

Phenomenological Bridge Building: Between Empathy and Archetypes in Fiction and Reality

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Abstract: This paper aims to uncover some of the important contributions the phenomenological method can offer to philosophical issues in literary studies. It leads us to the idea that the archetypes found in fiction are intuited phenomenologically. This idea is then linked to a social constructive attainment of meaning for reality. From the intersubjectivity provided by phenomenology, empathy with characters in fiction is then displayed as more than an intellectual activity, as it becomes known to have practical implications. It is framed as involving the same processes as the empathy we have with people in the real world. This equivalency allows for the plausibility of the notion that fiction-making is a necessary process for our interpretations of reality. It designates our involvement in fiction as beneficial to our experience of the real world and supports the notion that it can train us to empathize. Such training is displayed to be possible from phenomenology's role in the process of empathy. Phenomenology's method de-centers the Cartesian ego to prevent any impasse between internal consciousness and the external world. Since they are bridged together by intentionality, we learn that phenomenology is a method that can contribute to how we conceive of empathy.

Keywords: archetypes, empathy, fiction, intentionality, phenomenology

Introduction

One value of fiction, which we can consider as stories derived from the imagination instead of strict historical fact, is the genre's ability to provide an understanding of the human condition.¹ The focus of this paper is the correlation of this ability of fiction and phenomenology's intersubjective sense of meaning attainment for empathy. To prove this correlation, this paper will explore if fictional value should be considered a derivative of the reader's recognition of archetypes. Through this study the author aims to show that empathy is not limited to 'real' experience, but also takes place when readers consume fiction.² The paper will show that phenomenology's intentionality – that which bridges internal consciousness and the external world – is

¹Gary Saul Morson, *Prosaics and Other Provocations: Empathy, Open Time and the Novel* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), p. 199.

²Readers, watchers, consumers etc.

what allows empathy with fiction to take place. To support this point, this paper will link archetypes to empathy by arguing that the bridging through intentionality is also imperative for how archetypes are created and detected. This not only highlights the reciprocal relations between the processes of empathy and archetype recognition, but also frames them as phenomenological processes. Fiction-making and -consuming, whether through writing, interpreting a story, or through visual means, becomes more than just a literary activity. It should also be framed as an imperative process for our interaction with and understanding of the physical world. To further articulate phenomenology's role in the attainment of fictional meaning and empathy, this paper will first aim to uncover evidence that fiction's semantic force can equate to that of reality. The evidence for this is linked to the notion that the empathy derived from both is possible through a phenomenological experience of archetypes. The second aim of this paper will frame fiction-making as necessary for the building of our conception of reality, particularly the physical world. Finally, the paper will show how phenomenology provides constructive insights into the intersubjective nature of meaning and empathy found in fiction, and its ability to interpret and transmit physical reality.

Social Construction of Meaning Through Archetypes

Our interaction with fiction involves the same faculties of imagination that allow us to interpret reality. Both require phenomenology to not only support this notion, but in turn lead to the consideration that our experience of reality is also an intellectual 'reading'. Consuming fiction can thus strengthen our ability to empathize with people. Gary Saul Morson states that: 'What literature generally and novels in particular are good for is an education in the skills of empathy. [...] Readers practice empathy. And what one practices one finds easier to do and, eventually, does by habit.'³ The intentionality involved in the method of phenomenology is what allows such education to take place. Its consideration of mental acts extending beyond themselves towards otherness allows us to derive the indirect and implicit experience of archetypes as pre-given universal paradigms.⁴ It does this through its capacity to bridge experience of internal mind and external reality through a non-reductive process; one that does not reduce the external world to objects defined by causal explanations.⁵

Alfred Schutz considered phenomenology to be a method that socially constructs reality via interactions among different people, who use symbols in order to interpret each other and give meaning to perceptions and experiences.⁶ The phenomenological method reveals the importance of such symbols, or archetypes, for empathy in fiction and we will

³ Morson, pp. 208-9.

