Narrative Discourse

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Chapter 2

Cross-Textual Implied Painters and Cinematic Auteurs

Rabindranath Tagore’s Paintings and Bimal Roy’s Madhumati

The preceding discussion of discourse is, of course, far from exhaustive. There is a great deal more to say about each of its components. This chapter and the next take up some complications and extensions of implied authorship. Specifically, the present chapter examines the consequences of bringing the idea of implied authorship into the analysis of works in two other media—painting and cinema. As with other aspects of discourse, one would expect the idea of an implied author to have consequences outside its original domain of narrative fiction. However, critics and theorists rarely extend the concept beyond novels and short stories. That is unfortunate, because a broader application should complicate and enhance the theoretical understanding of the implied author (and other aspects of discourse) while simultaneously deepening comprehension of and response to nonliterary works. In other words, such an extension should challenge and improve ideas in both areas.

This chapter first takes up the relevance of narratological discourse analysis for painting. Focusing on some of Rabindranath Tagore’s work, it considers such theoretical issues as what an implied painter may be and what relation the implied painter may have to a narrator in painting. In connection with this, it explores the consequences of “implied paintership” for interpreting Tagore’s famously enigmatic works. These paintings have been widely admired, but infrequently analyzed, and, it seems, rarely understood. Many years ago, Asok Mitra pointed out
that the center of Tagore’s creative work shifted to painting in his later years. For this reason, it is crucial to understand Tagore’s paintings if one wishes to gain an understanding of Tagore. Moreover, Mitra main-
tained that Tagore is “one of the greatest painters we shall ever have” (62). Thus, understanding his painting is intrinsically important as well.

One of the main conclusions of the first part of this chapter is that there is a level of interpretive relevance, thus cognitive unity or pat-
terning, above the individual work—the level of an author’s or painter’s canon. Thus, just as one may refer to the implied author of an individual text, one may also refer to the “cross-textual implied author” of a body of works. This concept is obviously closely related to the idea of a film “auteur.” On the one hand, this link with auteurism confirms the signifi-
cance of the cross-textual implied author. On the other hand, there are well-known problems with the idea of a film auteur. These arise primar-
ily due to the highly collaborative nature of film production. The sec-
ond half of the chapter examines some of these problems. It begins with
a discussion of how the receptive account of authorial intent resolves
some of the more obvious dilemmas about auteurism. Nonetheless, dif-
ficulties remain. These lead to a partial reformulation of the idea of a
cross-textual implied author and, indeed, a partial reunderstanding of
authorial receptive intent.

Painting as a Challenge to Narrative Discourse Analysis

The differences between painting and verbal narrative appear so obvious and extensive that one may ask whether they should even be compared. What can be learned by bringing together such disparate phenomena? In fact, there are considerable continuities between verbal narrative and representational painting. Moreover, they are continuities that fit well with narratological concerns. But there are, of course, crucial differences as well. The similarities indicate the possibilities for extending discourse analysis to paintings. The differences suggest the possibilities for altering and developing discourse analysis through this extension.

REPRESENTATIONAL PAINTING AS NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

For present purposes, the most fundamental connection between ver-
bal and visual art is that representational works imply a represented
world. Viewers do not simply see that represented world directly. They construe it by processing the information given on the canvas. In short, there is a discourse and an inferred world—perhaps not a story in the restricted, prototypical sense, but something at least parallel to a story-world. Moreover, the purposes of this construal are the same as in verbal art—emotional response and thematic reflection.

A wide range of examples could be cited to illustrate these points. Obviously didactic works come to mind, such as Picasso’s  *Guernica* or Goya’s  *Third of May*. These are clearly painted to inspire aversive emotions in viewers—horror, anger, disgust, fear—and to connect those aversive emotions with a normative/thematic condemnation of the violence they represent. The entire range of devotional paintings and sculptures fits here as well—Christian depictions of Jesus’s crucifixion, Hindu paintings of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa, and so on. These foster feelings of devotion (*bhakti*, in the Hindu lexicon) and thematically suggest the divinity, as well as the humanity, of their subjects.

Of course, the thematic point of a painting is not always entirely clear or open to formulation in precise, unequivocal terms. Perhaps it is never so, except in the crudest instances of propaganda. But that too only means that it is like literature.

Needless to say, not all works of visual art have thematic implications. But, if they do not have thematic implications, then their *raison d’être* derives from something else—emotional effect. Here, too, the emotional effect is of two sorts. The first relates to the storyworld. I see a lover touching his beloved—say, a couple kissing in a painting by Chagall—and, as a result of emotional memories or facial mirroring, I feel some of their joy. The second is related to the discourse. In part, this is a matter of “narration,” for example, the visual perspective—is the subject close or distant, facing toward or away from the viewer, seen from above or below? It is also in part a matter of how much information one is given, thus, roughly, the plot: Does the painting suggest events that preceded or will follow? To what extent are these unequivocal, and to what extent will any tension (or suspense) aroused by the work remain unresolved?

Of course, there is still the issue of narrative as a sequence of causally linked events. After all, representational art is not necessarily storytelling art. Indeed, narrative painting proper—in the sense of painting that sets out to represent even two or three episodes from a story—is clearly not the most ordinary form of painting (though it is not as rare as one might initially believe). On the other hand, the paintings mentioned
above are clearly embedded in narratives. Guernica and The Third of May depict moments from larger historical stories of violence. The point is obviously crucial for their thematic import. If the pain in Guernica simply arose, then disappeared, with no cause or consequence, it would be confusing rather than damnable. If there were no story of fascist bombardment, there would be nothing to condemn. The point holds no less for the emotional impact of a work. The initial emotional force of a particular painting or sculpture may derive from a facial expression or bodily posture. But as one reflects on the work, one must be able to elaborate on it imaginatively, bringing it into connection with a wider range of precedents and consequences. The point holds no less obviously for the depictions of Jesus crucified, or paintings of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, which suggest their surrounding stories.

Needless to say, not all such surrounding stories are elaborated and particularized. In some cases, narrative reconstruction is more general and prototypical. But it is still there. For example, it may seem that one does not engage in narrative elaboration around a work such as Chagall’s The Birthday. But in fact one does, even if one is not self-consciously aware of it. Viewers so readily integrate the episode into a prototypical romantic narrative and a prototypical set of birthday events that they may not even notice they have done so.

In this respect, paintings are very similar to lyric poems. Lyric poems often represent junctural moments in implicit narratives. A junctural moment is a moment of particular emotional intensity associated with a change in a character’s pursuit of goals (e.g., when lovers are separated). It seems that moments of particular emotional intensity are often isolated for representation in paintings. Moreover, these frequently do seem to be narrative junctures—as in the cases of the crucifixion, or the dance of Kṛṣṇa and his beloved gopī devotees.

In these respects, then, visual art is well-suited for comparison with verbal art in terms of the components and operation of discourse. There are some clear and significant continuities across the two, continuities that are illuminated by narratological concepts. But, of course, this does not mean that there are not striking differences as well.

Perhaps the most significant difference between works of visual art and works of verbal art, even lyric poems—the difference stressed by Lessing—is that paintings and sculptures are so severely limited in the time frame of explicit information. A lyric poem may focus on lovers’ leave-taking. It may not even tell the reader anything outside the time of that leave-taking. But it can at least spread across the minutes
of that separation. A painting or sculpture is usually confined to an almost extensionless point in time. Of course, it may give much more information about that single moment. But it remains confined to the moment nonetheless. The result is not simply a loss of information, but often a loss of specifically disambiguating information. Moments may be embedded in many narratives. The differences in those narratives entail different understandings of the moment itself, different thematic implications, different emotional responses. Consider a photograph of people crying outside a church. One’s understanding and response are likely to change if one assumes it is after a funeral but is then told it is after a wedding.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{TWO PAINTINGS BY TAGORE}

To work out these implications of ambiguity in visual art, it is helpful to consider concrete cases. In some ways, Tagore’s paintings are particularly well suited to this task. In 1932, Joseph Southall wrote that “Tagore’s drawings constrain us to pause and ask ourselves anew, what is the purpose of drawing, of painting, of art generally?”\textsuperscript{11} One reason for Southall’s question is that Tagore was generally very nondirective in orienting the viewer’s interpretation of his works. He did not title his paintings, rarely dated them, and did not generally rely on standard stories, such as that of Kṛṣṇa and his gopīs. In considering Tagore’s paintings, a critic is likely to become acutely aware of just how important titles and shared topical allusions are.\textsuperscript{12} Knowing the story of Jesus, in the case of Michelangelo’s \textit{Pietà}, or having the title \textit{Guernica} and the date of the painting, in the case of Picasso’s work, are crucial for understanding the depiction, explicating the thematic concerns, and emotionally responding to these works. Looking at Tagore’s art tends to highlight the ambiguity of individual paintings. At the same time, it may suggest ways to expand the understanding of individual works and further enrich the conception of discourse.

