

Filipendula Literaria: Applied Literary Studies

Ivan Rabinowitz

Summary

By definition, disengaged literary exegesis, vigorously pursued since the advent of Anglo-American New Criticism (and avidly recycled in various guises in the aftermath of the deconstructive spin), retreats from the prospect of integrating "art" and "life" (to revert to an older, belletristic idiom). It retreats, too, from the prospect of investing the discipline of literary studies with existential purpose or propensity. Although recent orientations such as ethnic and embodiment studies are routinely interfused with standard, often Levinasian, animadversions concerning moral and cultural circumstances and the amelioration of socio-political ills, the professional pursuit of interpretative fecundity compels their exponents to sorn upon the artefact and to treat the activity of reading ontolophagously – as an opportunity to infiltrate shopworn "theories" and viscid banalities into tedious and wearisome recensions of the literary text.

The article proposes an exegetical model which has its source in a desire to rediscover the paradoxes, perplexities, and polarities – the unaccountable amalgam of dispossession, intimacy, and spectatorship – inherent in the act of reading.

Beyond characterisation, beyond narrative progression, beyond action and reaction, even beyond the artifice of syntax and semantics, the reader is preoccupied with the singularity of consciousness as it seeks to organise experience. The article explores some of the ways in which consciousness is represented to consciousness, and some of the ways in which readers "model" consciousness in order to make it available to itself.

Opsomming

Onbetrokke literêre eksegeese, wat sedert die aanbreek van die Anglo-Amerikaanse New Criticism sterk steun geniet het (en geesdriftig onder die invloed van die dekonstruktiewe denke in verskillende vorme hergebruik is) vermy uiteraard die integrasie van "kuns" en "lewe" (as 'n ouer, belletristiese idioom hier ingespan mag word). Dit beweeg ook weg van die idee dat literatuurstudie as dissipline met eksistensiële doeleindes en neigings bekleed kan word. Onlangse oriëntasies soos etniese en vergestaltungstudie word in die gewone loop van sake versmelt met 'n standaard-, dikwels Leviniaanse, kritiek oor morele en kulturele omstandighede en die versagting van sosiopolitieke euwels, maar die professionele soeke na vertolkingsvrugbaarheid noop voorstanders van hierdie oriëntasies om alles moontlik uit

die artefak te neem en ontologies op die leesaktiwiteit te teer as 'n geleentheid om holruggeryde "teorieë" en banaliteite na saai en vermoeiende hersienings van literêre tekste te laat deursypel.

Hierdie artikel stel 'n eksegetiese model voor wat sy oorsprong vind in die begeerte om die paradokse, ingewikkeldhede en polariteite – die onverklaarbare vermenging van ontneming, intimiteit en toeskouerskap – wat onlosmaaklik deel van die leeshandeling is, te herontdek.

Oor die grense van karakterisering, narratiewe progressie, aksie en reaksie, en selfs die behendige gebruik van sintaksis en semantiek heen word die leser se aandag in beslag geneem deur die enkelvoudigheid van die bewussyn wat struktuur aan ervaring wil gee. Die artikel ondersoek enkele wyses waarop bewussyn aan bewussyn voorgestel word, en ook wyses waarop lesers die bewussyn "modelleer" om dit tot hul eie beskikking te stel.

Although all students of English literature harbour the illusion that they are engaged in “literary studies”, this fortunate circumstance does little to help us when we wish to understand the scope and nature of “literary studies” as a formal discipline in the humanities. And things are even worse for the formulation to the east of the colon in my title, since the parentage of an “applied literary studies” is still in question and is still full of problems.

The problems concern ethics, epistemology, and meaning. Although such categories are fraught with traps for the unwary, ranging from their dangerous proximity to cliché – their “so-whatness” – to their built-in levels of vagueness and incipient circularity, they offer a point of departure for an approach to reading commensurate with the ideals and principles of an “applied literary studies”.

