

# Ethical Agency and the Global Community: A Phenomenological Exploration of Literary Discourse

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## Abstract

The following paper explores the ethical possibilities of the reception of literary discourse, using the philosophical approach of phenomenology as a compass in order to help in assessing the ethical possibilities available to readers of literature. I explore the aesthetic discourse that opens up a reconfigured sense of Being through which the putative reading subject becomes defamiliarised. Focusing especially upon the example of James Joyce, I argue that this new phenomenological attitude to the world engenders the possibility of a new ethical encounter with the “other” through which perceived sociocultural barriers of other-ness are broken down, actualising a stronger sense of global community. After utilising a number of literary-critical theories such as formalism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, in the service of my overall phenomenological argument, I conclude by arguing for the timeliness of this heuristic literary-critical-tool in the context of the current socio-political landscape.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, Literary Criticism,  
Poststructuralism, Defamiliarisation, Aesthetic Discourse, Ethics,  
Literary Modernism

In what follows I attempt to outline the ways in which literature, as a specialised area of discourse, works in a paradoxical fashion in both what the formalists would call “defamiliarising” the reading subject, whilst at the same time integrating them into a more communitarian, or “global” sense of community. This process is established in the first instance by forcing the reading to subject to re-think their phenomenological attitude to the word—thus, instead of residing in the uncritical, Husserlian “natural” attitude to the world, they revert to a more critical, or *defamiliarised* attitude.<sup>1</sup> This new attitude (or praxis) towards their worldhood, opens up a space in which the critical reader can debate and analyse aspects of a text, (and ultimately their horizon-structure experience of the world) and enter into a more empathetic and recognitive appreciation of citizens of other nations, creeds and cultures. This unique and hybrid space is a dynamic area of discourse, which opens up the reading subject towards new horizons of experience through which they are enabled to potentially become more open to alternative discourses, *paroles* and what Wittgenstein would call “forms of life.”<sup>2</sup> This hermeneutic sense of a newly

shared space of experience may in turn be claimed to engender a political process of *global citizenship*, which is now, in the age of varying forms of political intransigence and intolerance (such as the political stasis in SE Asian regions such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand—and in the West historically significant events such as the UK’s historic and unexpected decision to part company with the European Union and in North America the surprise election of the political maverick Donald Trump), arguably more pertinent than ever. This new interpretive space is something that can be in part established through the practice and reception of canonical literary texts and more particularly, what I will term in this paper an *aesthetic discourse*.

I will commence with a number of examples of philosophers, literary theorists and cultural critics who have outlined this hermeneutic process<sup>3</sup> and posit how a *defamiliarisation* of our interpretive attitude to the world can lead to interesting results, entailing consequences that are both philosophical and purely aesthetic, while leading towards a more *ethical communitarian* standpoint: a standpoint that integrates the reading subject into a wider sense of belonging within a truly global community.

### 1. The philosophical-hermeneutic attitude.

To begin with, German philosopher Martin Heidegger famously wrote of our ‘Being-in-the-world’ in *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger, building upon the work of his former mentor Edmund Husserl, wished to closely examine being, right down to the philosophical implications of our taken-for-granted use of the *copula*. In examining being and our univocal sense of being, Heidegger argued that as thinking subjects we are always “thrown-into-the world” (*Geworfenheit*) and could never stand outside of our situation or take what one might call an “Olympian perspective,” whereby one could objectively stand outside of the world as we know it. Our already being entangled into the world, or our “thrownness” into the world has further implications when it comes to our experience of objects in the world, or what he often terms *utensils* and their everyday usage. Heidegger famously uses the example of a hammer, arguing that we use a hammer as being “readiness-to-hand” (*Zuhandensein*) without even thinking about or analysing this action—we just utilise the hammer as an object at hand that fits a certain purpose—and this is how we encounter the environment (*Umwelt*); indeed this is how the environment is made up for us—we actively construct our being in our interactions with the environment. However, when this readiness-to-hand nature of something is changed, disappears or is hindered in some way, our interactions are brought into focus so to speak; the object in question becomes “unready-to-hand.” For example, when we drive a car or use a hammer we don’t really analyse or think about our action—however if the car breaks down or the head falls off the hammer our relationship, or sense of being, is defamiliarised. This then brings the object into

focus (as either for example a car engine or hammer in a completely new light). Thus, we take a completely different stance towards that object. Heidegger writes the following:

