

# Revival of the Author

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## *Integrating Revised Hermeneutics in Literary Research Using Psychological Methodology*

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Jasper G. L. Peters,

Erasmus School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam,  
Bachelor Thesis of Philosophy in Psychology and Literary Studies.

"The intellectual takes refuge in books by time-honoured authors and learns from them no more than how to write with style; the fool, on the other hand, unless I'm mistaken, wins common sense by confronting problems and grappling them at first hand."

*Desiderius Erasmus, Praise of Folly*

### Abstract

In this thesis Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical theory is reevaluated, with the goal of reintegrating it as a practical methodology in literary research. Schleiermacher's theory is held up against Gadamer's critique of hermeneutics in academic practices, as to lay bare the essential methodological components of Schleiermacher's theory. These methodological components will be fitted as such that they are applicable in the scientific practice of psychological research. The thesis substantiates a view of hermeneutics where neither the work nor the author is the sole orchestrator of meaning and argues that understanding of a text lies in the recreation of the context in which it was created. This supports a method of psychologically methodical observation of readers that does not rely on subjective assessment, but on generalizable interpretation that is best suited for a specific text. This new methodology strives not to understand the effect of a text on readers, rather it provides an approach to gather understanding of texts through readers.

Student Number: 512889

Supervisor: Dr. Prins

Advisor: Prof. dr. Korsten

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## Introduction

There has never been an equally exceptionally good or bad time to be a reader, us readers currently have the widest selection of texts available to choose from in history, a heap of texts which will only increase. The Aspiration to read all those texts, while an admirable endeavour, is no longer in the scope of any human, there is an innumerable number of texts we will not even have heard of; that are written in mystifying tongues; are not accepted in the literary canon or that we simply cannot access. Therefore, we need to think carefully about which texts we decide to read and *not* read. Additionally, authors must understand how the material in their book may be accessed by, practically, the entire world now that the vast majority of people are literate, and subsequently how impactful their text can become. Hopefully many authors already have conceived this notion, by which we mean the realisation of the concrete impact their text can have on society, and not just the intention they have laid in their text. At the same time we readers have to determine which texts to read, while also decide what to do with the provided information, opinions, knowledge, fantasies, and insights of the author. additionally, we as 'critical readers', not to be mistaken for New Critics<sup>1</sup>, especially as academics have substantial impact on which texts the 'generic' reader gets exposed to and which not, conditioned by our interpretation of the text and, accordingly, our critique.

The question of how we should analyse and interpret texts then immediately follows; Is there a separate and exclusive method for every individual scholar, or should we instead attempt to adhere to the same theories? As aspiring literary critic, author, or publicist these questions are not only interesting, but probably the start of a never-ending quest to understanding. However, to me, this is not just a search for deeper understanding, it is one where I try to broaden not only my own horizon, but also contribute to expanding the knowledge in both the literary, philosophical, and psychological field. Hence, this investigation on the role of psychology in a philosophically based literary theory, must also be considered as an exploration of the interdisciplinary possibilities the aforementioned sciences have to offer and how I can manage to integrate them successfully. Like in science, the motivation is to take steps forward while taking advantage of knowledge gained in the past and as such combining now and then to establish how I aspire to contribute to the scientific debate.

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks, C., "Foreword." In *Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1920-1948*. New Criticism was an American literary movement in the twentieth century; the text must provide the ultimate sanction for the meaning of the work.

*Concepts of Literature*

It goes without saying that the literary work at hand should be the focal point of literary criticism, but the significance of the linked components has been up for discussion. Broadly, the conception of literature can be broken down into three categories. The *Universe* and its interaction with the work is seen as the *Mimetic* approach and, together with the *Didactic* approach, which considers the *Audience* in relation to the work, is a staple of a classical literary theories dating back to the eighteenth century. While it is still paramount to explore how literature can represent the world and is able to impart moral values and knowledge onto the reader, Romantic thinkers (i.e., Friedrich Schleiermacher), introduced a new element to consider when trying to understand texts; the author. Since we cannot ask texts to interpret themselves, and their meaning is generally obscured, someone with great knowledge or information about its creation is required to generate understanding. The text must not be thought of as just a mere collection of words, but rather be seen as an *Expressive* process, an echo that reflects the author's inner soul.<sup>2</sup> Or, as Schleiermacher phrased it, "Every act of *understanding* is the obverse of an act of *discourse*, in that one must come to grasp the thought which was at the base of the discourse."<sup>3</sup> The most used literary approaches used today are derived from the formalist movements, which focusses on *the work itself* as an autonomous, aesthetic object; de-emphasizing any relations between the text and the world, author, or reader. This mode of interpretation was adopted and further adapted when Ronald Barthes<sup>4</sup> introduced the notion of the *Death of the Author*.

Instead focussing our attention on the work, Barthes' suggests that it is exclusively the idea of the author that has to be abandoned in the interest of writing, thereby restoring the place of the reader.<sup>5</sup> According to Barthes' theory, a text should be considered a performance, instead of an author's final product, thereby challenging the author's authority as the only person to control the meaning of a text. Even though Barthes' theory includes vital literary concepts constructive in any discussion of texts (e.g., intertextuality), this *inclusion* should not be enough to indefinitely *exclude* the author. Even if many critics *did* set out to discover how the author imposed themselves onto the text, supposedly being able to fully 'explain'<sup>6</sup> the text at

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<sup>2</sup> Abrams, M. H., *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953)

<sup>3</sup> Schleiermacher, F., "Hermeneutics," in *Northon Antology of Theory and Criticism: Third Edition*, eds. Vincent B Leitch, William E Cain, Laurie A Finke, John McGowan, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Jeffrey J Williams. (WW Norton & Company, 2018), 538. Emphasis added for clarity. (Hereafter entries from the *Northon Antology of Theory and Criticism: Third Edition* will be mentioned as NATC)

<sup>4</sup> Barthes, R., "The Death of the Author" in NATC, 1268-1272

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, NATC, 1269

<sup>6</sup> Barthes, NATC, 1271

once when that author was found, there is still no substantial argument to be made against the endless endeavour of Hermeneutics as Schleiermacher has presented it to us. The ultimate process to understanding any text, with all its possible interpretations, is, like the task itself, infinite.<sup>7</sup>

### *Text Interpretation and its Difficulties*

Even though it seems we must include the author's intent when critically reading texts, there are borders to be drawn. Understanding the author should be an attempt at recreating the original intellectual act of producing the text, uncovering the specific intentions the author had when writing the text in the context of them being written. This must however not be confused with the practice of psychoanalysis. When interpreting, take for instance Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the point in the text where Gregor repeatedly refers to his parents with "the mother/father", instead of "his" or "my",<sup>8</sup> can of course lead to an analysis of Kafka's subconscious without ever reaching any sort of objective theory about the text itself. Hermeneutics, in contrast, is an attempt to translate the conditions of the writer to meaning in the text at hand, of finding the object within a seemingly subjective utterance.

