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Multiple versions and fictional minds: manuscript research, digital editing, and enactive cognition in literary studies

Reference:
Multiple Versions and Fictional Minds: Manuscript Research, Digital Editing and Enactive Cognition in Literary Studies

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Literary studies have changed due to digital technology. The understandable result is a tension between an enthusiastic embracing of digital humanities and a cautious resistance against this embrace. The tension is related to the notion of measurability, which defines the academic environment we now find ourselves in. Whereas a few decades ago, the prestige of the humanities was unquestioned, the current situation at most universities is different in that it is the sciences that have the prestige. The result is an increasing institutional pressure on literary studies to be “scientific.” The discipline of literary studies is trying to find its bearings in an environment dominated by a culture of measurement. Digital tools can be of help in obtaining measurable data, if that is what literary critics want. For instance, the shift from “close reading” to what Franco Moretti has dubbed “distant reading” is based on the measurability of big data, analyzable thanks to digital technology.

But the digital turn is not just a question of technology. It is above all a matter of methodology. For instance, in order to recognize an author or to define a genre (such as the Gothic novel) literary scholars used to base their analyses on striking or conspicuous characteristics of form and style. Digital text analysis, on the contrary, works with inconspicuous function words such as “the” or “a”. This implies that there are formal aspects of literature that cannot be detected with the human eye without digital help. Digital text analysis thus facilitates diverse forms of serendipity and unexpected discoveries, which in their turn generate new research questions.

One of the consequences of working with digitized texts is an enhanced awareness of versions. Digital editing buttresses archival work in important ways and it is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the recent flourishing of genetic criticism, the

1 The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013)/ERC grant agreement no. 313609.
study of writing processes. In this essay, I would like to investigate to what extent this particular aspect of literary studies can be of value to other research, both in the humanities and in the sciences, notably cognitive sciences. My research hypothesis is that the multiplicity of versions, which is characteristic of literary writing processes, not only accords with recent findings in cognitive philosophy or neurophilosophy, responding to advances in cognitive sciences, but also constitutes a rich potential for research into the human mind. In other words, the exchange of ideas between neurophilosophy and literary studies can be bidirectional and mutually beneficial.

Literary texts exist in multiple versions. Public and private archives contain hundreds of (often unexplored) manuscripts, typescripts and other textual versions. Their authors did not throw them away and the community of readers continuously invests in their preservation. This preservation of manuscripts is more than a merely material matter; it reflects an increasing interest in the multiplicity of versions as a crucial element in the workings of the human mind. In this essay, I argue that – especially with digital methods – the study of manuscripts can contribute to an understanding of the nexus between narrative and mind, a common point of interest in narrative theory and cognitive philosophy.

From the perspective of cognitive narratology, the workings of the mind can be studied in at least three dimensions:2 (1) the invention and production of the storyworld (the genetic dimension); (2) the presentation or evocation of cognitive processes of the characters in the storyworld (the narrative dimension); and (3) the cognitive processes by means of which readers make sense of the narrative (the reception). The cognitive turn in literary studies has (so far) mainly focused on inquiries into the fictional minds of characters and the examination of readers’ minds (dimensions 2 and 3). This essay focuses on the value of the genetic dimension in “three-dimensional” literary studies, by concentrating on two notions: “versions” and “gaps.”

2 David Herman, “Cognitive Narratology.” The Living Handbook of Narratology, ed. Peter Hühn et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2009), online.
The study of manuscripts typically involves multiple versions of a text. This multiplicity of drafts and versions reflects the workings of human consciousness, according to what Daniel C. Dennett has called the Multiple Drafts Model. Dennett developed this model as an alternative to Descartes’ model of the mind, the so-called Cartesian body/mind split. Dennett refers to Descartes’ model as the “Cartesian theatre.” In this so-called “Cartesian theatre,” a tiny homunculus observes and interprets all the incoming sensory data (as if they were projected onto a screen), makes decisions and sends out commands to the limbs. The problem with the model is that the homunculus would also need a homunculus to perform these actions, and this homunculus would have to contain yet another homunculus, creating an infinite Chinese-boxes effect. As a consequence of this model, our thinking about consciousness and the mind was boxed in, as it were, or – as Lambros Malafouris phrases it – “trapped in a Cartesian universe that separates the mental realm from the realm of materiality and practice.”