Similarly, when something ready-to-hand is found missing, though its everyday presence [Zugegensein] has been so obvious that we have never taken any notice of it, this makes a *break* in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers. Our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time *what* the missing article was ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*. The environment announces itself afresh. (*Being and Time*: 105).

The key factor in Heidegger's ontological argument for the purpose of this study is the idea that we see "for the first time" through this break in our circumspection. A change in our interaction with the environment affects a change in our whole *being-in-the world*. This "seeing afresh" is something that also occurs when our referentiality is affected—and for Heidegger referentiality is key to the whole of our interactions with the world.

Heidegger further developed these arguments in relation to aesthetics in his famous essay "The Origin of the Work of Art. (1971), during which he invokes his idea of Art (in particular poetics) as a form of "clearing" (*Ereignis*), which is a form of truth as made manifest through art. Troping art as a *lightening-strike*, he argues that art works in a manifold fashion—by at once both holding in abeyance what one already considers as Being-Present-at-Hand (*Vordhandensein*) and bringing into conscious existence (*Existenz*) the unfamiliar. He characterises this as a "leaping over" what is already present to us and thus changing this or reconfiguring this through the newly formed *aesthesis* through which we phenomenologically reengage with the ontological.

The setting-into-work of truth thrusts up the unfamiliar and extraordinary and at the same time thrusts down the ordinary and what we believe to be such. The truth that discloses itself in the work can never be proved or derived from what went before. What went before is refuted in its exclusive reality by the work. What art finds therefore can never be compensated and made up for by what is already present and available. Founding is an overflow, an endowing, a bestowal. (*The Origin of the Work of Art*: 75).

The hugely important point here is Heidegger's positing of the relationship between the "unfamiliar" and the "extraordinary" with the 'ordinary' and "what we believe to be such." The "bestowal" or "endowing" of the work of art is a

technical experience that in its *technique* brings an uncovering of our current sense of Being into play. More is exposed through the unfamiliar representation of an object such as, in Heidegger's essay, Van Gough's Pair of Shoes (1885); with this hermeneutical-phenomenological treatise as my starting point, I will now further examine this use of the unfamiliar in the context of modern literary theory.

## 2. Formalist Defamiliarisation

On my reading of Heidegger, one can also expand his notion of referentiality in terms of what was later developed by the structuralist linguist Ferdinand de Saussure as the relationship between the signifier and signified (sign/concept). Whenever our being in the world is disrupted in any way we see things afresh and whenever the relationship between the signifier and signified (sign) and another sign is disrupted, for example by a poetic trope, a figure of metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, prosopopoeia, kenning, etc, we "experience being" afresh, through a change in our system of references.

One great example of this defamiliarisation, is explored in a large part in James Joyce's epic *Ulysses* (1922). The novel has no ostensibly identifiable plot, formal structure, characterisation, rising/falling action or denouement. Coupled with the fact that the whole narrative takes place during one day in Dublin, and spans more than 900 pages, one may ask how the novel has attracted so much critical attention and so many accolades? The answer is at least in part due to the fact that Joyce has taken the most apparently banal circumstances—from frying breakfast, to attending a funeral, having a beer and walking on the beach—and through his rhetorical mastery (one chapter, "Aeolus" is itself a series of prose excerpts in a newspaper office utilising different forms of rhetoric) and the defamiliarisation of *aesthetic discourse*, has reframed these events, on the one hand changing our familiar, readiness-to-hand sense of reality and relocated it in the parameters of *aesthetic discourse*. As readers, our Heideggerian sense of referentiality or proximity in the world has been disrupted. This facilitates the reader responding to the text by seeing things "for the first time" through aesthetic discourse. Joyce is the master of this modality of aesthetic discourse, arguably alongside other modernist writers such as Proust, Eliot, Mann and Pound. High modernism such as this, sets aside modernist art as a self-referential troping that sees itself as *art-ifice* and in so doing attempts to raise the status of art from the ruins of technological society and in the wake of the Great War.

