (a resulting manuscript page or poem). It seems to me that for the most part general discussions of authorial intention are concerned with the second of these in a way that suggests authorial intention is simpler than it is, and not at all with the first (which we might think of as the process of intention).

Following Searle, authorial intention must involve "complex intentions" in which "the conditions of satisfaction of our intentions go beyond the bodily movements" (99). This relates to the nature of meaning in the creative writing process — because whilst a meaning will exist in the first act of externalised, satisfied intention, intention is not *fully* satisfied by that act (except at a level of intention-in-action). Instead, the work will be returned to over time and, in the case of a long poem or novel, one section forms part of a larger developing structure which must bear upon it. We can see, then, that whilst Searle's account usefully distinguishes between a kind of localised physical intention and a larger embodied textual meaning, the nature of written composition, with its extension of process over time, demands a more complex and larger Intentional structure. This

enables us to see the necessity of defining different kinds of intention in compositional material.¹⁹

In an excellent paper, which aims to show that the author's active intentions do have a bearing on the meaning of a text, Michael Hancher offers a definition of "Three Kinds of Intention": *pro-grammatic intention* — "the author's intention to make something or other" (829); *active intention* — "the author's intention to be (understood as) acting in some way"; and *final intention* — "the author's intention to cause something or other to happen" (829).²⁰ Hancher convincingly argues that the first and the third kinds of intention have often been confused with the second, and that in fact these only bear upon the meaning of a text when they are part of active intention. We can see that Hancher's first and second "Kinds" loosely correspond to the two principal divisions of intention in philosophical terms, as outlined above: programmatic intention Hancher defines as being "more or less approximate and generic" (829), as we would expect, whilst active intentions have "immediate bearing on the text" (830). Hancher tries to clarify the nature of active intentions in literary terms, stating that they "characterize the actions that the author, at the time he finishes his text, understands himself to be performing in that text" (830). He also draws attention to a temporal dimension, defining programmatic intention as having "a diachronic and hence mediate bearing on the text" (830) and active intentions as having "a present 'synchronic' and hence immediate bearing on the text" (830). In this, he seems to treat active intention as a single (if repeated) event, concerned with the author's anticipated communication of meaning, as opposed to programmatic intention which is more self-centred. He defines the difference between them as:

the difference between an intention to *do* something *oneself* . . . and an intention that the *thing* one has made *mean* (and be taken to mean) something or other. (831)

¹⁹ See also Tanselle for a description of different literary and philosophical classifications of intention: "The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention," *Studies in Bibliography* 29 (1976): 173–174.

²⁰ Hancher's 1972 article acknowledges John Kemp as well as an article by Geoffrey Payzant "Intention and the Achievement of the Artist," *Dialogue* 3 (September 1964): 154–156, and as his notes make clear he is fully familiar with the other major philosophical contributors to the debate. Searle's book post-dates Hancher's work (which it does not acknowledge), but there is clearly strong sympathy between them as a result of their shared use of speech-act theory in relation to intention.

In *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons* Hershel Parker engages with Michael Hancher's article and criticises it on the basis that it does not allow for any kind of fully "active" intention:

Hancher can accommodate the period before the composition, the moment of completion, and the indefinite period afterwards; but *during*—the ongoing creative process itself—has no place in his theory. (22)

As Hershel Parker makes clear, Hancher's "active intention" does not directly correspond to Searle's "intention in action"—which *does* allow for the creative process to operate in a fully active way. I would agree with Parker's definition here (as opposed to Hancher's). However, there are other intentional states around the core action which do exist before and after active composition and, in considering the relations between these states, we can usefully break intention down a little further than Parker seeks to do.

Intention as the basis for a Compositional Method

I want to reconsider, and enlarge upon, Hancher's three kinds of intention in order to develop an Anglo-American compositional method. The model suggested here, as a way of thinking about compositional material as it develops over time, is intended to have universal application in so far as all writers must work with, and through, such intentional states in order to create. It is emphatically *not* intended to be prescriptive or to be used as a rigid, regulatory structure. Rather it is offered as an adaptable framework allowing for complex exploration of the work of different authors, and for the possibility of comparison between them. I will also be defining the method from a specific perspective in terms of a form which is of particular interest to me; the long poetic structure. This may limit the definition in some ways, but it will help to give a grounded focus to it. The model should still be capable of adaptation to the study of compositional material in other literary forms.