The first piece to consider is plate 9 from Robinson\textsuperscript{13} (Fig. 2.1). It is an ink and watercolor work in black and shades of tan. The background, covering the top third of the paper, is a landscape, a horizon with foliage and hills. In the foreground, occupying the bottom two-thirds of the paper, there are nine figures. Though one or two may be female, these figures appear largely male. Immediately behind them is a black surface. The heads of the figures are just below the ground level of the landscape.
Figure 2.1. Tagore, ink and watercolor.
This suggests either a cliff or some sort of a tunnel. Most of the figures are faceless; many are turned away from the viewer. Figure three (from the left) seems to be walking with a staff. Figure four seems to be sitting down or getting up, perhaps with difficulty. Figure six is tensing away from the central figure (figure five). The central figure (five) is also the highest, giving him an apparent position of authority. He sits with his hands on his thighs, his legs spread, looking in the direction of figures three and four. The smile on his relatively clear face does not appear benevolent. Figure eight, the lowest, also has a clear face. He is concentrating on his work, which seems to involve hammering.

A careful description of the picture suggests a few things. There may be some sort of hierarchy here. There is a dominant figure who is not working and who appears to have a rather unempathic attitude toward the other figures. The face of figure eight is likely to draw a viewer's attention and interest. But his facial expression does not seem to have much emotional force. Indeed, figure six may be the most emotionally communicative. But it is difficult to say precisely what his apparently tensed muscles and withdrawal express—or even if they are genuinely tensed muscles and withdrawal. To complicate matters further, the seated figures seem to blend with blocks on which they are sitting as if they are not people at all but statues.

Different titles or stories would help to disambiguate this work. But there is no title (say, “Johannesburg,” suggesting South African gold mines) or story. Thus the picture remains disturbingly ambiguous. But that does not imply that one can make nothing of it. The figures are not, say, lovers; the place is not a battlefield. The painting allows a number of interpretations and a number of emotional responses. But some are normatively excluded. Moreover, of those that are not excluded, some seem more likely than others.

As indicated in the introduction, works of art—both verbal and visual—are all to some extent ambiguous. That ambiguity may involve a limited range of closely related and highly plausible interpretations, a broad range of interpretations with low plausibility, or some other configuration. Again, each work has a profile of ambiguity rather than a strict, unequivocal meaning. Indeed, some of the effects of artworks rely on just that ambiguity. My own engagement with plate 9 (Fig. 2.1) is in part a matter of the way my mind runs through the different alternative constructions of the figures, their relations and possible actions.

On the other hand, this does not mean that ambiguity is a good in itself. In fact, generally, when viewing paintings, viewers engage in strat-
egies to reduce ambiguity. After all, when it becomes too great, ambiguity ceases to be intriguing and becomes simply disorienting. Most of these strategies involve embedding the work in a larger, relatively well-established set of meanings, usually linguistic or semilingualistic. Again, titles and well-known stories come to mind. The stories may be signaled by various sorts of allusion or by iconography (e.g., in Indian tradition, blue skin and a flute indicate Kṛṣṇa).

Another obvious alternative is symbolism (cf. Wolf 432). This operates most straightforwardly when the symbols are already socially established and fairly clear. For example, the use of a halo to represent a saint or Buddha is immediately identifiable. Such a symbol is, in fact, virtually linguistic since it has been assigned a conventional meaning. Interpretation of putative symbolism that does not rely on established convention is more problematic. The lack of disambiguating information in Tagore’s paintings has led a number of critics to rely on symbolism. But, as Robinson rightly remarks, the results are questionable (56).

Two concepts that seem potentially more appropriate for interpreting paintings are metaphor and dhvani. Dhvani, or “suggestion,” is a fundamental concept of Sanskrit literary theory. It refers to the associative network that surrounds a word, image, event, or any other topic. That associative network includes emotional memories and therefore it is a crucial component in producing rasa (usually translated as “sentiment”), the emotional response to a work of art (see Bharatamuni for the foundational discussion). The difficulty with both metaphor and dhvani (including rasadhvani, dhvani that produces rasa) is that these are as ambiguous as the rest of the work. It seems very likely that the cavelike area in Tagore’s painting has metaphorical resonances. One can begin to suggest what some of those resonances might be (e.g., burial). But one needs a better sense of the painting as a whole before one can infer which possible metaphorical meanings are plausible and which are not—or even just what their target might be, what any metaphor might apply to (e.g., just what might be buried).

Here, it is useful to consider a second work, plate 156 (Fig. 2.2), an ink drawing of six women. The background is black, suggesting a night sky. The foreground is black and white, suggesting the ground at night. The women are all seated on the ground. Each is clothed in an apparently single piece of cloth. Figures one, two, four, and five have their heads uncovered. The colors of their clothes are also similar. Figures one and four have a sort of batik print. Figures two and five have a blackened red garment.
Figure 2.2. Tagore, ink.
Figures three and six stand out from the rest. They have their heads covered. Moreover, their clothing is distinctive. Figure three is in dark blue; figure six is in a bright rose and red. These figures are also placed highest on the paper. Figure six is further differentiated by the fact that her skin is noticeably darker than that of the other women. More significantly, figure three is the only one who is facing the viewer. The other five women are turned away.

Figure three draws particular attention. She rests her head in her hand in a gesture that seems sorrowful. But there is no face beneath her head covering, just a tan oval. So, here again, one encounters ambiguity or at least uncertainty. This woman is not precisely central (the number of figures being even). But she is approximately centered and is, very slightly, the highest on the paper, the tip of her head rising just above that of figure six. She is thus roughly parallel to the central figure in the first work (plate 9/Fig. 2.1). But the differences are striking. While the central man is genuinely central, the “central” woman is not. While the central man sits erect and angular, the woman gently curves downward. While the central man smiles as he looks at the others (who may be in pain), the woman presents the viewer with no face, but a sorrowful gesture.

Moreover, as already noted, the figure to the right of the central man seemed to be pulling away painfully. In contrast, the woman to the right of the focal female figure is actually leaning toward her, pressing her shoulder against the focal figure’s back. The relation between the contiguous male figures seems to suggest fear. In contrast, the relation between the contiguous female figures seems to suggest warmth, attachment.

One may begin to get a sense here that plate 9 (Fig. 2.1) is, narratively and thematically, a painting about a world of hierarchy and mutual isolation, largely a world of men. It is also about labor, as suggested by the man with the hammer. In contrast, plate 156 (Fig. 2.2) suggests mutual connection, but also sorrow, in a group of women. This fits with a broader sense of Tagore as an author. His stories, poems, plays, and novels recur continually to the condition of women in India, to their constraints and trials. Thus one would expect to find these concerns once more in his paintings. As Satyajit Ray wrote, in painting, Tagore’s “special field remained the study of women” (13).

One recurring motif in Tagore’s treatment of women was their physical confinement within the home, their constraint to live in the inner rooms, away from light and life. Once one remembers this, the blank darkness of the background in plate 156 (Fig. 2.2) takes on new reso-
nances. The background for the men is the open horizon of the world. Even if they have sunk themselves in some sort of tunnel, the light is there, available to them. The women face only an impenetrable wall of black.

Of course, none of this entirely disambiguates either work. However, it begins to give the viewer a sense of what their thematic concerns are, as well as their implied narratives. The story of the men, it seems, concerns pride in social hierarchy—perhaps even Schadenfreude—and interpersonal fear in the public world; the story of the women, it seems, concerns attachment and sorrow in the home.