⁴ Thomas R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Alfred Schutz, *Structures of the Life-World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).



see below, in reality as well. Phenomenological descriptions are able to bring the implicit awareness of archetypes to reflective consciousness.⁷ Such descriptions involve intentionality of consciousness, as mentioned above, which allows for the bridging of internal consciousness and external reality. Such bridging corresponds to the nature of how we empathize. As archetypes are not found in the external world in a physical sense, but are instead intuited, they are detected through the same imaginative requirements as empathy. We do not objectify a character or person in order to empathize with them. Rather, when we encounter another person in the world or a character in a text to empathize with, we can identify with them from within. This means we experience phenomenologically what it is like, for example, to be of a different sex or another social class.⁸ It is important to note that this takes place through phenomenological intuition, not objectification. Therefore, the social recognition of archetypes in reality or fiction, provided by phenomenology, initiates the 'sparks' required in the mind for empathy to take place. They outline or signal the situation in which a person or character finds themselves, leading to the subjective process of empathy in the 'reader', as argued and explained further below.

Phenomenology makes the detection of archetypes possible because, for this method, meaning involves a relationship between language and the world in which archetypes are pre-given. Meaning, under phenomenological terms, is thus not a mere linguistic affair. Without consciousness providing the archetypes from which we gain meaning, there would be no world within which phenomenology could exist. Phenomenological meaning thus starts with consciousness, which suggests that the mind creates meaning. Mind first creates the universal archetypes that we eventually connect to in reality, in turn providing the building blocks for empathy.⁹

We now see that the intuition involved with phenomenology provides for the social construction of archetypes and the sociality needed for empathy. We do not create and detect archetypes directly, nor in isolation, but rather we give them their meaning socially. It is such sociality that also allows empathy to take place. If one is to empathize with someone else, they must first have had a similar experience or have been in a similar situation as the person with whom they empathize. This would have to be a first-hand and direct experience to begin with, whereas the empathizing itself functions in the same way as the experience of archetypes. Both require indirect and mutual experience through intuition. Therefore, the reason the fictional meaning of archetypes is worth investigating is because it holds answers to how we empathize with others in real life, while showing

⁷ Flynn, p. 120.

⁸ Morson, p. 208.

⁹ Flynn, p. 109.



that our epistemological capabilities are limited. We can dwell on the notion that written history can degenerate into fiction, and fiction can degenerate into myth.¹⁰ When we do so, we consider that the latter is due to a lack of fiction-making capability. This notion is important for how we construct reality and our capacities to empathize. Now that we have seen how archetypes are socially constructed, it is thus important to look at what role they play in the social construction of reality through phenomenological means. Such investigations question the scientific validity of empirical and historical inquiry and method, which makes this paper critical.¹¹ It is also a speculative paper, in that it aims to show that all text and experience, whether historical, scientific, or fictional, should always normatively contain meaning in a phenomenological sense.¹²

Meaning's reliance on archetypes can be framed to be true for fiction and reality as well. Archetypes work as universal symbols that generate meaning in a phenomenological manner by relying on intuition instead of rationale.¹³ In the spirit of idealism, this paper recognizes that the meaning of reality derives from the mind, and so the mind is considered to engrain archetypes into the otherness of reality. This process occurs through the intentionality found in the method of phenomenology and takes place in order for archetypes to be recognized and retrieved, and eventually provides for the grasping of reality by the mind. Intentionality can be understood as the 'boomerang effect' of meaning, which echoes the social learning theory on meaning, by claiming meaning is activated by the mind through archetypes. Intentionality thus holds an intersubjective view of meaning attainment and this is demonstrated in Dilthey. For Dilthey, no objectification of otherness involves an appearance of anything that is not already also found in the mental life of the subject doing the apprehending.¹⁴

The Kantian notion that our capacity to recognize archetypes was constructed in our minds before our experience of reality suggests the mechanism by which humans generate meaning from the world. Since meaning is derived from the mind, this implies that the mind needs to see itself in reality. The mind does this through the familiarity of the archetypes it creates, by applying them to the otherness of reality. And so the mind's fictionalization of reality depends on the detection of archetypes. This shows that the imagination is what truly sets out to comprehend the world. Fiction does not make direct explicit statements on reality or life in the way that science does. Rather, through phenomenological intuition, fiction indirectly expresses

¹⁰ Peter Brooks, 'Symbolization and Fiction-Making', edited reconstruction of taped presentation at Wellfleet meetings, August 28, 1972 in *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*, eds. Robert Jay Lifton, Eric Olson (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishers, 1974), pp. 214-230 (p. 220).

¹¹ William Dray, *The Philosophy of History* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 2.