Dennett’s alternative “Multiple Drafts Model” compares the workings of the conscious mind to a process of editorial revision, involving “various additions, incorporations, emendations, and overwritings of content” (112). None of these narratives counts as the canonical version, since “at any

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4 See for instance Ernesto Bussola, “What Is a Memory, That It May Comprehend Itself?” Memory Mass Storage, ed. Giovanni Campardo, Federico Tiziani and Masimo Iaculo (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2011), 20-1: “The obvious risk of this conception is to fall in infinite regress, which recalls the story of the *homunculus*: the subject looks at an object, but the projected image needs another inner subject that looks at it, …, and so on, in a never-ending recursive process.”

point in time there are multiple ‘drafts’ of narrative fragments at various stages of editing in various places in the brain” (113; emphasis added).

Dennett explicitly sees his model of consciousness as something that takes place “in the brain.” He employs the notion of multiple drafts as a metaphor, but in genetic criticism these multiple drafts are real, tangible materials. They constitute a research object in and of themselves, which is the starting point of the analytic process to study the dynamics of literary invention. From a cognitive perspective, one could even argue that these manuscripts are not just traces of, but an integral part of, a writer’s cognitive process. In manuscript studies, the multiple drafts model becomes palpable as in the case of Richard Feynman, quoted by Andy Clark. In a conversation with the historian Charles Weiner, Feynman said about his notes and sketches that they were more than just a record of his work:

Weiner once remarked casually that [a batch of notes and sketches] represented ‘a record of [Feynman’s] day-to-day work,’ and Feynman reacted sharply.

‘I actually did the work on the paper,’ he said.

‘Well,’ Weiner said, ‘the work was done in your head, but the record of it is still here.’

‘No, it’s not a record, not really. It’s working. You have to work on paper and this is the paper. Okay?’

The study of modern manuscripts thus turns the metaphor of the multiple drafts model into a tangible research object. By extending Dennett’s model beyond the brain, genetic criticism can bring it closer to another recent paradigm in cognitive sciences,

called enactivism, which has affinities with, but also differs from, the “extended mind” theory. According to this theory, the mind is not limited to the inside of the skull (Dennett’s “in the brain”); instead, the mind is seen as an interaction between an intelligent agent and his or her material and cultural environment. Enactivists argue that Dennett’s multiple drafts model may be too brain-bound, and that even the notion of the “extended mind” is still too much inspired by the Cartesian inside/outside split, because it implies an “inside” that is extended only if necessary. Instead, enactivists such as Daniel Hutto and Erik Myin suggest the alternative term “extensive mind” to argue that the mind is constituted in an even-handed way by both the brain and the environment, without prioritizing the brain’s contributions over those of the environment. Literary manuscripts thus become a truly interesting research field to study the “extensive mind” at work.

To this enactivist paradigm in cognitive philosophy, an interesting archaeological dimension is added by Lambros Malafouris, who admits that “extended-mind theorists have, to varying degrees, expanded the territory of mind into the material world,” but argues that “they have generally failed, or that they remain unwilling, to break completely from representationalism and move beyond its

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9 This comment was made by Richard Menary at the colloquium “Enactive Cognition in Philosophy and Literature,” which Erik Myin and I organized at the University of Antwerp on 22-23 May 2013.

computational heritage” (85). According to Malafouris, “Material signs do not represent; they enact. They do not stand for reality; they bring forth reality” (118). This “material agency” (119) has an impact on the human mind, which Malafouris sees as “an emergent product of complex ecological relationships and flexible incorporative forms of material engagement” (239).

Applied to the study of modern manuscripts, this notion of material engagement corresponds to Richard Menary’s suggestion that the “manipulation of environmental vehicles constitutes cognitive processes,”11 that the creation of “written vehicles” is part of cognition, and that “writing transforms our cognitive abilities.”12 In this sense, genetic criticism can truly be called the “science of written invention,” as Daniel Ferrer defines it.13 The revision process Dennett described in terms of “various additions, incorporations, emendations, and overwritings of content” takes shape in retraceable cancellations and marginal additions (112). And even if contemporary writers work with computers, there is still a form of material engagement that helps shape their work. Thus, when the Flemish author Peter Verhelst was asked by the literary archive Letterenhuis if it could display any aspect of his work in their permanent exhibition, he donated the “delete” button of his computer keyboard – a palpable reminder of Nelson Goodman’s observation (in Ways of Worldmaking) that creation is always a dialectic of composition and decomposition.14 Even the “delete” button is one of the things that shape the mind.