We can begin by acknowledging the need for some kind of holistic aim, corresponding to Hancher's *programmatic intention*. This concerns the author's plans for a work, which may go so far as to divide it up into key parts and elements, and will, in a long poetic work, be concerned with the way in which the text is to accumulate, and the use of a generic model. Such intentions may be partly internal (involving pre-textual composition) or they may be formulated in notes or letters as some kind of plan. There are different possible

models of programmatic intention for the long poem. One model might be along the lines of “epic”: a development in which the overall aim is clear, material may even be divided up into “books”, but the detail is shifting and overall shape is being redefined throughout. Another possibility would be a looser “serial” model in which each part might be distinctly defined as a single whole unit but the whole poem and the order of parts within that poem remains undecided to a very late stage. Programmatic intention is only ever going to provide the broad framework for the work, but it also probably represents the poet’s wider ambitions (particularly for a long work) and could be viewed in terms of a “challenge” which the poet sets him or herself (but, of course, may fail to live up to).

Secondly, then, we have Hancher’s more problematic *active intention*, for which we will substitute instead Searle’s “intention in action”. I would redefine this intentional state in relation to a compositional method in terms of a doubled form of *contingent intention* which includes within it the localised acts of *intention as process*.²¹ Where Hancher seemed to view active intention as relating to a particular moment in time (synchronic) I would view contingent intention as combining a series of discrete intentional acts (intention as process) with a sense of those acts as part of a sequence or section of work (either of a single work across drafts or of a section within a larger work). Intention is contingent in the sense that, although a short term intention may have been satisfied, its fulfilment and its value within the whole work remains dependent on other parts of the process and the wider context of the developing work, and cannot be known until later. It thus represents an intention that is content to exist only as a stage on the way to something else. This is a state in which issues of priority, of which version to privilege, are not yet active; a “holding” state. It consists of blocks of writing which are brought to states of temporary completion but which, even at the point of such “completion”, are known to be likely to be readjusted in the light of later ideas. Stopping points are needed within the compositional process for a long work but they are only provisional, and are known to be so by the mind which creates them. The fact that the author does not fully understand the “overall” meaning, and

²¹ My thanks to Michael Sanders for suggesting the use of the term “contingent intention” here. The idea of contingency—which is central to my model—could also be compared to Louis Hay’s concept of the pre-text as representative of textual possibility: “the perspective of genesis shows us that this first, distinct work was one of the possibilities of the text. . . . the writing is not simply consummated in the written work.” (“Does ‘Text’ Exist?” *Studies In Bibliography* 41 [1988]), 75.

is still groping towards it, is partly what creates the momentum for continued composition and creativity. This is important because it makes clear that when one is studying *compositional* intention the very nature and idea of “authorial intention” as we have historically understood it must be redefined. It is not fixed or absolute: all meaning is fluid within the process and subject to change, including authorial meaning.

If we follow Searle, in believing that “every action has an intention in action as one of its components” (107) then we can also designate a kind of micro-intentionality (intention as process) within contingent intention. There must exist descending levels of intentional activity—from the writer’s intentions for a particular day, or hour, down to his intentions in relation to a line, or phrase, or word, and finally to the moment (or moments) at which he puts pen to paper and the physical translation of thought, through immediate pre-compositional intention, into word. This intention as process involves both the physical act of lifting a pen and applying it to paper, and the mental intentions involved at a word-by-word level. In a sense every act of revision, every element of composition, is an act of changing intention. This also reminds us that what we call textual process is in fact already a “product” of a sort—the concrete realisation of an internal process.

In terms of *final intention* I would question whether such a concept really exists for the creative agent, particularly in works of length. One question which the study of the text from a pre-publication direction allows us to ask is, how “final” is the published text? There is of course the first presentation of a work to the public, which means that an endpoint of some kind is achieved here as a sense of fixedness and finality attaches itself to the work by virtue of its material form and the fact that it is being read by numbers of others. Without question, this brings into play a whole train of specific activities and anxieties for the author which are embodied in the compositional material in different ways. However, the finality represented by the moment of publication is, in effect, imposed externally. The poet might have gone on changing things but now time constraints, the fixing of type on the page, and other physical and practical needs determine the text in one form, the “final” form of the first published text.