The first category, ethics or moral philosophy, encompasses the relationship between “real-life” moral dilemmas and literature, as attested to by traditional literary canonicities and, for example, by the current emphasis on Levinasian analysis and interpretation. Shakespeare’s examination of the perilous ethics of murder, conflict and succession; Dostoevsky’s fables of hate, jealousy and revenge; Thomas Mann’s relentless contemplation of the aesthetics of desire in *Death in Venice*; Vladimir Nabakov’s allegory of allusion, new-world fantasy and perversion in *Lolita*; Dickens’s exploration of utilitarian philosophy in *Hard Times*; Mary Shelley’s examination of the morality of creating new forms of life in *Frankenstein*; Michael Ondaatje’s obliquely poetic analysis of the intersections between outrage and tenderness in *Anil’s Ghost*; the growing list of texts on bioethics, environmental philosophy and genethics: such works probe the premises of our moral imperatives and bring into special prominence the dangerous instability of moral discriminations.

The second category is concerned with the sources of knowledge and belief, knowledge acquisition and construction, as well as truth and justification, and with the kinds of knowledge appropriate to specific fields such as physics, mathematics, the humanities, the social sciences and religion.

The third category, “meaning”, carries with it the burden of centuries of discussion and debate, and is obviously far too elusive to be useful here. It enters the discussion, nevertheless, because “meaning” constitutes the irreducible core of literary studies, whether pure or applied.

I shall begin by considering some of the implications of a formulation that has fallen on hard times and has been actively shunned by Anglo-American textual professionals and exegetical fecundicists as “reductive”: the “moral of the story”. Elizabethan allegorists and Victorian novelists would have been pleased to know that their readers were interested in “the moral of the story”, since they were aware that the term “moral” represents a complex amalgam of ethical, religious and social conventions and injunctions predicated on specific political and social circumstances. But contemporary theorists sneer at what they see as easily accessible moral teachings; the opportunity to construct an exegetical interface between a text and its epiphenomenal apparition, a Lacanian allegory, say, or a Derridean dialysis, is an opportunity not to be missed, and is thought to be far more gratifying than the possibility that the text might be saying something *about* something.

The simple fact that works of literature are *about* something, and that they could be said to point to a moral, leads to two simple corollaries: that criticism should do justice to the consciousness of the writer; that it should be capable of modulating thought and perception.

If we were to accept the idea that, like the mathematical notion of an imaginary number, something called applied literary studies exists, we might come to believe that it has “been there all along, unobserved until we’d asked the right question” (du Sautoy 2004: 68-69). And we might come to realise that what passes for professional, academic literary interpretation is nothing other than the operation of an algorithm: input a text, add what is commonly called a “literary theory” or a socio-political allegory, make a calculation, and the function outputs an interpretation fit for a conference.

Difficulties arise from every quarter, though, and the notion of an applied literary studies hangs by a slender thread, as intimated in my title, *Filipendula Literaria*. Apart from the fact that words such as “consciousness” and “value” require clarification, there is the not inconsiderable matter of *how* the reader and the literary work are to be brought into meaningful contact. Clearly, the mere circumstance of being exposed to a particular work through the act of reading cannot be relied upon to bring about a relation between text and consciousness. Some propaedeutic apparatus, some body of principles intimately grounded in the qualia by which thoughts and sensations are experienced as constitutive of consciousness, is necessary to prompt and sustain our interest in the import and significance of a literary work.

How, then, might an “applied literary studies” earn its credentials, especially when such an approach must claim its territory outside the esoteric maunderings and omphalopsychitic preoccupations of “pure” critics who deal in advanced and abstracted exegeses specifically designed for academic consumption? Or, to put the matter more simply, how might the reader resist the depredations of the ontolophage, the ravenous exegetical entity that eats away the being of the text and the being of the reader?