If “tools are us,” as Malafouris suggests (177), digital tools have actually refined our models of cognition in terms of versions and multiple drafts. As early as 1981, Theodor Nelson wrote a book called *Literary Machines*, in which he defined a “document” as “an evolving ongoing braid”: “Think of the process of making editorial changes as retwisting this braid when its parts are rearranged, added or subtracted, and think then of successive versions of the document, at successive instants of time, as slices in this space-time vortex.” These slices did not necessarily involve the whole document; what Nelson already envisioned in 1981 was that the user would be able to “ask for a certain part of a certain version at a certain point in time” (449), taking “the successive drafts of a novel” as an example: “While the user of a customary editing or word processing system may scroll through an individual document, the user of this system may scroll in time as well as space, watching the changes in a given passage as the system enacts its successive modifications” (449).

In the meantime, it is possible to bring this system into practice. The Beckett Digital Manuscript Project, for instance, enables readers and researchers to study the genesis of a particular sentence and search for what Nelson called “a certain part of a certain version at a certain point in time.” A good example is the genetic edition of Samuel Beckett’s novel *L’Innommable / The Unnamable* (first written in French, then translated into English by the author). The name of the character “Mahood” – which has been read by Beckett critics in terms of “manhood”16 – was a relatively late coinage in the manuscript of the original French version. A transcription of this document shows that the character was initially referred to by means of his initial

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only. This is what Nelson refers to as “scrolling in space,” that is within the narrative sequence of one version. Apart from this “scrolling in space,” the digital genetic edition also enables readers to “scroll in time,” following the development of “Mahood” across versions. This is not merely a matter of technical interest. It goes to the heart of Beckett’s œuvre. In his early essay Proust, he had already noted that “the individual is a succession of individuals.” Thus, Mahood in L’Innommable can be seen as the successor of the character Macmann (literally “son of man”) in the preceding novel, Malone meurt / Malone Dies. And it comes as no surprise that this representative of the human species was also initially referred to only by the initial “M” in the early stages of the writing process, when Beckett was not yet certain as to how to name this character. In the manuscript, this uncertainty is marked by a blank space (see also section “Gaps” below), which provides us with a palpable absence that might be useful to cognitive scientists as an instantiation of a writer’s extensive mind at work, defined by Malafouris in terms of material engagement.

Versions (II)

Admittedly, Malafouris’s “material engagement theory” is not based on the study of complex material objects, but on research into the most basic tools of the Stone Age (155), interpreting the knapping of stones in terms of “enactive cognitive prosthesis”


19 Samuel Beckett, manuscript of Malone meurt, second notebook, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Austin, TX (HRC), Samuel Beckett Collection, box 7, folder 4 (HRC MS SB 7.4), 19r.
(175): “The knapper first thinks through, with, and about the stone (as in the case of Oldowan tool making) before developing a meta-perspective that enables thinking about thinking (as evidenced in the case of elaborate late Acheulean technologies and the manufacture of composite tools)” (175). Although it is fair to object that literary manuscripts are much more complex than knapped stones, there is nonetheless an interesting correspondence that may help us define one of the values of manuscript research as an aspect of literary studies.

If “multiple drafts” are part and parcel of the extensive mind, an analysis of the invention of the storyworld across versions can inform a cognitive study of creative processes (the genetic dimension). But perhaps it can also inform narratological research into the evocation of fictional minds on the level of the characters (the narrative dimension). In the case of Beckett’s *Malone Dies*, for instance, the character could be said to write himself into being (while dying). Lying in his bed, his world is confined to what he can reach with his stick. Apart from this tool, his pencil and exercise book constitute the most important aspect of his prosthetic being. The pencil is actually so important that one could argue that Malone temporarily ceases to exist as a narrator when he drops his pencil:

Ah yes, I have my little pastimes and they

What a misfortune, the pencil must have slipped from my fingers, for I have only just succeeded in recovering it after forty-eight hours (see above) of intermittent efforts.\(^{20}\)

*Malone Dies* is of course a rather extreme case of metafiction, which facilitates the connection between dimensions 1 and 2, the genetic and the narrative. But even in less metafictional novels, the link with the draft versions may be of use to cognitive narratology. If draft versions are part and parcel of the extended mind, they may

directly inform the study of a different kind of versions in what David Herman calls
the unique capacity of narratives to create “an environment in which versions of what
it was like to experience situations and events can be juxtaposed, comparatively
evaluated, and then factored into further accounts of the world (or a world).”21

