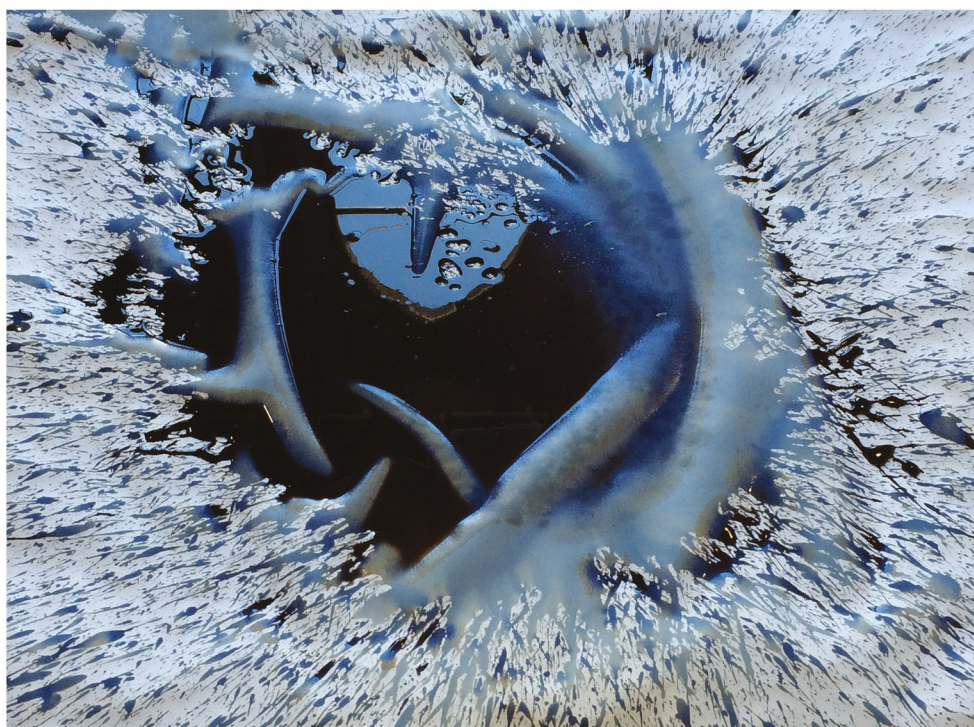# The Late-Career Novelist

Career Construction Theory, Authors and Autofiction

Hywel Dix

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The Late-Career Novelist

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For Rosie with love

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Introduction: From the Late to the Retrospective

An opening question: When we consider the life and work of a particular writer, how often do we come to the conclusion that that author's masterpiece – his or her career-defining work – also happened to be one of his or her last pieces of work? We are quite accustomed to thinking about artists and writers through recourse to a retrospectively created series of stages or phases, so it is perfectly possible to talk about Joseph Conrad: the major phase; or T. S. Eliot's major poetical works or the late plays of Shakespeare.[1] But rarely, if ever, does the idea of the major work coincide with the final stage of the career. On the contrary, the very idea of a major phase implies a subsequent later phase that is somehow less significant or more minor and therefore somehow less innovative or less important than the works produced during the writer's so-called major phase.

This book argues that whereas much critical attention has been devoted to establishing the idea of a major phase and hence to the transition between early and mature works of an author's career, the late stage has received comparably less attention. Along with this idea, however, it also puts forward a second and related argument that the concept of the 'late' stage has not been well defined and is in need of rigorous critical interrogation and provisional clarification. In other words, the two problems to be explored during this study are why the late works are often critically neglected and what constitutes lateness in the first place.