One way to put an applied literary studies on a reasonably firm philosophical footing would be to follow the implications of Schopenhauer’s *principium individuationis*, the notion of “will”, the fundamental, unmediated impulse to live. For Schopenhauer, as Thomas Mann points out,

[t]he will was the ultimate, irreducible, primeval principle of being, the source of all phenomena, the begetter present and active in every single one of them, the impelling force producing the whole visible world and all life

The will, then, this “in-itself-ness” of things, existing outside time, space and causality, blind and causeless, greedily, wildly, ruthlessly demanded life, demanded *objectification*.

(Mann 1939: 6)

There is a correspondence between Schopenhauer’s principle of objectification and the authorial demand for representation, the urge to make explicit the qualia of consciousness. The intentionality of the author – restless, multiple, quickened with imaginatively construed experience – expresses itself, like the will, in the desire to produce that which replicates the urge to live. Shakespeare exploits the rise and fall of tragedy, the tragic pattern, in order to explore the life of the will as it finds expression in all its complex manifestations. His tragic heroes – at once splendid and vulnerable, grand and foolish – reflect the authorial desire to understand the subtle relationship between two domains: the domain of individual consciousness, what Gerald Edelman calls “the remembered present” (Edelman 2005: 8), and the domain of “ideas”, those conceptions and perceptions that give meaning and value to consciousness. Shakespeare explores and represents this relationship in order to make it possible for his audience to “feel what it is like to be” Lear, or Hamlet, or Macbeth.

By definition, disengaged literary exegesis – vigorously pursued since the advent of Practical Criticism and Anglo-American New Criticism (and avidly recycled in new guises in the aftermath of the deconstructive spin), retreats from the prospect of investing the discipline of literary studies with existential purpose or propensity, to revert to an older, belletristic idiom. Although recent orientations such as ethnic and embodiment studies are routinely interfused with observations about the state of the world and the diagnosis and amelioration of socio-political ills, the professional pursuit of interpretative fecundity has acted as a nourishing substrate for the depredations of the ontolophage, and has provided an opportunity to infiltrate

shopworn “theories” and viscid banalities into tedious and wearisome recensions of the text. It passes life by, and casts a cold eye on life and death. Applied literary studies seeks another trajectory. It begs for a set of principles and procedures which will point to a viable alternative to commentary.

The model proposed here has its source in the aesthetic *modulation* of experience, not in the naive notion of an unmediated transfer of consciousness from writer to reader.

In the simple utterance Shakespeare gives to Othello on the approach of “Brabantio, Roderigo, and others with lights and weapons”, “Keep up your bright swords”, for the dew will rust “em”, there is ample evidence of modulation in action. The words hold a vast number of attitudes, ideas and areas of experience in equilibrium, intermingling the pastoral and the martial, and intimating a perilous balance between war and peace, and between dignity and dissolution. The suggestion of ceremony; the empathetic understanding of the need to protect things loved and held dear; the awareness of impending change and despoliation; the aubade-like consciousness of the significance of the hour; the dangerous undercurrent of threat and counter-threat; the measured, melodic rhythm of the statement; the sense of acceptance in the face of natural processes: all these are brought together, not merely for the sake of the unfolding drama, but with the aim of creating an answering consciousness in the reader – not in the manner of a diffuse, inchoate and fundamentally unpredictable “reader response”, but as an *intended* way of modulating the qualia of consciousness.

The place where writing modulates being, and writing *becomes* being, is the locus gestured towards by Mallarmé when he urges us to rediscover the paradoxes and polarities – the strange amalgam of dispossession, intimacy, and spectatorship – inherent in the act of reading:

[B]eyond the narration created to imitate life in its confusion and vastness, there are no means by which to theatrically reproduce an action; except to rediscover by instinct and through elimination It is the eternal return of the exile, his heart filled with hope, to the earth which was forsaken by him but changed into an ungrateful one, now someone at the point where he must leave it voluntarily this time, where with a glance he surveys the illusions suggested to his youth by the beckoning of the native land.