Versions (III)

Herman’s “versions” are of course not material drafts, but various ways of
experiencing situations, notably from another person’s or another organism’s
perspective. The ability to identify and understand others’ subjective states is often
called Theory of Mind (ToM), which can be either affective (the capacity to
understand others’ emotions) or cognitive (the ability to infer others’ beliefs and
intentions). According to a recent study by psychologists David Comer Kidd and
Emanuele Castano, literature would sharpen our affective ToM, also referred to as
empathy. The title of their article, published in Science (18 October 2013) is “Reading
 Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind.”22 By “literary fiction” the authors mean
what Roland Barthes called “writerly” texts, that is, texts that “engage their readers
creatively as writers,” as opposed to genre fiction, “intended to entertain their mostly
passive readers” (377).

The study corroborates recent pleas for the recognition of the importance of
the liberal arts in education, such as Martha C. Nussbaum’s Not for Profit: Why
Democracy Needs the Humanities (2010). Nussbaum argues that, in order to relate
well to a complex environment, human beings need more than just factual knowledge
and logic alone, but also a “third ability,” which she defines as “the ability to think
what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an

21 David Herman, Basic Elements of Narrative (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009),
151.

22 David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, “Reading Literary Fiction Improves
This is the author’s version of a chapter published by Cambridge University Press in *The Values of Literary Studies*, ed. Rónán McDonald (Cambridge, 2015), 220-234. Please refer to the published version for correct citation and content. For more information, see http://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/literature/literary-theory/values-literary-studies-critical-institutions-scholarly-agendas?format=PB#cuXzvS4zXseXTpwQ.97.

intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have.”23 This might serve as an adequate definition of empathy. Nussbaum calls it “narrative imagination”24 and “sympathy,”25 and literature plays a role in the cultivation of this ability: “Instruction in literature and the arts can cultivate sympathy in many ways.”26

In this context, it is probably appropriate to bear in mind Lee Siegel’s caution with reference to the notions of empathy and sympathy: “some of the most empathetic people you will ever meet are businesspeople and lawyers. They can grasp another person’s feelings in an instant, act on them, and clinch a deal or win a trial.”27 Steven Pinker similarly expresses his skepticism with regard to “the sense of empathy that gets valorized today,” which confuses empathy with “an altruistic concern for others.”28 Pinker does recognize the value of literature, and of “versions” in Herman’s sense – as various ways of experiencing situations. In this sense, the notion of “versions” links up with more familiar arguments about the value of literature. Pinker acknowledges that “Reading is a technology for perspective-taking. When someone

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25 Nussbaum 2010, 96: “The cultivation of sympathy has been a key part of the best modern ideas of democratic education, in both Western and non-Western nations.”

26 Nussbaum 2010, 106.


else’s thoughts are in your head, you are observing the world from that person’s vantage point. Not only are you taking in sights and sounds that you could not experience firsthand, but you have stepped inside that person’s mind and are temporarily sharing his or her attitudes and reactions.” (175) Pinker explicitly states that adopting other people’s vantage points can alter one’s convictions and relates this to literature, noting that the eighteenth century was a turning point in the history of the novel (176). He sees a direct link between the heyday of the novel and what he calls the “Humanitarian Revolution,” marked by a decrease of violence: “Realistic fiction, for its part, may expand readers’ circle of empathy by seducing them into thinking and feeling like people very different from themselves.” (175-6) So, in 2011 Pinker already suggested what Kidd and Castano confirmed in 2013, that “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” by means of five experiments.  

It is significant, however, that this study was done by psychologists, not by literary critics, and that their findings were published in the journal Science. The article’s closing paragraph refers to the new set of U.S. education standards that call for less emphasis on fiction in secondary education and concludes: “Debates over the social value of types of fiction and the arts more broadly are important, and it seems critical to supplement them with empirical research” (380). The implicit suggestion seems to be that literary studies would be barely able to capture the value of literature and that empirical research needs to come to the rescue. And if other disciplines are better at proving the value of literature, at least in terms of measurable utility, this would be indicative of the “value” of literary studies, according to the same controversial criterion. But of course, the real question is whether every discipline’s

