



TRABAJO FINAL DEL MÁSTER DE FILOSOFÍA,
CONDICIÓN HUMANA Y TRASCENDENCIA

LA RELACIÓN DINÁMICA ENTRE TEXTO Y LECTOR: UNA EXPLORACIÓN
FENOMENOLÓGICA A TRAVÉS DE LAS LENTES DE WOLFGANG ISER Y
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GRATITUDE

Navigating the terrain of gratitude without falling into the trap of transactional exchange can indeed be a profound challenge; Heidegger provides an insightful analysis of the concept of 'thanking' by exploring its connection to 'thinking'. In his work *Was heißt Denken?* He examines the Old English word *thanc*, from which both 'to think' and 'to thank' derive. Heidegger believes that "in giving thanks, the heart gives thought to what it has and what it is".¹ In the face of this, what is not thought cannot be properly thanked, so I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for the recognition of those who have made this thesis a reality. My gratitude is not recompense, but an offering of a pure gift of 'what gives'.

I would like to say to all who have contributed to bringing this thesis to fruition, particularly Angelo Valastro Canale, my esteemed Supervisor, in Heidegger's words, "the heart in thought remembers where (...) it belongs."²

DEDICATION

To those who seek heaven through the embrace of literary love and literary sublimity.

¹ Heidegger, Martin, *What Is Called Thinking?*, First ed., Harper & Row, 1968, p.141

² *Ibid.*, p.145

“I hope the amazed reader will be patient for a while- in order simply to read.”

— Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*.

RESUMEN

Esta tesis de máster pretende estudiar el proceso dinámico a través del cual el lector interactúa con un texto. La investigación que nos proponemos llevar a cabo explora el mencionado vínculo lector-texto, basándose en las ideas de Wolfgang Iser y Cassandra Falke. La fenomenología de esta interacción, tal y como emerge en la obra de estos dos estudiosos, será menos la relación entre texto y lector en el acto de leer con el propósito de extraer significado del texto, y más como una lectura estética con el único propósito de experimentar el texto.

Palabras Clave: Wolfgang Iser ; Cassandra Falke; Lector; Texto; Fenomenología

ABSTRACT

This Master's thesis aims to study the dynamic process through which the reader interacts with a text. The research we propose to carry out explores the above-mentioned reader-text link, drawing on the ideas of Wolfgang Iser and Cassandra Falke. The phenomenology of this interaction, as it emerges in the work of these two scholars, will be less the relationship between text and reader in the act of reading for the purpose of extracting meaning from the text, and more as an aesthetic reading for the sole purpose of experiencing the text.

Key Words: Wolfgang Iser ; Cassandra Falke; Reader; Text; Phenomenology

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: THESIS, STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

We learn to love when we are accompanied by a friend, opening ourselves to a gift that comes from the advent of their call. Perhaps this experience can be applied to the relationship between a reader and a text. The first thing that happens when a reader comes into contact with a text is not that they search for meaning, but that the text first allows itself to be accompanied, to be read. The text gives itself to the attention of the reader, perhaps in order to overwhelm them. Beautifully expressed in Jean-Luc Marion's thoughts that "the given is exposed because it explodes. To give itself therefore is equivalent to showing itself. What gives itself shows itself".³

The text then exposes itself by exploding before the reader, becoming an undeniable invitation to read.

The purpose of a literary work is not only the culmination of the author's creative process; it is also the beginning of a conversation with the reader. The moment the reader interacts with the text, they are taken on a journey of exploration through the imaginative, emotional, and intellectual landscapes that the author has painstakingly created. Every piece of literature is meant to be read by someone. As soon as the reader receives the text, a conversation may begin. In his complex and controversial essay "The Death of the Author" (1967), the French philosopher Roland Barthes actually claims that: "we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author".⁴

In the hope of exploring the intimate encounter between the 'reader' and the 'text', this master's thesis explores the contributions of Wolfgang Iser and Cassandra Falke, who, rooted in the fields of literature and phenomenology, have taken on the task of establishing this profound

³ Marion, Jean-Luc, *Being Given : Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, Stanford University Press 2002, p.69

⁴Barthes, Roland and Stephen, Heath, *Image- Music -Text*. Fontana 1977. P. 148 (When Barthes says that "the birth of the reader must be at the expense of the death of the author", he means that the reader should approach a text with a sense of independence and creativity, without being overly constrained by the author's intended meaning or biography).

connection. In the context of this scholarly exploration, this thesis aims to shed light on the phenomenological disposition that emerges from this dynamic entanglement. Iser claims that:

The text is a 'structured prefiguration', but that which is given has to be received, and the way in which it is received depends as much on the reader as on the text. Reading is not a direct 'internalization', because it is not a one-way process, and our concern will be to find means of describing the reading process as a dynamic interaction between text and reader.⁵

The idea that the text is a 'structured prefiguration' implies a deliberate arrangement of ideas and information by the author. This structured quality suggests a purposeful organization, implying that the text has a design or framework. However, the transformative power of the text is only realized when it is actively received by the reader. This act of reception is not a passive reception of information, but a dynamic process in which the reader's engagement is paramount. It is in this interplay between the structured text and the engaged reader that meaning evolves. The text, then, serves as a foundation, a pre-fabricated structure, but its realization depends on the interactive and interpretive capacities of the reader. The relationship is not unidirectional, and the meaning of the text is co-created in this interactive exchange. The process that initiates a friendship between a text and a reader develops a flawless aesthetic and a work of art.

Drawing on the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion, Falke situates this text-reader entanglement within erotic reduction, revealing that the text and the reader, summoned by love, enter into a relationship that helps define the reader's identity. More importantly, it is a source of adventure, opening up a reality that would otherwise be unknown; Falke captures this perfectly in Marion's thought that "we are a bedazzled people".⁶ She sees this relationship between reader and text as having the same transformative power as love, as both give themselves to each other through the promise of an invitation. Falke asserts that:

Therefore, to whatever extent reading includes actions that are part of love; to that extent it changes us. These actions, like love itself, involve, not the assertion of will or

⁵ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 107

⁶ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, New York, USA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p.1

harvesting of knowledge that one might expect in reading oriented toward ontology or epistemology, but rather attention, empathy, and a willingness to be overwhelmed.⁷

Engaging in the act of reading goes beyond a mere intellectual exercise; it becomes a transformative experience. The transformative power that lies in the actions inherent in love, is also manifested in the reader's approach. The process involves qualities such as attentiveness, empathy and a genuine willingness to be overwhelmed. Through attention, empathy and a willingness to be overwhelmed, the reader opens up to the nuances of the narrative and allows the text to shape his or her understanding and emotions.

The dynamic relationship between the reader and the text invites a nuanced analysis of the reading process, transforming the interaction into a provocative event. This interaction depends on the reader's engagement with the text, creating a unique and evolving experience.

STRUCTURE

Chapter one has already paved the way for us to take off. Chapter Two, will explain Iser and his approach, along with subchapters that will reveal his analysis of *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach* and its aesthetic response.

In Chapter Three, Falke will step in as Jean Luc Marion's reader. Her approach is full of Marion's phenomenology, believing that a reader's attention to a book also comes from the book's invitation.⁸ Such an invitation becomes a decision that comes from the *donación* or *givenness* of the text. The idea of the reader as a "witness" will also be explored in a brief way. Finally, we will take up the conclusions drawn from the analysis by showing that the text becomes an aesthetic figure in the consciousness of the reader, which in turn gives the text its life and fullness.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study will be to unfold the contributions of the work of Iser and Falke. The task will be simply to bring these two scholars into focus, to analyse their different

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100 (This is taken from Falke's work, where she writes that "...the attention he gives a book similarly originates in the book's invitation to him...")

approaches and to find a way of bringing them together; such a task will only require the delimitation of what is necessary within their work; other works of theirs will also be introduced. At some point, however, other scholars will be brought into the dialogue, not neglecting their personal interactions with the aforementioned scholars, but only to enrich the study. First, it is important to understand what phenomenology and literature are and how they appear in this work.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND LITERARY TEXT

At their best, phenomenology and literature have the capacity to work together to create new ways of attending to human experience, existence, commitments and desires. If phenomenology is a philosophical approach that focuses on the study of conscious experience and the structures of consciousness, then phenomenology, when applied to literature, emphasizes the subjective experience of readers and the ways in which literary texts engage with and shape consciousness, taking into account both the structures of consciousness created by authors and the dynamic engagement of readers with literary texts.

Falke notes that the act of reading literature lends itself readily to phenomenological reflection.⁹ Whereas phenomenology focuses on describing these actions, literature evokes them; it keeps our world “in force.” A phenomenology of literature, then, will be a description of the ways in which literature does this, couched implicitly in the idea that it is both inevitable and good for the world to retain its force over us.¹⁰ She further asserts that:

The goal of phenomenological approaches to literature, then, has been to portray the insight-rooted knowledge that becomes accessible when we turn our attention to literature. This insight changes, indeed we change, as the “luminous halo” of life is refracted and enhanced by literature. Consequently, a phenomenal description of our engagement with a single work could potentially go on forever. The description would not exhaust the insight any more than a description of light on water would exhaust the phenomenon itself.¹¹

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.18

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.19

When we look at literature through a phenomenological lens, we enter into a dialogue with the text that goes beyond mere analysis. We become aware of the unique insights that literature offers, insights that may not be readily apparent through other modes of inquiry. These insights can be profound and transformative, illuminating aspects of human experience, consciousness and existence.

The metaphor of the 'luminous halo' suggests that literature has a radiant quality that illuminates our understanding of life. Like light passing through a prism, literature refracts and enhances our perception, allowing us to see the world in new and unexpected ways. Each literary work casts its own unique halo, revealing different facets of the human condition and inviting us to contemplate deeper truths.

- PHENOMENOLOGY

The beginnings of phenomenology are a little tricky, but a little history is needed to show us the way. Firstly, the term "phenomenology" is a compound of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*. It signifies the activity of giving an account, giving *logos*, of various phenomena, of the various ways in which things can appear.¹² Phenomenology asks: "How is it that experiences actually appear to me?" and "What is the 'me' that perceives?"¹³ Falke notes that "Phenomenology aims to describe the ways that we experience objects and concepts, laying aside the idea that the subjectivity through which we perceive them is divisible from the objective world "out there." Phenomena are what experience, and the subject/object division is only one possible conclusion about how phenomena reach us".¹⁴

Moran, in his book *Introduction to Phenomenology*, gives us a map that deserves to be quoted at length:

Phenomenology, as the movement inaugurated by Edmund Husserl (1859— 1938), is now a century old. It was one of several strong currents in philosophy prominent at the outset of the twentieth century, alongside, for example, Neo-Kantianism in its various schools (e.g. Rickert, Natorp, Cassirer, Windelband, Lotze), idealism (Green, Bradley,

¹² Sokolowski, Robert, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, University Press, 2000, P.13

¹³ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, P.17

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

McTaggart), logicism (Frege, Russell), hermeneutics (Dilthey, Bultmann), pragmatism (Dewey, Peirce, James), Lebensphilosophie (Bergson, Simmel), Existenz philosophy (Kierkegaard and Nietzsche), as well as the empiricism of Hume's followers (e.g. J. S. Mill), and the positivism and empirio-criticism of Comte, Mach, Avinarius, and, somewhat later, of the Vienna Circle. In one form or another, phenomenology engaged with all these philosophical currents.¹⁵

The name Edmund Husserl immediately springs to mind when phenomenology is mentioned, partly because, as Moran would say, "though important precursors of phenomenology can be found in the work of Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Ernst Mach, phenomenology, as a new way of doing philosophy, was first formally announced by Edmund Husserl in the Introduction to the Second Volume of the First Edition of his *Logische Untersuchungen* (Logical Investigations, 1900-1901), when, in discussing the need for a wide-ranging theory of knowledge, he speaks of "the phenomenology of the experiences of thinking and knowing".¹⁶ But the field of phenomenology is not limited to the ideas of Husserl. However, Edmund Husserl was and is a key figure in the creation of the phenomenological movement. Spiegelberg writes:

But it would not even be correct to say that all of Edmund Husserl's own philosophy is phenomenology. For it was not until Husserl had nearly reached the age of forty that his philosophical thinking matured into his conception of phenomenology. Nevertheless it remains true that the central figure in the development of the Phenomenological Movement was, and still is, Edmund Husserl. Hence a discussion of his phenomenology will have to be the centre of this history of the Movement.¹⁷

Phenomenology is a significant philosophical movement because it deals so well with the problem of appearances. The issue of appearances has been part of the human question from the beginning of philosophy.¹⁸ In fact, the very term "movement," applied to phenomenology, requires some explanation and justification. It is by no means common among the "insiders." But

¹⁵ Moran, Dermot, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Routledge, 2000. p.1

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1

¹⁷ Spiegelberg, Herbert, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* 2 ed. revised and enlarged ed. Martinus Nijhoff, 1965, P. 73

¹⁸ Sokolowski, Robert, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, University Press, 2000. p.3

even less so is the expression "school," a label which has been imposed on phenomenologists only from the outside and is certainly not at all called for in view of the actual structure of the group.¹⁹ From the early investigations of ancient philosophers to the nuanced discussions of contemporary thinkers, the nature of appearance and the relationship between perception and reality has been a central theme.

