

ESTRATTO

# REFLEXIVITY

## Critical themes in the Italian Cultural Tradition

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THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY AND BENEDETTO CROCE

If it is true that outside Italy Benedetto Croce is less well understood than his name is well known, one of the reasons could be that in the English-speaking world he became associated with an approach to literary criticism which is almost exactly the opposite of what he actually believed and practised. It is hardly surprising that readers who first encounter his name in a context where he is charged with committing the 'intentional fallacy' – a charge based on a radical misunderstanding of his views on the nature of art and the role of the critic – should then feel little inclination to explore his thinking further.

The 'intentional fallacy' appears as a standard entry in most modern dictionaries or handbooks of literary terminology, coming somewhere between 'imagination', that cornerstone of nineteenth-century critical theory, and the late twentieth-century buzzword 'intertextuality'.<sup>1</sup> 'Fallacy' denotes a logical error in the conduct of an argument; the 'intentional' fallacy pinpoints the (alleged) unsoundness of attributing to authorial intention a role or weight or significance in critical debate which it does not or ought not to have. Specifically, it denies that the success or otherwise of a work is to be judged in terms of whether or not it fulfils its author's intentions; more generally, it questions the assumption that the author's intentions are a reliable guide to what the work actually is, or means. Evaluation and interpretation are two separate but related aspects of the question. As the debate has evolved over the last fifty years, there has been a significant shift of emphasis from the first to the second, reflected in the title of a recent collection of essays devoted to the problem, *Intention and Interpreta-*

<sup>1</sup> See for example M.H. ABRAMS, *A Glossary of Critical Terms*, sixth edition, Fort Worth, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993, p. 90; *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. PREMINGER and T.V.F. BROGAN, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 611-613; *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. C. BALDICK, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 110-111; M. GRAY, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, second edition, Singapore, Longman, 1992, pp. 149-150; *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J.A. CUDDON, third edition, London, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 452.

tion – a book which bears witness both to the continuing centrality to literary study of the issues involved, and to the difficulty of resolving them.<sup>2</sup>

Authorial intention in a given work may be ascertained by reference to documents of various kinds which exist outside the work, yet have some bearing on it: letters, journals, notes, working drafts, prefaces, reported conversations, interviews. Traditional literary scholarship has always found such parallel documentation to be both interesting and valuable, as constituting primary evidence of what the author himself thought he was doing, and a useful point of reference when assessing his achievement. Where no such evidence exists, as is often the case with early texts, the critic is perforce driven back to the work itself, and avoids committing the fallacy (if such it is) by default. The work is then of necessity treated as self-contained and self-explanatory. The author's intention is deduced from his achievement.

Anti-intentionalists (those who deny the critical relevance of authorial intention) argue that all works should be treated this way. They advocate an approach to literary criticism which is anti-historical and anti-biographical. The literary work should be treated as a by-product neither of the society and age in which it was written, nor of its author's life. The critic is, or should be, concerned with what the work is, not how it came to be what it is, whether the author's intentions are understood in a broad sense (in relation to a civilisation), or in a narrower one (in relation to a personal history and psychology). The work exists in the public realm of language. The critic's task is to interpret and judge it as a verbal structure or artefact – a 'piece of language' – whose principles of organisation and meaning are available for inspection and analysis on its own terms in the object itself.

The reference books are unanimous in assigning paternity and date of birth of the intentional fallacy to an essay by two American critics, W.K. Wimsatt, Jr and M. Beardsley. *The Intentional Fallacy*, published in the «Sewanee Review» in 1946,<sup>3</sup> reworked an earlier article by the same authors (entitled simply *Intention*) which had appeared in a *Dictionary of World Literature* three years before,<sup>4</sup> and was in its turn reprinted with some significant revisions in Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* in 1954.<sup>5</sup> Here it formed a pair with another essay, *The Affec-*

<sup>2</sup> *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. G. ISEMINGER, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1992. The contributors to this volume are mostly philosophers rather than literary critics or theorists, indicating the inseparability of the issues involved from broader issues in philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> «Sewanee Review», 54 (1946), pp. 468-488.

<sup>4</sup> *Dictionary of World Literature. Criticism. Forms. Technique*, ed. J.T. SHIPLEY, New York, Philosophical Library, 1943 and London, George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1945; second edition, *Dictionary of World Literary Terms. Criticism. Forms. Technique*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1955. A third edition, with the title *Dictionary of World Literary Terms. Forms. Techniques. Criticism. New, enlarged and completely revised edition*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1970, incorporated substantial changes in the material.

<sup>5</sup> W.K. WIMSATT, Jr, *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1954. This 1954 version is the definitive form of the essay, subsequently reprinted many times, both in later editions of *The Verbal Icon* itself (1967, 1970) and in

*tive Fallacy*, again written in collaboration with Beardsley. Where the intentional fallacy detached the literary work from the mind of its author, the affective fallacy detached it from the mind of the reader, arguing that reader response was no more the concern of the critic than authorial intention. The psychology of artistic creation and the psychology of artistic consumption were alike irrelevant to the critical task.

*The Intentional Fallacy* is often described as a 'classic', 'seminal', 'canonical' paper, and it has remained the obligatory point of reference for critics and theorists debating the issue. It offered a simple definition of intention ('Intention is design or plan in the author's mind'), and initially emphasised evaluation rather than interpretation ('the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art'). It presented its case in a more sophisticated and tightly argued form than the original *Dictionary* entry, which had given no concrete examples of the kinds of mistake a critic might make by paying too much attention to authorial statements of intention, and referred to no poems or literary works which in the authors' opinion had been misinterpreted or misjudged. The essay on occasion formulated its conclusions with memorable incisiveness ('Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine'), cited specific instances where the notion of authorial intention might be considered problematic (most interesting among them perhaps T.S. Eliot's allusiveness and his use of notes to clarify it, which thus firmly tied the debate to questions of contemporary poetic practice), and concluded with a telling hypothetical case which exactly illustrated the point at issue. If we were trying to establish whether the line (in *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*) 'I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each' was a deliberate allusion to Donne's 'Teach me to heare Mermaides singing', the appropriate way to find an answer to the question would be by way of poetic analysis and exegesis (does such an allusion make sense in context?) and not by way of biographical or genetic inquiry (by asking Eliot – still alive at the time – what he meant, or if he had Donne in mind). Only the first method is 'the true and objective way of criticism'. The essay ends with the ringing assertion that 'Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.'<sup>6</sup>

various collections of critical essays, eg. *Philosophy Looks at the Arts. Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, ed. J. MARGOLIS, second edition, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1978, pp. 293-306; *On Literary Intention*, ed. D. NEWTON-DE MOLINA, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1976, pp. 1-13; *20th Century Literary Criticism. A Reader*, ed. D. LODGE, London-New York, Longman, 1972; nineteenth impression, 1996, pp. 333-345.