For example, when looking at *The Waste Land*,<sup>9</sup> this may instigate an elaborate investigation into the significance of the mentioning of Ezra Pound before the text starts. How did he influence T.S. Eliot's writing of the text? The difficulty in drawing the right borders thus becomes obvious, because not only does that mean that any miniscule detail in any text could be of significance, it also means that their influence on other works of the author should be accounted for, as well as how the author was influenced by texts they read themselves or the people they were surrounded with. The aim is, then, to find the main intent of a text, implicated by the author, to which other ideas must be measured.<sup>10</sup> However, this would mean you have to read any text the author has ever been in contact with, which is not merely an endless endeavour, but a human-life-span surpassing one. As should be clear at this point, hermeneutics does not come without its own problems and limitations. To avoid losing ourselves in this hermeneutic circle of interpretation, the suggestion is to reevaluate the ultimate goal of this technical (i.e., psychological) component. The task may still be repeated endlessly,

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<sup>7</sup> Schleiermacher, NATC, 541

<sup>8</sup> Kafka, F., *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. (Penguin Modern classics, 2020), 116-17.

<sup>9</sup> Eliot, T. S., 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Schleiermacher, NATC, 542

but instead of infinitely moving between the parts and the whole, we shall look for another way of transporting the reader into the author's context.

For this investigation we shall first take a second glance at the need for hermeneutics in literary research, as presented by Schleiermacher, as well as its ongoing relevance, attempting to identify the concepts of Schleiermacher's theory that have maintained relevance even in more recent considerations of hermeneutics, mainly to showcase the persistent dismissal of the psychological component in his theory. As such, we shall put forward not only the importance of the author in understanding a text but draw a new line between the author and the reader, and explicate how modern psychology based literary theories, such as empirical research on the act of reading, can facilitate literary criticism. Lastly, we shall implement this into a short case study using *Metamorphosis* and *The Waste Land*, since their post-modernist origins have already proven to produce an abundance of interpretation using many different literary theories.

### Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics

As founding father of modern general hermeneutics Schleiermacher provided us with a new mode of interpretation, a way of connecting discourse to understanding. As Schleiermacher posed even back in the nineteenth century, hermeneutics is not an exact science, there is no mathematical formula for interpretation, it is a creative act, an artform, and like writing, requires a certain talent. Hermeneutics concerns the following of systematic procedures to understand and interpret discourse as it derives from the language and from the intention of the author.<sup>11</sup> In line with Barthes' conception of language Schleiermacher also argued that a work is not finished with the authors last, maybe romanticized, stroke of the pen, but is rather that what interacts with its creator and recipient. The author both *shapes* and *is* shaped by the text. Moreover, as the ideas of the author interact with the discourse they created in their text, so does the understanding of the reader of the discourse, as such the text (i.e., discourse) is the medium between the mind of the author and that of the reader. As it is impossible to ask the discourse itself to provide us an understanding, we must turn ourselves to the creator of the discourse, not as the sole authority on its understanding, but as the creator of this specific interpretation.

#### *The Grammatical and the Psychological*

To really understand this *discourse* Schleiermacher presupposes two elements, the *grammatical* and the *psychological*, both seemingly of equal interest. Interpretation, as follows, should engage in understanding discourse as a characteristic of the language, since language has the power to shape the mind of the author as well as itself, as it does to modifications of the language, since individual influence on the language presents itself through their discourse.<sup>12</sup> An interpreter must thus seek for both aspects in a text but must also consider one being predominant over the other, and as such adjust their interpretation accordingly.

When both aspects of interpretation [...] are used equally throughout, they are nevertheless always used in different proportions. This follows from the fact that something of grammatical insignificance does not necessarily have to be of psychological insignificance, and vice versa; and insignificance in one does not

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<sup>11</sup> Schleiermacher, NATC, 535

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 535

imply insignificance in the other. A minimum of psychological interpretation is needed with a predominately objective subject.<sup>13</sup>

In this act of understanding the interpreter should let themselves be affected by the discourse they are exposed to and limit exposing the text to their own ideas of the discourse. Whereas most classical works tend to be predominantly grammatical, works that include original didactic advice or mention historical events and information as precepted by an individual predominantly present us with psychological aspects.

This psychological interpretation is often erroneously taken as a retrospection on textual events, Schleiermacher explicates further by mentioning that the author and interpreter are generally separated by time, and as such the interpreter must temporarily cast aside their modern thinking and adapt to the relationship between the writer and their original audience. However, as literature is currently in much higher production, and a great part of our favourite texts is written not too far from our current reality, the spatial separation between the author and the writer deserves to get our increased attention. For instance, a novel including the current threat on the democracy of Brazil<sup>14</sup> should tempt its interpreter to inform themselves not only on the history of Brazilian politics, but also on the current cultural, social, and political influences that affect the writer and their audience. Influences that will vastly differ from an interpreter with only cultural, social, and political knowledge regarding a country in Europe. As such not only does “The successful performance of the art [hermeneutics] depends on a linguistic talent and a talent for assessing individual human nature.”<sup>15</sup>, we must also employ our common sense, or investigative skills, to uncover how different circumstances affect human nature as we know it. That is to say, human nature is no longer a solely subjectively measured element. As we know it can instead be presented as an empirically substantiated argument, making use of social sciences, such as psychology.

### *Creating Understanding*

Unfortunately combining a social science with the artful practice that is hermeneutics does not instinctively fare well. While the goal of hermeneutics is to create a more precise understanding, it does not aim to do so by merely eliminating sources of misunderstanding, for

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 537, [the analysis of the grammatical and the psychological part of a tekst]

<sup>14</sup> This example refers to: Fowler, Y. R., *There are more things*. (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2022), which addresses specifically this topic.