Chapter 2

CROSS-TEXTUAL IMPLIED AUTHORS, MOTIFS, AND OTHER COMPLICATIONS OF VISUAL DISCOURSE

These feelings and themes will be considered again below, along with other aspects of the second work particularly. For now, it is valuable to isolate a few implications of the analysis thus far. The first and most crucial involves the scope of evidence cited in the preceding interpretations. Most obviously, the preceding analysis took up recurring issues in Tagore’s writing and painting. This may seem to suggest a return to the real, biographical author and a rejection of the implied author, but it does not. It is very different to look at Tagore’s other works for disambiguating information and to look at, say, his private family life. In effect, when looking at Tagore’s other works, one is appealing to the implied authorship of those works and assuming a certain degree of continuity across that implied authorship. In this way, it is an extension of the idea of implied authorship to an entire canon of works. This may be referred to as cross-textual implied authorship.

The second implication of the preceding analysis is related. Indeed, it is the converse or “objective” side of the continuity in (subjective) implied authorship. The preceding examination of Tagore’s two pieces drew on recurring features in order to group the two works together. For example, both involve a planar composition of figures forming a single line parallel to the viewing space. This is in part a feature of the storyworld, since the men and women are arranged in that formation in the represented world. But it is also a discursive feature because it relies on a particular point of view given in the discourse. In this way, it is a recurring complex of interrelated storyworld features and discourse features. One may refer to recurring complexes of features—from the storyworld,
the discourse, or both—as motifs. Motifs may be of particular significance for interpretation, especially in cases where a work is highly ambiguous, as in Tagore’s paintings.

The mention of point of view brings up a further feature of paintings that is important and requires development before it is possible to continue with Tagore’s art. The precise point of view on the subject of a painting, like the precise choice of words in a text, is that of a narrator. Here it is important to draw a couple of distinctions. First, it is valuable to distinguish perceptual from verbal (or, perhaps, semantic) narrators. Films may have both, though they always have perceptual narrators. Literary works have only verbal narrators. What about paintings? It may seem that paintings have only perceptual (specifically, visual) narrators. But things are more complicated. First, there are ways in which a work of visual art may suggest narratorial commentary through visual means. In other words, there are often suggestions that a visual image has been organized verbally, that it is not purely perceptual, but gives the viewer a perception designed in relation to speech. The use of well-established symbols, such as halos, provides a case of this sort. Put simply, a viewer of, say, Jesus would not actually see a halo. The halo is, therefore, a narratorial comment, rather than a narratorial perception.

More commonly, a work of visual art may use some amount of text. This occurs most obviously in titles. One’s default assumption about titles tends to be that they are the product of the implied author. But viewers can and do interpret titles ironically. That fact alone suggests that titles are best understood as spoken by a narrator, since they can be evaluated relative to an implied authorial standard.

TAGORE’S NARRATION: THREE CAPTIONS

It is now possible to return to Tagore. Though he did not use titles, Tagore did sometimes include sentences with his paintings (see Robinson 71). These are much more evidently and consistently equivocal than titles, much more complex in their relation to the paintings. Yet, as such, they serve to highlight some of the issues surrounding the relation of titles to narrative voice, including the issue of irony.

The first problem with Tagore’s sentences is that it is not entirely clear what their status is. They undoubtedly represent some sort of voice commenting on the paintings. But the precise status of that voice is not self-evident. Tagore decided that it would be valuable to pair some paint-
ings with sentences when they were published in *Chitralipi*. Thus he made a judgment that the sentences should bear on viewers’ response to the works, at least in that context. However, just how they should bear on one’s response is far from obvious. For example, though the sentences are paired with individual paintings, they sometimes seem to bear on a larger set of works and to provide a broad context for the viewer’s emotional or thematic orientation, rather than a particular interpretive orientation. More generally, they rarely seem to be parts of the painting in the way that a title is part of the painting. Rather, they seem more like the sort of commentary a painter might give when asked about his or her work in an interview. Indeed, these sentences sometimes even point toward Tagore’s inability to articulate what he experiences when faced with his own paintings.

A good instance of this concerns plate 12 (Fig. 2.3). This ink and watercolor work is a portrait of a woman’s face, blotchy and darkened, wrapped in a black chador. Her expression involves a subdued sadness, like that in so many of Tagore’s portraits of women. The quality of the emotion suggests an enduring condition, not an acute episode. She looks off to her right, without turning her head. It is as if she is avoiding a potentially confrontational meeting of eyes. But at the same time, she is not signaling submission, for she does not turn her face or head down.

Tagore’s sentence for this painting is “The phantoms of faces come unbidden into my vacant hours” (Robinson 202). The simple fact that this refers to faces (plural) suggests that the comment is more general than this particular painting. More importantly, the reference to “unbidden” indicates that the appearance of the faces is not something in the artist’s self-reflective control. Indeed, it is not something that Tagore himself can fully explain or evaluate. Here, there is the peculiar situation that the apparent narrator converges with the real author and both are distinct from the implied author. They are not distinct by irony, however. Rather, they are distinct by ignorance. Recall that the implied author is, so to speak, the real author’s receptive intent, his or her experience of the work as a reader—or, in this case, his or her experience of the painting as a viewer. That implied painter judges that the painting is somehow “right,” that it produces the desired effect. But this does not mean that the real author can articulate precisely why or how such an effect comes about or even precisely what that effect is. Indeed, typically the real author cannot do this. The point is particularly obvious in an author’s or painter’s commentary on his or her work. Such commentary commonly arises in a creator’s post facto pronouncements about a
Figure 2.3. Tagore, ink and watercolor.
work. Those pronouncements are often taken as untrustworthy. Tagore’s sentences here point toward that commentatorial unreliability. At a theoretical level, what is perhaps most striking here is that this real authorial unreliability with respect to implied authorship is directly parallel to the well-known unreliability of narrators.

In other cases, the sentences suggest a post facto attempt to interpret the principles that guided implied authorial judgments at the time of the painting. In principle, these might provide a broader context, particularly some elements of a story. There is an example of this in plate 151 (Fig. 2.4). This is a red and black ink drawing. In the middle, there is a couple in profile, facing left. The faces of the figures are outlined in white against the black background (a recurring technique in Tagore, as several critics have noted [see Robinson 61]). To some extent, this recalls photographic “edge lighting,” where the contour of a figure is more brightly illuminated than the rest of the figure. Among other things, this technique allows the viewer to see the figures distinctly while at the same time placing them in near total darkness, which usually hints at either threat or intimacy. The man’s features are sharply angular with straight lines and right angles. The woman’s features are more curved. She wears a chador over her head. He wears a shawl over his shoulders. Neither face is strongly expressive, but the slight elevation of the pupil in the woman’s eye may hint at wateriness, and her lips seem less tight than those of the man. Thus there may be a hint of sorrow in her face that is absent from that of the man. The background is primarily black. But the left third of the work has an irregular column of red. It is easy to see this as either dawn or sunset.

Tagore’s sentence for this painting is “The day’s gains and losses are lost to their sight when they gaze at an unrevealed promise gleaming out from the dark” (Robinson 208). Here, one is tempted to say that Tagore has just not done a very good job of interpreting his own painting. The sentence seems to suggest a certain amount of hope. But it is not clear that the two people are experiencing any hope. On the other hand, the sentence is so obscure that it is difficult to say if it really does suggest hope. The couple forgets not only temporary “losses,” but also temporary “gains.” There is something “gleaming out of the dark,” but it is also “unrevealed.” Viewers would probably be inclined to identify a “promise gleaming out from the dark” as dawn. But why would dawn be contrasted with the day’s gains and losses? That contrast suggests that the glow is sunset—but then why is sunset a promise? These apparent inconsistencies seem to indicate that the author/narrator here is not reliable.
There is the same lack of knowledge as in the previous painting, but this time the accompanying sentence in effect denies that lack of knowledge. The painting is hauntingly beautiful, but opaque. Tagore’s narratorial comment does not render it less opaque.

A related example may be found in plate 79 (Fig. 2.5). The sentence reads, “The eyes seeking for the enigma of things explore the boundless nothing” (Robinson 205). This black and white etched print presents a seated woman beneath a black sky and beside or above the swirling currents of a river. She is turned away from the viewer, staring, it seems, into the black void. The figure forms a soft arc, which is a recurring motif in Tagore’s depictions of women. The caption is as obscure as the work itself. Both suggest some sort of sorrow. But the statement provides few clues as to the nature of the sorrow. Indeed, one almost wonders if the author is making fun of the viewer here, saying, in effect, “You want profound meaning—here’s some.” In other words, the caption may be ironic. But it seems unlikely that it is simply suggesting the opposite, as irony sometimes does. Rather, the unreliability is primarily a matter of concealing information, “underreading,” as James Phelan would put it (see “Rhetoric/Ethics”). The sentence indicates that the woman is searching for an answer to some question. But to say that the question concerns “the enigma of things” is only to render it more enigmatic. It may contribute to the sense of sadness. But that sadness remains vague, if nonetheless affecting.