<sup>6</sup> Thus by the end of the essay the concern had shifted from evaluation to interpretation. Returning to the issue more than 20 years later, Wimsatt reformulated the original thesis to emphasise both aspects equally: 'The statement in our essay of 1946 should certainly have read: «The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging either the meaning or the value of a work of literary art»; in *Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited*, in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, ed. P. DEMETZ, T. GREENE, L. NELSON, Jr., New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1968, pp. 193-225; reprinted in NEWTON-DE MOLINA (previous note), pp. 116-138; and – with the title *Genesis: An*

A significant addition to the essay (not present in the original *Dictionary* entry) is an attempt to put the problem in historical perspective. 'It is not so much a historical statement as a definition to say that the intentional fallacy is a romantic one.'<sup>7</sup> After a cursory mention of Longinus and Saintsbury, the authors continue: 'Goethe's three questions for «constructive criticism» are «What did the author set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?» If one leaves out the middle question, one has in effect the system of Croce – the culmination and crowning philosophic expression of romanticism.'

This is a startling misrepresentation of Croce's position, neither qualified nor clarified by the few sentences on him which follow. In fact, Croce is an anti-intentionalist. The irrelevance of authorial intention both to the meaning and the value of a literary work was for him a fundamental principle, never abandoned no matter what other changes or modifications (sometimes of considerable theoretical and practical significance) he introduced into his philosophy of art. It seems, even at this late date, worth trying to clarify the issues involved. This essay makes no attempt to contribute at a theoretical level to the continuing debate on intention, which in recent decades has shifted ground significantly from the relatively circumscribed domain of literary criticism to the broader territory of philosophy – philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and even ontology.<sup>8</sup> It sets out to fulfil two more modest historical goals: to chart the process by which Croce came to be perceived and presented in this 'classic' paper as the arch-representative of the intentionalist viewpoint; and to clarify what his views on intention in art and literary criticism actually were. For our present purposes, therefore, Wimsatt and Beardsley's definition ('Intention is design or plan in the author's mind') will suffice, even though two of its key terms, 'intention' and 'mind', have been at the centre of philosophical debate for half a century.<sup>9</sup>

If we compare the two versions of *The Intentional Fallacy* in the «Sewanee Review» and *The Verbal Icon* with each other and with the original *Dictionary* article, we can track the way in which references to other critics are progressively eliminated from the text, leaving, in the final 1954 version, Croce alone

*Argument Resumed* – in *Day of the Leopards*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 11-39.

<sup>7</sup> Quotations, unless otherwise specified, are from the final version of the essay printed in *The Verbal Icon*, which here as elsewhere may differ slightly in wording from the earlier «Sewanee Review» text (henceforth in the notes respectively *VI* and *SR*). The significance of two extensive cuts made in the transition from *SR* to *VI* will be analysed later in this article.

<sup>8</sup> An excellent overview of these developments is to be found in A. PATTERSON's essay *Intention*, in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. F. LENTRICCHIA and T. MCLAUGHLIN, second edition, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 135-146, which draws interesting parallels with the problem of establishing authorial intention in non-literary texts such as the American Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> At least since the publication of G. RYLE's *The Concept of Mind*, London, Hutchinson, 1949 and G.E.M. ANSCOMBE's *Intention*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1959.

as named representative of the view under attack. The key figure here is J.E. Spingarn, Croce's leading admirer in the United States, still referred to in the final version as 'an eminent intentionalist', but identified by name only in a footnote. In the *Sewanee Review* he had been named in the text,<sup>10</sup> and quoted in a formulation which encapsulates the intentionalist position the authors are attacking: '«What has the poet tried to do,» asks Spingarn in his 1910 Columbia lecture from which we have already quoted, «and how has he fulfilled his intention?»'<sup>11</sup>

Spingarn had repeated this formula, with a telling verbal variation, in the next sentence, and again at two later points in this same essay, à propos of the dramatist's art ('what has he tried to express, and how has he expressed it?'), and the critic's task ('When Criticism first propounded as its real concern the oft-repeated question: «What has the poet tried to express and how has he expressed it?» Criticism prescribed for itself the only possible method.') These quotations served Wimsatt and Beardsley's purpose less well because they do not use the word intention, but they are crucial reformulations, introducing as they do the key Crocean notion of expression, always open to misinterpretation in English accounts of his thinking, and especially so when, as here, the verb 'to express' is used as though its meaning were self-explanatory and commonplace, no different from its use in normal speech.

In the *Dictionary of World Literature* Spingarn's intermediary role as a conduit of Crocean ideas had been much more apparent, indeed had been clearly spelled out:

The widely-held theory that literary works should be judged with respect to their success in carrying out the author's intention has been called by H.L. Mencken the 'Spingarn-Croce-Carlyle-Goethe Theory' ('Criticism of Criticism of Criticism', *Criticism in America*, 1924, p. 181). But it is significant that, though Spingarn in his lecture on 'The New Criticism', 1910 [...] called this 'the only possible method' of criticism, he later modified his position [...] by adding that the work itself is the 'intention', and that the author's aim can be detected internally in the work even where it is not realized. This is surely a self-contradictory proposition (cf. Croce, *Aesthetic*, trans. Ainslie, 2nd ed., 1922, 20-4, 111-12 [...]).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Other critics named in *SR* and eliminated from *VI* include I. A. Richards, René Wellek, Allen Tate and Bernard Bosanquet, but of them no trace remains even in the footnotes.

<sup>11</sup> *SR*, p. 473. Spingarn's 1910 lecture was published with the title *The New Criticism* (New York, The Columbia University Press, 1911). It was reprinted with the same title in J.E. SPINGARN, *Creative Criticism. Essays on the Unity of Taste and Genius*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1917, and again in a collection of essays by various authors, *Criticism in America. Its Function and Status*, second edition, New York, Haskell House Publishers Ltd, 1969. Each of the two reprints made significant modifications to the original text, as we shall see. The lecture is a spirited defence of the principle of the autonomy of art, and the inappropriateness of judging literature by extraneous criteria such as morality or rules about genres. In this respect it is an accurate rendering of Croce's views.

<sup>12</sup> J.T. SHIPLEY (note 4 above), p. 328. (The page references to Croce are baffling, as they have no obvious bearing on the issue.)

Three points require clarification here. First: Mencken, in talking of the 'Spingarn-Croce-Carlyle-Goethe theory', is merely reporting Spingarn's own account of his position in *The New Criticism*. (The passage referred to in the above quotation reads: 'But what is the anarchistic ex-professor's own theory? — for a professor must have a theory, as a dog must have fleas. In brief, what he offers is a doctrine borrowed from the Italian, Benedetto Croce, and by Croce filched from Goethe [...]', and so on). Mencken's view of Croce is entirely and self-confessedly derived from Spingarn. Second: Spingarn's modification of his position in subsequent editions of this lecture (reprinted in 1917 and again in 1924, each time with significant additions and re-wordings) represents an attempt to explain Croce's true position more accurately.<sup>13</sup> If it is at odds with the original formulation, that is because the original formulation was highly misleading. Whether the new formulation is self-contradictory is another matter (this claim remains in both the «Sewanee Review» and *The Verbal Icon*, which quote the sentence beginning 'Only one caveat must be borne in mind [...]' cited in note 13, and comment 'says an eminent intentionalist in a moment when his theory repudiates itself'); but any contradiction there might be is certainly not Croce's. And third: the reference to the Ainslie translation of the *Estetica* provides a key piece of evidence, for this was how most English speakers became acquainted with Croce's ideas. If we turn to Ainslie's introduction to his translation, we find that he had summarised Croce's position in terms which are crudely intentionalist: 'This amounts to saying that all works of art must be judged by their own standard. How far has the author succeeded in doing what he intended?'<sup>14</sup> The first sentence is unexceptionable, and Wimsatt and Beardsley would surely have approved of it; it is the second, which gives an 'intentionalist' gloss or spin to the first, which misrepresents Croce. It is possible (indeed probable) that this single sentence is the source of many later misunderstandings. Croce, it must be said, was not well-served by his early translators and admirers.