These problems are particularly acute when considering contemporary literature: we are given to think of the idea of the contemporary as something existing rather than something concluded, so the idea of the late-career stage of certain contemporary writers has barely been operative at all.[2] One of the results of this has been a peculiar distancing or historical displacing of the contemporary, whereby significant contemporary writers are primarily associated with work that they produced years or even decades earlier, rather than with their current work.[3]

For example, in an important study of *Artistic Capital* (2006) David Galenson has done much to enhance our understanding of how some authors flower relatively early, while others fulfil their artistic visions very late on, if at all. Yet he consciously excluded living and recently deceased writers on the grounds that 'their careers are incomplete' and 'critical evaluations of their entire careers … are relatively scarce'.[4] His study of the careers of twelve novelists included none born after 1900 and in effect was unable to challenge the already existing mechanics of literary canonization that he found. In other words, the study reaffirmed a definition of literary worth based on a notion of individual creative *genius*, which is a concept that has come under increasing critical scrutiny in recent years. Moreover, the notion of *genius* is often accompanied by the category of the *masterpiece* with the implication that after his or her definitive masterpiece, an author produces little or nothing as worthwhile. This also was one implication of Galenson's study.

My purpose here is not to engage in a critique of Galenson, who made a major contribution to identifying the different potential stages in artistic life cycles. It is, however, to emphasize how common and hence unchallenged the assumption of a literary and artistic decline wrought by the process of ageing has become. To challenge the idea of distinct major and minor phases is also to challenge a cultural and social hierarchy based on age. At the same time, to question the idea that the best works of an author's career are located in a phase some time before the last period of his or her career is to challenge also certain assumptions and definitions about what constitutes the best work and hence to contest the criteria of judgement. This is not simply to acknowledge that the late stage of a career and hence the late stage of a lived lifetime can be creative and innovative in valuable and original ways – although such an acknowledgement is an important argument in its own right. It is to argue over and above such an acknowledgement that the kinds of works produced during the late-career stage are necessarily different from the kinds of works a writer is able to produce during the earlier stages. In this sense, 'stage' rather than 'age' is very compellingly the focus of the argument. Regardless of their age, writers in the later stages of their careers are necessarily caught in a creative tension between originality and habit, or between repetition and newness, so that the work produced during the latter stages often becomes profoundly metafictive as the writer in question returns to the forms, themes and techniques of the earlier work for which he or she has become celebrated, and writes about them again – in a new way. From the beginning, therefore, it is necessary to clarify how I will use the term *late*.

Rethinking lateness, the belated and the retrospective

In *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), Edward Said identified four typical kinds of 'conflicts' that commonly occur during an authorial career. The first of these was what he called the writer's life as 'active writer'.[5] In effect, this is a conflict between the author's life as author (the precious time devoted to writing) and the author's life as a human being, involved in all sorts of other relationships, tasks, roles, dilemmas and even other careers. This conflict is likely to be particularly acute for authors at an early stage in their career before they have achieved sufficient critical and/or commercial success to earn their living solely from writing, when they might be working full time in other roles, perhaps raising children or caring for relatives and having to squeeze their writerly selves into a very small portion of the total time and mental energy available to them. This of course has been a particular challenge for female authors. The early-career stage is one where it is by no means clear that the author is destined to achieve a successful career in writing as such, which remains a combination of aspiration and open question. Since the writer at the early stage cannot be certain of achieving the establishment of an authorial career, writing exists as a vocation, or perhaps as a career-in-potential, rather than as a career as such – although it will be argued below that how both the early stage and the idea of a vocation have been constructed is problematic.

The second conflict is likely to arise once writing itself has become a full-time occupation. During this stage the writer develops a characteristic style: a recurring set of themes, a distinctive idiom, a greater or lesser degree of formal experimentation and so on. But of course, to choose and develop those themes, that idiom and that high or low level of generic innovation is also necessarily to leave certain other paths not taken. The conflict, in other words, is between the kind of writer the writer chooses to be and the other kinds of writers that he or she could have become. The different factors that contribute to making these choices have not been well understood or analysed in the past but can be seen as important paratexts for the discussion of the career as a whole.