<sup>15</sup> Schleiermacher, NATC, 536, [Addition for clarity]



interpretation must, rightly, always account for misunderstandings of discourse and language both by the author and the interpreter. Psychology, however, aims precisely at its opposite, it attempts to eliminate misunderstandings, to thereby create a common understanding. Indeed, both see their project as an endless one, but psychology does so by posing hypotheses that can be either falsified or verified, thereby eliminating misunderstanding. Hermeneutics, on the contrary, does neither seek to falsify nor verify, but rather to discover understanding with as few presuppositions as possible.

However, seeing that the task of hermeneutics is ultimately “to understand the discourse [i.e., the text] just as well and even better than its creator.”<sup>16</sup>, it also calls upon the interpreter to consider all advances in hermeneutical theory, being open to criticism and ideas, because we have no immediate knowledge of the actual thoughts of the author it is the task of the interpreter to bring the possible unconscious thoughts of the author to consciousness. Hence, maybe there is a place for psychology not as a threat to understanding, but as a tool to enrich the interpreters understanding, since it primarily seeks to uncover subconscious natural, or innate,<sup>17</sup> human processes as objectively as possible.

### *The Importance of Objectivity*

An important factor in the consideration of the use of psychology in general hermeneutics, as not to steer towards specialized hermeneutics, is the avoidance of predetermination of meaning. Interpreters may be required to have extensive knowledge of both the language and context of the discourse but should not let that knowledge intuit the meaning of a text.<sup>18</sup> To mitigate any confusion, the interpreter’s task is to be objective, as to uncover the possible subjectivity of the author. This process is already extremely difficult, which is why many thinkers, such as Gadamer, have modernized and evaluated components, such as the hermeneutic circle, of general hermeneutics. When introducing psychology in this task the burden of attempted objectivity will certainly not decrease. Hence, why in the following chapters we must carefully examine how psychology can be used without tampering with the understanding of the author’s intent.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 540, [Addition for clarity]

<sup>17</sup> Natural nor innate human processes are meant to encompass the human psyche as a whole, it is used in this text as a collection of the taught and untaught behaviours we as humans present.

<sup>18</sup> Schleiermacher, NATC, 532

### Current Relevance of Hermeneutics

Schleiermacher successfully introduced a general theory on hermeneutics, proving it not only useful for interpreting texts, but applicable to any interpretation of language. However, this progression, towards a universal philosophical doctrine of hermeneutics, spearheaded by Schleiermacher but eventually evaluated by Gadamer, is no longer specifically targeted towards literature per se.

Its province extends as far as does meaning and the need to understand it. Hermeneutics names no particular method of interpretation or coherent body of theory that could be expounded in systematic form. In our time, as before, it exists only as a historical tradition. Thus hermeneutics can be understood only through a historical overview of its development.<sup>19</sup>

To be able to consider the current relevance of Hermeneutics in literary interpretation we must therefore take a closer look at Gadamer's concept of hermeneutics, identifying components essential for the consideration of psychology as a tool in understanding discourse.

#### *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*

Gadamer's doctrine of hermeneutics can, in this case, best be understood by comparing it to ideals touched upon in the discussion of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. Firstly, Gadamer too contradicted that the uncovering of a finite meaning placed in a text by its creator was a realistic possibility. Like Schleiermacher, Gadamer saw hermeneutics as way of reaching infinite understandings, and as such new meaning could always be uncovered. Gadamer, however, provides additional insight on the following aspect of Schleiermacher's original reasoning for the allowance of interpretations of religious texts:

Therefore, we must expose it to the same method and consider that even if the authors were no more than dead tools, still the Holy Spirit could only have spoken through them as they themselves would have spoken.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Weinsheimer, J., *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*. (Yale University Press, 1991), 1

<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher, NATC, 538

According to Gadamer not only religious text must be allowed to be reconsidered in the expression, but also texts with another base of previously untouchable authority, such as ones with a legal nature.

It may be that the creator of a work intends the particular public of his time, but the real being of a work is what it is able to say, and that stretches fundamentally out beyond every historical limitation.<sup>21</sup>

At first this might seem in contradiction with Schleiermacher's notion, being that it is precisely the relation between the audience and the author we should attempt to uncover, however, it does emphasise the effort an interpreter must put in to uncover meaning. Historical limitations should not stop the process of interpretation from progressing, rather we should open ourselves up to every possible new comprehension of the text.

In contrast to Schleiermacher, Gadamer does not recognize the grammatical and psychological elements of a text as means of interpretation, but rather as media through which our understanding of the text can take place. Following Gadamer we are not attempting to recreate the ideas formulated in the mind of the author when interpreting but are ourselves producing understanding from the text. The hermeneutic endeavour should thus not be grasped as a method that serves objective interpretation, but as a journey of self-transcendence. Since we can never have knowledge of the complete history of language used in texts, it is impossible to presuppose definite meaning without conversation and investigation.<sup>22</sup> The conversation should then, as Schleiermacher proposes, take place not just between the author and the audience but should also be originating from the work itself. As such, when deeper understanding can be gained through the help of psychological methods, they should be employed.

Lastly, we must address Schleiermacher's assumption that we can rely on an innate knowledge of human nature in the interpreter. Just like Schleiermacher, Gadamer accepted that mere rhetoric is, due to the presence of opinion, not the only device that must be deployed in hermeneutic practice. However, unlike the assumption that only innate knowledge about the psyche is enough to create understanding, a seemingly superior position of the interpreter to draw ungrounded conclusions based on what is practically a 'hunch', often linked to what

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<sup>21</sup> Gadamer, H., *Truth and Method*. (1989), 96

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 401

Schleiermacher names as 'divination', Gadamer introduces an element of reflection within the process.

Hermeneutics is philosophy because it does not allow itself to be just the teaching of an art [Kunstlehre] that devotes itself to empathizing with the opinions of the other person. No, as philosophy, hermeneutical reflection includes the point that in all understanding of a matter, or of another person, the critique of oneself should also be happening.<sup>23</sup>

Essentially, critique must not be limited to the author or text, but also include the interpreter, overcoming any sense of superiority, thereby keeping possibilities for dialogue and discussion intact. Followingly, the questions posed about a text pertain to the mind of the author, but also comprise readers prejudices, and how these prejudices can be productive in creating understanding. As such, unavoidable human behaviours and processes might be repurposed as components that support interpretation and enrich understanding, instead of working against it.

