criticism; nor does an estimate of its effects. Good literature is more than effective rhetoric applied to true ideas—even if we could agree upon a philosophical yardstick for measuring the truth of ideas and even if we could find some way that transcended nose-counting for determining the effectiveness of the rhetoric.

A recent essay by Lionel Trilling bears very emphatically upon this point.[4] (I refer to him the more readily because Trilling has registered some of his objections to the critical position that I maintain.) In the essay entitled "The Meaning of a Literary Idea," Trilling discusses the debt to Freud and Spengler of four American writers, O'Neill, Dos Passos, Wolfe, and Faulkner. Very justly, as it seems to me, he choose Faulkner as the contemporary writer who, along with Ernest Hemingway, best illustrates the power and importance of ideas in literature. Trilling is thoroughly aware that his choice will seem shocking and perhaps perverse, "because," as he writes, "Hemingway and Faulkner have insisted on their indifference to the conscious intellectual tradition of our time and have acquired the reputation of achieving their effects by means that have the least possible connection with any sort of intellectuality or even with intelligence."

Here Trilling shows not only acute discernment but an admirable honesty in electing to deal with the hard cases—with the writers who do not clearly and easily make the case for the importance of ideas. I applaud the discernment and the honesty, but I wonder whether the whole discussion in his essay does not indicate that Trilling is really much closer to the so-called "new critics" than perhaps he is aware. For Trilling, one notices, rejects any simple one-to-one relation between the truth of the idea and the value of the literary work in which it is embodied. Moreover, he does not claim that "recognizable ideas of a force or weight are 'used' in the work," or "new ideas of a certain force and weight are 'produced' by the work." He praises rather the fact that we feel that Hemingway and Faulkner are "intensely at work upon the recalcitrant stuff of life." The last point is made the matter of real importance. Whereas Dos Passos, O'Neill, and Wolfe make us "feel that *they* feel that they have said the last word," "we seldom have the sense that [Hemingway and Faulkner] . . . have misrepresented to themselves the nature and the difficulty of the matter they work on."

Trilling has chosen to state the situation in terms of the writer's activity (Faulkner is intensely at work, etc.). But this judgment is plainly an inference from the quality of Faulkner's novels—Trilling has not simply heard Faulkner say that he has had to struggle with his work. (I take it Mr. Hemingway's declaration about the effort he put into the last novel impresses Trilling as little as it impresses the rest of us.)

Suppose, then, that we tried to state Mr. Trilling's point, not in terms of the effort of the artist, but in terms of the structure of the work itself. Should we not get something very like the terms used by the formalist critics? A description in terms of "tensions," of symbolic development, of ironies and their resolution? In short, is not the formalist critic trying to describe in terms

4. The essay referred to is included in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950). The American critic Trilling (1905–1975) discusses in it the influence of the Austrian founder of psychoanalysis SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939) and the German philosopher of history Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), author of *The Decline of the West* (1918–22), on the playwright Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953) and the novelists John Dos Passos (1896–1970), Thomas Wolfe (1900–1938), and William Faulkner (1897–1962).

1951

WILLIAM K. WIMSATT JR.
1907–1975

MONROE C. BEARDSLEY
1915–1985

"The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) and "The Affective Fallacy" (1949), coauthored by William Kurtz Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, are two of the most important position papers in the history of twentieth-century criticism. Neither presents an argument that is wholly original, but each codifies a crucial tenet of New Critical formalist orthodoxy. In "The Intentional Fallacy," Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that we cannot use the author's intention, even when we possess information about it, to judge a literary work; the work is a public utterance, not a private one that depends for its meaning on the intent or design of its author. In the later piece, "The Affective Fallacy," Wimsatt and Beardsley emphasize that the meaning of a literary work is not equivalent to its effects, especially its emotional impact, on the reader. Both of these positions are connected to Wimsatt and Beardsley's formalist view that analysis must

center on the text itself: the critic's task is to examine its linguistic structure and its aesthetic unity as an autonomous object.

