

THE INKLINGS: CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED

Genre, intertextuality and intersemiosis¹

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1 Introduction

It should come as no surprise that there is no commonly accepted, unified set of intertextual relations² inside the field of the literary studies. After all, this is as much as could be expected given the complexity of all semiotic systems in general or the diversity of intersemiotic action between distinct semiotic systems in particular. Still, there are some commonly accepted terms for different kinds of intertextual relations, and many more whose relative meanings do not present insurmountable difficulties to the literary scholar, even if there are no clear-cut boundaries between them. These terms include—but are not exhausted with—those of *genre*, *school*, *style*, *epoch*, *oeuvre*, and *allusion*. Each of these terms tries to define a more or less specific form of intertextual relation between one or more texts, and the totality of these might be formulated so as to comprise the **classification of intertextual relations**.

Intertextuality is here used as a cover term for all the relations between texts whether explicit or implicit. I do not use the term in the vague sense of ‘interdiscursivity’ between a text and a cultural or situational context. Even if this may not be in line with the usage of any particular scholar, and is definitely against Kristeva’s initial formulation of the term, I believe the loose definition has its merits. It captures neatly in one word a set of differing textual practices all having something to do with the relations of one text, i. e., the text under scrutiny, to another that is not present in the surface text in its whole.

Thus, on the surface level, intertextuality seems to be a **dyadic** relation: a pairwise relationship between two distinct texts. In truth it is not: an inter-

¹ This article has profited from the comments made on it by the participants of the *Intertextuality and Intersemiosis* seminar in Tartu, Estonia, 14th to 15th of February, 2003, and from the papers presented there. Especially I would like to thank Marina Grishakova and Heikki Kujansivu for providing me additional sources, and professor Pekka Tammi for dragging my feet back to the ground—or at least for trying to do so.

² Neither is there a commonly accepted classification of *intratextual* relations, for several reasons I will not go here.

textual relation is analogical to the logical comparison relation between any two terms, and as such, it of course demands a third term, the *tertium comparationis* of the Classical authors—the ‘ground’ of the comparison. Still, the simplistic surface-level solution, where intertextuality refers to a dyadic relation, will do for a start.

Texts (or signs of any other kind) can also enter in more complex relationships. In these, there do not exist simple surface-level—i. e., **textual**—explanations for the connectedness of the texts, while some connection between them still seems to be required in order to correctly interpret either text. These kinds of relations justly deserve to be called ‘intersemiotic’ since they create and uphold connections between distinct semiotic systems—texts. This article is not intended to solve the dilemma of a terminological taxonomy with one sweep of the metaphorical broom; rather I am trying to argue that while most of the above-mentioned terms have definitions specific enough to be usable in most instances of text analysis, one does not. The one left out is that of **genre**. If presented as an intertextual, or text-to-text, relationship, genre cannot be fully formulated: this has already been shown for several times during the recent history of genre theory. Genre simply cannot be equated with a ‘textual formula’ (cf. Copley 2001). It requires a looser and definitely a non-textual definition. Still, genre shares some characteristics with the intertextual terms and should not be wholly separated from them in theory either.

There are connections between literary works where genre seems to be the *only* term to adequately describe the intersemiotic—if not strictly intertextual—relation in question. Thus my purpose here is to elaborate the concept of genre from the point of view of the notions of intertextuality and intersemiosis. My example is the English group of writers called *The Inklings*. Basically I am arguing *for* the generic interpretation of the relationship between the various Inklings but *against* the conception that shared genericity in any way implies strict text-level intertextuality.

A note on terminology and theory. There is some discrepancy about the terms ‘semiotic’ and ‘semiotics’. They are often seen to be bound to a specific—namely structuralist—theory, but here, semiotics is specifically the name for a general discipline, like ‘mathematics’ or ‘logic’. In fact, even though I will not make it an issue here, I strongly reject some claims made in the structuralist vein. Maybe I could have chosen the form ‘semeiotic’ as Peirce did, or maybe I could have made a difference between ‘semiotics’ (in the general sense) and ‘semiology’ (the structuralist version of it). In the event, I did neither; but still, I lean very much on Peirce’s version of the discipline.

In brief, there are two important things to consider in the Peirce’s model. First, Peirce’s semeiotic does not quite have ‘sign systems’, only signs; thus, the term ‘intersemiotic’ really turns into a pleonasm. Secondly, Peirce sees meaning as a *dynamic act* rather than as an inherent, static property of the sign. Both of these points are important for the following discussion.

2 The Inklings

There have actually been two different clubs named ‘The Inklings’, both of whose members included J. R. R. Tolkien. The first one, founded by Edward Tangye Lean during the early years of the 1930’s, was short-lived and does not concern us here. The second one, although probably not actually founded by C. S. Lewis, was always centred on him. This latter club brought together three very different writers: Lewis, Tolkien, and the lesser known but at least equally curious Charles Williams. The known existence of the extraliterary connection between these writers has been the topic of much discussion ever since Lewis and Tolkien achieved worldwide fame, and it is now being used as a marketing strategy for the re-found Williams. Williams has thus become ‘the third Inklings’ mainly for commercial purposes, and one might say there is also ‘the fourth Inklings’, Owen Barfield, who may be even less known than Charles Williams, but who has gained a certain following in small circles, at least partly because of his anthroposophical background.

