Implicit Assertions in Literary Fiction

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Abstract. In analytic aesthetics, a popular 'cognitivist' line of thought maintains that literary works of fictional kind may 'imply' or 'suggest' truths. Nevertheless, so-called anti-cognitivists have considered the concepts of implication and suggestion both problematic. For instance, cognitivists's use of the word 'implication' seems to differ from all philosophical conceptions of implication, and 'suggestion' is generally left unanalysed in their theories. This essay discusses the role, kinds and conception of implication or suggestion in literature, issues which have received little attention in contemporary literary aesthetics. In the first part, I shall examine classic views on implication in literature and introduce objections to the views. In the latter part, in turn, I shall propose a definition of the 'literary suggestion' and discuss issues related to its interpretation.

I. Introduction

> "The main problem that confronts us now has to do not with explicit statements, but with statements which the author nowhere makes."[1]
>
> — John Hospers

In the so-called literature and truth discussion in Anglo-American analytic aesthetics, an oft-advanced 'anti-cognitivist' claim maintains that literary fictions cannot make truth-claims and thus contributions to propositional knowledge, because they consist of fictional discourse and employ fictional speakers, for instance. Many literary fictions seem, however, to convey

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[1] John Hospers, "Implied Truths in Literature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 19:1 (1960), pp. 37--46 (38--39).

knowledge claims and broader points about reality. Although there is arguably authors' explicit assertions in literary fiction — consider, for instance, Steinbeck's social criticism in *The Grapes of Wrath* — the supporters of the so-called ***moderate propositional theory of literary truth*** maintain that the major cognitive gains of literary fiction lie beneath its surface. According to a popular brand of the moderate propositional theory, literary works may 'imply' or 'suggest' truths.

Nevertheless, anti-cognitivists consider the concepts of implication and suggestion both problematic. For instance, the moderate propositional theorist's use of the word 'implication' seems to differ from all philosophical conceptions of implication, and 'suggestion' is generally left unanalysed in the theories. Moreover, during the last decades, there have been no systematic studies on implication or suggestion in literature, and the oldest contributions to the discussion still remain the most intriguing. In this essay, I shall discuss the role, kinds and conception of implication or suggestion in literature, issues which have received little attention in contemporary literary aesthetics. My task is to examine how implications or suggestions in literature function, how they convey views, and how readers are to interpret them.

The structure of the essay is twofold: In the first part, I shall discuss classic views on implication in literature and introduce objections to them. In the latter part, I shall argue, with the help of Monroe C. Beardsley's and John Hospers' notions, that implications or implicit assertions in literature are best considered in terms of suggestion. Furthermore, I shall propose my view of the 'literary suggestion' and discuss issues related to its interpretation. Finally, I shall sketch the distinctive interpretative context of literary suggestion.

II. Truth betwixt the Lines

The view which I call the 'moderate propositional theory of literary truth' maintains that at the literal level, literary works are, at least for the most part, fictive: their content is fictional and their mode of presentation is not assertive; nonetheless, at another level, the works may 'imply' or 'suggest'

propositions which the reader is invited to assess as true or false[2]. To my knowledge, this view was initiated in modern terms by Wilbur Marshall Urban who argued in his *Language and Reality* (1939) that there is 'covert metaphysics,' or 'implicit assertions' of reality, in poetry[3]. Many literary fictions imply assertions, or thematic claims or theses, by broad passages, such as events in the story or the work as a whole. Actually, there are even genres of literature in which making assertions in order to instruct, advice, or criticise, for example, is an essential part of a work's design function, such as allegory (*Everyman*), parable (Steinbeck's *Pearl*), satire (Orwell's *Animal Farm*), thesis novel (Golding's *Lord of the Flies*), and thesis play (Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*), to mention some.

