UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

RESEARCH AND GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Doctor of Education

# THE POSITION OF AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD WITHIN READER-RESPONSE THEORY, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE READING OF AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

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## ABSTRACT

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# THE POSITION OF AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD WITHIN READER-RESPONSE THEORY, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE READING OF AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

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In this thesis I examine to what extent, and how, auto/biographical method has its theoretical base within reader-response theory,

I begin by reviewing significant literature pertaining to auto/biographical method. This includes works on the concept of temporality, and on current understandings of narrative as it relates to such aspects as self and identity, and truth and fiction, as found in the writings of Denzin and others. I explore the relevance of phenomenology and hermeneutics in the work of a number of theorists, as well as writings on psychoanalytical and psychological aspects of auto/biographical method.

My review of relevant literature within reader-response theory begins with works on the reading of narrative, the position of the reader, and the establishing of identity through textual interpretation. The notion of 'literary competence' and of an interpretive community is examined, as is the nature of literary meaning and the concept of textual indeterminacy, found in the work of Iser and others.

The discussion of narrative theory begins with an examination of the position of both the narrator and the reader in the written work, and Iser's ideas on viewpoint and indeterminacy in texts are linked with Derrida's ideas on *difference* and on the decentering of the text. From this follows a discussion on concepts of 'truth' and 'fiction' in texts.

I next point out theoretical links between notions of the identity and function of the self as subject, for example in Ricoeur's narrative theory of personal identity.

The importance of the function, and indeed the location, of the author in both auto/biographical method and reader-response theory are examined next. This is followed by a consideration of the two theoretical positions on how the individual functions within a social context, given the growing importance of aspects of biographical theory in sociology.

Finally, I discuss how hermeneutical principles may be applied to modern biographical theory, and, moreover, how the hermeneutical circle may help to define the reading process.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Over the last few years, biographical studies has seen a gradual raising of its profile, together with a marked proliferation and popularity of the literary biography and autobiography as a genre for public consumption. One feature of biographies and autobiographies that may account for this warm public acceptance is the exploration they afford of the narrative features of human identity, which is a subject of unfailing fascination for readers. As well as the purveying of what is the equivalent of a narrative fiction, but with the added interest of a real life lived, the more significant autobiographies and biographies, especially those written recently, add something more. They position the individual within a social and cultural context, where the detailed specificity of the life described is related to the social, economic and political environment as if symbiotically.

The broad field that is known as literary theory contains within it a number of theories, and one of the more recent, developed originally from hermeneutics, is 'reception theory', otherwise known as 'reader-response theory'. This theory examines the reader's role in literature, as opposed to sole preoccupation with the author which was the focus of nineteenth century enquiry, and which was followed by an almost exclusive concern with the text by the adherents of the 'New Criticism' in the first part of the twentieth century. Because reader-response theory deals with such ideas as the relationship and roles of author, text and reader, concepts of narrative truth and fiction, notions of 'self', anticipation and retrospection, and indeterminacy in texts, there are a number of areas where auto/biographical method can be comfortably situated within reader-response theory. This work aims to explore some of these links.

It may be useful firstly to give some perspectives on auto/biography and biographical method, with regard to definitions, reasons for writing, sources, types or forms, and connections with other disciplines, in order to outline their significance.

Dictionary definitions of 'biography', refer to it variously as a written record or account or history of a person or individual's life; and of 'autobiography' as a personal account of one's own life. There is, for some theorists, a crucial difference between the two, in that autobiography suggests the power of agency in social and literary areas, and because of the power it offers in

this way is often accused of blurring the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. This makes of the autobiography far more an exercise in critical judgment for the reader than does biography. But at the same time, it can be that the very act of writing forces a self-examination that changes both the self and the life that is being written about; the self, the life and the writing are in a constant state of flux. And so, imperceptibly, the argument about the nature of autobiography begins to wander into the areas of the role of the reader, notions of the self, and other considerations that are within the province of reader-response theory.

Where biography is concerned, there are immediate questions to be asked on the decision concerning who to write about. It is the biographer's personality, his/her fears, desires, conflicts and anxieties, that reach out to what he/she feels are positive responses in the prospective subject, even in spite of him/herself. One clear example of this is Boswell's interactions with his subject Dr Johnson. It is the interaction between the two men, as much as what is told of Johnson's life, that engages the reader. In a similar way, the perspective or theme that the biographer chooses to put upon the work, although based on insight or prior knowledge, and with possible audiences in mind, is nevertheless dependent on the writer's 'relationship' with the subject. Where autobiography is concerned, the question of who to write about is simple; the question as to why that individual should consider his/her life worth telling may reveal a good deal about the personality of the subject. In both cases, however, the theme is inextricably bound up with plot and character, and in more ways than a simple chronology, for it must include tragedy and joy, relationships coming and going with friends and relations, all of which breathe life into the narrative. And this is what the auto/biography is - a narrative.

The choice of subject for biography may sometimes be influenced by the discovery of new data which persuades the writer towards his subject. This said, there is a case for saying that discovery of source material, whether it be letters, diaries, oral statements, or whatever, will never be entirely serendipitous, and the researcher will be sensitized to the type and relevance of material that he/she is looking for.

The form that the autobiography or biography takes prompts considerations of authorial involvement, depending on the degree of objectivity or subjectivity that the text displays. Thus the work may vary from the heavily chronological and factually orientated form, with little

authorial interpretation, through texts exhaustively researched yet written in a lively manner, to the narrative or even fictional biography, where the work is research-based to a greater or lesser extent, and whole scenes and conversations are invented, to give a novel-like feel.

As far as other academic disciplines are concerned, there are a number that may lay claim to biographical method as an extension of their own discipline. This is not the same thing as the appearance of these disciplines within biographical method, as this aspect will be discussed at length later in this study. The areas of literature, history, and to some extent the social sciences make some use of biographical method.

In the case of literary biography, Smith (1994) notes that Strachey disdained the boring, tedious obituary volumes written by his Victorian contemporaries, preferring himself to interpret source material and impart creativity and artistry to the text - perhaps achieving the middle ground in the description of biographical form discussed above. He commented, ‘it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as it is to live one.’

Biography is important for history, since any set of historical events has its roots in the characters and motives of individuals, in events of a private nature, not necessarily public ones, and in the complex social arena they inhabited. So biography, especially that of groups, can contribute to the historical identification and understanding of patterns and relationships.

Where anthropology is concerned, the life history is seen as a way of achieving cultural analysis, but with the problem that the reader’s acceptance of the text will occur not because of the factual or theoretical weight, but because of the strength of the literary devices that make the world being described seem real.

Psychology, and to some extent psychoanalysis, make use of the life history when exploring the area of personality. Freud’s case histories, for example, a form of literary biography both intimate in detail yet clinically penetrating, were a historic step in the history of medicine. Sociology uses the life history to fill in the jigsaw of community life, and also finds the chronology inherent in autobiography and biography useful for the organisation of data.

As has been stated above, reader-response theory focuses criticism on the reader of a text, on the reading process, and on response to the work. The meaning of a literary work can only be

described and understood in terms of its realization in the mind of the reader. Reader-response theory Includes within its overall field ideas from other theoretical positions such as the new criticism, structuralism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis and deconstruction, all of which contribute towards the generation of a new understanding of discourse. It is useful at this point briefly to give the history of these theories and how they are expressed by some of their main proponents, with regard to how they impact on the main thrusts of reader-response theory, before setting out in more detail what the main argument of this work intends to do.

Although the 'new criticism', work on emotional response in the 1920s and 1930s by such theorists as Richards, Rosenblatt and Harding, can be said to herald the beginnings of reader-response criticism, literature was still viewed as primarily text-based, with the meaning contained in the words on the page. Richards attempted an ontological shift, whereby he maintained that a poem should not *mean*, but simply *be,* but the new critics' stand was that the text was a self-sufficient collection of signs, self-identical and unchangeable.

Structuralism is similar in a number of ways to the new criticism, seeing literature as an autonomous verbal structure, shaping itself through language. But, however, structuralists such as Culler moved away from this 'literariness' of texts, where the reader is a function of the text, noting instead the structure of the reader's responses and introducing the notion of an internalised grammar for recognising liteary meaning, which he termed 'literary competance'.

Fish took these structuralist ideas further with his doctrine of affective stylistics, relocating meaning in the reader. This is achieved by regaining the subjectivity of the text by focusing on the experience of the actual reader, even to the extent of the purporteded disappearance of the text altogether.

Holland's brand of psychoanalytic criticism, based to some extent on Freud, saw the model of reading as a dynamic transaction between the individual and the text., whereby the individual creates from the text an interpretation, and in doing so recreates his own identity.

A phenomenological view of the reading process, and whose chief proponent is Iser, maintains that since all consciousness is consciousness of something, a subject consciously bringing into being ('intending') an object, is itself that object; so the subject-object dichotomy disappears.

Iser also pointed out the virtual dimension of a text, with its shifting viewpoints and indeterminacies .

What must be noted with regard to the status of these aspects of response theory is a number of irreconcilable differences in the positions of Fish and Iser. Put simply, Fish's position is that if something, say the literary text, is 'given', then it is already an interpretation of an indeterminacy, and in a sense is producing the phenomena it is supposed to be describing - so for Fish, nothing is given, the text does not exist for the reader, and the reader supplies everything. But as Iser sees it, without something to interpret, no interpretation may take place. Essentially, reader-response theory slides and shifts between these two basic positions.

The following two chapters in this study set out to review current literature in the fields of autobiographical method and reader-response theory, in sufficient depth as to reveal some of the possible links and associations between the two disciplines.

First in the literature review of writings on auto/biography, the issue of temporality is raised, where Erben, Usher and Hunsberger discuss autobiographies and biographies as texts in time. Narrative analysis is discussed in the writings of Culler, MacIntyre, Scott and Denzin, and the relationship between narrative and fiction is looked at in the work of Lamarque and Olsen, Easton, and Figueroa. The relaionship between truth and fiction and standards of truth in auto/biography is noted in the work of Lamarque and Olsen, Culler and Denzin. This leads on to a review of the writings on identity and selfhood, especially those of Derrida, Stanley, Ricoeur and Dunne, together with notions of narrative identity and emplotment. The location of the author in texts is found principally in the works of Stanley and Alcoff.. Phenomenological influences and the idea of lived experience are explored in the writings of Grumet and van Manen, and the importance of hermeneutics is defined in references to Husen and Postlethwaite, Schlieiermacher and Dilthey. Writings on psychoanalytical and psychological aspects are quoted, including those by Ellman on Freud, and Kosulin on biography in psychology.

The review of reader-response literature in chapter two begins with a discussion on reading narrative, where Benton's ideas on the reading of fiction and the creation of the secondary

world between author, reader and text are explored. The position of the reader is reviewed through the work of several theorists, including Harding and Fish on reader participation, Chambers, Gibson and Prince on the role of the narratee, and Wright who looks at the issue of the gendered reader. Literary response and interpretation, and hermeneutical considerations, are aspects of writings by Purves and Rippere, Culler, and Petrosky, where internalised structures are seen as possible ways of responding to texts, and Rosenblatt's transactional theory as a way of interacting between author or reader and the text is defined as another area of literary response. The location of meaning in text is next reviewed. Rifaterre, who locates meaning in the language of a text, is in contrast to Iser, who concentrates on the dynamic and virtual aspects of the text, and states that identification with the text is achieved through a continually shifting viewpoint and textual indeterminacy. Holland's examination of the unifying central theme of a text whence comes identity followed by interpretation, is examined, and from this is seen to come the acknowledgement of the self. Lastly is reviewed the notion of reader-response as an epistemological process within a community of interpreters, as explored by Bleich and Fish.

The six subsequent chapters of this study set out to show in some detail how links and associations exist between the two disciplines in most of the areas considered important and significant in literary theory as a whole. These areas are: narrative theory; aspects of 'truth' and 'fiction'; concepts of 'identity' and 'selfhood'; the location of the author; sociological, psychological and psychoanalytical aspects; and phenomenological and hermeneutical considerations. The principal ideas in these chapters are summarized below.

'Plot' as described by Culler (1997) is seen as an inescapable element of narrative, and Denzin (1989) admits that even in 'life stories', that appear to be independent of their narrator, both author and narrator are in fact present through what in postmodern terms is known as *difference*. Harding (1962) offers the concept of the dual role for the reader of committed participant and passive spectator, and Prince (1973) and Gibson (1980) similarly discuss the complex role of the narratee. The significance of indeterminacies and gaps in the text for giving the story dynamism is explained by Iser (1980). Denzin (1989) acknowledges similar

indeterminacy gaps in auto/biographical writings, achieved by, in Derrida's terms, 'fallacies of presence'. The chapter ends with a discussion of viewpoint in narrative, where Chambers (1977) points to the use of gaps in the narrative to affect the viewpoint, and Iser (1978) and Benton (1992) refer to the 'shifting viewpoint' . A final warning comes from Scott (1998) who describes auto/biography as a positioned text resulting from the fusion of biographer and subject.

The writings of Lamarque and Olsen (1994) are of use at the beginning of the chapter on 'truth' and 'fiction'. They say that 'truth' is not a relevant term in fiction, since 'untrue' can mean both 'false' and 'unreal'. Denzin (1989) similarly looks at standards of truth in auto/biography, where for example 'real' truth can exist in pure fiction. He further makes the point that the story of a life cannot be the same thing as the life itself, but that writing about the life may be the most effective means of access to it. Harding (1962), and Morrison (1998), see the narrative text as a form of social communication, and as such the evaluation it offers of human experience, so long as it has internal consistency, outweighs the importance of any considerations as to whether the text is narrative or fiction, or whether the auto/biography is true or false. Lamarque and Olsen (1994) refer to Iser's ideas on indeterminacy in texts, with the notion of 'supplementation', or filling in details according to the reader's own imaginative reflection. They add to this the idea of intensionality, where the same story told by someone different becomes a different story; and these issues can be seen to hold true for auto/biography also.

The chapter on 'identity', 'selfhood', and 'psychoanalysis begins with discussing how characters define their identities, and sees a tension between portrayal of the individual on the one hand, and the wider issues he/she represents on the other. Stanley (1992) is seen to criticise a focus on the individual, seeing the subject's significance in his/her social context. Denzin (1989) discusses the forms of the self, but remembers that words written about the life are not the same as the life lived. Iser (1980) sees two forms of self when reading, the real self being a powerful force in the background behind the self that is engaged with the text. Harding sees the reader as empathic, but not identifying with the experience of the text. As far as the construction of identity is concerned, Holland sees interpretation of the literary work as a function of identity, which is an unchanging essence. Like Ricoeur (1992), he sees identity as

timeless, but 'selfhood' as emanating from a web of social experiences throughout life. Literary fictions are 'imaginary variations' in human life, and the articulation between plot and character he calls 'emplotment'.

The discussion of psychoanalysis in this chapter refers to the threat to the elitist position of nineteenth century literature by the arrival of psychoanalysis, with its own ways of exploring the human condition. Freud's ambivalent attitude to biography is mentioned, together with the observation that he saw a connection with narrative, and viewed his case studies as short stories. The importance of Lacan is stated, where the early identification of self is rewritten in terms of language, and its consequently shifting nature is pointed out. Lastly, Jackson's (1994) work on the significance of the phenomenon of transference in psychoanalysis, in auto/biographical terms as it occurs in letters and diaries, is cited.

On questions of authorial voice, Culler (1997) explores the narrative voice, or who speaks 'to whom', 'when', what language', and with what authority'. Both Culler and Fish (1970) discuss the author's status in relation to the text and the reader, and maintain that the internalised rules that govern the reader's understanding of a text are the same ones used by the author to write the text, and so in one way the author creates the reader's experience. Alcoff raises questions of authorial voice when she asks 'who is speaking for whom?' She fears that the identity or perceived importance of the speaker, and other peripherals, will alter the significance of what is being said. She sees the 'retreat' response, that of non-involvement, as no solution, since that in itself is a use of privilege. Nevertheless, there are occasions when the authorial voice, especially in autobiography, may have an impact in a wider context, to combat, for example, oppression.

Where sociological and psychological perspectives are considered in the next chapter, both Erben (1993) and Evans (1993) hold that since the individual in fact functions at a social level, the study of the individual in auto/biography, frowned upon by sociologists, is in fact of value. This is for the very reason that it highlights social structures and functions, and this in turn enables individuals to function at a personal level and make life choices with confidence. Stanley (1993) shares with Iser (1974) ideas of referentiality and intertextuality. Stanley sees, for example, how the writing of an autobiography can reveal as much about the biographer as

the subject, and how knowledge depends on the social location of its producers. For Iser, what happens in a text is a product of what has gone before and what is to come, a product of both retrospection and anticipation. The sociological implications of the ideas on 'linguistic competance' of Culler and Fish, the existence of an internalised grammar of interpretation that is received by a community of interpreters, are another example of social location. Stanley's critique of the 'spotlight' approach of some biographers, which considers the individual without reference to the surrounding social, cultural, political and economic position, or to the other people who inhabit the subject's world, is another reinforcement of the importance of social context.

In this chapter are mentioned Kosulin's (1998) considerations of the use of literature as a psychological tool to mediate human experience. He holds that following the literary model, the subject 'authors' his actions, which are then the text. Autobiography best fits this model, since the individual becomes the narrative, using language to tell about his/her life.

The chapter ends with a consideration of the ideas of Wright (1992) and Culler (1982) on the gendered reader. Wright maintains that reader-response theory is gender-neutral, but Culler enters into a discussion whereby he holds that women at present read as men, but must learn to read as women. Easton (1984), in discussing writing about the self in autobiography, in fact broadens the issue into a consideration of how the autobiography can fight stereotype and give minorities a voice.

The last chapter deals with the aspects of reader-response theory that have a theoretical base in hermeneutics and phenomenology, and where these aspects have relevance to auto/biographical method. The features of hermeneutics that involve the 'hermeneutical circle', where understanding is reliant on pre-understanding, are compared to Iser's (1974) description of reading the literary text as a continual modification of expectation by the reader

in order to interact, and finally for reader and text to converge to create the 'virtual dimension' of the text. These attempts to construct the text are seen by Culler (1975) as a coming together of the value systems of the society to create the internalized grammar, or literary competance, referred to earlier. Purves (1985) calls these mental outlines 'schemata', working in a similar

way to Iser's 'pre-intentions' to produce the meaning of the text ; the hermeneutical circle again in action.

van Manen (1990) attempts to explain the subtle differences between hermeneutics and phenomenology, where phenomenology is a description of the 'lifeworld', but without interpretation, and hermeneutics is the interpretation of experience through the medium of a text. Phenomenology uses similar source material to biography, but uses this to understand an aspect of human experience in order to give meaning to all human experience - the individual does not interest the phenomenologist at all. Language in the phenomenological model, which involves silences (gaps), anticipation and retrospection, and the narrative power of the story, shows distinct links with reader-response theory. Grumet (1992) looks at the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, where the subject enters the consciousness only through the object that it intends. All of this takes place in 'now' time, and there is a danger that distancing might lose ties of commitment to the real world. Temporality is important in auto/biography, and Hunsberger discusses the tension that arises between clock time and inner time when the reading process takes place, for the reader and for the writer who has to manage time within the text. Sequential reading is also discussed, as is the skill needed in closure of a text where the reader, who can experience a real sense of loss, has to be let go delicately and sensitively by the text.

In short, this study sets out to examine not simply how the central philosophies of reader-response theory enable the reader to achieve the meaning of a literary work. It hopes also to discuss in what ways the reading of auto/biographical texts is transformed using the approach of the response theorists, for many of the tenets of auto/biographical method are in fact grounded in this approach. The constant state of flux existing in the relationship between author, text and reader; the indeterminacies and gaps in the text; the complex anticipation and retrospection involved in the aspects of temporality within the text; the delicate balance between the fragile concepts of 'truth' and 'fiction'; the identification of the 'self' within the surrounding context ; these are some of the features that establish auto/biographical method firmly within reader-response theory. This study investigates, and hopes to reveal, how these ideas of

reader-response theory are are intrinsic within auto/biographical method, allowing the meaning of the auto/biographical work to be achieved.

## THE LITERATURE REVIEWED: AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD

The Concept of Time within Biographical Method.

In order to have some understanding of narrative analysis as one of the principal features of auto/biography, it is important to take into account Time and its relationship with social life. Time may be seen as the one universal feature of existence, and a human life may not be lived satisfactorily without a constant awareness of its past and a conception of its future.

Erben (1998) makes the case that although formal analysis and imaginative engagement are necessary features of biographical research, these may only be employed within the recognition that lives are lived through time, and that time and its passage are the one inescapable feature of human life, ' a life that is studied is the study of a life in time' (p. 13). He goes on to cite Ricoeur as particularly significant for biographical research because he links individual identity and social context together, with time as the ultimate referent. According to these ideas, the individual creates an account of his/her life, a narrative that he terms 'emplotment' (*mise en intrique)*, in order to manage the process of living, with accounts of lives as 'allegories of temporality... employing imaginative reconstruction' (Erben, 1998, p. 14).

A post-structuralist view of time as *lived,* and encompassing all three temporal moments of past, present and future, is offered by Usher (1998). The structure of lived time involves their simultaneity, where the past and the future are always present as experiences and possibilities, and the present is consequently never fully 'present', but an unending linear flow of befores and afters. This according to Lacan is the point at which the subject comes into being, at the intersection between an irrecoverable past and an unattainable future where the present is a continually shifting horizon, and may consequently be termed 'decentred'.

Scott (1998) further observes that biographical texts are situated in time, and the 'life' so constructed is made in terms of the past, but transformed into the present so as to be

narratively coherent; and this past is reconstructed with reference to how we understand the present. He goes on to say that these accounts are delivered in terms of the different contexts from which they were originally enacted; but that each time a reconstruction of a past event takes place, it is reconstructed not from the original, but from the previous reconstruction.

Further observations on the relationship between time and the text, and consequently between time and the act of reading, are offered by Hunsberger (1992). About the nature of time, she challenges the notion that time is invariably linear with the idea that 'inner time', or time as experienced subjectively, can vary in length. Moreover, the present is at once both split-second and of some duration, and we inhabit it exclusively; the function of the past and the future is to locate and contextualise the present, and they are not always easily separated from it. This 'inner time' mentioned above can come into play when a reader does what Hunsberger describes as 'entering the world of the text', and at this point there emerges a tension between clock time and inner time. Clock time has to do with existence and consciousness, a state which is admittedly essential in reading, and inner time has to do with meaning and relevance, and an interpretation of the text takes place according to this inner reality. Thus the act of reading takes place at the intersection of these two states, and needs both in order to happen.

But apart from the reader's sense of time when reading, there is also the question of time in the text itself; for it may be important for the theme of the text for time to appear to be passing quickly or dragging emptily. The interesting thing here, however, is that the seeming length of time alters when recollected from how it was when lived, so that interesting and varied experiences seem short in passing but long when recollected, whereas boring or uneventful times seem long in passing but short when looked back upon. This creates an interesting predicament for the writer, since if a text is dragged out because it represents a boring period in the action of the text, it risks boring the reader. Time can be twisted around and manipulated, however, and Hunsberger cites the example of

Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* which tells about literally every hour of one day. Each of these hours is experienced as lasting indefinitely, and yet there is no connection between this sense of duration and the time actually spent reading. In fact, if the text creates its own world and invites the reader in to experience it, then it can also create its own inner time for the reader to partake in and feel the difference from clock time; which can be one of the pleasures of reading. Hunsberger goes further, to point to the ability of the text to make time appear to stand still while the imagination challenges its inexorability; a state which she calls 'not-time'.

Questions of linearity, of sequence and endings in texts, of importance when looking at current understandings of narrative, story and fiction, are raised by Hunsberger, and need to be considered in the light of the latter. She refers to the moral/ethical imperatives inherent in story as opposed to reference books that force some readers to read stories sequentially rather than 'cheating' by skipping or reading ahead; and, moreover, with linear reading, later text reinterprets earlier text, and there is a gradual building of understanding. But at the same time it is true to say that with many stories, knowing the outcome does not detract from the enjoyment, such is the power of a good story. Of further relevance here is the sense of parting, of loss even, that comes with the end of a book. The text, however, pushes its reader forward, and even rereading, although it makes the separation more gradual, cannot fully alleviate this loss. A careful writer is able to let the reader go at the end, in such a way that, even if there are twists and surprises, it feels 'right'. A good text will continue to influence, continue to be integrated into the life of its reader.

It is this integration mentioned above that prompts reconsideration of time and what happens during the reading of a text. Firstly, there is the passage of time during the reading of a book. This experience may be described as 'pre-critical', as simple enjoyment of the text as it is read. The act of comprehension is here a moving viewpoint, which needs constantly modifying as more of the text is read. Next, after the reading is finished, comes a response which may be termed 'simultaneous unity', where discrete parts of the text influence one another to enrich the interpretation and produce a unity irrespective of the time when they

were read. If this wholeness does not occur, and time is not suspended, then the text remains fragmented, a series of segments or bits.

Current Understandings of *Narrative*

Culler (1997) briefly sets out the position of narrative within literary theory today, claiming a cultural centrality for it over other literary forms such as poetry, because stories are the main way people make sense of the world and their lives - a process he terms 'narrative competance'. He outlines the chief theories of narrative structure: notions of plot, of different kinds of narrator, and of narrative techniques.

Where plot is concerned, Culler emphasises the need for a transformation. From an initial situation (a beginning) there is a change (a middle section) and consequently a resolution marking the change as significant (an end). There may in some cases be event development such as changes in character relationships, fears or predictions and their realization, and so on; but these are always paralleled by thematic transformation. Readers' narrative competance rests on their ability to identify the plots shaped by the narrative, and in addition they may encounter the presentation of different versions of the same story, which is known as the discourse.

Having outlined the basic functions of plot and presentation, of story and discourse, Culler discusses what he terms 'variables'. These include the position of the narrator; the question of to whom the narrator is speaking and the implicit construction of the audience by the narrative; when the events occur(red) within the narration; the type of language chosen, for example adult or child; the 'authority' or otherwise of the narrator; and, most importantly, point of view. The person who 'sees', through whom events are 'focalized' and put into perspective, may or may not be the same as the narrator. Thus events may be related at whatever distance in time, may be kaleidoscoped, have varied amounts of knowledge - the viewpoint character may be omniscient, for example, or even a space alien! And there may even be stories within stories.

Culler ends his summary of narrative theory by touching upon the function of stories. Firstly, there is the pleasure given by this imitation of life; there is the desire to know and find out;

the function of teaching about the world, so man may adjust his expectations to social reality; and lastly, they may act as a form of social criticism whereby nobler aspirations may be aimed for. He says: '...we find it very hard indeed to avoid conceiving of our lives by patterns of fictional narratives. Does this imply that narratives' clarifying and consoling effects are delusory?' (p. 94). At this point the discussion begins to widen out into considerations of truth within fiction, which is of importance when considering the nature of biography and biographical truth, and which will be considered later.

