

Literary Influence: a Rule of Thumb?

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Who that shall point as with a wand, and say
'This portion of the river of my mind
Came from yon fountain?'

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), II, 213-5.

Once upon a time it was assumed that the primary obligation of a work of art was 'to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature' (*Hamlet*, III, ii); to imitate, to re-present, to reflect 'reality' or 'nature'. There were three qualifying assumptions implicit from the beginning, however. The first was that the 'nature' so reflected or re-presented would manifest aspects of the chosen medium or mirror, thus making it constitutionally different from 'nature' itself or the world in which we 'live and breathe and have our being'. The second, related assumption was that all the different instances of 'nature' reflected or re-presented in the same medium or mirror would manifest constitutional resemblances deriving from that common medium. The third and final assumption was that, along with the people, things, and events in the world at large that make up 'reality' or 'nature', previous instances of their reflection or re-presentation become themselves the legitimate object of reflection or re-presentation. As well as objects in 'nature', then, artistic genre (the chosen medium or mirror) and other works of art (those previous instances of reflection or re-presentation) were assumed to condition and compose the complex 'image' that was the work of art. The critical appreciation of a work of art therefore necessarily involved, besides judging its fidelity to 'reality' or 'nature' and its competence at handling artistic conventions, an assessment of the significance of specific *influences*: the informing and constituting 'in-flow' or effect of other works of art.

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Translation; imitation; parody, both gratuitous and 'serious'; the revisionary adaptation of a traditional genre or *mythos* (plot/story) by inverting, extending, completing, distorting, or digressing from it—these and other structural and rhetorical practices have always been familiar to the specialist and general reader alike. Correspondingly, 'practical criticism', from at least Dryden and certainly since the 1920s when it was explicitly theorized and became the basis of the academic discipline known as 'English', has always respected and to some extent explored the multiplicity of ways in which literature builds self-consciously on previous works of literature. Whether meaning has been regarded as an authorial prerogative, only imperfectly communicated in and by the text and/or imperfectly understood by the individual reader; whether as inherent in the text itself and susceptible of one or more valid interpretations; whether as an 'event' effected by the collaborative and creative response of the reader to the text—still, meaning has been recognized as often overtly or covertly contingent upon other works of literature, past and present.

What has not always been registered, however, is the extent to which all forms of literary influence also invoke complex questions of cultural and intellectual continuity and appropriation on the one hand and, on the other and more immediately, of how a specific influence is to be distinguished and characterized critically and how its effects, meaning, and value are to be established. The very familiarity of literary influence, especially in our own century where literature's recourse to other literary works can seem tiresomely perfunctory, often discourages close enquiry and the necessarily fine critical discriminations it in fact demands.

Not that questions of literary influence have ever been ignored by the theorists. At the beginning of the critical tradition that we inherited from the ancient world, extended debate on textual *mimesis* or *imitatio* was already well under way and included such issues as the origins of poetry or art; what we would call 'intellectual property'; the status or relative 'perfection' of Homer's 'reality' or 'nature' as against that of 'reality' or 'nature' itself; the spiritual and social value of literature. Since then, philosophy and literary criticism have consistently conferred on these and related issues. Only with the advent of linguistically based

criticism like semiotics and structuralism, however, as well as of Northrop Frye's archetypal or mythological criticism, was an attempt made critically to theorize and systematically to anatomize or classify the characteristically literary nature of literature.

Behind these professedly 'scientific' developments, however, were assumptions about linguistic and literary autonomy—about language and literature as independent, 'self-referring' conventions only tenuously or indirectly related to 'reality' or 'nature'—that threatened to collapse distinctions made by writers and readers alike. And the last twenty or thirty years has seen an extension of this theoretical tendency, with a good deal of energy expended on literary influence in the abstract; on the genetic literariness of literature or 'intertextuality', as it is called. For the intertextualists, a poem might be said to consist of residual traces or fragments from a multiplicity of other—or, for some, traces from *all* other—works or texts. There are a number of types of intertextuality, in fact, ranged between the extremes of what might be called 'soft' and 'hard' intertextuality, after philosophy's distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' determinism.

The former, or soft intertextuality, still respects the integrity of poet and poem while it centralizes the relationship between a poem and its literary predecessors, making that relationship the definitive characteristic of literature—what Coleridge would have called its informing 'principle of *individuation*, the inmost principle of the *possibility*, of any thing, *as* that particular thing'¹. The most comprehensive and idiosyncratic example of this approach is represented by the work of the American critic Harold Bloom, whose *Anxiety of Influence* sees literature as a struggle or 'agon' involving a limited and identifiable number of strategies or 'revisionary ratios' between a 'strong' poet and his or her chosen precursor².