As Noël Carroll notes, the political, philosophical, and moral points authors advance in their literary works are "often secured through oblique techniques," such as implication, allegory, presupposition, and illustration that is not accompanied with explicative commentary.[4] In the literary culture, a traditional reason for authors to hide their views in implications has been to mislead the censors. As a classic example, one could mention the 'Aesopian language,' practiced by authors such as Saltykov. Nevertheless,

[2] See Peter Lamarque & Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 321. Unlike Lamarque & Olsen, I label this view *moderate*, because it admits that at the 'literal' level literature is mostly fictive, and thus distinguish it from the traditional *proposition(al) theory of literary truth* which maintains that literary works may (also) contain the author's assertions which she advances *in propria persona* (for proposition(al) theories of literary truth, see Hirst 1973; Juhl 1976; Urmson 1976; Graff 1979, 1980; Reichert 1977, 1981; Rowe 1997). I would also like to make a distinction between *literary assertions* and *literary suggestions*. Literary assertions differ from literary suggestions in that literary assertions are clearly stated, put forward by isolated utterances (a character's assertion, inner monologue, or explicit discourse or commentary) and relatively easy to interpret; consider, for instance, Tolstoy's philosophy of history. Literature suggestions, in turn, are hinted, conveyed by literary devices such as illustration, or by works as whole, and have several correct, apt, or plausible interpretations (the thematic claim a work implies may be paraphrased in various acceptable ways); consider, for instance, the thesis of Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

[3] Wilbur M. Urban, *Language and Reality. The Philosophy of Language and the Principles of Symbolism* (London: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939), p. 501.

[4] Noël Carroll, "Art, Intention, and Conversation". In Gary Iseminger (ed.), *Intention and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 97--131 (108). See also Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Camridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); ref. on p. 114.

in the contemporary literary culture (of democratic countries), the main reason for authors to imply their views is rather to gain efficacy for their claims. John Hospers argues in his influential article 'Implied Truths in Literature' (1960) that Jonathan Swift's point in *A Modest Proposal* was "devastatingly effective" because he did not state it but "said, with multiplied examples just the opposite"[5]. Besides its rhetorical force, authors rely on implication also because of aesthetic reasons. As Hospers points out, would the author spell out her point, she would undervalue her readers' intellect and turn her literary work of art to a children's story.

> "Sometimes, indeed, when an author has meant to communicate something throughout an entire work, and then goes on to say it explicitly, we are pained and disappointed. "The President of the Immortals had had his sport with Tess," wrote Thomas Hardy thus spoiling at the end (as Collingwood quite rightly, I think, points out in a different connection) the effect of what was otherwise a fine novel."[6]

It is obvious that literary work imply truths and their doing so plays a central role in the literary practice. The question is rather: what are implications like, how they function and how are they to be interpreted?

III. The Concept of Implication

To begin with, a clarification needs to be made. The word 'implication' has two meanings when applied to literary works. On the one hand, there are *implications in the work* which construct the fictional world indirectly, such as the narrator's suggestions concerning an event or a character she tells about. On the other hand, there are *implications through the work*, that is, implicit assertions about reality. Moreover, there are arguably two sorts of implications through the work, those made *by an utterance* and those made *by the work*: implicit assertions conveyed by isolated fictive

[5] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 39.

[6] Hospers, "Implied Truths," pp. 39--40. Robert Stecker (*Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, pp. 281--282) makes the same point.

utterances (a narrator's meditations on a philosophical topic, for example) and, more typically, implicit assertions conveyed by the complete work (the 'message' of an allegory, for instance). In this essay, I shall discuss implications through the work and mainly those made by the work.

The first actual theory of literary truth based on a philosophical conception of implication was, as to my knowledge, formulated by Morris Weitz, who argued in his *Philosophy of the Arts* (1950) that there are 'first-order' and 'second-order' meanings in literature. Leaning on DeWitt Parker, Weitz also calls the latter 'depth meanings.'[7] According to Weitz, depth meanings may be propositional and function as truth-claims; they are 'contained in the work of art even though they do not appear in print.'[8] As an example, he claims that Richard Wright's *Native Son* implies the truth-claim that "individual freedom is still an abortive ideal in America, since our social injustices cancel out individual development."[9] For Weitz, the claim is implied by the first-order meanings; however, he maintains that this sort of 'implication' is not Russell's material implication or Lewis's strict implication, but "nonmathematical, ordinary sense of implication."[10] Instead, Weitz considers G. E. Moore's conception of implication applicable to literature[11]; for him, secondary meanings or depth meanings are "logical functions of the first-order meanings."[12]