The formalist linguist and literary critic Victor Shklovsky in his essay "Art as Technique" (1917)<sup>4</sup> was the first to actually formulate an argument similar to Heidegger's ontological argument in the discourse of literary criticism. In fact, Shklovsky actually uses the term "defamiliarisation" to describe the process by which specialised literary language operates—as

opposed to the more practical or perhaps “natural” use of language—or in phenomenological terms the “natural attitude/ready-to-hand” apprehension of reality. In attacking the Russian school of Symbolism, Shklovsky argued that the novel usage of images was not the actual key to understanding the formal qualities of literary language—the key was the defamiliarisation of ordinary language. In Shklovsky’s own words:

After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it—hence we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways. [...] Tolstoy makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. (Lodge, ed., p. 21).

In using the example of Tolstoy, Shklovsky proposes that art—and by this he means *aesthetic discourse*—changes our perceptual set and thus affects our sense of being-in-the-world because normally “the object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it.” As in Heidegger’s example of a tool that is damaged and thus “un-ready to hand” (a hammer, or the driving of a car)—until our modality of knowing is altered, our being-towards this object—then we are hermeneutically blind to this object. Defamiliarisation for Shklovsky is a linguistic and formalist mode of an essentially phenomenological argument proposed ten years later by Heidegger. Whilst Heidegger’s proposal is ontological, Shklovsky’s is linguistic and situates an alteration of our comportment towards the world directly into the formalistic-literary sphere.

It is to the political implications of these arguments, to which I must now turn. Turning back to Joyce, and his seminal short story “Araby,” we can examine how Joyce brilliantly defamiliarises the familiar—in the example below a market place—and turns it into a locus of romance and passion for the young boy, who, in love with a young girl, feels himself part of a romantic adventure. In juxtaposing the brutal realism of the Dublin marketplace with the romance narrative running through the boy’s mind, Joyce in turn juxtaposes metonymic and metaphoric details:<sup>5</sup>

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs’ cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a come-all-

you about O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

The realism of metonymic and synecdochic details such as “flaring streets”, “drunken women”, “curses of labourers”, “pig’s cheeks” and “nasal chants” is combined with the romantic troping of the young boy as a knight from the mediaeval period “I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand.” Scenes such as the brutal working class streets and the market place, which would have been portrayed in a much more realistic/naturalistic sense by writers such as Balzac and Zola are transformed into sights of romance in Joyce, as he combines both the metonymic and metaphoric poles to produce a new aesthetic, that through this process of defamiliarization will produce what was to become a high modernist aesthetic, greatly expanded upon later on in *Ulysses*. At the end of the story, we are treated to a brilliantly ambiguous characterisation of the boy, as the sound of the metonymic coins jangle in his pocket—he becomes a Janus-faced caricature of both the romantic hero and at the same time the realist protagonist, who has come of age with the knowledge that socioeconomic forces are to ultimately shape both the behavior of his Grandfather—he comes home late from the pub—and his own inability to take control of his destiny such as in the old romantic tales of yore. “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.” This situation defamiliarizes the reader’s reception and so the boy is presented by two evaluative participle phrases: both “driven” and “derided”; and he is thus a symbol of both the romantic individual, still driven by his passion (and hubris) and also the realistic character who understands and begrudgingly accepts the weight of the *real* world upon his shoulders. Upon the second reading the boy has come-of-age and the Freudian *reality principle* is forcing itself upon his conscious mind. This combination of formalistic techniques ensures that the reading subject has to reassess not only the character and his social context, but also his *own* phenomenological take on the world, environment, and other actors within this horizon of experience; as this horizon is modified within the reception of the written text.