#### *Hermeneutic Essentials for Literary Interpretation*

Even though Schleiermacher's and Gadamer's theories on Hermeneutics can be compared to find overlap and contradiction we still must consider that the understanding this creates might not be on the same plane of understanding as the texts might create on their own. Whereas Schleiermacher provides very direct instructions to help us reach understanding; a mode of interpretation, Gadamer's theory itself is not one of interpretation, but one of understanding that interpretation. It rather demonstrates that the theories and methods generally used are not the only way to expose the whole truth or meaning, nor are they unquestionably true themselves. And it is exactly at that point where total faith in any sort of hermeneutical theory or method stops to function as intended that thinking about hermeneutics becomes *philosophically* relevant. Fundamentally, we turn to philosophy when we are unsure that our selected method will successfully assist us in avoiding any possible error, when certain thought becomes conjecture without any substantiation. Schleiermacher, with his hermeneutical approach to textual interpretation, attempted to mend that gap between methodical critical

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<sup>23</sup> Gadamer. H., "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics." *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (2006): 51.

thinking and a mere theory of interpretation, transforming philosophical thought into a repeatable theory of hermeneutics. As such, it should not come as a surprise that literary critics such as Barthes challenged his theory, as it was not a method that could reasonably be repeated by all individual interpreters to begin with. Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics has a lack of self-reflection being imposed on its understanding by the individual, as Gadamer explains by his introduction of prejudice.

As Such, Gadamer's assemblage of hermeneutical theories, methods, and criticisms, either eliminates the impossibilities in Schleiermacher's theory or gives us a way of reforming it to fit a reality in which understanding is not just a product of careful methodical thinking. Schleiermacher's hermeneutical theory was mainly disputed due to the fact that it allows application of subjective thought onto any object, without consideration of the prior understanding present in the subjective thought that is provoked. However, as Gadamer explains, this prejudice has nothing to do with the method itself becoming subject to falsification, the prejudice can only be considered as being methodologically illegitimate, as is judging earlier interpretation to be erroneous only because of their supposed prejudice. Therefore, since prejudice is inherent part of our history as it is to being human, the meaning imposed on any object can only be understood if we find a manner in which the prejudice that comes with it can be seen as productive.

Hermeneutics should then be understood, not as a method to uncover the meaning imposed on the text by the author, but instead as a method to uncover the authors' prejudices, subsequently revealing that meaning. That what we are trying to interpret in that case is not the author themselves, it is the creative process the author underwent. As such we indeed do not need to transpose ourselves in the mind of the author, only in the context, effectively bringing past and present together. The text itself is then the medium through which any reader will be able to experience those circumstances, thereby, instead of trying to grasp the authors understanding in our interpretative efforts we must focus on the readers understanding of the contexts conveyed by text itself. Ultimately the text is then not a medium through which we can understand the author, but through which we can understand the meaning.

Since this will eventually turn into an exposition of psychological practices in literary criticism it seems only fitting that the evolution of textual interpretation, as sketched in this thesis be explained by a tool close to any empiricist's heart, figures. First and foremost, we have realized that the text is a medium with which the author can communicate. Followingly it is the reader who interacts with this text to interpret it, as displayed in Figure 1.

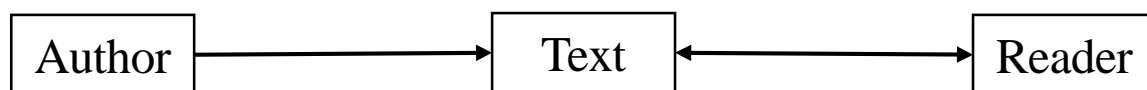


Figure 1.

That would be correct, if indeed all meaning was embedded in the text itself. However, as we have seen, it is the authors intention that conveys the meaning, or rather the authors influence on the text is the meaning. As you can see in Figure 2, even if the reader manages to place themselves in the shoes of the author, their role is to influence the text once again, not subtract meaning from it. It is something the author uses, not something they have.

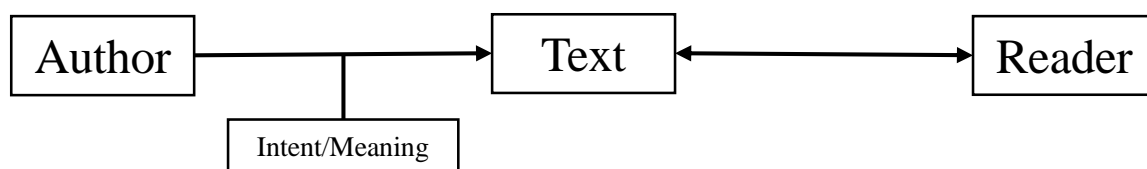


Figure 2.

However, this approach fails to consider the context in which both the meaning and the author are formed, either historical, cultural, or geographical. As we can see in Figure 3, the source of the text is not its author, not its meaning, but rather the context.

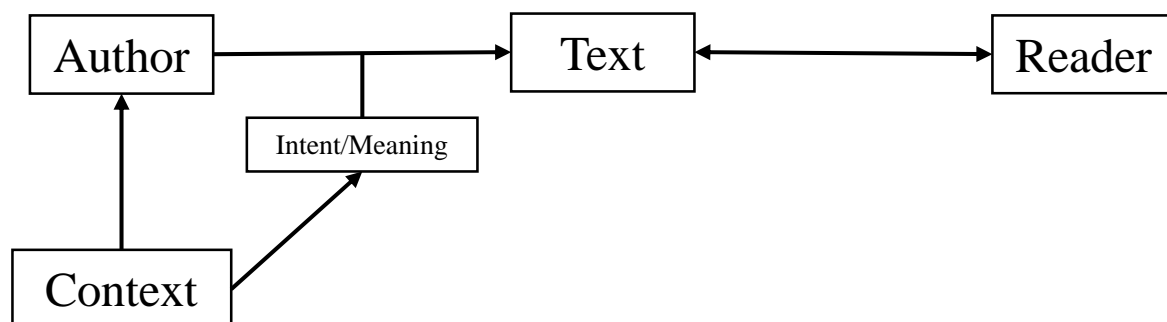


Figure 3.