Hospers also maintains that works of literature may imply the author's statements, views, and even theories. As he sees it, the implicit statements seem to "contain the most important things in the novel, and are often the

[7] DeWitt H. Parker (*The Principles of Aesthetics*. Second edition. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1946, p. 32) defines depth meanings as "meanings of universal scope underneath relatively concrete meanings or ideas."

[8] Morris Weitz, *Philosophy of the Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964/1950), p. 142. As examples of (American) authors who embody depth meanings in their works, Weitz mentions Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Farrell.

[9] Weitz, *Philosophy of the Arts*, p. 142.

[10] Weitz, *Philosophy of the Arts*, p. 142.

[11] Weitz refers to Moore's "Reply to My Critics" in which Moore maintains that "[t]here seems to me to be nothing mysterious about this sense of 'imply,' in which if you assert that you went to the pictures last Tuesday, you *imply*, though you don't *assert*, that you believe or know what you did" (see Paul Arthur Schilpp (ed.), *Library of Living Philosophers*, vol. IV: *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1942, p. 542; emphasis in original).

[12] Weitz, *Philosophy of the Arts*, p. 142.

novel's chief excuse for existing; yet they seem to operate entirely behind the scenes."[13] Nonetheless, unlike Weitz, Hospers thinks that all philosophical conceptions of implication are problematic in explaining implicit assertions in literature. He thinks that implicit assertions in literature cannot be described in terms of logical entailment, because the implications to which people refer to when talking about implied truths in literature are seldom individual propositions; rather, people refer to "large segments of a work of literature," or even the entire work[14]. Hospers also rejects implication as what the author intended to convey (on the grounds of his critique of absolute intentionalism), what the author succeeded in conveying (on the grounds of his relativist critique which maintains that the work might imply different propositions to different readers), Moore's conception of implication as broadly plausible but inapposite in the strict sense (literary works differ from conversational remarks; the two have different contexts when considered utterances).

On the other hand, Hospers also considers the term 'suggestion' problematic in explaining the implied truths in literature, for it has a broad, subjective sense which 'implication' does not. Following Max Black's proposal, Hospers thinks that the term 'intimation,' which he considers stricter than 'suggestion,' might best describe the literary implication[15]. As a conclusion, Hospers maintains that literary works may suggest hypotheses about reality[16]. According to him, the author does not necessarily assert the propositions she suggests; rather, she may "wish to assert them."[17]

The view of literary implication has, however, been objected to by various arguments drawn mainly from the philosophy of language. To begin with, it has been argued that the operational function of literary implication remains vague or unexplained in the moderate propositional theories. For instance, Joseph Margolis thinks that neither Weitz nor Hospers succeed in describing how a work's unstated message is communicated to its

[13] Hospers, "Implied Truth in Literature," p. 39. John R. Searle, for his part, asserts that "[a]lmost any important work of fiction conveys a 'message' or 'messages' which are conveyed *by* the text but are not *in* the text" (Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 6:2 (1974), pp. 319–332 (332); emphasis in original).

[14] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 39.

[15] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 44.

[16] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 45.