29 In experiment 1, they compared the effects of reading literary fiction with reading nonfiction by means of the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET), which showed that “reading literary fiction, relative to nonfiction, improves performance on an affective ToM task” (379). Experiments 2 to 5, “showed that this effect is specific to literary fiction” (379), by testing the effects of reading literary fiction as opposed to reading popular fiction.
value should be tested by the same criterion of measurable utility. Many literary scholars feel uncomfortable with the idea of literature as cultivating empathy, because the assumptions are too humanist. Beckett’s work actually questioned this notion of humanism, especially since Sartre’s 1946 lecture, *L’Existentialisme est un humanisme*. The human, according to Beckett, was a concept we tend to keep for times of great massacres. According to critics such as Martha Nussbaum, these are “disturbing thoughts” to anyone “who approaches narrative search for an understanding of human life and its prospects”, “anyone who wishes to claim that fictional narratives play a central and, so to speak, a positive role in self-understanding” (227), notably because these narratives evoke emotional activity and “because their very forms are themselves the sources of emotional structure, the paradigms of what, for us, emotion is” (236). Beckett, however, undermines these “paradigms” by means of the “unwriting of stories” (234). Simon Critchley has criticized Nussbaum’s inference that Beckett would be trying “to divest readers of their emotionality.” What Beckett’s denarration does problematize, however, is a humanist tendency to stress the use of literature in terms of ethical, therapeutic or pedagogical values, and of what Critchley terms a “communally authorized and ritualized sense of pathos” (261). Beckett thus presaged capital-T Theory’s distrust of the concept of a generalized human nature that tends to marginalize deviating forms of humanity – a distrust that is not present in the empirical research by Kidd and Castano.

Even though this empirical research was not done by literary critics but by psychologists, they did make use of literary studies to enable their empirical research. They started from a research hypothesis, based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “polyphony” and Roland Barthes’s distinction between “readerly” and “writerly”


texts in order to define the notion of “literary fiction.” This suggests that although the value of literary studies may not be as directly measurable, their indirect contribution to other disciplines may be valuable – even if its societal impact is indirect. I think this is especially true for the link between literary studies and the field of cognitive philosophy. To examine this hypothesis, I would like to start from the notion of “gaps,” referred to in Actual Minds, Possible Worlds by Jerome Bruner, whose ideas Kidd and Castano make use of.\textsuperscript{33} Before embarking on their study, Kidd and Castano note that “Bruner, like Barthes and Bakhtin, has proposed that literature engages readers in a discourse that forces them to fill in gaps and “search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings.”\textsuperscript{34} Evidently, Bruner is not the only researcher who has pointed out the importance of “gaps,” which is a prominent topic in narrative theory.

\section*{Gaps}

Literary studies focusing on narrative analysis and reception theory (dimensions 2 and 3) have duly pointed out the central role of “gaps” in the cognitive processes related to reading minds. In the context of Beckett studies, H. Porter Abbott has coined the phrase “egregious gap,” which emphasizes Samuel Beckett’s sustained effort to maintain attention on the experience of unknowing. Although “gaps are endemic in literature,” “The difference in Beckett is the degree to which he felt the urgency of making ignorance a felt condition of his readership and the corresponding degree to which he capitalized on the same device.”\textsuperscript{35} The construction of narratives as coherent

\textsuperscript{33} Jerome Bruner, Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986).

\textsuperscript{34} Bruner qtd in Kidd and Castano 2013, 377.

\textsuperscript{35} H. Porter Abbott, “Narrative,” in Samuel Beckett Studies, ed. Lois Oppenheim (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 20: “in the 1940s, with the narrative interruptions of Watt and then the extraordinary gap between the two parts
This is the author’s version of a chapter published by Cambridge University Press in *The Values of Literary Studies*, ed. Rónán McDonald (Cambridge, 2015), 220-234. Please refer to the published version for correct citation and content. For more information, see http://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/literature/literary-theory/values-literary-studies-critical-institutions-scholarly-agendas?format=PB#cuXzvS4zXseXTpwQ.97.

wholes paradoxically requires holes – narrative lacunae, gaps of indeterminacy or what Wolfgang Iser called *Leerstellen* – to elicit readers’ cognitive processes of sense-making.³⁶ Iser developed his concept from the point of view of literary reception (dimension 3); from the perspective of literary production, these *Leerstellen* can be deliberate omissions, but they can also indicate moments when the writer hits the limit of what is utterable. And this confrontation with ineffability in the writing process (dimension 1) may be thematized in the narrative (dimension 2). To illustrate this role of gaps in the nexus between the genetic and narrative dimensions, Beckett’s radio play *Rough for Radio II* may serve as a case study.