### 3. The Communitarian and Ethical implications of Phenomenological-Aesthetic Discourse.

The arguments which I have been adumbrating up until now can be placed into the service of a more politically orientated form of literary criticism, one that implicates opportunities for us to empathise with others and to become citizens in a truly global community. Tradition is often stultifying and the grammar of our perception requires re-arrangement in order that we learn to see automatised phenomena anew; this can in turn aid in our social and moral perception and challenge institutionalised ways of thinking that create, what are in Benedict Anderson's terminology "imagined communities."<sup>6</sup> The process of cognition affected in *aesthetic discourse* can help to form both empathy and human solidarity. Our imagined barriers can be removed by the action of recognition of feelings, motives, fears and wishes in someone who would otherwise be categorised as "other."

The phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas accounts for this sense of what he terms the *alterity* of the other. The "other" Levinas recognizes (in a structuralist sense) is somehow recognized in its *difference* from other signifiers, as part of a discourse of being; the "other" is a signifier *without limit* within a system—an epiphany that is *self-referential* and cannot be reduced to the usual semiotic system of referentiality—or the signifier/signified relation. He "makes an entry" which in a sense disrupts the simple contextual sign-bound way we interpret the world. Levinas writes, in characteristically difficult prose:

But the epiphany of the other involves a signifyingness of its own, independently of this signification received from the world. The other does not only come to us out of a context, but comes without mediation; he signifies by himself. His cultural signification is revealed and reveals as it were *horizontally*, on the basis of the historical world to which it belongs. According to the phenomenological expression, it reveals the horizons of this world. But this mundane signification is found to be disturbed and shaken by another presence, abstract, not integrated into the world. His presence consists in coming unto us, *making an entry*. This can be stated in this way: the phenomenon which is the apparition of the other is also a *face*. Again, to show this entry at every moment into the immanence and historicity of the phenomenon, we can say: the epiphany of a face is alive. Its life consists in undoing the form in which every entity, when it enters into immanence, that is, when it exposes itself as a theme, is already dissimulated. (Levinas: The Trace of the Other: 351)

This "dissimulation" is also a reference to Heidegger who, in his later work claims that *Being* is dissimulated into *being*—or by its very nature is hidden

within being as we experience or re-cognise it. This is for Levinas disrupted by the alterity of the experience of the “other”; more exactly and immanently by the experience of the other through their naked face. In one sense the “other” and their naked face is the *rosetta-stone* of being for humanity—a way to break through to a sort of epiphany that disrupts our everyday phenomenological experience of the world

This is for Levinas the rosetta-stone or heart also of human ethics. From this epiphany with the *face of the other*—this alterity—we develop a sense of desire without bounds, because the other can never be reduced to a simple signifier. There is always a *trace* within the other, but a trace of their history, their discourse, one which cannot be bounded in simple signification, but is in fact *infinite*. This phenomenology of the other, and the ethical implications of the other as it impinges upon our “natural attitude” or our normative sense of Being, is also a form of defamiliarization; a social and ethical extension of the aesthetic effects of literary discourse outlined above. In aesthetic discourse we realise the other through formalistic techniques employed by the author—the ethical implications of this type of experience are adumbrated in the work of Levinas.

In cultural theory, or more particularly postcolonial critical theory, Homi K. Bhabha has written of the sense of defamiliarisation that takes place, and is a politically performative action, in the discourse of what he terms “the postmodern.”<sup>7</sup> Postmodernism, for all its ambiguities, holds course with the idea of upsetting our ontological boundaries and expectations; for example, between high/low culture, patrician/pop art and different forms of discourse—postmodernism has in this sense an attractively democratic impulse. Bhabha realises, from a poststructuralist standpoint, the political implications of this aspect of postmodernism, which he characterises as a gap between what is both the signifier/signified and more particularly between the two formative axes of language according to Saussurean linguistics: the *langue* (collection of language as a whole) and the *parole* (individual utterance). This gap is for Bhabha opened up in postmodern work, and agency is negotiated in this space—the agency of the subject caught in a “lag” between the overall cultural apparatus (the *langue*) and the transformation of this into an individual *parole* (voice, drumbeat, phrase, visual symbol, etc). This for Bhabha is the space of “hybridity”—a space wherein the major culture and the co-culture clash and mingle in a play of signification that is constantly opened up. One example Bhabha gives of this is V.S. Naipaul’s novel, *The Mimic Men*. Bhabha writes:

It is the ambivalence enacted in the enunciative present—disjunctive and multiaccentual—that produces the objective of political desire, what Hall calls ‘arbitrary closure’, *like the signifier*. But this arbitrary closure is also the cultural space for



opening up new forms of identification that may confuse the continuity of historical temporalities, confound the ordering of cultural symbols, traumatize tradition. (Bhabha: p.196).

For Bhabha, the space opened up in discourses that “traumatize tradition” is an extremely pertinent political one. Take for example the work of an African American writer such as Maya Angelou. Through metonymic details<sup>7</sup> she paints a picture of the American Midwest mid-twentieth century that would be unrecognisable to a traditionally Caucasian perspective. Angelou produces a hybrid image of the American landscape and what has been called “local colour.” Using mainstream discourse and producing an individual utterance, or *parole*, Angelou produces a *bricolage* of local colour that is at once wild, emancipatory and autonomous. Angelou further succeeds in opening up this experience of what was once formerly “the other” to the eyes of the “Western subject.”

In postcolonial theory in general there has been a move towards “english” as opposed to the formerly dominant “English.” Thus, discourses of “local colour” open up the main discourse, (with a capital “E”) and produce a series of “englishes”, which are not of course generally encountered in for example, a standardised English register, but which play not only a huge political role, but help *a fortiori* to affect the socio-linguistic dynamics of an English such as American or British English. Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin (ed). write of the phenomenon in postcolonial theory of “englishes” in the introduction to *The Empire Writes Back*.<sup>8</sup>

We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world. For this reason the distinction between English and english will be used throughout our text as an indication of the various ways in which the language has been employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world.” (Ashcroft, et al., p. 8).

This use of “englishes” of course also applies to writers who draw the reading subjects’ attention to characters and settings not generally regarded as postcolonial but who nevertheless challenge the linguistic orthodoxy and hegemony of RP (Received Pronunciation) English, such as: Dickens, Twain, Baldwin, Kwesi-Johnson and experimental poets from Pound and Olson to Sutherland, Milne and J.H. Prynne. Each of these writers/poets has at the centre of their aesthetic a de-centralisation or challenging of tradition—whether this be through giving voice to the under-represented (Dickens, Twain, Welsh) or experimenting with everyday usage and subverting hierarchies (Sutherland, Milne, Prynne). The one “English” lesson we all garner from these canonical

(and sometimes non-canonical writers) is that the discourse under analysis is equivocal and subject to change, defamiliarisation and politicisation.

According to Jacques Derrida, ethics and justice are not immanent, but always outside of, always in the *space*, through which we enjoin the past and the present.<sup>9</sup> This spaciality is also the space between signifier and signified, or *langue* and *parole*: the space between which we experience the “other”; through literary texts whereby defamiliarisation takes place. This opening of space between the signifier and signified, this movement of deconstructive *différance*, is experienced through our reading of texts and the sense of community through which we are enjoined to the “other.” For example, through her defamiliarisation of Arkansas in the 1930s Maya Angelou colours a picture for us, as does Irvine Welsh in his portrayal of the underclass, (junkys, bent cops, vagrants). Across a wide-ranging spectrum, experience is recognised through literary language as what it is—always different—and it is by virtue of this necessary difference that we are *part of a global community*. Our “otherness” is something that we share, our need for injunction and justice, is something we *share*, the gap between *langue* and *parole* is something we *share*; the fact we have to fill that gap with our relative agency is also something we *share*. This can lead us to a new ethics of Hegelian mutual recognition—whereby we mutually recognise (*Anerkennung*) our difference as a hugely pivotal aspect of our global condition. Or as Hegel himself puts it, an “I that is We and a We that is I.”<sup>10</sup> This is, significantly, for Hegel the basis of “ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*).