¹² Maurice Mandelbaum, 'Some Neglected Philosophical Problems Regarding History' in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XLIX, No. 10, (1952), pp. 317-329, (p. 317).

¹³ Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p. 154.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History, Selected Works. Vol. 4*, eds. Rudolph A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 253.

and reveals experience through archetypal forms of metaphor, symbolism and imagery.¹⁵ The archetype — “The Loss of Innocence”, is an example of how archetypes are universal motifs in every culture. For example, a virgin is violated and loses his or her 'purity' through some sort of sexual act, as seen in the myth of Europa. Not only do archetypes take common forms in all modern cultures, but they also can be demonstrated to have existed in cultures throughout history. In Jungian terms, archetypes are considered to exist in the collective consciousness, which refers to a layer deeper than the personal unconscious mind.¹⁶ In their universal collectivity, they can be characterized as the collective codes that Barthes identifies as the content which generate meaning in text.¹⁷ Archetypes are thus not found in a conscious brain, but rather exist in an unconscious does not exist by virtue of personal experience, but is rather inborn and intuited. It represents modes and contents of behaviour that contingently exist equally in everyone.¹⁸

We need to recognize, however, that archetypes are not always equally found in fiction or reality for everyone. Some individuals lack the capacity to detect them, leading to a lack of empathy with others, and an inability to connect to the archetypes to which others may be attuned. As discussed in the next section, this requirement for intersubjective meaning attainment, and consequently empathy, is a phenomenological claim.

Archetypes Through Intentionality

The intuition of archetypes is possible because they are the universal *motifs* for human recognition. They exist primordially as archaic types accompanied by universal images that are always expressible in fiction.¹⁹ Archetypes function in tandem with the phenomenological principle of intentionality, which is used to inform what is unique about mental acts. This uniqueness is based on the idea that such acts extend beyond themselves toward others.²⁰ Such extending occurs in the same way that archetypes implant themselves in otherness in order to interpret such alterity. Archetypes and intentionality thus share the desire of overcoming otherness, and so phenomenology, as a method, can help us understand how empathy works in fiction and the real world.

As mentioned, intentionality coheres with the function of archetypes, and we will later see, with the function of empathy as well. It overcomes the Cartesian problem of having a gap between the ideas in our mind and the external world they supposedly

¹⁵ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory 3rd Ed. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 98.

¹⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works, Vol. Nine The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, eds. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 3.

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Inaugural Lecture at the College de France, 7 January 1977' in *Oxford Literary Review* 4 (I), 1979.

¹⁸ Jung, p.3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁰ Flynn, p. 17.



resemble.²¹ Due to intentionality, phenomenology can function in a non-Cartesian sense. We do not have a view from nowhere, or a 'third eye', to attempt to know the external world. Rather, from the perspective of phenomenology, since we are not trapped inside our minds, we do not have a problem of trying to bridge internal and external reality, nor with empathizing with others. We do not have an inside or outside for consciousness. Instead, conscious acts intend, or analogously comprehend objects and archetypes already in the world. Our way of intending objects differs depending on how we conceive, perceive, recollect, or imagine them internally.²² When we follow an intuition we do so through internal processes. When we intuit an archetype, leading to its eventual social apprehension, it does not matter whether the archetype corresponds to a situation or a person that is fictional or one that is real. Rather, what matters is that the meaning the archetype expresses is successfully intuited from the style the archetype requires to be delivered and then detected. We will see below that this requires more quality than quantity, thus style over fact, and so phenomenology over rationality.

The psyche's need to assimilate reality *via* archetypes is thus satisfied through the universality derived from fiction-making. We can particularly see in every culture the need for storytelling and narrative, in that they allow archetypes to reduce experience to the inner events of the psyche.²³ The importance of this fictionalized reduction of reality by archetypes leads to a de-centering of the Cartesian subject. This knowledge of otherness converts into empathy, as empathy derives from this reduction and provokes the mind to adapt to the reality that stands before it. Such a reduction also provides self-knowledge, expressed by Jung as the: 'symbolic expressions of the inner unconscious drama of the psyche [...] accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection that is mirrored in the events of nature.'²⁴

Empathy Through Style Not Fact

The potency of an archetype in fiction is not dependent on a fiction being scientifically true or false. Rather, it depends on whether or not archetypes are expressed in literature effectively through style and variation, what Barthes refers to as flavour.²⁵ This idea of fictional flavour is important for empathy. As noted in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the empathy a reader experiences with fiction is considered to derive from the pity and fear aroused in them. This takes place from the successful style and imitation of the work by the writer.²⁶ Ricoeur assents to this, as whether a text is fictional, empirical, or historical, it always contains archetypal symbols when containing narrative. Every symbolic system adds to the creation of reality by shaping our mute and formless

²¹ Ibid., p. 19.