Before we examine Croce's own views on intention, it is worth noting that Wimsatt and Beardsley themselves seem to have had some misgivings about their representation of Croce's position, although these are articulated only in a

<sup>13</sup> As already mentioned (note 11 above), when Spingarn reprinted the essay in 1917 he 'modified his position', by adding the sentence, quoted by Wimsatt and Beardsley: 'Only one caveat must be borne in mind when attempting to answer [these questions]: the poet's intentions must be judged at the moment of the creative act, as mirrored in the work of art itself, and not by the vague ambitions which he imagines to be his real intentions before or after the creative act is achieved.' In 1924 he added a further sentence: 'For to create a work of art is the goal of every artist; and all questions in regard to his achievement resolve themselves into this: Has he or has he not created a work of art?' This second addition represents, as we shall see, a shift in the argument, reflecting a development in Croce's own thinking; but even with this development it is mistaken to present Croce's views as intentionalist (see pp. 111-112).

<sup>14</sup> B. CROCE, *Aesthetic*, translated by D. AINSLIE, second edition, London, Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1922, p. xxi; the first edition (London, Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1909) made the same point on p. xxiv.

footnote. This footnote is itself significantly, and revealingly, modified between the «Sewanee Review» and *The Verbal Icon*. Thus note 9 in the «Sewanee Review» reads: 'It is true that Croce himself in his *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London, 1920), Chapter VII, «The Practical Personality and the Poetical Personality», and in his *Defense of Poetry*, trans. E.F. Carritt (Oxford, 1933), 24, has delivered a telling attack on intentionalism, but the prevailing drift of such passages in the *Aesthetic* as we quote is in the opposite direction.' In *The Verbal Icon* this has become note 4, which (citing the same two books) reads: 'It is true that Croce himself in his *Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille* [...] and in his *Defense of Poetry* [...] and elsewhere, early and late, has delivered telling attacks on emotive geneticism, but the main drive of the *Aesthetic* is surely toward a kind of cognitive intentionalism.' It is difficult to understand how Croce could deliver telling attacks against something which at the same time represents the 'prevailing drift' or the 'main drive' of his philosophy of art and criticism, unless he were very confused indeed. (The shift from 'intentionalism' *tout court* to a distinction between 'emotive geneticism' and 'cognitive intentionalism' reflects the authors' uneasiness, but hardly clarifies the issue.)<sup>15</sup> But Croce is not confused. His ideas may on occasion be problematical and even apparently paradoxical, and especially difficult for a sceptical and pragmatic Anglo-Saxon mentality to engage with (a situation exacerbated by the fact that Ainslie and Spingarn talk at times with the ardour of converts to a religious sect),<sup>16</sup> but they are consistent and coherent. The confusion lies elsewhere. It is now time to try to clarify what Croce's view of intention is in the context of literary debate.

We must start with a little background. Croce's nineteenth-century Italian predecessor, Francesco De Sanctis, had made the distinction between what a poet intended to do and what he had actually done a key principle in his critical practice. He had argued, for example, that some of the greatest episodes in the

<sup>15</sup> And when Wimsatt returned to the subject in 1968 in *Genesis: a Fallacy Revisited* (note 6 above) he still identified Croce with the crudest form of intentionalism, which he summarised in these words: 'The poet had a specific aim or plan in mind; he managed (whether inspirationally or rationally) to carry this out in the poem; thus he is a successful artist; his work is good art. This is the 'Spingarn-Croce-Carlyle-Goethe' theory named by H. L. Mencken.' Wimsatt added for good measure, by way of illustration (à propos of Poe's *The Raven*): 'to argue [...] that, because we can here prove that the artist achieved his intentions, we know that *The Raven* is a good work of art would seem a fairly obvious kind of fatuity.'

<sup>16</sup> For example, from Ainslie's introduction to the first edition of his translation, describing a meeting with Croce: 'His most remarkable feature was his eyes, of a greenish grey: extraordinary eyes, not for beauty, but for their fathomless depth [...] I do not know how long that first interview lasted, but it seemed a few minutes only, during which was displayed before me a vast panorama of unknown height and headland, of league upon league of forest, with its bright-winged birds of thought flying from tree to tree down the long avenues into the dim blue vistas of the unknown' (p. xix); 'The philosopher feels that he has a great mission, which is nothing less than the leading back of thought to belief in the spirit [...] I believe that Croce will one day be recognized as one of the very few great teachers of humanity', p. xxiii. The first of these passages was, perhaps wisely, cut from the second edition.



*Inferno* are those where Dante's conscious theological intentions (to show the justice of the sinners' punishments in the afterlife) are subverted by other considerations – a large part of twentieth-century Dante criticism has been an attempt to prove De Sanctis wrong on this point. On De Sanctis's reading, Dante the moralist is subverted by Dante the man, Dante the theologian by Dante the poet. Dante's common humanity, or the power of his creative impulse, has led him to portray certain sinners in a way which engages the reader's sympathy so profoundly that it undermines the moral and religious scheme which would have us acknowledge the justice of their damnation. He has in point of fact produced something which is at odds with what he intended. (English readers will be familiar with a similar argument in relation to *Paradise Lost*. Blake famously said that Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it; many modern critics have felt that his declared intention – 'To justify the ways of God to man' – fails because all the imaginative energy and power in the poem find expression in the depiction of Satan.) For De Sanctis the *Comedy's* success, indeed its greatness, is to be located precisely in this mismatch between authorial intention and achievement.<sup>17</sup>

A few quotations from De Sanctis's *Storia della letteratura italiana* should illustrate how clearly he formulated the notion of conflict between what the author intended and what he actually achieved: 'Sicché nella *Commedia*, come in tutt'i lavori d'arte, si ha a distinguere il mondo intenzionale e il mondo effettivo, ciò che il poeta ha voluto e ciò che ha fatto.' 'Ma questo mondo artistico, uscito da una contraddizione tra l'intenzione del poeta e la sua opera, non è compiutamente armonico [...].'<sup>18</sup>

In so far as De Sanctis can plausibly be thought of as representing the culmination of Romanticism in Italy, then in an Italian context Romanticism's most significant critical heritage – in the work of its leading critic writing about its greatest poet – is precisely the principle that authorial intention is no guarantee either of the meaning or of the value of a work, and that both meaning and value may have to be established by the critic in the face of contrary or extraneous evidence of authorial intention. An awareness of the problematical status of evidence of authorial intention is arguably the single most important thing Croce learnt from his illustrious predecessor. It is in fact a starting-point of his theorizing about art and critical practice, not something he overlooked or fatuously failed to understand.

<sup>17</sup> A similar point, though from a different critical perspective, was made a hundred years later by Lukács about Balzac: 'what Balzac really did in this novel was the exact opposite of what he had set out to do: what he depicted was not the tragedy of the aristocratic estate but of the peasant smallholding. It is precisely this discrepancy between intention and performance, between Balzac the political thinker and Balzac the author of *La Comédie Humaine*, that constitutes Balzac's historical greatness', cited in J. MARGOLIS, *The Intention of the Artist*, in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (note 5 above), p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> F. DE SANCTIS, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. B. CROCE, Bari, Laterza, 1912, pp. 162, 168.