[17] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 46.

readers[18]. Margolis justifiably criticises Weitz for loose and unanalysed use of terms, such as a character being 'about' or a 'symbol' of something, or 'representing' something, or 'epitomizing' or 'embodying' a truth-claim[19]. In turn, he argues that Hospers fails to distinguish between one's inferring truths about the author from the work and the work's implying (in a Moorean sense) certain propositions. As Margolis sees it, one may infer from a novel that its author is naïve, but this does not mean that the work would imply any particular proposition.[20]

Another common objection to the view of literary implication maintains that the moderate propositional theorist's conception of implication is not suitable in explaining the alleged implicit truths in literature. Margolis, for one, argues that Hospers's view of a work implying author's beliefs does not correspond with Moore's sense of implication and Hospers does not provide "even informal criteria for the required sort of contextual implication."[21] Mary J. Sirridge, for her part, goes so far as to claim that there is no conception of propositional implication that would be applicable to

[18] Margolis is, nonetheless, broadly sympathetic to literary cognitivism. In *The Language of Art and Art Criticism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965, p. 155), he maintains that in reading fiction, one may notice that the author might herself have intended to draw one's attention to certain resemblances between the fictional world of the work and the actual world.

[19] Margolis, *Language of Art and Art Criticism*, p. 158.

[20] Margolis, *Language of Art and Art Criticism*, p. 159.

[21] Margolis, *Language of Art and Art Criticism*, p. 159. Margolis is, nonetheless, broadly sympathetic to literary cognitivism. In his *Language of Art and Art Criticism* (1965, p. 155), he says that in reading fiction, one may notice that the author might herself have intended to draw one's attention to certain resemblances between the fictional world of the work and the actual world. As he sees it, to read works such as Aesop's *Fables* or the parables of Jesus correctly probably requires that "one must deny that it is a mere fiction at bottom and consider instead the lesson *exhibited* (which may also perhaps be neatly appended as an explicit moral)" (ibid., p. 156; emphasis in original). Margolis, however, remarks that such works are not fiction: "I do not deny that some literature at least can only be properly understood as making assertions about the world, whether true or false, even as referring *via* such assertions to particular events and persons in the world. I should only say that such literature cannot be fiction, in our original sense, and that *that* is analytically true." (ibid.) Further, he claims that to "judge the verisimilitude of a fiction is precisely to *compare* a fiction, in respect to which, questions of truth and falsity are ineligible, with the actual world, in respect to which, certain matters of fact have been isolated." (ibid., p. 159; emphasis in original.)

literary works and no 'well analyzed sense of "imply"' by which a thematic claim can be said to be implied by a work with which it is commonly associated[22]. In her thorough analysis, Sirridge discards different philosophical senses of implication as unsuitable candidates: she rejects (1) any strictly formal sense of logical implication, (2) implication as truth table tautology, (3) implication as entailment, (4) implication as inductive reference, (5) implication as inductive reference plus 'ordinary commonplaces,' and (6) implication by counterfactual analysis (which she, however, considers most plausible)[23].

Echoing Sirridge, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen claim that the propositional theory of literary truth based on 'implication' is problematic, for it uses an "unanalysed concept of implication."[24] Further, Lamarque and Olsen claim that because the moderate propositional theorist's concept of implication cannot be analysed as material implication or logical entailment, it must rest on a looser concept of implication. However, Lamarque and Olsen believe that all attempts to formulate such a concept must fail, for all 'loose conceptions of implication,' such as 'suggesting,' are too vague to provide a theory real substance[25]. In what fol-

[22] Mary J. Sirridge, "Truth from Fiction?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 35:4, pp. 453--471 (462).

[23] Sirridge, "Truth from Fiction?," pp. 460--461; see also McCormick (*Fictions, Philosophies, and the Problems of Poetics.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 115--116. McCormick also proposes that literary implication should be interpreted "counterfactually." As he sees it, "[l]iterary works such as *Anna Karenina* may suggest moral knowledge in that they imply that appeals to some features of human situations may function as appeals to a moral principle by allowing counterfactual suppositions to arise in the course of readings." (McCormick 1988, p. 118.)

[24] Lamarque & Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, p. 326. The authors, however, demand that a plausible theory of *fiction* should account the author's suggestions (indirect assertions) she makes in her work, see ibid., pp. 64--68.

