

Iser, "Changing Functions of Literature" (1986)

Pivotal → bourgeois concept of art → separate literature (art) + reality  
... indeed (Schiller) art in opposition to reality (201) — (201)  
to "play" of art as "ennobling" (200) and a "training for freedom"  
(Art → no longer the traditional 'imitation of Nature')

∴ FUNCTIONS (NOTED AS AN INITIAL STEP)

- "moments of rapture" (203) and "escape" from the "burdensome character of experience" (202)
- one can "forget everyday life and its transitoriness" (by late 19th c = not a promise of freedom but a stimulus to ecstasy" (203) (negative aspect? "flight" - 202.)
- museum-like canon, abstracted from original circumstances of production (as exemplars of human achievement) (205)
- and ultimately → (merely) a "means of gaining social recognition" + status/culture (206)

BUT (while this may be all true), Iser proceeds to sketch out a more positive function for literature/art (to which it might be put)  
... ANTHROPOLOGICAL PURPOSE (?)

p. 208 (box, read...)

- Art not really an escape from reality → it's more of a <sup>209</sup> reaction to reality.  
(ART AS REACTION TO CIRCUMSTANCES)  
This is the crucial thing (diff. from mere contemplation of an aura 209)

- Literature → fictive alternative world, (extensions of our experience) that projects [or reveals] "exclusions" — things or ideas, not permitted or acknowledged in the everyday world.
  - + does this in a culturally safe way; "trial runs" / "testing movements" / a means of 'surveying what lies beyond the familiar' (210)
  - "Literature" [thus] refers to things that are suppressed, unconscious, inconceivable, perhaps even incommensurable... (211)
  - ∴ Reveals or deals with the other or double outside the system ("unconscious level" 212)
  - ∴ this double creates a gap (negation) between experience + the aesthetic, + members of a society invited to explore/fill this gap.

via acts of interpretation (explicit or tacit)

- NB → Filling that gap (+ the production of art) fulfills a social need or function that can differ from era to era, place to place... "changing images of fantasy..." (213) tells us who we are,

- This study of function within the doubled world (life . . . art) is essentially ANTHROPOLOGICAL and requires study along those lines.

(E.g. why does this or that society produce this or that kind of fiction/fantasy double in its art and literature?)

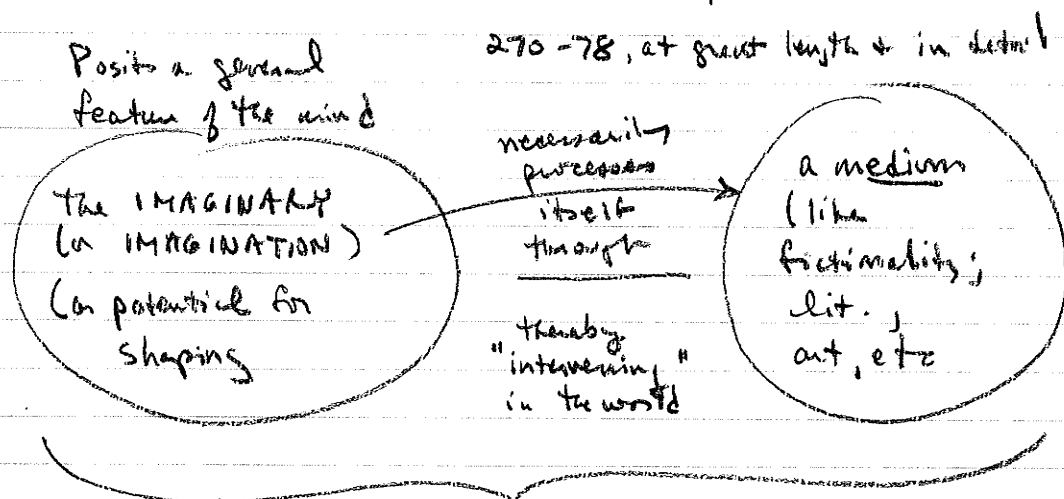
Why is this such a necessary, required thing for all societies to do?