In a note to his earliest essay on critical theory, an essay which predates the *Estetica* by some eight years, Croce emphasized precisely this aspect of De Sanctis's critical practice:

Una delle sue teorie più salutari e sulla quale più soleva battere e che pure non ha ancora prodotto tutti i buoni effetti che avrebbe dovuto, è la distinzione tra ciò che il poeta *vuol fare* come uomo, e ciò che fa come poeta. 'Il poeta (dice a proposito di Dante) si mette all'opera con la poetica, le forme, le idee e le preoccupazioni del tempo; e meno è artista, più il suo mondo intenzionale è reso con esattezza [...] se il poeta è artista, scoppia la contraddizione, vien fuori non il mondo della sua intenzione, ma il mondo dell'arte.'<sup>19</sup>

And in the same essay: 'Si ricordi, per esempio, la posizione da lui stabilita per giudicare esteticamente l'opera dantesca: «Dante è stato illogico: ha fatto altro che non intendeva»: in Dante lottavano il politico-teologo-teorico, e il poeta; e la *Divina commedia*, nelle parti veramente divine, rappresenta la vittoria di Dante poeta sugli altri Danti, che s'agitavano in lui.'<sup>20</sup>

Some 50 years later Croce was still making the same point: 'Il De Sanctis, con la sua sentenza che nel giudizio sull'arte le intenzioni dei poeti non contano e solo conta il fatto stesso dell'opera d'arte, recise uno dei più sottili ma più tenaci legami onde la poesia era asservita alla pratica [...]'<sup>21</sup> And again: '[De Sanctis] chiamava «intenzioni dei poeti» le loro personali «poetiche», contrapponendo ad esse l'effettiva loro poesia, quando c'era.'<sup>22</sup>

On the one hand Romantic theories of creativity emphasize subjectivity and emotion (Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'), and these in turn suggest criteria of 'sincerity', 'fidelity' and 'authenticity' and thus a standard which involves somehow measuring the work against the writer's lived experience. On the other hand they stress with equal insistence the notion of inspiration as something which is not subject to an act of willing, not something the poet can control (thus Shelley's 'Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be

<sup>19</sup> *La critica letteraria. Questioni teoriche*, Rome, Loescher, 1894; reprinted in *Primi saggi*, Bari, Laterza, 1919, p. 124, note 1. Slightly confusingly, in this very early essay Croce uses the terms 'poeta' and 'artista' in a way which is at odds with his later normal usage, where broadly speaking they correlate respectively with the terms 'fantasia' and 'immaginazione' as explained in note 52. The anomalous usage does not affect the theoretical point being made about intentions.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> From *Le 'Poetiche' dei poeti*, a note in «La critica», 40, 1942, p. 127; reprinted in *Pagine sparse*, 3 vols, second (revised) edition, Bari, Laterza, 1960, III, pp. 67-68.

<sup>22</sup> From another note on *Le 'Poetiche' dei poeti* in «Quaderni della critica», 5, 1949, p. 122; reprinted in *Terze pagine sparse*, 2 vols, Bari, Laterza, 1955, II, p. 144. See also *Le intenzioni e i fini dei poeti*, one of the *Postille* to *La poesia*, Bari, Laterza, 1936, pp. 306-307: 'Avere riconosciuto e detto - già or sono ottanta anni - che le intenzioni e i fini dei poeti rimangono di necessità affatto estranei alla poesia, e che non importa quel che il poeta si propone o vuol fare o crede di fare, ma unicamente quel che esso fa, ancorché inconsapevole e in contrasto col fine professato: questo è forse il più gran merito del De Sanctis nella metodologia della critica letteraria, la lezione più salutare che egli ci abbia somministrata.'

exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say «I will compose poetry.» The greatest poet even cannot say it.'). Romantic theory contains within itself the seeds of both the intentionalist and the anti-intentionalist positions, depending on which of these two key aspects – subjectivity or inspiration – one emphasizes. Croce's aesthetic draws on both aspects, but crucially modifies our understanding of the first in a way which precisely avoids the intentionalist fallacy; the second – the irrelevance or impotence of the acts of deliberation and willing to the fact of creativity – with all its anti-intentionalist implications, lies at the heart of his thinking.<sup>23</sup>

A further point requires clarification before we attempt to elucidate Croce's views on intention. Intention in a work of art can be understood in two different ways. A writer's intention can be described generically as an intention to write a poem or produce a work of art; in this sense, the intention has no specific content – the meaning of the work will not be at issue. Alternatively, his intention may be described specifically as an intention to express or communicate something in or through the work of art; in this sense, meaning (what is communicated) is at the heart of the question. We can usefully refer to these two kinds of intention as 'categorical' intention and 'semantic' intention respectively, and both are relevant to a discussion of Croce's position.<sup>24</sup> 'Categorical' and 'semantic' intention might seem at first glance to correlate neatly with evaluation and interpretation; but the situation is in reality rather more complicated than this. We have already seen how De Sanctis's view of both the meaning and the value of the *Comedy* flies in the face of Dante's 'semantic' intention; Croce's view of Dante is broadly similar to De Sanctis's, although its theoretical basis is more fully and formally elaborated.<sup>25</sup> In the 'semantic' sense Croce is certainly not an intentionalist; but even in the 'categorical' sense, where the artist's intention is understood simply as the intention to create a work of art, the label does not fit his philosophy of art or his view of the

<sup>23</sup> Croce's intellectual roots, as he himself emphasised, can be traced back beyond De Sanctis to Hegel and Vico: each of these thinkers insists on the power of imagination as a faculty in human mental life separate from rationality or intellect and not controlled by an act of will; each adapts and builds on the ideas of his precursor; and together they constitute a powerful, evolving line of anti-intentionalist theoreticians. The spurious Spingarn-Croce-Carlyle-Goethe alignment which Mencken seems to have pulled out of a hat on the sole basis of Spingarn's essay should rightly be Croce-De Sanctis-Hegel-Vico. The decisive formative influence on his thinking of De Sanctis, whose work he read while still at school, is mentioned repeatedly by Croce in his essay in intellectual autobiography *Contributo alla critica di me stesso*, written in 1915, privately printed in 1918, and reprinted in *Etica e politica*, Bari, Laterza, 1931, pp. 363-411.

<sup>24</sup> The terms are suggested by J. LEVINSON in *Intention and Interpretation: a Last Look*, the concluding essay of the volume *Intention and Interpretation* cited in note 2. 'Semantic' intention encompasses meaning in both the broadly thematic sense (communicating a view of the world) and at the level of textual detail. Other kinds of intention an artist may have – to make money, to please a patron, to win prestige or notoriety – need not concern us for the moment, though we will see that these too are accounted for in Croce's theory.

<sup>25</sup> See B. CROCE, *La poesia di Dante*, Bari, Laterza, 1921. The English translation by Ainslie appeared the same year.

critic's task. Both aspects of the question require elucidation.