The third kind of conflict takes place when the author is assumed to be at the height of his or her creative powers – although again, how the idea of a high point has been culturally constructed, along with its implication of a subsequent decline or falling off in creativity, will be questioned further over the course of the coming pages. But whether or not it depends on the author reaching a putative zenith in his or her creative art, Said's third kind of conflict in the authorial career is between 'innovation and repetition' or between 'novelty and

habit'.[6] It is a conflict that is likely to arise once the writer has become known for producing certain kinds of works, which in turn is likely to happen at a stage when the very name of the writer in question serves as a hallmark or indicator of assumed intrinsic worth, so that the name alone becomes a signature underwriting the effective prolongation of the career. This is not the quite same as the 'name of the author' defined by Foucault's author function, which argues that our idea of the author is an effect of the writing that we 'construct' during reading, rather than its instigator.[7] Nevertheless, implicit in Said's account of the main conflicts that comprise the authorial career is the idea that the figure (as opposed to the 'function') of the author emerges partly as a result of participation in those conflicts and partly through the realization of all those different texts, articles, reviews and so on that he or she has been involved in producing.

The fourth and final conflict Said identifies is typically associated with the late-career stage. It arises when the author and his or her public sense that the most significant creative achievements are already behind him or her but the writer is likely to feel impelled to go on writing since it is not a career from which many people retire. The ironic effect of this continued written experimentation even after the apprehension that the best might already be past is that writing returns to the status that it enjoyed in the early *active* stage: it is a vocation again.

There are a number of problems with Said's account of these four conflicts. First of all, his overall argument is that the concept of a 'career' as such came into being some time towards the end of the nineteenth century and that within literary history there is therefore a discernible shift from writing as a vocation (prior to that date) towards writing as a professional career (in the twentieth century).[8] This overlooks the possibility that even in the twentieth (and twenty-first) century, potential writers starting out on the path are themselves involved in writing as a vocation for the reason stated above: they cannot be certain of achieving a career *as writers*. In other words, Said's model of the four conflicts is contradictory in a temporal sense. On the one hand he suggests that any of the four conflicts might arise at any point in an authorial career; on the other hand some of them seem more likely to arise at certain career stages than others. This contradiction gives rise to the feeling that they are cumulative or successive rather than coinciding.

More significantly, the idea of a high point (third conflict) implies a sense of decline (fourth conflict) that is in turn tacitly associated with old age and a loss of control of the creative faculties. This idea of a peak followed by a decline due to the process of ageing is utterly uninterrogated by Said and has in fact become very commonly entrenched in literary discussion. It is possible that

had he pursued his interest in career research further, Said himself may have elaborated in a deeper and more complex way upon some of the questions that *Beginnings* opens up. Instead, the publication of his pioneering work *Orientalism* (1978) three years after *Beginnings* led to his work being very strongly associated with the then-nascent field of postcolonial studies, which he is often, somewhat hyperbolically, credited with having founded. Guy Davidson and Nicola Evans suggest that one result of his close association with this field was that he was unable to pursue the idea of the literary career as a potential area of research that had been launched in *Beginnings*.[9]

This book challenges the idea of a career high point and subsequent decline that has hitherto been largely unquestioned in literary research by freeing the construction of different career stages from biological age and suggesting instead that how the different stages of a given authorial career are constructed is specific to that career. In other words, the late-career stage need not be seen as one of decline but can be better understood in a relational sense, in the full context of the career as a whole, where the lateness of the stage is defined by what has come before and is not merely an effect of age. This means that work produced during that stage has certain properties and characteristics, some of them intrinsic to the text and some of them extrinsic, that is, pertinent to the life and career of the author rather than to the text itself, which renders such work analytically distinct. In turn these properties elicit a different kind of reading compared to work produced in an earlier stage. I shall therefore follow the method adumbrated by Wayne C. Booth in *The Company We Keep* (1988) in trying to interpret such texts in the way they 'invite' us to read them.[10]

Perhaps conscious of having said less in *Beginnings* about the late phase than about the other phases that compose an authorial career, and apparently conscious also of having entered his own last phase, Said made late-career works the subject of his last, unfinished and posthumously published work, *On Late Style* (2005), a work that ranges widely across music and literature, mainly from within the Western canon. *On Late Style* reinvigorated the concept of lateness and served as a stimulus to further theoretical research and analysis of late works. The great strength of the book is that in it Said identified the possible stylistic features associated with lateness.