Wimsatt, born in Washington, D.C., attended Georgetown University and Yale University, where he received his Ph.D. In 1939 he became a member of Yale's English department, and he soon won wide acclaim for his work in eighteenth-century studies; his books in that field include *The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson* (1941) and *Philosophic Words: A Study of Style and Meaning in the "Rambler" and "Dictionary" of Samuel Johnson* (1948). But he is best known for his literary theory and criticism, notably *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954), *Hateful Contraries: Studies in Literature and Criticism* (1965), *Day of the Leopards: Essays in Defense of the Poem* (1976), and, with CLEANTH BROOKS, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957). Beardsley, a native of Connecticut, received his B.A. and Ph.D. from Yale University, and held a position in the Philosophy department there before moving on to Mount Holyoke College in 1944. He later taught at Swarthmore College and at Temple University, focusing on literary criticism and aesthetics; his books include *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958) and *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present* (1966).

In their critique of intention, Wimsatt and Beardsley take aim at the Romantic idea of poetry as the expression of a writer's soul or personality. Influenced by T. S. ELIOT, as well as by JOHN CROWE RANSOM, Brooks, and other New Critics, Wimsatt and Beardsley define poetry as an impersonal art: what matters is the text itself. They also challenge literary historians who, according to Wimsatt and Beardsley, mistakenly believe that when evaluating a poem, one must know its biographical and historical origins. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, one must attend only to the organization of the words on the page and the coherence that the words do or do not possess. As they affirm near the beginning of the essay, "the poem itself shows what [the poet] is trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem."

"The Intentional Fallacy" is a powerful polemic, but somewhat confused, as critics have pointed out. How convincing, for example, is the distinction that its authors draw between the inside and the outside of a text? They insist a poem is a public utterance and hence cannot depend for its success on personal or private knowledge about the author, whether deliberately revealed or unearthed by literary historians and biographers. But one could reply that what an author says and the information that a scholar brings forward are public as well. It is precisely the idea that a text has discrete inside and outside meanings that clearly separate into the private and public that KENNETH BURKE, E. D. HIRSCH JR., HAROLD BLOOM, and SANDRA M. GILBERT AND SUSAN GUBAR, among many others, have in their different ways disputed. For the purposes of their polemic, Wimsatt and Beardsley's distinction is effective, but it has not held up under attack.

As with many key New Critical precepts, one of the appeals of "the intentional fallacy" is pedagogical. A teacher and class can concentrate on the text at hand without feeling that the students' interpretive work needs the support of information about the author and the historical period when the text was composed. Wimsatt and Beardsley have a convenient rule of thumb: if information about the author or period is relevant, it will be *in* the poem; if it is not realized in the poem already, then it is not relevant. Thus they regard as extraneous all reference to psychology, social history, and anthropology, disciplines focused on *extrinsic* rather than *intrinsic* matters—a key distinction for New Critics. Yet their claim creates pedagogical problems of its own, as E. D. Hirsch noted in *Validity in Interpretation* (1967; see below) and *The Aims of Interpretation* (1976). Once we set aside the author's intention, Hirsch maintains, we have no way to determine which reading of a poem is correct. The words on the page, he argues, can sustain interpretations that in fact conflict with one another, and the only principled way to resolve such disagreements is by recourse to the author's "original meaning."

Such foregrounding of authorial intention might seem to be common sense, but poets and novelists as well as critics have denied that the author is the best authority on the meaning of his or her work. T. S. Eliot, the most influential poet-critic of the twentieth century, remarks in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) that "What a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author; and indeed, in the course of time a poet may become merely a reader in respect to his own works, forgetting his original meaning—or without forgetting, merely changing." Earlier, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), D. H. Lawrence set out this maxim: "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it." Wimsatt and Beardsley would accept these claims only insofar as they reaffirm the primacy of the text. For them, the text shapes and controls what we say about it. Meaning is in the text, not in the intention of the author and, as "The Affective Fallacy" suggests, not in the reader, either.

In "The Affective Fallacy," Wimsatt and Beardsley contend that what the poem *is* is one thing (and the important thing), and what it *does* is another: it should be judged on the basis of itself, not according to its effects. While not forbidding discussion of emotion or feeling, they seek instead to keep all lines of inquiry connected to the "text": that is, to the elements of the poem that account for the effects that it creates. They distinguish sharply between "classical objectivity" and "romantic reader psychology," and of course accent the former.