There are no records as to the exact date of birth for the club: it could actually have been founded very soon after the first club’s demise, even though the first contemporary evidence for its existence is as late as 1939. As already mentioned, Lewis is widely believed to have been the progenitor for the new grouping. Tolkien was one of the ‘founding members’—if such a word can be used of an informal club—as was Barfield, Lewis’s long-time friend. The club met once or twice or week, quite informally and mostly without an explicit invitation, either on ‘The Eagle and the Child’ pub or in Lewis’s work rooms in the Magdalen college. The club was never a fixed entity. Apart from C. S. (‘Jack’) Lewis, his brother Warren, Tolkien and Barfield, it had regular members who either wrote no fiction or have not become famous for it, and many occasional visitors, most of whom are probably not even known since the group kept no journal of its meetings.

As such, the existence and the ideational substance of the group deserves little scholarly notice. The atmosphere in the English universities, at least before the Second World War, seems to have favoured clubs that were formed as loose institutions for leisurely conversation on more or less common grounds. From what we know without the benefit of actual historical documents from the meetings, the Inklings was just another one of these. The membership of the group was vacillating and the common ground of the members vague. The habit of reading aloud members’ own texts seems to have been restricted to only some of the club’s members, and even if the conversation had some directionality towards literature and (lay) philosophy, there is no doubt that during the actual meetings the conversation wandered without a definite purpose just as much as in more casual gatherings.

If there is any reason at all to remember the Inklings from anything other than as a symptom of their times, it is the supposed *literary* connection between the various writing Inklings. The critics of Tolkien and Lewis, in the

1950's in particular, were often to raise the point of their connection to the fore. However, apart from the historical coincidence of their happening to be in the same place at the same time more than once, the nature of their literary linkage has mostly been rejected or at least strongly questioned. As scholars such as Humphrey Carpenter (1981) and Gareth Knight (1990) have shown, there is really very little in common on the textual level on the literary works Tolkien, Lewis and Williams wrote; that is to say, the substance, themes, style etc. of their works are markedly different. The question now is: if no textual connection can be established between the writers, is not the whole club just a historical coincidence and unworthy as evidence for the literary scholar?

3 What is in a 'text'?

Answering the question formulated at the end of the last chapter requires us to delve in the variety of literary connections, and it involves the problem of the nature of 'text' itself.

Although the two-sided concept of the (linguistic) sign is often attributed to Saussure, even before him it was always difficult to keep apart two very different conceptions of 'text'. Firstly, texts can be conceived of as complex material signs—or to use the structuralist terminology, as *signifiers* which in their turn are comprised of signs from a different semiotic system, such as language. The text as a signifier does not have inbuilt interpretations. It needs to be situated in a complex of other signs in order to fulfill its function as a text—in order to be interpreted. Likewise, the constitutive signs of the text, its linguistic, stylistic, generic, etc. constituents, cannot, in their turn, be interpreted by the reader just by encountering them in a textual sequence, but only with an interpretative effort of the reading mind. This is, I think, how C. S. Peirce would have detailed out the notion of 'text' had he ever done it.

On the other hand, the Saussurean notion of 'text'—even though Saussure never provided one and it is in any case far older than him—would have it as a union of material (or materialised) signifiers and their inseparable signifieds, these two sides being bound according to the currently relevant code. This notion is not without its merits, but it can lead seriously astray if not kept strictly apart from the first one. When talking about texts, one has to know 'which' text we are talking about: the material manifestation of a semiotic process, or the time- and matter-bound chunk of the process itself.

From now on, I will use the word 'textual' to refer only to literary signifiers—that is, literary 'signs' in the Peircean terminology. Since literary code is built on top of the linguistic one, this more often than not means that those signifiers do have signifieds on the *linguistic* level, and all the other sublevels, if such are needed in the description; the important point is that they do not have interpretations yet on the *literary* level, the level currently relevant.

4 Discernible influences between the Inklings

Before embarking to the (lack of) evidence on the textual level I present some biographical facts to shed light on the *possibilities* of influence between the Inklings. Facts such as these may or may not possess literary significance; in this case, my opinion is that they would have had, had there *been* influences.

Literary influence, when manifesting itself as intertextual links, is not just a matter between two texts. Traces of it are often seen outside the texts too, and there is the natural prerequisite that the source must predate the target. Thus we must start with Charles Williams, who had won the field as a published writer well before either Lewis or Tolkien, even if their poems—published in more or less obscure magazines—are taken into account. Williams's *The Silver Stair* was published in 1912, and ever since that, Williams remained a prolific writer. By the time Lewis had even heard of him—in 1936—he had already published about 20 books, most of them non-fiction.

The Inklings were a much later ingredient in the life of Williams. He did not become a member of the Inklings until the wartime, when his employer, the Oxford University Press, stationed him in Oxford and even from then on, he remained a passer-by in the club. The one obvious impression rising out of the bare numeric facts is that Williams simply could not have been influenced by either Lewis or Tolkien. His literary style had matured a long time before ever meeting the other Inklings; in fact, most of his works were written long before that. The impression of a separate line of creation (as compared to the other Inklings) is reinforced when one looks closer at Williams's *oeuvre*, which was always closer to his patron's works in its symbolism and this-worldliness—this patron being T. S. Eliot. Eliot also happened to be one of Lewis's archfoes: where Lewis and Tolkien were strongly opposed to modernism, and found many things in modern art not only abominable but downright incomprehensible, Williams did not condemn anything in the new literary movements at first hand. His view of the world was wide enough to cover even those aspects of it he personally did not wish to become entangled with. Lewis is known to have criticised Williams's texts heavily at times—never in public, though—, but there is no evidence that Williams ever took any heed of it: Williams, like Tolkien, was quite impregnable as far as his literary works were concerned.