[25] Lamarque & Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, pp. 326--327. Following Sirridge, Lamarque and Olsen claim that the only plausible version of the theory should thus hold that language used in a literary fiction would have a special "poetic" meaning and the implicit propositions in the work would be implied by the poetic meaning; however, without providing the code to decipher the poetic meaning, the theories are useless. Nevertheless, Sirridge's and Lamarque and Olsen's view of the propositional theorist's resorting to a "poetic meaning" theory is deceptive, for a substantial theory of literary implication may be based on 'suggestion' (see also D. E. B. Pollard, "M. J. Sirridge, Fiction, and Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 38:2 (1977), pp. 251--256).

lows, I shall nonetheless attempt to sketch a view of such loose conception of implication which would explain the way how literary works imply assertions or communicate their hidden messages.

IV. Literary Suggestion

Sirridge's and Lamarque and Olsen's analyses of implication in literature are insightful in many ways. However, literary works should not be treated as (mere) objects of the philosophy of language but artworks that may have different social functions in addition to their aesthetic function. What the critics seem to ignore is that literary works, such as those mentioned in the beginning of the essay, actually convey their authors' views by their design function, and acknowledging that function would be needed in order to understand the works properly or fully in the light of their historical origins, literary traditions, and philosophical, political, and social contexts to which they belong. Further, as long as we speak of literary works implying assertions, or even embodying a thesis that is not printed on its pages, an account of literary implication is needed. Also, in order to account the many faces of literary implication — implicit assertions are being conveyed in different literary genres from parables to realist novels and by various literary devices from analogy to illustration — implication has to be defined in a loose sense, and only informal criteria may be provided for it. Nonetheless, I argue that such an account may be given and that it is substantial in defining literary implication which is a focal, yet arguably not the only, way literary works provide knowledge.

In this part of this essay, I shall argue that the way literary works convey implicit assertions and broader points about reality is best explained in terms of suggestion, as Hospers, for one, proposes in the end of his paper. My account is roughly based on Monroe C. Beardsley's view of suggestions in literature which I shall develop in an intentionalist manner. In his *Aesthetics* (1958/1981) Beardsley maintains that literary works may, and assumedly all do, 'suggest' theses[26]. As he sees it, suggestions are 'secondary meanings' which are put forward "in the form of insinuation, innu-

[26] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Second Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981/1958), p. 417.

endo, hint, or implication."[27] Beardsley also calls such suggestions 'implicit Reflections'[28] and considers them predications derived by interpretation from "sentences that report the situation, the objects and events, of the story."[29] According to him,

> "[A] narrator of a novel may relate certain events in such a way, that is in such an order and in such a style as to show that he is *judging* them: reading a generalized significance into them, or making an evaluation of their actors. The theses, or doctrinal content, then, of a literary work, are the set of all Reflective beliefs purportedly in the mind of the dramatic speaker."[30]

Many important questions are raised but not fully pursued in Beardsley's insightful work, and more questions will emerge if suggestions in literature are treated as the author's implicit truth-claims as I shall do.

i. Paraphrasing Suggestions

The moderate propositional theorist's concept of 'suggestion' has also been widely objected to. In general, the objections maintain that there seems to be no general method for solving the meaning of a suggestion in a work of literature or settling disagreements between different interpretations of the work's suggestion. Sirridge, for one, forcefully argues that the justification of a critical claim which a work implies as a whole, such as that *The Scarlet Letter* implies that "Unacknowledged guilt leads to perdition" (Sirridge's paraphrase), is problematic, for the sentence does not occur on any of the pages of the novel. Further, Sirridge argues that readers' 'interpretive claims' about the content of a work "cannot be justified merely by pointing out to the expressions which occur in the work and explaining what the expressions mean in everyday context."[31]

Sirridge's objection is, nonetheless, misguided in that it takes there to be one single correct paraphrase of a work's suggestion. First, literary suggestions, especially those made by the work as a whole, may have various

[27] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 123.
[28] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 410.
[29] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 410.
[30] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 415; emphasis in original.
[31] Sirridge, "Truth from Fiction?" p. 456.