It is always the case that writers could have burnt previous draft material upon publication if they wished, if the text alone were what mattered and the concept of finality were absolute. That they kept such material suggests a valuing not only of product but also

of process. It suggests, too, that for the writer a sense of finality may be far more tenuous than for the publisher, printer, critic and reader. Compositional material contains the potential and possibility for many different kinds of poem, not just the one which the world knows. Of course various decisions led the poet to create *this* text and not *that* one, and those decisions were unlikely to be arbitrary, but the poem is something more than the final product—as the very survival of compositional material illustrates. For the poet, I would suggest that this representation of the text is really only one possible stopping point in the continual process of contingent intention through which the material evolves. Potentially, such a process is endless, and for this reason the poet may well go on changing the text after publication and right up to the end of his, or her, life. Rather than retaining the concept of final intention, then, it is perhaps more helpful to acknowledge the existence of points of completion within the creative process when the author feels able to leave a text in a certain state for a certain length of time. One (or more) such points may also constitute an act of publication.

Finally we should briefly consider the concepts of *unfulfilled intention* and *revised intention*. The first is a similar state to that of programmatic intention, existing at a distance from the period of core creative activity, but occurring at a different moment in time within the compositional process. At some later point—possibly after the publication and reception of a work—the writer is forced to acknowledge that his original ambitions cannot be met because of the way the material itself has emerged. This may well result in future action, through revision or rewriting, in a further attempt to fulfil the original holistic aim.²² Arguably, contingent intention also partakes of unfulfilled intention but the lack of fulfillment is still an active part of the process and subject to further change. The boundary between unfulfilled and contingent intention is a flexible one.

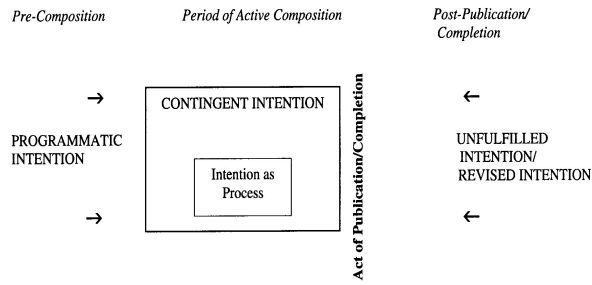
Revised intention is also situated in the time frame after publication or initial completion of a text. This is similar to unfulfilled intention but implies that the author, rather than still trying to meet his original objectives, returns to the work with changed objectives.²³

Such a change may occur as the result of a considerable time delay

²² Although the extent of such changes is limited by the existence of the first version of the published text. Post-publication revision is thus of a different order from pre-publication revision.

²³ The relationship between Keats' *The Fall of Hyperion and Hyperion*, for example, might fall into this category.

MODEL A: Authorial Intention over Time in the Compositional Process



MODEL B: Authorial and Non-Authorial Intention over Time in the Compositional Process

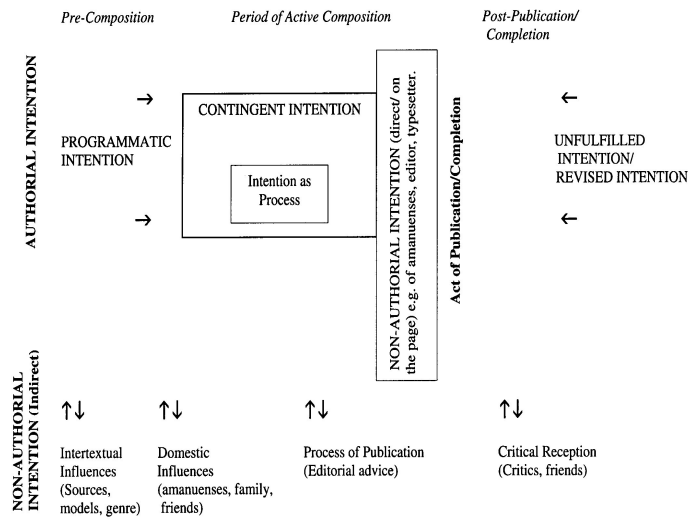


Figure 1. Models A and B.

between first finishing the work and returning to it, so that the author has lost sight of, or forgotten, his original intentions, or the changed context of his life and other works makes him dissatisfied with those original intentions. Revised intention will result in material which is effectively defined as a separate work from the original and which differs from it intellectually as well as textually.²⁴