Hard intertextuality, on the other hand, sees the literary work, not as the outcome of the poet's Oedipal struggle to overcome the constraining influence of an earlier major poet by 'rewriting' that poetry in his or her own terms, nor more generally as a discrete entity echoing with ancestral voices, but as the arbitrary and depersonalized 'site' of innumerable intertextual relations; a sort of conceptual 'space' *between* a work or text of illusory discreteness

on the one hand and, on the other, that multiplicity of other works or texts from which it has been traditionally but arbitrarily demarcated, as time is arbitrarily demarcated into discrete moments. The 'reality' of literature for the hard intertextualist, its abstract location or mode of existence, is not to be found in individual texts or in textuality at all; on the contrary, its 'reality' is its intertextual *condition*, or is to be 'found' disappearing into the amorphous intertext.

However compelling, one result of all this has been that the less abstract but no less complex or exigent questions that I mentioned earlier are simply not being asked. Discriminations important for the practice of criticism and the historical study of literary practice are being lost before they have even been found, so to speak. All literary language may only ever be a form of literary allusion and unable to re-present anything besides other texts, but for the purposes of critical and indeed cultural practice 'no, I am not a tragic figure' remains qualitatively different from 'No, I am not Prince Hamlet', and an elegy in rhyming couplets from an elegy in Spenserian stanzas.

It is not just from the sophistications of certain forms of theory alone that a discriminating criticism of literary influence requires protection, however. There is a perennial naivety threatening it as well—a naivety, moreover, with which the different theoretical tradition concerned with the psychology or phenomenology of reading and with the role of the reader in literary hermeneutics can be of assistance.

The best way to approach this is by contrasting the ideas of two commentators, each with his own renown, writing two hundred years apart. However little else Samuel Johnson and Hans Georg Gadamer may have in common, they both defer to individual response in defining and attempting the interpretation and evaluation of literature, as indeed of life itself. It is with the **apparently different conclusions to which this deference leads them** that we are concerned, especially on an unlikely subject central to any experiential or phenomenological approach to literature: the subject of *prejudice*.

Dr Johnson delivered his challenge to a long tradition of literary elitism when he denied any prerogative in critical decision-making

to what we would call 'the expert'—today, the professional or academic critic—conferring it instead upon readers 'uncontaminated by literary prejudices' whose 'common sense' qualified them to decide 'all claims to poetical honours'³. The context is Johnson's discussion of Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* in the *Lives of the Poets* and although it is difficult to determine the tone of the passage, the ultimate recourse to the common reader is too characteristic of his criticism for it to be dismissed as either sarcastic or perfunctory. Conditioned or 'influenced' expectations resulting *from* reading and brought to bear *in* reading—whether merely fashionable or, like his own, massively informed—only destroy for Johnson the possibility of a fresh response.

To Johnson's pre-Kantian understanding of things, then—the German philosopher Immanuel Kant would argue the active collaboration of the human mind in all human perception and experience; to Johnson's understanding, 'common sense' implied a wisdom derived rather from the world of common experience than from literature, education, or systematic theory. For Gadamer, on the other hand, it 'is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being' (meaning, I take it, something like 'our identity'; 'our being' is at once too grand and too ambiguous a claim). He continues:

the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience.

For Johnson, to read with the 'prejudice' of expectation and prior knowledge is to read with the mind *closed* to experience, impervious to certain literary possibilities. For Gadamer, by contrast, 'prejudices are the bases of our *openness* to the world'⁴.

Changes in the precise meaning and moral charge of the word 'prejudice' should not blind us to a radical difference in their theory of knowledge. Johnson aspires to a willing suspension or dissolution of 'literary prejudices' before a fresh, or 'primitive', or 'original' confrontation with the text—an aspiration that is curiously poignant in the light of his own capacious familiarity with literature. Gadamer insists that any apparent novelty or

freshness of experience in fact derives only from such prejudices as have already accrued: 'Is not our expectation and our readiness to hear the new also necessarily determined by the old that has already taken possession of us?' As in our daily experience, so in our reading: the conscious and unconscious expectations or anticipations that inform our negotiations with the familiar are accompanied by an alertness, even preadjustment to the unanticipated. The previously unfamiliar experiences that the reader undergoes are then assimilated into the 'expected and anticipated', to become part of his or her reconstituted and re-formed knowledge or understanding, giving rise to a new set of 'literary prejudices'.