Phenomenology focuses not only on the external aspects of appearances, but also on the subjective experience and consciousness that give rise to them. The movement pioneered by philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and later developed by figures such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, explores the ways in which individuals experience and interpret the world. By examining the structures of consciousness and the intentional acts through which we engage with phenomena, phenomenology offers a unique approach to understanding the complexity of appearances. Its emphasis on bracketing preconceived notions and approaching experience with openness and curiosity allows for a deeper exploration of the ways in which reality manifests itself to conscious beings. Sokolowsky asserts:

... Identity and intelligibility are available in things and that we ourselves are defined as the ones to whom such identities and intelligibilities are given. We can evidence the way things are; when we do so, we discover objects, but we also discover ourselves, precisely as datives of disclosure, as those to whom things appear. Not only can we think the things given to us in experience; we can also understand ourselves as thinking them.²⁰

In exploring the nature of identity and intelligibility, we find that these qualities are inherent in the things around us, and that our own definition is intricately linked to the reception of such identities and intelligibilities. As we engage with the world and provide evidence for the way things are, we not only reveal objects but also reveal ourselves in the process.

We become the recipients of revelation, the ones to whom things manifest their identities and intelligibilities. Through the act of perceiving and understanding the things presented to us in our experiences, we simultaneously recognize ourselves as the thinkers of those thoughts. In essence, our awareness extends beyond the mere observation of external phenomena; it includes

¹⁹ Spiegelberg, Herbert, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* 2 ed. revised and enlarged ed. Martinus Nijhoff, 1965, p.1

²⁰ Sokolowski, Robert, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, University Press, 2000, p.4

the recognition of our own role as conscious entities, intimately involved in the unfolding of meaning and understanding in the world around us. Our awareness is not just passive observation, but an active engagement with the world in which our consciousness plays a crucial role in shaping the meaning of our experiences.

The natural attitude of the mind is to interact with the identity and intelligibility of things. Husserl asserts that:

Such an attitude, our attention is turned - in acts of intuition and thought - to things given to us, and given as a matter of course, even though they are given in different ways and in different modes of being according to the source and level of our knowledge of them. In perception, for example, a thing stands before us as a matter of course. It is there, in the midst of other things, both living and lifeless, animate and inanimate. That is, it stands before us in the midst of a world, part of which is perceived as particular things are perceived, part of which is given in connection with memory - from whence it spreads out into the indeterminate and the unknown.²¹

The crux of phenomenology lies in the relationship between consciousness and objects. Phenomenology seeks to bridge the gap between the subjective and the objective by exploring how our subjective experiences actively shape and contribute to the formation of knowledge. It's a philosophical endeavour that emphasizes the importance of understanding consciousness as a central aspect of any meaningful inquiry into the nature of reality. Moran affirms that:

It is indeed true that central to phenomenology, and indeed part of its continuing appeal, is its attempt to provide a rigorous defence of the fundamental and inextricable role of subjectivity and consciousness in all knowledge and in descriptions of the world. But phenomenology attempts to recognize and describe the role of consciousness in the achievement (*Leistung*) of knowledge and is not a wallowing in the subjective domain purely for its own sake.²²

²¹ Husserl, Edmund, *The Idea Of Phenomenology*, Translated by Lee Hardy. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999, p.15

²² Moran, Dermot, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Routledge, 2000. p.15

Every conscious experience is intimately related to an object - whether real, imagined, remembered or conceptualized. This interconnectedness rejects the notion of an isolated or passive consciousness and emphasizes active engagement with the world through intentional acts. Phenomenological reduction, a method introduced by Husserl, encourages the suspension of assumptions about the external world, allowing a focused examination of the pure structures of consciousness and its intentional objects. The term most closely associated with phenomenology is "intentionality." The core doctrine in phenomenology is the teaching that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially "consciousness of" or an "experience of" something or other. All our awareness is directed toward objects. If I see, I see some visual object, such as a tree or a lake; if I imagine, my imagining presents an imaginary object, such as a car that I visualize coming down a road; if I am involved in remembering, I remember a past object; if I am engaged in judging, I intend a state of affairs or a fact. Every act of consciousness, every experience, is correlated with an object. Every intending has its intended object.²³

Intentionality is a word that cannot be avoided in the phenomenological tradition. Sokolowski quickly adds that:

The phenomenological notion of intentionality applies primarily to the theory of knowledge, not to the theory of human action. The phenomenological use of the word is somewhat awkward because it goes against ordinary usage, which tends to use "intention" in the practical sense; the phenomenological use will almost always call up the sense of practical intending as an overtone. However, "intentionality" and its cognates have become technical terms in phenomenology, and there is no way of avoiding them in a discussion of this philosophical tradition.²⁴

The doctrine of intentionality, then, states that every act of consciousness is directed toward an object of some kind. Consciousness is essentially consciousness "of" something or other.²⁵ Intentionality provides a lens through which we can understand the directed and purposeful nature of consciousness in every facet of our lived experience. Whether perceiving,

²³ Sokolowski, Robert, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, University Press, 2000, p.8

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.8

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9

imagining, remembering, or judging, intentionality underscores the idea that every act of consciousness is intimately related to an intentional object, shaping the very fabric of our subjective reality. Furthermore, intentionality extends into the realm of memory. In the act of remembering, our consciousness is directed towards a past object or experience. This temporal dimension underscores the idea that intentionality is not limited to the present, but extends across the timeline of our experiences. In addition, intentionality plays a crucial role in the process of judgment, as our awareness is directed towards intending a particular state of affairs or factual event. This intentional stance in judgment further reinforces the inextricable link between consciousness and its objects.

If intentionality is object-directedness, and consciousness is being aware of something, then as Sokolowski will add, by discussing intentionality, phenomenology helps us to reclaim a public sense of thinking, reasoning and perceiving. It helps us to reclaim our humanity as agents of truth.²⁶ This is precisely what this thesis aims to achieve, namely the phenomenological disposition of the reader-text relationship.

- LITERARY TEXT

What exactly could be called literature or a literary text? Meyer signals a difficulty in definition. He affirms that, Understanding exactly what literature is has always been a challenge; pinning down a definition has proven to be quite difficult. In fact, at times one seems to be reduced to saying, “I know it when I see it,” or perhaps, “Anything is literature if you want to read it that way”.²⁷ Klarer also asserts that: “If the term literature is looked up in any current encyclopedia one will be struck by the vagueness of its usage as well as by an inevitable lack of substance in the attempts to define it”.²⁸ The ambiguity surrounding the definition of literature reflects the inherent challenge of encapsulating the vast and dynamic nature of written expression.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.12

²⁷ Meyer, Jim, "What is literature? A definition based on prototypes," *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*: Vol. 41, Article 3, 1997, p.1 (DOI: 10.31356/silwp.vol41.03)

²⁸ Klarer, Mario, *An Introduction to Literary Studies*, 2nd ed, Routledge, 2004, p.1

However, I do not intend to chisel deep into the history of literature or literary text, so to attempt to do so would be to deviate from the intended project of this study. I intend to weave together certain key ideas about literature or literary text.

Literature is not a static thing, but a living, breathing reflection of human experiences, emotions and ideas. Its boundaries are porous, allowing for a constant influx of new genres, styles and perspectives. This fluidity makes it difficult to confine literature to rigid definitions. In essence, the vagueness of the definition of literature can be seen as a testament to its richness and complexity. The challenge lies in an art form that defies easy categorization, one that is constantly evolving and embracing new forms of expression.

The Latin word "*litteratura*" derives its etymology from "*littera*," or letter, which is the smallest unit of alphabetic writing. The word "text" is synonymous with "textile" and means "fabric" in the same way that individual strands of cloth are formed by words and sentences to produce a meaningful and cohesive text. Therefore, it is not very helpful to define literature or text based on the origins of the two key concepts. Examining the circumstances surrounding the creation and reception of literature and texts as cultural and historical phenomena will shed more light on them.²⁹ The idea of literature here is given a tactile and visual dimension by the metaphorical comparison of "text" to "textile," in which discrete words and sentences are woven together to form a coherent fabric. This metaphor effectively conveys how language is complex and interrelated when it comes to producing meaningful writings.

How does this assemblage of a text from an author to the search for a reader come into being? Let us begin with a question.

Where – or when – does a literary text begin?³⁰ In a literary text, the beginning can be perceived through several lenses, each contributing a different facet to the concept of beginning. Physically, it manifests itself in the first word, sentence or paragraph, serving as the gateway through which an author unveils the narrative, themes or ideas. Narratively, it marks the beginning of the plot, introducing characters, setting and the initial conflict that drives the story forward.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1

³⁰ Bennett, Andrew and Royle, Nicholas, *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 3rd ed, Pearson/Longman 2009, p.1

From the author's point of view, the beginning can be traced back to the beginning of inspiration or the moment when the idea took root. For the reader, however, the beginning occurs when he or she first engages with the text, whether by opening the book or by immersing himself or herself in the first lines. Temporally, the 'when' of the beginning of a literary text corresponds to the historical period in which it was conceived, written or even published. In essence, the beginning of a literary text is a multifaceted concept, intricately interwoven with elements relating to the text itself, the author and the reader.

We are all in agreement that every text is the creation of a creator (author), who knits together experiences or ideas in order to tell a story. Lubbock in his book, *The Craft of Fiction*, asserts that, "Creation of this kind we practice every day; we are continually piecing together our fragmentary evidence about the people around us and moulding their images in thought. It is the way in which we make our world; partially, imperfectly, very much at haphazard, but still perpetually, everybody deals with his experience like artist".³¹ What exactly is in a text that consumes the reader's attention and transports the reader into a textual world? The following chapters will reveal this art form.

SELECTING WOLFGANG ISER AND CASSANDRA FALKE

The selection of these two thinkers is not arbitrary; instead, it is intentional. They possess the essential similarities required for our study, and their divergent characteristics are, in fact, even more advantageous for our research objectives. Both arouse the aesthetic sense resulting from the text- reader relationship in their own unique ways.