It seems then, that the reader merely has to place themselves in the right context to be able to not only understand the author, but also to understand the exact meaning that is imposed on the text by that author.

This means, that we can finally allow ourselves to do exactly what Schleiermacher imposed on us to do with his Hermeneutics. For was it not the idea to understand the text even better than its creator? This can be done by not placing ourselves in the authors positions, but by placing ourselves, as readers or interpreters, in the context of the creation of the author's

text and the meaning that context carries with it. As such we transcend them, without losing access to the prejudices we already have, since it is still ourselves we can find in that context. Moreover, it has been clarified, that, since the text is the only accessible dialogue we have between the past and the present, it is the text only that lends us the capacity to access that context. Followingly we can observe how readers get influenced by being placed in the context that is actually the text, and how the text changes in meaning when exposed to the changes in the reader. We can expose ourselves, as reader, to the contextual components we can discover in the text, through research, and measure how our interpretation changes when that exposition occurs. Here the essentials of Schleiermacher's method, namely being the endless quest to uncover meaning, are upheld, only by measuring the change *in* meaning, not by changing that meaning following new interpretation. As such, we are not just counting subjective interpretations of different readers, we are comparing how the text has influenced the reader, and as such has been able to convey its meaning. An unrealistic ideal would then be for that change to reach zero, at which point the meaning would be truth. However, since empirical science deals with hypotheses this would not be possible, it would merely be a confirmation of only that hypothesis, not an undeniable truth about the meaning of a text.

## Psychology in literature

As beginning literary scientist<sup>24</sup>, I too realize that the steps taken thus far have seemingly set us on a path towards recreating the circumstances of the birth of Reader Response Criticism (RRC)<sup>25</sup>. So, let us begin our psychological venture explaining how this thesis is not a recapitulation of that theory, by highlighting their differences. We too want to be able to rely on the faculties the reader brings to the table, we rely on their perception, and how they manage to translate those perceptions with their imagination. There must always be a relationship between the reader and the text, otherwise what would we even be trying to understand? Only, RRC assumes that the meaning we are trying to find in the text is actually not in the text but brought about in ourselves. It builds further upon the idea that texts are not just words with meaning imposed on them by a single entity, but a multi-dimensional concept in which unoriginal writings mingle to create endless new meanings.<sup>26</sup> However, RRC suggests that the meaning shall followingly be found neither in the text, nor the reader, but rather in the interaction between them, whereas, as we saw in Figure 2 and 3, we suppose still that meaning is the influence of the author on the text, and as such can only be found by examining it at its source. We are not looking where the text can be taken by the reader, which would still result in truly endless journeys, but rather where the text has been. We do not have to differ between the real reader and the reader the text implicates, for context will eventually allow just one kind of reader, which is both the reader at hand as well as the one implicated by the text.

Moreover, when we assume that context is embedded within the text, and the text, when read correct and enough<sup>27</sup>, can translate that context to the reader, the subject of the text will become to the reader as intended by the author, making interpretation of the text more likely to be unchanging. Instead of regarding previous experiences of readers with texts that share similarities as cause for different interpretation by different readers, they are rather advantages which allow easier access to the right context. A temporary advantage at best in that case, since, as the hermeneutic circle implicates, all readers *will* involuntarily move between the single work and everything that they can relate to it, which will inevitably expand if the process

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<sup>24</sup> This is a literal translation of the Dutch ‘literatuurwetenschapper’. Since this Thesis produces an empirical and methodological approach to studying literature, I think it is appropriate to refer to this method as scientific. Thus, regarding those who follow it, not as critics, but as scientists.

<sup>25</sup> Iser, “Interaction between Text and reader” in NATC, 1452-60

<sup>26</sup> Barthes, NATC, 1270

<sup>27</sup> *Correct* and *enough* may, in this case, be regarded as having similar meaning, since, when enough readers are compared, only the correct reading will survive when the readers are exposed to the context embedded in the text. The next paragraph will explicate how an ample amount of readers can be ensured.



continues<sup>28</sup>, thus allowing for a more level playing field concerning the ability to understand, especially in such a connected society. Although readers may all read separately, hence form separate interpretations, the context in which these interpretations are formed can be shared among individuals. As such, the meaning derived from that context will also be shared.

### *Replacing Reading with Observation*

When exercising this psychological approach to hermeneutics applied to literature, one is only required to have a basic understanding of the text at hand, the act of reading has turned into one of methodological planning and observation. Instead of functioning as the sole authority on interpretation of the text's meaning, the researcher observes how a certain population of readers create their understanding of the text. This observing of readers is of course not revolutionary, as mentioned before RRC has served as a basis for empirical literary research, they often combine psychological or sociological factors of reader behaviour to test their hypothesis.<sup>29</sup> Currently, however, research based in RRC frequently utilizes a sample pool that is too small and/or not varied enough.<sup>30</sup> Studies that make an effort to follow psychological research protocols generally employ qualitative investigative methods instead of a quantitative one,<sup>31</sup> or choose to combine both.<sup>32</sup> RRC based research that *does* solely use quantitative methods and adheres to correct data collection and processing protocols is rare or focusses instead on the affective changes and reactions in the reader.<sup>33</sup> In these investigations the intention is not to research the general interpretation of meaning, but to uncover how presupposed meaning could influence readers. Furthermore, RRC based frameworks that utilize empirical research methods have, up till now, largely restricted their investigations to textual aspects, in spite of contextual ones.<sup>34</sup> This results in investigations that are not conducted to uncover the meaning of a certain text, but, as the theory suggests, to observe the different reactions texts can provoke in readers. As such the observation-based system that stems from RRC can serve as an introductory framework for empirical research of literature,

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<sup>28</sup> This thesis does not overcome the hermeneutic circle, and while it does support our argument in this case it also means that we neither can impose definite meaning on any text.

<sup>29</sup> See Bibliography: Schmidt; Schram; Steen.

<sup>30</sup> e.g., Bell, A., et al., "A reader response method not just for 'you'."

<sup>31</sup> e.g., Fernandez-Quintanilla, C., "Textual and reader factors in narrative empathy: An empirical reader response study using focus groups."