A peculiar feature of the drawing is that the woman’s breast is lighter than her clothing, as is her face and the exposed part of her neck. The slight hint of an areola at the end of the breast may suggest that it is uncovered. If so, this may give some indication of the precise nature of her suffering. To explore this further, however, one must turn again to the cross-textual implied author and the recurring motifs in Tagore’s work. Indeed, these are precisely what one needs to consider in further exploring plate 156 (Fig. 2.2).

THE GRIEVING WOMAN

As already noted, according to Satyajit Ray, the condition of women was of preeminent importance in Tagore’s painting. Ray was not the first to notice this. In his valuable study of Tagore as a painter, the eminent novelist Mulk Raj Anand wrote that “Always there were echoes of the silences of women before the patriarch” (60) and “The pathos” of
Figure 2.5. Tagore, etched print.
Tagore’s characteristic “oval faced woman came back again and again” (74). Ray and Anand were, of course, referring to the paintings. But both were also familiar with Tagore’s literary works. In the terms introduced above, they were making reference to recurring motivic and thematic concerns of Tagore as a cross-textual implied author (or, more broadly, cross-textual implied creator).

As Ray and Anand indicate, the condition of women is one of the most persistent topics in Tagore’s literary works. Yet, it is arguably overshadowed and to some extent encompassed by another concern—attachment, the bonding that most prominently characterizes the relations of parents and small children. In Tagore’s work, the tragedies of women are, more often than not, the tragedies of broken attachments—frequently the attachments of romantic love, but also attachments to parents or children.

Unsurprisingly, then, Tagore’s narratives often treat attachments that are shattered. This destruction is frequently the result of social identities, dividing people by nation, race, sex, or caste; but the cause may also be more personal, as in the scapegoating of someone who is vulnerable. In keeping with this, perhaps the most prominent emotions in Tagore’s work are those that involve attachments—romantic love (or śṛṅgāra, in rasa theory) and parent–child love (vātsalya)—along with empathy. Indeed, empathy is already associated with attachment, since attachment tends to focus one’s attention on and intensify one’s sensitivity to the emotions of the person one loves.

In the context of Tagore’s recurring concerns, it is useful to return to plate 79 (Fig. 2.5), the woman by the river. Even the mention of love makes one realize immediately that the most common significance of a representation of this sort involves romantic love. The “enigma” would then appear to concern the beloved; the “boundless nothing” would be his or her absence. But, on reflection, this does not seem right. Except for the swirls of the river, the piece does not seem to convey passion (e.g., in the woman’s posture). The breast may seem to sway the interpretation. But the woman does not appear to be in a condition of specifically sexual undress.

Suppose, then, that one considers the etching to address some other form of attachment. One might in that case imagine that the bare breast refers to the nurturance of a child—a child who is absent, perhaps dead or unborn. Of course, here too there is not much in the way of evidence. Either interpretation is plausible.

This leads back to the cross-textual implied painter. There are recur-
ring motifs in Tagore’s paintings that point toward enduring representational, emotional, and thematic concerns. One of these motifs is the smooth arc of the seated woman, an arc rendered even more salient by its contrast with the angular bodies of men.

A striking case of this sort is plate 4 (Fig. 2.6). This ink drawing in orange and black depicts a woman curved into a rocking-chair shape (perhaps in a rocking chair). There is the soft arc from legs to shoulders. In this case the woman leans forward. Her face is black, the features outlined in ochre. One aspect of the piece is particularly anomalous. A swath of black begins at the woman’s head, suggesting a lock of hair. But it ends in flattened breast with a clear nipple. The woman stares down at her lap and seems to be smiling. There is nothing to suggest eroticism. Perhaps one should envision a child below the arm of the chair.

Another work seems to point toward related concerns. This is plate 162 (Fig. 2.7), an ink on paper drawing. This work presents only the woman’s upper body. For this reason, one cannot directly link it with the arcing seated figures. But the woman leans over, about to rest her head on her hand, balled into a fist. Her eyes are nearly closed; her face is blackened. Though she seems to be wearing her scarf and shawl, her breast is bare. The resonance is, again, more maternal than sexual. The fist may suggest anger. The face could communicate exhaustion or despair. One thing seems clear from the fisted arm—the woman is not holding a child.

The suggestions drawn from the preceding paintings appear to be confirmed by plate 145 (Fig. 2.8). Here there is another seated young woman. An arc curves around from her legs to her neck. Her head bends forward. She rests her cheek on the head of a child at her breast.

Narratively, then, these works point toward some relation of mother and child. This does not mean that they are unambiguous. They remain ambiguous. But, considered together, they suggest variations on a story, along with an associated set of emotions—prominently, sorrow for lost attachment or a shared feeling of warmth in attachment.

All this allows a reconsideration of plate 156 (Fig. 2.2). Having looked at these other works, one cannot help noticing that the central figure is seated and partially curved forward, tilting her head, leaning against her hand (recall plate 162/Fig. 2.7). Now something about the second figure from the left becomes noticeable. She has her left arm raised as if she is cradling something. Here, too, then, there is the dhvani of maternal attachment (figure two) and maternal loss or separation (figure three). Indeed, on inspection, it is clear that one could interpret figures one and five as preoccupied with something in their laps as well.
Figure 2.6. Tagore, ink.
The overall “narrative” dhvani, or suggestion, of the piece, then, is one of maternal loss. The central, focal figure appears to be suffering the absence of the child that preoccupies at least some of the other women in the painting. This does not at all eliminate the ambiguity of the work. The viewer does not know the precise nature of the loss (e.g., has a child died, or has the woman been unable to conceive?). Moreover, the loss remains only one of the possible interpretations of the represented world. On the other hand, the integration of the work into the
Figure 2.8. Tagore, ink and watercolor.
receptive intent of the cross-textual implied author foregrounds this possible meaning, giving it a more prominent place in the work’s profile of ambiguity. Moreover, that integration reacts back on one’s encoding and explanation of details of the work, altering what one notices about the figures and how one understands them. It also bears on one’s emotional response to the work, one’s sense of the third figure’s pensive sorrow and the intimacy of the third and fourth figures—an intimacy that is qualified by the fourth figure’s apparently positive, perhaps even enthusiastic interest in something to her left, such as a child in the lap of the second figure.

Needless to say, these points bear on the thematic implications of the paintings as well. Unsurprisingly, ambiguities arise there too. For example, the work may hint at a criticism of the relation between motherhood and family status. At the same time, one might wonder if the paintings suggest that women find fulfillment only in giving birth and raising children. Certainly, the two works considered at the outset now seem to contrast male labor—perhaps the creative labor of sculpture—with the female labor of reproduction. (The two possibly female figures in plate 9/Fig. 2.1—numbers two and seven—are motionless and uninvolved observers, in contrast with the apparently male figures.) Anand maintains that, at least in some of Tagore’s pictures, “The feminine principle” is “asserted in the Mother and Child” (61). However, in the context of Tagore’s other works, it seems much more likely that he is suggesting the central importance of attachment in human life. The contrast with the men, in that case, is not primarily one of reproduction versus production. It is, rather, a contrast between relations of hierarchy and relations of attachment, or even violence and nurturance. Note, for example, that one male figure hammers between his legs, at precisely the place where the women cradle their children.