In a moving tribute to Wolfgang Iser, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan writes that she does not presume to convey the richness and complexity of Iser's contribution to literary and cultural studies.³² I would extend this slightly, adding that one must allow Iser's thought to reveal this richness and complexity by reading him carefully.

Iser is interested in describing "articulated reading moments" and more generally the interaction between a reader and a text, which is not a reflection of any given reality. (He is not

³¹ Lubbock, Percy, *The craft of Fiction*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1955, p.7

³² Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, "Wolfgang Iser — In Memoriam." , *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 5 no. 2, 2007, p. 141 (Project MUSE, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pan.2007.0007>).

concerned with retrospective views, surely the basis for most literary criticism.) It is this interaction which produces the aesthetic object, and the "meaning of a literary text" certainly is not a "detachable message" but rather "a dynamic happening".³³ The concept of 'articulated reading moments' reflects Iser's emphasis on the active role of the reader in creating meaning. As opposed to retrospective views or predetermined interpretations, Iser is interested in the on-going, interactive process that takes place between the reader and the text.

It is this interaction, Iser argues, that creates the aesthetic object. The meaning of a literary text isn't a fixed or detachable message imposed by the author. Instead, he sees it as a "dynamic happening", an evolving and subjective experience that emerges through the reader's engagement with the text. Readers actively fill in gaps, make connections and interpret the text based on their individual perspectives and experiences.

Falke, on the other hand, using the richness of Jean Luc Marion's phenomenology, explains in terms of erotic reduction what is actually happening in this text-reader interaction. She writes that the event of reading, like the event of loving, is singular. Just as our love for another creates a new reality as it unfolds, each reading of a particular text makes us lovers without precedent. Reading creates in us new ways of loving, and thus new ways of being. Or it can. In order for a book to work on us this way, we have to open ourselves up to an intentionality and signifying practice that originates outside of our own "ecological sphere".³⁴ Because we cannot anticipate the way we will be changed by an event of reading, we commit ourselves first to the act of surrender itself and, through that surrender of our own intentionality, find ourselves remade.³⁵

In surrendering our own intentionality to the text, we undergo a process of self-transformation. This act of surrender is not passive; it requires an active engagement with the text and a willingness to be transformed. Falke suggests that through this surrender we discover new aspects of ourselves and experience a profound shift in our being. Reading becomes a

³³ Deneau, Daniel P., Rev, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, by Wolfgang Iser, *The International Fiction Review*, 7, No. 1 , 1980, p.76

³⁴ Marion Jean-Luc, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, University of Chicago Press, 2007, p.102 (The term "ecological sphere" is Marion's)

³⁵ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, New York, USA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p.3

transformative journey that shapes our thoughts, emotions and ways of relating to the world, much like the unfolding of a unique and unprecedented love.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Given that Wolfgang Iser was a central figure in reader-response criticism, that he shifted the focus from the text alone to the interaction between text and reader, and that his theory offers a nuanced and sophisticated framework for understanding the dynamic process of reading, his approach resonates somewhat with Cassandra Falke, now a professor of English literature and an established scholar in her field, whose research often explores the ethical implications of reading and interpretation, the role of empathy in literature, and the interaction between reader and text.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the body of research that underpins our understanding of the ways in which a text and a reader form a bond. This work is not an attempt to discredit the function of the author. Without writers there would be no texts for others to read, publish, and review. Novels and poems usually fly under the banner of an author's name and if that name is already famous, any new work is guaranteed some measure of public interest.³⁶

When an author creates a piece of literature, it becomes a reflection of their unique voice, experience and worldview. Attempts to discredit the author could be seen as an affront not only to the work itself, but also to the creative spirit that drives the artistic process. It suggests that the intention of creating literature should be to make a positive contribution to the cultural and intellectual landscape, fostering understanding and connection, rather than to undermine the author's credibility. The work here is simply to point the way, and the destination will be determined by those who simply read.

³⁶ Wurth, Kiene Brillenburg and Rigney, Ann, *The Life of Texts : An Introduction to Literary Studies*, Amsterdam University Press, 2019. p.81

Chapter Two

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF WOLFGANG ISER

Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) was a prominent German literary scholar and philosopher, known for his contributions to literary theory and the aesthetics of reception. Born on 22 July 1926 in Marienberg, Germany, Iser studied English, philosophy and Romance languages at the universities of Leipzig and Tübingen. He obtained his doctorate in 1950 with a dissertation on the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth. A quote below will give us an insight into his emergence in academia:

Against a narrow focus on “the text itself,” theorists in the 1970s turned to consider the role of the reader. Alongside French poststructuralist approaches that asserted, in Roland Barthes’s phrase, the “writerly” nature of reading and psychoanalytic views that studied the psychology of reading, the German “Konstanz School” was most prominent in advocating the investigation of Rezeptionsästhetik, or “the aesthetics of reception.” Wolfgang Iser was a leading member of the Konstanz School, and he focused particularly on the way in which texts are actively constructed by individual readers through the phenomenology of the reading process.³⁷

Iser was associated with the school of Konstanz. It was during his time at Konstanz that Iser developed his influential theories of reader response and the act of reading. During his academic career, Iser held teaching posts at various universities, including the University of Heidelberg, the University of Konstanz and the University of California, Irvine. Ben De Bruyn wrote this:

On 24 January 1976, Wolfgang Iser delivered his inaugural address to the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences. The lecture took place between the publication of *Der implizite Leser* [The Implied Reader] (1972) and *Der Akt des Lesens* [The Act of Reading] (1976),

³⁷ Iser, Wolfgang, "Interaction between Text and Reader." The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Third ed. W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, p.1450

the two studies that propelled him to international attention; and Iser used the opportunity both to take stock of the past and to map out a course for the future.³⁸

In his seminal work *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1972), by implied reader, Iser refers to a textual scheme that contains within itself how a text should be read. In other words, how a text is to be read in order to achieve its full meaning is implied in the text itself, so that one doesn't have to go outside a text to ask and find out how a text is to be read. The text itself contains guidelines on how to read it and how to concretise it.³⁹

Iser's work has had a profound impact on literary studies, influencing fields such as narrative theory, reception theory and hermeneutics. His ideas continue to be studied and debated by scholars around the world. In addition to his academic work, Iser has written numerous books and essays on literature and philosophy, including "The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response" (1978), "Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology" (1989) and "The Range of Interpretation" (2000).

Wolfgang Iser died on 24 January 2007, leaving behind a rich legacy of scholarship that has significantly shaped the way we understand the dynamics of literary interpretation and the relationship between text and reader.

INTERACTION BETWEEN TEXT AND READER IN WOLFGANG ISER

How do text and reader interact? Iser is convinced that "The text is a 'structured prefigurement', but that which is given has to be received, and the way in which it is received depends as much on the reader as on the text."⁴⁰ Georges Poulet describes this affectivity in his essay "The Phenomenology of Reading", which deserves to be quoted at length:

At the beginning of Mallarme's unfinished story, *Igitur*, there is the description of an empty room, in the middle of which, on a table there is an open book. This seems to me

³⁸ De Bruyn, Ben, *Wolfgang Iser : a Companion*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012, p.9

³⁹ Jyothi Priya, A.R. , "The phenomenology of reading: a brief study of its features and its relevance to wolfgang iser's essay, "the reading process: a phenomenological approach", International Journal of ELT, Linguistics and Comparative Literature, Vol.3.Issue.5. 2015, <http://journalofelt.kypublications.com/3.5.15/1-4%20A.R.%20JYOTHI%20PRIYA.pdf>, p.2

⁴⁰ Iser (n 3)

the situation of every book, until someone comes and begins to read it. Books are objects. On a table, on bookshelves, in store windows, they wait for someone to come and deliver them from their materiality, from their immobility (...) Made of paper and ink, they lie where they are put, until the moment someone shows an interest in them. They wait. Are they aware that an act of man might suddenly transform their existence? They appear to be lit up with that hope. Read me, they seem to say. I find it hard to resist their appeal.⁴¹

Poulet understands that the act of reading gives life to texts as they come to life through the reader. The idea of texts 'waiting' for someone to engage with them reflects a sense of longing or anticipation for their purpose to be fulfilled. Texts have a kind of agency in that they seem to beckon the reader to unlock their content and take part in the journey they offer. We can then say that the act of reading is presented as a transformative experience, freeing texts from their physical constraints and allowing them to fulfil their potential. For this reason, Iser sees reading as a process that is, in essence, a communication between the text and the reader. As the reader accepts the invitation and participates in the game between himself and the text, his disposition is captured by the presence of the text. He speaks of this as a form of enjoyment or pleasure derived from this interaction, he claims:

The reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive, i.e., when the text allows him to bring his own faculties into play. There are, of course, limits to the reader's willingness to participate, and these will be exceeded if the text makes things too clear or, on the other hand, too obscure: boredom and overstrain represent the two poles of tolerance, and in either case the reader is likely to opt out of the game.⁴²

Iser reveals this intimacy that unfolds whenever a reader and a text interact; as an invitation to participate, not just to observe. It is an interaction that brings out the full beauty of the literary work, and this affectivity is created in the reader's consciousness through reading. Now, if communication between text and reader is to be successful, clearly the reader's activity

⁴¹ Poulet, Georges, "Phenomenology of Reading." *New Literary History*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1969, p. 53. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/468372>. Accessed 16 Feb. 2024.

⁴² Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 108

must also be controlled in some way by the text⁴³. In George Poulet's thought, Iser asserts "books only take on their full existence inside the reader"⁴⁴. For Iser, "reading is an activity that is guided by the text; this must be processed by the reader, who is then, in turn, affected by what he has processed".⁴⁵

It is important to understand: As Iser would say "the text is a whole system of such processes, and so, clearly, there must be a place within this system for the person who is to perform the reconstituting. This place is marked by the gaps in the text—it consists in the blanks which the reader is to fill in. They cannot, of course, be filled in by the system itself, and so it follows that they can only be filled in by another system. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins".⁴⁶ These gaps or blanks serve as potential connections, according to Iser. He asserts:

The gaps arising out of the dialogue—this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections. He is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said. What is said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning. But as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said "expands" to take on greater significance than might have been supposed: even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound⁴⁷.

Iser here notes that by leaving gaps in dialogue or narrative, the reader is forced to actively engage with the text, filling in the gaps with their own interpretations and projections. This involvement draws the reader deeper into the events of the story as they become co-creators of its meaning. The unsaid aspects of the story come alive in the reader's imagination, allowing them to construct a more nuanced understanding of the characters, plot and themes. As a result, what is actually said takes on greater significance, not just as statements in themselves, but as clues or references to the larger, unspoken aspects of the story.

⁴³ Iser, Wolfgang, "Interaction between Text and Reader." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Third ed. W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, P.1454.

⁴⁴ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, op.cit, p. 153

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁴⁶ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, op.cit, p. 169.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182

Even seemingly mundane or trivial scenes can take on unexpected depth and meaning when the reader is invited to participate in the process of interpretation. This dynamic between what is said and what is left unsaid creates a rich and multi-layered reading experience, where every detail, no matter how small, contributes to the overall impact of the story.

For Iser, therefore, the relationship between text and reader is quite different from that between object and observer: instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving point of view that travels inside what it has to grasp. This way of grasping an object is unique to literature.⁴⁸ A reader is always outside the text, observing and interpreting it from his or her own point of view. But when they immerse themselves in the text, they become part of its world and experience its events. Going further, Iser notes two difficulties in understanding texts as objects.