<sup>32</sup> e.g., Schrijvers, M., et al., "Transformative Dialogic Literature Teaching fosters adolescents' insight into human nature and motivation"

<sup>33</sup> Fialho, O., "What is literature for? The role of transformative reading" following the framework of: Koopman, E. M. & Hakemulder, F., "Effects of Literature on Empathy and Self- Reflection: A Theoretical-Empirical Framework"

<sup>34</sup> Whiteley, S. & Canning, P., "Reader response research in stylistics"

however, it must be adapted on to provide a method with which a generalized understanding of texts can be found.

Instead of delving into a text themselves, empirical literary researchers thus observe how other people read a given text and manipulate the conditions in which this is done. Whereas Reader Response based investigations would thereafter conduct tests as to, for instance, establish the way in which a reader empathises with a certain real-life situation (i.e., as to see how the text has affected the reader), this thesis suggests interventions based on the context of the manuscript, whereafter the text is read again. A variety of testing moments based on the same manuscript but with different interventions allow a researcher to see how those specific interventions have not only changed the reader, but specifically how the reader understands the text, based on the given circumstances. Of course, neither the specific (parts of a) manuscript, the method of testing, or the interventions can be decided upon without careful consideration. Prior to conducting any kind of investigations, basic knowledge of the text will help the researcher formulate ideas on the specific components to be researched by conducting the experiment. After an idea is formed, variables can be established. Since this thesis argues for the use of hermeneutics in empirical literary research, the goal should be to understand the text even better than its creator, by which logic the outcome, or dependent variable, should be understanding. What will be measured after manipulation will consistently be understanding of the text at hand, or the change thereof.<sup>35</sup>

What influences the outcome, however, is open to design for the researcher. The independent variables are ways of manipulating the context in which the text is perceived, the selected variables must be hypothesised to eventually alter the interpretation of the meaning of the text and thereby change understanding. In literary research this can be something as simple as manipulating the kind of paper or font the text is presented in, what would happen if the text were presented as similar as possible to its original production? The case study later in this thesis will provide some more examples of possible manipulations in perception. Most importantly the researcher needs to be able to make the readers comprehension of the context change. Reading is not a singular process that happens all on its own, it is composed of automatic- and control processes. While the automatic processes have a low tax on our working memory, which happens due to practice in reading, control processes require our explicit attention. This can happen simply because we encounter an unfamiliar word but is still vital in

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<sup>35</sup> Sternberg, R. J. & Sternberg, K., "Planning and Writing the Experimental Research Paper," in *The Psychologist's Companion: Sixth Edition*. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 87-130

manipulating the reader in changing their comprehension. Automatic processes work to support our control processes, as to allow the latter to fuel our active thoughts about what we are reading and empower us to acquire new knowledge about it. While this may sound complicated it can already be apparent by the fact that we read slower when encountering a text not written in our native language; it requires greater labour of our working memory.<sup>36</sup> While it has, understandably, been very popular to use language to investigate the workings of the brain<sup>37</sup> the same principles can be used in reverse.

Next the researcher must consider how participants will be exposed to the selected manipulations. Is it better to compare the understanding of the text from participants with no exposure to participants who have been exposed to the manipulation? Or might it be more worthwhile to first measure the unexposed participants' understanding of the text and followingly expose all of them and measure again? A main concern in this decision-making process should be the possible influence of the consequential exposition of participants to different manipulations. If we first decide to change the font type when providing a medieval text and sequentially put the reader into a medieval setting, the font type might have a positive effect when administered by itself but have a negative effect on how the reader comprehends the context when they get placed in the medieval context. It would then seem as if the medieval contributes only little or nothing to understanding, while this is caused by the font. When comparing subject with separate manipulations, this would no longer be a problem. However, to create a reliable study, the researcher would have to acquire many more participants than when all are exposed to the same manipulations. In short, both have their advantages and disadvantages, essential is thus a well-considered research design to produce studies that are both reliable and reproducible.

The next problem the researcher encounters is the selection of the right participants. In most cases a researcher must want to be able to generalize the results of the study to a broad population, which would mean populating the participant pool with *just* as broad a population. However, it is often much easier, especially with an academic budget, to find participants in certain, more specialised population. Even if one thinks they know where to find a wide variety of reader, the question remains how to contact and entuse them to participate. The question that must be answered is which population we want our research to have result for, what will be the use of the newly acquired knowledge. If the researcher's intention would be to improve

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<sup>36</sup> Walczyk, J. J., "The Interplay Between Automatic and Control Processes in Reading" *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35. 4 (2000): 554-66

<sup>37</sup> E.g., See Bibliography: Turner & Engle; Daneman & Merikle.

understanding of texts by highschoolers, it would be strange to use senior citizens as our samples. Rather, we would select a pool of participants that is representative of the broadest populations of highschoolers. This means selecting participants of different sociocultural groups, educational levels, etc. and making sure our sample population has a representation of each of these groups that is equal to their representation in the general population. The size of the sample is also something to keep in mind when conducting any kind of research, even when research *is* conducted empirically, its result can only reach a statistical significance if the sample is both varied *and* is big enough. This means not conducting your experiments on sixteen English teachers, but rather on a mixed pool of *at least* a hundredth participants.<sup>38</sup>

We mentioned earlier that the researcher does not need an extreme amount of knowledge of the text at hand, this might have been a slight exaggeration. That is to say, the next step in designing our research is the selection of material, which might be vital to the results we will reap. In the previous paragraph we mentioned enticing people to participate. Let's imagine having to read a 356-page long manuscript five times over, perhaps in sequentially more demanding conditions, all to produce a silly little paper no one might ever be interested in. A solution to this problem would be to select sections of material<sup>39</sup> or at least make sure that the chosen material does not tire the participants in such a way that it would influence the research as a separate variable.<sup>40</sup> However, the selection of the material might influence the ability to generalize the outcome to the work as a whole. When selecting the wrong ten pages of a considerably longer manuscript, the understanding gathered due to the improved relation to the context on those ten pages is highly unlikely to be equally as positive as the understanding gained with the same manipulations for the rest of the manuscript. In short, the more a researcher knows about a text, the better they can judge what sections are representable for the text as a whole. Alternatively, the more a researcher knows about a genre in literature, the better they can judge which texts best embody that genre. In literature I would argue that this comes down to a lot of experience and subjective (or intuitive) judgement, which is unfortunate but nevertheless a necessary start in any kind of investigation.

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<sup>38</sup> See Bibliography: Mundfrom; MacCallum.