The paradigm of the mutual modification of the familiar and the unfamiliar that Gadamer here uses for his phenomenology of experience is the same as that adopted by T. S. Eliot in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' specifically to characterize literary influence and literary evolution. 'A man must write', insists Eliot (concerned for the moment rather with writing than reading),

not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer, and within it the whole of the literature of his own country, has a simultaneous existence, and composes a simultaneous order.⁵

The mother of the Muses was, after all, Mnemosyne or Memory. For Eliot, Tradition, or the common fund of literary texts, is the collective memory of a culture and approaches a sort of Jungian 'collective unconscious', itself a typological reading of culture that has been internalized in the psyche of each individual.

The passage and the essay undoubtedly reveal many of the preoccupations and anxieties of Eliot, as it does of Modernism as a self-conscious, literary movement, as well as a self-consciously *literary* movement. Eliot's own 'classicism', his belief in order and in a transcendent though adaptable authority, at once stable and self-contained yet paradoxically accommodating, is undoubtedly of interest for a biographical and historical study. But to explain an assumption or belief—to establish its personal and historical or ideological origins—is not to explain it away. That the paradigm should be found in Gadamer without the

reactionary social and political implications or the *hauteur* of a self-elected literary aristocrat suggests its functional validity as an hypothesis.

Eliot goes on, making a transition from author to reader, creator to critic, that is vital for our purposes:

no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his *relation* to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism⁶.

Perhaps purposely confusing 'meaning' and 'value', Eliot is saying that the very act of creation or composing involves the individual writer in relationship with a manifold of texts and textual conventions that he or she inherits from the past, from Tradition—most importantly, perhaps, the convention of language. Outside the context of this Tradition the meaning of a work of art is greatly impoverished—in fact, it becomes effectively meaningless and certainly valueless.

The idea, in more or less rigorous philosophical forms, characterizes all thinking in which an implicit or explicit appeal is made for a reading and a criticism of literature not (or not exclusively) in the context of any extra-literary 'reality'—whether a transcendent world or 'nature' or history or biography or prevailing ideas—but in the context of literature itself. Again to quote T. S. Eliot: 'When we are considering poetry we must consider it primarily as poetry and not another thing'⁷, though Eliot's classicism transforms 'Tradition' from a body of 'influential' literary texts into a sort of transcendental, cultural superego. The argument of Harold Bloom about a poet's 'anxiety of influence' that I referred to—that anxiety which issues in an heroic struggle by a later poet to displace his intimidating precursor in order to achieve an individual voice—is an idiosyncratic digression from this assumption. What it does is to make 'influence' the psychogenesis, the forum, the form, and the meaning of the work: what poetry *is*, and what it is *about*.

Next to Gadamer's dialectical model of experience, with what is known helping to process the unknown, Johnson's idea of a pristine interaction between an 'uncorrupted' (spontaneous; uninfluenced) reader and an 'original' (spontaneous; uninfluenced) text is bound to seem naive, a radical nostalgia, especially coming from a professional reader and writer whose life was a 'continual allegory' of the expanding print culture of his period and whose 'works were the comments upon it'⁸.

And so it is—naive, that is, and nostalgic, though only at the same time as it simultaneously reflects the pragmatism for which Johnson is renowned. What the paradox of Johnson's championship of the unlitrary or uneducated response reflects is another paradox: the paradox of eighteenth-century print culture itself, as well as the irony of Johnson's own magisterial function in that culture. Many of those that made up the new eighteenth-century reading public did indeed think of themselves as comparatively unread, only they saw it rather as ignorance than innocence, and in fact sought expeditiously to acquire a familiarity with literature and correct taste—in short, 'literary prejudices'—in order to gain access to the cultural establishment. Their needs were amply met by encyclopædias; by histories and biographies of literature and the *literati* of the kind Johnson himself wrote; by dictionaries like Johnson's own; by rhetorics of belles lettres and discourses on taste; by annotated editions like Johnson's *Shakespeare* and by anthologies of the nation's literature like the edition of *British Poets* from which his *Lives of the Poets* derived—in other words, by all the characteristic products of an unlicensed, economically competitive press pandering to class-conscious acquisitiveness. Even while Johnson promoted the unpretentious taste of the first generation of what would become a mass reading public, the reading public desperately sought manufactured 'literary prejudices' as the basis of its pretensions to a predominantly literary culture.