²² Ibid., p. 20.

²³ Jung, p. 5.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁵ Barthes, p. 368.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.3.3.html>> Chapter XVI, [accessed 18 March 2016]



experience of temporality through employment, whether such experience is empirically factual or not.²⁷ Fiction thus transfigures reality through the 'boomerang effect' of meaning provided by archetypes. Archetypes collide, intercept, and eventually infect the real world in order to remake it for the sake of the mind.²⁸ This involves the phenomenological de-centering of the subject mentioned above. Readers of text can empathetically re-experience thoughts, feelings, and intentions of past individuals. It does not matter if individuals are fictional or not, since experience can be thought of as being organized *via* the symbolic structures archetypes provide.²⁹ This phenomenological experience is hermeneutical. We can seek in a text this structural organization provided by archetypes by identifying a text's power of projecting itself outside of its textual boundary. This reflects its capacity to provide a fictional world for us to empathize with.³⁰ What is important is that we realize that the semantic force and empathetic power of a text is not limited to what Ricoeur referred to as a romantic congeniality of the subjectivities between the author and reader.³¹ We need to consider, rather, that this power of congeniality should extend to the empathy the reader can have with characters in a text, not just the author's intentions. This congeniality should also extend to the empathy we have with individuals in the 'real' world.

Intentionality's Bridge to the Internal and External by Archetypes

By claiming that reality's meaning derives from the lacing of reality with archetypes, fiction can be characterized as reflecting on human experience. It confronts us with the phenomenological challenge of studying the relationships between psychological and aesthetic forms.³² The symbolic fabrication involved in fiction-making is artistic, because it is based on the archetypes coupled with our process of perception. The latter process can thus be considered to involve the inner re-creations that human consciousness requires in order to process the experience of the world.³³ Peter Brooks contends that as humans we use our 'status' as a self-consciousness, as status we believe no other creature possesses, in order to process phenomena to understand the world and give it meaning.³⁴ Fictions thus begin at the link between consciousness and otherness (the latter of which can be equated with the unconscious), as we invent in order to make sense of that which is alien, in turn processing that which is non-mind.³⁵

The root of fiction is metaphor, and metaphor allows us to convert phenomena into

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, 'On Interpretation in Philosophy' in *France Today*, ed. A. Montefiore, (Cambridge University Press, 1983) in *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁹ David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge USA: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishing, 1996), p. 87.

³⁰ Ricoeur, pp. 152-3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³² Brooks, p. 228.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

³⁵ Brooks, p. 216.



meaningful experiences. Metaphor thus undermines the semantic difference between reality and fiction. It allows fiction-making to be conceived to involve a transfer of items from the phenomenal world of reality into language. Fiction is thus necessary for understanding the world, because it involves the metaphor needed to express the world through language. Without fiction it would be impossible to speak of the world outside of the mind, and this is a phenomenological idea. As we saw above, meaning is a relationship between the world and language, so meaning starts with consciousness. This suggests that the mind, rather than reality, creates meaning.³⁶ The conversion or transference that metaphor provides between phenomenal items and language can be understood to allow the mind to discourse, fictionalize, and in turn live in the world.³⁷ Humans by nature are thus fiction-makers, as they need to create language and signs to make sense of everything. This includes the world, which in turn designates humans as the bearer of systems of sense making signs.³⁸