Literary texts do not serve merely to denote empirically existing objects. Even though they may select objects from the empirical world—as we have seen in our discussion of the repertoire—they de pragmatize them, for these objects are not to be denoted, but are to be transformed. Denotation presupposes some form of reference that will indicate the specific meaning of the thing denoted.⁴⁹

Not all objects in the real world are simply indicated by the text. Literary texts, on the other hand, take objects out of this framework and allow us to re-evaluate them and perhaps even form new opinions about them.

Iser introduces the notion of the 'wandering point of view'. The process of understanding an object is never complete and takes place in stages. This means that a text can only make sense if it is visited again and again. Iser notes that: "The incompleteness of each manifestation necessitates syntheses, which in turn bring about the transfer of the text to the reader's consciousness. The synthesizing process, however, is not sporadic—it continues throughout every phase of the journey of the wandering viewpoint".⁵⁰

Iser explains this synthesizing process in detail, using the concept of the "eye-voice span", referring to the area of the text that can be grasped at each stage of reading and from

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.109

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

which we anticipate the next stage.⁵¹ The process of synthesizing, in the context of reading comprehension, involves integrating information from a text to form a coherent understanding or interpretation. One way of conceptualizing this process is through the notion of the 'eye-voice span', which refers to the area of text that can be processed and understood at each stage of reading. This concept helps explain how readers anticipate the next stage of reading based on the information they have processed. We could analyse the "eye-voice span" in these stages: the pre-reading stage, the initial reading stage, the integration stage and the reflection and reconstruction stage.

In the pre-reading stage: Before starting to read, readers often engage in pre-reading activities such as previewing the text, skimming headings, and activating prior knowledge related to the topic. At this stage, the eye-voice span is wide, encompassing the whole text or significant parts of it. However, comprehension at this stage may be superficial, as readers are only forming initial impressions and expectations. The second stage is the initial reading stage.

Initial reading stage: As readers begin to read the text, their focus narrows to smaller sections or chunks of information. The eye-voice span now encompasses smaller segments of text, typically a sentence or a few sentences at a time. Readers process the words visually (with their eyes) while simultaneously internalising the meaning (voice). At this stage, readers actively make connections between the text and their existing knowledge and begin to anticipate what might come next based on contextual cues and the information presented. The third stage is the integration phase.

Integration phase: As readers progress through the text, they continue to integrate new information into their existing understanding. The eye-voice span moves along the text, continuously processing and synthesizing information. Readers may encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts, which they integrate into their mental schema through inference, context clues, or further exploration. Anticipation of what comes next becomes more refined as readers build a more comprehensive understanding of the text. The fourth stage will be Reflection and reconstruction.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.110

Reflection and reconstruction: After completing the reading, readers can reflect on the text, evaluate its content and, if necessary, reconstruct their understanding. This stage involves synthesizing information from different parts of the text, drawing conclusions and forming opinions or interpretations. The eye-voice span can now encompass the whole text again as readers review and analyse key points.

Throughout this process, the eye-voice span acts as a mental window through which readers engage with the text, moving from one level of understanding to the next. By constantly adjusting their focus and integrating new information with existing knowledge, readers construct meaning and develop a deeper understanding of the text. Anticipation plays a crucial role in this process, as readers use contextual cues and their evolving understanding to anticipate what is coming next, facilitating smoother and more efficient reading comprehension.

ISER PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Iser's understanding of the reader's function in reading a text is truly impressive, and his phenomenological approach reveals the way a text should be read. At the heart of the reading of any literary work is the interaction between the structure of the work and its recipient. In an essay, *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach*, Iser claims that "The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be different from his own (since, normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves)".⁵²

He explores the complex dynamics between readers and literary texts, focusing in particular on how readers' experiences shape their understanding of the text. Central to Iser's argument is the notion that the reader's disposition strongly influences their interaction with the text, effectively turning the literary work into a mirror. While the literary text serves as a mirror, it also facilitates the creation of a reality different from the reader's own.

This notion challenges the idea that literature merely reflects the reader's pre-existing knowledge or beliefs. Instead, Iser argues that the act of reading involves a dynamic process of

⁵² Iser, Wolfgang, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose from Bunyan to Beckett* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. p. 281.

negotiation between the text and the reader, in which the reader's interpretation is shaped not only by his or her own experience but also by the text's clues, ambiguities, and gaps, which prompt the reader to actively fill in the blanks and construct meaning. Iser believes that “in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text”.⁵³ A text can only have meaning if it is read, implying that a literary work can only have meaning if the reader participates in it. The text is not seen as separate from the reader. This entanglement, as Iser describes it, gives the text a life that would not be possible without the reader's touch. He writes:

(...) For the text only takes on life when it is realized, and further- more the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader-though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence.⁵⁴

One can see in Iser's work that a literary work has within it a certain irresistible power that feeds on the disposition of the reader, this power strives for attention to give it an existence in the sense that it was created to be realized, and this realization is what is referred to as *KonKretisation*.⁵⁵ Iser's point of departure is the fact that, a literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader.⁵⁶ This text-reader performance is made possible “as the reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and “”schematized views” to one another, he sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself. Thus, reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character”.⁵⁷

In reference to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Iser uses a passage about how authors sometimes leave the reader with something to ponder over after reading a piece of writing:

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.274

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ The Polish critic Roman Ingarden coined the term ' *KonKretisation* ' to describe the process of meaning projection that involves the comprehension and integration of the schematised viewpoints of the text.

⁵⁶ Iser, *The Implied Reader*: op.cit P.274

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.275

(...) no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own⁵⁸.

Iser characterizes Sterne's idea of the literary text as an arena in which writer and reader engage in a creative contest.⁵⁹ Iser's understanding is that "If the readers were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us. A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination".⁶⁰

In order to bring out the text-reader interaction, Iser applies Ingarden's use of *intentionale Satzkorrelate* (intentional sentence correlatives) to recommend this phenomenological approach or analysis. He asserts that, sentences combine in different ways to form more complex units of meaning, revealing a varied structure that gives rise to entities such as a short story, a novel, a dialogue, a drama, a scientific theory.⁶¹ Ingarden believes that:

"a whole world is created with variously determined elements and the changes taking place in them, all as the purely intentional correlate of a sentence complex. If this sentence complex finally constitutes a literary work, then I call the whole stock of interconnected intentional sentence correlates the "portrayed world" of the work".⁶²

In Ingarden's view, the world represented by a literary work is not limited to its explicit content, but also includes the implicit meanings and possibilities that emerge from the text. This world exists independently of the real world, but is grounded in the text itself, providing the reader with a unique and immersive experience. Falke claims that the main idea is explained by

⁵⁸ Sterne, Laurence, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, Munich: Edited By Günter Jürgensmeier 2005, p. 96

⁵⁹ Iser, *The Implied Reader*: op.cit P.275

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.275

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277

⁶² Ingarden Roman et al., *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, Northwestern University Press 1979, p.31

Wolfgang Iser, who notes that the sentences in literary works often create expectations that are not fulfilled, turning our expectation into the expectation of surprise itself.⁶³ Iser wrote:

One might simplify by saying that each intentional sentence correlative opens up a particular horizon, which is modified, if not completely changed, by succeeding sentences. While these expectations arouse interest in what is to come, the subsequent modification of them will also have a retrospective effect on what has already been read.⁶⁴

Intentional sentence correlatives act as catalysts for intellectual engagement, fostering a dynamic dialogue between the text and the reader. They invite us to actively participate in the construction of meaning, challenging us to navigate the ever-changing landscape of interpretation with curiosity and discernment. Moreover, the process of continual adjustment doesn't just influence our anticipation of what is to come; it also casts a retrospective light on what has already been read. Falke commented on Iser as follows:

As readers we do not bear the responsibility of deciding what to do, say, or think next in a text, we often do not look into our memory of the text unless the text itself prompts us to do so. If a character has been hidden from view and suddenly reappears, then we may try to recall details about him or her. If the structure recalls an earlier incident (a parallel scene to one that occurred earlier, a clue that places a character at the scene of a crime based on information we already have), then we may note both the earlier incident and the literary formulation that drew our attention to it. But however little attention we pay to the text's past, we must carry that past with us in the reading-present in order for the new sentences we encounter to be meaningful.⁶⁵

Iser further claims that, (...) the intentional correlatives disclose subtle connections which individually are less concrete than the statements, claims, and observations, even though these only take on their real meaningfulness through the interaction of their correlatives⁶⁶. Iser

⁶³ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading* , p.33

⁶⁴ Iser, *The Implied Reader*: op.cit P.278

⁶⁵ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading* , p.34

⁶⁶ Iser, *The Implied Reader*, P.277

goes on to ask how the connection between the correlatives is to be understood, to which he replies:

It marks those points at which the reader is able to 'climb aboard' the text. He has to accept certain given perspectives, but in doing so he inevitably causes them to interact. (...) This is true of all sentences in literary works, and it is through the interaction of these sentences that their common aim is fulfilled. This is what gives them their own special quality in literary texts. In their capacity as statements, observations, purveyors of information, etc., they are always indications of something that is to come, the structure of which is foreshadowed by their specific content.⁶⁷

Iser's dependence on a claim made by Husserl in his work *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, that: "Every originally constructive process is inspired by pre-intentions, which construct and collect the seed of what is to come, as such, and bring it to fruition".⁶⁸ For Iser The reader's imagination, which gives form to the interactions between correlatives implied in the sentence structure by the order of the words, is necessary for the fulfilment of the literary text.⁶⁹

Iser identifies two key aspects of the reading process: First, he notes that the reading process is a non-linear temporal activity, and second, it is about finding coherence when we encounter "gaps", unstated meanings, or disappointed expectations in the text.

Reading as a non-linear temporal activity Iser means that: "In every text there is a potential time sequence which the reader must inevitably realize, as it is impossible to absorb even a short text in a single moment. Thus the reading process always involves viewing the text through a perspective that is continually on the move, linking up the different phases, and so constructing what we have called the virtual dimension. This dimension, of course, varies all the time we are reading".⁷⁰ Let's look at Iser's example, which describes this non-linear temporal

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (The quotation is taken from Iser's work) See Also Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of internal Time Consciousness*, Trans. J.S Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964)

⁶⁹ Iser, *The Implied Reader*, P.277

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*,280

activity, a text cannot be exhausted in one sitting, it must be read again to internalize itself within a reading. Here he deserves to be quoted at length:

when we have finished the text, and read it again, clearly our extra knowledge will result in a different time sequence; we shall tend to establish connections by referring to our awareness of what is to come, and so certain aspects of the text will assume a significance we did not attach to them on a first reading, while others will recede into the background. It is a common enough experience for a person to say that on a second reading he noticed things he had missed when he read the book for the first time, but this is scarcely surprising in view of the fact that the second time he is looking at the text from a different perspective. The time sequence that he realized on his first reading cannot possibly be repeated on a second reading, and this unrepeatability is bound to result in modifications of his reading experience. This is not to say that the second reading is 'truer' than the first—they are, quite simply, different: the reader establishes the virtual dimension of the text by realizing a new time sequence. Thus even on repeated viewings a text allows and, indeed, induces innovative reading.⁷¹

What Iser highlights in the above is the dynamic nature of reading and how our understanding of a text can evolve with each encounter, influenced by our prior knowledge and the perspective we bring to it. He emphasizes that when we revisit a text, our awareness of its totality can lead us to make different connections and interpretations, thereby changing our reading experience. Recognizing patterns and themes previously overlooked can enhance our understanding, while other details may fade into the background.

The concept of 'creating the virtual dimension of the text' also suggests that each reading creates a unique mental space in which the meaning of the text unfolds. This process is not about one reading being more accurate or true than another, but rather about the fluidity of interpretation and the richness that multiple readings can offer. Each encounter with the text invites innovation and discovery as we navigate its layers of meaning and complexity. Iser simply emphasizes the idea that reading is a dynamic and iterative process, shaped by our

⁷¹ *Ibid.*,281

evolving perspectives and prior knowledge, and that each reading offers the potential for new insights and interpretations.