In his introduction, Erben (1998) makes the point that the concept of Narrative is an essential requirement for biographical research. By exploring the *narrative* features of human identity, then the significance of the self in relation to contemporary values may be examined and analysed. His first chapter enlarges upon this, and, as already touched upon above when discussing how lives are lived through time, it may be seen that these lives are made intelligable by being composed of narratives. Moreover, because these narratives lived through time, whether past, present or future, are the cohering mechanisms for human experience, then *narrative analysis,* more than any other analytical method, is able to weave the social context and the individual life together. Because narrative analysis is able to *combine conventional empirical findings with imaginative reconstruction,* historical considerations and everyday moral and cultural exegesis, it is able to reach a dimension beyond that of the individual researcher or participant at that point in time, thus deepening the nature of the biographical exercise. In addition to the work of Ricoeur (discussed later), Erben cites the work of Macintyre (1985), explaining his ideas on the nature of narrative as being essential if human actions, including the unity linking birth, life and death, are to be understood.

When considering contemporary attempts to envisage life as a whole, a unity, MacIntyre emphasises the importance of what he terms the 'self-characteristic', whereby the individual identifies with the roles he or she plays. When this is achieved, only then may he or she realize 'a concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life

to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.' (p. 205). MacIntyre goes on to give examples of human actions and selfhood which show the natural propensity to think of the self in a narrative mode, and for human actions to be thus characterized. He explains that any account of human behaviour or actions has to be seen in terms of *intention* in order to make sense, and that these intentions include not only short-term reasons for actions, but depend on longer term beliefs, histories and settings that inform the actions; in other words, the self is thought of in a narrative mode. Indeed, the narrative form, MacIntyre argues, is the form through which we understand the actions of others as well as ourselves:

> It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. (p. 212)

He goes on to discuss the notion, put forward by Sartre among others, that narrative is something that can only exist retrospectively as a story told later, and that beginnings, middles and ends are things that cannot exist as the events are unfolding, but are made sense of later. MacIntyre points out that actions, prior to any narrative form being imposed upon them, are nevertheless the disjointed parts of some possible narrative, inevitably constrained by the actions of others and social settings in typical narrative fashion, and, moreover are experienced in the light of conceptions of the future. This is true of both real and imaginary characters, where in the former the characters are also the authors.

MacIntyre takes the above ideas on to relate them to the concept of personal identity. On the one hand, the subject of a narrative that encompasses a whole life has to be able to give an account of that life that is intelligible enough to provide a unity of character for it. On the other, single lives form part of an interlocking set of narratives with other lives, which make a necessary contribution towards the notion of personal identity, and which can best be discovered through membership of a community. MacIntyre concludes his thoughts on narrative and personal identity with ideas on the importance of tradition within personal histories.

Scott (1998) points out the fragmentary nature of narrative accounts, and that they cannot be

other than past events reconstructed in the present to be narratively coherent given the current moral and epistemological situation. This he describes as the 'limitations of consciousness' (p. 32), where not only are the settings for an activity never fully known, but the consequences are either unforseen or unknown, and there may be unconscious or tacit forces compelling courses of action. He describes the role of the biographer as 'complicit', both because of his/her own life narrative brought to the work, and because there is the mediating effect of the act of research itself. Although he is not as condemning as the postmodern view that the biographer is committing an act of violence, this view sees a narrative account constructed by both researcher and participant and redolent of both past lives - hence the term 'auto/biography'.

An account of the biography or autobiography as a *story* is given by Denzin (1989). He describes a story as a fictional, narrative account, with a beginning, a middle and an end and fashioned out of real or imagined events, of how something happened. To Denzin, the plot and storyline of a story as narrative exist independent of the life of the narrator, in the form of a text that may be studied. These stories examining a life, or part of a life, Denzin refers to as *life stories*, and maintains that the narrative form gives them the appearance of a fictional account. Moreover, he differentiates between 'self stories' and 'personal experience stories'. Whereas in the self story the teller positions him/herself centrally in a story about the self in relation to a significant experience, and which is told in a linear format with a beginning, a middle and an end, a personal experience story on the other hand, although based on a personal experience and with the narrative structure of a story, is often an everyday experience and does not necessarily have the narrator as the centre of the story. Indeed, he contextualises stories even further, 'No self or personal-experience story is ever an individual production. It derives from larger group, cultural, ideological, and historical contexts.' (p. 73). In a sense, Denzin is calling into question the nature of stories, when he maintains that a life story is in fact a multiplicity of stories that could be told, with no clear separation between where one story ends and another begins; and contributing to this is the fact that story told is not the same as the story heard; the teller and the hearer both operate from unique and

unshareable positions, so the two versions have to merge into a collective, group version of the original. In this way, stories take their place within the larger narrative construction that is the story that the narrator is trying to tell.

In their investigations into the nature of truth and fiction, Lamarque and Olsen (1994) look at the role narrative plays in human cognition. They acquiesce to claims that narrative is a primary act of mind, and that individuals define themselves in terms of a life-narrative which lends order and purpose to their lives. But they have some interesting things to say about the relationship between narrative and fiction, emphasising that fiction is one among various kinds of narrative, and that narrative is not itself a kind of fiction. Narrative is, in fact, indifferent to reference and truth, merely requiring for its existence two or more events or situations, whether real or fictive, in a time sequence.

In their attempts to distinguish the relationship between narrative and fiction, they identify three dimensions of narrative, namely structural, referential and genre. The structural dimension is a typology of narrative devices, such as tense, voice, point of view, identities, temporal, spatial and causal structures, and so on. In a sense this dimension is distanced from subject-matter and may be applied to many genres of narrative, not only biographical. The referential dimension may be summed up as what a narrative is 'about'. However, Lamarque and Olsen do not find that reference or lack of reference is what defines a fictional or a non-fictional narrative; whereas it is always possible to ask of a narrative whether or not events represented actually took place, it is simply that establishing narrative reference for narratives in the fictive mode is dependent on its intentions and expectations. It is here that the genre dimension of narrative becomes important, in its defining the function or point of the narrative. This point must be a function of its context, and the narrative must be unusual and non-obvious and something which is relevant for and matters to the receiver. But besides this, it is clear that fictive narrative will belong in a different genre from the discursive practice of biography, with conventions of its own.

Finally, Lamarque and Olsen comment upon the relationship between narrative and fact, both its distortion and its creation. They maintain that 'objectivity' has to be a matter of

degree, and that the ideal narrative that mirrors facts without a point of view is an unrealizable fallacy. Moreover, imprecision in language is not the same as distortion in narrative features. They also point out that there is a difference between selection of content that goes into a narrative and distortion of that content itself. Distortions of selection, as such, do not entail distortions of content. Crucially, they make the point that claims of distortion of fact presuppose the existence of undistorted fact in the first place; that the narrative is referential and is *about* something in particular. They take the claim that narrative 'creates' the events it tells, and show that that is precisely the model of fiction; there is a significant difference between narrative 'mediating' reality and 'creating' it, for the latter ignores the referential elements mentioned earlier, and the 'creation of a world' that takes place in fictive narration. Lamarque and Olsen elaborate further on the nature of fiction in their discussion of truth, which is reviewed later in this chapter.

Defining more closely the Relationship between Narrative and Fiction.

A number of writers make interesting observations about the relationship between narrative and fiction, and Easton (1996) points out that this question is of particular interest where the writing of autobiography is concerned. There is, she explains, a vital difference between the lived experience and the textual representation of that experience, and whereas the reader will not find this a problem with fiction, autobiographies, with what appears as direct access to the author, will appear to be the representation of a 'true' and not a textually constructed self. She goes on to cite specific autobiographies, all by women, since the main thrust of her argument is to present the particular difficulties experienced by women autobiographers. Of interest here is her discussion of Maya Angelou's book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970/1984). She points out that there are silences and gaps, and that despite its appearance of candour, the book has to run the gauntlet of possible criticisms from its racially-mixed potential readership, from racist whites, from powerless and frustrated blacks, and from masculine prejudice. This aspect of the book Easton sums up by quoting Angelou's secretive grandmother: 'If you ask a Negro where he's been, he'll tell you where he's going' (Angelou 1970/1984: p189). Even though she rejects the temptation to use the

culturally powerful black stereotypes of the matriarch, or 'mammy', cooking and caring for her family, she will revise or reject them at will as suits her narrative. Moreover, there is the deliberate double perspective during the book of the older narrator looking back, and the younger Maya living the events. All of the above are aspects of the fictive features of 'situated' autobiography - and it may be argued that all autobiographies are situated in this way.

By questioning the status of text in autobiography, Figueroa (1998) similarly addresses what he calls the postmodern view held by Denzin (1989), that the subject of the autobiographical text is a 'fiction', and that the stories - or narratives - about the subjects are a creation separate from the life, and not the same thing at all. The telling of these lives necessarily serves merely to create a new fiction, and the life has to be distinct from the telling about it. He challenges this view, maintaining that it must be possible to distinguish between what he terms 'degrees' of fiction, between gratuitous invention and fact, for example, when the study of a life contains a large measure of coherence. The text has to give us access to a reality beyond itself, and to reduce everything to 'fiction' and 'story' is to call the text itself into question. These considerations lead to broader questions about the relative positions of fiction and truth in auto/biography.

The Relationship between Truth and Fiction in Auto/biography.

Lamarque and Olsen (1994) propose a 'no-truth' theory of literature, where the concept of truth has no central role in the critical practice of explaining the values of literature and the nature of fiction, and their theories have bearing on biographical method, since they discuss the relationship between fiction and storytelling. For them, the interest lies not in whether there is any connection between literature and truth, but whether the expression or revelation of any truths is indispensible to the literary work.

They begin by discussing terminology, what is meant by 'true', and discuss several possibilities; 'true' meaning 'sincere', or 'true' meaning 'verisimilitudinous', or what is called the 'equivalence schema' (Dummett: 1978), ' It is true that p if and only if p' (page xx). This

leads to a 'redundancy theory' of truth, where truth cannot be a genuine property of statements because there is nothing more to saying that a statement is true than saying the statement itself.

They emphasise the point they are making about the diffuseness of literary truth by outlining some of the propositional theories of fiction. Mimetic theories, where works of fiction 'mirror' the world, are flawed as far as their contribution to the truth debate goes, in that mimesis relies on relations between mental images more than between images and objects. It is questionable whether epistemological theories, with their belief in 'learning from fiction', need be considered within the appreciation of the value of literature and literary truth. Again with moral theories, the central issue is not the moral content as such, but whether the literature has any relation to literary truth. Integrity theories, concentrating on the sincerity of an author as a mark of 'truthfulness', and likewise affective theories, appealing to the effects wrought by works of fiction, are of questionable use when considering criteria of literary value.

Further to Lamarque and Olsen's considerations of literature and truth are problems of fictionality. They distinguish between a fictional thing - suggesting that it does not exist, so is *unreal* - and a fictional description - in that it is not true, so is *false.* However, not only may there sometimes be shreds of truth within the fictional description, but also the mode of utterence may be unwittingly at odds with the content of the utterence, such that a fictional account may be uttered as true or a true account be recounted as pure fiction. Indeed, they go on to blur the distinction still further, when they challenge the notion that fiction, with its associations of falsity, is inimical to truth, and literature, with its cognitive values, is congenial to it. In fact, they say, fiction is hospitable to truth, whereas literature is resistant to evaluation in terms of truth.

Lamarque and Olsen do. however, make a clear distinction between narration or storytelling and literary fictions, as they maintain that the intellectual inquiry upon which literature rests depends upon the distinctive uses to which it is put and the conventions by which it is governed, and not merely upon the presence of the narrative form. For the purposes of this study, these observations serve to underline the importance of defining the role that the auto/biographical narrative may be considered to have within literature.

Denzin (1989) lists what he calls 'standards of truth' in autobiographies, including sincerity, subjective truth, historical truth, aesthetic truth and fictional truth. A sincere writer will tell subjective truths about his/her life; historical truth accords with existing empirical data; an aesthetic truth is one deemed to be aesthetically successful; and a fictional truth is when 'real' truth is evidenced in 'pure' fiction. However, Denzin explores deeper and finds what he terms true and false fictions. True fictions he describes as those in accord with known facts and 'facticities' (or descriptions of how facts were lived and experienced by individuals), thus creating believable experiences for the reader. False fictions on the other hand distort or misrepresent these understandings. There is debate as to whether autobiographies are a mixture of fiction and nonfiction, neither wholly factual nor wholly fictional, or whether they are, as is all writing, fictional. An autobiography or biography is, in a sense, a fiction about a third person being who he or she was at previous times in their life, and to whom events, experiences and their meanings have to be ascribed in the text. Denzin quotes Elbaz (1987) ' autobiography is fiction and fiction is autobiography: both are narrative arrangements of reality' (p. 1). Denzin concludes that the dividing line between fact and fiction is of necessity blurred in the auto/biographical text. He quotes Sartre's assertion that if an author believes in the existence of something, then its effects are real, and since all writing is made up of things that could have happened or did happen, then it is necessary to do away with the distinction between fact and fiction.

As part of these considerations of the relationship between truth and fiction in auto/biography, Denzin discusses the role of the *story.* This he defines as a fictional narrative account of how something happened, having a beginning, a middle and an end, in the form of a text that can be written down, and with a plot or storyline that exists independent of its narrator. He goes on, however, to say that the beginnings and endings of stories are not always clear-cut, and may come in more than one version. The criteria of truthfulness where these stories are concerned are grounded in the culture of the listeners, and as such have a variable relation to absolute truth, as they are often shaped by ideological forces which put pressure on the storytellers to establish their individuality.

Moreover, the stories told are never the same as the stories heard.

Culler (1997) similarly questions the role of narrative, asking whether it is a fundamental source of knowledge, or a rhetorical structure that is delusory and distorting. The problem here is that it is difficult to avoid conceiving of our lives except by patterns of fictional narratives, so we have no independent and more authoritative knowledge than that provided by narratives. Even the contemplation of narrative as a merely rhetorical structure becomes itself a narrative fiction, a story of disillusionment yielding to truth; and so it becomes virtually impossible to answer the question of whether narrative is a source of knowledge, consequently of truth, or simply an illusion prompted by desire for it to be true.

Identity and 'Selfhood'. The Position of the Subject in Auto/biography.

When attempting to determine the place of the subject within biographical method, Denzin (1989) considers the assertion that subjects are real and concrete, living lives of meaning with a concrete presence in the world, what Derrida terms a *metaphysics of presence.* The aim of biographical method is to find a way of uncovering how these subjects give subjective meaning to their life experiences. Denzin goes on to explain, however, that Derrida maintains that there is no clear window into the inner life of a person, filtered as it is through the glaze of language and signification, and that there can never be a clear, unambiguous statement of any intention or meaning. This, then, is the problem underlying biographical method. When a biographer gives the 'real' details of a life, that 'real' person is in fact a creation in the text that is written, and to go back to the text is to go back to yet another version of the fictional person in the text. Yet at the same time, it is the central tenet of the biographical method that there is a real person there who has lived a life which in turn can be written about; and Denzin makes a number of valuable observations on truth and fiction in auto/biography, as indicated earlier.

Denzin makes useful comments about the various forms that this 'self' as a subject may exhibit. The unique images, thoughts and ideas that a person may have may be seen as unified around one single point of reference, yet at the same time bound to others in interpersonal relationships through self-other interactions. This is what Denzin calls the

*Phenomenological Self.* The inner conversations that a person directs at him/herself and fills with emotional and symbolic meanings point to a *Linguistic Self.* The *Material Self* consists of all a person possesses at a particular time; and when this self is transformed into a book, as in biography, this erases or displaces the self as it is written about. An individual in a particular cultural group at a particular time becomes imbued with particular meanings, and when these individuals as subjects write autobiographies and biographies, they inscribe their versions of subjectivity in the texts they produce according to the ideology to which they ascribe. Such an individual is the *Ideological Self.* The *Self-as-Desire* has sexuality at the centre, and although desire always escapes complete fulfilment, and is experienced as a hunger, a lack, an absence, nevertheless the subject will always return to it.

Stanley's (1992) approach to auto/biography rejects reductionist accounts of 'the individual', instead insisting that individual people are social and cultural products, and that structural analyses must work at the level of particular lives. Moreover, she eschews the notion of the 'reconstruction' of a biographical subject, believing that the past cannot be recreated and experienced as it was by the people who lived it. She asks as to whose viewpoint this past is viewed from, and why this particular viewpoint should be privileged. For her, biography is simply one more interpretation from a range of possibilities and from one particular angle, and by a biographer who is socially located and partial.
Pertinent to this is her critique of the 'spotlight' approach used by some 'modern' biographers. Here the uniqueness of a particular subject is emphasised, in individualised terms as opposed to a social self within a network of others. This concentrates on what is essential about the self, rather than how social processes produced what the self consists of. She does not totally denigrate this approach, which sees biography in individualised terms, but emphasises that all biographical research involves making choices as to what counts as 'knowledge' about a subject. The question therefore is an epistemological one, and a biographer cannot avoid making choices based on his/her own particular concerns.

In his disquisition on the relationship between notions of 'self', 'sameness', and 'identity',

Ricoeur (1992) places emphasis on the fact that personal identity can be articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence. He gives to personal identity a separate existence with a core of permanence, and makes a distinction between selfhood and sameness, ' ...it is not the sameness of my body that constitutes its selfhood but its belonging to someone capable of designating himself or herself as the one whose body this is.' (p. 129). The self is not permanent, it develops over time through webs of relationships, and self-understanding is rooted in a relationship with the world around.

Narrative identity, on the other hand, relies on the interpretation of the human life through the stories people tell about them, and life stories are made more intelligible when a narrative model, either historical or fictional from literature or drama, is applied to them. In this way, self-understanding may be seen as an interpretation, mediated through the narrative, so that a life story is a 'fictional history' or a 'historical fiction', 'interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies' (p. 114).

Ricoeur also argues that events are interconnected through emplotment of their lives by the characters, or subjects, and that this interconnectedness integrates the permanence in time represented through 'sameness' with diversity and instability, the 'selfhood' of personal identity. The threat posed to the singular life, lived in a temporal totality, by the possible discordance offered by events, necessitates, he believes, the history of the life. This life history equates to the identity of the character, which is therefore a construction of the narrative. Ricoeur quotes Dilthey's equivalence of the connectedness of life with the concept of a life history, and by linking action and the character performing it, he creates a narrative conception of personal identity.

Furthermore, a mediating function between the poles of sameness and selfhood is performed by a character's narrative identity when it is submitted to 'imaginative variations', On the one hand is depicted the stable character, always the same; on the other hand, the plot or narrative seems to be put in the service of the character, and with the consequent losing of the configuring function of the narrative, the character begins to lose narrative identity. Narrative in the form of life history is thus essential to prevent this loss of identity.

Ricoeur thus moves into a consideration of the place of literature in defining the relation

between sameness and selfhood within narrative identity. He holds that in spite of the 'narrative' incompleteness of real life, and the elusive nature of the concept of the narrative unity of a life, literature can help to fix the outline of courses of action and soften the sting of anguish of endings through its imaginative variation. He therefore refutes the idea that the literary narrative, because it is retrospection, can only inform the past; the protagonists in the narrative are in fact being oriented towards their mortal future. He sums up his view of the relationship between literary narratives and life histories:

> ...literary narratives and life histories, far from being mutually exclusive, are complementary, despite, or even because of , their contrast. (p. 163).

Writings on the relationship between Author and Text.

In her research into feminist autobiographies, Stanley (1992) notes the essentially intertextual character of written lives. They claim referentiality to 'the life' of the author, yet our understanding of 'lives' has of necessity to be from the written auto/biography, even a fictional one such as *Jane Eyre*, and not from life as it is lived. Moreover, this leads to an expectation for real lives to have troughs and peaks, to have heroes and villains, to be chronological and linear, in other words to share the characteristics of fiction.

She expresses scepticism also at the argument of Barthes and Foucault and others concerning the 'death of the author', where the conventional view of writing as a unique subject that is the unique production of a unique mind is seen as realist ideology. She maintains that this 'death' is a convenient one for them, and the denial of authorship is a sham.

There are in fact many discussions on the location of the author by writers about biographical method. In her work on the problem of speaking for others, Alcoff (1991) outlines two views of the source of the author. In one view, the author of a text is its 'owner' and interpreter. In another view, the original author is no more privileged than anyone else with those views, and anyway the term 'author' is an ideological construction. Alcoff maintains that there is room for both ideas, but that basically the importance of the source of material should be subsumed within an overall analysis of effects, and it is the effects that count.

Denzin (1989) critiques Derrida's work on the position of the author as follows. Derrida challenges the view that the written text is a conveyor of meanings and understandings through the written word. Words, he says, are only made up of *difference*, and can never function without referring to traces of other elements that are not in fact present. Thus texts have no centre, no essential structure. When writers and readers read real authors and real meanings into texts these are, according to Derrida, 'fallacies of presence', based on the belief that real subjects can be found in the real world and then relocated in texts. He also questions a number of other assumptions. He claims that the sense of order presented in a text is false, based as it is on hierarchies and oppositions; self and other, or reason and emotion. The autobiography centres a person at the heart of the life story, whereas in reality this centre is found in the personal experiences and interactions of this person with others. He claims also that the author finds biographical subjects in the material things around them, and that in trying to locate the subject in a social context, the author invents a version of society where the subject may exist and achieve meaning. The documentation of the material subject can take place only through the invocation of absent others and absent social structures, so the subject's real presence exists only in the text. All of this, Derrida maintains, leads towards the suggestion that no reading of a life is ever complete or final, and there can only ever be multiple versions of a biography or autobiography. Denzin points out, however, that meaning arises out of the interactions between texts, writers and readers, and that in this way readers themselves create texts.

Phenomenological Influences on Biographical Method.

Grumet (1992) explores the usefulness_of biographical accounts of educational experiences in educational research. She emphasises the adequacy of everyday experience as a context for knowledge, and the capacity of the narrative form to convey the character of this experience, and holds these as preferable to the anonymity of the quantitative model. In the course of these considerations, she relates the tensions between phenomenological and existential approaches, to those in auto/biography; for instance intimacy, spontaneity and individuality of the narrative text as opposed to its reflective distance, narrative logic and

communicative collusion.

Education she places firmly in terms of a person's dialogue with the world of his or her experience, and both phenomenology and existential philosophy describe experience as the relationship of one person to his or her world. This educational experience forms the basis of a dialectic between person and world which possesses apparent polarities such as subjectivity and objectivity, particularisation and generalisation, but which in fact paradoxically reciprocate each other. From this point, auto/biographical method is seen as creating a text that brings the subject's experience in the world to words. Through a process of disciplined reflection, subjectivity and objectivity reciprocally make meanings, since the writer of auto/biography is both the subject and the object of the text; and immediate experience is described through distancing, or seeing oneself seeing with one's own eyes.

Van Manen's (1990) account of the application of hermeneutic phenomenology in educational research enlarges upon Grumet's observations about the value of biographical accounts of human experience of the world. The act of researching, questioning and theorising, he says, is an intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, even of *becoming* the world, a process which in phenomenological terms is known as 'intentionality'. In this way, the philosophy of the individual or personal is pursued against the background of an understanding of communal or social life. The 'lifeworld' is studied as it is immediately experienced, pre-reflectively; it is not possible to reflect on lived experience whilst living through the experience, so reflection has to be retrospective and not introspective. Thus the description of lived experience is both collected by and recollected by that lived experience at the same time, in a 'circle of validity'. However, van Manen does seek to clarify the differences between the meanings of the words 'description' and 'interpretation'. An immediate description of life as lived edges towards possessing an interpretive quality when it is mediated by some sort of expression such as talk, action or a text - although it may be argued that all description is ultimately interpretation. When something, a work of art, for instance, already has a meaning, then it already contains an element of interpretation, and so we are in fact interpreting an interpretation. It is here that the hermeneutical, interpretive

element may be conflated with the phenomenological element of researching lived experience.

It is because of the emphasis on the immediacy of the lived experience in phenomenology that van Manen is doubtful about the true phenomenological worth of auto/biographical writing. In spite of this, however, there are features that he finds do parallel auto/biography. Van Manen situates lived experience firmly within a temporal structure:

> ...lived experience first of all has a temporal structure: it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past presence. Moreover, our appropriation of the meaning of lived experience is always of something past that can never be grasped in its full richness and depth since lived experience implicates the totality of life. (p. 36)

Moreover, since it is an aim of phenomenology to translate lived experience into a textual expression of its essential nature such that a reader re-lives the experience in a reflexive way and also reflects on its meaning, there is a connection here with the idea of the biographical narrative as a story in textual form. Again, this idea of phenomenological description as textual interpretation verges on hermeneutics, which needs to be considered separately in respect of biographical narrative. Further to this, when van Manen considers the nature of lived experience material as data, there emerges again the difficulty of lived experience descriptions not being the same as lived experience itself.

## The Relevance of Hermeneutics within Auto/biography.

Husen and Postlethwaite (Eds 1985) suggest a definition of hermeneutics as ' the theory and practice of interpretation (*Verstehen*) in different kinds of contexts' (p. 2162). This consequently implies an intention to increase understanding of other cultures, groups, individuals, conditions and lifestyles, both in the present and in the past, with an implied increase of self-understanding on the part of the subject. Before this understanding, comes a concept known as 'pre-understanding', where something can only be understood if it is already partially understood. These two processes, understanding and pre-understanding, having been accomplished, there comes the process of interpretation. This is not simply a

mirroring of understanding, but interpretation and understanding interact, and thus a change in the understanding of something may occur. These three, interpretation, pre-understanding and understanding, are integral to human existence, and people's self-definitions and definitions of life result from their understanding based on their experiences. By understanding their lives, people complete what is known as the 'hermeneutical circle'. The connection between hermeneutics described in this way and auto/biography is apparent.

The work of several theorists cited by Husen and Postlethwaite has relevance to auto/biographical studies. Schleiermacher sees interpretation as both grammatical (linguistic) and psychological. The latter implies that a text should be analysed as regards thoughts and feelings of the author seen through his/her identification with or transformation into the other person. Understanding is seen as always relating to a context and, moreover, is founded on intuition - which transcends the paradox of understanding always building on prior understanding. The analysis of thoughts and feeings in interpretation, and the contextualisation of understanding described above, are both reflected in the elements of biographical method and the process of auto/biographical writing.

Husen and Postlethwaite see the contribution of Wilhelm Dilthey as a widening of the hermeneutic circle mentioned above. He sees 'experience' as a unity of parts of life bound together through a common memory. From overall experience, a singular experience may be interpreted and given special meaning in relation to a whole. Similarly a singular experience may give rise to a complete change in, for example, a person's self conception and perception of meaning, and thus there is a continuous interaction between the parts and the whole of life. Where understanding is concerned, Dilthey sees self-understanding primarily in a historical context. When the past is united with the present, then experience, and the meaning of life are clarified. This description of the interaction of past and present as a feature of hermeneutics complements the references to Erben (1998), Usher (1998) and Hunsberger (1992) made earlier during the discussion of the concept of time within biographical method.