When we consider the compositional process in this way, we can also develop Hancher's connection between time and intention further. It might be argued that developing any kind of time structure for intention simply takes us back to the old authorial model of linear progress towards a "final ideal" text. However, although the model is teleological in its overall structure, (assuming a forward motivation towards an end) what I am postulating here is a structure within which different kinds of time perspective upon a work compete or co-exist.²⁵ (*See illustration for Model A.*) At one level, of course, the text comes into being chronologically, but different kinds of intention relate to different points within, or perspectives upon, that chronological timespan. Contingent intention and intention-as-process, involve a sense of fluid time in which intention is being acted out directly, or being rapidly overwritten.²⁶ The other intentional states are either anticipatory of this core state (programmatic), or look back retrospectively upon it across the divide created by the act of publication/completion (unfulfilled intention, revised intention).²⁷

Intention itself changes according to whether it relates to a fixed point in time from which process is considered, or to a fluid, changing

²⁴ The existence of revised intention is debatable, and bound up with editorial debates over the distinction between a "variant" and a "version" of a text. For discussion of such ideas (and rejection of the concept of revised intention) see Hans Zeller, "A New Approach to the Critical Constitution of Literary Texts," *Studies in Bibliography* 28 (1975): 231–264.

²⁵ James McLaverty's work, as mentioned in the discussion of textual versions, is again relevant here since he makes good use of the temporal dimension in order to retain an intentionist element whilst releasing a text (or editorial presentation of it) from absolute linear organisation. See "Issues of Identity and Utterance: An Intentionalist Response to 'Textual Instability,'" *Devils and Angels: Textual Editing and Literary Theory*, ed. Philip Cohen (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1991) 134–151.

²⁶ In the model given here contingent intention is shown as a single block of work, with a single act of completion at its end, but there could also be multiple blocks and multiple acts of completion occurring over time. Wordsworth's three principal versions of *The Prelude* would correspond to such a model. The relationship between contingent intention and revised intention might be debatable in some cases when a work is returned to after considerable time.

²⁷ Programmatic intention anticipates contingent intention but also clearly overlaps

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process in action. These two kinds of time perspective upon the text are essential for a full critical response to the compositional material of any work.

I would also suggest that in long poetic composition a drive towards intention in any particular block of work is often being counterbalanced by an almost deliberate “resistance to intention” at a creative level through the piling up of indeterminate material and the creation of multiple possible creative paths (one of which may be fixed by the act of publication, but which is not the only possible shaping of the text). Michael Hancher makes an interesting observation in passing within his essay, which is relevant to such issues:

There are cases—most obviously, certain long works—in which the author never does face and reconcile his *conflicting* tentative intentions_A for different parts of his text . . .
 (“Three Kinds of Intention” 831n.).

Intention implies in itself a forward dynamic, a sense of purpose, an objective to be attempted or attained. But the creative artist may not want to be thinking in this way about the *whole* text at the point of writing one *part* of the text. It is possible then that programmatic intention might be at odds with contingent intention, or that there will be conflict within contingent intentional material.²⁸ At certain points the writer may want simply to produce a mass of material with no particular shape or order which he can then draw upon later. At this point he may not want to be writing within an actively shaping mass of material but to write with a *deliberate lack of shape* (within the whole—there will still probably be clear intentions for what he is writing locally). There may then need to be a denial of any sense of wider intention in the short term in order for programmatic intention to be achievable in the long term.

There is, however, one problem with the model of intention and time that I have just outlined in that, as it stands, it is purely authorial in focus, even though it places emphasis on creative process as much

with it, and continues to be present behind it. Contingent intention is in a sense also “unfulfilled” at the time of writing, and may only be seen as contingent retrospectively.