We can start with a short essay written by Croce in 1905, which tackles the subject of authorial intention directly. It is called *I fini dei poeti*: literally, the ends of poets, i.e. their aims, their goals, their purposes – broadly speaking, what they intend to achieve by writing.<sup>26</sup> This essay, in the brief space of three and a half pages, so exactly anticipates key aspects of Wimsatt and Beardsley's views on the irrelevance of external evidence of authorial intention to critical appraisal of a work that one is tempted to call it a formulation of the intentional fallacy *ante litteram*. Croce directly confronts the issue of the status of authorial statements about aims (in prefaces, letters, conversation, and so on), concluding that either the aims are realized in the work, in which case we have no need of the extraneous statements, or they remain outside the work, detached from it and unrealized in it, and thus may be of interest to a biographer but are of no concern to the critic ('Appartengono alle intenzioni, alle aspirazioni, ai ghiribizzi dell'uomo; e sono, tutt'al più, materia di biografia'). He illustrates anecdotally the possible unreliability of an author's own statements about his intentions, and he enunciates the principle that even when the author's statements are sincere they never have probative force, i.e. reference to them never constitutes a definitive or conclusive argument ('non hanno mai valore decisivo'). He argues that the only way of determining in any given case whether the author's declared aims have been realized or not is to study the work of literature in itself ('non vi è altro modo, se non quello di studiare l'opera letteraria in sé stessa').<sup>27</sup>

Where Croce differs from Wimsatt and Beardsley is that his views on intention imply an aesthetic, a philosophy of art, and thus a theoretical model for the relationship between creative activity and critical activity. The statements just quoted stand alongside others which link them to this broader perspective. Thus Croce formulates what he calls 'il teorema dell'ateologismo pratico dell'arte', alluding to his view that art has by definition no practical aim or goal. A writer's moral, social or political aims come in Croce's system into the realm of practical activity. They are extraneous by definition to the realm of the aesthetic, unless they have been integrated into and realized in the work of art, at which point they cease to be practical and become of direct concern to the critic.

Croce starts with a fully elaborated conceptual model of what art is and how it relates to other kinds or categories of human activity. It is in the light of this that he talks about that form of art which is a literary text, the role of the

<sup>26</sup> The essay first appeared in Croce's journal «La critica», 3, 1905, pp. 433-436, and was reprinted with slight verbal retouchings in *Problemi di estetica e contributi alla storia dell'estetica italiana*, Bari, Laterza, 1910, pp. 61-64. Quotations in the text are from the revised version, which itself was retouched in later editions of the book.

<sup>27</sup> Compare Wimsatt, recapitulating his original position in *Genesis: a Fallacy Revisited*, p. 136: 'What we meant in 1946, and what in effect I think we managed to say, was that the closest one could ever get to the artist's intending or meaning mind, outside his work, would be still short of his *effective* intention or *operative* mind as it appears in the work itself and can be read from the work.' [Wimsatt's italics]

literary critic who interprets and evaluates it, and the procedures which are or are not appropriate. His starting-point is human mental life in all its richness and complexity; the issue is for him one of terminological exactness, of correctly identifying, describing and naming certain mental activities, and understanding how they relate to one another – the passion of the taxonomist applied to the life of the mind. (Thus, for example, certain procedures and practices which are valuable in themselves – scholarship, biography, and so on – are not correctly described as criticism.)<sup>28</sup> Wimsatt and Beardsley's starting-point, by contrast, is the close examination of the linguistic fabric of particular texts, especially poems, and the meanings to be assigned to them, and the principles for establishing meaning; they move from practical experience to general considerations of critical methodology.<sup>29</sup> 'Judging a poem', they tell us, 'is like judging a pudding or a machine.' Clearly we do not need a theory to judge a pudding, still less do we need a philosophy of art. Croce starts from a theoretical or philosophical position about what art is, Wimsatt and Beardsley from practical experience of interpreting and judging particular works of art; but on the question of the usefulness or validity for the critic of statements of authorial intention made by a writer outside the text, their conclusion is identical.

If we return to Wimsatt and Beardsley's definition of authorial intention ('Intention is design or plan in the author's mind'), it can be seen to imply a model of creative activity, of the process of creating a work of art, which involves both deliberation (forming the plan), and willing (taking steps to put the plan into effect), and a temporal sequence linking them (forming the plan is logically prior to carrying it out). Such a view of intention has been repeatedly called into question by philosophers as an adequate account of intention in any sphere of human activity,<sup>30</sup> and it is a view that Croce himself rejected. It is, moreover, as any attentive reader of his work can hardly fail to realize, radically incompatible with his view of creativity and its place in the mental life of human beings.

<sup>28</sup> Croce was a prolific critic as well as a theoretician, and his critical practice demonstrably influenced and modified his theoretical position in the course of his long life, as we shall see, but his first impulse was theoretical. In *Contributo alla critica di me stesso* he describes his diffidence when, in the initial discussions for *La critica*, it was decided that the literary criticism should be entrusted to him, for his mind at the time was dominated by his passion for philosophy; in retrospect the essays retained for him more the character of an exemplification of a theory than of criticism in their own right (*Contributo*, second edition, 1926, pp. 42-43). A similar point is made in a letter to Vossler in 1911 which describes his critical activity of the preceding years in these terms: 'quel tanto di critica letteraria che io ho fatto è stata informata al desiderio di mettere ben in chiaro, *per exempla*, l'ossatura della critica letteraria. Dico scherzando che non ho mai preteso di essere un pittore ma un maestro di disegno, che offre modelli di nasi, gambe, mani, atteggiamenti, ecc.>'; in *Carteggio Croce-Vossler*, Bari, Laterza, 1951, p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> And subsequently, in the case of Beardsley, to the elaboration of an aesthetic theory; see his *Aesthetics*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1958.

<sup>30</sup> It is 'a crude view of intention', in the words of N. CARROLL in *Art, Intention, and Conversation*, in *Intention and Interpretation* (note 2 above), p. 101. An equally telling point might be made from the Freudian premise that it is impossible for an individual ever to say what he 'really' means.

*I fini dei poeti* is a kind of corollary to the *Estetica*, in which several years earlier (1902) Croce had expounded his philosophy of art.<sup>31</sup> The *Estetica* itself nowhere deals directly with the question of intentions because the entire theoretical system it presents precludes the possibility that authorial intention or goals could be regarded as having significance for the critic.<sup>32</sup> Any intention an artist may have, intellectual or practical, categorial or semantic, is *by definition* extraneous to the realm of the aesthetic. Nor does Croce discuss intentions in the *Breviario di estetica* or in *Aesthetica in nuce*, two later, shorter expositions of his aesthetic theory which he recommended as being superior to the *Estetica* in clarity and conciseness.<sup>33</sup> When Croce uses the language of 'resolving an aesthetic problem', he is not thinking of a problem formulated before the process of composition begins, which is then solved by thought or analysis or deliberation. He is referring to the process of composition itself, to the *attività estetica* whose end product is a work of art. The metaphor he sometimes uses is that of giving birth, an activity which is certainly purposeful and fully conscious, but which is not brought to a successful conclusion by thinking, by critical reflection on what is going on.<sup>34</sup> When he speaks of the genesis of a work, he is referring, not to historical, political, and social circumstances on the one hand or to the author's personal history on the other, but to this mental or 'spiritual' process by which it is produced in the author's mind. The genesis of the work is simply the way it came into being, as the product of a free creative act in the mind of an individual. The only evidence we have of this process is the work itself. Its genesis is its nature.