*Rough for Radio II* can be read as the thematization of a creative process, divided into four cognitive functions. The four characters (Dick, Fox, Stenographer, Animator) each play their cognitive “rôle”³⁷ in the fictionalized process of imagination, which starts with a “report on yesterday’s results” and a rereading of “yesterday’s close” (61). Dick is mute and serves as a torturer, possibly in a Schopenhauarian sense of the “Will” – in this case an urge to tell. Fox is the voice, but it needs to be urged to speak. One of the things it says is the sentence “Have yourself opened, Maud would say, opened up” (63). Stenographer notes it all down. And Animator coordinates the whole process, asking Stenographer once in a while to read what she has taken down. When she reads “Have yourself opened, Maud would say, opened –,” Animator interrupts her and insinuates that she has skipped a passage:

of *Molloy*, he began capitalizing in earnest on the heretofore rare device of the egregious gap.”


“Don’t skip, Miss, the text in its entirety if you please. […] How can we ever hope to get anywhere if you suppress gems of that magnitude?” (68) According to Animator, Fox said “Have yourself opened, Maud would say, between two kisses, opened up” (69; emphasis added). Animator thus creates a second version by reading something into the original version. He implicitly claims that Stenographer has created a gap by leaving out the words “between two kisses,” whereas “between two kisses” is actually an addition. Strangely enough, this addition has the paradoxical effect of making a gap, albeit a gap of another kind. The “egregious” narrative gap he thus creates is metaleptic in nature: between Fox’s first version and Animator’s revision, Stenographer has been urged by Animator to kiss Fox to inspire him: “Kiss him, Miss, perhaps that will stir some fibre” (67). Thus, the addition “between two kisses” becomes more complicated, as it projects a metalevel (Animator’s suggestion that Stenographer play a cognitive “rôle” as inspirer by kissing Fox) onto Fox’s original narrative. As a result, “between two kisses” applies not only to the fictional Maud in Fox’s narrative, but also to the metalevel, creating a gap of indeterminacy or Leerstelle for the reader.

This gap in the receptive dimension corresponds with an indeterminacy in the narrative dimension, by means of which Beckett questions pre-Romantic and Romantic notions of imagination as issuing from a so-called “inner” voice. Fox’s narrative may be seen as an “original composition,” in the sense of Edward Young’s “Conjectures on Original Composition” (1759). From Stenographer’s perspective, Animator distorts this original version; but from Animator’s perspective, she has partially de-composed the “original composition.” So what is the “original composition” and who is its author? Dick? Fox? Animator, who provides us with the most “complete,” but possibly revised/distorted version? Or Stenographer, who seemingly notes down every single word Fox utters, but whose autograph recollections may not be free of gaps?
These gaps in the autographer’s recollections are also made thematic in Beckett’s novel *Malone Dies*. As a form of self-writing or autography, Malone’s narrative actually starts with a “hiatus in [his] recollections”. As discussed above, there are also real (that is non-fictionalized) instances of a “hiatus” in the manuscript of *Malone meurt* (dimension 1), notably at places where a new name is introduced. In the manuscript version, Macmann is not yet called Macmann but “M …” At first sight, it may sound a bit hyperbolical to argue that these gaps indicate moments in the autograph when the writer hits the limit of what is utterable, but in the case of Beckett’s novel *Malone Dies*, the “M …” gaps are about more than mere naming; what is at stake is the unnamability of “me alone,” of what it is to be a conscious “self.” Hence the title of Beckett’s subsequent novel, *The Unnamable*. In this novel, his further inquiry into the human mind touches upon the central issue of what Dennett has called “narrative selfhood,” but it does so by adding an important nuance: it extends the brain-bound aspect of the multiple drafts model (cf. supra). Beckett’s suggestion that, as soon as you name the self, you are already narrativizing it,