In his writings Dilthey (1976) also discusses questions of subjectivity and objectivity within

what he calls the 'mind constructed' world, and this relates to the discussion of writings on identity and selfhood and the position of the subject within auto/biography dealt with earlier. On the one hand, the knowing subject creates this world in what he hopes to be a meaningful pattern; and on the other, he/she strives to know it objectively. Dilthey hopes that the answer to this problem, which he calls that of 'apprehending reality', lies in categorising concepts such as power, value, interaction, etc, which arise from experience within the mind-constructed world, but which may then be applied to reality.

When discussing these 'categories', Dilthey comes to the question of temporality, mentioned above in the article by Husen and Postlethwaite (Eds 1985), and he states that the concept of time forms the basis of all the other categories. He refers to time as:

> ...the restless progression, in which the present constantly becomes the past and the future the present. The present is the filling of a moment of time with reality... (p.209)

Dilthey goes on to point out that the present is always there, and nothing exists except what emerges from it. Moreover, the parts of time are different in character depending on whether we look from the present back into the past or forward to the future. In our attitude to the past we are passive, but to the future we are active and free with the thought of infinite possibilities. The experience of time, Dilthey tells us, determines the content of our lives; there never is a present, only a memory of what has just been present, and each unit of meaning may be termed an 'experience', a temporal flow in a constant state of change. But at the same time, any attempt to observe, be aware of and experience the flow results in the observed moment becoming a fixed remembered moment and not a flow. Thus immediate experience cannot, strictly speaking, be experienced; time cannot be observed and becomes simply change.

Dilthey's views on the connectedness of life, where the parts of human life are linked into a whole, as mentioned by Husen and Postlethwaite above, are considered in his own writings with reference to autobiographies. Giving the examples of Augustine, Rousseau and Goethe, he asserts that autobiographies are the most direct expression of reflection about life. He maintains that each life has its own significance, determined by a context of meaning, where each different remembered part of a life has its own intrinsic value, yet,

thanks to the perspectives of memory, is related to the meaning of the whole. Thus for Dilthey, autobiography provides the most important form of the understanding of life, where understanding penetrates from external phenomena into the particular environment. By experiencing, planning and observing what is significant about his/her life, the person has created threads of connections, experiences of past and present, held together by a common meaning. Memory has preserved and experience has pre-selected the significant events, and the individual's understanding results in the expression not simply of the passage of a life, but of the continuity of a life. Autobiography is thus the literary expression of a man's reflection on his life.

Psychoanalytical and Psychological Perspectives on Auto/biography: Freud.

Ellmann (1984) claims that the influence of Freud and psychoanalysis on the nineteenth century literary establishment was enormous. This was partly because both of these areas deal with dreams and fantasies, because Freud could offer literature a theoretical validity, and also because, by logical extension of this, the imprecisions of literary word usage could be tightened. Freud himself, Ellmann maintains, acknowledged the influence of literary works on his discoveries about the psyche, yet at the same time was suspicious of literary works for what he believed to be their repression and cover up of reality. The area of literary biography was especially sensitive to the challenge offered by this new psychology since, together with the information derived from documents and reminiscences, the principal source of information for biographers was surmise based on the written works of the subject him/herself. Psychoanalysis used in biography would put writers through a rigorous scrutiny, noting aberrations and concealments, and including details that could at best be irrelevant and at worst petty and humiliating. Psychological biography consequently had a mixed reception by writers such as T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, and by Oscar Wilde who famously said that biography 'adds to death a new terror, and makes one wish that all art were anonymous' (p. 468). Freud claimed that biographers had to tie themselves up with 'lies, concealments, hypocrisies...', adding that if they told truths, these would be unbearable. Yet at the same time, Freud acknowledged that his case histories were close to biography,

except that the temporal aspect is not present. As far as he was concerned, the linear past was irrelevant and what mattered was the imaginative past. In the unconscious, fact and fantasy are not easily distinguishable - a point of view which relates well to the considerations on truth, reality and fiction discussed earlier.

In summation of these points, Ellmann valuably attempts to isolate the features of modern biography, and the debt owing to Freud. Because the biographer conceives of himself as inside, not outside, the subject's mind, there results a heightened sensitivity, where the facts do not necessarily speak for themselves. In fact, Ellmann goes on to point out that Freud tended to see outside evidence, for instance letters, as incomplete or even duplicitous sources. Similarly, interpretation of a subject's acts as either virtues or vices is fraught with uncertainty for post-Freudian biographers; Freud showed how we may repress a wish by doing the exact opposite of it, and so the modern biographer recognizes that every motive is really a multiplicity of motives, many of them in conflict. Moreover, because in modern biography everything is seen as relevant, and an ahistorical unconscious constantly obtrudes into the historical layers of the mind, the chronological nineteenth century view of biography is seen as inadequate. For Freud, the phenomenon of 'deferred action' may reveal hitherto supressed parts of the self, so the idea of the unity of the self has to be called into question by the biographer as well.

Thus the contribution of Freud to modern biographical method is a complex one. On the one hand, the complexities of the human personality have been underlined; and on the other, there are the uncertainties of interpretation of these complexities. What is made clear thanks to Freud, however, is that the filtering of these complexities through an alien consciousness is a necessary process.

In his investigation into where sociocultural psychology lies within the paradigms shaped by the humanities and by science/nature, Kozulin (1998) quotes both the essentially interactive nature of any psychological situation, and the fact that the very existence of the processes studied by psychology often depends upon the irreversible changes that are occurring in the clients' minds, to emphasise the humanistic model. Taking these ideas further, using the

work of Vygotsky and others, he states that the problem of memory, for example, may be approached in terms of integrating disjointed episodes of human life into a coherent narrative whole, thus following a literary model. Freud himself was an example of how this ambivalence carried over into psychoanalysis, where his mechanistic approach, citing clinical theories in scientific language, conflicted with his treatment through semiotic analysis followed by restoration through the spoken word - the 'talking cure'.

Kozulin's ideas take on relevance for auto/biography in his discussion, based on the ideas of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, of what he calls the 'Life as Authoring' approach of psychology using the literary model mentioned above. In this analogy, all human conduct is perceived as authoring, and the emerging self may be seen as the author of the literary work. Human thoughts, acts and intentions may also be conceived of as a potential text. The text is the unmediated reality, the 'primary given', and may be turned into something that is 'developing' and not simply 'given', through the tool of human language. The author's personality does not appear in the work, nor is he/she one of the characters either, even in a first-person narrative. Present in the text and yet not a person in the text, the author emerges only in the totality of the text as a capacity, an energy.

At this point Kozulin explains an important point that Bakhtin makes when describing how autobiography helps in the 'construction' of the self, and which he calls the 'surplus of vision' of the author. An author can usually 'live into' a character's horizon, then return to his own privileged position outside the text; in this way the character becomes complete, and the work is aesthetically finished. In autobiographical writing, the author cannot 'return', since he/she does not have any 'surplus of vision' in respect to him/herself, and so the autobiographic narrative becomes a personal document rather than a work of art. Similarly, the author's 'surplus of vision' can allow for temporal encompassing, for telling the complete story of a character or a real other's life; the autobiographical individual, on the other hand, cannot experience his own life as temporally finished and aesthetically accomplished.

## THE LITERATURE REVIEWED: READER-RESPONSE THEORY

Ideas about Reading Narrative

Benton (1992) quotes Langer (1953) when he states that narrative is a ' primary act of mind'. Narrative, or 'storying', shapes each day, organizes individual consciousness and enables communication with others. Moreover, for children, stories and poems are a most powerful means of learning about language. Underpinning Benton's work here are the views of the reader-response theorists, about whom more later. Benton's particular importance from the point of view of possible connections between narrative and biographical studies is his critique of fiction reading, or what goes on when fiction is read, in this case when it takes place in school. He identifies ten paradoxes about the nature of reading fiction, as follows.

He suggests that the reader of a story detatches him/herself from the world around and becomes 'lost' in a book, a committed participant; and yet at the same time remains a spectator.

The second paradox concerns what Coleridge calls the 'willing suspension of disbelief', where the reader edits and extracts what he/she chooses from the illusory world and the actual world, varying his/her attachment to each as the story progresses.

Thirdly, there is the paradox concerning the individual and singular nature of a reading experience, but which is at the same time a cooperation between the reader and the writer, and which is at each reading a participation in a unique textual performance.

The fourth paradox embraces similar ideas, where the text is what Benton calls a monologue needing decoding but at the same time a dialogue between author, narrator, characters and reader.

Fifth, the process of reading a story is both an active and a passive activity, where the reader is actively engaged in making meanings, yet at the same time is a passive recipient of the 'secondary world' as described in paradox one.

The creation of this 'secondary world' features in paradox six, as this creation, or rather re-creation, of a story involves effort; yet at the same time reading a story is recreational.

Paradox seven deals with the fact that each rereading of a book is a unique experience, where the nature of the reader's imaginative participation changes as he or she finds different things on each rereading, and yet the book has not changed, the same words are still in the same order.

In paradox eight Benton calls upon the ideas of I A Richards involving 'approximate understanding' and 'essential omission'. In all readings the reader abstracts, or takes into account only some of the possibilities of words' meanings; yet at the same time there exists a complementary process of filling in from the reader's own imagination in order to complete meaning.

During the reader's experiencing of the secondary world of the book there are triggered various unpredictable streams of impressions, similar to the 'stream of consciousness' ideas of novelists such as James Joyce or Virginia Woolf. But there exists a paradox in that the reader has a need for coherence, form and pattern in the story which conflicts with the disordered effects of the streams of impressions.

Paradox ten deals with the twin processes of retrospection and anticipation which oscillate inside the head of the reader of the story as he/she constructs the narrative.

Benton in his summary above touches upon some of the principles set down by various reader-response theorists, as will become clear later.

It is useful to look briefly at Benton's development of the concept of the secondary world in terms of its location, structure and content, and the viewpoint that brings it into existence, since this area is explored more fully by the response theorists, and this forms an introduction to their ideas.

Benton explains that the 'secondary world', a phrase first used by Tolkein, exists in a limbo, a theoretical 'space between' the author or reader and the text. The writer works in a space between the subject and the external world to produce the language of the text. This then forms a literary work which is the external reality to which the reader must respond to form another 'space between' the reader and the world in the text. The world of the text thus occupies a central space.

Where the structure of the secondary world is concerned, Benton envisages a three-dimensional structure involving both space and time. With regards aesthetic response, there are two dimensions, the *psychic level* which conveys the interplay between the conscious and the unconscious, and the *psychic distance*, or the degree of involvement with a work of art, in this case a story. The third dimension, a temporal axis measuring the journey through the secondary world and involving retrospection and anticipation during the process of reading or writing a novel, can be termed the *psychic process*.

At the junction of the three psychic dimensions described above is situated the shifting viewpoint. This intersection is in constant movement as stories are written or read, since the dimensions of the secondary world depend upon the shifts occurring with respect to these axes. As we vary our degree of involvement in and detatchment from the story, the degree of engagement of our conscious or unconscious mind, and our degree of anticipation of what will happen in the story according to what has happened so far, so the shifting viewpoint allows these psychic dimensions to cohere with each other, whilst at the same time it remains securely on the inside of the action.

Where the substance of the secondary world is concerned, Benton discusses the process of imaging. He accepts to some extent Sartre's view that the term 'imaginary world' is a cover-all term and not specific enough, and maintains that the secondary world is composed not of a series of complete, discrete images, but of a series of more or less formed images of unequal importance and clarity that manifest themselves in many different ways during reading or writing.

Insights into the act of reading fiction, in this case the psychological processes involved, are offered by Harding (1962). He attaches importance to the position of what he terms the onlooker, and views the reading of a novel as a process of looking on at a representation of imagined events, or listening to a description of them. This is not to say, however, that this non-participant relation excludes an active evaluative attitude, since the reader/onlooker will inevitably give some sort of attention, and with this comes an interest, and this response almost instantaneously becomes an evaluation. Furthermore, it is Harding's contention that events at which we are mere 'onlookers', in this case those experienced during the act of reading fiction,

come to have a cumulatively deep and extensive influence on our systems of value, and may possibly be more formative than events in which we take part. A detached and distanced evaluation can often be both sharper and broader than that of a participant.

The paradoxes apparent in Benton are present in Harding's argument also. For the onlooker can be both a participant in a story and a spectator, filling a dual role which may be strongly developed or remain at the margins according to the proximity of the demands of real life. From here the reader can pass into the area of what *might* happen, extending the range of human experience and taking it possibly into a social setting, where it may be likened to 'gossip' and everyday narrative. Harding acknowledges the existence of a transitional area between true narrative and fiction, an area occupied by the funny anecdote, for example, where ' the audience's tacit permission is assumed for embellishments and simplifications that enhance the effectiveness of the story.' In this way, fiction is in fact a conventional mode of communication. This same area may be worth considering as one which could embrace the auto/biographical genre, and these ideas link with the ongoing considerations of truth and fiction in auto/biography. The principal area of difference between the act of reading fiction and that of reading auto/biography would seem to lie in the readers' view of the characters of the text. The characters in the auto/biographical text are of necessity 'real', but Harding puts forward a different case for the novel or work of fiction. He maintains that the reader of fiction knows, or rather should know, that there exists a communication of a special sort with the author, and that thereby the personae are not real people with a past or a future, but are part of a convention by which the author proposes and discusses an evaluation of possible human experience.

## The Position of the Reader

The ideas about the dual role of the reader, that of both spectator and participant, referred to above in the work of Harding, feature also in the work of Stanley Fish (1967). This initial attempt to explain his position uses Milton's *Paradise Lost,* where the poet 's narrative strategy is to establish a parallel between the situation in Paradise and that of the reader, so that the reader experiences the same struggle between faith and reason as Adam does, becoming an active participant in the events as well as a critic of his/her own performance. Fish moves on

from this point in his subsequent writings to a consideration of the position of the text in literature, and the part the reader, or a community of readers, have in making meaning; and these writings will be considered with the writings of other reader-response theorists that consider the meaning and significance of the text in literature.

Writing with reference specifically to children's books, Chambers (1977) nevertheless has some pertinent things to contribute to the discussion about what is called 'The implied reader', as he works on the premise that it takes 'two to say a thing', in this case the reader as well as the writer of a text. Moreover, the author in a sense creates an image of himself and of his reader, in the hope that the two creations find complete agreement and thus achieve a successful reading of the text.

Gibson (1950) makes an interesting point about authors and readers. He maintains that as well as the obvious distinction to be made between the 'real' author of a literary work and the fictitious speaker within that work, there is a difference between the 'real' reader and what Gibson calls the 'mock' reader. This latter is remote from the chaos of everyday life, assuming that set of attitudes and qualities which the language of the text asks him/her to assume - sharing, for example, the attitudes and assumed experiences of the characters or speakers; and the ease or difficulty with which the reader accepts or refuses this role has to do with how he/she reads and takes meaning from the text.

In similar vein to Gibson's idea of the 'mock' reader, Prince's (1973) contribution to the debate is to state that just as the narrator in a fiction creation is a fictive creation, so in fact is the 'narratee', or person whom the narrator addresses. There are, he says, a variety of narratees found in fictive narrations, and, moreover, the narratee and the reader are not the same; the narratee is fictive, the reader is real. Take, for example, *A Thousand and One Nights,* where the importance of the narratee is undisputed. Nor, he says, should the real reader be confused with the virtual reader, who enjoys certain desirable qualities, faculties and inclinations; nor with the ideal reader, who would understand implicitly all the nuances and multiple possibilities possessed of a text. The narratee is assumed to possess certain characteristics, such as, for example, knowledge of the language employed by the creator, an excellent memory, and no prior knowledge of characters. He/she may range in classification from being no one in

particular, to being a character in the action; and so on. Prince summarises the narratee's functions thus: he/she is a relay between narrator and reader; helps establish the narrative framework and the character of the narrator; helps to drive the plot and clarify the themes. Thus the narratee helps towards a better understanding not only of the narrative genre, but of all acts of communication.

Reviewing the work of the theorists mentioned in this section, Fish, Chambers, Gibson and Prince, gives some idea of the attention given in reader-response theory to the position of the reader. There are, as has been discussed earlier, similar concerns in the writings of auto/biographical theorists. It is interesting to note at this point the work of Wright (1992), who points out that reader-response criticism does not allow for a *gendered* reader, since she views reader-response as a hermeneutic act, and consequently gender-neutral. In contrast, there is much important feminist writing within the realm of auto/biographical studies. The concept of the connection between hermeneutics and reader-response will be seen in the review of writings by Purves and others.

Reader-Response Theory as Literary Response.

Within the writings of the literary response theorists there are a number of interesting ideas which are of relevance in the consideration of what happens when readers read, and of the relationship between the reader and the text. Purves and Rippere (1968) attempt to investigate the ways in which people write about their reading of works of literature, and come up with the notion of *elements.* These are discrete operations that the writer of a piece of work about literature must draw from to compose his writing. Purves and Rippere divide these elements into four broad categories, based on the relationship of the writer/audience to four areas: the direct interacting of writer and work; the writer's viewing of the work and the author as objects; the writer's relating of the universe portrayed in the work to the universe as the writer conceives it to be; and the writer's judging of the work in relation to the artist him/herself and the context in which he/she functions. From these four relationships can be defined the categories into which the elements fall. The first category, *engagement-involvement,* defines the ways in which the writer of the literary response informs his/her readers of how he/she has experienced the

literary work, in other words his/her reaction to it. The second category, *perception,* deals with the ways in which a person looks at the literary work as an object, which as such is separate from his/her consideration of the world around the writer. Purves and Rippere report an epistemological difficulty when considering the category of perception, asking whether the reader of the literary response should take it that the response refers to the phenomenon itself, the rhythm of a poem, for example, or assume that the reference is to the writer's report of his/her perception. This is a difficulty that remains unresolved in their writings. The third category, *interpretation,* stands in direct contrast to the above, as it is a seeking to connect the work to the world around the writer of the literary response. The essential difference between perception and interpretation is that where the former is a description of the work as the writer thinks it is, and existing apart from the writer's experience of it, interpretation is a means of extracting meaning from the work using prior experience of the universe that he/she knows. *Evaluation* is the last category, and consists of statements about why the writer thinks the work is good or bad, based on either personal or objective criteria and using the elements of the other three categories, engagement-involvement, perception or interpretation.

Elsewhere, Purves (1985) identifies two antipodal positions with regard to response to literature. On the one hand is the theory premised by I. A. Richards that there is a 'correct' reading of and response to a text. On the other there is the idea that the text's meaning is both fragile and indeterminate, and as such must be the personal property of each reader. He refers to the works of other response theorists for fuller debate on the issues here, but what is of interest is his explanation of the concept of schemata, or mental outlines. These may be described as expectations, or predictions that a text is to be understood in a particular way. As a text is read, we project a schema upon the text which is followed by confirmation; but these schemata are, however, progressively refined in a dynamic way as the reading goes on. People acquire these schemata through the experience of hearing or reading texts, and so in this way the texts themselves help to produce readers who read texts in this way, and thus meaning is achieved.

A more developed statement of this position is seen in Culler (1975), with his theory of 'literary competance'. Here he takes the notion of 'linguistic competance', where the reader possesses

an internalised grammar, an implicit knowledge, allowing him/her to assign to sentences a phonological and grammatical structure, through which he/she may interpret them; and claims a similar process for literary works. He maintains that the literary work is read in a particular way, such that it assumes structure and meaning. If someone were unacquainted with literature and unfamiliar with the conventions by which fictions are read, they would be unable to read a literary work as literature in spite of being able to read the words and sentences; they would lack the necessary 'literary competance'. A literary text is:

> ...an utterence that has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated. If other conventions were operative its range of potential meanings would be different. (p. 116)

He is, however, at pains to say that while the experience of literature may be that of interpreting works, the interpretation of individual works is tangential to the understanding of literature as a mode of discourse. Culler goes on to say that authors use this implicit knowledge or competance as well, engaging with a literary tradition and writing within the context of a particular genre or genres; albeit not always with the conscious knowledge that they do so.

Petrosky (1985) makes the point that an interactive process takes place within the reader when he/she responds to a text, and he explains it thus. The features influencing these responses he divides into two broad categories. On the one hand are internal features such as personality, development, expectations and past experiences; and these interact with external features such as culture, texts and instruction to produce the reading of the text.. The ways in which these influences act in conjunction with each other, however, are not always predictable.

The writings reviewed above would make it appear that readers do not approach a text entirely without presuppositions, and there is a complex yet unstated set of rules and structures governing their reading. It is not unreasonable to assume that these rules or expectations will make the reader's reading of an autobiographical text a different experience from the reading of texts from other genres.

The Transactional Theory - Reader and Text.

Rosenblatt (1985) maintains that there is a danger with reader-response criticism of a fixation developing on the personality of the reader, to the virtual exclusion of the text, and she emphasises that all her published work insists upon the importance of both the reader and the text. Her use of the term 'transaction', moreover, is an attempt to eliminate the dualistic overtones suggested by the term 'interaction', used for example by Petrosky, above. For her, the written symbols on a page become a text by virtue of their particular relationship with the reader, who in turn becomes a reader by virtue of his/her relationship with the text, all mediated by a network of past experiences in literature and in life. She maintains that the 'transaction' occurs between the author and the text, or the reader and the text. 'The text' is a set of signs/symbols, from which the reader extracts or evokes 'the work', which is not an object but an event, a lived-through process or experience. The work is never, however, simply a function of the reader. Because the same text may give rise to different works in transactions with different readers, or even the same reader at different times, there is no single 'correct' reading of the text, as the 'New Criticism' advocates would have determined; however, it must be admitted that some readings may be more defensible or complete than others. Indeed, as mentioned above, Rosenblatt warns against over-emphasis on the reader's personality, since above all the discussion should revolve around a literary transaction, a reading process that produces a literary work of art.

Another main thrust of Rosenblatt's argument which it is important to consider here is the difference she identifies between what she calls 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' transactions or readings of a text. She differentiates the evocation of a poem, a novel or a play, from other kinds of reading, but admits that what makes a text aesthetic is not necessarily its content, nor its poetic language, nor its remoteness from real life. In *efferent,* or nonaesthetic, reading, the reader's attention is centred on what information is retained after the actual reading event in the way of information or instruction. In the aesthetic transaction, the reader's attention is focused on what he/she is living through during the reading event, and the literary work comes into being from what the text activates within the reader and what images and feelings he/she synthesises. Because the reader has had to draw on individual past experiences during transaction with the text, he/she becomes a participant, and not simply an onlooker. Following

this evocation come later reflections, or responses to the evocation. Because Rosenblatt considers the literary transaction as a form of human behaviour, she considers it a fruitful area of study from the point of view of any discipline, as long as the reader's active process of evocation of the work is kept central. Transactional reading of the auto/biographical text is therefore a concept that may be of interest here.

Literary Meaning in Reader-Response Theory.

Although Riffaterre (1966) locates meaning within the language of the text, he does assert that this meaning does not exist independently of the reader's relation to it. He maintains that the stylistic analysis of literature can best be achieved by concentrating on those lingustic features of the literary text that have most attracted the reader's attention. The reactions of this reader, a theoretical construct that he terms a 'superreader', help him to isolate the significant features of the text. He identifies two key terms, predictability and unpredictability, whereby the text arouses certain expectations which it then either satisfies or frustrates; and from this unpredictability arises the significance of the text. At no point, however, does Riffaterre allow that the reader's response is contributory to textual meaning; it is simply an indicator of the presence of literary meaning in the text. Meaning for him is a property of the language itself and not of any activities the reader performs.

It lies with other response theorists to provide more satisfactory examinations of the nature of literary meaning, and the different elements that contribute to it. Among the most significant of these is Wolfgang Iser, and what is called the aesthetics of literary reception.

He describes the literary work (1974) as having two poles, the artistic and the (a)esthetic, where the first refers to the text created by the author, and the second to the realization accomplished by the reader. As with Rosenblatt, the literary work is not therefore completely identical with the text, nor with the realization of the text, but comes into existence in a virtual, as opposed to a concrete, convergence. The virtuality of the work gives rise to its dynamic nature, whereby it is the unwrittten aspects of trivial scenes in a text that draws the reader into the action and leads him/her to shade in outlines. This has the effect of giving the text a reality

of its own which in turn influences the effect of the written text. In this way, trivial scenes in a text assume what Iser calls an ' enduring form of life'.

The approach that Iser chooses to adopt to describe this process is that of phenomenological analysis. In one of several descriptions of the process (1974), he takes the sentences that compose literary texts, and refers to these as 'component parts', or 'intentional sentence correlatives', after Ingarden. These sentences, he says, only assume meaningfulness through their interaction. Moreover, the sequences of sentences work together with the reader's imagination to foreshadow and create an expectation of what is to come, a 'pre-intention'. But it must be pointed out that the interaction of correlatives creates not so much a fulfillment of the expectation as a continual modification of it - as a literary text is not an expository one, the reader wants a continually changing horizon.

This continual modification, however, also serves to modify retrospectively what has already been read with anticipation. Whatever the reader reads sinks into the memory, to be evoked later against a different background and evoking hitherto unforseeable connections. But the evoked memory can never reassume its old shape, but comes with new aspects of itself, which in turn influence the new background and arouse more complex anticipations. Thus the reader causes the text to reveal a multiplicity of connections, between past, present and future. This is how readers feel involved in events which seem real even if they are far from his/her own reality. The 'reality' of the world presented in a text in fact becomes a creative process through the coming together of text and imagination, producing what Iser calls the 'virtual dimension' of the text.

From this point, Iser goes on to examine the fact that anticipation followed by retrospection does not always happen with smooth connections, and the text occasionally leaves gaps, 'indeterminacy gaps', which the reader fills in for him/herself thereby excluding other possibilities. This reveals the inexhaustible nature of the text and the dynamics of the reading process. Iser says, 'With all literary texts, then, we may say that the reading process is selective, and the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations.' (p. 55) From this emerges the fact that a second reading cannot be the same experience as the first,

since the perspective will be different; it will not, however, be a 'truer' reading, just a different one. The result of this rereading Iser terms 'advance retrospection'.

Iser then takes several concepts: that of 'picturing' by the reader's imagination, where he/she fills in the 'indeterminancy gaps' in a text; the anticipation and retrospection mentioned above; and the idea that the reader will strive to group together the different aspects of a text into a consistent pattern; and he proposes these as the 'gestalt' of a literary text. This 'gestalt', he says, is in a state of balance against the need for illusion created by the reader's inevitable expectations. But, however, Iser quotes Gombrich's assertion that although the reader must be aware that any experience must be an illusion, he/she cannot watch him/herself having the illusion so must in fact oscillate between involvement in and observation of these illusions. The dynamic of the text depends on the failure to achieve balance here between the polysemantic nature of the text against the illusion experienced, and this leads to other areas of indeterminacy such as shifting perspective, and an interplay of illusion-making and illusion-breaking. The reader seeks continually for consistency in order to make sense of the unfamiliar. But this entails selection, and hence exclusion of some possibilities; and these excluded possibilities assume a reality inasmuch as they are a latent disturbance of the established consistency. To emphasise the latter he quotes George Bernard Shaw: 'You have learnt something. That always feels at first as if you had lost something'.