Lewis had read Williams's *The Place of the Lion* (1931) in 1936, just at the time when his *Allegory of Love* was waiting publication in the Oxford University Press, where Williams was employed. Williams wrote to Lewis in March 1936, and they met shortly after. They became friends or at least close acquaintances, but the relationship ended up as almost a mirror-image of the one between Lewis and Tolkien, with Lewis being the 'second class friend' to Williams (cf. below). To Tolkien, Williams was probably always just an intruder in the Inklings as well as in his friendship with Lewis. The Inklings

was thus not the only connection between Tolkien and Lewis but it *was* the only connection between Tolkien and Williams.

Lewis is known to have been very sensitive to advice, criticism and influences alike but in spite of this, there is also a quite distinct, ‘Lewisian’ flavour in his works which is already shown in his first major fictional work—and the first to be published under his own name—, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933). As all his works, it was an allegory, or ‘allegorical apology’, as the subtitle claims, ‘for Christianity, reason, and romanticism’. Unlike the ‘mystical’ Williams and the ‘mythical’ Tolkien, Lewis really had an unerringly logical way of thinking and writing. No textual detail ever just dropped out of the clear sky in his works: everything was rationally controlled, ‘logic-driven’. Allegory was thus the natural form for his writing and he never wandered far from it.

The taste for allegory Lewis already had before the Inklings period, and if anything, the downright hostility of Tolkien towards allegory would have had him turn away from it. This never happened. When Tolkien and Lewis made an mutual agreement to write two science fiction stories—Tolkien of a time travel, Lewis of a space travel—, and Lewis produced the first part of the *Ransom* trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1943)³, it was just as much an allegory as were his previous works, or the later ones such as the *Narnia* series (1950–56). Even the names borrowed from Tolkien to the *Ransom* novels—taken not from Tolkien’s writings but his reading aloud *The Silmarillion* stories in the Inklings meetings—were given so different second-world interpretations that they do not carry anything of Tolkien’s world to Lewis’s.

Lewis had had scant connections with Tolkien and none with Williams up to the time he began his almost professional writing. Though Lewis and Tolkien were both Oxford dons, their friendship had been slow to start; one might say with reason that no friendship could ever have evolved had Lewis been as unchangeable in his views and opinions as Tolkien. In the end, it was always Lewis’s conversions, first the conversion in his stance to the university politics, and later, in 1931, his conversion to Christianity, that bridged the gap between them. Their first common venture outside to professional sphere was *The Coal-biters* (or in Icelandic, *Kolbítar*) club, whose sole purpose was to read Old Icelandic literature in original language. The club was started by Tolkien, an expert in Old Norse, in 1926, and Lewis joined it early in 1927. The club, though short-lived, enhanced their acquaintance and could also have provided some common mythical material for their later writings; but for Tolkien, the Norse legends and myths were nothing new, and for Lewis, myths and legends as such, without a thought-out, logical equivalence relation to the present times were valueless. Whatever *Kolbítar* was, it never had any evidential significance for the literary scholarship.

³ Tolkien never finished his time travel story, *The Lost Road*. Its rough drafts were published in *HME* 5.

The extraliterary connection to Tolkien still did affect Lewis. The *Narnia* series, Lewis's high fantasy sequence, was written in part to compete with Tolkien, although at a time when their friendship had already cooled—at least in part because of Lewis's admiration for Williams, which Tolkien never shared. As compared to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–56), parts of which Lewis had heard Tolkien read aloud in the meetings of the Inklings during the wartime, *Narnia* was a downright allegory in the best 'Lewisian' vein. Furthermore, its first part, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) contained a Messianic figure, the lion Aslan, while Tolkien carefully tried to avoid the Evangelium, which he thought the greatest 'mythopoeia' of all⁴. Even if *Narnia* belongs to the Tolkien-influenced stage of Lewis's *oeuvre* in subject matter and style, the influence never went very deep. The same applies to the period when he was more heavily influenced by Williams. The last part of Lewis's *Ransom* trilogy, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), clearly resembles Williams in style, the set of characters, and feeling⁵, but underneath it hides a well thought-out allegory very much his own and very unlike Williams. It might be said that Lewis only found his own style in his latest fictional writing, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), but the question of style is on the (textual) surface: no one would ever think *That Hideous Strength* was written by Williams, and all the extraliterary connections (and their traces) removed, very little would change in the interpretation of that novel.

Tolkien was the last to become a widely published author with *The Hobbit* (1937). It was an immediate success. By that time, he and Lewis had already become friends, and Lewis probably had a part in coercing Tolkien to publish the novel which was, when begun, just a pastime for Tolkien's own children. Tolkien's major work, *The Lord of the Rings*, was begun as a sequel to *The Hobbit* as early as late 1937, by the publisher's request (*HME* 7.11, *Letters* 18). The novel⁶ which was to win him worldwide fame was slow to ripen, and it was only finished in late 1948 (*HME* 9.12), and even after that, lots of work in refining and correcting the details was to wait until just before the publication of the first part of the novel in 1954. However, the late 1930's is not the correct starting point for Tolkien's epic. Though a sequel to a children's book when begun, it quickly merged with Tolkien's long-time project of a 'mythology for England', already existent during the First World War (Grotta 1976: 57; Flieger

⁴ In *The Lords of the Rings*, Frodo of course achieves an almost Christ-like significance, but Tolkien was very careful not to overstress Frodo's role as a salvation for all "human(oid) kind".