For Wimsatt and Beardsley, the authority is the poem. Only by keeping our focus on the text can we guard against the dangers of impressionism, subjectivism, and relativism—a vital concern for scholars and teachers intent on giving legitimacy to "English" as an academic field of study and source of scientific knowledge. This position reaches back at least as far as MATTHEW ARNOLD, who in "The Study of Poetry" (1880) warned against the "personal fallacy," by which we judge poetry "on grounds personal to ourselves." Paradoxically, however, many of the same critics who in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries highlighted the priority of the text also spoke about the creative or constructive role played by the reader. I. A. Richards, for example, in "The Interactions of Words" (1942) maintained: "Understanding is not a preparation for reading the poem. It is itself the poem. And it is a constructive, hazardous, free creative process, a process of conception through which a new being is growing in the mind."

During the late 1960s and 1970s, a new movement in criticism, reader-response theory, drew on the insights about the reading process that Richards and others had advanced or implied in formulating their text-centered approaches. One of its most important members, STANLEY FISH, explicitly invoked Wimsatt and Beardsley's arguments in his essay "Literature in the Reader" (1970). For Fish, criticism should be concerned with the "analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time."

Other critics and theorists during this same period challenged and complicated Wimsatt and Beardsley's conception—in effect, a diminution—of the author. For example, MICHEL FOUCAULT and STEPHEN GREENBLATT are as much opposed to the Romantic conception of the author as were Wimsatt and Beardsley. But for them the author, reimagined and reconfigured, is nonetheless a focal point for literary investigation and analysis. Thus in "What Is an Author?" (1969; see below), Foucault considers not the author as such but rather the historical "author-function," a "mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society." For Wimsatt and Beardsley, and for those they influenced, this position, and reader-response criticism as well, takes us too far afield from the specific text, the self-contained poem. Studying literature in a disciplined way means directly examining literary artifacts, not authors or readers or social contexts.

"The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy" are very important historically as key documents in the theory and practice of New Criticism, the dominant mode of American academic criticism during the mid–twentieth century. They remain

sharply pertinent to debates today about interpretation and judgment, as WALTER BENN MICHAELS AND STEVEN KNAPP's essay "Against Theory" (1982; see below) and the many responses to its favorable account of "intention" suggest. Where do we locate the authority or control for textual meaning? in the poem itself? in the author? or in the reader? How do we define these terms, and what is their relationship to one another? Can we make a distinction between the inside and the outside of a text, between intrinsic and extrinsic criticism? What is the nature of the knowledge that literary study gives us? These are permanent questions in the field of literary theory and criticism, and Wimsatt and Beardsley raised and vitalized them as vividly as anyone has done.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The major works of Wimsatt and of Beardsley are listed in the second paragraph of this headnote. Secondary sources on Wimsatt include Eliseo Vivas, "Mr. Wimsatt on the Theory of Literature," in *The Artistic Transaction and Essays on Theory of Literature* (1963); *Literary Theory and Structure: Essays in Honor of W. K. Wimsatt*, edited by Frank Brady, John Palmer, and Martin Price (1973); and René Wellek, "The Literary Theory of William K. Wimsatt," *Yale Review* 66 (1977). See also the overview by Robert Moynihan, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 63, *Modern American Critics, 1920–1955* (ed. Gregory S. Jay, 1988), which contains biographical and bibliographical information. Other than the two classic essays he coauthored with Wimsatt, Beardsley's work in philosophical aesthetics has had little impact in the field of literary criticism.

The Intentional Fallacy

> He owns with toil he wrote the following scenes;
> But, if they're naught, ne'er spare him for his pains:
> Damn him the more; have no commiseration
> For dullness on mature deliberation.
>
> William Congreve, Prologue to *The Way of the World*[1]

The claim of the author's "intention" upon the critic's judgment has been challenged in a number of recent discussions, notably in the debate entitled *The Personal Heresy*, between Professors Lewis and Tillyard,[2] and at least implicitly in periodical essays like those in the "Symposiums" of 1940 in the *Southern* and *Kenyon Reviews*.[3] But it seems doubtful if this claim and most of its romantic corollaries are as yet subject to any widespread questioning. The present writers, in a short article entitled "Intention" for a *Dictionary*[4] of literary criticism, raised the issue but were unable to pursue its implications at any length. We argued that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art, and it seems to us that this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes. It is a principle which accepted or rejected points to the polar opposites of classical "imitation" and romantic expression. It entails many specific truths about inspiration, authenticity, biography, literary history and scholarship, and about some trends of contemporary poetry, especially its allusiveness. There is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic's approach will not be qualified by his view of "intention."

