

## *Introduction: on influence*

“Influence” has been a controversial term in critical studies because of its different definitions. For some, it conjures up an outmoded model of source study. For others, source study remains useful in practical criticism despite challenges posed to it by poststructuralism. Yet for the most part, Harold Bloom’s theory of the anxiety of influence has superseded the association of influence with source study. Bloom’s work has had its own influence, particularly on feminist critics who have revised his paradigms to describe how female writers relate to a patriarchal tradition.<sup>1</sup> More recent critics have preferred “intertextuality” to “influence.” “Intertextuality” has been particularly associated with Julia Kristeva’s work, such as *Le Texte du Roman*. She argues that the illusion presented by a work as a coherent expression of its author’s mind should be disrupted so that “the notion of a ‘person-subject of writing’ becomes blurred, yielding to that of ‘ambivalence of writing.’”<sup>2</sup> This ambivalence leads to treating texts as mosaics of other texts, which include for Kristeva any form in which meaning is inscribed, not just other books. Kristeva insists on the irreducible plurality of what Anglo-American critics had traditionally understood to be unified: the individual author and the literary tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein have analyzed the popularity of Kristevan intertextuality, as opposed to Bloomian influence, as a theoretical model.<sup>4</sup> They isolate several factors behind influence’s decline, all of which point to the perceived necessity of discarding the concept of the author whose isolated genius provides the source of literature. Intertextuality avoids the problematics of agency and canonicity associated with traditional source study and with Bloom’s oedipalization of influence. Instead, it replaces them with a more open notion of the relations that may

exist between texts. In particular, if culture itself is read as a web of signs, then possible candidates for intertextual relationships increase dramatically. Even more than influence, intertextuality is an umbrella term that can be used to describe widely differing hermeneutics, from Roland Barthes's stress on the infinity of codes that a text might engage to Michael Riffaterre's exploration of textual matrices that point to a unitary reading.

Jonathan Culler has suggested that intertextuality's weakness is the enormous range of texts that it opens to interpretation, since when the concept is used as the basis for practical criticism it either regresses to source study or narrows itself to particular texts for convenience.<sup>5</sup> John Mowitt, in contrast, suggests that intertextuality undermines disciplinary assumptions governing the interpretation of texts, including the assumption that theoretical insights should be evaluated by their helpfulness in producing close readings.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, insofar as critics have appropriated Kristeva's theory in Anglo-American literary study, they have severely neutralized it. Rather than fundamentally challenging the literary work's status, intertextuality has merely provided an attitude toward textual origins, a reminder that they are never self-generating. Much criticism of the 1980s embraced such an attitude even when it did not necessarily highlight intertextuality as a theoretical starting-point. For example, new historicist critics who developed Foucault's insights about power assumed that particular texts must be understood as intersections between or competitions among larger cultural discourses.

The neutralization of Kristevan intertextuality suggests that influence may not be so easy to dismiss, limited though its assumptions may be, because it fits into the academic construction of literary criticism as a discipline. Clayton and Rothstein point out but do not pursue the irony whereby theorists of intertextuality, who attempt to go beyond the concept of the author, have had tremendous influence as authors.<sup>7</sup> Although Barthes proclaimed the death of the author, his effect on literary criticism has been as a highly ingenious writer; interest in the relation between sexuality and his criticism has heightened his life's importance.<sup>8</sup> Even if one rejects the ideology of canonicity or wishes to move beyond the problematics of individual agency, it is difficult to think oneself out of the degree to which individual authors have influence that involves their lives as well as their

*Introduction: on influence*

3

works. The cultural fiction of the author is not “just” a fiction because the practices and institutions of literary study underwrite it in innumerable ways.

Influence, understood as the way that the work of one author shapes that of a later one, now has the peculiar status of being everywhere and nowhere. As an approach to literary analysis, it has become intellectually suspect and professionally unfashionable. Yet a glance at footnotes of books or articles in the field reveals that the discipline of literary study is obsessed with documenting influences. The older interest in tracing literary-historical lines of influence has not so much disappeared as been transformed into tracing the effects of major theorists. This book reexamines the historicity of influence partly because influence has become so central to how literary study constitutes itself as a discipline. Doing so demands exploring the construction of the author as a figure who can have influence.