(Mallarmé 1945: 174)

Writing is the “carrier”, being is the “signal”, that which is superimposed onto the carrier so that the characteristics of the signal *modulate* the writing.

In the words from *Othello*, the carrier does not begin life as a plain statement. Instead, its nuances and dimensions of meaning are partly conditioned by the reader’s prior intuitions and expectations about the character and fate of the figure of the tragic hero, the claustrophobic atmosphere of malign prejudice stirred up by Iago, and by the dignity and assurance of

Othello's early responses to Iago. There is a "real-life" moral dilemma in the air, held in suspension, as Othello utters his first words to those who have come to confront him. The moral problem is not paradigmatic or simple. It is not a question of who is right or wrong: Brabantio or Othello, the Venetian or the Moor. The moral predicament set forth in the words of the "carrier" statement involves the relative weighting of the auditor's values and preconceptions. Are we convinced of the "rightness", the appropriateness, of Othello's words, given our own conceptions of what is "proper" or "improper"? How much notice are we to take of our own impulses? Clearly, the first category specified at the outset of this discussion – ethics or moral philosophy – is already activated in the "carrier", awaiting modulation by a second category: the sources of knowledge and belief, knowledge acquisition and construction, truth and justification, that which directs and animates "being". And, equally, therefore, "meaning", the third category, appears to be a more complex amalgam of beliefs, conceptions and preconceptions than can be specified in a model in which there is an unmediated transference of consciousness from writer to reader.

George Steiner provides a clear indication of the need to investigate the relationship between these three categories: "great art", Steiner declares, "is not reserved for the specialist or the professional scholar ... it is best known and loved by those who live most intensely" (Steiner 1961: viii). Far from displacing or reducing the significance of direct human testimony in the perception and appreciation of art, Steiner affirms the place and power of life in making, judging and responding to aesthetic experience. Unlike reader-response theory, affective stylistics, or the retrieval of consciousness espoused by the Geneva School, an applied literary studies is pre-eminently concerned with desires and impulses, the "will to understand": that which compels us to make experience meaningful. Whereas affective stylistics observes and chronicles the making of meaning in the act of reading, applied literary studies, as a form of praxis, intervenes actively in the response of the auditor or reader by *remodulating* experience.

One of the most important features of the interaction between neural activity and consciousness is the notion of "discrimination", defined by Gerald Edelman as "[t]he capacity of conscious systems to categorize, distinguish, or differentiate among a multitude of signals or patterns in terms of integrated scenes and qualia" (Edelman 2005: 155).

Notwithstanding Edelman's unselfconscious appeal to metaphor and analogy, and the uneasy circularity of his formulation (not to mention the intractable vagueness inherent in the use of "in terms of", a slippery operator which conceals more than it reveals), the definition draws attention to the significance of integration and patterning in the life of the mind, characteristics which make it possible to be "conscious of being conscious", the distinguishing feature of higher-order consciousness (Edelman 2005: 116).

Clearly, the condition of "being conscious of being conscious" applies in equal measure to both writer and reader. In the act of reading, the reader is

aware of a doubling of consciousness: a sense of being conscious of being conscious *and* an awareness of the writer's consciousness (being conscious of being conscious). By the same token, the writer is aware of being conscious of an *imagined* reader, an awareness which entails intimations of the reader's experience of being conscious of being conscious. It is obvious, here, that an infinite regress is at hand, and that any attempt to describe such intricate doublings and redoublings is in danger of being overwhelmed by its own figurations and rhetorical ambitions. And yet the process outlined above is decidedly "ordinary". It takes place when readers read and writers write.