To give a detailed account of Croce's views on the nature of art and the role of the critic is beyond the scope of this essay. Those views in any case developed over the length of a very long and active intellectual life; to summarize them is inevitably to oversimplify.<sup>35</sup> What can be asserted with absolute confidence is that at no point can his views be described as intentionalist. What follows is, first, a brief indication of the central core of Croce's thinking on art, which remains constant in its attitude to intention despite refinements in termi-

<sup>31</sup> A draft version of the *Estetica* had been published in 1900 with the title *Tesi fondamentali di un'Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale* (reprinted in *La prima forma della 'Estetica' e della 'Logica'*, ed. A. ATTISANI, Messina-Roma, Principato, 1924).

<sup>32</sup> Thus (unsurprisingly) Ainslie's translation – which unlike the Italian original has a full subject index – has no entry under intention.

<sup>33</sup> Published respectively in 1912 and in 1929. The *Breviario* was reprinted in *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, Bari, Laterza, 1920; *Aesthetica in nuce* appeared simultaneously in English (in the fourteenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* under the heading 'Aesthetics') and in Italian (Naples, Cooperativa Tipografica Sanitaria), and was reprinted in *Ultimi saggi*, Bari, Laterza, 1935, pp. 3-42.

<sup>34</sup> Compare the language in which he describes the writer's choice of theme: 'L'artista vero, infatti, si trova gravido del suo tema, e non sa come', *Estetica* (first edition, 1902), p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Croce's publishing life spanned seventy years, from his earliest essays in 1882 to his death in 1952 (but new material continued to appear posthumously, as he always had several years' worth of material to hand ready for publication).

nology over time;<sup>36</sup> and secondly, an account of his thinking on the role of the critic, where there is one development which bears directly on the intentionalist question. My account will take us beyond the *Estetica*, and will emphasize those aspects of his aesthetic theory which distance themselves from (but are easily confused with) Romantic theories about the place in artistic creativity of feeling and personality on the one hand, and of inspiration on the other.

Here then is a series of propositions about art which encapsulate, without attempting to explain or defend, some of the basic tenets of Croce's aesthetic theory. Art is a form of knowledge, which exists alongside, but is essentially different from, conceptual knowledge. Art is a mental experience, not a physical object. (The notion is not difficult to grasp in relation to music or poetry, where few people would want to argue that the score or the printed words on the page *are* the work of art, but it is clearly much more problematical in relation to painting or sculpture.) Art is one of the four fundamental categories of human mental life; it is to be confused neither with intellection, nor with volition (in its two manifestations as 'economic' and 'moral' activity). The value of art ('aesthetic value') is both autonomous and objective: it cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of other kinds of value (intellectual, moral, practical); whether a given work has aesthetic value or not is a matter of objective fact, not of subjective impression or taste.

Art is the product of a special mental faculty which all human beings have, the *fantasia* (imagination), which is quite distinct from *intelletto* (intellect), and gives a different but equally valuable kind of knowledge of reality – direct, intuitive, unmediated by reflection. Where intellect produces abstract or universal concepts, *fantasia* produces images or representations or (as Croce prefers to say) intuitions, a term which in his view is inseparable from, indeed synonymous with, expression. (An intuition which is not inwardly expressed is not an intuition, but merely a passive impression on the psyche from the outside world. The active, not passive, character of mental life – its free, not determined, nature – is for Croce a fundamental principle.) Expression is often used loosely in ordinary speech to refer to other kinds of activity, as when we say that a concept is expressed, or blushing expresses embarrassment, but in a strict philosophical sense it is exactly equivalent to intuition.

Every genuine work of art is such an intuition, unique and unrepeatable. It expresses a direct knowledge of or vision of reality, of human life. Its uniqueness reflects both the uniqueness of the human being who created it and the unrepeatability of the point in human history at which it was created. But this double aspect of the originality of a work of art does not correlate in any simple

<sup>36</sup> The key developments occur in two essays *L'intuizione pura e il carattere lirico dell'arte* (1908), reprinted in *Problemi di estetica e contributi alla storia dell'estetica italiana*, Bari, Laterza, 1910, pp. 3-30; and *Il carattere di totalità dell'espressione artistica* (1917), reprinted in *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, Bari, Laterza, 1920, pp. 123-138; and in the book *La poesia*, Bari, Laterza, 1936. Only *La poesia* alters the parameters of critical discourse, but not in ways which affect the intentionalist issue.

way either with the artist's biography or his personality, or with the historical circumstances of the time and place in which he wrote it. The relation of the work of art to its creator and to history is not one of cause and effect. To think in such terms would be to deny the free, creative character which is the essence of mental activity. On the question of history, Croce in one of his grander formulations insists that the whole of human history, the whole of reality, the whole universe up to that point in time, enters into the work of art at the moment of its creation.<sup>37</sup> On the matter of biography, he specifically (and on the face of it paradoxically) excluded knowledge of the writer's life from the general historical awareness a critic ought ideally to have.<sup>38</sup> On the matter of personality, he insisted on the distinction between a writer's *persona pratica* (his personality in everyday life) and his *persona poetica* (the personality expressed in his work).

It may be helpful to approach this last idea through a formulation with which English readers will be more familiar. When T.S. Eliot in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* talks of the distinction between 'the man who suffers and the mind which creates' he is making precisely Croce's distinction between *persona pratica* and *persona poetica*, the man in his day-to-day existence and the mind which produces the work of art.<sup>39</sup> Croce's *persona poetica* (the 'mind which creates') is – and can only be – experienced in and inferred from the work itself. It corresponds in fact to Eliot's idea of impersonality. Once again Croce's theory turns us back to the work itself, and away from the individual who produced it. Talk of the artist's personality, like talk of his state of mind or his inspiration, is a way of referring to the authenticity of his intuition (not of his feelings), while acknowledging that each work of art bears the hallmark or imprint or likeness of a human being who is unlike any other human being ('ciascuna con la propria inconfondibile fisionomia').<sup>40</sup> What is at issue is not the genuineness of the artist's feelings in real life, but whether a genuine aesthetic experience has taken place.

The difficulties of Croce's theory are well-known. His account of human mental life, the foundation on which the whole structure rests, is debatable, for there is no way of proving that the four mental categories exist. There is the (in-

<sup>37</sup> E.g. 'il contenuto [...] è scientificamente inesauribile perché abbraccia tutta la realtà [...]', *Estetica* (1902), p. 90; 'i poeti [...] esprimono [...] sé medesimi, e, in sé medesimi, l'universo tutto [...]', *Nuovi saggi*, p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. 'chi pretende spiegare [...] l'arte con la biografia, nega, senza avvedersene, l'arte stessa', in *Alcune massime critiche e il loro vero intendimento*, III, *Nuovi saggi*, p. 227.

<sup>39</sup> T.S. ELIOT, *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), in *Selected Essays*, third edition, London, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1953, pp. 13-22. Eliot makes the distinction in the course of explaining his 'impersonal' theory of poetry; his essay is cited by the staunch intentionalist E.D. HIRSCH, Jr., in *In Defense of the Author* (in *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1967, pp. 1-23; reprinted in NEWTON-DE MOLINA (note 5 above), pp. 87-103; ISEMINGER (note 2 above), pp. 11-23) as a key text in establishing the climate of ideas which led to *anti-intentionalism*.