²⁸ In terms of the relationship between the whole structure of the poem and its parts see also Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren’s account of the poet’s creative process: “he develops his sense of the whole, the anticipation of the finished poem, as he works with the parts, and moves from one part to another. Then, as the sense of the whole develops, it modifies the process by which the poet selects and relates the parts” (*Understanding Poetry*, 3rd ed. [New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1960]) 527.

as on the individual creator. As such it places the method in danger of reverting to an idealist position. A compositional method must not assume a whole-hearted return to the Romantic concept of the autonomous artist which more recent editorial and literary theorists have so strongly sought to deny.²⁹ But it is dangerously easy to slide towards such a position when studying composition. If we return to the model, then, alongside the authorial compositional process we do need to place a secondary structure of external (non-authorial) influence and involvement in that process, which may occur at each stage. The nature and weight given to such influence is likely to increase as the work draws closer to completion and others become involved in its preparation for dissemination.³⁰ The model ultimately needs to be that of Model B, rather than Model A (*see illustration*).³¹

A Typology For the Study of Compositional Material

Since I would like this article to have direct practical application, it seems helpful to provide an outline typology which will clarify distinct phases within the compositional process, and thus provide a practical framework for critical response to such material.

One initial consideration in terms of a compositional method concerns the relationship between text-critical and literary-critical activity. Historically, a distinction has been made between literary criticism as an act of interpretation which has as its aim the production of meaning within a work, and textual criticism as an activity which is concerned with the presentation of a work, and with details of form. However, Tanselle, in discussing the editor's role, makes clear the way in which one position can easily slide into another:

²⁹ In her piece on "Intention" Annabel Patterson sums up the tensions between intention and literary theory well in her description of Foucault as a writer who "devoted much of his *Archaeology of Knowledge* to outlawing all approaches to texts that were ordered by any notion of an author, of an origin, of an oeuvre" (143). She concludes that, "Between them, Foucault and Derrida gave anti-intentionalism a philosophical prestige that the literary-critical version never acquired" ("Intention," *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995]) 144.

³⁰ At the same time, the nature of influence changes according to when it occurs within the process. The earlier the influence, the more likely it is to have a significant effect on the development of a work.

³¹ The model only attempts to represent the main kinds of intention but there are others of course that might be sub-categories or stand alone. Greetham, for example, mentions "collaborative intention, censored intention and author's death-bed intentions" (190).

The editor may at first feel that his job is different from the critic's in that he is concerned with establishing intended *wording*, not with explicating intended *meaning*. . . . But he soon realizes that his discovery of textual errors or his choice among textual variants involves his understanding of the intended meaning of the text.

("The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention" 179)

This suggests that whilst literary criticism is more able to concern itself with meaning alone, the textual critic must have a full appreciation of the meaning of the text, in order to undertake the act of editing it, *as well as* a full appreciation of its presentation and form. Literary criticism thus lies beneath the act of textual criticism, (although literary-critical activity may not be explicitly articulated).³²

Shillingsburg takes this further when he refuses to let the literary critic get off so lightly:

The central concern of both textual critics and literary critics is meaning. The central focus or locus of that concern is the text. The problematic nature of *meaning* agitates literary critics and theorists; the problematic nature of *texts* agitates textual critics and theorists. Both should agitate us all.

("The Autonomous Author" 22)

Shillingsburg is not alone in holding such a position. In fact, from the time of Fredson Bowers onwards, textual critics and editors have been urging the need for a greater awareness and involvement in their work on the part of the literary critic. For his part, Bowers states that:

many a literary critic has investigated the part ownership and mechanical condition of his second-hand automobile, or the pedigree and training of his dog, more thoroughly than he has looked into the qualifications of the text on which his critical theories rest. (*Textual Criticism and Literary Criticism* 5)³³

³² This issue is perhaps significant. I would agree that many of the skills put into practice by literary critics must be shared by textual critics — such as sensitivity to the text, response to elements of poetic language and so on. However, it seems to me that whilst such skills might be applied to the text "internally" by the textual critic this is still a very different act from articulating those ideas in writing. I would say that literary critical judgment lies beneath the text-critical act, but the full articulation of thought, which I would define as literary criticism, often does not.

³³ McGann also repeatedly demands that literature as a discipline should recognise that it "surrendered some of its most powerful interpretive tools when it allowed textual criticism and bibliography to be regarded as 'preliminary' rather than integral to the study of literary work" ("The Monks and The Giants," *Textual Criticism and*

The relationship between textual and literary criticism in the study of compositional material can perhaps best be seen as a continuum with, at one extreme, controlled “textual” tasks (such as decisions about the spelling and presentation of words on the page) and at the other the highly subjective interpretation of a literary text in terms of its content. Between these two positions a range of activities occur which involve varying degrees of critical intelligence and judgment, and in which the two areas frequently overlap. The outline given below is intended to suggest that compositional study could potentially range across the whole continuum, or may involve engagement at a particular point.

