

Discussing greek epic poetry english literature essay

Profession, Poet



The definition of the author has changed over the passing of time, as authors began to claim ownership of their work. Currently, an author can be broadly defined as the originator of any written work. However, Foucault would beg to differ, as he says that "all authors are writers, but not all writers are authors" (Foucault, 1984, 104). This means that anyone might be able to come up with written work, but in order to title oneself an "author", one would need to analyze one's work by certain standards in order to be able to do so. To go back to the main claim, while looking at the work of an author, one must understand that in some cases, it is important to have a deeper understanding of the author's life. This brings us to the theme of authorial criticism. While authorial criticism, also known as biographical criticism, is no longer used by scholars, it remains relevant, as it stakes the claim that the author is all-important, and in order to understand a certain text, the reader must know as much as possible about the author (Dalrymple, 2004, p. 3). While this theory has been discarded by scholars, as it privileges authors who have left behind much autobiographical texts – letters, personal anecdotes and the like – it still remains relevant, as it holds firm to the claim that in order to understand a text, one must first become familiar with the author, which is true, in certain circumstances. In this essay, the claim will be discussed in relation to a number of points. The first point that will be made is that of the relationship between this claim, and biographical criticism. Before this is elaborated on, one must first understand what biographical criticism is. Biographical criticism is one of the oldest forms of literary criticism, used by readers to interpret a fictional text. At the time of its invention, biographical criticism was primarily used to interpret Romantic

poetry (McGann, 1982, p. 575). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, biographical criticism, while no longer used by scholars, still remains relevant, as it holds strong ties to the claim - wherein it states that in order to evaluate a fictional text, the reader should focus on the biography of the author, as the life and experiences of the author will enable the reader to gain a deeper sense of knowledge about what the author was writing about, and why the author chose to do so, as well as the connections between the author's life and the fictional texts. This leads us to intention. According to Beardsley and Wimsatt, the intention is the design in the author's mind, that has apparent affinities to the author's attitude and feelings (Beardsley and Wimsatt, 1946, p. 468). It is what the author's intent was, as determined in the author's work. This means that a text that the author has thought out will be interspersed with the way the author felt or the opinions the author held, at the point of writing it. Therefore, because the text is spread with the author's attitude and feelings, no matter how much the author does not think of it as such, any knowledge of an author's life through their biography could lead to a better understanding of the fictional text that said author has written. This knowledge of the author's life will then help the reader understand and analyze the text on a deeper level, as the reader will be able to draw connections between common themes that might occur in the fictional text, and events that may have happened in the duration of the author's life. For example, it has been argued that in the case of Edgar Allan Poe, many of the fictional texts that he has created bear similarities to his life. One can draw a parallel between them by noticing that in many of Poe's fictional texts, there are sickly women who seem to be suffering from

symptoms of tuberculosis, and a male protagonist who cares deeply for these women (Magill, 1974, p. 679). One can also note the similarity between this and the occurrences in Poe's own life, where Poe's own wife died of tuberculosis, as did Poe's mother when he was barely a year old. Intention is a term that affects many types of literary criticisms, as every form of literary criticism has mentioned intention - regardless of whether or not it lightly touches upon intention and the connection between intention and the theory itself, or whether it delves deeper in explaining exactly how intention affects the theory, changing perceptions and enabling the readers who are analyzing a certain text with that theory to look at the intention of the text and the way it is all tied together (Arp, 2000, p. 43). Therefore, one is able to take a note of how intention is central to almost every type of literary criticism that is covered in this unit, in various ways. For example, in biographical criticism, intention is seen as being able to be found in the author's biography, and will be able to be interpreted with regards to the fictional text (Arp, 2000, p. 28). In this way, the connection between the intention and the fictional text will be made from that. However, in new criticism, intention is seen as being irrelevant to the understanding of the work, and if it is relevant, by chance, then the reader will not have to delve into the author's biography in order to understand the intent behind the author's work, because if the understanding of the intent is needed, scholars who support the theory of new criticism claim that everything needed to interpret the text is already in the fictional text itself. Thus, the reader will not need any additional information on the fictional text. Intention itself has proved to be central, with regards to analyzing Romantic-era poetry. In the