No Archetype: No Bridge

Since humans are by nature fiction-making creatures, an inability to create fiction makes us incapable of attaining meaning in the world or achieving self-meaning. It signifies the incapacity to identify or relate to archetypes. We have seen that archetypes are needed to base the meaning we receive through the lens of fiction. Without archetypes to interpret reality, we suffer from a 'psychic numbing', which reflects the diminishment of one's symbolization of reality. It is a condition that is due to a lack of connection with the archetypes the mind has created to understand the world. Without the phenomenological detection of these archetypes, a person suffers from a lack of imagination. Such imagination is needed to prevent reality's overliteralization by the mind.³⁹ To comprehend reality in a literal sense thus results from a deficiency of fiction making capability, and so results in the acceptance of reality as myth over fiction. In turn, this deficiency causes an individual who suffers from such 'psychic numbing' to lack empathy. They accept a view of the world as a mythical sacred text in which everything is justified *via* a static monolithic fiction.⁴⁰ Such a fiction is akin to the meta-narratives that post-modern authors warn about, which consider the danger of our reality turning into fiction and eventually myth.⁴¹ It is a danger that involves reality becoming meaningless by being reduced to a static and unchanging picture without any archetypes to be detected. By ensuring the mind's connection to archetypes, a plurality of fiction, one which interprets reality intersubjectively, can thus be considered a maintainer of reality. This in turn designates fiction itself as having cognitive value, as it can play more than just an

³⁶ Flynn, p. 109.

³⁷ Brooks, p. 216.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁴¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, 'The Concept of Enlightenment from Dialectic of Enlightenment' (London: Verso, 1979) in *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, eds. Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 209.



emotional role.⁴² Through the creation of meaning by expressing the archetypes that the mind processes as reality, fiction can be considered that which makes us human. It should then be framed as humanity's major cognitive activity for meaning attainment.⁴³ Psychic numbing is thus the expression of a purely literal interpretation of the world. It is the consequence of an individual that is no longer capable of performing the re-creational human function of fiction-making. The phenomenological method's capacity to change our perspectives and embrace intersubjectivity could therefore assist in one's connection to archetypes and eventual empathy with mankind.⁴⁴

Now we can understand one's lack of inner-re-creation as a 'psychic numbing' that involves a lack of archetype detection. We see it as a desymbolization of a shrinking ego; a deficiency classified as a form of neurosis.⁴⁵ It reflects a decrease in one's mental capacity to symbolize. Those who suffer from it remain disconnected. They lack the meaning and empathetic activity provided by the phenomenological re-centering of ego assisted by archetypes. So they suffer from an incapacity to confront or feel experiences that contain archetypal significance. This involves a lack of the fiction creation capabilities to communicate such experience.⁴⁶ The desensitization brought on from 'psychic numbing' thus reveals an interference with one's formative mental functions of creating inner archetypal forms. Such a process involves the ongoing act of fictional symbolization to comprehend reality through an inner sense of symbolic relation over space and time.⁴⁷ The evolution of this symbolic fiction-making process can be traced back to the inner imagery we create to represent reality from birth. We psychologically start off as an organism with a rudimentary image of reality already created before experience. This is a concept attributed to Kenneth Boulding, which for Robert J. Lifton reflects the mind's anticipation for the interaction with reality and the environment.⁴⁸ Such anticipation is inherent in the use of storytelling. Storytelling is evidence of a fiction-making tool found in every culture to assist in a child's comprehension of the concept of reality. Lifton summarizes this process as involving a sequence from a psychological direction (inchoate image) to pictorial images representing the world, and finally to eventual archetypal symbolization.⁴⁹

The evolution of meaning thus requires the archetypes to be created in the mind

⁴² Ricoeur, p. 142.

⁴³ Robert J. Lifton, in Peter Brooks, 'Symbolization and Fiction-Making', edited reconstruction of taped presentation at Wellfleet meetings, August 28, 1972 in *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers*, ed. Robert Jay Lifton with Eric Olson (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishers, 1974), pp. 214-230 (p. 223).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁵ Robert J. Lifton, 'The Sense of Immortality: On Death and the Continuity of Life' in *Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers* ed. Robert Jay Lifton with Eric Olson, (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishers 1974) pp. 271-287 (p. 283).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.