⁵ Gareth Knight (1990: 8) has found Williams's influence in the former two *Ransom* stories (*Out of the Silent Planet*, 1938; *Perelandra*, 1943) as well. Although there is no external reason why it should not be so, I find the textual support for it lacking.

⁶ *LR* is not a 'trilogy' despite its original publication in three parts. The only thing that could be questioned is whether it is a 'novel' or something else, for example, a romance (Brewer 1975) or a pastoral (Burger 1986). Here I am using the word 'novel' to refer to a *format*, not necessarily to a genre.

1983: xii⁷) although published posthumously as *The Silmarillion* in 1977. To conclude, *The Lord of the Rings* inherited more in style and subject matter from *The Silmarillion* than *The Hobbit*; and *The Silmarillion* was so very much Tolkien's own personal project that no detail could ever come to it even from his closest friends.

Tolkien had always had his own ideas about literature. Perhaps he was not as unresponsive as sometimes represented, but still, when he had formed his opinion about how and what he should write, no one could change his mind. His friendship to Lewis was important to him—always more important to him than it was to Lewis, for whom Tolkien, in his own words, always fell to the 'second class' of his acquaintances. In spite of that, the literary influences can only been shown to have flown to the opposite direction: Tolkien merely shrugged off any criticism that was not consistent with his own, early formed views of literature. Lewis, on the other hand, was always ready to modify his text. Partly this shows how very different attitudes they had towards their own texts: while Tolkien held the exact wording of his text almost sacrosanct, for Lewis it was only the purpose of the text that really mattered.

Williams, who had no academic degree, was a passer-by in the Oxford circles. Lewis could not have wished for more welcome an addition to the Inklings, but Tolkien considered Williams much the worse type than Lewis's other friends. Lewis, easily influenced, actually ended up truly idolising Williams in a way that even his biographer (Wilson 1990) has found hard to grasp. Tolkien could hardly have found Williams anything other than an intruder. When alone with Lewis, Tolkien could always direct the conversation to the scarce literary works that really interested him; with Williams present, the conversation was destined to wander to areas Tolkien, although knowledgeable, had long ago found not only uninteresting but downright abhorrent. Despite his lack of academic education, Williams was a talented literary scholar whose interests reached from the antiquity right down to the present. Unlike Tolkien, the targets of his literary passion were rather post-Middle Age and included such figures as Milton and Shakespeare, both of whom Tolkien found totally devoid of interest. Where Tolkien always concentrated on the *language* of diction, Williams, like Lewis, was always on the side of more literary points of view. However, unlike Lewis, Williams was a keen admirer of modern lyrics and had no use for the nostalgia evident in both Lewis and Tolkien. To sum up, despite the more or less shallow literary connection between Lewis and Williams, the Inklings as a group had not one literary point of view in common.

Faced with this, some scholars have tried to situate the 'missing link' between the works of the Inklings in the extraliterary context, especially in religion. The Inklings was a manifestly Christian grouping, strongly opposed to the mainstream agnosticism of the Oxford they inhabited. I think it is unarguable that the religious stance each of the Inklings manifested was a major

⁷ Grotta dates the beginning of the mythology in 1916, Flieger in 1917.

factor in bringing them together; but it has to be discerned there is no common denominator between the members as to *what kind of* Christianity they professed. Lewis is often classified as an ecumenical Christian who was determined to adopt a ‘simple’ Christian stance, thus keeping distance to the more disputable questions of different Christian practices. Tolkien is described as being a traditional Roman Catholic. According to Colin Duriez (1993: 134) this picture is deceptive: neither Lewis nor Tolkien are easily classifiable as Christians. Daniel Grotta (1976: 95) labels Tolkien as a ‘Manichean’ Christian, for whom the natural order equals God’s order, but I think this label is so vague it could safely be given to most naive⁸ Christians, Lewis and Williams included, and thus, it does not have any particular evidential value.

The range between the religious views inside the Inklings is best illuminated when we look at Williams and Barfield. Barfield was an anthroposophist, and although his *History in English Words* (1926) and *The Poetic Diction* (1928) were approved by Tolkien, they clearly point to quite a different worldview than the cold, rational ecumenical Christianity of Lewis or the myth-full, romantic Catholicism of Tolkien. Williams, in his turn, can easily be described as a mystic or even an eccentric. Although the other Inklings were never in any open dispute with his views—quite on the contrary, in fact, except perhaps for Tolkien—, to an outside observer his dogmas were of such nature that he was quite close to end up being a Christian in any meaningful sense of the word at all. His ‘theology’, or rather, natural philosophy, always tried to grasp both ends of the argument, sometimes creating an almost Orwellian impression of a man who has no difficulties accepting two diagonally opposed points of view at the same time. I think it can safely be summarized that the Inklings shared no common theological or ideological ground. Another way to present their differences is Verlyn Flieger’s (the standard of comparison here being Tolkien):

As developed in *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien’s Christianity is manifestly tougher and darker than Lewis’s, less mystical and occult than Williams’s, and far less hopeful than either man’s faith. Tolkien’s Christian belief is precarious, constantly renewed yet always in jeopardy, and it is this precariousness which gives its knife-edge excitement. The issue is always in doubt. Where Lewis’s Christianity is firmly based in logic, and Williams’s in a sense of mystical practice, Tolkien’s Christianity is measured against experience and constantly put to the test. (Flieger 1983: xviii.)