Romantic era, many poets of the time wrote poetry about what they knew, and the experiences that were important to them (Szenczi, 1969, p. 180). According to Shelley, the philosophy of Romanticism was that " every author was necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and beautiful , in a word the good which exists in the relation" (Shelley, 1977, p. 482). This means that language is in itself, poetry, and that poets seek to embody the truth and beauty and goodness in the world in their poetry. In *The Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth referred to the poet as " endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, and has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul" (Wordsworth, 2003, p. 35). Therefore, this meant that the poet was seen as a higher being than people who made up the public, who did not write nor fully comprehend the poetry that was written. However, the Romantics did not mean for it to remain this way. Shelley says that poetry " awakens and enlarges the mind" (Shelley, 1977, p. 487), and here, we come to the intention of the Romantic poets, which is to open the mind of the people who read that poetry and make them think about the various ways in which it affects their lives. In this way, it is clear how intention is present in Romantic-era poetry, as the poets of the time chose to write about what they knew, what they experienced, what they felt, and what they wanted to experience, with regards to the spirit. The poets of the Romantic era wrote poetry that they wanted to share with the public, and they wanted the public to understand this, and gain some awareness of what the poets themselves felt at the time. Being able to analyze a fictional text with relation to the author's biography, however, is not always the case,

because many a time, a reader cannot be sure of the author's intention - regardless of whether the reader has studied the author's biography prior to attempting to analyze a fictional text. The reasoning behind this is that an author's opinion may change over the course of time that it takes the author from the start of writing a text up until the time the author finishes writing the text (Beardsley and Wimsatt, 1972, p. 337). Not only is this a problem when it comes to biographical criticism, as it makes it more difficult, in fact, almost impossible to interpret the fictional text with relation to the author's life as the author's intention changes, but this is also the basis for another theory - the theory of new criticism. New criticism is a literary theory that was formed in America, in the 1920's, perhaps as an American answer to biographical criticism, as the two literary theories are extremely different. Unlike biographical criticism, new criticism does not focus on the author's biography in order to interpret a certain text. Upon using the theory of new criticism to analyze a fictional text, one, as a reader, must disengage oneself from the author, as a person, and instead focus entirely on the text (Dalrymple, 2004, p. 23). One of the core beliefs of new criticism is that a fictional text stands on its own, and that everything needed to interpret it is already in the fictional text itself, and therefore, the author's biography is not needed for additional understanding. This is because the belief of new criticism is that a fictional text is not an exact representation of an author's mind. For example, an author might write a fictional text set during WWII in Germany, that glorifies the way the Nazi party conducted themselves, but according to new criticism, this does not mean that the author is anti-Semitic. It simply means that the author is capable of creating a text that

they, as the author, are not emotionally or mentally attached to. Upon further research, this claim that the biography of an author should be the main focus of any critical evaluation of a fictional text is not supported by new criticism. This is because of the main point of new criticism - as previously mentioned; new criticism moves away from the author as a person, and simply relies on the fictional text to be interpreted. New criticism is made up of a few concepts that are related to the main claim in this assignment; the topic of the importance of the author's biography when interpreting a set of fictional text, as the concepts do not place much importance - if at all - when it comes to an author's biography in relation to interpreting a form of fictional text. These concepts of new criticism predominantly consist of Booth's terminology of "the implied author". He says that the implied author is "reconstructed from a narrative by uncovering the core of norms and choices implicit in a work" (Booth, 1961, p. 68). Here, he suggests that the reader is guided by a presence in the text, a presence formed by the words that have been written, that leads the reader to arrive at a conclusion of the text. The implied author is not an extension of the author, or even a character in the text, as it is not a creation of the author or an implication that the author wants to give. The implied author is a guiding force written into the text that helps the reader understand the text and come to an understanding of it upon finishing the text. Therefore, while analyzing a form of text with regards to the theory of new criticism, one is not required to have any knowledge of the author's personal life, as in new criticism, everything required for textual analysis is already in the text that one is supposed to read. This brings us to the Intentional Fallacy. In the

Intentional Fallacy, one learns that the reader who wants to analyze a fictional text cannot do so in relating the author's fictional work to the author's life, as this is wrong. This is because, as previously mentioned, the author's personal life and opinions do not affect the fictional text at all, and all this is irrelevant. Wimsatt and Beardsley comment on this by saying that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art", which means that the author's personal experiences or opinions should not be used or measured with regards to judging the author's literary work (Beardsley & Wimsatt, 1972, p. 334). In this way, Wimsatt and Beardsley oppose the main claim of this essay, as they are saying that a literary text - in this case, a poem - should be judged by its form, and not its meaning, nor the author or the poet's life, as the meaning and the content of the poem is only secondary to its form and style (Beardsley & Wimsatt, 1972, p. 335). In the Intentional Fallacy, we then learn that there is no evidence to prove that the intention of the poet while writing is correct. Therefore, it is unnecessary to study the poet or the author's biography or personal details while analyzing a fictional text or poem. In conclusion, the reader must begin to understand that in some cases, it is important to understand the author's life, before attempting to analyze the text, as sometimes, the text bears strong connotations to the author's personal experiences and opinions. This is especially true of Romantic literature and poetry, as the authors and poets of the Romantic era constantly attempted to write about their personal experiences, what they knew, and what they felt. In other times, however, this is not as important. This is because not all fictional works or poems of

authors or poets - especially that of authors and poets who came about after the Romantic era - are based on their lives. That being said, the claim that this essay is based on remains important and current, as it does help, on occasion, with interpreting certain forms of fictional texts.