The second aspect of reading is when we are confronted with 'gaps' in the text, trying to find coherence. Iser suggests that readers actively engage in a process of projection, filling in gaps and ambiguities in the text with their own mental constructions. This process of projection allows the reader to create a coherent narrative or interpretation from the fragmented and often ambiguous material presented in the text. However, Iser asserts that “by grouping together the written parts of the text, we enable them to interact, we observe the direction in which they lead us, and we project onto them the coherence we require as readers”.⁷² The coherence here “arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, and its own outlook”.⁷³

Iser, while examining the reader in search of coherence, asserts that the text contains pregnant riches waiting to be born. He explains:

Even while the reader is seeking a consistent pattern in the text, he is also uncovering other impulses which cannot be immediately integrated or will even resist final integration. Thus the semantic possibilities of the text will always remain far richer than any configurative meaning formed while reading. But this impression is, of course, only to be gained through reading the text.⁷⁴

Iser understands that as we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser extent between constructing and shattering illusions. In a process of trial and error, we organize and reorganize the various data that the text offers us.⁷⁵ Jyothi goes on to comment on Iser's remarks, so it deserves a long quote:

Iser says that reading is an ‘illusion building’. He says that what one gets from reading is not the truth of the text, but an illusion of truth. Iser says that every reading is threatened by “alien associations” (other ways of filling the gaps in the text) and is handicapped by what he calls as the “latent disturbance”. Any number of readings of a text, he says, is an

⁷² *Ibid.*,284

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.285

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.288

illusion of the truth. For instance, when we read a text, in our reading, we have done full justice to the text and there is a beautiful consistency about the way we have filled the gaps, made connections etc. Therefore one is seduced into the illusion that one is consistent with the truth of the text.⁷⁶

When reading a text, the reader must constantly decide whether to accept the story offered or to analyse it critically in order to find contradictions or alternative points of view. Because of the content, readers may find themselves creating complex mental interpretations or visions, only to have these delusions dispelled when they encounter new details or alternative points of view within the book. Occasionally, readers may consciously work to dispel preconceptions or biases, challenging their initial interpretations and seeking a more thorough understanding of the text's intricacies.

According to Iser, the following forms the foundation of the relationship between the reader and the text: the process of anticipation and retrospection, the consequent unfolding of the text as a living event, and the resultant impression of life-likeness.⁷⁷ The reader is forced to let go of his or her own expectations and to be more receptive to the mechanics of the text through the process of entanglement. Reading for Iser reflects the structure of experience in that we have to suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text. But in the process, something happens to us.⁷⁸

THE TEXT AS AN EVENT AND THE WANDERING VIEWPOINT

Stein, in an article *Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser*, said this: "(...) "the text as an event," serve as the continual process of reinterpretation necessary to comprehend the variety of materials and perspectives offered in any work worth reading".⁷⁹

Iser, as he writes, believes that, by looking closely at the ways in which the reader is led, it is necessary to look at the modes of influence. He goes on to say that: "Consistency-building is

⁷⁶ Jyothi Priya, A.R. , "The phenomenology of reading: a brief study of its features and its relevance to wolfgang iser's essay, "the reading process: a phenomenological approach",p.4

⁷⁷ Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p.290

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.291

⁷⁹ Stein, Richard L., "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1981, p. 214–215.

the indispensable basis for all acts of comprehension, and this in its turn is dependent upon processes of selection. This basic structure is exploited by literary texts in such a way that the reader's imagination can be manipulated and even reoriented".⁸⁰ That is to say, the interplay between consistency and comprehension is fundamental to literary texts. Authors craft narratives with careful attention to maintaining internal coherence and consistency, which allows readers to immerse themselves in the world of the story and make sense of the events unfolding within it.

Through carefully constructed narratives, authors can lead readers down particular paths of interpretation, evoke particular emotions, or challenge preconceived notions. This manipulation of the reader's imagination can lead to a deeper engagement with the text and even a reorientation of the reader's perspective. Iser points out that the basis for engaging with the text as an event is Consistency-Building,⁸¹ which reveals the richness of the literary work. Stein notes that Iser, in responding to the richness of a literary work, adopts what he calls a "wandering view point".⁸² Iser understands that it "permits the reader to travel through the text, thus unfolding the multiplicity of interconnecting perspectives which are offset whenever there is a switch from one to another".⁸³ Stein further claims that "wandering viewpoint" is:

"A self-consciously flexible stance which is committed only to the notion of reading as a process of variety and continual growth, it is, in fact, the variety and continuity of reader response which Iser identifies as the essential ingredient of meaning, a term which itself refers to an interaction between reader and text rather than some element exclusively the property of the latter".⁸⁴

The position described emphasizes flexibility and recognizes reading as a dynamic process characterized by diversity and on-going development. According to Iser, meaning emerges from the multiple and on-going responses of readers as they interact with the text, rather than being inherent in the text itself. This view emphasizes the importance of the interaction between reader and text in creating meaning.

⁸⁰ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, op.cit, pp. 125-126

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.118

⁸² Stein, Richard L., "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, p. 216.

⁸³ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, P.118

⁸⁴ Stein, Richard L., "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, p. 216.

“(…) the meaning of the text does not reside in the expectations, surprises, disappointments or frustrations that we experience during the process of gestalt-forming. These are simply the reactions that take place when the gestalten are disturbed. What this really means, though, is that as we read, we react to what we ourselves have produced, and it is this mode of reaction that, in fact, enables us to experience the text as an actual event. We do not grasp it like an empirical object; nor do we comprehend it like a predicative fact; it owes its presence in our minds to our own reactions, and it is these that make us animate the meaning of the text as a reality”.⁸⁵

Iser notes that it “also serves as a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text”.⁸⁶

This presence is at a point where memory and expectation converge, and the resultant dialectic movement brings about a continual modification of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation. These processes depend on the reciprocal spotlighting of the perspectives, which provide interrelated backgrounds for one another. The interaction between these backgrounds provokes the reader into a synthetizing activity.⁸⁷

Here Iser suggests that this interplay of backgrounds invites the reader or viewer to engage in a process of synthesis, integrating and reconciling different perspectives to form a coherent understanding. The word "Gestalt" comes in at this point. Iser notes that “the “consistent interpretation,” or gestalt, is a product of the interaction between text and reader, and so cannot be exclusively traced back either to the written text or to the disposition of the reader”⁸⁸. He believes that a gestalt would not be possible if there were not originally some potential correlation between the signs. The reader's task is then to make these signs consistent, and in doing so it is quite possible that the connections he makes will themselves become signs of further correlations.⁸⁹

In the process of deciphering and interpreting signs, the reader is faced with the task of establishing coherence between them. This endeavour often leads to the discovery of

⁸⁵ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, pp. 128-129

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.118

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.118-119

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

connections and correlations, where the act of making sense of one set of signs may itself become indicative of further relationships. In essence, the reader's role goes beyond the mere recognition of individual signs; it involves the active engagement of finding coherence and meaning within the broader context. Through this iterative process of correlation and interpretation, a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of the signs emerges, enriching the reader's understanding and revealing previously unnoticed layers of meaning. Thus, the act of harmonizing signs not only facilitates understanding, but also serves as a pathway for uncovering further layers of knowledge and insight.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE READER?

In Iser's view, this interactive relationship between text and reader should have a manipulative effect, where the texts manipulate the reader in order to guide him. He claims:

“Although the reader must participate in the assembly of meaning by realizing the structure inherent in the text, it must not be forgotten that he stands outside the text. His position must therefore be manipulated by the text if his viewpoint is to be properly guided. Clearly, this viewpoint cannot be determined exclusively by the individual reader’s personal history of experience, but this history cannot be totally ignored either: only when the reader has been taken outside his own experience can his viewpoint be changed”.⁹⁰

The reader is able to bring the text to life by simply exposing himself to the charm of the text. Iser notes that “the constitution of meaning, therefore, gains its full significance when something happens to the reader. The constituting of meaning and the constituting of the reading subject are therefore interacting operations that are both structured by the aspects of the text”.⁹¹ Iser quickly adds: "However, the reader's point of view must be prepared in such a way that he is not only able to assemble the meaning, but also to understand what he has assembled."⁹²

Stein points to a certain difficulty; he asserts that “the discussion of the reader often turns into a discussion of the text, which regains much of the classical primacy that Iser seeks to

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.152

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

challenge. Indeed, one is tempted to ask whether the essential task of the reading process, that of familiarizing oneself with the unfamiliar material created by the author, is left to the reader or is somehow performed for him in the text".⁹³ Stein notes that despite Iser's attempts to shift the focus to the role of the reader, discussions often return to an analysis of the text itself. This raises the question of whether the text still retains its classical significance, despite attempts to challenge this notion. The mention of the reader's task of familiarizing himself or herself with the author's material highlights the tension between the reader's agency and the influence of the text in shaping interpretation. When Stein signals the phrase "is left to the reader or is somehow performed for him in the text", he is suggesting the ambiguity surrounding the division of labour between reader and text in the reading process. Does the reader actively construct meaning, or does the text somehow direct this process? This reflects wider debates within reader response theory about the degree of reader autonomy in interpretation versus the influence of textual cues and structures.

However, Stern points out that the difficulties surrounding the issue of indeterminacy become most apparent in the discussion of "gaps", one of the "two basic structures of indeterminacy in the text" the other being "negations".⁹⁴ Iser believes that "the reader is not simply called upon to 'internalize' the positions given in the text, but he is induced to make them act upon and so transform each other, as a result of which the aesthetic object begins to emerge".⁹⁵ Sterns claims: "What is disturbing here is the circularity of such definitions. In them, the reader becomes a kind of fictitious presence derived from descriptions that really apply only to the text".⁹⁶ Here Iser notes that :

The fictitious reader is just one important strategy that serves to fix the position of the real reader. The latter is given a role to which he must then adapt and so 'modify himself' if the meaning he assembles is to be conditioned by the text and not by his own disposition. Ultimately, the whole purpose of the text is to exert a modifying influence upon that disposition, and so, clearly, the text cannot and will not merely reproduce it.⁹⁷

⁹³ Stein, Richard L., "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser.", p. 218

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* (see: Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, p. 182)

⁹⁵ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, p. 203

⁹⁶ Stein, Richard L., "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser.", p. 218

⁹⁷ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, p. 153

Iser claims that the role of the fictitious reader prompts the real reader to re-evaluate their own beliefs and perspectives. This involuntary opposition to previously taken-for-granted attitudes can lead to a deeper engagement with the text and potentially foster critical thinking and reflection. In essence, the fictitious reader acts as a catalyst for cognitive dissonance, encouraging the real reader to confront and reconsider their own assumptions and beliefs. It is important that we distinguish between a fictitious reader and the role of the reader. In the words of Iser:

The fictitious reader and the reader's role, for although the former is present in the text by way of a large variety of different signals, he is not independent of the other textual perspectives, such as narrator, characters, and plot-line, as far as his function is concerned. The fictitious reader is, in fact, just one of several perspectives, all of which interlink and interact. The role of the reader emerges from this interplay of perspectives, for he finds himself called upon to mediate between them, and so it would be fair to say that the intended reader, as supplier of one perspective, can never represent more than one aspect of the reader's role.⁹⁸

This fictitious reader is not an independent entity within the text, but rather one of many perspectives that contribute to the overall narrative experience. The reader's role, on the other hand, emerges when these perspectives interact. It is at this point that we see what Iser is trying to do: he delves deep into the inherently dynamic process that involves the intricate interplay between text and reader. Iser notes that, each text we read relates to a different part of our person; each text has a different theme, and so it must relate to a different background of our experience. Since each text involves only certain facets of our dispositions and never invokes the whole system of our orientation, the very composition of this system will be differently weighted according to the text we read.⁹⁹ Each text we encounter influences and shapes our overall perspective differently, depending on which facets of our disposition it touches.