For example, he makes a distinction between two different kinds of late 'style'. First there is a version of late style in which the artist knows that the end is coming and uses the last phase to produce work that is serene and harmonious, as if to reconcile himself or herself peaceably to the approaching finality of death. This is the kind of style Said finds in Shakespeare's late plays. By contrast, he

suggests that some artists have refused to become reconciled to the approach of
death in such a harmonious way and have produced late works of a raw and sav-
age power that cannot easily be accommodated to existing political or aesthetic
sensibilities. This is what he finds in the late work of Ibsen.

Throughout *On Late Style* it is the second, discordant and unaccommodated,
version of lateness that Said is really interested in. In his earlier *Representations
of the Intellectual* (1994) he had argued that the public intellectual is someone
who must maintain a critical distance from cultural and institutional sources
of authority in order to be able to critique them in a disinterested way. For this
reason, he had suggested, the most effective source of theoretical critique in a
given field is often somebody who is an amateur in that field rather than work-
ing directly within its principal organizations. Amateurs are potentially rich
sources of critique because their public self-representation, career progression
and opportunities for success and advancement do not depend on their capacity
to become accommodated to the ideas and activities of the leaders in that field,
from whom they can thus maintain a critical separation. What he says about
late style is an extension of his earlier work about the outsider status of public
intellectuals: that if late works were valued because they represented too serene
an accommodation with the existing social order, then the capacity of the artist
to enter into a critical creative dialogue with existing sources of power would
be incorporated in them and hence undermined. Since its capacity to participate
actively in social and historical process is more or less how Said defines art in the
first place, this would be tantamount to art abdicating its own properties. Any
rigorous critique of work produced during the late-career stage should not be
content to allow this to happen out of some sympathetic sense of the weakening
effects of old age. On the contrary, Said says that if the late works are to be taken
seriously at all, then they should be interpreted with the same scrupulous rigour
as all the earlier works, and no allowances made. Thus, he says, 'late style is what
happens if art does not abdicate its rights in favour of reality'.[11] The power of late
style is for this reason a negative power: the negation of conformity.

If he is successful in identifying the characteristic features associated with
late work, however, Said is less successful in defining the concept of lateness
itself from either a temporal or a conceptual, perspectival viewpoint. In fact, in
On Late Style he discusses at least five different kinds of lateness without paus-
ing to marshal them into a systematic theoretical framework for critical discus-
sion of the concept. Thus 'late', in Said's account, variously refers to the very
last works of art created after a lengthy career has already been achieved and
typically shortly before death; work produced in old age, even in cases where

the work in question might be the first piece of work that artist ever produces; work produced towards the end of any synchronically defined period of history; any piece of work that revisits thematic material that has already been explicitly portrayed by one or more prior artists or generations; and finally to all works of the twentieth century – which in Said's account are assumed to have an inherent belatedness compared to the cultural work of other periods.

It should be noted that Said uses these definitions of lateness more or less interchangeably without pausing to clarify the distinctions between them that have been extrapolated here. Indeed, the notion of lateness is taken for granted to the extent that it is never defined in theory, but that same taken-for-grantedness is undermined by the imprecision with which the term is used. Both the undermining and the imprecision indicate that a new critical interrogation of the concept of lateness is required. This situation contrasts with Said's earlier *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), which had provided a rigorous theoretical critique of the positivistic tendencies of such synchronic histories as those associated with Western imperialism, and paved the way for a more nuanced, diachronic reading of world history. It is therefore surprising that in *On Late Style* he does not manage to distinguish between different ways of conceptualizing either individual life stages or collective historical periods, and hence is unable to make a theoretical distinction between different ways of situating lateness. This means that all his examples of work produced towards the end of a given historical period come from periods of Western history.