"Intention," as we shall use the term, corresponds to *what he intended* in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance. "In order to judge the poet's performance, we must know *what he intended*." Intention is design or plan in the author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write.

We begin our discussion with a series of propositions summarized and abstracted to a degree where they seem to us axiomatic, if not truistic.

1. A poem does not come into existence by accident. The words of a poem, as Professor Stoll[5] has remarked, come out of a head, not out of a hat. Yet to insist on the designing intellect as a *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a *standard*.

2. One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. "Only one *caveat* must be borne in mind," says an eminent intentionalist[6] in a moment when his theory repudiates itself; "the poet's aim must be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself."

3. Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. "A poem should not mean but be."[7] A poem can *be* only through its *meaning*—since its medium is words—yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant.[8] Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrelevant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and "bugs" from machinery. In this respect poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention. They are more abstract than poetry.

4. The meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul rather than a physical

1. Restoration comedy (1700) by the English dramatist and poet Congreve (1670–1729).
2. *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy by E. M. W. Tillyard and C. S. Lewis* (1939). Tillyard (1889–1962) was an English literary scholar, Lewis (1898–1963) an Irish-born literary scholar and novelist.
3. Cf. Louis Teeter, "Scholarship and the Art of Criticism," *ELH* 5 (Sept. 1938), 173–94; René Wellek, review of Geoffrey Tillotson's *Essays in Criticism and Research*, *Modern Philology* 41 (May 1944), 262; G. Wilson Knight, *Shakespeare and Tolstoy*, English Association Pamphlet no. 88 (April 1934), p. 10; Bernard C. Heyl, *New Bearings in Esthetics and Art Criticism* (New Haven, 1943), pp. 66, 113, 149 [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note].
4. *Dictionary of World Literature*, ed. Joseph T. Shipley (New York, 1943), pp. 326–39 [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note].
5. Elmer Edgar Stoll (1874–1959), literary critic whose works focused primarily on drama (especially Shakespeare).
6. J. E. Spingarn, "The New Criticism," in *Criticism in America* (New York, 1924), pp. 24–25 [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note].
7. From "Ars Poetica" (1926), by the American poet Archibald MacLeish.
8. As critics and teachers constantly do. "We have here a deliberate blurring . . ." [illegible] regarded as ironic or unplanned?" ". . . is the literal meaning intended . . . ?" ". . . a paradox of religious faith which is intended to exult. . . ." "It seems to me that Herbert intends. . . ." These examples are chosen from three pages of an issue of *The Explicator* (Fredericksburg, Va.), 2, no. 1 (Oct. 1943). Authors often judge their own works in the same way. See *This Is My Best*, ed. Whit Burnett (New York [illegible]

object like an apple. But even a short lyric poem is dramatic, the response of a speaker (no matter how abstractly conceived) to a situation (no matter how universalized). We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker*, and if to the author at all, only by a biographical act of inference.

5. If there is any sense in which an author, by revision, has better achieved his original intention, it is only the very abstract, tautological, sense that he intended to write a better work and now has done it. (In this sense every author's intention is the same.) His former specific intention was not his intention. "He's the man we were in search of, that's true"; says Hardy's rustic constable, "and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted."[9]

"Is not a critic," asks Professor Stoll, ". . . a judge, who does not explore his own consciousness, but determines the author's meaning or intention, as if the poem were a will, a contract, or the constitution? The poem is not the critic's own."[1] He has diagnosed very accurately two forms of irresponsibility, one which he prefers. Our view is yet different. The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology or morals. Mr. Richards[2] has aptly called the poem a *class*—"a class of experiences which do not differ in any character more than a certain amount . . . from a standard experience." And he adds, "We may take as this standard experience the relevant experience of the poet when contemplating the completed composition." Professor Wellek[3] in a fine essay on the problem has preferred to call the poem "a system of norms," "extracted from every individual experience," and he objects to Mr. Richards' deference to the poet as reader. We side with Professor Wellek in not wishing to make the poet (outside the poem) an authority.