#### 4. Conclusion.

However, these philosophical recognitions are not something realised in and through the prison house of a fixed language system, or unexamined forms of life—a language comprised of *langue*—but only through the space of difference, between *langue* and *parole*—though which we *announce* our agency. This is a global phenomenon, a truly shared phenomenon, a political move through which we can also determine our shared commonality or community with other agents. This recognition that is in one particular instance facilitated and brought to the fore in *aesthetic discourse*, is one that is perhaps as timely as ever in the context of present-day Thailand, looking through the prism of recent political events. Thongchai Winichakul recently lamented the lack of recognition of other cultures in the ASEAN region that Thais exhibit; could this lack of recognition be down to the fact that the Thai cultural attitude to literature has been somewhat limited at times, to say the least? How many public libraries are there in, for example, my hometown of Chiang Mai? If my thesis is correct about the ability of *aesthetic discourse* to open up our ethical understanding and recognition of other peoples and cultures—could it be that we need more than a second language to make us truly empathetic members of a truly global community—we need the ability to engage with the “other” in the disruptive

space opened up in literary textuality. Engagement with the simple *Lingua Franca*, (whether that be [E]nglish or Mandarin Chinese) of globalised discourse is not in its own capacity enough to bridge gaps between various social agencies, cultures and creeds.

To conclude, and to bring this polemic back to a Thai educational-tertiary context, it therefore seems pertinent that Thai-English departments are often seen to be cutting down on literature classes, instead of improving and honing this desperately needed heuristic aspect, not only of language education—but also the humanities in general—and thus *limiting the potentiality for a truly ethical recognition of global citizenship within their own student body*. The reading process of alienation, defamiliarisation and ensuing empathy that is engendered through literary reception is surely one that warrants not only further investigation, but also more pedagogical exploration at a time when—arguably—cultures creeds and global “agents” seem more atomised than ever. The phenomenological hermeneutics that I have traced here invoke the paradoxical thesis that through a recognition of our seemingly perspectival apprehension of the “world” we in fact have the ability through the reception of literary discourse to partake in a wider, more inclusive cultural discourse based upon our mutual alterity—or what I have written of elsewhere in the context of Romanticism as a *symbiotic alterity*.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. Husserl first explores the relationship between different phenomenological attitudes towards the world in his ground-breaking book on transcendental phenomenology *Ideas*, in 1913. The distinction is here made between the everyday “natural attitude” to the world and the “phenomenological attitude” whereby through the process of *epoche* (bracketing) and the *eidetic* reduction, one separates subjective experience out for phenomenological analysis.

2. Wittgenstein first outlines his ideas on “forms of life” in *The Philosophical Investigations*, published posthumously in 1953. For Wittgenstein we cannot construct our assumptions about the world upon our simple uses of everyday language and consequently a closer analysis to our use of language in determining our comprehension of the world is required in “ordinary language” philosophy.

3. Hermeneutics—the theory of interpretation—was first explored in its modern, non-scriptural sense, by Friedrich Schleiermacher and later, in terms of human beings and their relationship to history, by Wilhelm Dilthey. Heidegger called his work in *Being and Time* (1927) “a hermeneutics of being.” He developed the idea of “thrownness” into being as *a priori* facilitating our ways of understanding and interpreting being: “the hermeneutic circle.” This was later developed by his student H.G. Gadamer and explored at length in *Truth and Method* (1960), in which Gadamer expanded the notion of the hermeneutic circle to take into account elements such as history, culture, time, etc. The hermeneutic circle was for Gadamer much more contingent than had first been understood by Heidegger and hence open to dialogue and debate between the putative phenomenological subject located at the precipice of the present historical position and the canonical texts of the past. This work was the groundwork for modern hermeneutics in literary criticism, especially in thinkers such as Hans Robert Jauss. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962).