Stern claims that Iser's perspective is a position rather than a method of textual analysis. Both *The Act of Reading* and *The Implied Reader* offer a theory of novel reading and

⁹⁸ Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, p. 33

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.155

an interpretation of the history of the novel; the latter extends the former by focusing on prose fiction and what the subtitle refers to as 'aesthetic response' in general. Iser's opposition to the separation of text and reader is evident in both of his works on the subject.¹⁰⁰

In both texts, Iser brings out the internal structure of what happens when reading takes place. His emphasis on this interaction brings out the beauty of what is at stake in the event of the text and the disposition of the reader.

¹⁰⁰ Stein, Richard L., "Historical Fiction and the Implied Reader: Scott and Iser.", p. 214

Chapter Three

INTELLECTUAL SKETCH OF CASSANDRA FALKE

Cassandra Falke has an extraordinary talent for entangling the minds and hearts of her readers with the delicate threads of her writing. With every carefully chosen word, she draws the reader into her world, holding their attention and transporting them to realms beyond the confines of reality.

Falke is Professor of English Literature at the UiT. She specialises in English Romanticism and literary theory. Her books include *Intersections in Christianity and Critical Theory* (ed. 2010), *Literature by the Working Class: English Autobiography, 1820-1848* (2013), *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading* (2016; paperback 2018), *Phenomenology of the Broken Body* (co-ed 2019), *Wild Romanticism* (co-ed, 2021), and *Interpreting Violence: Narrative, Ethics and Hermeneutics* (co-ed 2023). She has also written articles and book chapters on Romantic literature, class, education, contemporary phenomenology, and the representation of violence in literature.

She is the recipient of a Fulbright Professorship, two NEH Awards, and a Distinguished Professor designation for teaching. She directed the NEH-HS-funded network *Interpreting Violence: Narrative, Ethics and Hermeneutics* and is a partner in the project *Instrumental Narratives: The Limits of Storytelling and New Story-Critical Narrative Theory* projects. She also directed the *Read Respond: Literature / History / Human Rights*, an international online reading initiative that encourages discussion of rights-related literature. Falke was president of the American Studies Association of Norway from 2018-2022, and leads the interdisciplinary phenomenology research group at UiT. Her current book projects include *Global Human Rights Fiction* (Routledge 2023), *Wise Passiveness: Being Receptive in the Romantic Period* (Bloomsbury, 2024) and *The Reader as Witness: Seeing Political Violence through Contemporary Novels*. Falke without doubt makes writing a delight and she makes reading.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Falke, Cassandra, "Professor in English Literature Job Description." UiT The Arctic University of Norway, en.uit.no/ansatte/person?p_document_id=382127. Accessed 1 March 2024. (The biographical sketch of Cassandra Falke is taken from the website of UiT The Arctic University of Norway.)

In an introduction to *Intersections in Christianity and Critical Theory*, Falke wrote: "I would prefer to write about rivers than roads. Their motion is more relaxing. They inspire me to stillness whereas roads, when they inspire me at all, breathe only the restless longing for elsewhere".¹⁰² Perhaps, I think, because rivers have this profound sense of stillness surrounding them. Every ripple on the surface tells its own story, a tale whispered by the currents as they gently caress the water. As we contemplate the tranquil waters that flow endlessly before us, there is an embrace of serenity that rivers inspire, giving peace in the gentle rhythm of their timeless movement. For it is in their meandering course that we can discover the serenity we seek and be swept away on a journey of quiet contemplation and inner reflection.

For those privileged to experience Falke's writing, her words become a sanctuary where they can lose themselves in the beauty of imagination and the power of storytelling. From the first page to the last, Falke's writing captivates her readers, leaving them unable to escape the magic of her words.

FALKE AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF LOVE AND READING

In *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, Falke appears as a reader of Jean Luc Marion the renowned French philosopher and theologian. Falke notes that 'despite his recognition as a philosopher, the literary value of his work has not yet been recognised by English readers. While his phenomenological predecessors Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas and Paul Ricoeur have received the attention of literary scholars, Marion has not.'¹⁰³

Marion's work provides a wonderful connection between new discourses in phenomenology and new discourses in literature because it clarifies the basis from which all our doing arises, which is love. An approach to literature informed by Marion's phenomenology must begin with a focus on givenness. The givenness of what we are and what we experience provides the grounding of Marion's philosophy, and he points out that phenomenology has always had gift as its foundation. For him, givenness precedes both knowledge and being, and the phenomenological reduction (wherein we step outside

¹⁰² Falke, Cassandra, *Intersections in Christianity and Critical Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010, p.1

¹⁰³ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, p.6

of the “natural” belief that we can separate the perceiving self from what it perceives) begins with the recognition of givenness.¹⁰⁴

Falke integrates concepts from Marion's *Le Phénomène érotique* (The Erotic Phenomenon, 2003) into her idea of the reader's experience in the act of reading. In her own words, she wishes to “welcome Marion's work more fully into this conversation. His contribution of The Erotic Phenomenon to this unfolding story is what connects this advice to real life. It is what can offer wisdom. The fact that this is not a new story, but a very old one, leads me to hope that the advice given in the following pages will spread into other conversations within and beyond the academy”.¹⁰⁵ She says this of Marion:

Marion is unique among phenomenologists for being fascinated with phenomena wherein intuition, the element of the phenomenon that gives itself to perception, exceeds what we intend. These phenomena dazzle, overwhelm, amaze, and astound us. He calls these “saturated phenomena,” because when they occur our intention is saturated by the intuition offered. We know that there is more being given to us than what we can take in, and we are therefore reminded of our perceptual limitations.¹⁰⁶

At the heart of Marion's concept of saturated phenomena is the recognition that our perceptions are not always neatly contained within the boundaries of our intentions. Instead, there are moments when the sheer intensity or complexity of an experience exceeds our ability to fully grasp or comprehend it. In these instances, our intentions are overwhelmed by the intuition offered by the phenomenon, leaving us in a state of wonder and amazement. Marion's exploration of saturated phenomena within phenomenology provides a unique lens through which to understand the complexity of human perception and experience. Unlike many other phenomenologists who focus on the intentional aspects of consciousness, Marion delves into the moments when intuition overpowers our intentions, resulting in experiences that are overwhelming and awe-inspiring. These phenomena, which he describes as 'saturated', reveal the limits of our perceptual capacities and highlight the inherent richness and depth of the world around us.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.15

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.27

In Falke's view, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading* is an exploration of the implications of erotic reduction for literary theory.¹⁰⁷ Following Marion's phenomenology, Falke takes up the idea that love overcomes the vanity of what he calls 'epistemic' and 'ontological' reductions. Assuring ourselves of our own being through cognition or awareness of ipseity, Marion argues, cannot give us any reason to want to be. On love and the hope of being loved gives meaning to the impoverished certainty that we can reach alone.¹⁰⁸ In fusing this idea with the act of reading, she claims that:

Reading that is trapped in epistemology and ontology is similarly impoverished. Reading within the epistemic reduction, we may acquire knowledge, even knowledge about how to love others, but the epistemic reduction provides no bridge between knowing how to love and actually loving. The ontological reduction can account for the ways that reading changes us individually but not for the relationship between us as readers and other people.¹⁰⁹

Falke is of the opinion that while we may gain knowledge through reading, such as knowledge about how to love others, this knowledge alone does not necessarily translate into genuine love or meaningful connection with others. In other words, simply knowing about love intellectually does not guarantee the ability to genuinely experience or express love in real-life interactions. On the other hand, she also critiques the ontological reduction that focuses on how reading changes us as individuals. While it acknowledges the personal transformations that reading can bring about, it fails to capture the relational aspect of reading - the connection between readers and other people. In essence, it recognises that reading can transform us as individuals, but it doesn't take into account how these individual transformations affect our relationships with others and our ability to empathise, connect and love beyond ourselves.

Jean Luc Marion's idea of erotic reduction is necessary to understand what Falke is doing in her work on the "Phenomenology of love and reading". She tries to capture the experience of reading, and especially the experience of reading, within erotic reduction. In a narrower sense, the erotic in Marion appears in his book *Le Phénomène érotique*, in which he

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* ((Falke takes this idea from *The Erotic Phenomenon*, pp. 21-23.)

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,p.2

advances his phenomenology of the givenness by first deconstructing the Cartesian subject. He introduces the *ego amans*, disagreeing with Descartes' *ego cogitans*.¹¹⁰

Man, as *ego cogito*, thinks, but he does not love, at least from the outset (...) if the concept of love became impossible because the ego excluded love (and hate) from its original modalities (in order subsequently to submit it, arbitrarily and not without danger, to the will), could one re-establish a radical concept of love without destroying this very definition of the *ego*? We will see later that in fact it is necessary to pay this price by redefining the *ego*, insofar as the ego thinks, exactly through the modality of love that metaphysics omitted and repressed-as the one that loves and hates pre-eminently, as the *cogitans* that thinks insofar as it first loves, in short as the Lover (*ego amans*)¹¹¹.

Taking Marion's hint that in erotic reduction "the point is to love, because under the rules of the erotic there is nothing unloved or unloving"¹¹², Falke then asks: why read at all?¹¹³ She argues that if certain activities "hold" within the erotic reduction, then reading definitely holds as well¹¹⁴. She goes back to Marion, The essential condition for entering the erotic reduction is that: "I am insofar as I am susceptible to a decision, which does not belong to me and which determines me in advance, because it comes to me from elsewhere, from the decision which renders me likeable or not"¹¹⁵. Falke quickly adds that even books offer an elsewhere. For her, reading literature, she asserts, with the singularity of an act of love, and like an act of love requires us to yield our intention¹¹⁶. "Because we cannot anticipate the way we will be changed by an event of reading, we commit ourselves first to the act of surrender itself and, through that surrender of our own intentionality, find ourselves remade".¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Schulzki, Irina, "Love at Loss: Jean-Luc Marion's Concept of Erotic Reduction and Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia*." *In Einheitsdenken nach der Postmoderne. Figuren von Ganzheit, Präsenz und Transzendenz nach der Postmoderne*, edited by Irina Hron, 2015, p. 148

¹¹¹ Marion, Jean-Luc, *The erotic phenomenon*, (S. E. Lewis, Trans.), University of Chicago Press, 2007, PP, 7-8

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.28

¹¹³ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, p.2

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3

¹¹⁵ Marion, Jean-Luc, *The erotic phenomenon*, p.25

¹¹⁶ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, p.3

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Falke offers a summary of 'erotic reduction', suggesting parallels between the way we engage with another person through love and the way we engage with a book.¹¹⁸ One difficulty Falke signals is to carefully integrate Marion's concept, that is, the other is often required to complete the erotic phenomenon, and how is this achieved when a reader engages with a text? And she advances what Marion calls "the lover's advance":

“The moment when we forget ourselves and love first. Modern reading is a solitary activity, and without the presence of another person who could potentially love us back, we cannot complete the erotic phenomenon. But, the alterity we find in books imitates the alterity of the beloved enough to train us in the act of loving first”.¹¹⁹

She accepts that we cannot really love through books in the way that we love through people, since Marion's erotic phenomenon suggests that an embodied other is required to complete it. The language and physical body of a book can never offer the uniqueness of flesh through which erotic reduction can be fully accomplished. Lacking the capacity to deny our advance, lacking the flesh, lacking the uniqueness of an embodied person, a book cannot help us complete the erotic reduction it has helped us to begin.¹²⁰