Discriminations of consciousness are necessarily embedded in questions of axiology, just as values are animated and given substance by subjective, qualitative phenomena. In Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, for example, the "carrier", the raw material of the novel, is modulated and remodulated by the experience of reading, the "signal" being derived from a wide range of subjective, qualitative impulses, each with its own level of embeddedness in moral precepts and inherited dispositions of value and ethical significance. The Nabokovian genre of the puerotic novel – with its puns, esoteric inter-literary allusions, parodic gestures, its uninhibited bricolage of puzzles and games for the thoroughly modern intellectual – unsettles received notions of "proper" fiction and the transitive, moral purpose of reading. The central moral conundrum has its source in the insistent, insidious way in which the mode of narration draws the reader into the perspective – the gaze – of the protagonist, Humbert Humbert.

The experience of "what it is to be like" Humbert Humbert is not a direct and unmediated consequence of Nabokov's ability to represent an imagined situation. Thus Humbert Humbert, the alienating and alienated protagonist of the novel, forever attempting to command a distanced, quasi-satirical view of himself in relation to the dangerously fragile culture of the New World, far from being only a "character in a novel", an *object* of analysis and moral critique, is a *subject* of consciousness, a fabulation arising from the will, embodying the demand for Schopenhauerian "in-it-selfness", "existing outside time, space and causality, blind and causeless, greedily, wildly, ruthlessly demand[ing] life" (Mann 1939: 6). The fabulation, in other words, has a life of its own. It is not a mere consequence of reading, a polite and suitably abstract "response" to reading. It is an animating presence, derived principally from the demanding arrogance of will.

Reading articulates the representation of consciousness to consciousness – the modelling of consciousness that makes consciousness available to consciousness. The process of representing consciousness to consciousness – modelling the model – is not a direct, linear sequence. Instead, as Richard Dawkins explains in his account of the way in which "nervous systems exploit the massive redundancy of all sensory information", there is a sense

in which “information is *surprise* value, measured as the inverse of expected probability” (Dawkins 1999: 259):

Redundancy is the opposite of information, a measure of unsurprisingness, of old-hatitude. Redundant messages or parts of messages are not informative because the receiver, in some sense, already knows what is coming. Newspapers do not carry headlines saying, “The sun rose this morning”. That would convey almost zero information. But if a morning came when the sun did not rise, headline writers would, if any survived, make much of it. The information content would be high, measured as the surprise value of the message. Much of spoken and written language is redundant

Everything about the world is signalled as *change*, and this is a major economy ... sense organs are set up to signal, economically, the discontinuities in the world; and the brain, assuming correctly that the world doesn't change capriciously and at random, uses the information to construct an internal virtual reality in which the continuity is restored.

(Dawkins 1999: 259-261)

In this model of consciousness, the perception of *change* constitutes information, while that which is already known is “logged” and held in suspension in order to supply an illusion of continuity and wholeness. In *Lolita*, the ethical dimensions of the subject are known, “logged” and understood. What is new – or, in Dawkins's terms, what constitutes “change” – is the reader's *awareness* of being drawn into the gaze of the protagonist, *and* the uncanny doubling of consciousness that this inevitably entails. The reader, acutely aware of the perceptual pressure of Nabokov's intellectual dominance, tries to escape the unsurprising, stereotypical responses expected of the *implied* reader – an aesthetic construct fashioned by Nabokov to disoblige the “real” reader. The reader, like the astronomer depicted in Camille Flammarion's woodcut, *L'Atmosphere meteorologie populaire*, breaks through the seductive shell of the known, the *already logged*, to arrive at an understanding of the fundamental mechanisms that lie behind, and begins to observe his or her own responses. Those observations, in turn, are “signals” of change, indices of being, modulating the writing and animating the act of reading by adding and subtracting discriminations of feeling and value in relation to fluctuations of consciousness.