4. See Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique” in David Lodge (ed.) *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 15-30.

5. I am using metonymy in the more general sense of the linguist Roman Jakobson, when he discusses the effects of aphasia. In his famous paper “The Metaphoric and the Metonymic Poles” (1921) Jakobson equates metonymy and synecdoche as both operating on the “metonymic” or syntagmatic axis of language, which corresponds to de Saussure’s *parole* axis and the “metaphoric” or paradigmatic axis of language, which corresponds to de Saussure’s *langue* axis. See David Lodge (ed.) *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 57-61.

6. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Verso, 2006).

7. See Homi K. Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The question of agency”, in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 245-282.

8. See Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin (ed.) *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (London: Routledge, 2002).

9. One thing the subversion between a unitary signifier/signified or langue/parole does is to fragment our idea of the unitary subject. This is something explored by Jacques Derrida in much of his work—the space opened up in writing and the key concept of *différance* (the word/sign both differing from and deferring to something “other” whether it be another sign or an object outside of the sign itself) in language itself. This key deconstructive idea means for Derrida that the human “subject” is constantly fragmented, constantly opened up by language and our use of sign systems. The angst that is caused by this can also be emancipatory—through the “play” of language we are allowed to constantly reinvent both ourselves and our conception of others; through the instability of language (not just “english”- but English is under question here), we are allowed a dynamism that forever occludes a permanently fixed centre. Moreover, if the politics of this “play” seem ethically relativist, that is because in a sense they are. However, Derrida argues that we, as Prince Hamlet, are haunted by the past and by the future in this space between signifier and signified—the *différance* both temporal and spatial that we encounter in language opens up a negotiatory space between the past and the future—a simultaneous presence and absence. This space is openly interrogated in literary texts, especially texts that self-consciously “play” in the space between signification. Derrida claims:

The present is what passes, the present comes to pass [*se passe*], it lingers in this transitory passage, [*Weile*], in the coming-and-going, *between* what *goes* and what *comes*, in the middle of what leaves and what arrives, at the articulation between what absents itself and what presents itself. This in-between articulates conjointly the double articulation [*die Fuge*] according to which the two movements are adjoined [*gefügt*]. Presence, [*Anwesen*] is enjoined [*verfügt*], ordered, distributed in the two directions of absence, at the articulation of what is no longer and what is not yet. To join and enjoin. This thinking of the jointure is also a thinking of injunction. (Derrida, (pp. 29-30.)

For Derrida, time is constantly as it is for Prince Hamlet, “out of joint” and yet the jointure, the injunction is where we have the experience of “justice.” Hamlet experiences time “out of joint” because of the injustice of

events and the fact they are both present and absent, in the past and future. The permanent “rupture” as Derrida has it, which is the present, is a space through which we experience the “other” and consequently justice. The “other” is always anterior or pre- but only by “conjoining”, by “injunction”, do we “pre-serve” justice so to speak. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994).

10. Hegel writes of his famous and influential concept of mutual recognition in chapter 4 of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), in which he writes of the inter-subjective experience between subjects who, after dialectically sublating the life-death struggle and the lordship-bondsman stage, reach a modern liberal understanding as enshrined in the stage of mutual recognition.

11. Thongchai’s lecture was held at *Thammasat University* on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2013. It can be viewed online at: <http://prachatai.com/english/node/3649>.

12. I discuss the “symbiotic alterity of autonomy and receptivity” in my book, *Hegel and the English Romantic Tradition* (2015), in the context of which I argue that a central philosophical preoccupation of the English Romantic poets is that of an interrogation between the autonomy of the imagination and an experience of being necessarily bound to the natural world in order to cognise an intellectual intuition. In the context of the present discussion, the same bald argument applies: the putative phenomenological subject is of necessity bound to a fragmentary hermeneutics of being; but one in and through which, by the experience of aesthetic discourse, a communitarian ethical understanding may take place.

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