The title and outline of this book have an allusive relation to George Ford’s *Keats and the Victorians*, a classic source study.<sup>9</sup> Although, like this book, it examines a major Romantic poet and his influence on later, canonical Victorian writers, assumptions have changed. Ford relies on a self-contained understanding of literary history as a process determined by changes in taste. Influence depends on parallel passages, and sometimes less on verbal echoes than on general similarities in diction and language. More generally, his work conceives of historical action in terms of intending subjects who impose their will on their environment with little structural constraint. Yet treating Ford as a theoretical strawman is less interesting than responding to the genuine challenge that his work offers to reconceptualize the cultural practices producing literary influence as a historical phenomenon.

As W. J. T. Mitchell has noted, influence itself has a history and is “influenced” by its materials.<sup>10</sup> By arguing eloquently for influence’s historicity, Mitchell suggests that the diachronic aspect of influence has not been sufficiently investigated. In particular, new historicists have privileged synchronic explanations over diachronic ones: they are more likely to analyze the political pressures of a particular moment than the constraints exercised by literary conventions or classic authorities. Yet Raymond Williams’s statement about tradition applies more narrowly to certain forms of literary influence: “[T]radition is in practice the

most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits.”<sup>11</sup> Even if influence does not express the dominant tradition, it still has political significance.

Several writers suggest promising directions for developing Mitchell’s concern with influence’s historicity. Foucault, especially in “What Is an Author?,” has drawn attention to the author not as an individual but as a discursive category giving a privileged status to certain texts.<sup>12</sup> Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse’s *The Imaginary Puritan* continues and partly challenges his work by investigating the appearance of “the author” in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain. Their book describes the agency of writing in locating subjectivity inside the body and history outside of it, so that writing seems to come from inside the author’s physical person. Like Armstrong and Tennenhouse, I am interested in the power of writing to create the inner self, especially because I understand Byron’s career as a critical turning-point in the relations between author, text, and audience, when the text became not merely an author’s product but an eroticized expression of the most authentic depths of his or her personality.

Yet a welcome stress on the agency of writing leads Armstrong and Tennenhouse to downplay, although not to ignore, the role of institutions and reception as catalysts for this agency. While this role is hardly outside of or prior to writing, it cannot be traced solely within the frame of the text itself. Likewise, their paradigm-shattering account of the relation between American captivity narratives and Richardson’s *Pamela* relies on imaginary readers to support arguments about relations between texts: “[M]ost readers appear to have accepted Pamela’s view that it was better to die than have sex with anyone but one’s husband. Could it be that they heard in her protests the sentiments of colonial heroines responding to the Indian menace? What else would have made the loss of her virtue equivalent to losing one’s English identity?”<sup>13</sup> The rhetorical questions about audience suggest a simultaneous appeal to and discomfort with modes of source study that might establish the path from captivity narratives to *Pamela*. Armstrong and Tennenhouse rigorously avoid empiricism, by which I mean the writing of history as if facts simply could speak for themselves. Yet if writing is to be granted historical agency, and Armstrong and Tennenhouse demonstrate

that it must, the question arises of how anything else can be described as having agency if one is to avoid empiricism.

Two critics who suggest possible answers are Hans Robert Jauss and Pierre Bourdieu. Jauss's *Rezeptionsästhetik* proposes to analyze a work by considering the contemporary "horizon of expectations" in which it was written and by investigating whether it meets or disrupts these expectations:

The analysis of the literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language.<sup>14</sup>

Jauss foregrounds the importance of acknowledging diachronic and synchronic perspectives on literature simultaneously. His insistence on "the historical moment" of a work's appearance demands that the "system of expectations" involve more than just literature, because "the social function of literature manifests itself . . . only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, preforms his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior."<sup>15</sup> In such an emphasis, he shares with Barthes a concern for the "already read," the unwritten assumptions of readers that are an inevitable and often ignored element in the production of meaning.

Yet Jauss's ideas are exciting in theory but disappointing as realized in practice.<sup>16</sup> The problem lies in his desire to elevate reception to an aesthetic, an emphasis that leads him to avoid the specifics of a historical study of audience, despite his claim for the existence of an "objectifiable system of expectations." Authors such as Janice Radway have demonstrated the effectiveness of doing what Jauss does not by analyzing the responses of actual readers to challenge generalizations about how literature functions in society.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Jauss raises a crucial issue by suggesting that writers can situate their reactions to other authors only in relation to a larger cultural reception. He takes Foucault's question "What is an author?" one step further by asking, "What is an author to his or her audience?" A work's historical significance involves not only how it responds to con-

temporary ideological problems but also how contemporary readers responded to it.