Moreover, as Anand noted, other works by Tagore are highly critical of patriarchy and its effects on individual women. Indeed, this is connected with another potentially troublesome feature of plate 156 (Fig. 2.2)—the facelessness of the central figure. Tagore used this motif elsewhere, at least at times to suggest the anonymous labors of women, concealed within the house, unacknowledged and unrewarded. This may be seen in plate 157 (Fig. 2.9). In this ink on paper drawing a seated man looks on as a faceless woman serves him.
Film as a Challenge to the Cross-Textual Implied Author

In contrast with mainstream narratological studies of the implied author, the idea of an individual creator’s canonical reach has been quite important in film studies. As David Bordwell points out, “a body of work linked by an authorial signature encourages viewers to read each film as a chapter of an oeuvre.” Auteur studies stress the “consistency of an authorial signature,” including “recognizably recurring devices,” such as “camera technique” and “narrational qualities” (Narration 211). In many ways, the recognition of such canonical reach means that the idea of a film auteur converges with the idea of a cross-textual implied author. However, the idea of an auteur is notoriously difficult to spell out in theoretical terms—perhaps even more difficult than the idea of an implied author. The remainder of this chapter concerns two things. On the one hand, it considers the ways in which the preceding analyses can clarify the understanding of a film auteur. At the same time, it considers how the idea of a film auteur may expand and modify the idea of a cross-textual implied author.

AUTEURISM AND RECEPTIVE INTENT

For many decades, auteurism has been central to the study of film. Film criticism, histories of film, film retrospectives, and film courses in universities all routinely recur to the director as a central organizing principle. Though critics can and do shape discussions of film in other ways, they regularly view the director as the crucial individual behind a film. This presupposition often pervades discussions, not only of particular films, but of periods, movements, stylistic developments, and, in some cases, technical innovations. Even writers who reject auteurism as a theoretical concept are often drawn unwittingly into auteurist ways of speaking and thinking.

Yet, there are notorious theoretical problems with auteurism. The problems may be organized under two broad questions. First, who is an auteur? More exactly, is there only one, and is it always and only the director? Second, what is an auteur? More exactly, just what makes someone an auteur, whether he or she is a director or someone else, and what properties does one find in films that manifest the operation of such an auteur?
Classical auteurism is fundamentally a doctrine with three component principles. First, there is a guiding intentionality for a film. Second, intentionality not only defines films singly but produces a patterned coherence across films; in other words, the unit of an auteur's intentionality is not the individual work, or not the individual work alone, but the oeuvre. Finally, the guiding intentionality of both individual films and sets of films is that of the director.

The problems with auteurism are obvious as soon as one spells out these premises. Most obviously, the decisions made about a film are not made by one person. They are made by many people, at different times, in different ways. The point turns up even within auteurism itself. Thus Virginia Wright Wexman explains the general consensus that “directors are . . . the crucial creative force” (9) behind films. However, she also notes that producers, writers, editors, cinematographers, production designers, and stars have been “put forward as significant authors” (8). In contrast, consider literary works. It is virtually impossible to imagine someone arguing that the true creative force behind a poem or a novel is the publisher, the typesetter, or the copy editor.

The difficulty here is straightforward. There are many aspects of film, and many people are involved in the creation of a film. The different people make contributions in varying degrees. Of course, this is in some ways true of anything. To a certain extent, editors really do contribute to novels. They may suggest revisions of phrasing; they may urge that particular sections be cut or elaborated. However, the degree to which editors contribute to novels is, in most cases, very limited. In film, things are different. To get a comparable situation in a novel, one person would write the basic plot, someone else do the dialogues, someone else do the descriptions of scenes (perhaps one person describing the light, another describing the organization of the objects, a third revising everything for point of view); a further contributor might provide accounts of how the dialogue is delivered (e.g., inserting adverbs such as “sadly” or “with an accusatory tone”), and so on. If novels were created in this way, how could one possibly decide that any single person is the crucial creative force? As Harvey points out, it is very difficult “to assign value”—for example, normative value for interpretation—“to the various players active in the ‘supply chain’” (81; for some examples, see 83).

There is a way in which this problem is straightforwardly solved by the preceding account of implied authorship in terms of receptive intent. One might say that it does not really matter who produces the various components of the film. The crucial thing is that there is a uni-
fying reception. Suppose that the lighting director sets the lights one way, then another, then another. The director chooses the manner he or she prefers. The costume designer presents various sketches, of which the director chooses what he or she deems best, and so on. In each case, the director makes his or her decision, thus organizing the entire work under his or her receptive intent.

But this clearly will not suffice. For example, Notaro (citing work by other researchers) discusses how people create new artistic works simply by selecting from templates offered by software programs (88). When faced with such a work, one is likely to take the intent of the “selector” as a guiding norm for interpretation. But interpretation in those cases is likely to be very limited.

For example, suppose little Sally uses a program and produces an artwork with a cut-and-paste drawing of a little girl, a cut-and-paste heart, and a cut-and-paste woman. She then hands the printout to her mother and says, “Happy Mother’s Day, Mommy!” Most people will interpret the artwork according to her receptive intent. Sally presumably receptively intended to express her love of her mother. The original, productive intent of the drawing of the girl may have involved representing a particular person unknown to Sally. The original, productive intent of the drawing of the heart may have been to guide the design of candy pieces. These productive intentions are irrelevant. They are normatively overruled by the receptive intent of the artist, Sally.

To this point, the account of receptive intent works well enough. But now a problem arises. Perhaps the little girl has blonde hair and Sally has black hair. Is that an interpretable detail? Does it suggest some self-image problem on Sally’s part? Maybe the mother is wearing an apron, but Sally’s mother rarely cooks and never wears an apron. Is this a subtle (thematic) suggestion that Sally would love her mother more if she spent more time in the kitchen? In both cases, the answer is “probably not.” There are two issues. The first is whether Sally encoded (roughly, noticed) these features of the images. The second is whether she had alternative choices. In other words, viewers are more likely to say that these features are interpretable if Sally receptively encoded these features and if she chose them over other available images with different features. (Actually, things are more complicated, since she could have had choices of, say, blonde and black-haired girls, but preferred the clothes or posture or height of the blonde girl. But it is possible to leave aside these complications aside, since they are merely extensions of the same basic issue.)
Similar points hold for film, though without the same interpretive preference that one may have in the case of Sally. Imagine a very thematically oriented cinematographer and a very aesthetically oriented director. The director tells the cinematographer to set up the shots for a particular scene. Imagine further that the screenplay has a thematic concern with the way people are metaphorically blind to one another, continually misunderstanding each other. The cinematographer has the idea of echoing that theme by having a number of shots with interpositions or partial occlusions, something set between the camera and the focal person, partially blocking or distorting the audience’s vision of him or her. Thus the cinematographer may choose to shoot part of a scene through a window or with a curtain fluttering before one of the characters. The director may heartily approve of the shots. But, for the director, the important point is that they are visually interesting; he or she does not even notice that they have thematic resonances. Indeed, one could imagine an even more extreme case where the director is concerned only with whether the viewer can recognize the characters and understand the action. After that, he or she is happy to let the cinematographer do whatever he or she pleases. One can also envision the reverse. In this case, the cinematographer sets up different ways of shooting a scene. In one case, it is difficult to get the right angle, so he or she suggests shooting through a window. In another case, a curtain happens to keep fluttering before the actress as the scene is being rehearsed. In both cases, the thematic resonances strike the director and he or she chooses the partially occlusive shots, though the occlusions were never intended (for any reason) by the cinematographer. Finally, one can imagine a scenario in which the director explains his or her thematic and aesthetic concerns to the cinematographer, who comes up with the idea of partially occlusive shots.

These film examples are not entirely fanciful. Guru Dutt’s films seem to use interpositions with unusual frequency. It is difficult to tell who exactly is responsible for this. The obvious choices are Dutt and his usual cinematographer, V. K. Murthy. Thus the frequency of interposition may have been Dutt’s self-conscious directorial plan, or it may have resulted from Murthy’s unself-conscious aesthetic preference and Dutt’s relative indifference, or something else.

In contrast, there are some prominent uses of interposition in Bimal Roy’s film Prem Patra. In that case, the film involves a thematic concern with perception, treating literal and metaphorical blindness. It probably
alludes to the Vedântic idea of illusion, with its common image of illusion as a veil, thus a form of interposition or occlusion. A usage of this sort is part of Roy’s more general tendency to design his cinematography in such a way as to echo his thematic and emotional concerns. This design necessarily takes different forms in different films. Thus it is not always a matter of interposition. For example, in Sujata it is more bound up with staging in depth.²⁴ Roy’s responsibility is clearer here as this tendency appears with different cinematographers (Kamal Bose for Sujata and Dilip Gupta for Prem Patra).