In his definition of *L'avant-texte*, in *Le Grand Atlas des Littératures*, the French genetic critic, Pierre-Marc de Biasi, begins to formulate some of the stages and phases involved in the study of this kind of textual material. He defines four stages of realisation:

la phase prérédactionnelle, la phase rédactionnelle (où le projet se textualise), la phase prééditoriale (depuis le manuscrit définitif jusqu'aux corrections d'épreuves), et la phase éditoriale (où l'avant-texte devient texte) de la première édition à la dernière édition du vivant de l'auteur ... (25).³⁴

In a later article, which argues for the value of studying the rough draft, de Biasi sets out to provide:

a general table of the stages, phases, and operational functions that enable the classification of different types of manuscripts according to their location and status in the process of a work's production. (“What is a Literary Draft?” 32)

De Biasi divides the genetic text up into three main phases—pre-compositional, compositional and pre-publishing—which end at the point of *bon à tirer*, when the text is ready for printing (*see illustration*). He also gives two further phases—publication and postpublication—which are outside the realm of the rough draft text. His table is defined by him as a “chronotypology” (33) and thus works horizontally, to describe different aspects of each phase,

Literary Interpretation, ed. Jerome J. McGann [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985] 182.

³⁴ “The pre-drafting phase, the draft phase (when the project becomes text), the pre-editorial phase (from the final manuscript to correction of proofs) and the editorial phase (when the pre-text becomes text) from the first edition to the last lifetime edition of the author”.

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Reproduced from Pierre Marc De Biasi "What is a Literary Draft? Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation." *Yale French Studies* 89 (1996): 34-35.

Typology of Genetic Documentation			
STAGE	PHASE	OPERATIONAL FUNCTION	DOCUMENT TYPE
provisional process	exploratory pre-initial exogenetics and endogenetics	Orienting pre-initial sources and recurrences of the idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Previously collected genetic material Workplans and unfinished compositions Notebooks, marginalia, documentation Previous project or idea notes
exploratory process		Exploring preproject formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploratory workplans Fragments of exploratory writing Updated notes on projects or ideas
PRECOMPOSITIONAL PHASE			
<i>Initial limit of genetic zone known as the Rough Drafts of the work</i>	→	Determination of composition project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial planning notes Prelim' notes on information needed Initial drawings, sketches, schemata Initial workplans or scenarios
		Conceiving	
preparatory process	initial exogenetic and endogenetic structuring	Initial planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General sketches, chronologies Grand overarching rough models Overarching workplan or scenario
structuring process	endogenetic structuring	Structuring general structuring of the composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed workplans and scenarios Notes on plot-handling, chronologies Lists, partial workplans, sketches Subcompositional rough models
AVANT-TEXTE			
research process	exogenetic scriptability	Researching composition specified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading notes and research notes Iconographic notes or remarks Topographical sketches and schemata Various documents, nonhandwritten letters
COMPOSITIONAL PHASE			
compositional process	endogenetic structuring and scriptability	Inclusion of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening and partial rough models Basic compositional rough drafts Reworkings of overarching scenario Compositional plot handling notes Compositional schemata and sketches Intermediate workplans and scenarios Recapitulating summaries Advanced compositional rough drafts Corrected fair copies
		Textualizing Restructuring or structural reworkings	
<i>Final limit of the genetic zone known as the Rough Drafts of the work</i>	→	Finishing Touches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predelimitative manuscript Definitive manuscript
		PREPUBLISHING PHASE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handwritten copies of definitive manuscript
postcompositional process	endogenetic scriptability	Preparing for publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corrected copyist's manuscript Corrected copies or typescripts Corrected proofs
PUBLICATION PHASE			
TEXT	textual endogenetics and exogenetics	Manufacturing Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notes on layout Pre-first-edition publication (Press) First edition in book form From 2nd to next-to-last edition published in author's lifetime Printed editions Last edition in author's lifetime Handwritten corrections made to last edition in author's lifetime
		New edition	
POSTTEXT	POSTPUBLICATION PHASE	Posthumous editions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Editions not checked by the author

*The French expression is *bon à tirer*

Figure 2. De Biasi's Typology of Phases.

and vertically to denote the relationship of each phase to the next in a teleological line.³⁵ De Biasi is also aware of the generic limitations of his table, stating that his categories “concern the genetic documentation of a narrative work . . . and would undoubtedly be but imperfectly applicable to the genetic study of a dramatic or poetic text” (47).