For Tolkien, the link between literature and theology was crystallized in his views on the **myth** and his formulation of the concept of **sub-creation**. The importance of myth could have been acquired from Ernst Cassirer, who wrote

⁸ ‘Naive’ in no pejorative sense of the word, meaning just Christians with no interest in the more scholarly points of theology.

about it at much the same time, but the more obvious source is of course Owen Barfield and his B. Litt. thesis *Poetic Diction* (1928):

Barfield suggests that myth, language and man's perception of his world are inseparable. Words are expressed myth, the embodiment of mythic concepts and a mythic world view. [...] Barfield's theory postulates that language, in its beginnings, made no distinction between the literal and the metaphoric meaning of a word, as it does today. [...] All diction was literal, directly giving voice to man's perception of phenomena and his intuitive mythic participation in them. [...] In that earlier, primal world-view, every word would have had its own unified meaning, embodying what we now can understand only as a multiplicity of concepts, concepts for which we (no longer able to participate in the original world and world view) must use many different words. (Flieger 1983: 35.)

The place given to language in Barfield's concept was undoubtedly irresistible to a language-lover of Tolkien's proportions (cf. Knight 1990: 6). Lewis, on the other hand, showed some hostility towards the very concept. Even after his conversion, he always remained a logical rationalist passionately opposed to anything not only unexplained but unexplainable in principle, and to him, myth equalled falsehood which in turn equalled deliberate misleading—a thing God simply would not do to man. Tolkien equalled myth rather with his 'sub-creation' principle, the controversy between them resulting ultimately in his poem 'Mythopoeia', published in the 1988 edition of the *Tree and Leaf*, where Tolkien gave a poetic voice to his concept in the lost attempt of persuade Lewis behind it too.

Despite the fact of sub-creation having its traces in Barfield's thinking, neither Williams nor Lewis showed willingness to give it a dominant place in their own writings or their 'theories' of their writings. The net result was that though Tolkien was probably narrower-minded than Lewis *theologically*, in his prose he was to present a much wider range of possibilities and visions 'in which his own religious belief is not readily apparent' (Knight 1990: 112). This of course nicely fits in with his dislike of allegory, this very fact forcing him further and further apart from both Lewis and Williams. On the other hand, while not hostile towards allegory, Williams in his mysticism and un-rationality (not to say 'irrationality') was hardly compatible with Lewis either.

The connection between the Inklings cannot be found directly in their thinking: I think the real solution to the dilemma lies still in their works.

5 Intertextual relations

Norse sagas and legends, Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur* and George MacDonald's 'faery' romances from the latter half of the 19th century were early influences both for Lewis and Tolkien well before their first meeting. This convergence of

works is hardly random, since all the works mentioned can be subsumed under the heading of mystic romanticism they shared with many others in the post-Victorian era. In spite of this, there were far-reaching differences as well. Where Lewis, like Williams, had a truly 'literary' taste and devoured various literature with appetite, Tolkien found his taste early in life, narrow but deep, and he was always more interested in the language of literature than its genuinely 'literary' qualities. To put it bluntly (and not quite accurately), Tolkien's interests lay in the pre-Chaucerian, Lewis's and Williams's in the post-Chaucerian era of English literature (Carpenter 1978: 25).

Thus, even though motifs, settings and themes common to all of the Inklings *can* be found, these always have a much wider scope in the literature of the first part of the 20th century. The differences between them are much more marked. That is still hard to prove in an analytical way, since the *absence* of a sign cannot ever be proven without the whole text, but I will try to demonstrate these differences with small samples.

First of all, in Tolkien's works the marked feature is always the stylistic 'span' between high and low forms corresponding to the dual nature of the world in Tolkien's view. The exact features of the forms vary according to the setting, but the span itself is always found. For example, this is his bubolic, Georgian, or pastoral mode, the 'low' form of *The Lord of the Rings*:

Tongues began to wag in Hobbiton and Bywater; and rumour of the coming event travelled all over the Shire. The history and character of Mr. Bilbo Baggins became once again the chief topic of conversation; and the other folk suddenly found their reminiscences in welcome demand.

No one had a more attentive audience than old Ham Gamgee, commonly known as the Gaffer. He held forth at *The Ivy Bush*, a small inn on the Bywater road; and he spoke with some authority, for he had tended the garden at Bag End for forty years, and had helped old Holman in the same job before that. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 34.)

And the following represents the 'high' form in same novel:

[...] Théoden could not be overtaken. Fey he seemed, or the battle-fury of his fathers ran like new fire in his veins, and he was borne up on Snowmane like a god of old, even as Oromë the Great in the battle of the Valar when the world was young. His golden shield was uncovered, and lo! it shone like an image of the Sun, and the grass flamed into green about the white feet of his steed. For morning came, morning and a wind from the sea; and the darkness, was removed, and the hosts of Mordor wailed, and terror took them, and they fled, and died, and the hoofs of wrath rode over them. And then all the host of Rohan burst into song, and they sang as they slew, for the joy of battle was on them, and the sound of their singing that was fair and terrible came even to the City. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 870–1.)

In *The Silmarillion*, the stylistic extremes are different but the span is exactly the same. In *The Hobbit*, it is not so noticeable, at least not in the earlier editions of the novel; in the later editions, Tolkien tried to bring the novel closer to the style and feeling of *The Lord of the Rings*. In his ‘lesser’ works such as *Tree and Leaf*, the stylistic span almost vanishes but its literary function remains: there is still the span between a higher form (Heaven) and a lower one (mortal life). Without this span, it is very hard to appreciate its endpoints; and this is a feature peculiar to Tolkien alone of the Inklings.