If, following Jauss, we acknowledge that an influential writer is available to later writers not as a unified entity but as a network of cultural responses, it is also possible to conceive of writers who are influenced not as self-determining monads but agents within a system of production. The theorist most useful in picturing how such a system affects influence is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu is best known for his sociological studies of how education and culture reproduce symbolic capital, which he defines as a kind of power that takes the form not of money but of prestige, status, or recognition. The concept of symbolic capital helps Bourdieu to avoid simply recording “reality” in his sociological histories: he is arranging information so as to highlight how symbolic capital works. He has not, to my knowledge, been discussed as a theorist of literary influence. Yet his sociology of art analyzes how a literary system conditions the attitudes of later writers toward earlier ones.

Bourdieu takes nineteenth-century France as his model for the cultural field. This field, which consists of the totality of relations between writers, publishers, reviewers, and readers, arranges itself around a basic principle: the inverse relation between economic and symbolic capital. Writers aiming for the greatest amount of symbolic capital adopt an ethos of art for art’s sake: they are interested in success or failure solely in aesthetic terms, which an elite coterie of other artistic producers define. At the other end of the spectrum are writers who sell their art, such as journalists or hack dramatists. In between are a range of different positions arising from tensions between these two poles.

Bourdieu’s model treats influence in terms of the struggle for symbolic capital. Younger writers positioned to achieve symbolic capital oppose established ones:

The ageing of authors, schools and works is far from being the product of a mechanical, chronological slide into the past; it results from the struggle between those who have made their mark . . . and who are fighting to persist, and those who cannot make their own mark without pushing into the past those who have an interest in stopping the clock, eternalizing the present state of things.<sup>18</sup>

Where Bloom sees the agonistic position of younger writers towards precursors as an internal psychological struggle, Bour-

dieu demystifies it as the structural result of a competition for symbolic capital. Originality, for Bourdieu, does not arise from the strong poet's psychological need but from a cultural marketplace's demand that for writers to accumulate symbolic capital, they must "push into the past" more established writers. For Bourdieu, authors who simply imitate the current trends are not "weak," as they are for Bloom. Instead, their positions in the cultural field (typically as writers needing to earn money) lead them to capitalize on whatever constitutes popular taste.

As a sociologist, Bourdieu is not concerned with producing interpretations of the kind associated with Anglo-American literary criticism. He demonstrates how symbolic capital functions in a sociological field, not how to interpret literature. As a result, his models raise the problem of distinguishing between a work's social determinants and the work itself. Although "the work itself" may be a mystified concept, Bourdieu produces a purely formal description of the cultural field that rarely refers to the content of different works. Given his terms, it would be difficult to distinguish texts that occupy similar positions in the field of cultural production. Moreover, he tends to simplify the variety of possible positions that later writers can take toward earlier ones. While he maintains that younger writers refuse everything their artistic "elders" are and do, refusal can mask ambivalence or indebtedness. Here, Bloom provides a considerably subtler guide to influence's intricacies.

Moreover, Bourdieu describes the cultural field at one stage in its history. He assumes the existence of full-blown capitalism and offers few suggestions for how the cultural field came to assume a particular form or how it has changed. As a result, neither his model nor his terminology can be transposed to a different period without considerable modification. Nevertheless, his work offers some of the most promising areas for historicizing influence because it insists on the structural determinants of cultural production.<sup>19</sup>

A pre-text or a precursor is always already interpreted, so that influence is never a purely intersubjective activity, as Bloom represents it. A writer's influence involves far more than texts that she or he writes. It depends on the apparatus whereby that work is produced, disseminated, reviewed, consecrated, or forgotten. Equally important, it depends on how this apparatus

constructs the writer's life in relation to the work. Later writers encounter differing versions of an earlier one, so that their authorial positions in the cultural field are conditioned not only by their role in the literary system but also by the access that they have had to models of authorship. This book will demonstrate the importance of expanding and complicating the notion of pretext or precursor by insisting on the range of discourses through which earlier writers become accessible to later ones. A historical investigation of influence needs to account less for all the possible associations that any given writer may have had for later ones than the ways in which the career of a writer intersected with practices determining the reception of earlier writers. I take as axiomatic that the pull between treating texts as the products of individual authors and as products of larger systems of discourses, practices, and institutions is not simply a problem that can be solved by thinking about it hard enough. My choice has been to steer my analysis away from the psychological vocabulary that has dominated the study of influence. The histories that the following chapters construct underscore how circumstances of literary production condition the texts that later writers produce in relation to earlier ones.