For Lear in his madness the intimation that change is imminent is reflected in a shift from verse to prose. The transition is not *caused* by his descent into madness; it is an amalgam of the desire to transform experience, to separate himself from the past, and to achieve a new understanding his predicament and place in the world. As Steiner points out, “the prose in *King Lear* is a complete tragic medium and lies at the centre of the play. It shows virtues which differ from those of dramatic blank verse not in degree but in essence ... the weight of suffering lies with the prose” (Steiner 1961: 256-257). Lear, “having been wronged by fair but treacherous speech” (Steiner 1961: 258), attempts to transform his syntax, to separate his words from

their roots in deception and deceit, and to condense something pure and uncontaminated from the monstrous defilement of language to which he has been forced to bear witness.

Both *Death in Venice* and *Lolita* compel the reader to engage in intricate and fluctuating choices and changes. In Thomas Mann's novella, the morally and aesthetically fastidious Gustave Aschenbach, exemplar of a strict inner harmony rendered palpable in an aspiration towards the stylistic correlatives of simplicity, symmetry and austerity, is acutely aware of an irresolvable paradox: that "moral fibre, surviving the hampering and disintegrating effect of knowledge", strengthens "the hold of the evil, the forbidden, and the ethically impossible" (Mann 1966: 18). Conventional criticism might isolate Aschenbach as an autonomous subject of close analysis – a "character", in other words – offering conjectures about his motives, tensions, ideals and aspirations, and positing claims and counterclaims concerning the thematic dimensions of the novella. An applied literary studies does no such thing. Instead of treating Aschenbach as a "person" to be spectated, spoken about, and pronounced upon, with arch conjectures concerning his "motives", "personality" and propensities, an applied literary studies would consider the perceptual, ethical, and aesthetic changes, or modulations, that would have to be accommodated and understood by the reader in order to build up a picture of what it would be like to *be* Aschenbach.

Fortuitously, *Death in Venice* presents a number of telling episodes which describe what it feels like to be conscious of being conscious; prescient evocations, in fact, of qualia in action. One such episode takes place early in the novella, when the narrator contemplates the inner landscape of the "solitary":

A solitary, unused to speaking of what he sees and feels, has mental experiences which are at once more intense and less articulate than those of a gregarious man *Sights and impressions which others brush aside with a glance, a light comment, a smile, occupy him more than their due; they sink silently in, they take on meaning, they become experience, emotion, adventure.* Solitude gives birth to the original in us, to beauty unfamiliar and perilous – to poetry. But also, it gives birth to the opposite: to the perverse, the illicit, the absurd.

(Mann 1966: 29; my emphasis)

"They sink in, they take on meaning, they become experience, emotion, adventure". There is no mention of a hierarchy of experiences ranging from the quotidian to the elevated. *All* sensations have an intrinsic potentiality – the capacity to blossom into "meaning ... experience, emotion, adventure". Of course, in a post-romantic age accustomed to extravagant claims for the excursive power of the imagination, such a formula may well sound commonplace, even trite. But Mann goes beyond a mere enumeration of

experiences: he points to the perilous intermingling of moral, sensual, and aesthetic categories of being. The danger, as with Humbert Humbert, is that the reader is goaded into accepting, even luxuriating in, the gaze of the protagonist. The appeal to perceptions rich and strange; the prior intimations of classical austerity, symmetry and moral rectitude; the emphasis on Aschenbach's credo of "forbearance in the face of fate" (Mann 1966: 15); his obsessive search for a way of comprehending, and justifying, the realisation that the spiritual is apprehended through the physical: these factors tend to distract attention from the ethical conundrum which lies at the heart of the novel.

The trajectory of Aschenbach's incapacity, his inability to direct his consciousness towards anything other than the object of his desire, Tadzio, is also the history of the reader's evolving and deepening involvement in an alien milieu, one propagated by an entirely fictional dispensation.

Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, too, is a study in change. Its drama of mutability – forensic, biological, chemical, social, personal, political, geological, archeological, atmospheric – lacerates the land and the lives of the protagonists. Anil changes her country and gives up her name; the bones of the dead, reflecting their sullen, surreptitious migrations, are transubstantiated within the enshrouding earth; "Art burns, dissolves"; destinies shift; statues buckle and fall; people build and break allegiances in response to nameless terrors and fathomless intrigues.