The point Iser comes to next deals with the question of identification with the text, and he uses ideas from Poulet to develop his argument. Identification, he maintains, is just a description of the relationship with the text, not an end in itself. This is because the reader is taking on the thoughts of someone else and absorbing them into his/her own internal world, and by this internalization of the author, he/she gives that author a potential presence by placing his/her consciousness at the disposal of the work. While the reader is thinking these thoughts of someone else, he/she is still there as a powerful virtual force, and it is the relationship between the 'alien' reader and the 'virtual' reader that makes it possible for the unfamiliar to be understood.

## Considerations of Self and Identity in Reader-Response Theory

As in auto/biographical theory, evidenced in the work of, for example, Stanley and Ricoeur, attempts to determine the place of the subject through examining aspects of selfhood and identity are an area of focus in reader-response writings.

Holland (1980) discusses the term *unity* in literature, and asserts that it is arrived at by the reader identifying a central theme, applicable to one particular person and for a particular literary work; and yet the theme itself is not necessarily unique to either person or literary work. Then, taking the notion of *identity,* he sees here similarly a central theme developed from the life patterns emerging from a primary identity or from subsequent transformations of the individual, this theme a result of the series of potential choices during the life lived. This same identity theme may describe several different people, just as a single literary theme may describe several different texts. In this way, says Holland, *identity* resembles *unity.* Taking the term *text* as meaning simply the words on the page, and the term *self* as one's own person as contrasted with other persons outside oneself, he goes on to define *text* and *self* as data built up through experience and which builds up over time. *Unity* and *identity,* on the other hand, are abstract principles drawn from the experience of *text* or *self.* Consequently, readers of a particular literary work will bring different kinds of external information to bear, seeking out the particular themes that concern him/her, with the result that a different reading of the text occurs, with its own meaning and significance. Holland summarises thus: 'interpretation is a function of identity' (p. 123). In other words, all interpretations express the identity themes of the people making the interpretations. Moreover, because the literary work is interpreted as an individual's wishes or fears, he/she has to re-create from the work strategies for dealing with these, and when this is successfully achieved, then he/she derives from it fantasies.

It is at this point that Holland sees his study of identity and the self in literature as benefitting from a psychoanalytic approach. He says that because the literary work is interpreted by the individual to achieve what he both wishes and fears, he/she has to re-create from the work strategies for dealing with these wishes and fears, and when this is successfully achieved, then he/she derives from it fantasies that give him/her pleasure. But the real question is how readers with widely different personalities, ages, genders, cultures, receive pleasure from the same fantasy; and how works with widely differing fantasy content can appeal to one individual.

The answer rests with the fact that the reader creates from the fantasy within the work a fantasy to suit both his/her own character structure, and the kind of gratification he/she responds to. In a sense the reader re-creates the work in terms of his/her own identity theme, and by doing so in a sense re-creates his/her own identity. Although Holland locates meaning primarily in the reader rather than in the text, there does exist a dualism that regards the text as 'other', *and the text and the interpreting self exist independently of one another.*

In his comments about American attitudes toward the self and whether or not texts have determinate meanings, Michaels (1980) identifies a fear of subjectivity, in that if there were no determinate meanings, then the text could be interpreted as anything the interpreter wanted. So determinate meaning is consequently supposed to come either from the author, from the text itself, or as a function of literary competance - from a community of professional readers. Moreover, the self itself is not independent or free, but like the literary work is a text embedded within a community of interpretation, a system of signs. According to Michaels' model, the self is a function of its interpretive strategies, not free to impose its own subjective ideas and meanings on the text, but restrained by a community of shared standards. The consequent apparent loss of any ability to assume moral responsibility Michaels answers by the assertion that there are in fact no value-free criteria, there is no neutral description of absolute values to be had anyway. Later reader-response theorists as discussed earlier do not hold with this objectively based view of texts, stating instead that meaning is firmly located in the reader and his/her interpretive strategies.

Response as Symbolization.

Bleich (1980) sees literary works as symbols, mental creations. The meaning of the text depends entirely on the proocess of symbolization takng place in the mind of the reader. Initially a simple 'response', it later resymbolizes itself within the interpreting subject into an 'interpretation'. At this point Bleich takes his theory further into an epistomological question, where the individual's response to the literary work, which is purely subjective, becomes a form of knowledge, as determined by negotiation within a community of interpreters. In this way, the production of knowledge moves away from the objectivity of texts, teachers and schools, and

becomes subjective, the responsibility of those who are seeking it. This connection between knowledge of language and literature and the existence of the interpretive community is, for Bleich, due to the fact that pedagogy has an essentially social purpose, and once knowledge has become subjective in this way, a pattern of motives develops for the student to carry out his own pursuit of knowledge.

Fish's (1980) version of the 'interpretive community' is more extreme than Bleich's. He moves beyond the idea that an individual's judgements are a function of the assumptions of the group he/she belongs to, with its sign systems and social constructs. Meaning, he maintains, is what happens to the reader as he/she responds to authorial intentions as realized in the formal text. Indeed, he appears to become more extreme as his argument develops, for there is, he says, no preexisting text to which the reader responds; texts are written by readers, since the author's formal text and the reader's interpretive strategies are inextricably mixed. That is to say, the formal features of a literary work that occasion a particular response are the result of a particular interpretive framework; so it is the framework that creates the data and the response - that, in fact, produces the work. Fish's argument does not, however, mean that there exists nothing to respond to or interpret. He simply says that interpretations are not a response to what the author meant, or what is on the page, but a result of the reader's own interpretive strategies. What appears to be a flaw here is the dichotomy of a self that is independent and responsible for its own choices, yet at the same time is constituted by a set of communal, shared interpretive categories. Fish himself admits to his theory being 'just one more interpretation'.

**RELEVANT ASPECTS OF NARRATIVE THEORY**

Narrative theory occupies a position within literary theory such as to have bearings on both auto/biographical and reader-response theories.

At the heart of narrative theory lies the basic human need to tell stories, and the fact that these stories require a plot with a beginning or initial situation, a middle that incorporates some sort of change, and an end with a suitable resolution that has some bearing on the beginning. Plot is described by Culler (1997) as working from one of two angles: either as a process of shaping events on the part of readers and writers to make them into a comprehensible story; or as something that is itself fixed, but presented and shaped in different ways by various narratives . The plot or story is then presented to readers within the framework of the text, and at this point the presentation may be termed the 'discourse'.

Biographies and autobiographies have as their base stories, which in this case are narrative accounts of lives lived. They exhibit the same features as all stories with, as outlined above, a beginning, a middle and an end, and are set firmly within the structure of the text., presented through the medium of discourse. As Denzin (1989) points out, these auto/biographies, which he calls *life stories, self stories* or *personal experience narratives,* take on a plot or storyline that exists independently of the narrator.

From the above observations on the basic structure of narrative within the theory of narrative, it is possible to move on to considerations of who is telling these narratives, and how. There is, firstly, a narrator for every story. This narrator may be a character within the story, either as a protagonist with a main role in the action, a participant with a smaller role, or an observer whose function is not to act but merely to observe. This narrative is then a 'first-person narrative'. Alternatively, the narrator may not be a character in the story at all, and there is reference in the third person only, as 'he', 'she', or 'they'. In the case of biographies and autobiographies, a life, or part of a life, is reported. This may be in relation to a particular

experience, whether an everyday one or a life-transforming one, what Denzin (1989) calls an 'epiphany'; or a longer-term account. They are narrated either by the individual in question in the first person, who becomes both subject and author, or by another narrator in the case of biographies, which is a third person narration.

Moving on from simply discussing who is the narrator, it may be seen that the narrative voice in stories is often a polyphonic one, and different voices are used at various times in the discourse. A narrative may see events through the consciousness of a child, either using the language of a child or using adult language to report the child's perceptions. In his memoir *Angela's* Ashes (1996), for example, Frank McCourt describes his brother's funeral with the understanding of a four year old child:

> They put Oliver in a white box that came with us in the carriage and we took him to the graveyard. They put the white box into a hole in the ground and covered it with earth...I thought that if you're a man you can cry only when you have the black stuff that is called the pint. (p.76)

Sometimes the narrator speaks with an authority that the reader accepts until the text indicates otherwise. The narrator may give clues during the telling of the story that he/she is unreliable and does not share the values of the author and, by implication, the reader. In Swift's *A Modest Proposal,* where he suggests the consuming of superfluous babies as a cheap alternative to turkey at Christmas, the audience is asked to assume a number of roles. This audience has firstly to be one that listens to the argument, albeit with objections, but acknowledges its cogency and power; secondly, it takes the argument seriously, at face value; thirdly, the audience is one that sees the work as an ingenious masterpiece of narrative construction. An instance of the various roles that the audience might be asked to fit is found in a modern novel, John Fowles' *The Collector* (1963). Here, the protagonist continuously justifies his increasingly outrageous actions, to the growing disquiet of his readers, and with the result that upon the climactic death of his victim the disgust and horror of the reader is actually the greater because he/she has been prepared for, and in effect coaxed towards, this point. In a similar way, the narrator may discuss the telling of the story, exhibiting a deliberate self-

consciousness and lack of self-confidence. The elderly narrator of L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* spends much of the first chapter discussing his state of mind and the uncertainty which has brought him to the confession of an early tragedy which has effectively ruined his life and which forms the substance of the rest of the novel. These narrative strategies, by causing the reader to oppose or change their earlier opinion of the narrator, succeed in breaking the illusion set up in response to original interpretations, thus confirming the act of reading as an essentially recreative process. Other narrative techniques include the deliberate limitation of knowledge, where something which is recognisable to the reader either at the time or later, is described objectively and without apparent understanding by the narrator, or the character whose viewpoint we share. William Golding describes graphically the launching of a huge rock at the fugitive hero Ralph in his novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954):

> Something boomed up on the red rock , then the earth jumped and began to shake steadily, while the noise as steadily increased. Ralph was shot in the air, thrown down, dashed against branches. At his right hand, and only a few feet away, the whole thicket bent and the roots screamed as they came out of the earth together. He saw something red that turned over slowly as a mill-wheel. Then the red thing was past and the elephantine progress diminished towards the sea. (p. 215)

In contrast, there can be omniscient narration, where the narrator has unlimited knowledge, appearing to be an almost God-like figure. These ideas link to more detailed considerations on the subject of viewpoint, and are discussed subsequently in this chapter. In biography or autobiography, the author claims an authority over the life that is being written about through the very conventions that structure the telling of the story in the first place. Yet at the same time the author as narrator of this type of narrative is present in the text only through the conventions of this type of writing, and in fact, as Denzin (1989) tells us, both author and subject are present in the text only through the social context, or absence of it, around the subject. It is not the person, the subject, that is at the centre of the auto/biography, but the set of personal experiences, including other people or events, that may or may not have a place in the text; the subject, and the authorial intention for him/her, are present through the

phenomenon of *difference,* to use Derrida's phrase. Questions of authorial voice will be discussed at greater length when considering narrative identity.

As far as the 'when' of a narrative is concerned, most stories are told from a point after the final events in the narrative have occurred. More unusually, the narration may be situated at the time the events occur, as they unfold, or in sections just after new happenings take place. Conventionally, biographies and autobiographies are told as the narrator looks back on the entire sequence of events, often across many years and usually in chronological order. This happens irrespective of the verb tense, present and/or past, in which the text is written. Nevertheless, the narration in auto/biographies is allowed to slow down with great detail or to speed up, and detailed 'scenes' may be described before a jump of years to what the narrator considers to be the next significant point. In McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes*, for example, the first four years of his life occupy nearly a hundred pages of a book of three hundred and sixty two pages overall; whereas the penultimate chapter begins 'I'm seventeen, eighteen, going on nineteen...' Moreover, autobiographies may report word for word lengthy conversations that happened years, even decades ago - which will be an interesting feature to consider when looking at standards of auto/biographical truth The importance of time within auto/biographical method will also be subsequently discussed at greater length.

Narrative theory has features that form an important part of both reader-response theory and auto/biographical theory where reading and response to the text in order to achieve the narrative is concerned. When a reader engages successfully with a text, he/she assumes a dual role, that of passive spectator and committed participant. The former, as Harding (1962) observes, has the advantage of formulating for the reader his/her systems of interest and reflection, and influencing his/her sense of values, whilst at the same time permitting that degree of detachment necessary . The latter allows a most compressed yet vivid human experience to take place, but one that is untrammelled by reality and allowing consequences to be discussed and reflected upon. According to Harding, all forms of narrative invite the reader to be an onlooker:

> Between true narrative and fiction there exist...transitional techniques such as the traveller's tale and the funny anecdote in which the audience's tacit permission is assumed for embellishments and simplifications that enhance the effectiveness of the story. True or fictional, all these forms of narrative invite us to be onlookers joining in the evaluation of some possibility of experience. (p. 63)

Taking this argument, it may be seen that when we consider to what extent the reader of a biography or an autobiography is a committed participant or a passive spectator, debates about the 'truth' or not of the text, a topic discussed more fully elsewhere, are not significant; what matters is how a narrative achieves meaning, and this happens in a similar way whatever the form of narration and structure of the text. What is important when reading is maintaining an oscillation between involvement with and observation of what Iser (1980) calls the 'illusion'. Oscillation, and not achieving, a balance of the two states is necessary to the dynamism of the operation, for it is expectations, and the shattering of these, that creates the most ambitious experience of the meaning of the text.

There are interesting points concerning the narrative aspect of reader response to to the text to be examined in the writings of Rosenblatt (1985), when she sets out what she calls *The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work.* Her use of the word *transaction* as opposed to *interaction* reflects her feeling that the reader and the text are not two separate entities interacting, but that each becomes what it is, reader or text, by virtue of its relationship with the other. The term *transaction* is itself a reflection of the network of past experiences, both in literature and in life, previously experienced by the reader. The literary work is not so much read as lived-through or experienced - 'evoked'; moreover, the same text may be read differently by different readers, or even by the same reader at different times. However, the function of the text is not merely to promote memories and associations in the reader; there exist different reading events, termed by Rosenblatt *efferent* and *aesthetic* transactions. *Efferent* reading describes instrumental reading, perhaps, of instructions or recipes, where what is important is what is retained after the reading event. *Aesthetic* reading, on the other hand, focuses on what the reader is experiencing during the reading-event, and it is during this

aesthetic transaction that the literary work comes into being. Using the ideas expressed above about the literary work, it may be seen that the reader of an autobiographical text experiences an aesthetic transaction when he/she evokes the text. Not only does the reading of the life experiences of another promote reflection by the reader on his/her own experiences, but these experiences are evoked and brought to the text by that reader, and in this way the meaning of the work, that is itself the work, is brought into being.

Indeed, Iser (1980) uses the ideas of Ingarden to examine how the world presented in literary texts is constructed, and how meaning is made. Iser explains that the sentences that link up to form complex units of meaning to give rise to the literary work form 'intentional sentence correlatives'. By this he means that statements made or information conveyed in a sentence is already qualified, and aims at something beyond what the sentence actually says. These statements are indications of something that is to come, 'pre-intentions', the structure of which is foreshadowed by the content of the sentence. Moreover, as sentence follows sentence, expectations are not actually fulfilled, but instead are continually modified. In fact, the reader does not want in a literary text the kind of fulfillment found in an expository text, but instead demands a continually changing horizon. As well as this anticipatory effect, because the reader is continually modifying and changing the connections between past, present and future, there is an element of retrospection as the reader recreates the background. It is in this way that reading becomes a creative process. As whatever the reader reads sinks into his/her memory, it becomes foreshortened, and may be later evoked again and set against a different background, to make previously unforseen connections. But the memory is not the same as it was originally, for this would mean that memory and perception are the same thing. So there emerge new aspects of that original memory, which affect the new background, which in turn may in a similar way affect another new background. In this way more complex connections again are established between past, present and future, as a result of the reader's mind working on the text. It is in this way that a reader can feel involved in events which seem real to him even though they are very far from his own reality.

Where autobiography is concerned, a similar phenomenon may be seen to take place, where the reader does his/her own constructing, reconstructing and evaluating. Smith (1994) likens the reading of autobiography to the process of historical inquiry. To the historical records of a something 'out there' that has happened in the past, are brought by the historian questions, values, beliefs and life experiences, both professional and personal. These serve, as do Iser's 'intentional sentence correlatives', to continually change the horizon. As the life unfolds in an autobiography, or even a biography, and new information is imparted by the writer, the reader continually reconstructs that life from what he/she has already made of the work. In this way, just as Iser's readers accept the reality of a situation divorced from their own experience and take on the reality of the literary work, so the reader of auto/biography enters into the reality of the subject's life.

So the position of the reader when reading narrative is of significance when looking at both auto/biography and reader-response theory. The place of the narratee is of particular interest. In fact, the power of the narrative often depends upon how effectively the narratee has been set up to receive the narration, as Prince (1973) maintains. During the stories told in *A Thousand and One Nights,* for example, there exists the unspoken knowledge that if the story told by Scheherazade, who at the same time is the heroine of the overall story, does not please the caliph, to whom her stories are addressed, then she will be executed. The eponymous hero/storyteller of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* launches into a narrative the power and intensity of which is achieved through the contrived framework of the spellbound 'one in three' who is compelled to listen with a horrified fascination as the Ancient Mariner directs his story at him:

> He holds him with his glittering eye -
>
> The Wedding Guest stood still,
>
> And listens like a three years' child:
>
> The Mariner hath his will.

> The Wedding Guest sat on a stone:
>
> He cannot choose but hear...

Although it can be argued that the position of the narratee/reader in auto/biography is less committed than in other genres, nevertheless reader-response theory lends arguments for the idea that the reader, in this case of auto/biography, is an active participant in the process of making meaning. Gibson's (1980) remarks about what he terms the 'mock reader' (1980:1) are of interest. The reader of any text has to assume a set of attitudes and qualities which the language of the text asks him/her to assume, and in this sense is recreated by the language to become a modification of him/herself. Only in unsuccessful books will the reader refuse to engage with the text, when the author fails to make the mock reader an acceptable creation. In auto/biography as much as with any work of fiction, the reader will need to take on this role in the mock world of the literary experience.

The principle of the 'active participant' having been established in the case of both reader-response theory and auto/biography, Rosenblatt's (1980) exposition of her transactional theory leads to further interesting links between the two. In her discussion of 'what the reader brings' to a text, namely a fund of raw materials such as memories and life experiences, Rosenblatt points out that the reader has to select and organize these experiences. With this selection there emerges, through a natural progression, what I A Richards (1943:93) calls 'essential omission', where in order to arrive at meaning much must be left out by the author, according to the nature of the text; and, moreover, there follows the complementary process of 'filling in' from the imagination. Iser (1980) employs the the metaphor of the stars and constellations to illustrate this process, where of two people gazing at the same collection of stars, one may see the image of a plough, the other will make out the shape of a dipper. It is through these inevitable omissions, he says, that a story gains its dynamism. Because the reader fills in the gaps in his/her own way, the full potential of the text can never be exhausted, and any text is 'infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations' (p. 55). Laurence Sterne even leaves a blank page in his novel *Tristram Shandy* for the reader to fill in for him/herself! More important

still is the full realization of the part the imagination plays in all this. The picturing of something in the mind's eye can be seen as as a rehearsal for how it will feel when the expectations of seeing something are fulfilled. The written part of a text indeed gives the reader the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that enables the reader to picture things. Without these gaps in the text, what Iser calls indeterminacy 'gaps' (p.55), the reader is not able to use his/her imagination; and only by activating the reader's imagination can the author hope to involve him/her and so realize the intentions and meaning of the text. A useful illustration of this is the picturing of the hero of a novel, where the reader synthesises the information given in the text to achieve a rich and intensely private picture. When the novel is turned into a film, the infinite possibilities offered by the written text are cancelled by the brutal narrowing down to one immutable perception, the imagination is put out of action and the reader feels cheated, often resorting to the response of 'that's not what he/she looks like!'.

Auto/biographical method occupies an interesting place within these theories of omission and indeterminacy, and to begin a discussion of this it is useful first to look again at ideas on deconstruction put forward by Derrida (1972/81), already mentioned in relation to narrative technique. He maintains that words only ever function with reference to other elements, that words are only made up of *difference*, existing on the basis of the trace within them of other elements within the sign system. Consequently, the subject-centred text written in the belief that there are real subjects in real texts with real meanings, is a 'fallacy of presence'. It follows therefore, as previously pointed out, that the assumption that the auto/biography centres the person at the heart of the life story that is told is misleading; the centre exists somewhere else, in a set of experiences, in oppositions and conflicts, or other characters that surround the fictitious centre. Similarly, the importance attached to biographical documents and material, what Denzin calls 'life documents' (1989: 7), and to the social context surrounding these objects, is an attempt to locate the subject and give him/her a presence that denies the reader the opportunity of picturing and imagining through which he/she will achieve meaning. Here, in other words, are the absences and oppositions that relate to the 'essential omissions' and 'indeterminacy gaps' of reader-response theory. It is perhaps extreme to suggest that the idea

of social context and the use of biographical materials in helping to realise the subject in auto/biographies be abandoned; but the approach demonstrated in response theory can help to minimalise the materialist, subject-centred readings of auto/biographies and to replace them with open-ended versions that leave the work unconsensual and inconclusive, and consequently free to allow the necessarily multiple versions of the biography or autobiography to come into existence.

Iser's ideas, referred to briefly above, on the virtual and unfixed nature of the work that is brought into existence by the convergence of text and reader, also have a bearing on auto/biographical method. Because it is the virtuality of a literary work, together with the indeterminacy gaps, that gives rise to its dynamic nature, then it is important that the work be conceived in such a way as to engage the reader's imagination just enough into working things out for him/herself, but not so much as to strain the reader's patience. Biographies and autobiographies need to obey these literary boundaries, and it is an unnecessary and at the same time an impossible task to relate every last detail of a subject's life. Nor in fact would this be desirable even if it were possible, since the work is far more than a mere factual retelling in infinitesimal detail. Swathes of time - aspects of which will be addressed later - or events, may be kaleidoscoped or left out altogether, while elsewhere detailed conversations are recounted ostensibly word for word at a distance of many years, as pointed out earlier in this chapter. This raises questions of truth and fiction, which it is also important to address further. In auto/biography equally as much as in other literary genres, outlines are provided for the reader to shade in to help provide reality, and it is the unwritten aspects of episodes, and indeed the spaces between episodes, that provide implications that encourage the reader to endow them with far greater significance than than they would otherwise have. It is thus that the work begins to achieve meaning, and to acquire what Iser terms 'an enduring form of life' (1980: 52). Iser (1971) makes the point that the amount of indeterminacy achieved by a text does not depend on the size of its theme. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* attempts to paint a picture of Victorian society, whereas Joyce's *Ulysses* attempts to portray a single ordinary day; and yet Joyce achieves an almost unbelievably indeterminate text, in spite of using a huge number of

descriptive and narrative devices. His abrupt alternation between direct and indirect speech, authorial report, first person narrative, interior monologue, and so on, leave a large number of gaps for the reader to fill in. Thus it appears that the scope of the auto/biographical text does not affect the indeterminacy achieved within it.

So far, aspects of narrative theory that deal with what constitutes narrative, with some of the implications of the role of the narrator, and how the reader engages with a text to create the work, have been discussed in terms of how auto/biographical method relates to reader-response theory. Another aspect of narrative theory that is a progression both towards and from these ideas needs examining here, namely the nature of what is created when the text written by the author and that read by the reader are brought together to create the literary work.

In a sense, what we are looking at here is a theoretical, virtual space, and one moreover that is different in its nature for the reader and the writer of a text, as well as for every individual reader of that text. It is in that space that the literary work comes into being - the *transaction* described by Rosenblatt (1985) and referred to earlier is seen to take place, but the process involves a relationship with the author of the text as well as the reader and the text itself. The end result of these relationships is a filling of the space with what amounts to the meaning of the text. The reader him/herself has created, or constructed, the resulting work, and the particular way in which this construction happens, and the way in which the experiences that the reader has had influence his/her creation, is discussed elsewhere. At this point we may look again at the process whereby the reader takes leaps of the imagination to make connections and juxtapositions between ideas in a text to construct the work. T S Eliot's poem *The Wasteland* consists of a series of scenes, the symbolism of a number of which the poet relates in his *Notes* to a particular book on the Grail legend, although the connections may appear to the reader to be tentative. Other scenes, for example the conversation in the pub at the end of part II, are neither referred to in the notes, nor do they appear to bear any clear relation to any other

scene, or to the poem as a whole. The reader has to complete analogies and relate scenes in his/her imagination.

Autobiographies and biographies are described by Denzin (1989) as expressions of experience shaped by the cultural and social conventions of the life lived from beginning to end. In a sense, this life is actually given meaning by the narrative that tells its story and the cultural convention that surrounds it. But Denzin also makes the point that the conventionalised expressions of experience of a life offered by auto/biographical source materials can usually offer only different or incomplete expressions of experiences as versions of a person. The meaning of the life is achieved when the reader engages with the author's text, and these meanings are only ever '...different expressions of the same (and different) experiences which are attached to the same (and different) versions of the same person.' Thus '...we never get to the bottom of a life' (p. 33). So auto/biographical texts experience the 'indeterminacy gaps' described in reader-response theory.

Mentioned earlier in connection with both the role of the narrator and the gaps left in the literary work for the reader to fill in, is the question of viewpoint in narrative. Chambers (1977) offers a range of examples, quoting Enid Blyton's rather crude taking of sides, children against adults, having fun at their expense, in her *adventure* series, her *mystery* series, and her *famous five* series. The reader is manipulated in such a way that at times he/she is privy to information the characters do not know, at other times things are witheld from the reader that, it turns out, the characters knew all the time. Chambers, however, quotes another example that does succeed in adding a further layer of complexity to the idea of viewpoint, that of Richmal Crompton's *William* books. Here the author manages to add the element of irony to the stories, which goes some way towards avoiding the somewhat patronising effect of reader manipulation that is achieved by the cruder methods of Blyton described above. Here the reader is not simply either told or left in ignorance of how he/she should be thinking, but is left free to engage with the text via the humorous irony that is offered, as a sort of area of indeterminacy, an indeterminacy 'gap':

"Consumption of the lungs isn't at all uncommon in wild birds, nor is cancer, nor the other diseases we suffer from ourselves."

"Crumbs!" said William. "Fancy that! Do they have stomach-ache too?"

"I believe so."

"Gosh! I'm jolly sorry for them, then. I've had it an' it's rotten.'

William took up the diagram to study it more closely and uncovered another one underneath.