On the other hand, even where Lewis could have made a contrast between the same kind of forms, namely in *Heaven and Hell*, he did not do it: it was simply not his way of seeing things. Lewis was much closer to sense-perceptions and their direct report:

She began to walk forward, crunch-crunch over the snow and through the wood toward the other light. In about ten minutes she reached it and found it was a lamp-post. As she stood looking at it, wondering why there was a lamp-post in the middle of a wood and wondering what to do next, she heard a pitter patter of feet coming toward her. And soon after that a very strange person stepped out from among the trees into the light of the lamp-post. (Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 6.)

The world presented in this way has very little in common with the ‘macro-stylistic’, overall scope of Tolkien’s fiction.

And to conclude, the fiction Charles Williams resides much more in the mind of its persons, the exact line of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the mind being vague and at times almost totally vanishing. In the next sample, the ‘she’ of the cited text is just beginning to grasp the fact of being dead:

There was a confused sense in her mind that she was on her way somewhere; she was either going to or coming from her own flat. It might have been to meet Richard, though she had an idea that Richard, or someone with Richard, had told her not to come. But she could not think of anyone, except Richard, who was at all likely to do so, and anyhow she knew she had been determined to come. It was all mixed up with that crash which had put everything out of her head; and as she lifted her eyes, she saw beyond the Houses and the Abbey the cause of the crash, the plane lying half in the river and half on the Embankment. She looked at it with a sense of its importance to her, but she could not tell why it should seem so important. (Williams, *All Hallows’ Eve*, 2.)

There is no stylistic span here as there is in Tolkien’s works, since there are no dualities— not between the mind and the body, nor between the myths and the legends, nor the myths and the real world. In fact, Williams did not (could not) separate even the natural from the supernatural. The last point, in particular, makes a strong difference between his and Lewis’s works, too.

I could go on with enumerating differences: it is very hard to find anything *in common* between the works—at least not such common features that would not be shared with many other works in the 20th century just as well. To summarise, there are few explicit **intertextual links** between the writings of the Inklings, those few being mostly found in Lewis's works.

It begins to look like there are no literary connections between the Inklings at all; at least the intertextual relations mentioned in the beginning can easily be shown not to apply to the link in question. The differences in **style** between the Inklings have already been mentioned: there is very little in common between Tolkien's and Williams's prose, if the fact of Lewis's writing in both styles at different times is ignored. The period of ten years the Inklings were in closer contact hardly qualifies as an **epoch**, especially since the group was small and never exercised any kind of literary-political power even to its own members. The **oeuvre** is rarely held to be a textual relation at all, which results from the fact of its being extrasemiotic in the common world sense⁹: there is no requirement for the parts of an *oeuvre*—i. e., individual literary works of art—, to have anything in common between them, *textually* speaking. The *oeuvre* has an absolute requirement of a different nature: all the works in question must be products of one and the same writer. This definition looks back to the biographical stage of literary criticism, but since it also refers to a common-sense notion of human individuals and their life span, I most definitely don't encourage altering it. On the current subject let it suffice to say that since the Inklings is a group of individuals and not a single individual, the concept of *oeuvre* is self-evidently unusable to describe the connections between them.

Tolkien and Williams had found their respective styles and subject matters long before the forming of the Inklings, and neither found any use in the other's writings. An **allusion** is usually defined as 'implicit reference, perhaps to another work of literature or art, to a person or an event' (Cuddon 1979, s.v. allusion). This makes it a kind of implicit intertextual link, which is a loose enough formulation to cover many kinds of semiotic interaction between works of art even when their medium is different, or there is no discernible external connection (as of *oeuvre* or epoch) between them. However, it can hardly be interpreted so loosely as to be adequate in describing the vacuous and textually transparent relations between the works of the Inklings. Only Lewis, and probably only in *That Hideous Strength*, was anywhere near to referring to the other writers. *That Hideous Strength* has stylistic and ideological similarities with Williams—even to the extent that Lewis seems ideologically to divert from his earlier fiction: having read Lewis's *Narnia* sequence or *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) one can hardly have expected a pagan wizard, Merlin, to stand

⁹ The term 'extrasemiotic' should be used with extreme caution. If such philosophers as C. S. Peirce and V. N. Voloshinov are right, the whole of human life is semiotic in character, and the human consciousness in particular is composed of sign-matter. Still, the pragmaticist stance of Peirce I adhere to is realist, in the end: there *is* an outside world.

in foreline in the side of good in Lewis's fiction! Also, *That Hideous Strength* contains explicit references to Tolkien, as already mentioned, but these are merely on the level of individual borrowed names. But one novel by one writer can hardly connect all the novels by all the writers.

Yet there is one class of relations that seems readily applicable even to the loosest connections between texts, and that is the one of **genre**. I think genre should be kept free of overly strict definitions just because of this. There should be no need of saying that genre is a *semiotic* category: all communicative acts need to be interpreted just in order to be communicative acts, that is, they need to enter the chain of *semiosis*, the production of interpretants, and thus they acquire a semiotic nature. The interpretative chain starts from the substantive form of the act but is sooner or later bound to end up in the extrasemiotic spatiotemporal world where all communication ultimately is grounded. Before it does so, however, the semiosis has many links both within some given semiotic system (intrasemiotic sphere) and between different semiotic systems (intersemiotic sphere). All textual relations share this communicative-semiotic nature, but most of them, as already shown, have fairly strict formulations for the literary theorist. Given the loose semiotic definition of genre, the relations between the Inklings can be formulated anew.