What for our purposes is crucial is that Johnson's tendency to see in the 'literary' a betrayal of 'spontaneity', 'sincerity', 'authenticity', and all that family of attributes associated with a

type of primitivism reinforced by Romanticism, has not entirely left us. Students often insist on the prerogative of an 'innocent' reading, unencumbered by the 'pedantry' of conventions, literary sources, and all that intimidating business contained in editorial notes. The problem is that, granting for the moment the simplistic alternatives of 'innocent' and 'experienced', an innocent reading is just as critically indiscriminate as that version of intertextuality that sees all literature as nothing other than a patchwork of past literature. What, for example, can such a reading make of a literary work whose comprehension and criticism is *more* or *less* dependent on previous literature than another work? In short, how can it cope with *degrees* of literary self-consciousness—with the difference between Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot, say—or degrees of expressiveness or proficiency in the use of extant literature?

In his attempt to assert the critical prerogative of what in fact amounted to market forces, Johnson chose to ignore two analogous though categorically different phenomena. The first, familiar from Gadamer and Eliot, is that it is solely by virtue of inherent literary prejudices or precognitions—'the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience'—that literature can signify or 'mean' at all (rather as familiarity with the possibilities of a language is required to understand something new in that language). Until we master the basic conventions, the individual case remains 'a closed book'. Prejudices in this sense are *essential* to our reading, a fact that goes to the heart of the current controversies about 'cultural literacy' and 'the canon'.

The second oversight might be called ideological, and it sees prejudices in the sense of predispositions or partialities: conditioned and largely unconscious preferences and expectations. These 'literary prejudices' are not so much abstractly essential, as historically and humanly *inevitable*. In this sense, the rapid accumulation of cultural 'capital' required by the aspiring eighteenth-century reader could only have involved an exchange of one set of literary prejudices for another, not the shift implied in Johnson's *Life of Gray* from open-mindedness, whether innocent or ignorant, to experienced prejudice. To quote Terry Eagleton:

the reader does not come to the text as a kind of cultural virgin, miraculously free of previous social and literary entanglements, a supremely disinterested spirit or blank sheet on to which the text will transfer its own inscriptions. Most of us recognize that no reading is innocent or without presuppositions⁹.

The idea of interpretation carried on from within a configuration of our own prejudices *as ideology* brings with it the obligation to 'stake out the limits of human enquiry', however. For beyond helping to dispense with the idea of a simple transaction between an 'innocent' reader and a fully 'knowable' text, it actually raises the possibility of our only ever reading our own prejudices back to ourselves, so to speak. How far we can divest ourselves of ideology in an attempt to see 'the object as in itself it really is' (Matthew Arnold's definition of a truly disinterested criticism¹⁰), or to see our own ideology 'as in itself it really is', must remain a moot point. Ideology aside, the very idea of interpretation as involving the conscious or unconscious application of one's experience raises problems for Arnold's disinterested reader. A part of the experience brought to bear on a specific text will be the direct or indirect experience of that text itself, as well as of analogous or homologous texts which, having been assimilated, have already exerted an *influence* and modified the consciousness of the interpreter. According to Heidegger's existential reformulation of the dilemma: 'if the "world" itself is something constitutive for Dasein ["being" or "a being or entity"]', one must have an insight into Dasein's basic structures in order to treat the world-phenomenon conceptually'¹¹.

Thus is human consciousness caught up in what has been called 'the hermeneutic circle': the act of reading and the reader are 'always already' modified by what has been read, while what is and was read remains contingent upon the act of reading and upon the reader. Coleridge, for example, discovered himself a victim of the same paradox when attempting a disinterested reading of the Bible; when attempting a reading 'uncorrupted by literary prejudices', that is:

I take up this work with the purpose to read it for the first time as I should any other work,—as far at least as I can or dare. For I neither can, nor dare, throw off a strong and awful prepossession

in its favour—certain as I am that a large part of the light and life, in which and by which I see, love, and embrace the truths and the strengths co-organised into a living body of faith and knowledge ... has been directly or indirectly derived to me from this sacred volume,—and [I am] unable to determine what I do not owe to its *influences*.

To simplify: Coleridge's reading *of* the Bible was informed by certain basic cultural assumptions that derived *from* the Bible¹².