"What's the other one? he asked.

"That, said Mr Redding, "is the diagram of a sparrow's stomach."

"Corks!" ejaculated William in an awestricken voice. "It doesn't look as if it could get inside a sparrow." (*William the Film Star)*

Another example quoted by Chambers is that used by Iser (1978) when he writes about Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, specifically the scene when the starving Oliver has the courage to ask for more. The author comes down heavily on the side of the beadle and his establishment, sharing with them their indignation at Oliver's unreasonable request, but voicing his support in such a way that the reader absolutely has to reject it. We are not shown the boy's inner feelings here, the incident is seen through the eyes of his tormentors, and the expressed viewpoint dramatically effects the oppositional stance from the shocked reader. This shameless manipulation of the reader's expectations and allegiancies results in a reader commited both emotionally and intellectually to negotiation with the author, via such things as the plot and characters, to achieve the meaning of the work.

Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* is an example of the complex manipulation of reader viewpoint that is sometimes achieved in fiction. We appear never to be allowed to forget that the protaganists are a group of small children:

' He... laughed delightedly again and stood on his head. He turned neatly on to his feet, jumped down to the beach, knelt, and swept a double armful of sand into a pile against his chest. Then he sat back and looked at the water with bright, excited eyes.'

And yet parallel to this there runs a view of the boys as heroic figures, even superhuman in the classical sense:

> He spun on his heel, centre of a bewildered circle of boys.
>
> 'I got you meat!'
>
> Numberless and inexpressible frustrations combined to make his rage elemental,and awe-inspiring ...Jack looked round for understanding and found only respect.

Then, as the novel reaches its climax, the children referred to as 'savages', the hero Ralph 'screaming, snarling, bloody', fleeing in terror for his life, the reader is stopped short with the arrival of a naval officer, and sees the savages once again as 'little boys', and their heroic chief described thus:

> The officer inspected the little scarecrow in front of him. The kid needed a bath, a haircut, a nose-wipe and a good deal of ointment.

As a result of all this, the full extent of the reader's innocent complicity in his/her own manipulation is revealed in the officer's unwittingly ironic comment, 'Fun and games'.

The above is an example of what Benton (1992) calls the 'shifting viewpoint', and he points out that the reader's viewpoint is constantly changing in respect of various dimensions of the text. These dimensions, such as involvement with and detachment from the world of the story, whether conscious or subconscious, and anticipation of what is going to happen or retrospection of the story so far, are situated along axes on continuums, and as they shift , so does the viewpoint, based as it is at the point where the axes interlock. Iser (1978) expresses this as a series of 'changing viewpoints' of the text, each necessitating further perspectives, which in turn are shifting. He identifies these perspectives as that of the narrator, the characters, the plot and the reader. As the reader's viewpoint moves between these perspectives, those arriving form a theme for the work, those moved away from become a horizon, and this constant journey, involving the making of connections, is the gap-filling exercise referred to earlier.

Scott (1998) quotes Gadamer's description of the interweaving of the agendas of the person and their biographer as a 'fusion of horizons', and regards biography as the act of exploring the perspectives and frameworks of the two. Scott therefore maintains that the biographer brings to the text a set of presuppositions, which are necessarily ephemeral and partially constructed, about their own life, and that this serves to inform the perspective on the life being researched, as set out in the work. As a result of the account being constructed by both the biographer and the subject, the past of both individuals is what constructs the account - hence the term 'auto/biography'. The result of all this is that the perspectives and viewpoint emerging in a biography are conforming to particular agendas, those of biographer and participant - although, of course, a biographer will, one assumes, negotiate and consult about this with the subject. Nevertheless there may be seen to exist in biography the positioned text, imparting a particular viewpoint, which has resulted as much from the author's own story as from that of the subject, and this is in keeping to some extent with reader-response theory outlined above.

## RELEVANT ASPECTS OF 'TRUTH' AND 'FICTION'

'Truth' and 'fiction' are notably problematical concepts in the area of literary theory, and prompt such questions as, what is the *meaning* of a literary text; how relevant to this meaning is the author's intention; can a reader understand anything objectively, or is all understanding dependent on his/her own context? Eagleton (1983) quotes the ideas from Gadamer's central study, *Truth and Method,* which maintain that the meanings of a text can never be exhausted by the intentions of its author, since as it passes from one cultural context to another, new meanings are found in it which were never intended by the author nor discovered by its original audience. Moreover, it is this very instability of interpretation that gives it the particular character that it has.

Lamarque and Olsen (1994) point out the error in assuming that because literary fiction is in one way or another divorced from reality and from 'serious intent', it can therefore have no bearing or influence on the development and ideas of a culture. On the contrary, it may be that because literary fictions do not necessarily have any epistemological basis, they are not therefore restricted to telling what truths are currently fashionable, and may therefore contribute more successfully to the development of ideas within a culture. It is in a sense simply that 'truth' as such is not a relevant term to use in relation to fiction. A fictional character in a book, for example, is untrue in the sense of being *unreal;* a fictional statement to the police is untrue in that it is *false.* An actual place, person or event may appear in a work of fiction, and the resulting references to these and the development from them may or may not be true to their existence outside the work. Similarly, true or false propositions may be thought up by a reader as a result of reading a literary fiction. The point at issue here is not whether there are truths embodied, in whatever form, in works of fiction, but whether the expression of truths has any real bearing on the value of fictional literature.

At this point, we may look at the distinction between *content* and *mode of utterence,* where the content of an utterence may be fictional even though its mode of utterence is non-fictional - the illustration of the statement to the police mentioned above, for example; or where non-fictional

events are recounted, either knowingly or believing them to be fictions, in the fictive mode. Thomas Kenneally's *Schindler's Ark,* the story of Otto Schindler's saving of thousands of Jews from transportation to concentration camps in the second World War, is an example of the latter.

The cultural practice of storytelling provides the means whereby what Lamarque and Olsen (1996) term *fictive utterence* is made possible. This 'fictive utterence' is strictly governed by the rules of contextual and social practice, and is a collaborative activity enjoyed within a community. It can involve making or telling, and is not restricted to a particular style of fiction. In response to this utterence the audience adopt what Lamarque and Olsen call the *fictive stance* towards the fiction that is told. This again relies on cultural conventions, and upon the audience's acceptance of the storyteller's intention that they indulge in make-believe. The question that arises from fictive utterence and fictive stance is whether texts are non-fiction because their content is not 'made-up'. This is not the same as the question whether something is 'true', because there can be individual sentences which are 'truth' within a work of fiction; Lamarque and Olsen quote the example of the opening sentence of *Anna Karenina* and the discursive essay about whales in *Moby Dick* to make this point. Nor does it matter if the work is accidentally or intentionally true; nor if the work is an actual experience in the author's life, but subconsciously recounted. This question becomes even more complicated when considering such stories as ancient myths and legends. What was non-fiction for ancient Greeks and Romans, for example, has become fiction in contemporary society. These myths may have been initially produced with one set of intentions, but have since been appropriated by the fiction-maker under a different set of intentions, given the change in the social and cultural context of the society in which they are related. So the way this may be dealt with is to see the content of these myths becoming in effect new, separate works in their retelling. An interesting reflection on this is Morrison's (1998) observation that:

> If it were discovered tomorrow that Wordsworth had grown up in Sussex, not the Lake District, *The Prelude* would be no less magnificent, but it wouldn't be the same poem: the understanding between Wordsworth and his readers that it's autobiographically

truthful would have been violated. Non-fiction always implies some such understanding.

Content is fictional if it is described to be as it is by means of a fictive utterence, and by modes of presentation, whether in the form of fictive descriptions or characterisations; in contrast, true things are not dependent upon any kind of utterence, but simply are.

When considering where the position of auto/biography lies within the above ideas, it is important to remember that it is simplistic to regard lives as having factually correct, unchallengable documentary-like features. To this end, Gertrude Stein wrote a fictional autobiography of herself, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* in order to prove that the lives depicted in autobiographies and biographies are as much fictions as fictions themselves. She refused to begin the work with the conventional family history that would assume the significance of a family chronology and tie the work into conventional and sequential beginnings and endings. These ideas echo what T.S. Eliot says in *Four Quartets:*

> What we call the beginning is often the end
>
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
>
> The end is where we start from.

In fact, the author of the auto/biographical text must work from what Denzin (1989) calls 'markers' that reflect key aspects about the life being written about, and he/she has to take these and from them give coherence to the account of the life in question. There are two issues that arise from this.

Firstly, the writer has to take information of very different kinds and mould it all into a complete and meaningful whole. Denzin describes Sartre's relating of his difficulty, when discussing Flaubert's life, of how to use two such vastly different facts as his officially documented birth date and an account of his feelings about art.

The second issue follows from the points made above regarding both Stein and Sartre, and indeed Keneally, where Denzin suggests the existence of various standards of truth in autobiography, including 'fictional' truth, where 'real' truth is contained in 'pure' fiction. As the auto/biographical life is written and unfolds, it affects and changes what is already there, and the life can never be completely told. Moreover, a biography or autobiography can never be

more than a writer's claim to making statements about their own life or that of another, and there is an interaction within the text between the narrative discourse and the life that has actually been led. There is even an argument for stating that auto/biography is always only a series of statements about a third person as he/she was at particular points in the past.

The assertions made above point to the conclusions that it is not possible to create the 'real' subject in an auto/biographical text, but only to present a fictional version of that life within that text. Denzin quotes Elbaz when he states that, 'autobiography is fiction and fiction is autobiography: both are narrative rearrangements of reality' (1987: 1)

Biographical theory, however, holds that there exists a 'real' person who has lived a life with meaning, and that this life may indeed be written about. This idea, known as the *metaphysics of presence* ( Derrida, 1972: 250), is not without difficulty, and the difficulty lies in locating and interpreting this real subject within the substance of the text. For the text operates through the medium of language, and language is inherently unstable, often ambiguous, and in a constant process of change. Figueroa (1998) grapples with this question when he considers the methodology he uses in his discussion of the autobiographical account of the education of an African slave, Olaudah Equiano, in eighteenth century England. He considers what Denzin has to say, outlined above, about the subject of the autobiographical text being simply a fiction, that there exists simply and solely a multiplicity of stories; and how the telling of that life only creates a new 'fiction' about it. But within Denzin's argument Figueroa sees an acceptance of the fact that stories are representations of the lives and experiences that they tell about, and consequently stories and lives are not the same thing. Moreover, he believes in the ultimate referential power of language, and therefore it follows that the accuracy of the autobiography, which is of necessity an interpretation of a person's life, may be judged, through internal or external evidence. Were this not so, then the judging of something to be a fiction would be itself a fiction, and this would result in language itself becoming meaningless and lacking in significance. Figueroa sums up:

> The magic and mystery of language is that although we cannot 'stuff a real-live person between the two covers of a text' (Denzin, 1989: 83), that text can nevertheless in some way actually give us access to that real-life person. (1998: 151)

The psychological value of certain forms of narrative for the human evaluation of the possibilities of experience is discussed by Harding (1962), and is worthy of consideration here for the insight it gives into the relationship between 'true' narrative and fiction. He asserts that it is possible to be a non-participant 'onlooker' at events, imagined or otherwise, not simply to understand them, nor yet to do anything about them, but rather to evaluate them actively. Moreover, this attention does not result in merely a feeling of realization or even relief in the onlooker that similar things did not happen to him/her, but in an extension and modification of his/her systems of value and outlook on life. The consequent evaluation may in fact be both broader and more pertinent than that resulting from an event actually participated in, where closeness to the action may serve only to obscure. Taking this notion further, it is possible to compare what the spectator may do with actual happenings, with his/her reaction to fantasy. Memory, anticipation and other unconscious processes are able to distort what has actually occurred, whereas with fantasy, no matter how bizarre the imagined events, the resulting fears and desires are nevertheless real. The result of all this is the necessity to assign an equally invaluable evaluative role to spectated events, irrespective of whether they are imagined or real. Interesting in Harding's premise from the point of view of auto/biographical writing, are his comments on the importance of the social and cultural situation of the 'onlooker'. The views and opinions of this spectator, or reader where fiction or auto/biography is concerned, are constantly being challenged by the cultural community, whether in the form of what is the expected norm or of the attitudes of actual fellow spectators. This has the effect of 'gossip', whether it is a filling in by others of parts of the narrative missed by the spectator, a conveying of what is expected to be an appropriate attitude, or a consensual supposing of what might or could be. So whether the text is the true narrative of auto/biography, or the imagined form of fiction, there is an unspoken assumption that the story is possibly elaborated or simplified for the sake of effectiveness, and that the desired result is the evaluation of some possibility of experience, regardless of whether the actual story is real or imagined. In fact, imagining by the reader both of a situation and of the emotions, attitudes and sensations associated with the experience, is in effect the same process for fiction and for true narrative. An appreciation of

the distinction between fiction and true narrative is in fact a sophisticated cultural convention that has to be learnt, and the reader will be pleased or disappointed with the fiction depending upon whether it is internally consistent, even though it may not be dealing with real possibilities but with fantasy. Even in modern society there are individuals who cannot accept that popular radio and television series, soaps for instance, are not real life, and their characters not real people but actors. Conversely, and to augment this confusion, the real lives of young 'superstars', entertainment and sports personalities, for example, sometimes appear to be exiotic and far removed from the everyday existence and experience of their fans.

Empathic insight into ways of life beyond the range of the onlooker or reader is another way in which his/her values are helped to be defined, and this applies equally to auto/biography as to fiction writing. For in all of these forms of writing, the spectator may enter imaginatively into some part of a life that he/she has not been able to achieve. This spectator may witness what are to him/her familiar experiences such as disappointment, excitement or challenge, taking place within the heightened context of a more distinguished life than his/her own. In this way, these experiences serve to become one of what Harding calls 'our social possessions', and the reader's everyday life becomes enhanced and more significant as a result. But it is important to see this process as more than simply an entering into the experience of the subjects of the text, whether it be fictive or auto/biographical. As well as imagining what the subject experiences and sharing his/her feelings, the reader/spectator feels *for* the subject, and has feelings *about* him/her, even taking sides for him/her, and again this introduces a 'social' element into the experience.

The main thrust of Harding's premise, then, appears to be that the author offers a text as a form of social communication, the aim of which is to promote an evaluation of possible human experience. To this end, it becomes irrelevant whether the text is true narrative or fiction, or to what extent auto/biography can be 'true' or 'false'.

Another aspect of the idea of the text as social communication, with the consequent blurring of the distinction between 'fiction' and 'auto/biography' discussed above, is indicated by Morrison (1998). 'Narrative non-fiction' and 'the memoir' are forms that have more and more been

replacing the novel when an author's own story is the subject, and the reason for this may be that a 'culture of intimacy', as Morrison calls it, has grown up. As a result, the memoir and the diary, with its overtly candid first-person form, are in vogue. What is even more interesting, is that diaries and other auto/biographical works that are in fact unashamedly fictional, such as Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1997) become long-term best sellers. Grossmith and Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody* (1996), which humourously chronicles the trivialities in the life of the imaginary Charles Pooter, was first published in book form in 1892 and has never gone out of print since. The reason for this is perhaps because the form of the work - confessional, self-communing, and with the air of a personal testimony in the case of the diary or memoir - is what matters to the reader, and not its actual claim to truth. In order to gain this popularity, however, the work has to be written in such a way as to lay this claim to truthfulness and sincerity with some success; for example, in appearing to come straight from the heart and yet maintaining an appropriate detatchment and distance. This exhibits a similarity to the narrative voice in fiction and will be explored further in a later chapter when questions of authorial voice are discussed.

Indeed, it has already been noted earlier in this work that since memoirs and autobiographies depend on memories, when a scene that happened, say, thirty years ago, is recalled in exhaustive detail, complete with dialogue, it is unlikely to be entirely accurate. It is at this point that the reader enters into a contract with the author. As long as, overtly or otherwise, this non-fiction employs consistently the devices of fiction, such as characterisation, suspense, the sense of a beginning, a middle and an end, then the reader will trust that it is at least a kind of truth. But, however, there are unwritten rules at play; illness and death, for example, have to be recounted with devastating accuracy and totally without exaggeration. If insincerity is found to occur here, then the reader-author contract breaks. In summation, what counts is whether the text holds together in its form and structure, in the quality of its story; and in its moral integrity; and the requirement for this is not truth but narrative skill.

Reader-response ideas on indeterminacy in texts have already been discussed when looking at aspects of narrative theory. The concept of indeterminacy also has bearing on 'truth' in texts,

whether they are auto/biographical or purely fictional. It is part of the pleasure of reading fiction to 'fill in' characters and events not explicitely described, and hidden within this there is 'supplementation' (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, p. 89), which is the assumption by the reader that the human beings described are both physically and emotionally like ordinary human beings as far as the reader would imagine their actions and thoughts.

A more complex issue arises here, however, because the exact response of the reader will depend very much on the genre, the historical context or literary tradition of the book in question, which in a sense influences the filling in that takes place. The reader thus constructs the world of the work according to his/her own imaginative reflection on the content, appropriate to a particular type of fiction.

Moreover, in fiction, the fictional world offered is necessarily incomplete in the detail of innumerable features; for example, the weather on a particular day, physical details of a character, and so on. That is not to say that the details are indeterminate; simply that they are determinate in ways of which the reader can have no knowledge. An alternative way of viewing this can be as the existence of a set of possible worlds within the fiction; and this unfolding of events in various ways according to differences in interpretation of detail is a device used by fiction writers. But, however, this does not help when the reader attempts to make an interpretation of the meaning of a particular work or of a character within it; then there has to be some determination and consistency of detail.

Leading on from this discussion of the interpretation and supplementation of detail as a reader response to a fictional work, comes a consideration of the relationship between the mode of telling and the tale itself. The act of story-telling generates intentionality in the content of the fiction, such that the same story told by different story-tellers becomes a different fiction. Even when words are similar in two versions of a story told by different story-tellers, there may be different attitudes, connotatons and values internally shaping the development. The reader's task is to take what is reported and appears as 'true' within the fiction, and to reconstruct the fictional world for him/herself through these narrative filters described above. In this way, some of the literary work may be taken at face value, whereas at other times there may be alternative points of view, unreliable narration, irony, and so on, that have to be recognised and

interpreted. Consequently, it is a matter of assuming that states of affairs in fiction are similar to those in everyday life, unless there are indications to the contrary; generally speaking, in other words, what is true in fiction may be inferred from what is true in life.

Iser's (1971) observations about indeterminacy in literary texts have some bearing on the remarks above concerning fiction texts. Firstly, the literary text does not and cannot deal with an object that exists independently of the text; if it does so, it is merely an exposition of that object. Nor can the text set out aims or purposes, or formulate rules, for in doing so the text achieves a determinacy outside itself. Also, the text can never identify with a reader's own experience, but instead can present attitudes and reactions to the real world, and this will constitute its reality. If the reader has only his/her own experience to help to judge the text, there is always the danger that he/she will either see it as fantastic because it conflicts with his/her own reality, or trivial because it mirrors too closely his/her own. This is what makes the text so hard to verifiy, and it is this that produces a degree of indeterminacy within it.

Where auto/biography is concerned, the issues raised by Lamarque and Olsen above hold equally true. The 'supplementation' described is as necessary, given that there is a truly infinite quantity of tiny details which the author could not begin to fill in for the reader; as mentioned above; these details are not indeterminate, but simply determinate in ways that it is impossible for the author to impart to the reader. What Lamarque and Olsen assert about the relationship of the story and the story-tellers holds true for auto/biography also; that the same life in the hands of different biographers becomes a different life-story, depending on the differing attitudes, values and connotations guiding the narrative development. The reader shapes the life as told through the narrative filters mentioned above and reconstructs it for him/herself.

In the case of the indeterminacy described by Iser above, he suggests that this may be counterbalanced when the subjective norms of the reader help to guide him/her through the text, and the individual experience of the reader may assist in the meeting of the world of the life being described with his/her own familiar world.

Culler (1997) sums up the the above questions on the relationship between 'truth' and 'fiction' by explaining that narrative may be seen as either a fundamental form of knowledge, a way of making sense of the world, or as a rhetorical structure whose effects are delusory. But for the latter to be true there would have to exist alternatively a form of knowledge that is at the same time free of any form of narrative of its own, yet with some sort of independent authority inherent in it. For the very act of exposure of narrative as a rhetorical device free of any epistemological content would itself constitute a kind of narrative. Moreover, where auto/biography is concerned, the remarks used by Denzin (1989) quoted earlier, are relevant: 'autobiography is fiction and fiction is autobiography: both are narrative rearrangements of reality' (1987, page 1). Although the autobiography may be purported to be a fiction, and lives and stories are indeed not the same thing, it is still a representation of the life it tells about. Thus it can both have a claim to knowledge and at the same time be couched in the rhetoric of narrative fiction.

## CONCEPTS OF 'IDENTITY' AND 'SELFHOOD', AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS, WITHIN AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD AND READER-RESPONSE THEORY

The identity and function of the self as subject is the focus of much debate in the area of literary theory; this issue features both in the work of a number of reader-response theorists and in writings about auto/biographical method, and the two areas of theory may be pulled together in a number of ways.

One view of the subject or the self, favoured by postmodernists such as Derrida, is that it can only truly function when it is 'decentred', and what is marginalised is brought into the centre to constitute and, in fact, define the text. In this way, the subject becomes no longer unique in itself, able to control and explain events, but is actually formed by these events. It consequently becomes a product of the thoughts and actions of whatever theory determines it, whether it be the result of socially constructed gender roles in feminist theory, for example, or the product of class position profiting by or profiting from others' labour in Marxist theory, and so on. This leads to further considerations such as whether 'I' am made what 'I' am by circumstances, and whether this subject makes choices and does things as a free agent or has these choices imposed.

Narrative literature invariably concerns itself with how characters define their identities; whether they are defined through past events, through their choices, or through the social forces that act on them. Some characters' identities are defined through birth - a king will always be a king and a peasant a peasant, whatever their fortunes - or a character will change, or his true nature be revealed, during the course of the narrative. In yet another variation of this latter, the character becomes what he/she already was, since the self was, in essence, there all along, and as such was the basis for actions which, paradoxically, bring this true self eventually into being. The novels *The Prisoner of Zenda* and its sequel *Rupert of Hentzau,* written by Anthony Hope, are an example of the use of paradox to define identity. In the novels, a carefree English gentleman impersonates his double, the king of Ruritania, in order to foil an assassination plot.

Along the way, he falls in love with the king's fiancee, and she with him, but he relinquishes their chance of happiness for the good of the state. In the sequel, he is again a hero and has the chance of really becoming the (albeit false) king and rescuing his beloved from an unhappy marriage to the real king, but dies before a resolution is reached. The hero's destiny has been shaped by a combination of personal choices, past events, and social and moral forces.

It can be argued that there is a tension between the depiction and singular portrayal of the literary character as an individual on the one hand, and the presumption that the character's predicament is universal and general on the other. Because the central focus of the novel tends to be on the individual, and the character's individuality, this ideology may neglect the wider social issues that it should be exploring. Are the problems of Emma Bovary, for example, caused by her foolish infatuation with the idea of romance, or the general situation of women in the society in which she lives? Similarly, do the trials and tribulations of Dickens' Oliver Twist take us unequivocally to a condemnation of the structure of Victorian society, or rather does the art of the storyteller engage us totally with the fate of the novel's principal character?

These questions concerning to what extent the 'self' is an individual and to what extent it is of significance only in the context of those around him/her, are particularly relevant where auto/biographical method is concerned. Stanley (1992) is critical about the tendancy of modern biography to focus on the uniqueness and individuality of the particular subject, instead of seeing that subject in social terms, functioning within and deriving its significance from the social context surrounding it. The 'self' resulting from this what Stanley calls 'spotlight' approach, is thus essentialised, the social processes that may have been instrumental in shaping or changing it are discounted, and the 'self' appears to have created itself. Stanley's alternative to this approach is to combine the specific detail characteristic of a biography or autobiography, with both the interplay of a group of lives within the immediate social *milieu*, and the wider social, economic and political context. Stanley sums this up:

> No person is an island complete of itself; and an approach to biography...should recognise that social networks are a crucial means of enabling us to get a purchase on other lives. (1992: 10)

Stanley does emphasise, however, that *all* biography requires biographers making choices where their material is concerned. These are epistemological choices, deciding what counts as 'knowledge' about a subject, resulting in a particular construction of the subject and/or his/her social context; and this choice will of course be dependent upon the biographer's view of the 'self', as indicated above.

Denzin (1989) identifies several forms of self. One he calls the 'phenomenological self', which encompasses the thoughts, ideas and desires of a person as a unique indiviual, with that person as the central point of reference. Here, it is personal experience and interpersonal relationships that connect the self to the world. The 'linguistic self' is where the person directs inner personal and emotional conversations to him/herself, fleshing out the bare personal pronouns 'I' and 'me' with biographical details. Denzin's view of the 'material self' is that of the self in relation to all that belongs to it, and it is this material self that may be transformed into a book. But in this event, the written self paradoxically displaces the self as written about , and becomes only the words on the page. The real self in this case resides elsewhere. The 'ideological self' assigns the individual self to a particular cultural group at a particular time, and where ideologically speaking writers of biographies or autobiographies are themselves subjects who inscribe their own subjective versions of lives in their texts. The last 'self' described by Denzin is what he calls 'self-as-desire, where the self seeks fulfillment through sensuousness, sexuality and the bodily presence of the 'other'. Yet, although the subject only really experiences these desires in the form of an absence, a lack, the self nevertheless always returns to these experiences, and consequently auto/biographical narratives tend to focus on sexuality and relationships. The thrust of Denzin's argument where views of 'self' are concerned, and expressed by him when examining the self-narrative statements of individuals, is that the humanness and the selfness of the individual can only be expressed in the words he/she attaches to him/herself, as he/she strives to inscribe the meaning of words spoken into the life lived. In a similar way, all the auto/biographer has is words to attach meaning to the life being written about, and as mentioned above, the written self on the page takes the place of the real self, which is elsewhere.

It is interesting to see how Stanley (1992) contributes to this idea of there being a number of different forms of self. She maintains that the self is a complex organism, with often contradictory and competing views of aspects of character, behaviour and intention. Where biography is concerned, it is important to attempt to present these different versions of the subject, rather than eradicating them in favour of an apparent 'truth' about their life and the events occuring in it. What the biographer in fact achieves, when reducing the complexity of the self to one all-embracing version, is to hide from the reader material outlining the very complexity that makes the subject interesting and valid. Stanley quotes the example of Boswell's biography of Johnson, where Boswell, previously seen as a scrupulous and objective recorder of the minute details of Samuel Johnson's life, is now seen as a selector and interpreter of those details, reconstructing his subject according to his own views and judgement. The same can be said, presumably, for autobiography as for biography, since the competing versions of the self exist for the writer to deal with whether the life is the writer's own or somebody else's.