- And which interpretive techniques are appropriate for each set of doubles?

## Iser, "Toward a Literary Anthropology" (1989)

- Pursues the same links of questions, explores more deeply.
- Literature (as fictive world) MUST RESPOND TO A HUMAN NEED (263)  
+ There the q. is - WHY does it exist at all? (263)
- As before → "Literature [is] AN INSTRUMENT OF EXPLORATION" (264)  
→ "FICTIONS ARE INVENTIONS ENABLING HUMAN KIND TO EXTEND ITSELF (265)  
- A 'BASIS FOR [EXPLORING] SOMETHING OUTSIDE OF ITSELF (267)
- But beyond exploring, art/lit. also exists as a "MODE OF IMPACTING" (267)
  - an impact function, a "situational function" via its reception + practical use within a culture.
  - As another world or fictional double, it provides a society with an "As if" presupposition, a world in which potentially everything not existing or permitted in a society is now thinkable (269)
    - "WAYS OF WORLDMAKING" / "EXTENSIONS OF OURSELVES (270)
    - a "staged discourse" that all knows is not real (272)
  - ∴ "flow of fantasy" into our world is necessary (273)

How + WHY this is so is the study of "THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL MAKEUP OF HUMAN KIND" (270, top)



Result: a fictive or artistic world, primarily existing to give voice to what is excluded or not mentionable within an existing culture -  
- a safe haven for extension, exploration, critique...

Why study literature/art anthropologically? 279-82

① "to diagnose the human condition," which needs to reveal its "reverse side" in art + literature. (279)  
Literature can "bring out desires, needs, and necessities" (279)

② - Relationship of literature & dream (in structure of human mind) (280)  
[unclear?]

③ Can help to "regain the importance of literature" in a world that no longer sees it as an ennobling force (281)

(ultimately → emancipatory?)

READ p. 281, top!

Summary of the argument = 282-84

Iser, The Range of Interpretation, "Introduction" (2000)

3 "BASIC TRENDS" of interpretation, all of which Iser now regards as played out or inadequate.

1) those with claims of universal validity, overall explanations of everything (p. 2)  
- Marxism (now at a "dead end" - 2)  
- ideology critique from reified (underinterrogated) premises.  
- (psychoanalysis?)

2) "the conflict of interpretations" (e.g., Ricoeur) → embracing a plurality of explanations in competition with each other. (3)  
(problem → all explanations become relativized, limited)

3) "oppositional discourses" (minority, postcolonial) - (4)  
attempts to gain status, recognition, power.  
- but → fall into logocentrism (+ essentialism)

More important than WHAT is interpretation is WHY is interpretation? (3)

KEY IDEA → INTERPRETATION AS TRANSLATION (TRANSLATABILITY) (5)

"Each interpretation transposes something into something else... [Thus we have] a space that is opened up when something is translated into a different register." (5)

That space [to be explored, problematized, is called a "LIMINAL SPACE" (6)

- and that space can be wide or relatively narrow (6)
- but in all cases, it must be "coped with" (7)

This makes interpretation primarily a PERFORMATIVE ACT, not an explanatory one. (7)

essentially, Iser devise 3 broad categories of interpretation or translatability, depending on the materiality, availability, & distance of the object (thing / concept) to be interpreted,

From simpler to more difficult

① TEXT (given object) → trans. to expl. TEXT

METHOD  
hermeneutics  
(circularity, back + forth)

② NONTEXTUAL THING (like "history") → expl. TEXT  
in which the "object" first has to be (re-)energized from "facts", etc.  
- studies of cultures / cultural levels (b) that would normally decay (entropy) but have to be re-energized through research, etc.

cybernetics,  
feedback loops,  
recursive looping  
(more extensive range of circles)

③ THINGS THAT EXCEED KNOWABILITY → TEXT  
(God, the world, humankind)  
= INCOMMENSURABILITIES  
that we try to explore because of their immense importance

"the travelling differential"  
unfolding the problem  
from within itself (a)  
- non-linear  
- trying to grasp infinity  
in finite terms (b)

(?)