In comparison to De Biasi’s typology, the outline given below is focussed more upon the activities of the critic than the characteristics of the textual material and is preceded by an argument in favour of a need for compositional awareness in all critical activity, rather than only for a “compositional critic”. Although the typology focuses mainly on compositional material, critical activity should be understood to move freely across and between pre-text and text.

Activities within the process of critical editing that relate to critical study of compositional material (activities strongly defined by a teleological underpinning and nearer to a “text-critical pole”) might include: clarification of the order of the manuscripts; the development of a model for stages of composition relating manuscripts to each other; the mapping of this model onto biographical information; understanding of a particular manuscript notebook, or of a particular sequence within that notebook; characteristics of a particular text in terms of its composition by a particular author. For the literary critic, working with an Anglo-American scholarly edition, many of these tasks are likely to have already been performed by the editor, and to have been implicitly or explicitly articulated in the scholarly framework. If the edition works successfully, however, it should provide the scholarly reader with enough access to the material for him or her to be able to check and confirm the editor’s conclusions for himself and to then use this material to explore the text further, or to release the material from a teleological perspective (which may be necessary in the first instance). If the reader is working with a facsimile text which has no scholarly framework, then some of these more “text-critical” tasks may need to be undertaken. If the reader is working with an electronic presentation of the text, in the form of multiple versions, then the question of whether it is necessary to establish a teleological perspective upon the manuscripts, or whether a radial structure is able to be immediately used, can be explored.

³⁵ Although de Biasi is at pains to state that “This teleology, however, despite its heuristic and structural tendencies, does not imply finalist presuppositions” (33) and “There is no question of revising the opposition *text/avant-texte*: this typology demonstrates that quite clearly” (“What is a Literary Draft? Towards a Functional Typology of Genetic Criticism,” *Yale French Studies: Drafts* 89 [1996]) 54.

Once an initial sense of the structural relationships between compositional materials has been established, the reader can then begin to play out more literary-critical ways of responding to that material.³⁶ These more “text-critical” activities represent a valuable preparatory element for work on compositional material. Whilst not explicitly articulated within the framework given below, such activities are implicitly present within it.

The central point of connection and overlap between text-critical and literary-critical practice in relation to compositional material (the mid-way point on the continuum) is the use of this material to clarify and pursue cruxes within the published text which are revealed, explained, or contradicted by knowledge of the shape, structure and development of the poem in the compositional process. This is a vital act, and one in which literary criticism and the study of compositional material are bound together. It is probably the way in which compositional material is most frequently used by literary critics. I want to argue that knowledge and study of the pre-text is an essential element of literary criticism to a far greater degree than has so far been acknowledged. Until recently, for critics working in the period prior to the late twentieth century such a demand would have been unfair, unduly time-consuming, and impractical; requiring considerable manuscript work in specific locations for relatively little reward. Equally, of course, where no draft material has survived (as in much pre-nineteenth-century literature) then the critic is released from this responsibility. However, where, in the early twenty-first century such material is widely available in good quality scholarly or facsimile editions then it seems to me that there is some responsibility for the critic to make use of it. The key question here is whether the study of such material should be (as it currently is) a rarefied procedure undertaken by those with specialist interests, or whether it should be (as I would like it to be) a fundamental part of the literary-critical act.

As we move further from text-critical activity into more purely literary-critical interests, the method increasingly relates to an in-

³⁶ De Biasi, in his definition of *L'avant-texte* in *Le Grand Atlas des Littératures* (Paris: Encyclopedia Universalis, 1990) also distinguishes between a first stage of activity for the individual working with genetic material—which involves five stages of precise philological work (establishing the dossier of manuscripts; verifying the authenticity of documents and identifying them; specifying the documents by type; dating and classing each folio; then unravelling and transcribing the whole of the known documents)—and a second, more literary-critical, stage (25). The activities defined by him are more purely editorial than the ones I have given above, where I am trying to describe critical activity which connects text-critical and literary-critical activity.