In an interview with Alvin Toffler in 1964, Vladimir Nabokov emphasises the close correlation between the "pleasures of writing" and the "pleasures of reading":

[The pleasures of writing] correspond exactly to the pleasures of reading, the bliss, the felicity of a phrase is shared by writer and reader: by the satisfied writer and the grateful reader, or – which is the same thing – by the artist grateful to the unknown force in his [sic] mind that has suggested a combination of images and by the artistic reader whom this combination satisfies.

... I could never explain adequately to certain students in my literature classes, the aspects of good reading – the fact that you read an artist's book not with the heart (the heart is a remarkably stupid reader), and not with your brain alone, but with your brain and spine. "Ladies and gentlemen, the tingle in the spine really tells you what the author felt and wished you to feel."

(Nabokov 1964)

The artist and "artistic reader": Nabokov's perceptive formulation lies at the heart of an applied literary studies. The reader is not regarded merely as a "responder" to the aesthetic artefact, or as a "co-determiner" of literary meaning, but as the *intended* recipient of aesthetic endeavour, an equal arbiter in the evolving energies of the creative process. The idea of the "artistic reader" is a fundamental precondition for the act of writing, since the "artistic reader" – like the "narratee" invoked by Gerald Prince (Prince

1973) – is an aesthetic construct, part of the complex amalgam of focalisations that give the mode of narration its distinctive tones, tonalities and textures.

Reading is a biological phenomenon: we breathe, we watch, we pause, we breathe again, we tighten, we go cold. We read with death in our minds. Physiological, neurological, optical, proprioceptive and sensory functions are brought together to produce the vantage point from which the remembered present is reconfigured as consciousness. When we are conscious of being conscious, whenever we absorb that utterly human, often faithless parade of words, irrefutably alien, drafted outside ourselves, we are reminded of ourselves and our nothingness – sometimes obscurely, sometimes directly, sometimes brutally.

Reading finds its way back when it reclaims the remembered present in its fullness and complexity – built from syllables, intonations, the quick sensation of a stray inflexion, the barely perceptible precognition of a shift in emphasis or voice in the march of narration. “Keep up your bright swords”, for the dew will rust “em”. The “artistic reader” feels the need to contemplate the array of sensations and intimations – visual, kineasthetic, social, personal, cultural – inherent in the line: the suggestion of early morning; the measured tone of restraint mingled with respect, the sparkle and patterning of light as it scatters from sword to ground; the intimation of mortality and despoliation; the easy facility of the soldier’s utterance, thrown into relief by the high drama of the immediate situation; the intonation of assured and controlled leadership and command. And there is more: the “artistic reader” needs to be discovered – *invented* – in and through the act of reading. It is through invention, and self-invention, that Nabokov’s artistic reader begins to emerge, and, simultaneously, that the conditions for an applied literary studies are met.

In the act of reading, we are invited to participate in a reflexive consciousness in which *we observe ourselves reading*. We become conscious of consciousness, in much the same way as Baudelaire, in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, watches “himself see”: “*He watched in order to see himself watch*; it was his own consciousness of the tree and the house that he contemplated. He only saw things through this consciousness In his own art his one concern was to show things only as they appeared through a layer of human consciousness.” (Sartre 1949: 22; my emphasis) An applied literary studies brings to the reader’s consciousness the twin determinants of change and continuity, and restores to consciousness the *feeling* of being able to participate in the construction of ideas. It directs interest back to language as a *medium* of perception which accommodates the experience of “reading in order to see ourselves reading”, so that the reading process becomes constitutive of what we regard as distinctive about our attitudes and ideals.