Falke understands that “the act of reading literature lends itself readily to phenomenological reflection”. She continues by asking whether “the phenomenon of reading is similar enough to the phenomenon of love for one to instruct the other?”¹²¹ To put it in Marion's own words, “can books induce the “radical alterity of the ego to itself”¹²² that the erotic reduction requires?”¹²³, However, Marion and Falke come from different backgrounds, Marion from "Flesh" and Falke from "books", she believes that “certainly books impose decisions upon us”. It's essential to recognize that the influence of books on our decisions is not always explicit or immediate. Often, the impact of literature unfolds gradually, shaping our thoughts and behaviours over time. However, the cumulative effect of exposure to various books and ideas can significantly shape the trajectory of our lives.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.59

¹²² Marion, Jean-Luc, *The erotic phenomenon*, 2007, p.25

¹²³ Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, 2016, p.59

The reader's decision to perform the lover's advance varies with each book. The lover's advance may be described as the moment when a lover or reader engages in creating an event that becomes part of the lover or reader's emerging personhood. As a reader, I might decide to initiate the lover's advance before I begin reading. An inherited book, for example, or a book recommended by a favourite teacher may bring with it an aura of expectation that predisposes us to love. Or, the lover's advance may happen more gradually, as a book begins to shape our view of events that happen outside of its pages.¹²⁴

The lover's progress may unfold more gradually as the reader becomes immersed in the narrative. As the story progresses, the characters, themes and events presented in the book begin to resonate with the reader on a deeper level. This gradual immersion allows the reader to connect organically with the text as they are gradually drawn into the world created by the author. With each turn of the page, the reader's understanding and emotional investment grows, shaping their view of the events portrayed in the book and, in turn, influencing their emerging personality.

By engaging with literature, readers not only gain insights into the human experience, but also have the opportunity to reflect on their own identities and perspectives. The lover's advance represents a moment of intimacy between the reader and the text, where the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred and the act of reading becomes a deeply personal and enriching experience. To situate a book or a text in the context of a lover's advance, Falke writes:

(...) having made the (book) lover's advance, I can make a significant event of my reading. Significant, first, in that my reading can become an event that has a chance to help create me, and second, in that I will have one more experience in which I admitted a signification arising from outside myself.¹²⁵

Falke goes on to say that in order for the practice that reading gives us to matter, it must be repeated. Having repeatedly waited for meaning from elsewhere, and having repeatedly created new visions of the world that accommodate the vision of a literary work, it may become

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.61

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.66

easier to wait and create with our embodied, non-literary loves. Reading in love, expanding our capacity for love through reading, does not happen with one book, but with a lifetime of reading.¹²⁶

Her perspective underscores the transformative potential of a lifelong engagement with literature. By embracing the iterative nature of reading, we not only deepen our understanding of the world, but also nurture our capacity for love and connection. Each encounter with a work of literature offers an opportunity for growth and enrichment, reinforcing the notion that the true value of reading lies not in the accumulation of knowledge, but in the cultivation of wisdom and empathy over time. She goes on to describe the experience of reading offered by the reduction.¹²⁷ She notes:

Since my own acts of reading occur as singular events, constituted between one reader and one text, the description of them makes no claim to predict another reader's experience with the same text. Instead in describing the relationships that underlie acts of reading and acts of love, I identify modes of relating to works of art and other people that will manifest themselves in every act of reading performed by someone within the erotic reduction¹²⁸.

In the act of reading within erotic reduction, the boundaries between the reader and the text blur, creating a profound sense of connection and intimacy. The reader becomes deeply attuned to the nuances of the text, exploring its layers of meaning with heightened sensitivity and awareness. Just as lovers seek to understand and connect with each other on a deeper level, the reader in erotic reduction seeks to unravel the complexities of the text and forge a meaningful relationship with it.

Falke engages what she calls the three modes, which are empathy, attention and being overwhelmed. She claims that by habituating ourselves to these ways of relating to saturated phenomena in general, reading with empathy, attention, and a willingness to be

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.71

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.73

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

overwhelmed can shake readers out of the habit of thinking of ourselves as autonomous selves¹²⁹. Do all forms of literary texts invite empathy? Falke's answer is that they do not.¹³⁰

Within a phenomenological reduction that sees perceptual life as constituting the self without clearly delineated boundaries between “internal” experiences and “real-world responsiveness,” the reader’s amplified experience of empathy counts significantly among those acts of love that permanently change the self. Empathetic reading cannot predict empathetic action, but the act of empathetic reading signifies readers’ phenomenalization of a human experience from elsewhere unencumbered by an anticipation of return, an action that accrues to the acts of love in which I recognize myself.¹³¹

In the realm of phenomenological reduction, which seeks to suspend presuppositions and judgements in order to reveal the essence of experience, the perception of the self is intricately intertwined with the experiences encountered in the world. Rather than viewing the self as a distinct entity with clearly delineated boundaries separating internal experiences from external stimuli, phenomenology suggests that the self is constituted by its perceptual interactions with the world. This perspective challenges traditional notions of selfhood by emphasising the fluidity and interconnectedness of subjective experience.

Within this framework, the act of empathetic reading takes on significant meaning. Empathic reading is the act of immersing oneself in the perspectives and emotions of characters or situations presented in literature, without the expectation of personal gain or reward. By empathising with characters and situations, readers expand their capacity for understanding and compassion, thereby broadening their empathetic horizons. This heightened empathy not only enriches the reading experience, but also fosters a deeper connection to humanity as a whole.

Importantly, the act of empathic reading does not necessarily lead directly to empathic action. While empathic reading cultivates empathy and compassion within the individual, whether these qualities manifest themselves in concrete actions depends on various factors, including personal disposition, social context and external influences. Nevertheless,

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.75

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

empathic reading remains significant in its own right as a form of phenomenological engagement with human experience. In essence, empathic reading exemplifies an act of love that has the potential to profoundly affect the self.

Falke observes: “One thing that makes literature worth paying attention to at all is the kind of attention it invites, which is engrossed, self-forgetting intention”¹³². This unique appeal of literature suggests that its significance lies in the way it demands a particular kind of engagement: one characterised by absorbed, self-forgetting intention. This notion speaks to the immersive quality inherent in literary pursuits. Unlike other forms of media or entertainment, literature invites its readers to delve deeply into its realms, to immerse themselves in the worlds created by the author's words. In this state of absorption, individuals are transported beyond the confines of their immediate environment, losing themselves in the narrative tapestry unfolding before them.

This absorbed engagement implies a profound level of concentration, where the reader's attention is fully captured and held by the text. Every word, sentence and paragraph demands to be savoured, analysed and interpreted, fostering a sense of intimacy between reader and text. Through this intense concentration, the reader is forced to relinquish his or her self-consciousness and instead surrender to the flow of the story. In this state of self-forgetfulness, the barriers between reader and text dissolve, allowing for a deeper immersion in the literary experience. This kind of absorbed, self-forgetting intention elevates literature beyond mere entertainment or diversion; it transforms reading into a profound act of communion between author and reader, a meeting of minds across time and space. In essence, the attention that literature invites serves as a gateway to enlightenment, enriching our lives and deepening our appreciation of the complexity of the human condition.

On the part of the reader who is overwhelmed by a text, Falke adopts an insight from Marion. Marion describes four types of phenomena that he identifies as saturated: the event, the idol, the icon and the flesh.¹³³

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.76

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.77

We always experience the other as a saturated phenomenon if we really experience the other at all, through the figure of the face, which Marion describes as an icon. Love overwhelms us in a particular way in that it always, even at its most devastating, expands and benefits, even blesses the self. Literature uniquely prepares us to be overwhelmed by love because like the human other, a book as other opens itself to us more fully in relation to the intention we direct to it. As readers read, our capacity to intend a particular book is expanded, and that process looks like love.¹³⁴

The face as an icon here suggests that it carries a saturated meaning that overwhelms our perception. When we meet another person, we do so through their face, which embodies their uniqueness, humanity and presence. This encounter with the other is profound and transformative because it disrupts our self-centredness. Love, in its essence, is an overwhelming force that goes beyond mere affection or sentimentality. It involves a deep connection and concern for the well-being of the other, leading to a profound transformation within ourselves. Even in its most intense forms, love has the capacity to expand and enrich our sense of self, transcending personal boundaries and selfishness. In experiencing love, we are confronted with the inexhaustible depth of the other, which continually reveals new dimensions of meaning and significance.

Literature, as a form of artistic expression and communication, offers a unique space for exploring and experiencing love. Just as we meet the other through his or her face, the reader engages with the text as a dynamic other, revealed through the act of interpretation. The process of reading involves an intentional engagement with the text, where the reader's openness and receptivity allow the text to unfold its meaning and significance. This dynamic exchange between reader and text mirrors the encounter with the other, as both involve a mutual openness and responsiveness that transcends individual subjectivities. Falke went on to state that:

Reading offers a privileged opportunity to engage empathetically with an other without the illusion of autonomy that bodily distance and difference creates. What is needed then, for an understanding of empathy's action in literature and life, is an ontology that presumes both the uniqueness and the potential interconnectedness of every individual. I

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

say “potential” not because we are not already intersubjectively formed, but because each new person we meet can form us anew¹³⁵.

The text, like the other, invites us to enter into a relationship. Through this process, our capacity to intend and engage with the text is expanded. In this sense, a literary text prepares us to be overwhelmed by love by cultivating our capacity to recognise and respond to the Other, whether in the form of human relationships or encounters with artistic expression. Falke insists that it is the relationship between the power of love and reading that preoccupies her and that she has tried to clarify.¹³⁶ However, Falke is faced with a difficulty, she takes Marion to task that, in exploring the tension between the unreasonableness of love and the rational practices of reading, it's crucial to understand the philosophical framework that Marion presents. Marion's argument revolves around the idea that true love transcends the logic of exchange, where reciprocity is expected. Instead, he posits that true love involves an unreasonable commitment without any guarantee of reciprocity. This radical form of love, according to Marion, renounces reason and sufficiency.

Marion points out, we often love unreasonably. If we expect love in return, according to the logic of exchange, then we do not love at all. Rather, we must unreasonably commit to loving first “without any guarantee of assurance.” And “in loving without reciprocity, the lover loves without reason... . He renounces reason and sufficiency”. How then can the unreasonableness of love be reconciled to the reason-demanding practices of reading? Reason is a primary source of the categories that would limit our experience of the event of reading. Therefore, it is reason more than anything that the saturated phenomenon of reading literature overwhelms. And yet, it would be absurd to propose that we could process language, image, argument, and etcetera, without reason.¹³⁷

If we apply Marion's perspective to the act of reading literature, we encounter a paradox. On the one hand, reason is indispensable for engaging with texts, enabling us to process language, analyse arguments and interpret images. However, Marion suggests that reason imposes limits

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.84

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, .157 (see also: Marion, Jean-Luc, *The erotic phenomenon*, (S. E. Lewis, Trans.), University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp, 78-79)

on our experience, particularly in areas where the saturated phenomenon - such as the rich and complex experience of literature - overwhelms conventional categories.