6 Semiotics of reading and the concept of genre

What is a genre? Above, I have rejected the idea that it is simply a 'textual formula', and I hereby reject the idea that it need have explicit textual distinctive marks at all. As I see it, genre is most usefully seen as a *semiotic* connection between texts, but this does not mean it need be a *textual* one—in the Peircean sense of 'text' and 'textual', as elaborated above.

There is no such thing as a one-dimensional, surface-only reading of a text: reading always involves referentiality. However, this is a somewhat different claim than the one made on the structuralist paradigm, namely that signs always have a content or meaning part. Meanings do not automatically follow the signs but the signs—text itself being a sign too—are *directional*, in a sense, just in order to *be* signs. Thus reading, taken as a cognitive operation of the reading mind, not as a mechanical operation involving only movements of the eye when countering the light waves reflecting from the surface of the paper, always involves *relationalities* of the intratextual, intertextual and intersemiotic kinds. That is, the constituent signs of the text can refer to other signs in the text, in *other* texts, and *outside* the textual world.

Neither is there only one possibility of multi-dimensional readings—the imagined 'deep text' where all the intertextual references of the surface text were resolved. Interpretations of texts are not 'digital': there is no binary polarity magically switching a shallow surface reading to a deep intertextual reading, or an 'analytic' reading to an 'interpreting' one. Reading always

implies choosing the ‘correct’ textual cues from the chaotic multiplicity the surface text provides; ‘correct’ itself presenting here a continuum of possibilities from the most wildly inappropriate to ones that may offer almost rock-solid certainty.

By allowing the literary signs the possibility of referring outside the text they are a part of, I am not driving the claim that ‘all texts are intertextual’. Every utterance, every act of interpretable communication, is by definition in contact with at least one other utterance, otherwise it is not interpretable at all and thence, not communicative; but to call this kind of *prerequisite* to communication as ‘intertextual’ is bound to weaken the argument when the contact is truly *inter-textual*, i. e., between texts.

Text, in my view, is more or less exactly a **bounded sequence of discourse**. The boundedness of texts is epistemologically very similar to the boundedness of physical objects. Little intersubjective ambiguity arises as to the ‘objective’ limits of physical objects: there is no fuzzy line between, say, a pencil and the world outside it in people’s minds. The transition from the pencil to the not-pencil is (rather, seems to be) clear-cut and absolute. Likewise, texts, in the strict sense of the word, have limits (beginnings and ends, since texts are linear sequences of signs) and substance (the signs comprising the text), neither the limits nor the substance allowing much or any intersubjective uncertainty. One can rarely question ‘what is in the text’: the text sets its own boundaries quite clearly.

Even though it should go without saying, I want to emphasise that the epistemological similarity between the semiotic and the physical objects breaks on the ontological level. Unlike physical objects, texts are not really comprised of matter but of signs, these being *types*, not tokens, even though to be observable, the signs of the texts must materialise as physical objects. The ultimate result of the materialisation of signs is a physical object that *contains* the text but that still cannot be equated with it. Thus, **intertextuality** refers to the **textually bounded but interpretationally unbounded connection between texts**. The intertextual connections are interpretationally bounded not by themselves but by other signs in or outside the text(s) in question.

This definition leaves generic relations outside strict intertextuality by design. As genre refers to the connection between a bounded text and the unbounded set of interpretants, it is more appropriately viewed as an intersemiotic (or interdiscoursal) but *not* an intertextual relation. The line is fuzzy, though. Let us say we have two texts under scrutiny and the texts don’t seem to share any surface-textual, i. e., any discernible or ‘empirical’ connection. Still, if the reading of either text seems to profit from reference to a *third factor*, an element not (necessarily) manifestly present in any of the texts but still, *necessarily*, required by the interpretation, we can call this element the *genre* both of the texts manifest. This makes **genre** mean the **textually unbounded but interpretationally bounded connection**—the diagonal opposite of the intertextual connections. However, the interpretational boundedness of

genre is limited: just like any other sign, the genre cannot interpret itself, i. e., it cannot say anything interpretationally relevant about the genre but only about the texts for which it is an interpretant.

Like all the other kinds of signs, genres are, of course, not unerring. As unbounded systems by nature they have no way of getting ‘un-unbounded’, since losing that particular quality would destroy their ability to enter semiosis. Essentially this means that genre (like language, or any other semiotic system) is a way of bounding the virtual—and real—unboundedness of the possible interpretations of any given work. However, the genre’s ability of ‘un-bounding’ in no way lessens its own inherent unboundedness as a system of signs.

Works in a genre can of course enter in intertextual relations too. There is no ‘law’ (or norm or convention) against works in the same genre commenting each other, but neither is there a sanction of *failing* that commentary relationship. This means that works in the same genre, or rather, works utilising the same generic resources, have no obligation of mutual intertextuality. The works of the Inklings have only weak intertextual links to each other, but this does not—and should not—mean that there is *nothing* in common between them. The Inklings happened to write their works during a formative period of a particular genre, namely the one of *fantasy*, and this in itself should be a rich source of research for the literary studies, quite apart from any text-to-text connections.