Consideration of the position of the 'self' where the reading of and the production of the meaning of literary texts is concerned, figures largely in reader-response and literary theories. Iser (1980) talks about an artificial division of our personality when we read, as we the reader take upon ourselves a theme which is not our own, our own thoughts receding into the background as they are supplanted by thoughts not our own. That is not to say, however, that our own thoughts disappear completely when we are thinking the thoughts of another; they remain in the background, a powerful 'virtual' force. This results, in reading, in the operation on two levels of two selves, what Iser calls the alien 'me' and the real, virtual 'me'. Moreover, these two levels are never completely cut off from each other, but our own personality adapts according to the theme of the text, so that the virtual background takes on a marginally different form according to the theme of the text concerned. Thus, because a relationship develops between the alien theme and the virtual background of the reader's self, the unfamiliar may be understood.

When discussing the role of the onlooker during the process of reading fiction, Harding (1962) offers a view of the reader's active part in this process, and by thus dismissing the view that novel-reading consists of identification and vicarious experience, he enters into a useful consideration of the reader's identity. Harding recognises that there is a basic process of imaginative or empathic insight going on for a reader, but however, he has doubts whether this is actually a process of identification. The reader may , for example, recognise resemblances between him/herself and a fictional character. He/she may admire and envy a fictional character without any real hope of ever achieving such heights. Alternatively, he/she may either adopt a character for imitation, or, indeed, may enter into an absorbed empathy with a character. These experiences, Harding maintains, do not have to be described with the term 'identification', and may be better served by the explicit terms 'empathy', 'imitation', 'admiration', or recognition of similarities.

Harding has similar observations to make concerning the term 'vicarious experience'. The term, he explains, has been popular with those wanting what amounts to a facile explanation for the enjoyment of fiction, where the reader gives himself up to absorbed sympathy with a fictional character and is said to experience vicariously whatever the character undergoes. To Harding, the contentious part of this premise is the use of the term 'experience', as opposed to 'imagine'. He sees here the implied suggestion that reading a novel approximates to having a 'wish-fulfillment dream'. But the readers are not in fact in such a condition as to actually suppose themselves to be in a world of their fantasy, where their desire is defined and at the same time hallucinatorily satisfied. It is more accurate to say that the satisfaction is real, but it is satisfaction with a muted and incomplete version of the desires.

Given, then, that the process of reading literature is not simply one of identification and vicarious experience, we can move on to the question of the value of literature in constructing the identity of the reader; are the identities represented in literature ones that already exist or does the literature produce them? Foucault, for example, rejects the notion that 'sex' is something that existed prior to the novels and literary discourses that began to define and describe it in the nineteenth century. He maintains that sex is an effect rather than a cause, the effect of literature which tries to analyse describe and control the very thing it is in fact

constructing. This concept of identity is kept alive today by media such as films and television, which by appearing to reflect modern values are in fact creating them by telling their viewers how to behave, how to think and how to be.

Holland (1980) makes some valuable observations about the role of the literary work in creating identity. He sees the identity of a person as an unchanging essence that permeates the millions of his/her 'ego choices', which are at the same time changing yet continuous with what has gone before; and arriving eventually at a central unifying theme that is that person's identity. While 'identity' is fixed and unchanging, arrived at apart from considerations of events taking place in historical time, and close to what Holland calls a 'personal style', the 'self' on the other hand, is a result of the life experiences and individual variations that occur during the course of historical time.

Put into the context of how the literary work, or text, and its reader interact, this interaction can be seen as an act of interpretation by the reader's self, but which has grown out of and is an expression of his/her personal identity theme. Because of this, individual interpretations of texts and literary works will occur, according to both the different kinds of external information brought to bear, and the personal identity theme of the reader, in order for the reader to achieve significance within and satisfaction from the text. Moreover, because interpretation is a function of identity, this individuality of interpretation will occur even when the readers are similar in age, sex, class, nationality and education.

If this notion that interpretation is a function of identity is taken further, it can be seen that the text or literary work is used by the identity to re-create itself. Each reader finds in the text the thing he/she fears or desires the most, and consequently has to re-create from the work the strategies for dealing with these fears and desires. Holland gives the example of *Hamlet,* where several individuals who might see the central desire and danger in their lives as authority figures, respond differently. One might see offering alternatives to the demands of authority as a strategy of dealing with the fears and desires, and would respond to the duality, split personalities and oppositions contained within the play. Another might respond to the challenge of authority by concentrating on the irony and farce exemplified in the play by

Polonius, the gravedigger or Osric, and the contradictions of the play generally. In this way, the reader re-creates him/herself as a part of the literary work - inasfar as he/she interprets it. Moreover, it is for this very same reason that readers of differing age, sex, class, nationality and education, as listed above, can achieve their own satisfaction from the same fictional work, and also that the same reader can enjoy vastly different types of literature. The reader is simply re-creating the work in the shape of his own identity theme, at the same time putting the text through an identity 'filter' to synthesise it and make it acceptable to the individual's own style.

It is interesting to investigate the place of auto/biographical method in the creation of identity in the individual. As discussed above, Holland (1980) clearly posits the existence of a 'primary identity', itself irreversible and timeless, yet capable of infinite variations and developments during the course of a life. This primary identity provides the individual with an unchanging inner core of continuity whatever his/her later transformations. Holland cites the pictorial obituary as an example of where the developmental aspect of identity may easily be seen. He points to publication of pictures of famous men as toddlers, as students, at the beginning of their careers, at their prime, and as old men, and sees in them all the same structure, expressions and frame:

> In this way, too, identity is like a musical theme on which variations are played: not the notes themselves but their structural relationship to each other remains constant through a lifetime of transformations. (1980: 121)

Interesting also are Holland's writings on the poet Robert Frost. He reviews the poet's writings and facts of his life not in a straightforward, linear biography, but in terms of his 'identity theme', and invites the reader to guess at Frost's identity after reading his informal remarks about his view of the world, poetry, fiction, politics, and himself. Only after this does Holland expect the reader to suggest both his identity theme and his identity, and consequently to compare both him and his literary works to this identity theme. This approach to biography, using traditional source materials such as letters, reactions of his friends, his writings on science, philosophy and poetry, nevertheless points out the essential unity of the individual by showing how these materials interrelate around a central theme. Holland gives examples of how Frost deals with

the polarities that are an inevitable part of the identity theme. In a letter to his daughter after his wife's death, for example, he mentions his, and mankind's, outer humour and inner seriousness. His literary tastes indicated large aggressive internal forces within his cozy, comfortable exterior - the *Odyssey,* for example, featuring escape and homecoming where courage attempts to master supernatural forces. His liking for Rudyard Kipling Holland also mentions, whose work deals with oppositions and contrasts:

> If you can meet with triumph and disaster
>
> And treat those two imposters just the same...

Moreover, Holland claims that he can share empathically with the essential unity of Frost's life in the only way possible, that is by creating his subject's identity from his own inner identity theme; and by the very act of experiencing the other's identity he mingles his subject's characteristic style with his own.

Ricoeur (1992), when discussing the terms 'sameness' and 'selfhood', makes similar distinctions as does Holland between what he terms 'identity' and 'self'. There are two concepts of 'sameness': *numerical* identity, where there are several occurences of a thing; and *qualitative* identity, where two things are so similar as to be interchangeable. Moreover, for this 'sameness' to be viable, there has to be uninterrupted continuity, or 'permanence in time'. Here we have the same unifying and essentially unchanging identity theme as described by Holland. 'Selfhood' is a different concept, historical in nature, and based on a web of relationships and life experiences. It is based on the notion of disclosure of the self through actions in both temporal directions, past and future, and with these actions there enters the concept of narrative, and narrative identity, referred to by Ricoeur also as 'character'. History or narrative would appear to be necessary in order to make sense of the idea of self, in that we give meaning and significance to our lives by the kind of stories we tell about them, and living is itself an enactment of that narrative. This holds true even though others may tell a better story of our lives, if only because this story may be told in a fuller context, since it includes the closure, our death.

Ricoeur's narrative theory of personal identity emphasises the historical significance of the connectedness of life, defined by the concept of emplotment. Ricoeur views emplotment as the mediation between the concordant and the discordant events that go to make up the story of the life, and the paradox of emplotment he sees as what happens when contingency, or things that might have happened differently or even not at all, are converted into necessity, and so become an integral part of the plot. It is Ricoeur 's belief that narrative identity, or character, can be understood through the operation of emplotment, since the character is the one who performs the action in the narrative and is therefore, like plot, a narrative category; characters are themselves plots. He quotes the ideas of Aristotle that the character in a story preserves an identity correlative with the story itself. He also usefully describes in what way the narrative structure joins together these two processes of emplotment, that of action and that of character. Because telling a story is saying who did what and how, and spreading out the connection between these points over time, there is an articulation between plot and character, whereby the character has the power to begin a series of events without this signifying the absolute beginning, and the narrative can determine the beginning, middle and end of an action.

*The concordance and discordance described above as characterising the emplotment of action* has its corollory in the concordance and discordance involved in emplotment of character. The character achieves a concordance, a temporal totality in its life which distinguishes it from others and creates of it a singularity. This temporal totality, however, is threatened by the disruptive effects of unforseeable events, in line with the discordance referred to above. The contingency of the events contributes to the necessity for the history of the life, albeit retrospectively, and this is in effect emplots the identity of the character. In this way the character cannot be distinguished from his/her experiences, and in constructing the story, the narrative has constructed the narrative identity of the character also.

Ricoeur's ideas on what he terms 'literary fictions', investigating their function in relation to his concept of the self and the world, are interesting in view of the ideas on the self and identity within response theory, discussed earlier. He calls literary fictions 'imaginative variations' on the invariant human condition. Because the characters in plays and novels think, speak, act and suffer as do human beings, the imaginative variations around the human condition are

variations on the self and selfhood. Moreover, the condition of selfhood is extended beyond relevance to the body alone to that of the world and the terrestrial condition generally. Thus the action imitated in the literary narrative is subject to the conventional constraints on the human condition. Dunne (1996) points out Ricoeur's discussion of the moral and ethical dimension afforded by the imaginative variations of the literary fiction. These may project possibilities of an alternative life to our own with such vividness and power as to become paradigmatic, challenging on moral grounds the life story presently being enacted.

*Ricoeur also points to the importance of the existence of the character to the configuration* of the narrative. Without the character in the story having any definite characteristics, and simply being someone to whom things happen, the form of the work breaks out of the narrative structure and loses all sense of story. What actually goes wrong, is that there is an attempt to impose 'selfhood' upon the work without the underlying support of 'sameness', the personal identity which gives the lasting dispositions to the person, as described earlier. Whereas in the 'classic' novel the character is always restrained by the ordering principle of the plot allowing the presence of sameness to underpin the selfhood, in some contemporary novel forms, such as the stream-of-consciousness novel, the plot is placed in the service of the character who then becomes a manifestation of self, a non-narrativist version of identity. It is interesting to note Ricoeur's allusion to the fact that many contemporary autobiographies move away from the narrative form into a literary genre with little configuration, namely the essay, where the writer loses the essential narrative version of personal identity.

*Ricoeur gives other reasons for the importance of fiction which echo* the comments made by Holland on the existence of a central unifying theme that is a person's identity. Firstly, Ricoeur maintains that because real life is an unstable and elusive mixture of fabulation and actual experience, fiction is needed to organize this life retrospectively in order to achieve a narrative unity. Knowledge of the narrative beginnings and endings of courses of action through literature helps with the management of real beginnings and endings, including what Ricoeur calls 'the apprenticeship of dying'. Nor need the retrospective nature of the literary narrative result in its being viewed as mediating only on the past part of life, for the expectations and

anticipations of the protagonists point them securely towards their future. Ricoeur sums up his views on the relationship between literary narratives and life histories:

> ...literary narratives and life histories, far from being mutually exclusive, are complementary, despite, or even because of, their contrast. (1992: 163)

Some comment needs to be made regarding the self in relation to both auto/biography and literature as written works. Denzin (1989) observes that since the product of auto/biographical writing is usually a book, then this turns the self into a concrete object, one that may be purchased, owned, read about. The life turned into a book has become one of the most popular forms of literature, and the exploration during this chapter of the concepts of 'self' and 'identity' within auto/biographical method and reader-response theory may have served to expand on some of the reasons for this popularity.

The psychoanalytical approach used by Holland (1980) above when discussing textual interpretation by the individual as a function of his/her identity has its basis in the work of Freud and other early psychoanalysts, and there are a number of ways in which the literary biographies and 'case histories' of psychoanalysis link with reader-response theory. The relationship between author, reader and text is an example of this, as is the importance placed on narrative.

The literary world of the nineteenth century had been considerably disquieted by the arrival of psychoanalytical theory, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the elitist position of literature was being challenged by the fact that the works produced under the guise of the arts were no more than a kind of dream or fantasy as experienced by everybody. Secondly, argues Ellmann (1984), age-old literary terms and names, such as *Oedipus,* were being taken over with new connotations - *Oedipus* is now far more readily associated with Freud than Sophocles. Moreover, psychoanalysis promised to provide the theoretical basis for its verbose but imprecise terminology, and set itself up as a more accurate explorer of the human mind than,

say, the novel had been before. Marcus (1984) also points out that whereas in the nineteenth century, biography had been selective about how much intimacy to disclose, often suppressing discreditable evidence, modern biographies, especially psychoanalytical works, regard all that happens in private life as relevant.

Freud's attitude to literature was ambivalent. On the one hand, he stated that many of his ideas had been anticipated by works of literature; on the other, he suspected that writing was a mere pleasurable cover-up of and escape from reality. The area of biography was a particularly sensitive one, since traditional biography had always relied on written documents such as letters, or oral reminiscences, or indeed the written literary works of the subject - was Shakespeare like Hamlet as a young man, and Prospero as an old one? Failing lack of material, biographers were always happy to clutch at straws, and both Freud and numerous others made use of scanty evidence. Jean-Paul Sartre, having the dubious and probably mistaken recollection from Flaubert's aunt that her nephew - by all accounts in fact precocious - was illiterate at nine, wrote three huge autobiographical volumes, *The Idiot of the Family,* based on the premise of Flaubert as a slow learner. Freud was aware of the problems afforded by having one's past reconstructed with little real chance of setting the record straight. Oscar Wilde is noted as saying that biography 'adds to death a new terror, and makes one wish that all art were anonymous.' Ellmann quotes Freud's reply in similar vein to Arnold Zweig, when he offered to write his biography:

> To be a biographer, you must tie yourself up in lies, concealments, hypocrisies, false colourings, and even in hiding a lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had, and if it were to be had, we could not use it. (Ellmann, 1984: 469)

Freud here touches upon the problem of the nature of truth as discussed in my previous chapter. Although he clearly refers to 'truth' as the opposite of 'falsehood', yet there is some element of 'truth' as meaning 'reality', and Freud's suspicions about biographical truth refer to notions of both 'false' and 'unreal' as described by Lamarque and Olsen (1994). Freud says here what Denzin (1989) reiterates, when he talks of true and false fictions: true fictions that are

in accord with known facts; and false fictions that misrepresent the facts - according to the understanding of a community of minds,similar to Fish's (1976) 'interpretive community'.

Marcus (1984) makes a case for the relationship between psychoanalysis and the writing of narrative, and gives Freud's own views on the question: '...strange that the case histories that I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science.' For Freud, the essential medium of psychological transaction is language; objects are generators of meaning, ruled by the verbal artefact. Freud believed that people were the authors of their own stories that he wrote on their behalf, in the firm belief that they could not tell them properly themselves. But, in spite of the wealth of meanings generated, with new perspectives constantly generating inexhaustible new meanings, he would not promise that psychanalysis would provide the ultimate reading of the text - texts are for him simply 'impacted linguistic densities'. It is interesting to see that for Freud, as for the reader-response theorists, the text was not in itself the conveyor of meaning, but relied on many other influences, including writer and reader, for its significance. It could, however, prove a useful way of dealing analytically with textual accounts. With this in mind, the question of narrative truth may be addressed. In scientific terms, the 'case history' biographical account cannot stand up to the increasingly systematized approach of psychoanalysis, using such techniques as chemical therapy. But viewed as a part of the history of culture and of literature itself, there is an internally consistent truth within the work. Psychoanalytical and narrative literature both share an ontological status here, that of belief that they possess an ultimate authority, through their eventual coherence and inner reality, to construct human reality.

When considering the psychoanalytical aspects of narrative biography and its links to reader-response theory, it is valuable to look at the work of Lacan, since he attempted a rewriting of Freudianism with regard to the human self, its place in society and its relationship to language, and Eagleton's (1983) critique makes these connections clear.

In describing what he calls the 'mirror stage', Lacan refers to the early identification of self that is at once itself and alien, and repeated identifications with images of self build an ego for

ourselves, albeit based on a fictive sense of unitary selfhood. This process, including subsequent Oedipal relationships first with our mother then, when this is forbidden, with our father, is an acceptance of such things as sexual difference and gender roles, and so is a process of socialization. The importance of Lacan's work here is the fact that he rewrote the process above in terms of language, which is above all a social activity. The child before the mirror is a 'signifier', a bestower of meaning, and the image in the mirror is the 'signified'; the child sees the 'meaning' of itself. A gap consequently opens up between signifier and signified when the child has to realise that identity can only happen as a result of difference, the absence or exclusion of the other, and that its identity is only constituted in terms of the relations of similarity and difference to the subjects around it. It then has to resign itself to the fact that it will never have full imaginary possession, and enters into an endless chain of language, moving from one signifier to another, fruitlessly seeking signifieds but never finding any fully present. This movement Lacan terms desire.

For Lacan , the unconscious is structured like a language, composed of a continual movement of signifiers and a multiplicity of signifieds. Just as these are subject to constant sliding and inaccessibility of meaning, so is language prone to this indetermination of meaning. This has considerable significance where the accessibility of the literary text is concerned. Lacan draws a distinction between a literary work where attention is drawn not to how something is said, its context and purpose, but simply to what is said. The reader is more impressed by an uncontextualised document, such as a scientific textbook, because it does not show the reader why and what was selected, how it was orgnised and how it could have been different. Certain modernist texts, on the other hand, make the process of production part of the actual content. This encourages critical reflection on how and what reality has been constructed, and reminds the reader that this is not absolute truth, unlike the 'given' reality of the uncontextualised work.

The psychoanalytical view of literary form put forward by Eagleton is explored through comparison with Freud's commentary on the nature of dreaming. The 'dream-work' produced as a result of dreaming is reorganized by the unconscious mind, its gaps filled in and its contradictions smoothed over, to present it in the form of a consistent and comprehensible

narrative. This is termed by Freud 'secondary revision'. Similarly, much literary theory is devoted to a 'secondary revision' of literary texts, smoothing over apparent inconsistencies and contradictions, filling in the text's gaps and so on, in order to smooth the way for the reader. Similarly, literary theory tends to view the literary work as an expression of reality, embodying authorial intention. Indeed, a literary text will use devices - 'literary form' - upon itself to try to organize itself into a coherent whole. This whole process of attempting to provide coherence and cohesion is seen, however, to be ridiculous in the face of a work as diverse and divided as T S Eliot's *The Wasteland*, for example, with its interweaving allegories and shattered human lives. Holland (1968), however, sees this usage of literary form as a means of transforming otherwise unsatisfactory desires and anxieties that the reader receives from the text, into socially acceptable meanings.

*Moving on from considerations of the position of psychoanalytic theory in relation to* biographical and literary narratives, the concept of narrative truth, the role of language and the importance of literary form, one aspect of psychoanalysis, that of transference, needs special mention.

Stafford-Clark defines transference in psychoanalytical terms as: '... the investment of powerful and previously buried emotion in the physician undertaking treatment'. (1965: 37). Theorists have read transference as the relationship of the reader to the text, where the text is the powerful origin of knowledge, the 'subject presumed to know', and consequently the object of the reader's transference. Jackson (1994) considers the motivation received from the transference phenomenon for biographical narratives such as diaries, and the consequent relationship between reader and writer.

The position and status of the reader in general has been discussed earlier in this work, but Jackson notes that whereas an audience is assumed for auto/biography, the reader of the diary is drawn into a kind of intimacy with the diarist on account of the diary's ersatz secrecy; Jackson refers to this reader as an 'eavesdropper', and this eavesdropper is the object of the patient's

transference. In a sense the eavesdropper may be thought of as the writer him/herself, since, and this is not necessarily a contradiction of the above, diarists write for themselves. Jackson quotes the letters of Emily Dickinson to an unknown 'Master' as a possible transference relation rather than missives to a real person. The letters use progressively striking metaphors, use the third person, abandon the forms of letter opening, and are closer to poetry than correspondence. Letters of Charlotte Bronte show strikingly similar characteristics. The diaries of Sylvia Plath show similar idiosyncracies - expressive and spontaneous, with strange use of pronouns, for example referring to herself as 'you' as well as the first person. The diary is here a logical extension of the letter as a transference genre.

Not of least importance in the phenomenon of transference is the position of the writer's self. At the same time as the greater concentration on self mentioned above, comes the objectification of the self, as seen in the use of the third person in the letters of Dickinson and the diaries of Plath. This, Jackson maintains, aids the empathic role of both writer and reader of the diaries; where objectivity enables an ability to see the other in the text as an independent being, at the same time as an ability to share the other's sense of self. This empathic understanding, more usual in women readers than men, enables the reader of a fictional text to identifiy with the character, whereby she also takes up the position of the author. When reading a diary, the reader identifies with the character who is also the author, so they share the empathic understanding. This conflicts somewhat with the ideas of Harding (1962) mentioned eariier in this chapter, where he dismisses the idea of novel reading as identification or vicarious experience, seeing it rather as 'empathy', 'imitation', or 'admiration'.

On the whole, however, these ideas on transference and the creation of the auto/biographical self complement the fluidity of reader-response theory, with regard to the relationship of text, author and reader, working together in the construction of the meaning of the literary work.

## QUESTIONS OF VOICE - THE LOCATION AND FUNCTION OF THE AUTHOR

The position of the narrator is an issue which has already been explored to some extent during earlier discussions of narrative theory, and it is useful first to summarize these ideas, as they have bearing on the significance of the authorial voice in reader-response theory and auto/biographical method. The discussion of the narrative voice forming part of Culler's (1997) exploration of the variables involved in the presentation of a particular text, set out as a series of pertinent questions is of especial relevance here.

'Who speaks?' is a key question for establishing the narrator of a narrative. 'First person' narrators may be the main protagonists of a story, may be minor characters, participants, or simply observers with no part in the action. In autobiographies, it must be noted, the first person narrator always becomes a fully developed individual, consistently present, whereas in other narratives this is not necessarily the case. 'Third person' narrators are not directly identified in the story, and all characters are referred to by name or as 'he', 'she', etc. This is the narrative voice of the biography.

Because the author creates a text that is read by readers, the question arises 'who speaks to whom?', and the creation of a narratee is one discussed earlier in this work, and explored in some detail by Prince (1973). The narrator's audience is sometimes expicitly identified, as in Prince's example of the Caliph in the stories-within-a-story of *A Thousand and One Nights;* at other times it is implied or constructed, as Culler explains. The audience is constructed by events or situations that the author's narration either takes for granted as understood or else clarifies, and a work from another time may make various assumptions or references not shared by a modern reader. The contemporary audience approaching Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for example, may fail to appreciate the full mystical power, the influence and the serious intent represented by the Witches. Their full superstitious import, entirely familiar to the audience at the time, is the subject of a modern debate about their function in the play that would not have been necessary in the time when the play was written. Moreover, what is especially interesting here is the fact that Shakespeare, writing at the beginning of the seventeenth century, subsumes the views about witchcraft prevalent among his contemporary

audience and makes his witches morbid and vile, fit for the cruel persecution that in real life was reaching its height at the time the play was written. In this way the play, posing as a historical drama about eleventh century events, in fact addresses the issues of the age it was written in, not the age about which it is written. In the same way, there is a case for imagining that biographical subjects are chosen either because the thrust of their lives is such as to sieze the popular imaginations of their potential readers, or because the emphasis within the work is unwittingly geared towards the urgent issues of the day; or in other words one might say the subject is 'trendy'. This may be seen in the fact that two or more separate biographical works about a person are frequently published at around the same time.

Culler uses the question 'who speaks when?' to discuss the time at which narration of events occurs. The narration can be continuous - now *x* is happening, now *y* is happening, etc. Novels in the form of letters, Culler quotes for example Richardson's *Pamela*, may deal with the events as they happen. Often the narration may occur after the events in the narrative, even after a space of many years. In L P Hartley's *The Go-Between,* the narrator, a humble librarian, is prompted by the discovery of a diary to remember and recount the fateful events of one summer of his childhood that corrupted the rest of his life, inhibiting all chance of success and happiness. It is the technique of a number of modern novelists, Kate Atkinson in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, for example, to have her protagonist give an account of events that are autobiographical yet at the same time puzzling. The reason these events make no sense is because the narrator has, in trauma, blocked out a number of happenings from her mind. When the denoument occurs, the reader makes sense of the events of the plot in retrospect.

The polyphonic nature of the narrative voice has been discussed in the chapter on narrative theory, and Culler refers to it when listing the variables present in narrative theory, as 'who speaks what language?' As well as using a number of voices, and consequently staging different discourses and perspectives, the author may choose to use the straightforward distinctive narrative voice. Or alternatively the author may adopt the language of one or more of the characters, either seeing things through a child's eyes, as in the first part of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, or adopting a child's voice - I have already cited *Angela's Ashes* in this context.

Listeners are expected to grant the narrator a certain authority, and to accept what is said unless told otherwise; which Culler frames as the question 'Who speaks with what authority?'. Sometimes the narrator is 'unreliable', where the reader is given clues that make us doubt their interpretation of events; the example of John Fowles' *The Collector* has been quoted earlier as an example of this. The narrator may even be given a self-consciousness by the author, pretending to discuss with the reader how and indeed whether to tell the story.

An interesting consideration when looking at the ways in which the authorial voice can present the story in narrative is introduced by Culler when he differentiates the question 'who speaks?' from the question 'who sees?'. The story may be presented through the consciousness of and from the perspective of a third person subject who is yet not the narrator. The story is 'focalized' through this person in a number of ways, briefly outlined here, but discussed in some detail elsewhere when exploring narrative theory. There is a temporal continuum through which events may be focalized, either from when they occurred, or at any time afterwards, with a variable measure of knowledge and understanding on the part of the focalizer. Similarly, the story may be drawn out with detail or raced through quickly, with infinitely variable detail, speed and frequency, in fact. There may be differing limitations of knowledge, where the narrative may be focalized through a very limited perspective and with little access to characters' thoughts, or on the other hand where the 'omniscient narrator' has access to characters' innermost thoughts and motives.