for symbolization and eventual attainment of meaning, a process revealed by the phenomenological method. We can accept that exercising this symbolization and thus connecting to archetypes through consuming and creating fiction should have therapeutic benefits for those who lack the capacity to empathize. In the practical case, it can assist 'psychically numb' individuals in becoming empathetic by training them to experience empathy. This can take place through the recognition of archetypal symbols in texts, and relating them to characters for subsequent empathy. Such 'psychically numb' individuals could then create a fictional reality to be comprehended, instead of a mythical one to be fixed to. The 'psychically numb' narcissist, for example, could benefit from reading or writing fiction to improve their empathetic capacity. This could be done by providing an outlet or 'ledge' outside of their 'specialness', and help them empathetically observe themselves from the point of view of others.⁵⁰ Richard Kearney considers that writing fiction provides such self-reflection. It teaches writers to reduce trauma to traces, and the writer can then safely confront the trauma by revisiting the events as 'hauntings'.⁵¹ This notion supports Ricoeur's idea that self-understanding is always mediated by texts, signs, and symbols.⁵² Reading fiction today should thus be considered to increase our capacity to empathize in the real world. Kidd and Castano even demonstrated that it increased self-reported empathy, allowing us to expand knowledge of others to assist us in recognizing our existence as similar to theirs. They state: 'fiction may change how, not just what, people think about others [...] because it forces us to engage in mind-reading and character construction.'⁵³

Fiction Over Fact

The transfiguration of reality by fiction is thus able to prevent the limiting of truth to empirical verification or logical coherence. We no longer need to equate reality nor experience with an empirical one. Truth can rather be re-worked through fiction.⁵⁴ This re-working depends on phenomenology's approach to reality, which allows fiction to be understood to imitate human action. Fiction refers to the in-born collective pre-understanding of action's meaningful structures and temporality. Fiction also contributes beyond the text by remaking reality and praxis through the aiming at a horizon of a new reality we can call a world.⁵⁵ The productive reference fiction provides thus shows that human experience is always being shaped. Such shaping can now be seen to take place with the help of archetypes and their imaginative recognition and reconstruction into fiction.⁵⁶ The world of the text is thus capable of intervening in the world of action, taking

⁵⁰ Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 126.

⁵¹ Richard Kearney, *Writing Trauma: Catharsis in Joyce, Shakespeare and Homer*. (Sydney: ABC Religion and Ethics, 19 July, 2012 <<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/07/19/3549000.htm>> [accessed 13 March 2016].

⁵² Ricoeur, p. 147.

⁵³ David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, 'Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind' in *Sciencexpress*, 3 October 2013 <<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/early/recent>> [accessed 10 March 2016] (p. 1).

⁵⁴ Ricoeur, p. 147.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

place in reality by allowing for its transfiguration.⁵⁷

The power of fiction to configure reality was noted as far back as Aristotle. For Aristotle characters are uncovered through action, and so action is transfigurably by fiction. This means that fictional actions can still 'move' the reader, as the reader is at the centre of fiction's meaning and vitality. Fiction imitates emotions such as fear and pity, which leads to sympathy *for* and empathy *with* the characters and leads to catharsis. Catharsis is the exercising rather than the exorcising of the reader's emotions.⁵⁸ This is at the centre of the empathetic role played by fiction, as readers can train and refine their emotional balance through their connection to characters. By empathizing with characters through catharsis, readers partake in fictional worlds. Tragedies in fiction thus imitate actions that imply that its characters possess qualities of thought and personality which qualify their actions.⁵⁹ Fiction can thus phenomenologically express the universal through a manipulation of archetypal significance in the text. History or science, on the other hand, are limited to the particulars of the past or present.⁶⁰ This is yet another reason why the phenomenological method is valuable – it reveals fiction's capacity to give us important knowledge of the human condition.

Why is It a Good Idea to De-centre Our Egos?

Since the task of phenomenology is to provide descriptions that bring implicit awareness to reflective consciousness, which is immediate and precognitive, it counters the Cartesian ego.⁶¹ The catharsis derived from fiction can not only de-centre the author as the source of a text's meaning, but also the reader. It allows the reader to mould with fictional characters in order to empathize with them.⁶² This de-centered subject is the one that the twentieth-century phenomenological tradition has supported. This subject contributes to the notion of experience without a subject, a notion also defended by pragmatists, Critical Theorists, and post-structuralist thinkers.⁶³ The de-centered subject is one that we have seen experiences an empathy involving recognition of otherness, through the feelings they have for characters.⁶⁴ When we take this view of empathy and consider Dilthey's notion that 'transposition is transformation', we can understand the experience of otherness as a change in our position and point of view. It ultimately leads to a de-centering of ego and eventual change in oneself.⁶⁵ The de-centering of the ego through fiction consumption thus provides intersubjectivity. The same external reality experienced by different

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

⁵⁸ Barry, p. 21.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, Chapter VI.