What I have said above should make it clear that genres are language-like in nature: in fact, they *are* languages from the point of view of general semiotics. This easily calls for an objection. If language and genre are not only ‘alike’ but of one and the same semiotic form, does not it follow that literary works cannot be understood without reference to the genre(s) they contain? After all, no linguistic utterance cannot be understood without reference to the language in which it is uttered. This counterargument is, in its way, absolutely true, but it misses the point I am trying to make and in doing so actually ends up with reinforcing my argument. My argument is ultimately an argument *for* genre but *against* interpreting it as a fixed code (or a set of codes) instead of as a dynamic resource all the participants in the communicative act—the text included—can have a recourse to. There is no need for the hearer to be able to decode each and every part of the utterance to understand what is being said: the overall meaning (interpretation) of a linguistic utterance utilises the meanings of the constituent signs but is not totally bound to it. The overall pattern can even break the interpretative rules for the constituent signs, if necessary. This happens rarely in languages, since they are strong and extensive codes; in literature, it is more frequent, since genres are weak and diffuse codes. Languages govern most speech sounds human beings can make—even the ‘neutral’ vowels or nasals uttered in hesitation are in the habit of coming under the sway of the all-powerful language. Genres do not have this kind of power, but the power they have is of exactly the same nature.

A given work of art can hardly be called a ‘work of art’ at all unless interpreted as such through the sequence of interpretants leading to such a conclusion, this sequence (or ‘these sequences’, since there is nothing to restrict several of the interpretant chains leading to the same ultimate interpretant) constituting the social form of discourse called ‘art’. Likewise, a spoken utterance in Finnish is neither Finnish nor even speech at all unless interpreted as such through the socio-biological frame of reference human beings¹⁰ use when trying to understand certain modes of other human beings’ behaviour. Rather, the frame of reference constitutes this human being *as* a human being, since all knowledge is, like the human mind itself, of semiotic material. Understanding—which in the Peircean view is not really a separate mode of cognition from interpreting but just a special, ultimate form of it—is perfectly possible up to a point even if the frame of reference of the (human) interpretor had no common ground with that of the sender (writer, or utterer), on the condition that the first beginning step of interpretation, that of recognising the sign *as* a sign, is met and the semiosis in doing so is given a start. Thus, ‘work of art’ could be called a genre label, or a language label as well: it is a semiotic category too.

On the way of semiosis there are branching points of semiotic choice. ‘Choice’ here does not imply volitionality or intentionality, sign processes being not limited to human or even animate nature. Once the choice is made, it either makes other choices available to the interpretative chain or it does not; and when the the choices run out, the interpretation is forced to end. If, in facing such a dead end, the interpretor has not completely interpreted the whole of the message, and both the ‘completeness’ of the interpretation and the ‘limits’ of the message arise out of the process of semiosis, the choices made are judged to have been mistaken and the (pen)ultimate interpretant doomed a failure. This is a sure sign for the interpretor that somewhere along the line a piece of code was missing or was badly formed—and this, of course, means that new signs are need to supplement the present ones, the future totality of which constitutes both the ‘real’ work and the ‘real’ genre(s) the work belongs to in order to be ‘correctly’ interpreted.

There is a very legitimate sense in saying that ‘all texts are intertextual’, just as there is for saying that ‘there is nothing outside the text’. Each and every text, in order to be a text, has to have connections to other texts. But to label this kind of general requirement of textuality as *intertextual* is confusing and unfruitful: it is actually not required for the text to have its connections to other texts *as* a text *to* a text but on more general terms as a *specific* form of semiotic action to a *general* form of semiotic being. Likewise, Derrida’s famous catchphrase suffers from overly generalising the concept of text to all the other forms of semiotic processes. The human mind, for example, is a text only in a rather vague metaphorical sense, as an analogue between differing sign

¹⁰ Furthermore, the interpretor’s being human is just an *occasional* fact.

systems on the same level of complexity, or similar systems on differing, more or less abstract levels of complexity. Equating semiotic action with textual processes is ultimately like solving the language—thought puzzle by substituting the em dash (‘—’) between the words with an equals sign (‘=’) instead of first trying to understand either one of the terms in itself before embarking on the further problem of their relationship.

7 Conclusion

Literature is an almost unbelievably complex semiotic system: not only are the relations between literary signs on one and the same level an almost impenetrable jungle, but literature itself is a system of interrelating, partly hierarchical, partly overlapping semiotic (sub)systems. A scholar looking for a clearly defined and structured flowchart of autonomous, clearly bounded systems inside other equally clearly bounded systems is up to a serious disappointment. This is what makes literary scholarship so prone to disagreements, different scholars not infrequently pursuing diagonally opposed interpretations of one and the same work. This is also what makes literature so challenging as an object of study for a general semiotician.

The Inklings as a group of real-world individuals would not in itself be an interesting object for the literary scholar, however famous its members were as writers. The real challenge is in unraveling the enigma in the nature of their supposed *literary* connection. As I have argued, enough evidence exists to discount the possibility of its being of a simple textual nature. Here I am using the word ‘textual’ in a specific way, to denote just the literary signifiers, not the signifieds (although I am, as should be noted, in a way opposed to the Saussurean dichotomy of the signifier and signified when it is taken as the fundamental inherent property of the sign). The *interpretations* of the texts can still be related in many ways. What I am arguing is that in this case, the long-sought connection between their works could perhaps be labeled *generic*. A couple of points should be mentioned, though. Firstly, the works in question do not constitute the whole of the combined *oeuvres* of the three writers. Tolkien’s most works fall within the wide (‘super-’) genre of fantasy, as do most of the fictional writings of Lewis, but Williams did write novels and plays that cannot be taken into account in the same interpretational frame. Secondly, as should be clear in any case, the works in question do not constitute the whole of the proposed genre. In essence, this means that the Inklings is not an autonomous whole within the sphere of literature; however, I think the historical ‘coincidence’ of their meetings is not without literary significance, given the existence of the binding genre.

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