39 Beckett 2010, 7.

40 HRC MS SB 7.4, 36v-37r.

41 It should be noted that in a more recent publication, Dennett does take the physical environment into account: revisiting his concept of “narrative selfhood” as a centre of gravity (that is the “self” as a “centre of narrative gravity”), he notes that, in spite of its abstractness, this centre of gravity is “tightly coupled to the physical world.” Daniel C. Dennett, *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* (London: Penguin, 2014), 334. Still, the “physical world” Dennett concentrates on seems to be focused on the brain: “It is not so much that we, using our brains, spin our yarns, as that our brains, using yarns, spin us.” (339)
arguably prefigures the notion of “narrative selfhood,” which (like Mahood, Macmann, Molloy, Malone, …) consists of “streams of narrative” or “multiple drafts,” in Dennett’s terms.42 But Malone’s interaction with his exercise book and pencil integrates his material environment and implicitly suggests an enactivist model of the mind, which literary manuscript studies make explicit. My suggestion is certainly not that we should discard the cardinal distinction between the author and the fictional character. But after decades of drawing attention to the “intentional fallacy” literary studies have become so hypersensitive to this notion that one can speak of an “Intentional Fallacy Fallacy.”43 As a consequence, literary critics tend to avoid dimension (1) if they can, whereas it cannot be denied that literature has to be written before it can be read. In the case of Malone Dies, the fictional character has been created by someone who, like any writer, relied on his own experiences to give shape to a fictional mind. The character’s mind is entirely distinct from the author’s, but the method of evoking a fictional mind is based on a model of cognition that the author was familiar with. With hindsight, we can call this model “enactivist” (even though the term was not yet coined when Beckett wrote his novel).

Conclusion: “there are limits to my impotence”

42 “These streams of narrative issue forth as if from a single source – not just in the obvious physical sense of flowing from just one mouth, or one pencil or pen, but in a more subtle sense: their effect on any audience is to encourage them to (try to) posit a unified agent whose words they are, about whom they are: in short, to posit a center of narrative gravity.” (Dennett 1991, 418; original emphasis)

In the current scientific climate, characterized by the constant pressure to prove one’s value in terms of measurable utility and immediate “commercial and/or societal impact,” literary studies should not indulge in its Calimero-like “me alone” attitude, but take the example of Malone, who examines his own mind, admitting his ignorance and impotence, but who also states – *en passant* – that there are “limits to his impotence:”

And in the skull is it a vacuum? I ask. And if I close my eyes, close them really, as others cannot, but as I can, for there are limits to my impotence, then sometimes my bed is caught up into the air and tossed like a straw by the swirling eddies, and I in it. Fortunately it is not so much an affair of eyelids, but as it were the soul that must be veiled, that soul denied in vain.\(^{45}\)

The notion of the “soul” may in the meantime be devalued, while the “mind” has more currency at this moment, but the real value is in the exchange of ideas with other sciences. In “Narrative and Mind: Directions for Inquiry” (2013), David Herman notes that interdisciplinary research in cognitive narratology has so far been mainly unidirectional (literary studies “borrowing from” cognitive sciences); instead, he commends a bidirectional exchange of ideas.\(^{46}\) Digital genetic editing and the study of multiple drafts (in more than a metaphorical sense) may be a valuable way to facilitate such a bidirectional exchange of research results, especially between literary

\(^{44}\) This is the European Research Council’s formulation of one of the “required elements” for ERC Proof of Concept Grant proposals.


Combining genetic and cognitive approaches has a double effect, both within literary studies and in terms of the values of literary studies in a broader context.

Within the field of literary studies, one of the values of combining genetic criticism and cognitive narratology is that it enables us to examine “the pursuit of gappiness” on all three levels (the three dimensions of genesis, narrative and reception). With the help of new techniques in digital genetic editing, multiple versions can be made accessible in such a way that their analysis can directly inform cognitive narratology. The narrative analysis in its turn adds value to the genetic interest in writing processes in that it explicates both the narrative impact of particular variants across versions and, more generally, the importance of versions and multiplicity from a cognitive perspective.

In terms of the values of literary studies in a broader context, the combination of genetic criticism and cognitive narratology across versions has the potential to show how literature, often implicitly, challenges accepted models of the mind and prefigures innovative developments in cognitive philosophy. Evidently, these implicit “prefigurations” can only be recognized as such with hindsight, once their patterns have been made explicit – by cognitive scientists, neurophilosophers and/or literary critics. Our understanding of consciousness is transformed by advances in neuroscience, which has had an impact on philosophy. Neurophilosophy has made observations about consciousness, self-narration and “gappiness” that are strikingly resonant with Beckett’s work. As the case study of Beckett’s multiple drafts illustrates, genetic criticism – buttressed by methods of digital scholarly editing – brings home this resonance in that it gives us concrete examples of how creativity works.

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