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, p. 146.

⁶¹ Flynn, p. 120.

⁶² Aristotle, Chapter XVII.

⁶³ Martin Jay, 'The Lifeworld and Lived Experience' in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), pp. 91-104 (p. 101).

⁶⁴ Aristotle, Chapter XI.

⁶⁵ Dilthey, p. 253.

individual egos becomes reflected in the representational images they receive in their minds.⁶⁶ Each individual can be understood to grasp reality by constructing their own fiction in their own manner, and these constructions can be seen to be built on the universality of archetypes. The archetypes coalesce socially as different interpretations, phenomenologically creating objectivity via intersubjectivity. The importance of this phenomenological consciousness for revealing the connection between empathy and fiction takes place as knowledge of 'what it is like' to be someone else. To be able to develop the experience of 'what it is like' to be either a fictional character or a 'real' individual, thus confirms the necessity of archetypes in intersubjective experience.

We now see that the imagination brought on by fiction-making is what allows us to construct reality as past, present, or future.⁶⁷ Ricoeur frames history as a combination of fiction and conformity to historical documentation, in turn labeling history a form of interpretation.⁶⁸ This interpretative notion has so far been extended to the empirical reality of the present. Such de-centering can frame actions, whether fictional or real, as being understood through intuition.⁶⁹ Edmund Husserl's ideas on phenomenology concur, as the meaning of actions derive from intuition. He considered that the phenomenological tradition involves description over explanation of phenomena.⁷⁰ Phenomenology does not reduce the experience activated through fiction or from reality to an object, nor does it attribute meaning only to scientific truth derived from the natural attitude. Rather, phenomenology treats all experience as the experience of meaning.⁷¹ It does not aim at any causal or reductive explanations of consciousness.⁷² It aims rather to provide a descriptive account, which involves distinctions that can provide understanding of knowledge sources and not overlook the symbolic meaning archetypes provide.⁷³

Empathy's and Intersubjectivity's Concomitant Relationship

Phenomenology's main aim is not to de-centre the ego, because it only does so partially by still considering a transcendental ego as the source of meaning. Phenomenology is still considered to hold a subject-centred philosophy.⁷⁴ Phenomenology reveals the importance of fiction for empathy by involving a method that aims to reveal the mind's subjective structure through the subject *via* intentionality.⁷⁵ Phenomenology's

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶⁷ Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 283.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, p. 143.

⁶⁹ Dray, p. 12.

⁷⁰ Todd May, 'Foucault's Relation to Phenomenology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault Second Edition*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge USA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 284-311, (p. 287).

⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, *Positions, Translated by Alan Bass* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, original published in 1972), p. 30.

⁷² May, p. 307.

⁷³ Charles Siewert, 'Consciousness' in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), pp. 78-90 (p. 78).

⁷⁴ Gary Gutting, 'Foucault and the History of Madness' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault Second Edition*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge USA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 49-73 (p. 62).

⁷⁵ May, p. 300.



support of a transcendental ego can therefore be conceived as providing a locus for meaning.⁷⁶ It thus aims to show such meaning without explanatory reductionism nor with a complete de-centering of the ego.⁷⁷ As a result of such a non-reductive method, in phenomenology the ego is able to include the experience of others as empathetically represented. Since it does not reduce others to objects, the phenomenological experience involves the 'lived experiences' of others. It is not conceived as another object in reality, but as psychophysically constituted.⁷⁸ To be phenomenologically conscious of others is an irrational approach towards experiencing empathy. It is to involve a consciousness of otherness. In psychotherapy for example, it involves understanding the other's inner phenomenological world without standardized presuppositions or instruments.⁷⁹

The phenomenological consciousness thus requires fiction-making, in that empathetic experience is based on a method that involves a process in which Yalom states: 'one must "bracket" one's own world perspective and enter the experiential world of the other [...] that is what is meant by empathy [...] this phenomenological approach, which by definition is nonempirical.'⁸⁰ The recognition of others is a process for phenomenology that is bounded by one's own individuality.⁸¹ Empathy in the phenomenological sense is thus characterized as the conscious experience that involves others coming to one's own givenness. Not every individual perceives the world from the same perspective, nor do they fictionalize reality in the same manner. Rather, they have their own unique perspective to provide for the character of the experience of others.⁸² We thus consider others, even fictional characters whom we comprehend empathetically through fiction, as having value. They project experiences that intermingle into a whole that is intelligible and with meaning.⁸³