correct, or apt or plausible, interpretations *when expressed as compact re-statements*; there are multiple correct (or apt or plausible) ways of stating what the work suggests. A focal part of a suggestion's rhetorical force, both in literature and speech, lies exactly in that its meaning is not evident but depends on the hearer's interpretive task. Ironical remarks in everyday conversation, for instance, are forceful because of their ambiguity. Second, if there are several themes in a literary work, there may also be several thematic claims the work suggests. Thus, Sirridge's objection fails in that it mistakenly assumes that i) there has to be a 'key' for unlocking suggestions (made by large passages); that ii) (the message of) a literary work could have only one correct interpretation; and that iii) the correct interpretation should have to be expressed by a single proposition.

ii. Speaker's, Readers' and Author's Suggestions

Another objection to the moderate propositional theory has been that it does not, or cannot, distinguish between what the author *suggests* and what she 'merely' *expresses*. To begin with, there is a difference between the author's views and those of the fictional speaker, that is, the narrator or some other character in the work. Beardsley, for one, remarks that the story may be told by an incompetent narrator. As he sees it, in such case the "total attitude of the work, the basic point of view, extends beyond, and even contradicts, the set of beliefs in the mind of the narrator,"[32] and therefore the fictional speaker's suggestion cannot be considered the work's thesis. Beardsley, nevertheless, also hints the solution in the objection. It is precisely this 'total attitude' or the 'basic point of view' what a so-called conversational or truth-seeking interpretation looks for: the implicit thesis of a work is not the one suggested by the fictional speaker but the one suggested by the author by the overall design of the work.[33] Hence, the author's suggestion should be interpreted by investigating what the work as a whole suggests, paying close attention to issues such as the speaker's

[32] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 415.

[33] Beardsley (*Aesthetics*, p. 416), who thinks that in general there are no "Reflections contained in the work," that is, Reflections that the fictional speaker does not make but the work makes, advances a roughly similar view in maintaining that implicit Reflections are either "predications purportedly believed by the speaker or the ironically suggested contradictories of purported beliefs."

character and the work's tone.

Hospers, for his part, formulates another objection to the view of literary implication in contemplating that readers may take the work to suggest something what the author does not intend to suggest or what differs from what she actually suggests[34]. Are there, then, suggestions which the author does not intend to make? Naturally, authors may, for example, imply their worldviews in their works without intending to do so, say, by the manner they depict different characters. However, acts such as asserting and suggesting are intentional human action and, as Margolis notes, inferring truths about the author from her work and the work's (the author's) suggesting something are different things; only the latter counts as a suggestion proper. (The same applies to non-fiction, such as newspaper articles, in which there is a difference between inferring truths about a journalist's views from her article and the article (the journalist) suggesting something.) Thus, if there are suggestions or implicit assertions in a work, they have to be made by the author. When it comes to readers' 'derived suggestions' that differ from the author's suggestions, I would not speak of suggestions but misinterpretations.

It is clear that literary suggestions, considered illocutionary acts, have to be defined in terms of authorial intention[35]. But how exactly? Should a literary suggestion be defined as what the author intends to suggest in her work? Clearly, such absolute intentionalist view which maintains that the meaning of an utterance is what the speaker (author) intends in uttering it, is obsolete: it would lead to 'Humpty-Dumptyism' in which anything could mean anything. One might, then, argue that a literary suggestion means what the author succeeds in conveying in the work[36]. Hospers, however, remarks that there is relativism embedded in such a proposal and maintains that if readers are "dull, stupid, or sleepy," no proposition would be implied no matter how much the author meant to convey one, while if readers are sensitive and alert, the work would imply a "whole host

[34] See Hospers, "Implied Truths," pp. 40 & 43.

[35] Similarly, Carroll ("Art, Intention, and Conversation," p. 108) maintains that implicit or implied propositions, such as Huxley's point of view about the prospect of utilitarian social control in *Brave New World*, in literary works are best conceived as (authorial) performances.

[36] Hospers ("Implied Truths," pp. 40 & 42) discusses a roughly similar view.

of propositions, including many that never occurred to the [author] at all or to any reader but one."[37] Clearly, such formulation would not do either.