In contrast, Japanese writer Takashi Hiraide's memoir *The Guest Cat* (2014) is a poetic account of the transition in Japanese history from the Showa era (1926–89) into the Heisei period (1989–present) – a time that in the West was not characterized as one of epochal change. In addition to its distinctive situating of lateness within a non-Western historical period, *The Guest Cat* is also about the different stages that constitute a writer's career: Hiraide's own. He writes about the fact that during the 1980s he resigned from a publishing company and moved into a leafy Tokyo suburb to concentrate on writing full time. In other words, the act of writing is only one component of a career in writing that consists of a number of different stages. Having moved to Tokyo, Hiraide recalls being visited regularly by a stray cat whose visits had a pace and rhythm consonant with a writer's life.[12] Since the visits are fleeting and impermanent, the cat becomes a symbol for Hiraide's real theme: the transition of Japan's old order into the modern age. This means that the transition that was taking place in Japanese history is paralleled by a transition in Hiraide's career as writer.[13]

Hiraide's compatriot Haruki Murakami uses a somewhat different metaphor for the different stages that make up a career in writing. In *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running* (2008), Murakami discusses a relationship between being a writer and being a runner. This relationship is partly metaphorical, at the level of building up the required level of stamina, endurance and self-discipline necessary to complete a novel or finish a marathon.[14] It is also, however, partly mechanical. This is because Murakami (like Hiraide) became a writer as a result of a career change, where his previous career had been running a jazz bar in a fashionable part of Tokyo. He notes that once he sold the bar to concentrate on writing, his life became much less active than it had been and so he took up running as a means of maintaining physical fitness. That in turn contributed to his maintaining a degree of mental agility when writing.[15]

Murakami also identifies an important third parallel between writing a novel and running a marathon. He was almost sixty when *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running* was published. Having continued to run a marathon every year, he had become aware that it was now physically impossible for him to beat his best time for completing the distance. This did not mean that he gave up running, but indicates a necessary shift in how he was able to measure his performance. 'In long-distance running the only opponent you have to beat is yourself, the way you used to be.'[16] More specifically, for a marathon runner in his fifties, 'beating' his earlier self refers less to completing the course in a faster time, and more to overcoming the expectation of what can be achieved *now* that had been created by what was achieved twenty years earlier. That is, it implies a shift from an objective notion of the 'best' to one that is not only specific to him as an individual, but that is partial, provisional and subject to continual revalidation. Murakami goes on to claim that that the 'same can be said about … the novelist's profession'.[17] Following Murakami, it will be argued here that late-career fictional work will also often suffer if it is compared to what comes before and might be more positively interpreted when taken on its own distinct terms (although for the reasons explained above, I will also re-conceptualize the definition of lateness).

In a major study of how Shakespeare's late works have been constructed as such, Gordon McMullan has analysed the 'invention' of late Shakespeare during the romantic period.[18] Claire Chambers and Susan Watkins draw on McMullan's work to suggest that a conventional decline narrative ironically contributes to the mechanics of literary canonization (and hence also to the marginalization and exclusion of what is not canonized) since 'to embody the qualities of late style you have to be, or once have been, a genius'.[19] David Smit's study of the late style of Henry James identifies in James a prominent example of the association of lateness

with 'ingenuity'.[20] It is particularly pertinent to this study since a discussion of Henry James had earlier been the occasion for F. O. Matthiessen to introduce the concept of a 'major phase', specifically in relation to James's 'late flowering'.[21]

McMullan, Chambers and Watkins and Smit all challenge the conventional assumption of a decline in narrative mastery during the late period and McMullan in particular draws attention to how the entity of lateness has itself to be constructed and can accordingly be contested. Working in the area of critical gerontology, Peter Laslett has identified some of the cultural and historical means by which different life stages more generally have been created and recognized as normative. In a work that explicitly aimed to challenge the common association of loss of creativity with ageing, he proposes to replace the normal assumption that life can be split into three stages (i.e. youth, middle age and old age) with a four-stage model. This has the advantage, in his account, of moving the 'peak' to a later period in life than would otherwise be the case.