The question, then, is how should one interpret these different cases? For example, if the cinematographer and the director have different understandings of a shot, what establishes the interpretive norm? If the cinematographer set up the shots for thematic reasons while the director selected them for aesthetic reasons, does that mean that only the aesthetic reasons are interpretively relevant?

In fact, this is not a real problem. It is only a problem if one assumes that one intention must have some sort of ontological status that makes it definitive. But that is not the case. A particular intention becomes definitive only when one names it as being definitive, only when one stipulates it.²⁵ Put more simply, there is no right answer to the question “What is the meaning of these shots?” or “What is the norm governing the interpretation of these shots?” There are only the questions “What is the profile of ambiguity for these shots in the receptive intention of the cinematographer?”; “What is the profile of ambiguity for these shots in the receptive intention of the director?”; and so on. (Note that the intentional subjects here are not confined to people involved in selecting the shots. One can equally ask, “What is the profile of ambiguity for these shots in most viewers seeing the film for the first time?” or “What is the profile of ambiguity for these shots for such-and-such a director or cinematographer who was influenced by this film?”)

On the other hand, this still leaves a problem. It is important to recognize the multiplicity of norms available in any given work, the various profiles of ambiguity. But, in any case, critics want to be able to interpret the work. Part of the advantage of being able to embed a work in a canon is that it allows further insight into the work as a whole. By embedding Tagore’s painting of six women in his canon, one gains a greater sense of the representational, emotive, and thematic concerns of the painting. This advantage seems to be lost if one cannot necessarily locate a film in the directorial canon and draw on recurring patterns of that canon.
for interpretation. In other words, it seems that, far from supporting the idea of a cross-textual implied author, film (despite auteurism) may partially undermine it.

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS AND VARIETIES OF INTENT

At this point, one might feel that it is best to discard auteurism. But that would throw the baby out with the bathwater. The preceding discussion not only suggests problems with auteurism. It also suggests the importance of clearly and explicitly formulating the interpretive norms for a work. In particular cases, that may crucially involve embedding the work in a canon. One key point is that the canon need not always be the same. This is true even with a single author. One may first embed Tagore’s painting of six women in the canon of his paintings and subsequently embed it in the larger canon of his creative representations (including literature). The problem with cinema is that there are many intents—and thus canons—that could in principle be stipulated as establishing norms for the interpretation of a particular film (the canon of the director, that of the producer, that of the cinematographer, etc.).

In order to get a better sense of how to respond to these difficulties, it is necessary to return to the nature of film production. Such an examination shows that the production and selection process is more complex than indicated earlier. As already noted, film production proceeds in stages. But what was left out earlier was that at each stage there are multiple forms of feedback, thus multiple forms of productive and receptive intent. In connection with this, one needs to distinguish at least three components of creation, whether one is speaking of films, novels, or anything else. First, there are broad structures that guide creation; second, there are ways of developing and instantiating those structures; third, there are procedures for evaluating and selecting from developments and instantiations. When an author writes a play, these various functions are all fulfilled by the same person in almost all cases. Thus the playwright decides on the general structure (e.g., a romantic tragedy), begins to work out specifics (e.g., that the lovers will be from rival families that include violent youths), tries out different possibilities (e.g., regarding whether one of the youths is killed and, if so, which one), chooses among them, revising in light of receptive response (e.g., scratching “There’s a lamp in that room; who lit it?” in order to substitute “What light through yonder window breaks?”)—and so on, often through multiple cycles.
Now and then, an editor might intervene, taking up a small part of selection (e.g., suggesting that a particular section should be cut) or even generating a local specification (e.g., proposing some particular phrase for a piece of dialogue). But these contributions are, again, very limited in most cases.

What, then, about film? Clearly, these three tasks may be distributed across different individuals in a film. That is what makes auteurism questionable. However, merely characterizing these tasks as separated may be overly simple. What is most obviously the case in film is that many of the specific possible instantiations of general structures are produced by different individuals. In other words, the multiplicity in film is, most crucially, a matter of the second component of creation. One might, then, revise the first principle of classical auteurism along the following lines. There is—or, at least, may be—a guiding intentionality in films, the auteur. That auteur defines the broad structures for the film, not only in general, but in particular areas as well. Thus the auteur sets out the structures for set design, lighting, music, and other areas. He or she assigns individuals (including himself or herself) to specify and develop those structures—thus to specify and develop his or her guidelines for set design, lighting, music, or whatever. Those individuals then generate instantiations, from which the auteur selects just what will appear in the film. Moreover, this occurs in multiple sequences of feedback. The auteur gives broad structures to the set designer, who returns with sketches. This allows the auteur, not only to choose from among alternatives, but to suggest particular changes, to reformulate the general structures that he or she established initially, and so on.

It will not have escaped the notice of any reader that the preceding revision of auteurism is quite consistent with the notion that the auteur is the director. After all, the director commonly articulates general structures for the set designer, the actors and actresses, and the cinematographer. Moreover, in some cases, the director himself or herself undertakes that specification as well—acting, directing photography, composing the music. These points seem to at least partially salvage auteurism. There is a guiding creative force for a film in that there is someone who sets the general structures for the components of the film, assigns subordinates to work out the particulars, gives instructions for revising those particulars, and finally selects the instantiations of those structures.

But here two further problems arise. First, the director does not monopolize the first and third stages of creativity. Indeed, general structures may be established at different points by different individuals, and
tasks are divided in different ways by different people. A producer may set a particular task for a screenwriter and choose a star. He or she may determine certain aspects of the development of the film (e.g., insisting on specific sorts of special effects). The screenwriter certainly establishes structures for the director. Even if the director revises the script, he or she is still instantiating and developing the script’s main organizing principles and trajectory. In this way, the director is like the set designer or the director of photography. They too instantiate structures drawn from the script and the producer; they too generate structures that they expect subordinates to instantiate and develop.

The second problem is that the generation of broad structures and the selection of instantiations need not involve any crucial creative work. Suppose Jones determines that he or she will put together an anthology on auteurism, then assigns different topics to different authors. As the authors submit their papers, Jones makes suggestions for revision, finally accepting the papers when he or she feels that they are ready for inclusion. In this case, Jones has established the general principles; he or she has engaged in cycles of feedback; he or she has selected the specifications. But no one would wish to assign a great deal of credit to Jones for the creativity of the work composing the volume. Jones may be congratulated for a fine collection, but no one would say that Jones is responsible for the new insights or theories provided by the essays, nor would anyone make Jones’s receptive intention the interpretive norm for understanding those essays.

This all appears to work rather strongly against auteurism. Indeed, the example of the anthology seems devastating. It seems to indicate that the director is really not all that important. But only a slight change in the example shows that this is not necessarily true. Suppose that Jones is an experimental psychologist. He or she determines that several sorts of empirical study are crucial for understanding auteurism. He or she decides what those studies are and assigns them to technicians in his or her lab. Jones is involved at each stage in the design, execution, and evaluation of these studies. The interpretation of the findings is guided, in each case, by the framework Jones has provided. The studies are then written up by the subordinates and included in Jones’s anthology. In this case, I imagine most people would be quite willing to credit Jones with the overall creativity and insight of the volume.

What, then, does all this suggest about auteurism? In the example of the collection of research writings, the degree to which the editor or director of research is the crucial creative force is clearly an empirical
matter. One determines it by looking at the specifics of the collection and at its history. Though somewhat banal, the same point holds for the director—or, for that matter, the producer, cinematographer, editor, or star. The degree to which a director may be credited with (or blamed for) the creation of a film is an empirical matter. Moreover, as the preceding sentence indicates, this is not an absolute, but a relative attribution, a matter of degree. Indeed, it is possible to acknowledge that creativity is distributed, while still retaining a version of auteurism. All that is strictly necessary to preserve some form of auteurism is that individual (e.g., directorial) creativity be discernible. As a result, the second principle of classical auteurism becomes crucial, for the obvious way of discerning a director’s, producer’s, or other agent’s contribution to a film is to abstract from the set of films to which he or she contributed. In other words, this account emphasizes the oeuvre—or, rather, multiple oeuvres.

More exactly, classical auteurism is, so to speak, “maximal.” It asserts a single guiding intentionality and it does so a priori. It is possible to substitute for this a more plausible “minimal auteurism,” which revises the three principles of classical auteurism in the following way. First, it is possible to discern one or more guiding intentionalities in a film. In itself, this revision is not particularly novel. For example, Richard Dyer adopts a “model . . . of multiple authorship (with varying degrees of hierarchy and control) in specific determining economic and technological circumstances” (187). Berys Gaut has defended a multiple authorship view through arguments that partially overlap and partially complement the preceding discussion.