I therefore argue that a literary suggestion ***is intended by the author and recognizable in the work by a competent reader***[38]. This view, which may be called 'moderate actual intentionalism,' maintains that the author's intentions manifest themselves in the work; the meaning of a literary suggestion is constrained by the textual meaning of the utterance (a passage in the work or the work as a whole) and the best information about the author's intended meaning[39]. My view, which is based on H. P. Grice's notion of 'nonnatural meaning,' maintains then that when making a literary suggestion, i) the author presents an utterance to an audience with the intention that the audience will recognize that the utterance is intended by the author to suggest a certain proposition; ii) that the audience recognizes that the author intends them to both imagine the suggested proposition as characterising the fictional world and to genuinely assess it; iii) that the audience both imagines the suggested proposition as characterising the fictional world and entertains it as an asserted thought (suggestion); iv) and, finally, that recognizing the author's invitation to such a response is (at least partly) a reason for the response[40]. Further, it is extremely im-

[37] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 40.

[38] There is an enormous and complex debate around authorial intention in aesthetics. Unfortunately, there is no space to discuss the issue in detail in this essay; I have presented my version of moderate actual intentionalism in my article "Intentions and Interpretations: Philosophical Fiction as Conversation," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Vol. 7 (2009), http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=526.

[39] For a paradigmatic view of moderate actual intentionalism, see Carroll ("Interpretation and Intention: The Debate between Hypothetical and Actual Intentionalism." In Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 197--213 (197--198 & 200--201)). Naturally, the author may in some occasion fail to communicate her intention so that the readers will misinterpret her message. For instance, the author may intend her suggestion ironic, but the readers, relying on conventions of textual interpretation, may take it literally. Nevertheless, moderate actual intentionalism also accepts information concerning the author's actual intentions as criteria in judging interpretations, which makes it the most plausible theory in interpreting the author's conversational acts, such as assertions and suggestions.

[40] See Paul Grice, "Meaning," *The Philosophical Review* 66:3 (1957), pp. 377--388; Paul Grice, "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence Meaning and Word Meaning." In John R. Searle (ed.), *Philosophy of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974/1971 [1968]), pp. 54-

portant to note that literary suggestions have an *aspectival nature*: they are conveyed by a fictional character (even if the character would be the author's mouthpiece), and that has to be taken into account in interpreting the author's overall point. The author might not, for instance, intend to literally suggest what a fictional utterance, such as the narrator's inner monologue on a given subject, conveys, but the opposite. Therefore, the tone of the utterance has also to be assessed. This is, I take it, as formal and general as a definition of *literary* suggestion may be. There is, nonetheless, a major interpretative issue that needs to be discussed.

iii. The Context and Tone of the Author's Utterance

A focal problem in interpreting suggestions is that their meaning is contextual: a given utterance (or its textual representation) may suggest different things in different situations. Torsten Pettersson, for one, remarks that suggestions (implications) are grasped according to general usage of words and sentences and interpretive conventions. However, Pettersson also remarks that implications are open-ended: the utterance "This suitcase is heavy" may imply "Please help me carry it," "Aren't I strong, carrying it all by myself," or "You have done a fine job packing so much stuff into it," for instance. As Pettersson notes, the relevant implication depends on the context of utterance; if the hearer considers the utterance "This suitcase is heavy" to imply a request for assistance in carrying it, the hearer assumes at least that the speaker i) is primarily responsible for it being carried, ii) desires assistance, and iii) believes that at least one of the persons addressed is able and perhaps willing to help him.[41] The contextual nature of suggestions causes even more difficulties in literature in which the context of a suggestion is more vague than that of a conversational utterance, for instance. Hospers, for one, notes that in interpreting utterances in everyday conversation, one has clues such as the speaker's facial expression, gestures, tone of voice and the 'environmental circumstances accompany-

–70; Paul Grice, "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence Meaning and Word Meaning," *Philosophical Review* 78:2 (1969), pp. 147–177.