It may appear paradoxical to attempt an exploration of the position of the author within a reader-response view of literary theory which at first glance would seem to foreground the position of the reader, but in his exposition of the structuralist stance Culler (1975) attempts to define the author's contribution. Formalists such as Jakobson saw literary theory as a theory about the properties of literary language, the 'literariness' of texts, and the relationship that this 'literariness' has with interpretation. Reader-response theorists such as Culler moved the emphasis away from the linguistic meaning of sentences to the literary meaning of the whole work. Just as a sentence has a structure that gives it an internalized grammar, so literary works need to be read with an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse in

order to convert linguistic sentences into literary structures and meanings. These implicit literary conventions, which translate into a method for the reader to internalise the grammer of literature that Culler termed 'literary competance', involve not only the implicit knowledge of the reader but also that of the author. An author will always engage with a particular literary tradition, which can also be called a genre, even if only to write against, to subvert, the tradition. The author will make choices between words and sentences, between modes of presentation, in order to produce certain effects, and the author will read his/her own work with a mind towards the effects that it will have on his/her readers. The author creates an order of words according to the conventions of the genre he/she is writing in; he/she does not therefore assign meaning to the words, but makes possible the production of meaning both for him/herself and for others. Culler is sensitive to the extremely fine balance between author and reader over the location of meaning in this 'structuralist' theory of reading; he hesitates to state that the meaning of a text lies with the reader, claiming instead that the text is *inherently* meaningful:

> To speak...of literary competence as a set of conventions for reading literary texts is in no way to imply that authors are congenital idiots who simply produce strings of sentences, while all the creative work is done by readers who have artful ways of processing these sentences. Structuralist discussions may seem to promote such a view...(1975, p.106).

The enduring nature of the author's status in relation to the text and the reader in reader-response theory is clearly established in the work of Stanley Fish. This may seem at first surprising, since Fish's claim is that readers actively participate in the making of meaning, and, further, that the meaning is actually an experience one has in the course of reading:

> What I am suggesting is that there is no direct relationship between the meaning of a sentence (paragraph, novel, poem) and what its words mean. Or, to put the matter less provocatively, the information an utterence gives, its message, is a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with, its meaning. It is the experience of an utterence - *all* of it and not anything that could be said about it ... - that *is* its meaning. (1970: 32).

Literature thus becomes a sequence of events that unfold within the reader's mind, and thus it is in the responses of the reader rather than the contents of the work that the focus lies. But the function of the author is for Fish much the same as for Culler, as described above, in that there are internalized in the reader a series of rules that ensure that understanding will be *uniform*. Moreover, because these rules are the same ones as used by the author to generate the words of the text, the reader's experience is in one sense the creation of the author, whose will the reader is obeying. Fish describes this process of understanding as a succession of decisions by readers about not simply an author's purpose, but every aspect of the author's intention.

Derrida's ideas on texts and meanings form an interesting adjunct to the ideas set out above, for he too challenges the assumption that written texts have stable meanings conveyed through the words, phrases and sentences of the language. For him, words can only function with reference to other elements which are not necessarily present, and meaning in texts is simply 'difference', existing in traces elsewhere. Stories and texts are, however, written as if they have an essential structure, or centre, as if subjects can be taken from the real world and relocated in texts, and this Derrida terms the 'fallacy of presence'. This decentering of the text as posited by Derrida has bearing on the biographical writer, who seeks to locate his subject materially in the text, but who because of 'difference' can only achieve this through reference to other persons, places etc. Derrida's deconstructionalist readings of texts therefore become open-ended, inconclusive affairs, which as far as auto/biography is concerned is in keeping with the incomplete nature of any life as written or read about. This premise sits comfortably with the structuralist position outlined above, which says that the meaning of a text relies ultimately with neither writer nor reader, but the text carries its own inherent meaning.

The ideas on literary competance also serve to underpin the place of the author in auto/biographical method, for the 'internalized grammer' that Culler mentions above for the writing of literary texts holds true for auto/biographical writing. The author, writing within a specific literary tradition, uses words, sentences and other structural conventions that have to

do with truth and fiction, viewpoint, narrative, identity and so on, that constitute the auto/biographical genre and that are discussed at length elsewhere. This is not to say that the author creates meaning him/herself, but that there is a uniform understanding of authorial intention by both writer and reader which the reader may use to make decisions about meaning in the text.

Further questions of authorial voice, which may be framed as 'who is speaking for whom?', are raised by Alcoff (1991). She explains the difficulty of differentiating between 'speaking for' and 'speaking about', since when speaking for others, the speaker is representing their needs, desires and situation; in other words is participating in the construction of who they are. Moreover, there is a case for saying that what is said for others changes in meaning according to who is speaking, who is listening, the discursive context, in other words what relationships there are between this utterence or text and other utterences/ texts. Also, the percieved significance of what is heard depends both on the identity of the speaker and on the language and style with which it is stated. Further, if these variables change, so will the meaning; it is not fixed, but plural and shifting.

These observations lead towards another consideration, that of the position of truth within the discursive practice of speaking for others. For if the whole discursive context as described above entails that something is taken as true because of its context, this would indicate that the truth of a statement cannot be distinguished from its interpretation. If, on the other hand, truth is independent of the location and context of the speaker and listener, as well as of any consequent human interpretation, then it becomes outside of and free from any possibility of human understanding, and therefore inaccessible. So for the purposes of this exploration of the position of the speaker when speaking for others, truth must be assumed to be in the same category as meaning, and accessible to human interpretation in the same way.

But in spite of the fact that truth and meaning have to be seen as accessible to the listener through the discursive context, Alcoff issues warnings against what she terms 'reductionism', where it is assumed that the location, in other words the social location or identity, of the speaker determines truth and meaning; for although location has a bearing on meaning and

truth, yet inasmuch as it is in itself an unfixed and changeable property, it has a necessarily indeterminate relationship with them.

Alcoff takes further the problem of who is speaking, and who should speak, for others when she looks in more detail at the speaker's location, for she explains that a speaker's social location or identity will be epistemologically influential in establishing the authority of what is being said, irrespective of the worth of the content of the discourse. There is no easy way of disposing of this difficulty, since even without the dubious validity of a privileged speaker or author speaking for those less privileged, there arises the question of how to delimit the group of which one purports to be a member and therefore has the entitlement to be the speaker. If instead the position is adopted of only speaking for oneself, or alternatively remaining silent, then is this a shedding of one's responsibility for others; a responsibility, moreover, made more insistent by the fact of privilege in the first place?

Alcoff evaluates this latter response to the problem of speaking for others as follows. She refers to it as the 'retreat' response, since it involves the speaker retreating from all practices of speaking for, and asserting that one can only know one's individual experience and one's own truth, and can never make claims beyond this. There is even a case for believing that attempting to persuade or speak on behalf of another may inhibit that person's ability or willingness to take part in the construction of their own meaning; and anyway, no speaker can ever produce more than a partial account of another's meaning. There are, however, the accusations of abnegation of responsibility in the 'retreat' response, as mentioned above, besides which it is surely morally objectionable to refuse to speak in order to avoid criticism and to avoid error, for this becomes itself a desire to achieve a privileged and unchallengable discursive position, which would cut out the valuable contribution made by the inevitable errors occurring in dynamic discourse.

But Alcoff gives an example of where the practice of 'speaking for' has advanced the cause of those spoken for, namely a Guatemalian Indian whose family suffered the same fate of exploitation by landowners and government as that of nearly all other Guatemalian Indians. The interesting point here is that the speaker in the example uses the medium of the autobiographical book, claiming that her ( the author's) personal experience is the reality of her

whole people. In the same way, writers such as Maya Anjelou, in the first volume of her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* use the authorial voice to speak against the past and continuing oppression of the American negro. It may even be claimed that this same authorial voice is speaking for oppressed minorities everywhere and of every kind, but Alcoff is wary of indiscriminate appropriation of speaking for, without first considering the discursive effects that this entails.

The speaker needs to be aware of a number of considerations about the question of speaking for others. Firstly, the speaker must look carefully at his/her motive for speaking, in case it is simply a desire for mastery over a less privileged speaker. Even the retreat response described above can occur only from a position of privilege, when there is something to retreat from, and the very decision to retreat is in itself an application of that privilege.

Secondly, there must be an awareness of the bearing of the speaker's context and location on what he/she says. This should not be attempted through an autobiographical introduction by the speaker, who hopes thereby to disclaim any errors or limitations, for this merely gives the listener the extra work of appraising the substantive relevance of the speaker's offered location to his/her attempted appropriation of the discourse.

Thirdly, the speaker's responsibility and accountability referred to earlier must make him/her sensitive to criticism.

Lastly, the effect of the words of the speaker's discourse must be examined within the context of the specific location, for the meaningful content of a claim is an interaction of the words and the hearers within a very specific situation. This discourse is in effect an event, involving speaker, hearers, words, location, and so on; and, moreover, the event is a singular one and can in no way be universal - thus casting some doubt over the usefulness of the autobiography as an instrument for 'speaking for' discussed above.

It may be said, then that the above discussion of the problem of 'speaking for' highlights the competing views of the location of the author. On the one hand there is the view that the author is the 'owner' of a text, its creator and the interpreter of its ideas. The alternative view holds that the concept of author is an ideological construction, and the 'speaker for ' is no more privileged than anyone else holding the same views. This, of course, would entail doing away

with the concept of location and discursive space for the author. But the location of the author and the content of what he speaks is important in that it is constituted through the interaction of cultural, historical, economic, psychological and sexual practices, ideas which will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter. What is of overarching importance, however, is the effects of what is spoken, and the source, or author, of the content is relevant only to the extent that it impacts on effect.

## SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AUTO/BIOGRAPHY, AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO READER-RESPONSE THEORY.

Erben (1993) suggests that accounts of lives are more or less successful depending upon how well they achieve the necessary balance between the social structure around a life and the story of that individual life. He takes Ricoeur's notion of emplotment, which is a system whereby the sense of the passage of time may be interpreted by a represention of that past, and traces his argument that the imaginative integrity of the biographer or social historian has its basis in rich emplotments, and emplotments upon emplotments. The writer of fiction has no engagement with the plots through which a real life is lived, and for this reason the imaginary narratives of the creator of fiction may always be distinguished from those of the creator of biography. Erben explains, however, that other theorists such as Stanley recognize that the researching of a biographical subject involves a developing and accumulating level of emplotment, resulting in a careful relationship between research and narrative reconstruction. For this reason, and in spite of her acknowledgement of the indispensability of emplotment for the creation of the account of a life, Stanley makes less of a distinction between imaginative fiction and imaginative biography. Erben sums up the importance of biography for sociology by pointing out that it is through study of the individual that understanding of the cultural domain can take place. The individual's very ego is constructed at the social level, and biography attempts to chart its path between personal experience and the general experience of groups.

Evans (1993) accounts for the popularity of the idea of 'biography' amongst sociologists by the rise in importance of the particular as opposed to the general, and the fact that biography can reveal as much about the biographer as about the subject. This is an interesting echo of the reader-response stance, with its considerations of the relationship between writer, text and reader. She also points to the fact that for many years the study of the individual by sociologists was frowned upon in favour of the study of the collective. One important development within biographical writing, however, is the concentration not on subjects who are famous, but on those of interest to sociologists because they are poor, or oppressed, or

dispossessed. This is an example of illustration of the general with the particular, as discussed in the last chapter, and whose function here is to highlight social structures and ideas.

A large number of biographies under this new popularity, however, are written about the famous or notorious, and what is significant is that these reveal, as well as a predictable and inevitable chronology, a selective view of their subject's life. Sometimes events and facts are deliberately concealed, since they may be sensitive for political or other reasons; or it may simply be that it is not possible to give a narrative version of that life without being that life, and even then its very narrativisation would would make of it just another version! Here is reflected the postmodernist view expressed earlier in this work by Derrida and others, that the work is defined by what is left out, and is interesting in its absences. This also reminds us of the 'relative' nature of truth. The work of reader-response theorists such as Iser is also of relevance, for the absences and evasions in the text fit the patterns of indeterminacy in texts described in reader-response theory.

The first reason for the selective nature of the modern biographical text given in the paragraph above, that of the sensitive nature of the material, is discussed by Evans in her explanation of how a study of the individual illustrates the social, and in this way the presence of the general within the life of the individual is set out. In earlier biographies there were 'codes' of privacy, restricting what readers were allowed to know about individuals; but now readers are allowed to know more about 'private' life, there emerge issues of interpretation. They have to be able not only to evaluate the public works and persona of the biographical subject, but to set these into relationship with the cultural contexts in which the subject lived. The doubtful success of this exercise for the reader, in view of both what is absent - evaded or hidden, and what can never really be 'known', in an absolute sense, about the reality of the individual subject - is apparent. Nevertheless, Evans uses several examples to show how social scientists can contribute successfully to the understanding both of the individual and the general. She questions the assumptions of several biographers that Virginia Woolf's suicide was simply a culmination of her manifest instability, and she does this by drawing the focus out from the individual herself to her tangled web of social relationships with friends and relations. She points out how Woolf watched her neice marry an older man who had been the lover of the girl's biological father,

whose identity was anyway kept from her; which events recalled for Woolf the sexual advances of her own step-brother towards her. All of this came at a time when she found herself unable to write, and consequently unable to use absorption with her work to keep the effects of what was happening at bay; so her own assertion that she ended her life because she was losing her skills as a writer is not the whole explanation. This study of the individual shows that biography can illustrate the emotional meaning of what it is to be 'socially constructed'. A similar study of biographical work on Simone de Beauvoir again reveals the impact of unresolved family dramas on individuals, and consequently on social and intellectual thought. Additionally, there is a realisation of the ways in which women relate to intellectual life and attempt to engage with the masculine element within their social context.

So it can be seen that the significance of biography for the social scientist is made clear in Evans' work. Social understanding enables individuals to make personal choices in a world where social meanings become more and more ambiguous, and to resist the individualism prevalent in present day culture.

The features that define 'sociological autobiography' are examined by Stanley (1993). She looks at the work of Merton, (1988), who describes its role as:

> ...to construct and interpret a narrative text that purports to tell one's own history within the larger history of one's times...autobiographers are the ultimate participants in a dual participant-observer role, having privileged access...to their own inner experience (Merton 1988:18).

Merton here sees autobiography as a text in itself, not merely a resource that may be accessed outside of the text. So then in a similar way to biography, sociological autobiography can do better than simply relying on possibly erroneous memory and personal observation, and make use of documents and the words of relevant others. In this way, both biography and autobiography can claim epistemological credence by having privileged use of this kind of knowledge.

In several ways, Merton's account of the significance of autobiography and biography as a part of the sociology of knowledge uses the ideas of reader-response theory. Firstly, he sees

sociological autobiography (and biography) as a narrative text, with consequent acknowledgement that there are not only writers of these texts but readers as well, since texts have to be both constructed and interpreted. He refers to the '...constructed personal text of the interplay between the active agent and the social structure...' (Merton 1988: 19) This is a nod towards the collective interpretation of the text referred to by theorists such as Fish and Culler as one of the features of reader-response.

Secondly, Merton claims that autobiographers are the 'ultimate participants in a dual participant-onlooker role' (see above). Harding (1962) promotes the actively evaluative role of the onlooker, claiming that the consequent evaluation may be more reasoned and balanced than that resulting from an event actually participated in; Merton's premise is that the participant's access to his/her inner experience gives him/her advantage. But Harding goes on to say that the onlooker's opinions are constantly being challenged by what he terms the 'cultural community', who might fill in what they believe the spectator has missed, or what the appropriate attitude should be, or simply give a consensus of how things really ought to be. Whether Merton's view of the autobiographer's monopoly whereby he/she can be both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' at the same time prevails over Harding's view of the restraining influence of the surrounding cultural and social structure remains an interesting question.

When Stanley takes Merton's ideas on 'sociological autobiography', and compares them to 'intellectual biography' as developed from feminist ideas on reflexivity, she finds that both accounts accept that knowledge differs according to social position. However, Merton allows for the textual representation of lives as suitable for sociological enquiry, whereas the feminist approach is concerned with the re/making of lives, and when these are put into textual form, there is, especially in biography, an emphasis on referentiality with its insistence on veracity and validity. Feminist social science feels itself unable challenge these professional practices and knowledge claims of the modern biographer by questioning these positions. So the feminist position tends to reject the use of biography as a form of expression.

It is both because of and in spite of the above issues that Stanley introduces the term 'auto/biography', for she feels that this expresses the textuality and intertextuality of lives that are written about, both by one's self (autobiography) and by another person (biography). She

goes on, importantly, to discuss the sociological implications of the epistemological problems associated with perceptions of the 'self' , 'lives', etc, when put through the process of textual production.

As well as the difference between a 'life' produced by one's self and that written by another, as mentioned above, the ways that 'a life' can be written about Stanley sees as many and varied. In form they range from the conventional diaries, letters and memoirs, to photograph albums and CVs. Within these categories are those of a private nature, such as diaries and letters, as against those either written for publication, such as biographies or autobiographies, or those dealing with the more public aspect of a person's life - politics, for example. In addition, some life writing is of an immediate nature, such as diaries and letters, compared with that written years after the event and relying upon the vagaries of the memory, for example the memoir.

There are sociological implications of 'self-writing' as opposed to that written by another. For within its pages, the autobiography must contain biographies of the others whose lives have impinged upon that of the subject, since it is a rare life that does not touch the lives of others. Similarly, a biography has implications for the autobiography of its writer, because years of close familiarity with the subject and those around him/her, and sometimes the unusual strength of personality of that subject being written about, can impact upon the life of the writer. This reflexivity demonstrates how knowledge is situational and contextual, differing in relation to the social location of its producers. It also points to the dynamic character of a life, here the life of the writer, whose nature and expectations change with the continual unfolding of events in the biography he/she is writing. This description of the way in which autobiography is made is similar to that described by Iser (1974) with reference to the reading process of literary texts. Here, the sentences of the text interact with and relate to each other, becoming 'intentional sentence correlatives', to give the text its meaning. The sequences of sentences create an expectation, one that is not fulfilled but continually modified as each sentence correlative continues to react with what has gone before and modify the meaning, re-establishing or changing connections between past, present and future. In this way reading becomes a creative process and the reader recreates the world of the text in a coming together of text and imagination. Similarly the meanings within the autobiographical text that is the life of the person

writing biography, described above, are continually modified and recreated in response to the events occurring within the biography.

Stanley goes on to say more about the audience to whom different forms of life writing are addressed. 'Private' forms of life writing often address a named audience, a 'public', and diaries may be directed at someone outside the text, for instance a future understanding public. There is the additional problem of past and present for what Stanley calls the 'self who writes'. This person, writing for him/herself, has to recover the past in traces and hints, becoming a 'self who was' in the past as he/she tries to relate this self to the 'self who is' that moves on in time constantly outside the text. The 'self' written for as audience becomes a reconstruction, an invention.

Stanley has similar doubts about immediacy in life writing. The diary, supposedly immediate because of its descriptive nature, cannot in fact be anything but selective and interpretive, since it is rhetorically-constituted, and two accounts of the same event will often prove very different. Autobiography may in fact be seen as constructing social reality. The sociological knowledge created by the auto/biographer is socially located, so the sociologist's own autobiography becomes epistemologically vital to the work that he/she is undertaking, whatever its theme. The close articulation with the lives of others of the self who writes, even with the lives of others who are dead, helps to give the author's life the meaning it has. This idea may be related to the 'literary competence' of reader-response theorists such as Culler and Fish, where the author, by adhering to the conventions of the literary discourse he/she is engaged in, contributes to the making of meaning The life being researched, one's own or that of others, is always a series of social networks, both multi-layered and continually shifting and changing.

The 'spotlight' approach, as described elsewhere in this work and critiqued by Stanley (1992) is an approach to what is termed 'modern biography' which challenges the emphasis on social location referred to above. This approach emphasises 'the life' as a unique individualised subject, as opposed to a social self within a social network of others. Because the role of these others is dismissed or minimalised, then the self is essentialised, rather than the social processes that contribute towards the characteristics of that self. This is not to denigrate the

detailed specifity of this kind of biography, but it is only really of value when set in context with the social, political and economic issues that are also pertinent. As Evans (1993) points out, although there are advantages in the new recognition of the importance of individual lives, such as a maintaining of the relationship between the individual and society, yet the individualised biography suffers from problems. These include an inevitable tendancy towards selectivity and partial truths, and sensitivity about the interpretation of details of private lives. But she still feels that a study of the individual may still be useful in the investigation of general themes in the lives of individuals.

Further to this, Stanley's comments on the referential and intertextual nature of written lives, both autobiographical and biographical, serve to emphasise earlier discussions about the connections and relationships between the written lives of real people and fictional lives. Written lives are intertextual in that thay are often referential of the life of the author - as has been mentioned above - and, more pertinent yet to the discussion of the connections between auto/biography and the reading of the literary texts, the reader expects the lives written about to have all the features of fiction - a balance of characters, to be chronologically coherent, to be linear, to have ups and downs, and so on.

Referentiality has its place too in reader-response theory, and Iser (1974) explains this in his discussions of his theory of the literary text. He explains that the author of a text interacts with the contemporary social situation before the creation of the text, with the purpose of using the perspectives in the text to encourage the reader to reformulate existing social, cultural and historical aspects of reality. In this way, using Iser's 'indeterminacy gaps', which are omissions and ambiguities in the narrative, the reader will not only reconfigure these aspects within his/her imagination, but discover new thoughts of which he/she had not been conscious. This transforms the reading process into a discovery of alien thoughts, of 'otherness', so that the validity of accepted social and cultural norms may be questioned, with the consequent expansion of meaning of the self. Freund (1987), whilst agreeing that this model promotes an interactive reader-text relationship, where the active participation and creative imagination creates of the reader a co-author, has several concerns. She feels that the relative

indeterminacy of the of the text, with its gaps and absences promoting this co-authorship, places too much responsibility of interpretation on the reader, and in doing so deprives the text of its authority.

The ideas of another response theorist, Stanley Fish, have had mention earlier in this chapter when discussing Merton's views on sociological auto/biography as a narrative text, needing both writers and readers. Fish, along with Culler, Bleich and others, shares the view that since sign systems are social constructs automatically assimilated, consequently an individual's perceptions and interpretations are in fact the assumptions of his/her own social group. Moreover, Fish (1976) maintains that the interpretive strategies put into action when reading a text are not put into execution after reading, they actually *are* the reading. The same interpretive strategies could be used for a different text; another reader could perform the same set of strategies on the same text; the point is, that it is the notions of the 'same' or 'different' that are fictions, since interpretive strategies could be put into action to make all texts one, or be for ever making the same text. What does exist, Fish is saying, is not the text itself, but the interpretive strategies for it, and the reason why there is some stability of interpretation of texts is because of the existence of *interpretive communities.* Like texts, these interpretive communities are not entirely stable, but they are more stable than texts because the strategies learned by the individuals within the community are learned. This brings the argument round to the concept of what Culler and Fish term 'literary competence', which has been discussed elsewhere. So just as auto/biography sees the importance of the socially constructed subject, the aspects of literary theory described above engineer the disappearance of the text, and introduce instead a community-dependent reader who, at the same time as reading, creates the text.

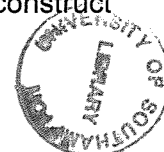
There are a number of ways in which psychology has a bearing on the sociological aspects of biographical theory and reader-response theory, and some useful ideas are found in the work of Vygotsky. Daniels (1996) explains that for Vygotsky, personal and social contexts are inseparable, and the psychological processes of the individual are due to a historically

developed socio-cultural experience - the act of naming, for example, is not a mental activity but a social interaction. The individual learns and develops his/her practice as a member of a particular sociocultural community, and there exist mediators as psychological tools to direct behaviour. These mediators include signs and symbols, individual activities and interpersonal relations.

Useful ideas on the concept of literature as a psychological tool that mediates human experience are to be found in the work of Kosulin (1998), who explores how cognition is affected not by the content of a literary work, but by the possibilities afforded by the literary form. This cultural psychology views the creative character of the human mind as paramount, and its subject matter deals with the interpretation of cultural texts, not non-interactive, 'experimental' processes. Memory, for example, is seen not in terms of mechanisms of retention or retrieval, but in terms of the integration of disjointed episodes of life into a coherent narrative whole. Thus, Kosulin argues, the early autobiographic memory of a child is in fact ordered and supplemented by narratives about that child's early years.
Kosulin touches upon the ideas that characterise both auto/biographical and reader-response theories when he discusses what he calls the 'life as authoring' approach of psychology following the literary model, and his views of texts and authors are interesting. Here, human thoughts, acts and intentions are an authoring by the self, and this human conduct is the equivalent of a text. This text, given the principles of cultural psychology relies on language for the development of its meaning. Language is not merely a passive system of labelling, nor is it simply an accompaniment of actions, or even a medium for expressing ideas. Language, in this case seen through the medium of literary texts, provides a series of complex cultural-semiotic programmes to enrich the psychological content of activities or objects. For example, there are different psychological connotations for 'hand-sewn' dresses and 'machine-sewn' dresses. This proposition whereby the language is potentially literature, and human conduct is perceived as a potential text, relates to the ideas of Culler and Fish with regard to literary competance, including human adopting of a series of codes to 'read' literature, and the elusive nature - in Fish's view the disappearance altogether - of the text.

Following on from the above there emerges an analysis of the relationships of the author, subject and literary text as a whole. Here, the author as such cannot be identified with any of the aspects of the writing, but is revealed solely in the totality of the literary work. The personality of the writer does not coincide with the essence of the author, he/she is not one of the characters, nor yet any singular figure in the text, even of first-person narratives. The author is not so much a fixed entity as an energy, a force. This is an echo of the reader-response stance, where the meaning of the literary text lies not with the author nor the reader, but the text is inherently meaningful in itself as a culmination of the contributions of all three. Kosulin quotes the autobiography, the 'self-telling of life narratives' as a primary literary model for the construction of the self, since the cognitive and linguistic processes involved structure and organize experience and memory and build life-events such that the individual becomes the narrative by which he/she tells about his/her life. But, however, he points out that when an author writes from the point of view of a character, the author 'lives into' this character's 'horizon'. But at a chosen moment the author can return to his own position and supplement what is seen of this character in other ways. Thus the author, using his 'surplus of vision' is able to present a complete life. The autobiographical writer, however, can never return, as there is no 'surplus of vision, no alternative position for him/her, and so the life may never be seen as aesthetically complete; so in this sense it remains a personal document, not a work of art. This position has bearing on the temporal aspect of the work. The surplus of vision of an author will allow for the temporal encompassing of the lives of characters, and there can be a complete story of the life; for only the totality of the life can become a subject for the value judgement that goes beyond the meanings of the subject when he/she was alive. An autobiographical individual, lacking surplus of vision, cannot achieve an aesthetically finished and accomplished life story, not least because he/she does not have experience of the end of his/her life; so the 'end' of the story is a constantly changing one.

The above observations explore the relationships between writer, reader and text and the social implications of these relationships on collective interpretation of texts; also how the individual can have significance for the general in auto/biography, and in doing so may help to construct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social reality. The usefulness of the literary form, and more specifically autobiography, as a tool in cultural psychology for the construction of the self has also been established. It may be relevant to finish this discussion by looking at how far the reader-response stance on gender goes towards meeting some of the issues of feminist auto/biography.