While "influence" is one area of concern in this book, the other is "Byron," whom I introduce in the words of a nineteenth-century admirer:

Why, if the fairest test of genius were to be tried by the influence it exerts on cotemporary [*sic*] literature, I hardly know how high we are to rank the name of BYRON. What a change he has created, not only in our poetry, but in our dramas, novels, and almost national character! . . . He quite sublimated the quiet English out of their natures, and open shirt-collars, and melancholy features; and a certain *dash* of remorse, were as indispensable to young men, and are so still, as tenderness, and endurance, and intense feeling of passion among the fair sex.<sup>20</sup>

The passage begins by describing Byron's effect on literature yet soon recognizes that Byron is not just an author, but an unprecedented cultural phenomenon. His work affects not only the novel, poetry, and drama, but fashion, social manners, erotic experience, and gender roles. This description suggests that any account of BYRON's influence will have to consider far more than the poetry written by George Gordon, Lord Byron.



*Introduction: on influence*

9

The movement from “George Gordon” to “BYRON” can represent an array of new developments in the production of literature. Although other writers have used “Byronism” to refer to a set of traits supposedly characterizing Byron’s texts, I use it to refer to developments that allowed Byron to become a celebrity in Britain. Byronism involves roughly three interpenetrating levels: Byron’s poems, biographies of Byron, and adaptations of and responses to both. The first level involves the apparatus that associated Byron’s name with a set of mostly poetic texts through publications, reviews, collections, annotations, illustrations, forgeries, and imitations. Yet the cult of Byron resulted from what was perceived to be his personality as much as from his poems. Byronism includes the biographies, legends, reminiscences, rumors, and gossip that surrounded every aspect of Byron’s life. Byron’s contemporaries felt that the importance of Byron’s life and character to his work made him distinctively new as an author. The stereotypes of the Byronic character, a passionate hero with a darkly mysterious erotic past, acquired so much prominence that they could soon stand for clichéd and outmoded forms of literature, behavior, or characterization. Finally, Byronism refers to the variety of responses to the poems and biographies by Victorian men and women, from professional writers to casual diarists. Not all responses were written ones: British entrepreneurs tried to capitalize on Byron’s appeal with an assortment of Byroniana. The products of Byronism have no essential or defining characteristics other than their perceived relation to the life and work of Lord Byron.

This study attempts to avoid essentializing either “Byron” or “influence” even while recognizing that their historical power has come from their role as perceived essences. Surprisingly, no book has been written about Byron’s influence. The closest is Samuel C. Chew’s *Byron in England*, which is about Byron’s reputation, not his influence. Shorter studies have focused chiefly on transformations of the “Byronic hero,” a type that later writers imitated with varying degrees of ambivalence. The problem with such an approach to Byron’s influence is that it overlooks the enormous complexity of possible institutions, discourses, and practices that made both Byron and influence available to Victorian writers.<sup>21</sup> While it is true that the clichéd Byronic hero represents an important element in Byronism, the type is less

interesting in itself than for what it suggests about Victorian representations of subjectivity. The Byronic hero's fascination lay less in his intrinsic qualities than in the fact that he was supposed to represent Byron, the man. The ramifications of the easily stated equation between Byron and his heroes were immensely complicated. Rather than arguing that Byron's life was as important as his poetry for later writers, I want to stress the extent to which "Byron's life," "Byron's work," and the relations between them all resulted from how the Victorians produced what counted as literature and culture.

The writers on whom I concentrate could hardly have been more different from Byron and from one another. Yet all wrote texts that engaged Byron and the market in Byron so as to be among the most daring and unexpected productions of Victorian literature. Four in particular, Carlyle, Emily Brontë, Tennyson, and Wilde, ruptured, often with considerable violence, contemporary aesthetic decorums, as the shocked initial receptions that greeted their Byronic works attest. In different ways, they departed radically from the author's established role, even though the content of their work was not necessarily what contemporary politicians would have called radical. Looking at them allows me to demonstrate the complexity of Byronism in Victorian literature by exploring how their work challenged possibilities for what literature was supposed to do.

The sheer diversity of forms through which "Byron" and "influence" were available to nineteenth-century writers prevents a single neat account of Byron and the Victorians. My goal is to suggest how historicizing the workings of influence, with particular reference to Byron, enables a rethinking of the significance of Victorian texts. Although the representation of subjectivity is a common theme throughout this book, each chapter is necessarily self-contained to the extent that each author engages with literary production and the representation of Byron differently. Nevertheless, certain core issues cluster for each writer around his or her relation to Byron. For Carlyle, these center on class; for Brontë, gender; for Tennyson, popularity; and for Bulwer Lytton, Disraeli, and Wilde, sexuality. These are not mutually exclusive areas of emphasis, but general areas of concern in which "Byron" and "influence" played a formative role.

I began this book hoping that examining Byron and his