[41] See Torsten Petterson ("Incompatible Interpretations of Literature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 45:2 (1986), pp. 147–161 (152–154). Pettersson, however, also maintains that suggestions could be unintentional.

ing the utterance,' whereas in literature such indicators are missing.[42]

Admittedly, conventions of everyday conversational interpretation are neither strictly applicable nor sufficient in literary interpretation. Rather, in interpreting literary works, readers rely on linguistic and literary conventions. Literary interpretative conventions relate to the literary historical context of the work (genre, literary tradition), common beliefs of the contemporary audience and the prevailing ideologies, the author's public biography, her *oeuvre*, and the like.[43] These are the criteria critics lean on, when, for instance, interpreting the theological message of Dante's *Commedia* or social critique in Dicken's *Oliver Twist*. Further, although the reader is not able to hear the author's tone of voice, she is able to detect the author's tone of utterance: her style of writing, manner of depicting characters and way of representing events. Beardsley, therefore, thinks that the work "itself suggests how it is to be interpreted'"[44]:

> "[A] long novel in which poor people are constantly exploited by their employers, landlords, stores, politicians, and policemen, can hardly help being a predication about social relations, even if the narrator makes no explicit generalizations; for in the absence of stylistic or other evidence that the narrator is stupid or insensitive or evil, we cannot help inferring that in his opinion the events he describes are unjust."[45]

Hospers, for his part, claims that inferring the author's beliefs, readers may observe her style, the treatment of themes, the plot, which characters are treated with sympathy, and the like.[46] As he sees it, one may make "highly probable inferences" of the author's beliefs and aims by looking for "belief-clues" and "intent-clues" in the work.[47]

[42] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 41.

[43] See Carroll, "Interpretation and Intention," pp. 197--198 & 200--201.

[44] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, pp. 416--417.

[45] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 417. Beardsley continues by reminding one of the author's predicative weight: "Yet even here we cannot be more than quite vague and tentative in our interpretation, and the less specific and clear the predication is taken to be, the more likely is the interpretation to be correct."

[46] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 41.

[47] Hospers, "Implied Truths," p. 42.

Finally, when interpreting literary suggestions, one should not apply binary logic, that is, to think that either the author implies a given assertion or she does not. Suggestions come in various forms. As Beardsley argues, the author may believe a suggestion "in various degrees of confidence, ranging from deep conviction to the bare supposal that it is more probable than not."[48] Hence, Beardsley proposes that suggestions have various degrees of 'predicative weight.'[49] According to him, were there a clearly defined theses in a work or not, there may be "certain vague generalizations" or "judgements of the situation" lurking in the background of the work, and it is part of the critic's interpretative task to find out such generalizations and judgements and help the general readers to see them[50]. Thus, on the one end of the scale, there are obvious suggestions, such as Pangloss's reference to Leibniz and Voltaire's ridicule conveyed by the character, whereas on the other end, suggestions come close to the author's 'contemplation' in which she rather invites the reader to entertain a given issue from a given point of view. But that is another issue altogether.

V. Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued for a brand of 'moderate propositional theory of literary truth' which maintains that the actual author's implicit assertions constitute a significant part of the cognitive purport of literary fiction and, further, that implicit assertions have a rhetorical force which makes them more persuasive than ordinary or literal assertions. Moreover, I have suggested that implicit assertions in literature should be treated in terms 'suggestion' which is a loose concept of implication. In using this loose sense of the term, I have sketched a broadly 'Gricean' view of the 'literary suggestion' in which suggestions are considered the author's genuine communicative acts and which applies to different kinds of literary suggestions (showing-that presentation, analogy). Finally, I have suggested that conventions of everyday conversational interpretation are neither strictly

[48] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, pp. 418--419.

[49] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 419

[50] Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, p. 419. As Beardsley (ibid.) sees it, the interpreter should always keep in mind the predicative weight, for there is no sharp line where the speaker makes predications and where she merely "offers a theme for inspection."

applicable nor sufficient in literary interpretation, but that literary suggestions are to be interpreted relying on linguistic and especially literary conventions.

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