<sup>39</sup> The distribution of different sections of the same manuscript to different participants might also be considered as an independent variable.

<sup>40</sup> Unless of course tiring the participants would make it so that reading the text under that specific manipulation would contribute to relating to the context in such a way that it is expected to positively influence understanding.

*Analysing and Reporting*

As literary ‘scientists’ the following often does not fall into the area of expertise; data collection and interpretation thereof. Avoiding exhaustive and expensive methods of collecting data a researcher could compose a simple questionnaire in which they can measure understanding at the different levels of the experiment. However, such a method is often not very reliable, since it would still include much subjective interpretation on the part of the reader as well as much difficulty on establishing the right questions to truly question understanding, consider only how each participant themselves would understand the meaning of increased understanding before answering yes or no. Luckily different methods could be employed, an example of such a method could be a measurement of brain activity when reading texts under different experimental conditions. Different areas of the brain have been found to serve different lexical processes, as such, when a different variable is implemented, the records of those activations may show different kinds of processes that can be translated into deeper interactions with the text.<sup>41</sup> This might just be an example of a way of measuring change in participants but hopefully showcases that selecting the right way of measuring is not an easy task, and is therefore a part of the research that must not be underestimated. The right questionnaire design could nevertheless still be sufficient to acquire constructive data from readers. For instance, while heavily discussed in its application the use of a Likert scale<sup>42</sup> can easily display the differences between various moments of measurements by means of statistical analysis.

Highly dependent upon the whole design of the study is thus the way in which a researcher is able to analyse the data they have acquired. Since we are in need of a way of analysing that is methodologically as objective as possible, I would suggest that qualitative research better be avoided. Qualitative research concerns itself with the collection of opinions and experiences, which is useful in situations where we are looking into the individual experience of a reader but does not support research that ultimately aims at analysing numerical results. As such qualitative research is subject to the interpretation of the researcher even *after* the data has been collected, whereas quantitative research supplies us with much more (perceived) objectivity. The latter supports an empirical approach in which subjectivity is eliminated as much as possible, since it does not have to account for the interpretation of the researcher themselves, only their statistical skill. It would provide either a positive or negative

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<sup>41</sup> Joubert, S., et al., “Neural correlates of lexical and sublexical processes in reading” *Brain and Language*, 8 (2004): 9-20

<sup>42</sup> Joshi, A., et al., “Likert Scale: Explored and Explained.”

outcome, and if done correctly, that outcome will not be influenced by the researcher's eagerness to produce an article that would fit their desired outcome. Moreover, negative outcomes in social research should never be considered as unsatisfying outcomes, after all, experience is the greatest teacher in this case. This is why reproducibility of the study is so important, since before the study is even carried out, the variables and manner of analysis have to be set to create a study that contribute the most to reliable new knowledge. Reproducing the study with certain changes, learning from the previous outcomes, gives us a whole new opportunity to discover new understanding.

### Case studies

As to give a better idea of the goal of this thesis, the following case studies are intended to sketch the possibilities this empirical approach to hermeneutics provides. For this I have selected two cases, of course I could say this was done with careful consideration, but as mentioned before, selection of material for any of these studies depends highly on experience. Since I believe there is a lack in this experience, I have let my judgement rely on where I feel this ‘lacking’ is most present, whereby we quickly arrive on the literary genre we regard today as modernism. The only experience I can surely account for in my encounters with modernism is the huge amount of doubt I have found within myself when attempting to create any understanding of the text. It feels as if anything is possibly the right interpretation, yet still every interpretation feels slightly off. As exemplary cases of this modernistic literary movement I have selected works by renowned authors within said movement. Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* for its repeated return in programmes of the study of literature and philosophy and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. As one is a short novel and the other a poem, they provide ample opportunity to showcase how the theory discussed in this thesis can be applied to different instances of literature.

#### *Kafka’s Metamorphosis*

Let us first sketch an extreme, and perhaps impossible, scenario, which will hopefully showcase how immersion in text, or better context, might be reached. Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* is, to summarize, a short story about a man turned into an insect<sup>43</sup>. In the story that man-turned-insect must deal with the household problems that come with one turning into a human sized insect. Of course, the context of the book is rather difficult to grasp, but nevertheless, the reader is demanded to imagine themselves transported into the body of Gregor, or rather the insect to be able to fully understand his problems. A possible manipulation is to question the participant in how they understand the story first after normally reading the text, and followingly after reading the text dressed as a insect laying on the backs in a room full of people. Naturally, this would, although hilarious, be an insane ask of any participant. Moreover, it would be hard to control variables, such as the comicality of the situation a participant might experience, and

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<sup>43</sup> In the original German version of the story Kafka refers to the ‘creature’ Gregor has turned into as “ungeheures Ungeziefer”, which is best translated as “monstrous vermin”. While often emphasized that the idea of an insect is rather the display of an idea than to be taken as the transformation into a literal insect. Since many translation however use a beetle or a cockroach to best capture the idea of Kafka’s ‘Ungeziefer’, we shall refer to it with the overarching term insect.

make sure we exclude them when analysing the impact of the actual manipulation. Sticking with a theme that occurs throughout the entire novel however, something stands out to any psychologist, the neglect Gregor feels in regard to the way his family handles the situation. Designing a study based around an immersion in the context of neglect is much more feasible than the previous design.

The pool of participants could first be tested on their experience with parental neglect, separating the participants into two groups, those who have no traces of psychological neglect and those who do. This research design would constitute a between-subject<sup>44</sup> measurement, which would require the participants to read the novel only once, whereafter the researcher can compare the interpretation or measurements of understanding between the groups. For instance, if it was hypothesised that the neglected group would mention that they felt a great understanding of the story, while the non-neglected group reported that they were not sure how to understand the story, the manipulation of the experience of neglect might be an essential contribution to an immersion in the context, thereby supporting the uncovering of the meaning imposed on the text. A difference like this can be established by the use of a questionnaire based on the earlier mentioned Likert scale.