To reconcile the unreasonableness of love with the rational practices of reading, we must recognise that while reason is necessary for engaging with texts, it should not be allowed to limit our openness to the overflowing richness of literary experience. Rather than trying to impose rigid frameworks or analytical structures on literature, readers can adopt an attitude of openness and receptivity, akin to the unreasonableness of love described by Marion. I would argue that while reason is indispensable for navigating the complexities of literary texts, it should be tempered by an attitude of openness and receptivity that mirrors the unreasonableness of love. Falke brings up Marion's clarification, which deserves to be quoted at length:

Marion clarifies the relationship of reason to love in person, and his clarification illuminates the role of reason in reading also. He says that "the issue is not . . . a lack of reasoning or of good sense" on the part of the lover, "but rather a failure of reason itself to give reasons for the initiative to love." In other words, I may reason about my love, but I cannot reason my way into love. This is because love is a primary and not a secondary epistemology. "I do not love because I know what I see, but inversely I see and I know in the measure that I, the first to love, love".¹³⁸

Marion's assertion that "the problem is not ... a lack of reason or good sense" suggests that the lover is not lacking in rationality. Rather, it suggests that the problem lies in the inherent limitations of reason itself when it comes to justifying or initiating love. In other words, while one can think rationally about love, reason alone cannot compel or dictate the experience of love. Love, Marion argues, operates on a different plane from reason - it is not something that can be reasoned into existence. This idea is encapsulated in Marion's assertion that "love is a primary and not a secondary epistemology". Here Marion emphasises that love is not derivative of reason, but rather precedes and transcends it. For Marion, love is a fundamental way of knowing or experiencing the world that cannot be reduced to rational analysis. It is a mode of perception that precedes conceptual understanding, a form of intuitive apprehension that defies logical explanation.

¹³⁸*Ibid.* (see also: Marion, Jean-Luc, *The erotic phenomenon*, (S. E. Lewis, Trans.), University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp, 79-80)

His insight extends to the very act of reading and understanding. When Marion states, "I do not love because I know what I see, but, conversely, I see and I know to the extent that I, the first to love, love", he suggests that our ability to comprehend and interpret texts is also shaped by love. As in interpersonal relationships, our engagement with literature and ideas is not just a product of rational analysis. Instead, it is imbued with a pre-reflective, intuitive dimension that Marion associates with love.

THE READER AS WITNESS

Falke makes an interesting reference to the reader as a 'witness'. In an abstract of her article on 'The Reader as Witness in Contemporary Global Novels', from which I might glean some ideas without necessarily going into detail, I want to chisel out the gist of the concept of the reader as 'witness'. She asserts that:

Phenomenological literary criticism has long taken the one-on-one exchange with an other as the model for thinking about the reader-to-text relationship (...) as witness, the reader is situated both by the literary text and also by his or her particular embodied and intersubjective relations to the world. Constituted and no longer constituting, the reader/subject as witness finds herself a site in which other's decisions have already been made, and her responsibility arises from the decisions she makes possible for others in the future.¹³⁹

The emphasis here is on the active and dynamic nature of the reader's engagement with a literary text, drawing on phenomenological concepts to explore the complexities of the reader-text relationship. The reader is both constituted by the text and their experiences, and constitutive of meaning through their interpretations and responses. The reader is thus positioned as both shaped by the text and capable of shaping its meaning through their engagement with it. She further notes that:

Phenomenologies of reading tend to assume an intimacy between a reader and a work of literature, an assumption that figures the one-on-one encounter as the model for a reader's relation to a text. One-on-one encounters between people or one person and a

¹³⁹ Falke, Cassandra, "The reader as witness in the contemporary world novel", *Studia Phaenomenologica* XXI, 2021, p.251.

work of art are an important part of an individual life, but our experience of the world extends far beyond these, so a more robust phenomenology of reading must take some account of the ways literature can change readers' relationships to the world, including our political responsibilities toward others.¹⁴⁰

The sentiment expressed suggests that through reading, individuals engage in a form of intimate communication with the thoughts and consciousness of others. Unlike face-to-face interaction, where there may be barriers or filters, reading allows a direct connection with the thoughts and perspectives of authors, bringing individuals closer to the essence of another's consciousness. In this sense, reading becomes a profound means of sharing and understanding, bridging the gap between individual minds in a unique and intimate way.

Falke further draws insight from Poulet's work on the "phenomenology of reading". She writes that:

The consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of license, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels.¹⁴¹

Here Falke seeks to capture the essence of deep empathy and connection, where one person experiences an unusually intimate and welcoming connection with the consciousness of another. She describes a scenario in which an individual feels as if they have been granted unrestricted access to the thoughts and emotions of another being. Another way of looking at it is as a reflection on the power of empathy and the potential for profound connections between individuals when barriers are broken down and true understanding is achieved. It speaks to the beauty and rarity of such experiences, where one is allowed to glimpse into the inner workings of another's consciousness with unprecedented freedom and intimacy. Falke shares that: "Since reading requires that we give voice, at least internally, to the words of another, there is a sense in

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.252

¹⁴¹ Poulet, Georges. "Phenomenology of Reading", 1969, p.54

which reading enables us to share thoughts in nearer proximity to another consciousness than we ever can in real life”¹⁴².

Under Subject as Witness, Falke notes that “The responsibility of the reader as witness is given, but it is given within limits, and like all given phenomena, the extent to which it is received varies in relation to conscious and unconscious factors. There are two key concepts that help to think about the limitations under which a reader-as-witness operates”.¹⁴³ She draws on the work of Jacques Derrida *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* and *the Politics of Friendship* and Jean Luc-Marion concept of *saturated phenomenality*.

To make Falke's point, she deserves to be quoted at length:

Following the death of Levinas in 1995, Derrida gave two speeches in his honor, one at his graveside and one at a colloquium remembering him a year later. In *Adieu*, which brings these speeches together, Derrida examines the gap between Levinasian ethics and the possibility of an ethical politics. That gap, he says, should not be filled in a way that implies a predicative relationship between Levinas’s ethics of hospitality one-on-one and a law of hospitality extended to politics. Remaining radically open to the encounter with any particular other necessitates leaving the possibility of that encounter free. So, if we ask to know beforehand what a Levinasian politics would have us do or be, we are asking the wrong question. The question is instead: how does the other’s precedence to me prefigure my response? As Derrida writes, for Levinas, “decision and responsibility are always of the other.” This is also the case during and after reading.¹⁴⁴

Derrida suggests that the essence of Levinasian ethics lies in its openness to the Other, which cannot be captured or predetermined. The encounter with the other demands a response that emerges in the moment, without preconceived notions or fixed rules. In this sense, any attempt to systematise Levinasian ethics within a political framework risks losing its essence. At the heart of Levinas's philosophy is the notion of the "other" as fundamentally prior to the self and demanding ethical responsibility. This responsibility is not based on reciprocity or

¹⁴²Falke, Cassandra, "The reader as witness in the contemporary world novel", 2021, p.253

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.256

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

calculation, but emerges from the encounter with the Other, which disrupts and transcends all preconceived frameworks.

In the context of reading, Derrida's insights suggest that engagement with Levinas's philosophy requires a willingness to embrace uncertainty and openness. Rather than seeking fixed answers or predetermined conclusions, the reader must remain receptive to the unpredictable demands of the other's primacy. Falke then notes that, "The uniqueness of the reading event is enabled by readers' decisions to receive what a book gives, but that decision must have been granted to us in a particular way by others' prior decisions".¹⁴⁵

Turning to Marion, Falke introduces the concept of saturated phenomenon. "In saturated phenomenality, what is overwhelmingly given overflows or "saturates" the intentionality we turn to".¹⁴⁶ All works of literature arrive as saturated phenomena in that they are works of art and also via the reading event.¹⁴⁷ Falke notes that, "Marion argues that in focusing on phenomena in which intentionality is not fulfilled, for example when we intend an object in its completeness but can see only the side of it that faces us, phenomenology has overlooked whole categories of phenomena in which what is intuitively given exceeds intentionality".¹⁴⁸

Falke goes on to say that 'some reading events surprise us into receptivity and we find ourselves dazzled, even though we might have been predisposed to resist this saturation. She quoted Marion as saying that "for all the individual differences in degree and form of perception, the ego never determines how a phenomenon presents itself".¹⁴⁹ Falke further asserts that "Marion sometimes refers to the self as the *adonne*, the gifted, because of this emphasis on *givenness*. This is the preferred term in *In Excess*, published in French in 2001. But in *Being Given*, published in 1997, and in an article entitled "The Saturated Phenomenon", originally published in 1992, Marion prefers to call the self a "witness".¹⁵⁰ This idea could also be transferred to the reader as "Witness".

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.257

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (see also, Marion, Jean-Luc, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, tr. Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2002, pp., 179–180.)

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.258

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Borrowing from Jyothi's thought, I would like to share a quote from an article she wrote, which will serve as a leap into my conclusion:

One of the golden principles of humanism says that there can be no growth of the self without an encounter with the other. It is important to remember that reading is a dialogic act not an introspective act. Reading is an openness to reality. In reading one is engaging with another self, because the other self is one's own unknown meaning.¹⁵¹

Throughout this work, we have endeavored to illustrate a compelling thesis: the interaction between the reader and the text culminates in the forging of a profound friendship. Drawing on the insightful perspectives of Wolfgang Iser and Cassandra Falke, we argue that this bond gives rise to an aesthetic presence that pervades the reader's consciousness, giving them the role of witness to the act of literary creation itself.

In our introductory exploration, we laid the groundwork for understanding the intricate dynamics of reader-text interaction. Through this lens, we set out to navigate the complexities of literary engagement, unravel the nature of the bond formed between reader and text, and delve deeply into the mechanisms by which texts come alive in the reader's mind. Drawing on the work of Iser and Falke, we explored the transformative power inherent in the act of reading.

The journey through chapters two and three unfolded as a testament to the richness and complexity of the reader-text relationship. We witnessed the myriad ways in which texts invite readers into dialogue and foster an intimate connection. We recognized that the act of reading is inherently subjective and multifaceted. Through the interplay of reader expectation and textual indeterminacy, we navigated the intricate swing between anticipation and surprise, recognizing that it is in this tension that the true magic of reading unfolds.

¹⁵¹ Jyothi Priya, A.R. , "The phenomenology of reading: a brief study of its features and its relevance to wolfgang iser's essay, "the reading process: a phenomenological approach", p.4.

As we arrive at the culmination of our journey, it becomes clear that the friendship forged between reader and text is not a static entity, but rather a dynamic process that evolves with each encounter. It is through the act of reading that we find ourselves transformed, enriched by the insights we gain from our literary companions. In the end, we are left with a profound appreciation of the transformative power of literature and the lasting friendships it fosters in the realm of the reader's imagination. This work has provided an insight into the contributions of Iser and Falke. However, it is not reduced to mere research or an in-depth study of their ideas.

I do not claim to have explained everything about these two scholars, but by revealing traces of their insight into the relationship between text and reader, I have forged a friendship between two minds separated by time. I am convinced that this human work, the fruit of my research, contains imperfections. But when Angelo Valastro reflects on the lyrics of Alda Merini (*A veces, Dios mata a los amantes porque no quiere ser superado en el amor,*) "Sometimes God kills lovers because he does not want to be surpassed in love," I hope his listeners will be patient enough to know why Falke claims that literature invites the lover's surrender,¹⁵² offering us an overwhelming experience if we decide to be "contaminated" by its unpredictable effect,¹⁵³ and the lover is none other than the reader.

In this work we have seen how reading is not just an act of solitary introspection, but a living dialogue with another self. This encounter transforms us, inviting us to new perspectives and deeper understanding. The friendship we form with texts is a testament to the deep human need for connection and growth, and reminds us that through literature we continue to evolve, enriched by every encounter with the written word. Marion could not be more right when he said that "we explain ourselves through the text, we go through it ... in short, strictly speaking, and we are told in it".¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Falke, Cassandra, *The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*, 2016, p.164.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.163.

¹⁵⁴ Marion, Jean-Luc, *God Without Being*, Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p.148.

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