An analogy employed to explain the concept of the *monad*, a term used by Leibniz to describe the mechanism whereby intrinsic properties of things are

brought into consciousness, may be helpful here. The hidden cartography, the mapping, of a photograph can be likened to a monad in that “what appears on the film *also defines a position from which the photograph was taken relative to the things that appear in it*” (Nerlich 1976: 5; my emphasis). Although the “position” lies outside the frame of the image, it is intuitively and irreducibly present at a particular and precise intersection of coordinates. Further, the “position defined does not depend in any way on where the photograph now is” (p. 5).

Memory, the neural imprint of consciousness, functions as a marker of relation, perspective, and point of view, in that, like a photograph – the physical record of the behaviour of light at a specific instant – it preserves not only a recollection-*of*, but a recollection-*that*. In so doing, it defines the *position* from which the memory was constructed – the causative, constitutive experience in relation to which attitudes, responses and emotions coalesce and are modulated.

The recollection-*that* preserves markers of time and place as well as affective indexicals associated with inflexions of mood, attitude, intellectual temperament, and what might be called the *chromatography* of an event – its textures, its implicative range, its cognate associations, its synchronic and diachronic significance. While the recollection-*of* captures the outer features of the event and stores superficial impressions of the subject for future reference, the recollection-*that* deictic orchestrates qualia responsible for remembering “what it was like”. Cognitive remodulation activates the recollection-*that* during the activity of reading by restoring the co-ordinates of recollection, and by extending the range of the deictic so that the reader becomes aware of the spatial, temporal, and indexical locations specified or implied in the text. As in the case of the grammatical-linguistic deictic, where the determination of the referent of a word depends principally on its context – on *who* utters, or might utter, the word or sentence, on *where* it is uttered, when it is uttered, and *of whom* it is said – the recollection-*that* deictic intimates far more than it proposes. It conveys an impression of mood, inflexion, or significance from the perspective of a hearer or speaker in a particular context, and introduces features of the speaker’s or hearer’s mutual and reciprocal cognitive domain into the activity of reading. In the field of grammar and linguistics, “we”, “you”, “here”, “there”, “now”, “this”, “that”, “him” “I”, “former” and “latter” constitute examples of deictic words; in the field of cognitive remodulation, *all* utterances are potentially deictic in that, once inflected through the coordinates of recollection-*that*, they acquire referential significance.

If the world is a medium within which the mind is able to perceive its purpose, an applied literary studies is a medium within which the mind begins to understand itself as it constructs itself in the act of reading.

References

- Dawkins, Richard
 1999 *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder*. London: Penguin.
- de Man, Paul
 1983 Impersonality in the Criticism of Maurice Blanchot. In: *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. 2nd edition. London: Methuen, 1983, cited by Shuli Barzilai in "A Review of Paul de Man's 'Review of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*'". In: *The Lesson of Paul de Man*. Yale French Studies No. 69. 1985. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 134-141.
- du Sautoy, M.
 2004 *The Music of the Primes: Why an Unsolved Problem in Mathematics Matters*. London: Harper Perennial.
- Edelman, Gerald M.
 2005 *Wider than the Sky: A Revolutionary View of Consciousness*. London: Penguin.
- Isaacs, Alan (ed.)
 2000 *A Dictionary of Physics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane
 1945 *Oeuvres complètes*. In: Arac, Jonathan, Godzich, Wlad & Martin, Wallace. 1983. *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mann, Thomas
 1939 *The Living Thoughts of Schopenhauer*. London: Cassell.
 1966 *Death in Venice. Tristan. Tonio Kröger*. Harmondsworth: Penguin..
- Nabokov, Vladimir
Nabokov's Interview. (03) *Playboy*. Online:
 <<http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/Inter03.txt>>
- Nerlich, G.
 1976 *The Shape of Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prince, Gerald
 1973 *Poétique* 14(1973): 177-196.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul
 1949 *Baudelaire*, translated by Martin Turnell. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Steiner, George
 1961 *The Death of Tragedy*. London: Faber & Faber.

Ivan Rabinowitz
 Department of English, Unisa
 Rabinia@unisa.ac.za