John Farrell, *The Varieties of Authorial Intentions: Literary Theory Beyond the Intentional Fallacy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. XII, 274 pp. €75.

Wimsatt and Beardsley's famous article "The Intentional Fallacy" (1954), and later on Barthes' (1967) and Foucault's (1969) seminal discussions of literary authorship, marked an epistemic turn in literary studies. These changed scholarly perspectives from theretofore mainly author-based, biographically orientated interpretations, to text-based interpretations employing poststructuralist methodologies such as discourse analyse and intertextuality. Like Danneberg and Müller in 1983—who called this new perspective a "dogma"—John Farrell sees the renunciation of intentional interpretation as a "merely theoretical taboo" (9). Farrell argues that this taboo led to a "scholarly neurosis" (9) disqualifying any reference to the author on the one hand, while, on the other hand, the author as a key concept had never truly disappeared from literary studies. Farrell's study *The Varieties of Authorial Intention* is thus a new attempt to do away with this taboo and "to suggest a way of thinking and talking about intentions that focuses properly upon the literary work and avoids the reductions of biography" (11).

Farrell's study has to be seen in the larger context of the return of the author (cf. Seán Burke's study of 1992), a broad ensemble of literary studies of the last 30 years that have critically revisited the theories of literary authorship established by poststructuralist Theory, and in parts already reintroduced and reassessed the potential of intention-based readings.[1] According to Farrell, "The Intentional Fallacy" and poststructuralism have engaged in a new dead end that he calls "*the textual fallacy*—the notion that a text is meaningful purely on its own" (9—emphasis original).

In order to find a way out of this proposed fallacy, Farrell refers to communication theories (mainly Sperber and Wilson 2005) to explain why intention is a necessary concept of human action and communication and why it has to be part of literary interpretation. Farrell argues that because of the essential underdeterminacy of language, words and texts only become meaningful when they are uttered in an actual context with a concrete intention behind them, just as the supposition of an intention is what makes the difference between a blink and a wink. The act of communication can furthermore only be successful when the receiver of that utterance is able to infer this intention by the means of conventions.

The basic argument for Farrell's pragmatic concept of authorial intention is therefore a simplification and naturalisation of our understanding of a literary text, thus to approach it as a result of human action (communication), i.e. as intentionally chosen statements: "Authorial intention is a straightforwardly naturalistic concept. It is essential to the definition of human action, and its application to the creation of literary

[1] Farrell acknowledges earlier attempts to reintroduce authorial intentions and refers to the works of E. D. Hirsch (1967) and P.D. Juhl (1980), but he does not discuss these attempts in systematically manner in order to demonstrate the differences and advantages of his own concept, neither does he include other existing concepts of intention based readings from scholars as Tolhurst, Nehamas, Levinson or Currie (for a critique and an overview of these concepts see Spoerhase 2007a and 2007b).

works requires an assumption not more demanding than writing is such an action" (11). In the following, Farrell attempts to create a concept of intention-based interpretation that stays as closely as possible to this intuitive understanding of literary communication, while also building up a few categorical distinctions to help avoid a regression to outdated, naïve-intentionalist interpretation. However, many of Farrell's assumptions—discussed respectively in the following paragraphs—bear precisely that risk.

Intentions are primarily inferable from the text

While Farrell explicitly does not exclude the potential value of external information from the process of interpretation, he stresses from the beginning that his concept of intention does not require any extra-textual evidence. Farrell argues that approaching literary texts as utterances means to suppose that the work is "*meant*" (34—emphasis original) and thus that the author chooses their words in such a way that their anticipated readers may infer their intentions from the text: "Grasping the content of a literary work depends primarily upon our ability to interpret the linguistic structures of various kinds that compose the work itself in its peculiar context. […] In fact the author's intention is what the text allows us to infer, knowing that he intended us to recognize it" (31-2). Keeping the literary text at the centre of interpretation, Farrell marks his distances from biographical or psychologising interpretations mainly built on external "proofs" (178).

Intentions are pluralistic

The key argument of Farrell's concept lies in his transposition of the philosopher Donald Davidson's (2005) concept of the "structured hierarchy of intentions" in language onto literary texts and their titles constituting *varieties of authorial intention*. Farrell argues that "the intention behind any human action can be multiple and complexly intertwined". As an example, he cites the act of raising one's hand at a meeting. "I raise my hand at a meeting in order to vote for a certain candidate. I vote for a certain candidate in order to advance a policy. Advancing a policy depends upon raising my hand. These are intimately related but distinguishable intentions" (35). In the case of literary writing, according to Farrell, a similar chain of intentions can be assumed. In doing so, Farrell differentiates between three levels of authorial intentions and puts them in a hierarchical order: *communicative intentions*, *artistic intentions* and *practical intentions*.