So it is with our own reading, if not of the Bible, then of the major English poets. Even if we have never read a Shakespeare play we can hardly expect a disinterested reading, given his influence upon our language and culture. When it was suggested to T. S. Eliot that 'dead writers' remained remote because he and his contemporaries *knew* so much more than in the past, his celebrated response—'Precisely, and they are that which we know'—implied a similar, equally simple recognition of this complex, paradoxical phenomenon¹⁰.

The often capricious and indeterminate symbiosis of subject and object in experience generally, and in literary experience and understanding in particular, does not negate the possibility of interpretation, however, nor does it condemn us to a self-echoing knowledge or a solipsistic universe. Rather it respects the relative validity only of any one interpretation. As relativity, however complex and elusive, is not arbitrariness, the practical and theoretical questions of literary influence remain notwithstanding.

I spoke earlier of a number of complex questions invoked by the use of literature in literary practice. To introduce just a handful of the sorts of questions I have in mind I want to quote the comments of a distinguished American critic on the way a familiar work of the 1920s utilizes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in a crucial interchange. The passage under Benjamin Thumb's relentless scrutiny is the following:

'You ought to look at that tree right over there', said Rabbit ...
'I can see a bird in it from here', said Pooh.
'Or is it a fish?'

'You ought to see that bird from here', said Rabbit, 'unless it's a fish'.

'It isn't a fish, it's a bird', said Piglet.

'So it is', said Rabbit.

'Is it a starling or a blackbird?', said Pooh.

'That's the whole question', said Rabbit. 'Is it a blackbird or a starling?'

Professor Thumb's authoritative comments, on the other hand, are uncompromising:

I feel sorry for any reader who might be so ignorant as to fail to recognize this exchange as a replica of Hamlet's 'Very like a whale' conversation with Polonius.

The quotation and its gloss come in fact from a parody by Frederick C. Crews of an obsessive 'sources and analogues' approach to literary criticism¹⁴, the overriding irony of which is that, by exploiting literary (critical) sources and analogues, Crews is himself 'under the influence' of literature. For our purposes, the success of Crews's parody can be measured by the extent to which it forces the reader to confront certain critical issues. We are immediately reminded of how dependent the effectiveness of influence is upon the reader's recognition of the original, for example. But 'Who is *the* reader?', as Stanley Fish not unreasonably asks (Fish, incidentally, does exist, in spite of the ironic coincidence of his surname). '*The* reader', according to Fish himself, 'is the *informed* reader':

The informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of the semantic knowledge that a mature listener brings to his task of comprehension ... (3) has *literary* competence. That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalised the properties of literary discourses, including everything from the most local of devices ... to whole genres. In this theory, then, the concerns of other schools of criticism—such as questions of genre, conventions, intellectual background—become *redefined in terms of potential and probable response*.¹⁵

Few readers of any age or degree of expertise would be likely

to recognize the vital 'replication' of Hamlet in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, however, and fewer still of those introduced to A. A. Milne at the age of five. The issue, then, is not only one of abstract familiarity or access, but also one of the nature and extent of the real or historical audience anticipated or solicited by any work. The implied reader of Professor Thumb's *Winnie-the-Pooh* is Fish's 'informed reader', possessed of a more intimate familiarity with extant literature (not to mention with bears) than might reasonably be expected of a five-year-old—indeed of as intimate a familiarity as is possible.

Assuming for the sake of argument that the allusion really is there, we then have to assume that few readers were meant to recognize it. Are we not further obliged to conclude that A. A. Milne was writing, not for an informed reader at all, but for an informed coterie or elite (or both)? Or that he was enjoying a private joke at his readers' expense? Perhaps, on the other hand, he was unconscious of the influence himself, in which case the allusion to *Hamlet* would mean something different again, or signify differently; it would certainly not be meaningless or less significant. With any one of these possibilities, the significance of the influence would alter quite radically and so would the 'meaning' of the passage, whether meaning was conceived as objective or subjective (what it means *or* what it means to me, the reader). Benjamin Thumb's shrewd insight may demonstrate the value of an acute and 'informed' criticism, making certain subtle or hidden meanings available to a wider reading public, but it is still only the beginning of the work of explication. Nor is Thumb's exemplary reader—himself—necessarily the reader sought by the text. The reader sought by a text may be one of more limited information than the critic pretends to.