Fiction provokes identity creation through a phenomenological consciousness. This consciousness establishes an ethics based on whether or not actions conform to one's original personal character.⁸⁴ The phenomenological consciousness thus reveals the intersubjective experience of empathy by focusing on intentionality. It does this in order to identify the inter-relationships at play in the world's constitution.⁸⁵ It thus adopts a view of the human being that respects the intersubjective creation of meaning.⁸⁶ We have seen

⁷⁶ Gutting, p. 12.

⁷⁷ May, p. 307.

⁷⁸ Janet Donohoe, *Husserl on Ethics and Intersubjectivity: From Static to Genetic Phenomenology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 78.

⁷⁹ Yalom, p. 24.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5

⁸¹ Edith Stein, *The Collected Works of Edith Stein Volume Three: On the Problem of Empathy*, Third Revised Edition, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1989), p.103.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁸⁵ Dermot Moran, 'Let's Look at It Objectively: Why Phenomenology Cannot Be Naturalized' in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 72, *Phenomenology and Naturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 89-115 (p. 95).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.



this provided by the archetypal significance in fiction. Through the phenomenological consciousness we see meaning as being based in relation to otherness. Meaning, whether from fiction or from the reality we turn into fiction, is thus intersubjectively attained through a horizontal openness to otherness. This relies on an inherent built-in experience that does not limit meaning to empirical reality.⁸⁷ The world can be understood as not an exclusive product of the ego, but rather as intersubjective and available from each individual ego's perspective.⁸⁸ Husserl explicates this intersubjectivity of meaning and identity by stating: 'What is specifically peculiar to me as ego [...] purely in myself and for myself with an exclusive ownness, includes (my) every intentionality and therefore, in particular, the intentionality directed to what is other.'⁸⁹

The non-objectification of other life through intersubjectivity allows the self to see others, whether fictional or 'real', like itself, through empathy. For Stein it: "empathically grasps the acts in which it is constituted for itself."⁹⁰ From another person's point of view, one's self can thus obtain a higher psychic life that is horizontally constructed through the image the other has of one's self. It shows that empathy allows us to eventually grasp ourselves.⁹¹ For phenomenology, empathy can be considered responsible for the way all understanding, including our fictionalized comprehension of reality, takes place. Empathy, experienced through fiction, therefore can prepare us for the experience of reality and the empathy it requires.⁹² By acquainting readers with otherness, empathy can become known as coincident with the ego.⁹³ From this we can consider that there is always a co-presence of the otherness in the ego's constitution, which characterizes it as a dialogical plurality constituted by the fictions it encounters.⁹⁴ In re-thinking an agent's or character's thought, the meaning of the action connected to such thought is not comprehended without the perceiver's or reader's practical reasoning. Consumers of fiction, through a phenomenological consciousness, can thus see from the protagonist's point of view whether or not actions committed were appropriate.⁹⁵

Conclusion

This study began by highlighting the intellectual endeavors required for interpreting fiction and reality. It noted that they both require phenomenology for detecting archetypes in experience. We saw that meaning in fiction has more in common

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 109.

⁸⁸ Stein, p. 80.

⁸⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960 [1931]) p. 94.

⁹⁰ Stein, p. 81.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁹² Ibid., p. 76.

⁹³ Donohoe, p. 72.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹⁵ Dray, p. 12.



with that of reality when we consider that empathy can be derived from both. We also saw that phenomenology is the method required to realize this. When the mind encounters other individuals in the world, it fictionalizes them, along with the reality in which they are found. Fiction in turn creates a defensive filter between mind and reality, with the archetypes acting as the buffers such a filter provides. Fiction protects the mind from the overwhelming otherness of reality, but it also allows the mind to engage with that otherness. Such engagement, we have seen, takes place through a phenomenological consciousness, which orients the mind towards otherness non-reductively. In doing so, it provides for the empathy the mind experiences in the face of that otherness. The archetypes in fiction thus assist us in categorizing the elements in a fictional text, yet they must also be seen to assist in comprehension of those elements. This is why the archetypes should be considered to also function within our intake of reality.

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