More significantly, Laslett also suggests that the different life stages need not be successive, and that they can often be experienced concurrently. This insight is a major innovation in considering lateness, because it decreases the reliance of definitions of each stage on a simplistic set of temporal, chronological data. Or as Laslett puts it, '[i]t follows logically enough that the ages should not be looked upon exclusively as stretches of years, and the possibility has to be contemplated that the Third Age could be lived simultaneously with the Second Age, or even with the First.'[22] In other words, life stage ceases to be an effect of mere age.

Margaret Gullette has explored in detail how cultural processes construct a whole series of social assumptions about ageing rather than merely reflecting it as a neutral process.[23] Kathleen Woodward has shown that age intersects with gender in ways that complicate the cultural construction of each.[24] Liberating different life stages from numerical biological age clearly has important implications for how we think about lateness in the context of a literary career. Rather than segregated from earlier stages by arbitrary temporal boundaries, lateness then becomes something related to, instead of divorced from, the earlier stages. Examples that Laslett provides of the concurrent experience of different life stages are the careers of artists and athletes, who – in different ways – can live different phases of life simultaneously. In a critique of the typical decline narrative that associates ageing with loss of creativity once an imagined high point has been passed, he argues that:

> No passage from one to the other need occur, for an individual with these characteristics is doing his or her own thing from maturity until the final end. Artists, the consummate artists, are the best examples. An athlete, on the other

hand, usually has to attain peak during the First Age, and so live part of the Third Age then.[25]

If the high point of professional achievement comes at different ages in different kinds of careers, and even in different individual careers, the idea of a prime followed by a period of decline is overhauled and replaced with a new way both to situate the idea of the late stage and to evaluate works produced in that stage. This discovery leads me to a provisional answer to the question of how to define lateness in the context of a literary career. Throughout these pages, 'late' will be defined as a connecting rather than a purely temporal concept, as *coming after* (an already achieved novel, play, piece of work, life stage or career phase) rather than *moving towards* (death, retirement, historical and/or epochal change). In other words, although many so-called late works are often written during their author's period of ageing, their lateness is not an effect of biological age and should be seen as a relational construct. The lateness of the late works, what makes it meaningfully possible to discuss them as such, is then defined by the relationship itself. Late works are temporally belated relative to those that came before them and with which they enter into a creative and critical dialogue. Because this way of figuring lateness liberates the concept itself from mere biological age, it would be possible to consider a particular work as belated even if written by an author in his or her thirties or forties – provided it comes after an even earlier achievement. For this reason, I shall follow Jenny Hockey and Allison James in suggesting that the term *late* is better replaced by the idea of the *retrospective* to avoid conflating the late with simplistic questions of numerical age.[26] This is how Bran Nicol employs the term 'retrospective' in a study of the late work of Iris Murdoch.[27]

This substitution of the surface idea of 'late' with a more complex idea of the *retrospective* generates a potential new category for discussion, that of fictions of self-retrospect. It is a category that makes it possible to consider late-career works in the relational – as opposed to biological – sense described above. Or to put it another way, thinking about fictions of self-retrospect in the way they ask to be read is a way of thinking about them not defined by some kind of deficiency or lack relative to works produced earlier in the authorial career, but as a specific kind of work and achievement that can only be produced during that career stage. What is specific to fictions of self-retrospect, in other words, is not that they are less creative or less original than the works produced during the earlier career stages. Rather it is that they are situated by their relationship to what has come before.