The first are "the most basic ones" in Farrell's conceptualisation, "they provide the meaning that comprises the work's information-content" (36). Like in any other situation of communication, these communicative intentions would have "a simple, fixed criterion of success": "all that communicative intentions require is that a competent reader be able to recognize what they are" (37) in order to understand what is meant. For Farrell, "the work itself is nothing more than the aggregate of these communicative intentions, though grasping all of them may not be possible given the complexity of literary works and the fact that ambiguity is a key artistic resource" (37).

On the second level, Farrell situates the artistic intentions whose success depends on the success of the basic, communicational intentions: "But once the reader has understood the communicative intentions of the work, its artistic qualities become accessible to her, and she is free to respond to and evaluate them according to her own lights" (37). Artistic intentions then would be essentially "the author's attempt to provide a valuable reading experience by creating literary effects—to move, amuse, perplex, inspire […] the reader" through "verbal skill, mastery of structure imagery, metaphor, narrative forms and genres" (39). Unlike communicative intentions, artistic intentions need not be "consciously recognized by the reader" to succeed. It would be enough that readers are affected in the intended way.

Practical intentions, finally, are the author's personal motivations to write and publish a literary text: "to impress others, give them pleasure, earn a living, gain status […]" (38). These intentions, Farrell argues, "do not affect [the work's] meaning" and must not "be intelligible in the work itself" (38). This also means that they cannot be inferred from the text by interpretation, even though they depend on the success of the other levels of intentions.

This tripartition of authorial intention is crucial to Farrell's concept as it allows him to argue that Wimsatt and Beardsley's "Intentional Fallacy" fails to separate between communicational and artistic intentions. In Farrell's opinion the "useful caution they [W. and B.] fostered about the psychologizing of literary criticism" would not have had to lead to an "obstacle blocking the necessary reference to authorial intentions" (43) if the scholars had taken into consideration this separation (39-46).

Nevertheless, Farrell's distinction between communicational and artistic intentions and their hierarchical subordination calls for further discussion: Farrell emphasises that he does not want to imply that a literary work's "purpose is merely to convey a message" (38) and adds that literary texts like those of the French Author Mallarmé aim at "the experience of meaningful*ness* […] rather than meaning itself" (38—emphasis original), which in his eyes underlines the separation of communicative and artistic intentions. However, in Farrell's hierarchy of intentions, the possibility of a reader to recognize artistic intentions is subordinated to, and dependent on, the success of the author's communicative intentions. Even though Farrell concedes that the form—which he imbues with intention by calling it "craft" (39)—of a literary text "can become part of its meaning" (39) and that thus the distinction between the types of intention "can become a subtle and perhaps not entirely pure one" (40), the hierarchy he employs seems (following Gerard Genette's terminology) to install a primacy of *histoire* over *discours*. It could thus be objected that the form of a literary text not only accidently but systematically contributes to its meaning and, disregarding this assumption, could unfortunately limit the power and success of interpretation.

Stable meanings but changing impacts

Connecting the meaning(s) of a text closely to the author's intentions—as Farrell does—implies that these meanings cannot change, but are fixed once a text has been written, no matter if we are able to recognize them. Besides the aforementioned doubts about

psychologizing interpretations, one of the most employed objections to intentionalist interpretation therefore is to note "that the meaning of works of art can indeed change over time, that they have an inexhaustible quality" (56). Similarly to E.D. Hirsch (1967), Farrell introduces the differentiation between *meaning* and *impact* in order to disprove this objection. While the meaning(s) of a text would indeed be limited to the set of the author's intentions, for Farrell, the impacts of these meanings on readers are always multiple, "not in control of the author" (57) and change within time.

To make this point clear, Farrell refers to an essay in which scholar Chinua Achebe points out the structures of racism underlying Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*. Farrell argues that Achebe's reading does not change anything about the meaning of the text but rather highlights meanings that were always there. What changes thus is the impact of the text on readers, their opinion of the text and its value (163-164).

Is there a single right interpretation of a literary text?

The stability of the intended meaning(s) of a literary text that Farrell defends raises the question if there is one correct interpretation of a literary text. Farrell's answer is more or less: yes and no. Looking for a way to harmonize his attempt to reintroduce authorial intention as a key concept of literary criticism with the common practices of literary scholars, Farrell differentiates three levels of interpretation (165-76) and argues that the assumed stability of intended meanings does not imply "singleness and clarity of meaning" (167).

The *surface level* is where readers infer "what the author is explicitly saying and implying" (165). On this level, the reader primarily deals with what Farrell calls the communicational intentions and suggests that "there is a single right interpretation" of a literary text "in the sense that there is a correct way of describing what actually happens in the most fundamental sense" (166). Two interpretations that contradict each other on this level cannot both be correct, yet it may be—and, as Farrell admits, it often is the case—that an author's intention allows for a plurality of meanings and thus several correct interpretations due to ambiguity, nonsense or opacity.