But it is not enough to point out that there are often several intentionalities in a film. One needs to have a sense of the process through which these intentionalities are interrelated. That process may be roughly defined by the three recursive subprocesses outlined above. The precise ways in which these subprocesses are themselves particularized (what is done by the producer, director, cinematographer, and so on) will vary from film to film. Understanding individual cases should have both interpretive and theoretical consequences. As to the latter, it should allow one to define the nature and varieties of authorial control more precisely. For example, it should help to explain how a work may be the product of conflict among various authors, as discussed by Gaut. Conversely, it should help to clarify how there may be varying degrees of “global authorship,” as treated by Paisley Livingston.

The second, and in some ways most important, principle of minimal auteurism is that authorial intentionalities are expressed or enacted
not only in individual films, but in sets of films on which a given auteur works in a particular capacity (e.g., as director), thus canons. Indeed, the patterns that manifest intentionalities are often discernible only by reference to the authorial canon. Thus, in studying an auteur—for example, a director—one must usually place the film in the context of that director’s other works. One then tries to discern a pattern across those works—more precisely, a distinctive pattern, a pattern that is not found across, say, the producer’s or screenwriter’s works. Insofar as the features of the particular film conform to that distinctive pattern, one may with some confidence attribute those features to the director as auteur. Indeed, one may explain them by reference to the auteur.

It is important to note that one’s understanding of patterns should not be too narrow. If one looks at the cinematography of Bimal Roy’s films, one may not see significant, recurring features. For example, occlusive shots or staging in depth recur, but not, it seems, very prominently. This may make it appear as if Roy’s cinematography does not involve cross-textual authorial patterns. However, many of his films involve a coordination of theme and stylistic technique. Again, there is prominent staging in depth in *Sujata*, his film about Untouchability (there, staging in depth gives concrete form to the physical isolation of Untouchables). There is some striking interposition or interference with vision in *Prem Patra*, his film about literal and metaphorical blindness. There is an enveloping of figures in mist and the visually similar superimposition of present and past images in *Madhubuti*, a film about memory and forgetting. These cases do not most importantly share directly perceivable stylistic properties. Rather, they manifest a recurring principle—the coordination of theme and style—that guides the production and receptive selection of such properties.

As to the third principle of minimal auteurism, it seems that, in general, the most consequential auteur is likely to be the director. However, in the majority of films, the director will not be the only auteur. Moreover, there will be films in which the producer, screenwriter, or someone else is the most consequential. In all cases, the issue is empirical.

Cinema, then, complicates the idea of the cross-textual implied author. It leads one to recognize that the initial production of the work is not rendered irrelevant due to receptive intent. Specifically, initial production has consequences for whose intention one considers important and in what degree. Nonetheless, receptive intent remains interpretively definitive (depending on the stipulated interpretive target). An implied author—or implied auteur—still establishes interpretive norms
by receptively judging the work (or some section of a work) complete. On the other hand, in the case of a film, there may be more than one implied auteur and those different implied auteurs may yield different interpretations of the work or features within the work (as when an interposition has thematic implications for an implied auteur/cinematographer, but only aesthetic implications for an implied auteur/director). At the same time, the case of film demonstrates all the more clearly the importance of the cross-textual implied author. Specifically, it indicates that the canon of a creator is key for separating out at least some of what applies to which potential auteur (director, producer, screenwriter, and so on) for any given film.

**BIMAL ROY’S MADHUMATI**

Clearly, there is not space here to cover the entire range of any filmmaker’s work. Nor is there space to cover all the implied auteurs in any single film. However, it is important to illustrate auteurial patterning, at least briefly.

Bimal Roy was one of the major filmmakers in the classic period of Hindi cinema from the 1940s to the early 1960s. Roy’s works show a number of recurrent, “auteurial” features, not only in style, but in narrative and theme as well. First, his films often treat very precisely isolated but also broadly human personal problems—for example, the misunderstandings that repeatedly vitiate human relationships, because one’s experience of other peoples’ actions is limited and biased. Commonly, these problems manifest themselves in the possible or actual separation of two people who have some attachment relation to one another (either romantic or parental/filial). Second, he recurrently locates these problems in the context of some important social or political issue—for example, caste hierarchization. Third, he often develops this problem and its consequences in relation to Vedāntic principles, thus early Hindu ideas of illusion, suffering, rebirth, spiritual liberation, and so on. In this way, he tends to give the problem a broader scope and greater, so to speak, ontological significance—for example, by connecting human misunderstandings with “māyā,” or the illusions of material existence. The second and third recurring features give rise to a fourth. Specifically, the spiritual concerns in part respond to the political problems, as when Vedāntic monism suggests the falsity of caste hierarchization. This integration of Vedāntic concerns into politics forms a central thematic
preoccupation in a number of Roy’s films. Finally and, for present purposes, most importantly, Ray develops those thematic concerns not only through the story, but through visual and aural elements of narration—or style—as well.

As to the final point, as already noted, Roy has a sort of generative principle according to which the visual and sound patterns should contribute to the thematic concerns of the work. They do this both emotionally and interpretively. The emotional impact tends to be, so to speak, implicit. In other words, Roy does not need to draw the viewer’s self-conscious attention to the relevant narrational features for him or her to respond to those features emotionally. That is because the emotional impact of these features tends to derive from the way they depict the storyworld. In contrast, their interpretive effects may require that the techniques themselves become to some extent salient.

There are two obvious ways in which a technique may be rendered salient. The first is through increased frequency. When repeated above some threshold, a particular device may become obtrusive. To take a simple example, frequent tight close-ups of hands may, at a certain point, lead viewers to notice that there are many tight close-ups of hands. The second obvious way of producing saliency is through a single shot that is somehow “intensified” so as to draw the viewer’s self-conscious attention. This may occur in different ways. For example, a filmmaker may intensify a shot simply by extending its duration. Thus a single close-up of hands may become noticeable if it is sustained for a long time. Alternatively, a filmmaker may enhance the distinctiveness of a shot by a contrast in the normal lighting for the rest of the film or a contrast in the use of color (an obvious case would be a shift from black and white to color or the reverse). An intensified shot or sequence of this sort may serve as a sort of signal to the viewer to attend to a particular technique. Once such a signal has occurred, other instances of the device may become more salient even if they are not particularly frequent, enduring, or even contrastive.

Of course, there is another way in which recurring patterns of significance may become salient to a viewer—more precisely, to a critic. That is through the distinctive recurrence of a device in an authorial canon. The fact that Roy uses theme–style connections in some works serves to draw attentional focus to possible theme–style links in other works. Moreover, there is some overlap across works in the stylistic techniques he uses and in some of their metaphysical resonances. These techniques include staging in depth, blocked line-of-sight staging (in which charac-
ters visible to the viewer are not visible to one another), nonface close-ups (e.g., close-ups of hands), and some form of figural occlusion relative to the viewer (i.e., some interference with the viewer’s sight of a character). The last is particularly interesting and occurs in different varieties, from interposition of various sorts—prominently aperture, sheer medium (e.g., a curtain), and latticework interposition—to “enclosure” (e.g., in fog) to superimposition of film images. There is also some overlap across Roy’s films in what might be called “metatechniques,” that is, means of rendering interpretable techniques more salient. Specifically, in at least a couple of films, he uses a “signal” shot or sequence to cue the viewer’s sensitivity to a particular technique.

The basic story of Madhumati (1958) concerns an engineer, Devendra, who is trying to meet his wife (Radha) at a train station, but ends up spending the night in a strange mansion. On entering the mansion, he finds himself filled with memories, apparently from an earlier birth. In a flashback, the viewer witnesses the story of Anand (Devendra in an earlier life) and Madhumati. Madhumati is the daughter of the former raja of the place, who has been displaced and impoverished by the new raja and the “company” (the characters use the English word), a timber enterprise. Madhumati and Anand fall in love, but Madhumati is abducted by the new raja. She commits suicide in order to avoid rape. Anand exposes the landlord and then joins her in suicide. In the end, it is revealed that Anand and Madhumati have been reborn and are now united as husband and wife.  