More specifically, the retrospective stage of an author's career can only be defined through recourse to other stages in that specific career, and does not occur at a pre-determined age or point in time. This means that the different stages that comprise the career are generated by the career in process and are different for every career, and cannot be generalized. In other words, it is not a question of imposing an arbitrary age boundary at which a writer can be considered to have entered a retrospective stage, since, as we have seen, the whole point of substituting the idea of the retrospective for that of the merely late is to liberate critical discussion of lateness from exclusive focus on age. In effect, this means that different authorial careers are constructed in ways that are particular to themselves. To see how each career and the different stages within it are constructed, we must look at the particular properties of each rather than at extrinsically defined surface data. Fictions of self-retrospect are those works of fiction that are produced in the retrospective stage, where the retrospective stage is defined in this specific and variable way. This means they are distinct from works produced during other stages although they might evince a high degree of continuity with them. They often also exist in a metatextual dimension commensurate with a high level of critical self-reflection and authorial self-renewal.

Rethinking the literary career

The idea of the authorial career as a fertile area of research that might enable new and illuminating interpretations of an author's work is a relatively new one. Davidson and Evans have argued that until recently the writer's career, where it was discussed at all, tended to be discussed on a surface factual level, as an offshoot of the separate subgenre of literary biography, rather than as a constitutive and therefore also potentially interpretative context for the writer's work.[28] But over the last thirty years, the growing research field known as book history has drawn attention to the material conditions in which literary production takes place, and to how those historically variable conditions contribute both to shaping what forms of literature are produced and how they are read. During the same period, the idea of the authorial career as itself comprising certain discernible properties that also contribute to the historic variability of literary production has received less attention. Implicit throughout this book is the assumption that a literary career, though intangible in the most literal way, is a particular kind of entity with specific properties, characteristics, relationships

and limitations that are all in need of further research and critical interrogation in a material sense. That is, the book will argue that alterations in the material conditions of a career has an indirect but traceable impact on the work produced at different stages of that career and hence – at least potentially – on how that work can be read.

After Edward Said, the second most significant early proponent of authorial career research as an important component of literary research was Wayne C. Booth. Just as Said has subsequently been assimilated to the field of postcolonial studies to the detriment of his work as a theorist of literary careers, so too Booth has become primarily associated with the field of reader research, especially through his relationship with his former doctoral student Peter Rabinowitz. However, in *The Company We Keep* (1988) Booth made three major contributions to literary career research.

First of all, he developed a notion of ethical reading. By this he meant the possibility that reading fiction can somehow change us in our core values and hence in our sense of who we are and what we stand for. That is, the ethical reading practice that he adumbrated was not really a matter of judging whether the 'effects' of certain kinds of reading are beneficial or harmful after we have engaged in them, in a sociological sense; he is more interested in what happens during the process of reading itself. To him, an ethical reading is one in which the reader holds herself open to the possibility of being changed by it. In doing so, readers create their own characters, their own provisional and variable sense of who they are, at least partly in response to their 'imaginative diet'.[29] Since it raises the possibility that reading fiction can contribute to changing the values and attitudes of the reader, it can bring about a varying set of behaviours in a vocational sense. This in turn means (to Booth) that the experience of reading can make a difference to the reader's chosen spheres of work and hence to his or her career choices. In choosing to become this kind of person, not that, during this period of time, not that, there is a direct continuity between the ethics of reading and potentially life-altering decisions about vocation and professional pathway:

> Some of the roles opened to me as I move through the field of selves that my cultural moment provides will be good for 'me/us', some not so good, some literally fatal. It will be the chief and most difficult business of my life to grope my way along dimly lit paths, hoping to build a life-'plot' that will be in one of the better genres.[30]

Booth's account of the potential role played by fiction in the reader's personal, vocational and professional decisions anticipates the much more recent field

of career construction theory in a number of important ways. As I will show below, career construction employs a narrative method in which counsellors encourage their clients to consider what kind of ideas, attitudes, behaviours and personal qualities they value. One of the means by which they do this, as anticipated by Booth in *The Company We Keep*, is by asking the client to consider which fictional characters they most admire. Moreover, just as Booth makes recourse to a number of literary metaphors for conceptualizing the life course as a whole, with all its different plots, subplots, genres and chapters, so too practitioners of career construction encourage their clients to envisage themselves as authors of their own life stories rather than merely passive observers of it. This shift in emphasis from passive recipient to active creator has a number of further implications, as we shall see. For now, it is enough to suggest that the significance of Booth's ideas lies in the association of reading fiction with life/career choices.