Deep interpretation in Farrell's taxonomy does not call into question the surface meaning of a text but looks for "some more valuable or explanatory level of meaning", often focusing "upon unconscious sources of meaning" (167) distinct from the author's conscious intention (Farrell discusses as examples Freud's psychoanalysis, Marxism, Foucault's notion of power, literary Darwinism and actor-network theory). With *interlinear or thematic interpretation* Farrell finally constructs a term for what scholars mostly do: addressing a particular aspect of a literary work and looking for explanation and interpretation by means of literary history, theory and categorisation. Interlinear interpretation then would not contradict surface meaning or authorial intention but, since the scholar can have greater expertise in certain fields than the author herself, the former could demonstrate implications and functioning of a literary work of which the latter would not necessarily be aware. Especially the number of valid thematic interpretations is not limited as long as different aspects of a work are addressed.

This taxonomy of interpretation gives Farrell the opportunity to on the one hand maintain his fundamental critique of poststructuralist attempts to negate the possibility and the value of including authorial intention to the process of interpretation, and on the other hand still concede a certain (but diminished) validity to practices as discourse analysis or deconstruction. He argues that on a practical level, these practices would not necessarily need to conflict with authorial intention.

Naturalising the evaluation of literature

In his last chapter—"Authorship and Literary Value"—Farrell argues that the era of Critique (190) misconducts literary criticism not only in concerns of interpretation but also in concerns of evaluation. Just as he perceives a stable meaning depending on the author's intentions, he also posits a stable value for a literary text that would not mainly be dependent on political, social or economic interests (i.e. power relations in general) but on the artistic skills of an author and the created valuable (reading) experience the work provides. The assumption of an artistic intention would thus be necessary to compare and evaluate artistic performances and their results, the texts. Admittedly, not everyone will be able to appreciate the same literary work to the same degree, which for Farrell is not a question of taste or subjectivity but of *afición*, a term he borrows from Hemingway meaning as much as "well-informed appreciation". This concept of passionate knowledge privileges the value judgements of experts over those of mere consumers and gives a naturalistic explication for the difference between 'high-' and 'mass-literature', while legitimising the building of literary canons as objective and transparent judgements.

Merits and risks of Farrell's Study

With the growing (historical) distance toward poststructural theory, the necessity for individuals to be responsible agents and moral arbiters in society has made a reappearance in public debate and academic research, as well as in literature. Defending the relevance of authorial intention for the understanding of literary texts, thereby humanising and naturalising the conception of literary interpretations, Farrell points to questions that concern today's scholars and authors. Thus, although not explicitly, Farrell ties in with current debates such as the search for a *New Sincerity* (Kelly 2016) in the communication between author and reader. With his book *The Varieties of Authorial Intention,* Farrell certainly proposes an intuitive and simple way of fully reintroducing the author as responsible for the meaning of a literary text without entirely disqualifying practices of interpretation that do not primarily focus on intention. Emphasising his deviation from poststructuralist, mainly French Theory, Farrell marks a clear position that opens wide possibilities for academic debate.

However, Farrell's rejection of Critique and his occasional tendency to naturalise the process of interpretation risks in some instances to oversimplify the construction of meaning in literature and thus to go back on previous achievements in literary theory. First and foremost, his (mostly implicit) understanding of the author as simply a holistic human actor lacks further justification and problematising. Dominique Maingueneau

(2004) for example proposes a heuristic tripartition of the entity we call 'author' and divides between the author as a social person (legally responsible for his texts), as a publicly acting *écrivain*, and as an authorial image which arises directly from the text. To maintain such a (of course artificial) differentiation does not mean to renounce the importance of authorial intention, but would have its merit in keeping a critical distance in the observation of author-text relations while rebuilding the entity of 'the author', which is an important part of reading. Farrell does not make any of these differentiations but sees literature merely as a direct form of expression. Therefore, he can easily dismiss possible misgivings about literary representation, seeing them as examples of the "textual fallacy", and argue that "there are poems that […] suggest no speaker other than the author" (44), which—if I understand him correctly—should be considered the usual case rather than an exception. It may be objected that such an assumption could misguide students and future scholars and lead to exactly the kind of naïve interpretation of which "The Intentional Fallacy" had cautioned. The same seems to be true in Farrell's already mentioned pre-eminence of content (*histoire*) over form (*discours*) for the creation of meaning in literary texts, and his negligence of intertextuality and discourse analysis in literature. It appears equally problematic to approach the judgement of literary value (strictly) in the naturalistic manner Farrell proposes. Although he certainly has a point in describing how scholars actually and practically evaluate literature, it seems highly problematic to declare *afición* as a direct means to objective value judgements, doing away with any observation and analysis of the power structures that influence the distribution of value in the literary field (Bourdieu 1992). This would mean taking existing orders (as canons) for natural, and neglecting the social processes and conflicts of interest that guide the evaluation of art in society.

For all these reasons, its positive and its criticised aspects, Farrell's study should provide matter for further academic discussions on how authorial intention can be part of literary interpretation. This discussion should furthermore also take into consideration other existing concepts of authorial intention that Farrell does not mention.

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