Furthermore, Thumb may be wrong; he may even be guilty of constraining a reading beyond either the evidence or reasonable consensus—of having his 'thumb on the scale', so to speak, and giving a false 'weight' to the *Hamlet* reference. And not only wrong about the allusion but wrong-headed in his critical approach. It is always possible to mistake some superficial evidence for meaningful influence; it is almost inevitable when one reads attentive only to possible literary analogues or antecedents. To

proceed on the assumption that A. A. Milne is expressing himself or communicating largely by means of allusion to another literary text may be to overlook the mimetic or expressive possibilities of simple dialogic misunderstanding as distinct from Hamlet's wilful and manipulative 'misunderstanding'.

On the other hand (to explore the subject further), one may feel persuaded that Thumb *has* come up with a 'genuine' echo on this occasion or that, more generally, he is dealing with a legitimate genealogy of language or form, and yet may remain unimpressed by his conviction of its critical importance, convinced rather that it were best muted or ignored because it contributes little or nothing of any real significance to our reading and interpretation of A. A. Milne. Even granted an influence, in other words, it is possible to mistake or to exaggerate its rhetorical function.

Which raises the question we have yet to broach of its effectiveness or *value*. When is an unequivocal influence used creatively, for example, and when, on the other hand, does it threaten or destroy certain expressive possibilities? The invocation of a well known and admired original in an uneven or tiresomely derivative text can accentuate its inadequacies and drive the reader beyond patience. Or an allusion intended to operate only 'locally', as it were—to enhance the definitive or suggestive power of a specific image or phrase—may unwittingly import so many and such various implications from the rich context of its original that it turns out to be unintentionally 'self-destructive' on the poet's part, contradicting or obscuring the evolved complex of related and mutually reinforcing meanings in the text.

We do have the text to help us settle the question of whether Thumb's detecting a significant allusion here is an act of insight or idiocy, notoriously vulnerable to conflicting interpretation though texts are (one reader's 'bird' will always be another's 'fish'). In the end the critic can only seek the confirmation of a general, invariably qualified consent; between comparably careful readers, critical disagreement can only be productive. The first thing that needs to be done is to ask the right questions and to make discriminations that keep faith with the complexity of poetic utterance.

What we can say with more confidence is that the identification

of the influence of a prior work of art can never obviate the critical assessment of its function or meaning; that theoretical sophistications should not be allowed to blunt important critical and cultural instruments; finally, that a knowledge and feeling for the body of literature out of which any one work evolves—whether we think of it as just a ‘body’ or, more controversially, as a canon or tradition—is just as vital, if not more vital, to reading and making meaning as it is to effecting cultural coercions.

Too much recent literary theory prides itself on its discovery of the radical artificiality—the *literariness*—of consciousness, establishing its validity in reaction and even resentment against ‘traditional’ assumptions about literature as the mirror of life or nature. From its beginnings, in fact, criticism has always respected the role of literature, both in literature itself and in experience. Different generations, different cultures, and different individuals have approached the issue of literary influence differently, but it has always been an issue to be reckoned with and, while a critical response is as natural to us as breathing, will always remain one.

Notes

1. *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols, Princeton, N.J., 1983, II, p.62.
2. *The Anxiety of Influence*, Oxford, 1973.
3. *Lives of the English Poets*, The World’s Classics edition, 2 vols, London and New York, 1952, II, p.464.
4. See the essay ‘The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem’, in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Inge, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, pp.3–17, esp. p.9.
5. In his *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn, London, 1951, pp.13–22, esp. p.14.
6. *Selected Essays*, p.15.
7. In his Preface to the 1928 edition of *The Sacred Wood*, 4th edn, London, 1934, p.viii.
8. ‘A Man’s life of any worth’, wrote Keats, ‘is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life ... Shakespeare led a life of Allegory; his works are the comments on it’. See his letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February–3 May 1819; *Letters of John Keats*, sel. and ed. Robert Gittings, Oxford, 1970, p.218.

9. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford, 1983, p.89.
10. In his essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'; see Arnold's *Essays in Criticism: First and Second Series*, ed. G. K. Chesterton, 2nd edn, London, 1964, p.9.
11. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford, 1978, p.77.
12. *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge, London, 1840, pp.8–9 [Letter I] (my italics).
13. *Selected Essays*, p.16.
14. 'The Style of Pooh: Sources, Analogues, and Influences', in Crews's *The Pooh Perplex: A Student Casebook* ['In Which It is Discovered that the True Meaning of the Pooh Stories is Not as Simple as is Usually Believed ... But for Proper Elucidation Requires the Combined Efforts of Several Academicians of Varying Critical Persuasions'], London, 1964, pp. 114–123, esp. pp.117–18.
15. 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', in his *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1980, pp.21–67, esp. pp.48–49.