Wright (1992) maintains that reader-response criticism does not allow for a gendered reader, and is gender-neutral. Culler (1982) , however, when considering the nature of the reading experience and the qualities of a reading self, engages with the question of reading as a woman, investigating the position of reading within feminist literary criticism. He quotes the opening section of Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* where the wife is sold, as a text that assumes a male reader. A male reader will give sympathy for the husband from a reading of the text as sensation-fiction; the female reader will find the text an appeal to her experience, and respond to the sensation of being marginalized, the watched rather than the watcher. Male readers, moreover, tend to regard subject matter dealing with the problems of women as trivial and of limited interest.

Culler moves on to discuss the position of the reader in gendered reading, pointing out that women can read as men. This begs the question whether it is necessary to be a woman to read as a woman, is it determined by biology or by culture? To make this question more problematical yet, women have learned the interpretive strategies of reading from a masculine perspective, and have learned to identify with male characters, against their own feminine interests; the woman reader is, in fact, expected to identify against herself. In response to this, feminist criticism seeks to appeal to the potential experience of the woman reader, making that experience possible by developing perspectives that would allow a woman to read as a woman, more seriously, more rationally and more reflectively than male readings. The way to achieve this, Culler says, is for the reading woman to construct for herself a role that refers to her identity as a woman. Culler terms this: 'A woman reading as a woman reading as a woman.' (1982: 64).

The comments by Stanley (1992) share some of the arguments put forward by Culler about the role a woman reader constructs for herself, when she discusses feminist auto/biography. She points out the divide in feminism, where some critics visualise an indifference to gender, and

the promoting of textual strategies useable by anyone; others see differences between women, both feminist and non-feminist, with a consequent decentering of theoretical authority. The way of encompassing and surmounting these differences, Stanley maintains, is to engage with lives and how they are represented. This auto/biography, or narration of a life, allows for both fiction and fact, for example, and the forefronting of both self and others.

Easton (1996) also looks at female self-representation in autobiography, and to what extent women are free to create themselves given current cultural constructions of female identity. She notes a number of similarities in female autobiography: the belief that writing the life will ensure the writer's survival in spite of a tenuous social identity; the definition of self in relation to the men in her life; the focus on a private experience rather than wider public events; and a desperate defence of the right to write the autobiography. At the same time the woman writer sees her own story as shared by others of her sex. She aims to create a self from her hitherto unrepresented experiences in order to gain social recognition, and from being an object in others' eyes, to become the subject of her story.

Using Maya Angelou's (1984) autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Easton investigates the way in which the self is written about in terms of language, plot and audience. In this the first volume of her autobiography, describing her childhood in the Deep South of the United States in the 1930's and 1940's, Angelou describes her upbringing and community, her rape as a child, adolescence, and single motherhood at sixteen. As described in the characteristics of female autobiography above, she writes with the shared experience of her people in mind, not her own life. In discussing the narrative, however, Easton points out that this apparently candid narrative has gaps, and these are present not simply as Iser's 'indeterminacy gaps', where the reader constructs the narrative from what is not explicit, since the notion of a complete 'truth' is quite unrealistic. They are, more accurately, silences, where for a black woman to reveal the truth can be dangerous, ( when Angelou revealed the identity of her rapist in court, he was subsequently murdered), and where the existence of a private black female world is being signalled.

Angelou is also seen as fighting against the stereotype of the black woman. Sexism exists not just from white men, but from black men also. As the social status of the African-American

male improved he, much as his white counterpart, persisted in seeing women in a subservient role. In addition to this, film and media images project the black woman as either a 'mammy' figure, or a domineering matriarch, or a sexually treacherous siren. The female characters in Angelou's autobiography are complex: her mother sends her children away from her and her dubious lifestyle, but not in order to pursue it more comfortably, but so they may be protected; Momma, Angelou's grandmother, although the most powerful figure in her community, still finds herself impotent before white men with only moral superiority to aid her.

By emphasising in her writing the ways in which the black woman has not been allowed freedom, but has adopted survival skills - singing, sewing, tale-telling, cooking, and so on - that allow creativity to stay alive, Angelou has given the black woman a voice.

## HERMENEUTICAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF READER-RESPONSE THEORY, AND RELEVANCE TO AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD

Hermeneutics, as defined by Husen and Postlethwaite (1985), is the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding in broadly different kinds of human contexts. These may include other cultures, groups, individuals, conditions and life-styles, both in the present and in the past, and must result in an increase of self-understanding. With the concept of 'understanding' comes that of 'pre-understanding', which means that it is only possible to understand something if a person has already partially understood it - pre-understanding is therefore understanding as history. In this way it is possible to understand something new, or alternatively, the pre-understanding of something familiar may be changed through a new structure of understanding - involving an interaction with interpretation. As a result of this, people's self-definition develops through their experiences, and this process is known as the 'hermeneutical circle'.

Iser (1974) uses these ideas to define the reading process. Given that a literary text is composed of sentences, these are related to each other by what he calls 'intentional sentence correlatives'. The sequence of sentences foreshadows the interaction of these correlatives, which creates an expectation in the reader of what is to come, or a 'pre-intention'. The interaction of correlatives is not so much a fulfillment of expectation but a continual modification of it. This continual modification establishes connections between past, present and future, so there is also a retrospective effect. The result of all this is not fulfillment in the literary text, for this is not what is needed; what in fact is needed is a continually changing horizon where the reading becomes a creative process, the world of the text is created by the coming together of the text and the imagination, and thus meaning is created.

For Wilhelm Dilthey, 'experience' is how the different parts of life are unified through a common meaning to create an overall impression. In this way, a singular experience can be assigned a special meaning in relation to the whole, and can thus in itself change a person's entire self-conception - a process not far removed from Denzin's (1989) 'epiphanies', interactional moments and experiences which alter the fundamental meaning structures in people's lives.

Dilthey's view of the purpose of Hermeneutics is for the interpreter to unite the past with the present through reconstructions which form connections between experience, the expression of that experience, whether it be verbal or nonverbal, and an understanding of the context thus created. In this way the past, containing the life-world of the subject or subjects, is presented to the reader of the interpretation. This overview makes the connection between this theory and modern biography clear.

Ricoeur defines hermeneutics as the interpretation of a particular text, but not seen as a closed system of signs that must be analysed in an attempt to disclose the underlying meanings. Instead, understanding and interpretation are directed towards the world of the work, and not the thought processes of the author, so that something that was alien becomes part of the world of the interpreter. The interpreter now understands him/herself in a new way, as the hermeneutical circle moves between the worlds of the interpreter and the text. This is similar to Iser's (1974) 'virtual dimenson' of the text, where it is the convergence of the text and the reader that brings the literary work into existence; 'virtual' because it is what is unwritten, unspoken or apparently trivial that gives rise to the dynamic nature of the text.

Husen and Postlethwaite (1985) do, however, point out that there are two possible interpretations of texts. On the one hand, there can be an attempt to reconstruct the world of the text outlined above; on the other, the text can be interpreted literally. This latter depends upon the text being able to explain all the relevant phenomena, and with no feasible alternative explanation. Whereas this kind of interpretation, termed by Ricoeur the 'archeological' aspect of hermeneutics, can be very accurate, when examining old documents, for example, it is most useful for the 'immediate' meaning of observable events, and for bringing to the surface something that is, in a sense, already there. The former interpretation, in contrast, is concerned with the symbolic or contextual meanings behind a text, or its world. Here, something that is not self-evidently there is being interpreted, and the rigid rules of interpretation cannot apply. Instead, there comes into play a 'grammar' of human cultural and historical contexts, a consideration of the value systems of the society wherein the text is situated.

This 'grammar' is, in fact, what Culler (1975) calls 'literary competence', a set of conventions for reading literary texts, agreed upon by a community of interpreters. Other theorists, including Purves (1985), term these mental outlines 'schemata', projected on to a text by the reader as a prediction or expectation that the text must be understood in a particular way. It is not purely an inductive process of prediction and confirmation, but proceeds through refinements and re-refinements in order to achieve meaning. Schemata are acquired through the experience of reading texts, so it is the texts themselves that help to produce the particular reading of the text. The readings of texts help to produce the communities of readers referred to above and elsewhere, bound together by a common understanding of language and the similar meanings they hold for words and sentences when placed in a common context. In order for this latter interpretation to happen in autobiographies and biographies, the broader biographical context needs to be addressed, as indeed it is in successful auto/biographical accounts, and the hermeneutical circle is thus an intrinsic part of auto/biographical method.

Indeed, Dilthey (1976) sees autobiographies as: '... the most direct expression of reflection about life' (1976: 213). He sees life as an external phenomenon, and understanding of this phenomenon penetrates to what produced it within a particular environment. Between the person who understands the life and the person who creates it there develops an intimacy of understanding, and the biographer surrenders to and loses himself in the existence of others. Dilthey sees the significance of the meaning of every life, unique, developed within its own context, yet related to and reflecting the meaning of the whole 'historical universe' (1976:214). This is a view shared by modern biographical theory.

It is important to make the distinction between hermeneutics and phenomenology, and van Manen (1990) explains the complexities of attempting this. Phenomenology is, in simple terms, an immediate description of the lifeworld as lived. When that description becomes a mediated description, expressed in symbolic form, the description begins to contain an element of interpretation. Van Manen gives Sartre's example of blushing to illustrate this. A person cannot

be embarrased by their own body when, for example, they blush, since they 'exist' their body. They are conscious of their body not as it is for *them,* but as it is for the *other,* and they experience themself as an object for the other. It has been argued that all description is a form of interpretation, and this is where the difficulty begins. van Manen, however, believes that there is a clear distinction between phenomenology (the pure description of lived experience), and hermeneutics ( the interpretation of experience through a text or some other symbolic form). There are, however, those who believe that there exist, as well as pure descriptive phenomenology, areas such as interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology. In fact, van Manen quotes Gadamer's assertion that a work of art is already an interpretation, and so to interpret the meaning of something - and this can surely include a literary work - is to interpret an interpretation.

Moving on from the definitions above, van Manen discusses the connections between phenomenology and biography. He acknowledges that phenomenology is a bringing to reflective awareness the nature of events experienced in the lifeworld, so contributing by this personal insight towards a remaking of the individual against a background of the communal or social. He also claims, however, that the focus of phenomenology is not upon the meanings relative to a personal life history, as in biography, but to meanings in the everyday world, what van Manen terms the 'lifeworld'. It is interesting that when investigating lived experience, he inevitably uses similar material to the biographer, with the full realization that this material is already a transformation of experiences, and cannot be identical to lived experience itself. He quotes personal experience, interviews, close observation, descriptions in literature, diaries and art as source material. This source material, however, is a borrowing of other people's experiences and reflections on their experiences, in order to better understand a particular aspect of human experience, in the context of all human experience. Phenomenology is not interested in the subjective experiences and perspectives of the subjects, the private, unique and personal events of individual lives, but in investigating the phenomenon in question as a human experience, that may relate to the possible experience of others. This point may be

illustrated by looking at an extract from the autobiography by Tim Lott, *The Scent of Dried Roses* (1997), when he talks about his mother's suicide:

> What does it mean to a family when the mother takes her own life? Was it really a sacrifice, as Jean imagined? Or was it vengeance of some sort? Or was she just mad? Perhaps it means whatever you decide it means, and nothing else. Of course, the stories must attempt the best connection with reality. But so many explanations fit the facts, so many meanings are sustainable. You make a choice, in the end. Each version has its profits and penalties. (1997: 255)

Although this extract is pertinent to the life that Lott is writing about, it stands up as a piece of phenomenological writing as an account of the possible experience of others in the same desperate situation.

A word needs to be said at this point about anecdotal narrative. The anecdote is a special kind of story, short, interesting or amusing, used not merely to liven up a text that would otherwise be boring or difficult, but certainly useful to make the essence of a subject comprehensible. Epistemologically speaking, if the complexities of a subject cannot be grasped, an anecdotal story about it may satisfy in a less direct manner. The anecdote has significance in both phenomenology and biographical writing: The narrative element has the power to compel the reader's willing attention; the anecdote invites the reader to reflect on the story to find significance; the story may involve the reader personally to search for meaning; the story may be moving; it may challenge the reader's interpretive abilities. Its particular value for biography is its ability to combine narrative power with reflective discourse in such a way as to reveal character. In phenomenology, it allows pre-reflective involvement in lived experience, whilst inviting reflection on the meanings that are within the experience.

The position of phenomenology with regard to language and text is of interest, since language is the way in which lived experience is reflected upon. Ricoeur maintains that all experience is a text; in which case phenomenological description is the interpretation of the text - in other words hermeneutics - and the difficulties in maintaining the distinctions has already been

touched upon. van Manen accepts that the act of writing allows the writer to make external what he/she knew internally, and in a sense the writer is a product of his own product. Moreover, writing creates a distance from the world whereby what is subjective in everyday experience becomes an object for reflection. At the same time as abstracting the writer away from the concrete nature of the world and from lived experience, the narrative power of story can paradoxically be sometimes more compelling than the life-as-lived. Another thing that van Manen regards as successful in a phenomenological text is what he calls the 'silence around the words'. Lastly, he recognizes the necessity of rewriting constantly, going back and forth between the parts and the whole - something which he calls 'style'. The ideas above, for example the narrative power of the story creating its own truth; the silences between words - what could in other words be called 'gaps' or 'indeterminacies'; the travelling back and forth within the text to create meaning; are such that they sit comfortably within reader-response theory.

Grumet (1992) looks at the work of Husserl towards exploring the phenomenological foundations of auto/biographical methods. Husserl believed in phenomenological reduction, or *epoche*, which is a bracketing of our convictions and prejudices so that we may examine, see and feel the essential form of a thing. This is, paradoxically, a distancing from an experience in order to see it closer. Together with this, Husserl saw the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the constitution of meanings and the description of immediate experience; and only in the immediacy and freshness of the experience could certain knowledge reside. Because consciousness has to be consciousness of something, the subject can only be presented to the consciousness through the object that it intends; thus 'intentionality' is a structure of consciousness. The intentional act of consciousness, feeling, remembering, imagining, Husserl linked to a unifying identity that would give meaning to a series of intentional acts of consciousness. Importantly, he recognised that all thought is situated in the history of individual persons and the culture they share, and saw consciousness as a stream of experience of the world. Moreover, he described a flow of 'now-points' situated within a

temporal perspective and carrying horizons of past and present 'nows'. Auto/biographical method shares these temporal perspectives, since the narrative takes place temporally, but at the same time, the world and life encounters taking place in the narrative are experienced *through the subject's own inner time. In one respect, phenomenology has to beware of falling* victim to the scrutiny of one person's experience, with the result that this reflection distorts experience to fit idealized forms. There is a danger that the distancing required in *epoche* breaks the ties of commitment to the real world. Modern auto/biographical method, on the other hand, with its anti-spotlight approach, is rooted in context, and reality saturates all of these cultural and social interactions.

All lived experience is a life in time; time is the one certain feature of life, and this temporal structure is a feature of reader-response theory and auto/biographical method. The temporality of narrative is referred to above, and van Manen (1990) notes that lived experience can never be grasped as an immediate phenomenon, but only reflectively as a past presence. Consequently, the meaning of lived experience is always of something past, and so it can never be fully grasped, since lived experience has to involve the totality of life.

Hunsberger (1992) looks at what happens to time during the reading experience, and what connection this has with 'entering the world of the text' (1992: 66). When a conscious decision is made to do this and let go of physical reality, then a transition occurs from clock time to inner time and a different kind of reality. However, there exists a lack of synchronisation between the demands of real life in clock time and the relevance of interpretation in inner time. The inner reality of clock time is not fixed, it is a shifting horizon, and a rereading of the same text will not yield the same interpretation. But just as a person cannot live fully in inner time with no connection with reality, he/she may not live constantly in real time, with no inner vision, without becoming ill or disturbed. The result for the reader is the existence of a constant state of tension between the two.

As far as time in the text itself is concerned, a writer has the problem of trying to show time passing slowly because nothing is happening, but without boring the reader. Similarly, a story that is told in present time is like past time to the reader, viewing it in retrospect. Although a writer has the freedom to manage time, and can even 'pace' the reader to read at a certain speed, the flow of time in the story must seem appropriate, and this takes great skill. Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* gives an account of virtually every minute of one day in the life of a political prisoner, filled with trivial detail that is nevertheless fascinating. Then at the end, the author reminds the reader that this is one day out of three thousand six hundred and fifty three days - three days for leap years. This instantly shows inner time operating on two levels - the inner time does not pass evenly; the one day described has a dense content relevant to the events of that one day, yet it subsumes within it the inexorable, interminable days of the rest of the prison sentence.

Hunsberger also points out the different relationships to time of narrative, discursive writing and poetry. The only importance of time for discursive writing is the time of writing, for reference purposes and because it may become outdated. Dealing with eternal themes, poetry occupies a place outside time. Narrative, on the other hand, encompasses change and moving on, whether it be minutes or centuries, and these naturally take time. It may be relevant to point out here that narrative auto/biography is of a life lived in time. Whether it covers a short section of a life, or the sweeping totality, and whatever the skills used by the author to manage time, auto/biography is essentially narrative, and as such is a text in time.

Linearity in reading texts is of interest here. Stories tend to have a sequence and end in some sort of denouement, and there are those who believe that, because in real life we cannot see endings in advance, we should not in a sense break the author's trust by reading ahead. However it is by no means certain that knowing the ending does weaken the story for the reader in any way. For some readers the story may be read as a puzzle, to see how well the pieces fit together; other stories are predictable in that good always defeats evil anyway; and the reader's mind may well sequence and order the events, characters, etc, in a far from linear manner. On the other hand, later text will, in effective reading, affect the interpretation of earlier

text. When a text is read in sequence then the earlier text must be reinterpreted in the light of later text, gradually to build understanding. The future, in a sense, influences the past in way it can never do in real life. This explanation is a temporal version of the 'intentional sentence correlatives' of Iser, (1974), explained at the beginning of this chapter.

Close to the question of linearity of a text is that of the ending. Reading to the end of a narrative text brings the experience of parting, even loss. Together with the desire for closure and the sense of completion and moving on that this brings, there is regret at leaving the world of the text. It exists still to reread or revisit, but response theory tells us that this will be a different experience, in fact the reading of a new text. And although reading is essentially a solitary activity, there is, paradoxically, a frequent feeling of involvement in a fellowship, and even if the reader rereads, he does so with the knowledge that that same feeling of community will dissolve as before. It is part of a writer's skill to provide the reader with a resolution, to let him/her go. Whether the ending of the story is powerful and unexpected, or drifts slowly to a close, the text world can live on after reading, and reflecting on the experience of the text will sometimes reveal new meanings, new significances, This may be seen as Iser's (1978) 'changing viewpoints' in action, where the reader constantly moves between the shifting perspectives of plot and characters on a connection-making journey - only here, this is achieved after the closure of the narrative. Indeed, the response that happens after a reading is when the temporal aspect of the text becomes irrelevant and the parts of the text come together in the text to create a unity. A circle of understanding develops, where understanding of one part of a text illuminates other parts, and a gradual richer and more unified interpretation of the text takes place.

This unity and wholeness, and the reliance on context for the full revelation of meaning, can provide a slipping out of the constraints of time that narrativity is bound by, and this is significant for the relationship between temporality and auto/biographical method. Auto/biography is sequential in nature, and the life as lived is narrated in a temporal frame. The work as it is read tells the story of a life, and the real time of the reader passes as the inner time of the text moves, in ways already discussed, from beginning to closure. But at the end of the

reading experience, the reader has a unified understanding of all the parts of the work, of all the different entities that the subject became for the reader at various points in time, and all of these are outside the 'lifetime' time of the subject in question. The subject is at the same time all the different people that he/she was portrayed as at various times, as well as the whole unified person. Moreover, this subject has been created by the interaction of the reader with the author and the text itself to create an individual unique to this reading. Were the same auto/biographical text to be read by a different reader, or even by the same reader at another time, there would be a different unity achieved, and a new interpretation of the subject. In this way, Hunsberger maintains that through the reading process the imagination becomes one of the few forces strong enough to challenge the power of time.

## CONCLUSION: WHAT AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD MIGHT LEARN FROM READER-RESPONSE THEORY, AND VICE-VERSA

It remains finally to identify the nature of the relationship between the two theories, in respect of how each draws upon the other, yet at the same time through the relationship adds both substance and essence to its own arguments.

Various aspects of narrative theory are important here. The role of the narrator may be seen to be polyphonic in narrative, at times assuming the sensitivities if a child, at times omniscient, and even unreliable or devious. Consequently, the apparently straightforward role of the narrator of biography or autobiography may be seen as one which can manipulate the audience. At times the autobiographer can see an episode through the eyes of the child he/she then was, and at others become the shrewd social commentator. The biographer can similarly withhold narrative details for later effect. In fact, the writer of an auto/biographical text is called upon constantly to make choices about which details of the life to include and which to leave out, since to include all would be impossible. Here, in fact, the 'indeterminacy gaps' of response theorists such as Iser, where the reader is left to complete the meaning in the 'virtual space' where the literary work comes into being, inform auto/biographical theory. Moreover, these ideas on 'essential omission' reinforce the proposition put forward by Derrida that the subject-centred text is a fallacy, and the subject/person of an auto/biography exists somewhere else, in the experiences surrounding that person.

Reader-response theory focuses on the complex manipulation of the reader's viewpoint that is found in narrative fiction, what Benton (1992) calls the 'shifting viewpoint', giving a continually changing horizon resulting from the differing perspectives of the narrator, the characters, the plot and the reader. In auto/biography, there is a similar interweaving of perspectives, what Gadamer calls a 'fusion of horizons' (Scott 1998), since the agendas of both the biographer and the subject inform and construct the account; as does the reader of it. Thus both reader-response theory and auto/biographical method produce a text that is positioned in its viewpoint by such influences as the author's presuppositions, the nature of the subject, and the reader.

The notions of 'truth' and 'fiction' may be seen as important aspects within reader-response theory, questioning as they do the nature of the *meaning* of a literary text, and Lamarque and Olsen (1994) point out that for this reason literary texts have cultural significance, in spite of their lack of any necessarily epistemological basis. 'Truth' is, in fact, an irrelevant term in literary fiction, as it can mean 'unreal', or can mean 'false', and a fictional narrative may contain within it a 'true' element. It is at this point that the distinctions between truth and fiction in auto/biography begin to blur, since sometimes a 'true' life may be outlined within a fictional work; and, as Denzin (1989) maintains, the creation of a 'real' life in an autobiographical text is in fact a fictional version of that life, being an interaction between the narrative discourse and the life that has been led. However, the real person with a real life does nevertheless exist, and biographical theory is the attempt to locate and interpret this life within the substance of the text. When the text is seen, as Harding (1962) maintains, as a form of social communication whose aim is to promote the evaluation of human experience, then notions of 'true' and 'false', true narrative or fiction, become irrelevant. What is important is such aspects as internal consistency, and basic narrative skill.

How characters define their identities is a concern of narrative literature, and one of the principal features of this concern is the balance between the individuality of the character on the one hand and the universal nature of his/her predicament on the other. Modern biography has a tendancy to focus on the uniqueness of the particular subject, playing down the social context, and auto/biographical theorists such as Stanley (1992) have voiced criticisms of this simplistic view of the self as subject; indeed, she explains that there are multiple and competing views of the self for the writer to deal with. This view finds echoes in the writings of response theorists such as Iser (1980), who describes two kinds of self that exist during the reading process, the alien self taking on and responding to the theme of the work, and the real, 'virtual' self in the background. Further, Holland (1980) makes the point that this 'self' develops and changes as a result of the life experiences of an individual identity, which is itself fixed. Textual interpretation emerges as an expression of this personal identity, such that the same text may

be interpreted by vastly different individuals. Consequently, Holland sees the writing of biography as the empathic creation of the subject's identity theme from the writer's own. Ricoeur takes this narrative theory of personal identity further with the concept of emplotment, which holds that a narrative identity, or character, cannot be distinguished from his/her experiences, and that in constructing the story, the narrative has constructed the character's narrative identity also. Lacan similarly places these themes of narrative identity firmly into a social context, where an identity is constituted in terms of similarity to and difference from the subjects around it, and is expressed in terms of language. Thus reader-response theory shares with auto/biographical method a view of narrative identity set firmly within a social context and realised through the literary work.

Questions concerning narrator - 'who speaks', narratee - 'to whom', as well as 'when', and 'with what authority', are discussed by Culler (1997), who explains that a 'literary competence' is assumed in both the reader and in the author who writes the text within inherent conventions. The result of this is to locate the meaning of the work within the text, often understood and not stated, and not solely with author or reader. Derrida's deconstructionalist stance is, surprisingly, similar to Culler's structuralist one, in that he says that words in a text are dependent for their function upon other elements not necessarily present; so the text becomes inconclusive. This complements the open-ended nature of auto/biographical writing, in keeping with the incomplete nature of the life written about.

Evans (1993) enlarges upon the ideas above concerning the illustration of the general with the particular when she addresses the selective nature of some modern biographical texts, which recalls both Iser's 'indeterminacies' and Derrida's 'fallacies of presence'. The sociological areas of auto/biography, as outlined by, for example, Merton (1988) reflect and make use of reader-response theories in several ways, for instance in the importance of the collective interpretation of texts, examined by Fish and Culler, and the view of the auto/biographer as a dual participant-onlooker put forward by Harding (1962). In fact, the idea of the biography being in part an autobiography of its writer is discussed by Stanley (1992), and her description of the dynamic

nature of the text with its unfolding events affecting the life of the writer as it is written, sit comfortably within the theories of theorists such as Iser about expectation and continual modification in a text.

Iser's theories of expectation above, where the sentences of a text are related to each other in 'intentional sentence correlatives', are a definition of the reading process similar to that expressed by the theory of hermeneutics. Furthermore, the link between hermeneutics on the one hand, where the past and the present come together through the interpretation of a text to create an understanding of an experience and its context, and auto/biography on the other, is clear. These expectations or projections put upon a text resemble the conventions of a community of interpreters that Culler calls 'literary competence'. Similarly, although phenomenology is not interested in individual lives, but in events experienced in the lifeworld that may be related to the experience of others, Ricoeur states that all experience is a text, so phenomenological interpretation is a kind of hermeneutics. Issues of linearity and temporality are discussed further, when van Manen (1990) remarks that from a phenomenological viewpoint, life as lived experience may only be captured reflectively as past experience, so it may never be grasped fully. But auto/biography is essentially a narrative text of a life lived in time, yet bound by a unity in a circle of understanding where past, present and future illuminate each other in a unity outside time. Here reader-response theory and autobiographical method come together.

I hope that the above synopsis of the links between the two theories and methods serve to highlight these links, in the areas of narrative theory, aspects of truth and fiction, concepts of selfhood and identity, the location of the author, sociology and psychology, and hermeneutics and phenomenology.

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