A critic of our *Dictionary* article, Mr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, has argued[4] that there are two kinds of enquiry about a work of art: (1) whether the artist achieved his intentions; (2) whether the work of art "ought ever to have been undertaken at all" and so "whether it is worth preserving." Number (2), Mr. Coomaraswamy maintains, is not "criticism of any work of art *qua* work of art," but is rather moral criticism; number (1) is artistic criticism. But we maintain that (2) need not be moral criticism: that there is another way of deciding whether works of art are worth preserving and whether, in a sense, they "ought" to have been undertaken, and this is the way of objec-

9. A close relative of the intentional fallacy is that of talking about "means" and "end" in poetry instead of "part" and "whole." We have treated this relation concisely in our dictionary article [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note]. The quotation is from "The Three Strangers" (1883), by the English writer Thomas Hardy (1840–1928).

1. E. E. Stoll, "The Tempest," *PMLA* 44 (Sept. 1932), 703 [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note].

2. I. A. Richards (1893–1979), English literary theorist. For his fullest statement of the view discussed, see *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1925).

3. René Wellek (1903–1995), Austrian-born American literary theorist and scholar; the "fine essay" is "The Mode of Existence of a Literary Work of Art," *Southern Review*, spring 1942.

4. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Intention," *American Bookman* 1 (winter 1944), 41–48 [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note].

tive criticism of works of art as such, the way which enables us to distinguish between a skilful murder and a skilful poem. A skilful murder is an example which Mr. Coomaraswamy uses, and in his system the difference between the murder and the poem is simply a "moral" one, not an "artistic" one, since each if carried out according to plan is "artistically" successful. We maintain that (2) is an enquiry of more worth than (1), and since (2), and not (1), is capable of distinguishing poetry from murder, the name "artistic criticism" is properly given to (2).

II

It is not so much an empirical as an analytic judgment, not a historical statement, but a definition, to say that the intentional fallacy is a romantic one. When a rhetorician, presumably of the first century A.D., writes: "Sublimity is the echo of a great soul," or tells us that "Homer enters into the sublime actions of his heroes" and "shares the full inspiration of the combat," we shall not be surprised to find this rhetorician considered as a distant harbinger of romanticism and greeted in the warmest terms by so romantic a critic as Saintsbury.[5] One may wish to argue whether Longinus should be called romantic,[6] but there can hardly be a doubt that in one important way he is.

Goethe's[7] three questions for "constructive criticism" are "What did the author set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?" If one leaves out the middle question, one has in effect the system of Croce[8]—the culmination and crowning philosophic expression of romanticism. The beautiful is the successful intuition-expression, and the ugly is the unsuccessful; the intuition or private part of art is *the* aesthetic fact, and the medium or public part is not the subject of aesthetic at all. Yet aesthetic reproduction takes place only "if all the other conditions remain equal."

> Oil-paintings grow dark, frescoes fade, statues lose noses . . . the text of a poem is corrupted by bad copyists or bad printing.

> The Madonna of Cimabue is still in the Church of Santa Maria Novella; but does she speak to the visitor of to-day as to the Florentines of the thirteenth century?

> *Historical interpretation* labours . . . to reintegrate in us the psychological conditions which have changed in the course of history. It . . . enables us to see a work of art (a physical object) as its *author saw it* in the moment of production.[9]

5. George Saintsbury (1845–1933), English scholar and critic, whose works include *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe from the Earliest Texts to the Present Day* (3 vols., 1900–05).

6. For the relation of Longinus to modern romanticism, see R. S. Crane, review of Samuel Monk's *The Sublime*, *Philological Quarterly* 15 (April 1936), 165–66 [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note]. On the Greek rhetorician LONGINUS, see above.

7. Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749–1832), German poet, playwright, and novelist.

8. Benedetto Croce (1866–1952), Italian literary critic, and philosopher; Wimsatt and Beardsley quote his *Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (1909).

9. It is true that Croce himself in his *Ariosto, Shakespeare, and Corneille*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London, 1920), chap. 7, "The Practical Personality and the Poetical Personality," and in his *Defence of Poetry*, trans. E. F. Carritt (Oxford, 1933), p. 24, has delivered a telling attack on intentionalism, but the prevailing drift of such passages in the *Aesthetics* as we quote is in the opposite direction [Wimsatt and Beardsley's note].