An endless assortment of themes can be found in the novel at hand, one more obvious than the other. One could say, for instance that the position of Gregor, as insect, constantly having to look up creates a theme of involuntary submission to authority. A psychological way of recreating this has been used continuously after the Milgram experiment, in which Stanley Milgram exposed participants to a variety of variables that represented authority to study the levels of obedience they would induce.<sup>45</sup> The results, though disputed, repeatedly showed that any person exposed to a certain amount of authority will submit obediently to even the most gruesome task. Just a simple manipulation of the conductor of the experiment having wear a lab coat or introducing themselves as professor such and so can have great impact on experienced authority. A more modern version of this manipulation, perhaps more impactful on modern participants, is to tell one group that, although they can read alone in their room, they may not leave until finished and will continuously be observed by a camera. In this case, when the time for this kind of authority to have an impact is established, the reader would not even have to be exposed to the whole text, as long as there is sufficient time to experience a

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<sup>44</sup> A between-subject design measures the difference in outcome between a group *without* a certain intervention/attribute and another group *with* the intervention/attribute. The opposite would be a within-subject design, whereby *one* group of subjects is tested twice, once before and once after the intervention.

<sup>45</sup> Milgram, S., *Behavioral Study of Obedience* (1963)



sense of authority and/or submission. Under such a manipulation there could again be a comparison made between readers who were exposed to the manipulation and readers who were not. Whereby attempting to answer how much responses differ to the same questions.

*Eliot's The Waste Land*

The above suggested experiments showcase manipulations that are a direct and active intervention by the researcher and are designs in which we can easily create different groups of participants that can be compared with each other. In the instance of a novel, even if short, this is a more practical approach, since it considers the amount of time it takes to read a longer manuscript. Seeing that *The Waste Land* is a considerably shorter piece of text we shall use it to provide examples of possible within-subject designs, where we measure the dependent variable within each participant after implementing the manipulation. Elliot's text is an interesting piece to consider for this case study since, not unlike *Metamorphosis*, combining the title with the term 'empirical research' (or terms related) in a google scholar search provides no articles that employ empirical methods to analyse Elliot's text to uncover meaning. Moreover, when searching on the title combined with 'meaning' or 'understanding' only papers will appear that provide an individual subjective analysis of the meaning that supposedly lay behind (certain sections of) the text. Not even Reader Response based methods seem to have been employed in analysing Elliot's texts, that while especially poetic writings lend for a great concealment of meaning, and ample opportunity for readers to form and *reform* interpretations of the text.

Earlier in this thesis we discussed how different works from an author could be related to each other. Eliot wrote many different pieces, among which this extract from *Little Gidding*

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>46</sup>

Let us assume that this quote, for it is often carelessly used around even without consideration of its deeper meaning, will impart some kind of questioning in understanding in every kind of reader. We could simply ask every participant to read the extract and consider it carefully before reading the text again. Will different more control processes occur when reading the

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<sup>46</sup> Eliot, T. S., *Little Gidding*, (1943)

text after the manipulation, identifiable by a greater activity of the working memory in the participants brain?

A last example of a research design fitting an analysis of *The Waste Land* will be provided, it could use the same method of observation as previously mentioned, just a different manipulation. Since we know that it was written after the first world war, and carries very imaginative themes such as death, decay, and aimless wandering, participants can be asked to convey their first reading of the text into an interpretation made by drawing how they perceive the image of the text. Drawing being a tool that might allow readers to unlock their imaginative processes. Their next reading will then be influenced by a direct access to their imagination, possibly providing a very different immersion in the context of the text, ultimately leading to a different understanding. Just like all other sketched research designs this too is just the beginning of a reliable experiment, which would require much more elaboration. However, a showcase like this substantiates that even within the parameters of empirical research, greater understanding can be unlocked. Not only that, but it would also possibly allow for an interpretation of meaning that does not have to be subordinate to the argument of subjectivity.

The case of *The Waste Land* is thus merely a groundwork to emphasize how even poetry, which is often seen as having endless possible interpretations even more so than novels, can still be analysed when the right methodology is employed. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates that we are still only attempting to generalize and deepen understanding of texts based on shared experiences, not providing a method that creates a single rule for understanding a certain text. After all, Elliot already supposed that meaning is formed partly by the readers themselves.

The Poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express', or his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the writer or the writer as a reader. Consequently the problem of what a poem 'means' is a good deal more difficult than it first appears.<sup>47</sup>

In this thesis we take this one step further, where the reader can only deepen their understanding of that meaning when they are able to place themselves in the right context related to the text

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<sup>47</sup> Eliot, T. S., *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980); 15

they are interacting with. Providing a method to guide readers towards an understanding, instead of getting lost as an interpreter yourself when surpassing the surface of the text.

## Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to integrate the fields of philosophy literary studies and psychology through the use of Schleiermacher's theory on Hermeneutics. In our exploration we adapted his Hermeneutical theory to hermeneutic essentials by using the critical interpretation of hermeneutics as a method of research provided by Gadamer. In this thesis it is first and foremost explained that, to successfully construct a hermeneutical research method that is adapted to previous criticism, we must consider not the author nor the text as our sole or most important path to understanding imposed meaning on any literature. Meaning is not a product of the soul of the author, but rather finds its source in the context the author derives it from. Thus, to uncover the meaning, to create understanding, we must find ways to immerse a reader in the context that the text provides, instead of attempting to replace our own soul with that of the author. The steps undertaken in substantiating this argument have led us from a philosophical analysis of hermeneutics in literary research to an implementation of the identified elements in empirical research design. Necessary elements in each step of design can be successfully identified, providing a practical method to follow as a literary case is attempted to be studied through the process of empirical hermeneutics. The case studies in this thesis provide a broad spectrum of different research designs that can demonstrate the possibilities this integrate version of hermeneutics has to offer. Due to the restrictions of empirical research, perhaps mainly its need for reliability, clear borders can be drawn in which we can ask ourselves questions dooms creative thinking as a wrongful interpretation, but one where creative thinking can be checked on validity.

As participant in all the aforementioned scientific practices I acknowledge that successfully implementing empirical research into both literature and philosophy, especially so focussed on psychology, requires extremely broad knowledge. To even make it common practice might be a far reach, but still one that is worthwhile considering. This method provides opportunity to keep track of subjective interpretation and keep personal opinion of researchers in check. Especially in a field as literature, where engaging and understanding of emotions is such common practice, the study of those emotions and processes of understanding should be utilized. If anything, this thesis has made me realize that it is possible to successfully integrate my different areas of study. Previously unrelated theories and methods have been used to enrich and critique each other, merging into the beginning of an answer on how we can establish a different way to make sense of all there is to understand.

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