terest in the act of composition itself, and as such can be agreed to have a specific function and purpose, concerned with textual process. The activities undertaken thus relate to specific study of the act of composition rather than being a potentially necessary element of any critical analysis. The method at this point, which attempts to define the characteristics of the compositional process that might provide the focus for critical study, can be mapped onto the core phases of intentionality already outlined.³⁷

Programmatic Intention

- Pre-textual composition (mental and oral)
- Motivation for composition (internal, external)
- Relationship of text to other texts (of the author, of other authors)
- Potential failure, change or re-direction of programmatic intention

Contingent Intention

- Compositional propulsion, means of stimulating or re-starting composition
- Phases of work upon a text
- Points of contingent completion (fair copy texts of part or whole work)
- Structural organisation and reorganisation
- Relationship of text to other text (of the author, of other authors)

Intention-as-Process (intentional act of writing, intentional meaning within that writing)

- Physical aspect and appearance of text on the page
- Physical aspect and appearance of manuscript notebook
- Localised structural organisation
- Distinction between first draft, draft, fair copy
- Revision: immediate, intermittent, long-term, shaping, propulsive
- Effect of changed context upon meaning of words
- Replacement of one word with another (reflecting changed intention)
- Creative judgment (changing intentions, how defined, how directed)
- Use and role of amanuenses

Act of Publication/ Point of Completion

- Concept of completion
- Pre-publication preparation of text
- Distinction between revision and editing
- Revision of proofs

Non-Authorial Intention

- Indirect effect of others on authorial intention, pre-publication (opinions of friends, family, editor)
- Direct effect of others on the text domestically (copying, punctuation, spelling)

³⁷ My thanks to James McLaverty for suggestions and comments which directly inform the typology at certain points.

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- Direct effect of others in preparation for publication (compositors, typesetters, publishers)
- Direct effect of material aspects of publication (number of pages, layout, shape and size of text)
- Indirect effect of others on future authorial intention, post-publication (reception by critics, journals, wider circle of friends)

Unfulfilled Intention/Revised Intention

- Response to critical (or domestic) reception
- Revisions to first edition and later editions
- Enlargement of a work (once or more than once, over time)
- Restructuring and rewriting
- Revision or preparation of texts by others (during the author's lifetime, after his or her death)

Unintended Meaning³⁸

- Degree to which the unintentional is allowed to enter into the creative process
- Local level within the text (crossed out words misread, misspelt words, the "wrong" word entered) by the author
- Local level within the text by another (result of dictation, copying)
- Effect of external factors, human and non-human — interruption, mood, weather
- Effect of material factors (shape, size, form of paper)
- Effect of printing and publishing methods and conventions

Running across these stages, which are primarily concerned with the process of composition, are three broader elements of importance to the critic: the exploration of unique characteristics for a particular author and of artistic strategies and anxieties, (universal and individual); the consideration of composition in a particular literary form (e.g. the long poem); the consideration of what the study of composition reveals about (in this case, poetic,) creativity.

For Wimsatt and Beardsley, any study of genesis, of creative origins, was associated directly and negatively with a descent into subjectivism, speculation and a limited focus on the psychology and biography of an author. More recently, French theoretical writers such as Barthes and Foucault make an absolute division between textual origins and the Text, seeking to deny art any real germination in order to destroy the notion of authorship altogether. Both positions partake in a shifting concept of the function of criticism over the course of the twentieth century by which:

³⁸ There has not been space within this paper to consider unintended meaning, which is an interesting element of the compositional process. For a full definition and exploration see my paper on "Meaning in Dickinson's Manuscripts: Intending the Unintentional," *Emily Dickinson Journal* (2005).

the question of intentionality was therefore transferred to the problem of whether authorial intention could or should be invoked as a tool in the task of meaning's excavation. (Patterson 142)

In the hands of French theorists the debate has moved towards an anti-intentionist position which validates a de-personalised understanding of text as "anonymous discourse" (142–143). Nonetheless, it seems to me that the core question above—"whether authorial intention could or should be invoked as a tool in the task of meaning's excavation"—remains active. In the light of this, is it possible to imagine a further life for intention, beyond fears of speculative genetic criticism or anti-intentionist positions: a life in which the focus of study is not discourse, but process; in which the compositional text is allowed to be both the embodiment of a certain kind of textual meaning and the intentional object of a sequence of acts performed by a single mind.

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