If this component of career research traceable to Booth is mainly about the ethical and hence vocational and professional decisions made by the reader, *The Company We Keep* also made a second major contribution to the field of authorial career research. This was Booth's realization that within the writer's life, the periods of time spent not writing are not irrelevant to the process of literary creation and are themselves in some sense formative. More specifically, he focused his attention on a number of responsibilities implied in the overall process of literary creation. These responsibilities equate to a number of different social relationships in which the author is involved, such as to one or more readers; to the work itself; to those whose lives are used as raw material; to those others whose labour is required to make the work possible; and even to abstract entities such as 'truth' and 'posterity'.[31]

Perhaps most notably in this context, he also discussed the author's responsibility to him or herself as a human being situated in a material world where the practice of art is only one of many different roles. As with the first of Said's conflicts, Booth's notion of authorial responsibility to self suggests an unresolved and maybe unresolvable tension between the devotion of effort, time and energy to the practice of fiction and to all sorts of other necessary activities. In Booth's account, the sheer effort necessary to produce a written work and so become an author involves living for a long time in this multiplicity of roles, with the effect that in making the work the author is also in a sense creating himself as such: 'To dwell with a creative task for as long as is required to perform it well means that one tends to *become* the work – at least to some degree'.[32] This acknowledgement of the writer's life outside writing and of other kinds of experiences that

conflict with the writing in the course of the life is an early consideration of career criticism.

It should be noted that since he is interested in developing an ethics of reading, Booth also identifies and analyses a number of different responsibilities on the part of the reader. However, for the purposes of tracing his contribution to career research, it is the relationships and responsibilities involving the author that are more germane. They reveal that the writer's life aside from time spent at his desk and the active collaboration with other kinds of professionals have a constitutive role to play in shaping the finished work. This new emphasis in turn demystifies the inherited romantic image of the solitary author working in isolation to produce a work of individual genius and so posits a version of literary creation that is social rather than individualistic.

Booth uses the term 'career author' in an attempt to conceptualize the (then) newly socialized figure of the author.[33] Though he does not define precisely what he means by the term, the two main properties of the 'career author' as an analytic construct seem to be collaboration and mutability. That is, the career author is necessarily involved in a network of relationships with editors, publishers, distributors, proof-readers, friends, relatives and loved ones in a way that explodes the idea of the solitary genius. Similarly, the career author is an author whose career might comprise several distinct and different stages, thus replacing the idea of a singularity of artistic vision with the possibility of becoming several different kinds of authors during the course of the career. Indeed, this latter point gives rise to a particular challenge for authors in different stages of their careers, since our image of the career author can impede our judgement of works produced during those stages if 'we insist that an author's new work maintain the ethos we have constructed from earlier works'.[34] Booth's resolution to this problem of late-career authorship is again a question of ethical reading. A reader who has been impressed by a given author's early works might 'feel a greater responsibility to do justice to his next tale, even if it might initially prove less inviting than the others'.[35] It will be argued throughout these pages that doing the subsequent works justice in this way will involve acknowledging that they are necessarily different from the earlier works because the author has entered a new career stage.

All of Booth's examples of 'career authors' date from the nineteenth or twentieth centuries: Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Norman Mailer, George Orwell. Booth thus anticipates Joe Moran's later more explicitly career-focused research, which found that 'professionalization of authorship' took place from the early nineteenth century onwards and 'coincided with the rise of literature as a commodity