<sup>40</sup> *Nuovi saggi*, p. 309.



tractable) problem of technique and its role in relation to a purely mental experience. There is the problem of circularity or self-referentiality (his theory generates a rich and thought-provoking series of synonyms for art – intuition, expression, language, *liricità*, a priori aesthetic synthesis, *poesia* – but they are meaningful only if one has granted his premises).<sup>41</sup> He offers no sure way of identifying in any given case whether what we are dealing with is art or not – yet, as we shall see, this, in the final form of his theory, is the essence of the critical task. Croce himself was well aware of all these difficulties.

His own position on the subject of demonstrability is unequivocal. The basic mental ('spiritual') categories and concepts, he says, cannot be defined, or even proved to exist.<sup>42</sup> They are self-evident to the unprejudiced observer. Confronted with a sceptic, one can point to the contradictions and inadequacies of other theories and so clear the way for an understanding of the nature of mental activity, but one cannot demonstrate its character or functioning. In other words, mental activity can only be defined in terms of itself, with synonyms or tautologies. Thus, as we have seen, we have a whole series of synonyms for the word 'art', but nothing outside the concept to which we can refer if we disagree about whether a given work is in fact a work of art or not. We fall back on 'poesia [...] definizione di sé medesima,'<sup>43</sup> and find that we have to argue about who has an ear for poetry and who is deaf to it. But whereas in the case of music tone-deafness is a measurable deficiency, and perfect pitch is not a controversial notion, the poetic equivalent of perfect pitch is impossible to demonstrate. Each of two critics who disagree will claim to have it, but only one of them can be right.<sup>44</sup>

We must now turn to Croce's views on the critic's role – on what it is the critic's task to do and how he does it. Those views changed at a certain point in a way which impinges directly on the intentionalist issue. In the early phase of his thinking – the years in which he drafted the *Estetica* in its first form, revised and published the reworked text, revised the early editions, elaborated the other volumes of the *filosofia dello spirito*, and produced the body of criticism of modern Italian writers reprinted as *La letteratura della nuova Italia* – the critic's role is simply to reproduce the intuition, to experience and share the intuitive act of knowledge, the vision of the world, of its creator. Judgment does not involve any operation beyond that of reproduction, reproduction carrying with it an awareness of value. On this view all of us as we experience works of art and

<sup>41</sup> 'Il vero è che, dove la poesia è poesia, non c'è luogo ad altra qualificazione che a questa, generalissima; e i concetti e le parole di significato positivo non solo sono pochi, ma quei pochi stessi, scrutati a fondo, si dimostrano o sinonimici o metaforici' (*Nuovi saggi*, pp. 285, 308-309).

<sup>42</sup> See *Logica come scienza del concetto puro*, Bari, Laterza, 1909, pp. 32-34.

<sup>43</sup> *Per una poetica moderna*, in *Nuovi saggi*, p. 326.

<sup>44</sup> Croce's own polemics with other critics often degenerated into accusations of this kind. No statement of Gentile's about art, for example, could ever be taken seriously, because he was notoriously 'sordo affatto alla poesia' (*Terze pagine sparse*, II, 73), 'negato da natura d'intendere quel che sia poesia' (*Pagine sparse*, III, 69). Interestingly, Croce himself seems to have been tone-deaf; see F. NICOLINI, *Benedetto Croce*, Turin, UTET, 1962, p. 136.

respond to them are critics, just as all of us are poets or artists in so far as the intuitive apprehension of reality is a normal part of every human life. One of the most striking and appealing aspects of Croce's aesthetic is its anti-elitist nature. Art is a fundamental aspect of man's humanity. All human beings share to a greater or lesser degree the mental processes which, in the case of the artist, produce a work of art, just as we all share to a greater or lesser degree the mental processes which, in the case of the philosopher, produce philosophy. On this view the critic's activity is an aesthetic activity.<sup>45</sup>

Croce's thinking on the critic's role evolved as a direct result of his own extensive activity as a critic in these early years of *La critica*. Two important developments occur more or less contemporaneously, the second more significant for our purposes than the first. In the 1908 essay *L'intuizione pura e il carattere lirico dell'arte* Croce tried to theorize more satisfactorily the emotional dimension of aesthetic experience. This resulted in a new description of the critic's task – to characterize the *personalità* or *stato d'animo* the work embodies. At around the same time Croce came to see judgment as a second step following the preliminary step of reproduction, a step essentially different in character in that it belonged to the intellectual and not the intuitive sphere:

Pel giudizio manca qualcosa, che può sembrare di piccola importanza ed è importantissimo, può sembrare nulla ed è tutto. È necessario che il fatto estetico, riprodotto nella fantasia, sia *qualificato*, cioè *pensato*, come fatto estetico; che esso, da contemplazione, diventi atto logico (soggetto, predicato e copula). In questo atto semplicissimo di aggiungere un predicato al soggetto della contemplazione consiste la critica letteraria [...]<sup>46</sup>

The critic must pronounce a judgment on the work, must declare that it is or is not a work of art. This represents a radical shift, for the critic's activity is no longer understood as an aesthetic activity, but as a philosophical one.

In consequence of this shift, a different qualification is now required of those who practise criticism. Whereas originally it was sufficient to have – as well as the necessary learning and a sense of history – taste or sensibility, the capacity to share the artist's vision and respond imaginatively to it, now in addition it was necessary to have a theoretical understanding of what art is, and the capacity to apply that understanding by distinguishing between what is art and what is not art. Thus while in its earliest phase Croce's aesthetic does not require any philosophical competence in the critic, it now requires him to have a philosophical understanding of the nature of his own activity.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See *Estetica*, fourth edition, pp. 139-140; and *Problemi di estetica*, p. 163: 'se la letteratura è fatto estetico, essa non può essere indagata in quanto letteratura, se non in modo conforme alla sua natura, cioè esteticamente'.

<sup>46</sup> *Problemi di estetica*, p. 52. This passage dates from 1909; the principle had already been clearly enunciated in 1907, see *Problemi di estetica*, p. 93.

<sup>47</sup> The issue is discussed in detail and very persuasively in an essay of 1918, *La critica letteraria come filosofia*, reprinted in *Nuovi saggi*, pp. 205-19, which argues not only that a philo-

Croce's definitive position – the requirement that the literary critic have a fully elaborated philosophy of art – is something to which critics in the English-speaking world have traditionally proved resistant. F.R. Leavis, for example, resolutely opposed the notion that the critic must be a philosopher who grounds his judgments in a theoretical view of what art is. Wimsatt and Beardsley, when they say that 'judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine' are implicitly making a similar claim for pragmatism against philosophy. When J.E. Spingarn republished his lecture *The New Criticism* in *Criticism in America* in 1924 (see note 13) and added the sentence 'For to create a work of art is the goal of every artist; and all questions in regard to his achievement resolve themselves into this: Has he or has he not created a work of art?', he was reflecting this second and definitive stage in Croce's thinking about the critical act. It is a development which for our present purposes marks a crucial change of emphasis, inasmuch as it appears to shift the weight from the artist's 'semantic' intention to his 'categorical' intention.

The critic's task, then, is to tell the genuine from the false, the real thing from the spurious, art from non-art. He is not making discriminations on a scale of values (bad, mediocre, good, superb, a masterpiece) but telling true from false, the genuine from the counterfeit, what is a work of art from what is not.<sup>48</sup> What is not a work of art will be something else, which may well have its own interest and value. Works which superficially look like works of art because of their extrinsic formal characteristics (eg. metrical or dramatic form) may prove on examination not to be works of art at all, depending on the animating impulse, the informing principle, which produced them. The sorts of discrimination the critic will be called upon to make will reflect his grasp of the categories of mental activity and may fly in the face of common linguistic usage and authorial intention. Lucretius and Manzoni may have thought they were creating works of art, but in the first case we have a philosophical treatise in the form of a poem, in the second a moral tract in the form of a novel. Each is a work whose interest and value no one would deny, but that interest and value is not correctly described as aesthetic. Croce uses the word 'oratoria' for works whose primary impulse is not to express 'stati d'animo' but to create them in others (to instruct, to persuade, to amuse).<sup>49</sup> Books written purely to make money constitute another category whose animating impulse is practical. But whereas we might all agree that Jeffrey Archer does not produce works of art, to dismiss Lucretius and Pirandello, Manzoni and Brecht, is clearly more problematical. Their works are all examples of non art, or *non poesia* in Croce's preferred later terminology.<sup>50</sup>

sophical position is an indispensable premise for the critic, but that criticism is of its nature philosophical.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *Problemi di estetica*, p. 503: 'Non vi sono opere d'arte, a cui sia possibile assegnare il punto 10, e altre a cui si assegni il 9 o l'8 o il 5.'

<sup>49</sup> On 'oratoria' see *Conversazioni critiche. Serie prima*, Bari, Laterza, 1918, pp. 62-63.

<sup>50</sup> From about 1915 onwards Croce talks of *poesia* and *non poesia* rather than art and non

The 'categorical' intention to create a work of art is in itself no guarantee of anything. No one, in Croce's view, can simply decide to create a work of art by an act of will, for the artist must have two things which it is not in his power to bestow on himself: something to say and the capacity to say it. (Strictly speaking, this is an artificial distinction, for it is only apparent that you have something to say when you have found a way of saying it.) This is not to be confused with Romantic notions of inspiration, of the poet as a vehicle through whom powerful forces are working which are beyond his control, any more than talk of states of mind equates with the Romantic view of art as the expression of feelings. (Croce distanced himself explicitly and repeatedly from this view, which equates art with expression in a non-aesthetic sense.)<sup>51</sup> Having no 'inspiration' simply means having nothing to say, no intuition to express, no personal view of the world to communicate. Inspiration is yet another word which correlates with the authenticity of the aesthetic experience, the originality of the true work of art, the individual and unmistakable voice with which the true artist speaks.

The 'categorical' intention to create a work of art, nurtured by someone who has nothing to say, may involve the use of a mental faculty which exists alongside *fantasia* (imagination) but is not to be confused with it; *immaginazione* is the faculty which produces a 'willed' version of creativity by people who lack the inner resources to be genuinely creative.<sup>52</sup> Its products claim to be works of art, but they are masquerading under false colours. Croce dismissed much baroque art in these terms, as a product of *immaginazione* rather than of *fantasia*, seeing in it a straining after effect which aimed to surprise and shock with its arbitrary yoking together of images. His antipathy to much modern art – for example, to the poetry of Futurists like Marinetti – was based on his conviction that the artists concerned had nothing to say. Their creative sterility masquerades as art, but their claims are fraudulent; their 'art' is in fact pseudo-art – which is not the same as non-art, but is another way in which something which claims to have aesthetic value may fail to have it. (Visitors to the notorious pile of bricks at the Tate Gallery might feel some sympathy with this aspect of Croce's theory. 'Conceptual' art is in Croce's terms an oxymoron.)

art. *Poesia e non poesia* later became the title of a book on nineteenth-century European literature (Bari, Laterza, 1923).

<sup>51</sup> For example, *La poesia*, p. 4 f.

<sup>52</sup> That Croce uses 'fantasia' for imagination, the authentic creative faculty, and 'immaginazione' for the inauthentic 'willed' version ('fancy', in Coleridge's terminology) has needless to say caused confusion to translators. Croce himself was well aware of Coleridge's usage, and draws attention to the apparent mismatch with his own (the distinction they are making is of course identical) on various occasions; see *Immaginazione e fantasia*, «Quaderni della critica», 3, 1947, p. 91; *Fantasia e immaginazione*, «Quaderni della critica», 5, 1949, p. 117. The confusion has persisted. It is everywhere, for example, in C. SPRIGGE's translation of Croce's essays, *Philosophy, Poetry, History: an Anthology of Essays*, London, Oxford University Press, 1966. More recently it has resurfaced in J. GALASSI's translation of Montale's prose, *The Second Life of Art. Selected Essays of Eugenio Montale*, New York, Ecco Press, 1983.

What actually takes place at the moment of creativity, rather than whether it measures up to any pre-existing intention, categorial or semantic, intellectual or practical, is what is of interest to the critic. The only evidence we have for what takes place is the work itself. The work alone provides evidence of its own genesis, of its own nature, of the process by which it came into being in its author's mind. A pre-existing 'plan in the author's mind' may or may not be fulfilled in the finished work. The finished work may have aesthetic value in spite of failing to fulfil its author's intentions (or indeed, as in De Sanctis's reading of Dante, *because* it fails to fulfil its author's intentions); conversely, it may fulfil its author's intentions and yet not be a work of art; or it may be a work of art *and* fulfil its author's intentions. But it will never be a work of art simply *because* it fulfils its author's intentions.

*The Intentional Fallacy* has been described by an acute critic as 'arguably this century's most important short essay in aesthetics and literary theory'.<sup>53</sup> It is probable that many English readers interested in critical theory first encounter Croce's name in this context, where he is presented as a crude intentionalist. Ainslie's translation of the *Aesthetic* continues to be referred to as the 'classic target' of those who attack intentionalism.<sup>54</sup> And yet Croce – undeniably one of the most original and influential thinkers on aesthetics in the first half of this century – was, like De Sanctis before him, an anti-intentionalist *avant la lettre*, for whom the idea that one could argue in any simple way from authorial intention to meaning was as crass as the idea that one could argue from authorial intention to value. The alleged summary of Croce's thinking in *The Intentional Fallacy*, reiterated 20 years later by Wimsatt in *Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited* – 'The poet had a specific aim or plan in mind; he managed (whether inspirationally or rationally) to carry this out in the poem; thus he is a successful artist; his work is good art' – is quite simply a travesty of Croce's views. It reveals a profound ignorance of both his aesthetic theory and his critical practice, and an unwillingness or inability to engage seriously with his philosophy of art.

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<sup>53</sup> R. SHUSTERMAN, *Analytic Aesthetics, Literary Theory, and Deconstruction*, «Monist», 69, 1986, pp. 22-38 (p. 34); compare M. MOTHERSILL, *Beauty Restored*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 15: 'No single essay of the past half-century has been more influential than «The Intentional Fallacy».'

<sup>54</sup> J. MARGOLIS in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, (note 5 above), p. 364; M. MOTHERSILL (previous note), p. 15.

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