The means by which Anand exposes the landlord are somewhat surprising. He meets a young woman, Madhavi, who is physically indistinguishable from Madhumati. However, there is a systematic change. Madhumati was a village girl who did folk dances in actual village celebrations. Madhavi is a city girl who does folk dance as part of an artistic revival of traditional customs. Inspired by Madhavi’s appearance, Anand devises a plan to make the new raja confess his crimes.

The discussion of the old raja, the new raja, and the “company” alone would suggest some of Roy’s thematic concerns here, particularly to members of an audience watching the film slightly over a decade after Indian independence. The old raja suggests Indian self-rule; the new raja suggests the British—or, in this case, those Indians who collaborated with the British; and the “company” calls to mind the East India Company, the initial agency of British colonialism in India, commonly referred to simply as “the company.” These links are enhanced by the fact that the new regime is associated with extensive corruption (on the notorious corrup-
tion of the early East India Company, see Wolpert 188–89; the problem continued past Company rule and well into India’s independence). In a standard allegorical pattern, Madhumati is traditional India, or perhaps the traditional culture of India, and two men fight over her.29 Somewhat surprisingly, she dies—but then the traditional culture she represents is revived in an artistic and learned form (through Madhavi). That revival of traditional culture inspires a rejection of the colonial rule (manifest here in Anand’s exposure of the new raja). This points fairly accurately toward what happens in nationalist movements. As traditional culture is threatened by the colonizer, nationalists seek out that traditional culture to develop in national arts.30 The end of the film points to the new, independent India. This is manifest not only in the rebirth and reunion of the couple, but in the birth of their child—a standard image of the new nation.31

Turning back to the list of recurring patterns in Roy’s work, one may wonder just what personal problem is being treated here. The whole narrative is organized by Devendra’s worry over being reunited with his wife and his sense of being haunted by a past that he does not fully understand. The course of the narrative involves working through that past. The literal problem may be seen as a sort of haunting by a ghost, particularly after Madhumati dies and begins to call to him and even appear to him. But this would hardly be a common human problem of the sort Roy typically addresses. Rather, there is a hint that the recurring human problem is the interference of memory with current life and current human relations.

In keeping with Roy’s usual practices, this personal concern is carried into the politics of the film. Specifically, the traumatic memories that trouble Devendra are the traumatic history that troubles modern India. Indeed, for viewers who do not believe in reincarnation, the point fits India better than it fits Devendra, since history was uncontroversially an experience of people in another lifetime. Moreover, patriots in effect often did commit suicide in fighting against the unjust rule of their country.

In connection with both the personal and national problems, the problems of memory and history, the film seems to urge remembering the past without thereby becoming emotionally distorted by it. Devendra achieves a sort of peace by remembering his traumatic past. When he forgets the past, he is anxious. But remembering the past does not inspire anger or resentment, as one might have feared. Rather, it enhances his joy in the present.
The metaphysics of the film are more straightforward here than in the other films. The story explicitly treats reincarnation and, thus, karma. The main idea of karma is that the desires of previous lives carry over into new births. Specifically, souls continually return to the material world, the world of illusion, with all its attendant suffering, because they have not overcome the desires of previous lives. These desires include not only lust or greed, but also the desire for revenge (in anger), the desire for status (in envy), and so on. The desires have their effects through memory traces or saṃskāras (see, for example, Patañjali). This does not mean that the film is necessarily advocating an actual belief in reincarnation. It may or may not be doing so. The crucial point is that the desires associated with memory are a cause of being drawn back into painful illusions. As such, they inhibit one’s ability to achieve mokṣa or freedom, with its associated sense of peace.

The metaphysics of the film clearly bear on the personal problem, since Devendra is troubled by the saṃskāras of his previous traumatic experiences. He only overcomes the anxiety produced by those experiences when he works through the memories, accepts them, and realizes that he now has what he desired all along. He and Madhumati/Rādhā are now united. These points may be extended to the politics of the film, where “freedom” has national rather than personal implications. The nation too is troubled by saṃskāras; it too needs to recognize that it has achieved the union which it was previously denied (i.e., the union of India), and so on.

The film addresses these thematic concerns through several narrational and stylistic means. First, Roy sometimes uses staging in depth to separate the lovers. This is unlike the staging in depth that he uses in Sujata, as it does not suggest alienation or prohibition. Indeed, the lovers clearly respond with joy to even their distant presence. Moreover, the location of the staging in depth is different. It is not separation across indoor spaces (e.g., between rooms), but outside, in large natural settings of water and mountains (see Fig. 2.10). Thematically, the lovers’ joyful response even to distant connections in nature may suggest—and, indeed, inspire—joy in the land of India with its national links across great distances. This suggestion and inspiration are enhanced by the cinematography (an aspect of narration) that conveys a close connection between the lovers and that land stolen from its rightful raja. Related to this, Madhumati repeatedly leads Anand to distant places, barely visible across the mountains and valleys (see Fig. 2.11). As one might expect from the thematic concerns, these are historically and culturally
significant places. One is the plateau and cave where her ancestors are monumentalized and the family deity is worshiped. Another is the local village, where the traditional songs and dances are performed. A third is her home, where she lives with her father, the deposed raja. The significance of these places for the cultural heritage of the new Indian nation need hardly be spelled out.

Another technique used by Roy is blocked line-of-sight staging. Roy repeatedly makes Anand and/or Madhumati visible to the viewer, but invisible to one another (see Figs. 2.12 and 2.13). They shift positions, one becoming visible to the other, then disappearing, and so on. There may be a hint here of Roy’s recurring Vedântic concern with illusion and ignorance. Alternatively, it may merely suggest the nature of memory, the way that memory may be elusive. One tries to remember the past, but often fails. Moreover, a memory can appeal to someone without fully revealing itself. These connections are no less relevant in the case of partially remembered history than in the case of partially remembered personal experience.

Another way of expressing this aspect of memory or history would be to say that the past calls to one or one hears a voice from the past. This relates to a more unique feature of this film. Roy pays much more attention to sound in this work than seems to have been typical in his other films. Often, one lover will hear the other before seeing him or her. Indeed, Anand’s initial introduction to Madhumati is by way of a song that he hears in the distance. Thus the voice signals presence, even as the visual relation is often troubled by lack of recognition or immersion in mâyâ.
In connection with this last point, Roy often interweaves signals of auditory presence with another recurring technique—that of an enveloping occlusion. Again and again, the lovers are obscured in masses of white (see Figs. 2.14, 2.15, and 2.16). In some cases, this is the foam of rushing waters. That most often isolates the figures, rather than enveloping and concealing them. More frequently and more significantly, one or both lovers are swallowed up in billowing clouds of mountain fog. Repeatedly, they disappear in or appear out of a white, misty expanse—though, again, a voice often penetrates the haze even when no image is visible. The parallels here with fading and reappearing memory seem straightforward. The same point holds for history, which is often spoken of as hidden by the mists of time.

In the context of Roy’s works, the connection of this concealing mist with illusion may seem, at first, self-evident. However, the watery whiteness of the fog and the river are not wholly negative. The suggestions of the technique are more complex and ambivalent. This becomes apparent if one contrasts the mist and water with the more obvious way of engulfing and concealing figures—darkness. In opposition to the more stereotypically frightening image of dark night, the engulfing white may even suggest a sense of monistic unity. Indeed, the fading of the two lovers into the mountain fog (see Fig. 2.16) particularly may point toward monism in identifying the lovers with the encompassing and undifferentiated world of nature, thus the material aspect of the absolute. (In the Vedāntic school of Absolute Monism, there are two aspects of reality—nature and spirit. These are ultimately identical. But, viewed from different angles, the Absolute appears as one or the other [see, for example,
Figure 2.14. Anand disappearing into the fog.

Figure 2.15. Madhumati engulfed in mist.

Figure 2.16. The lovers emerge from the fog.
This identity of the lovers with nature is an important motif elsewhere in Roy’s work. In Sujata it contributes to the political use of monism in criticizing Untouchability. In both Sujata and Madhumati, the lovers—the women especially—are closely identified with nature. In the case of Madhumati, this further associates her with the nation, which is not only a population and a government, but also a land.

All these techniques are repeated with enough frequency to become salient. However, Roy also includes a pivotal “signal” sequence. Moreover, he includes it at perhaps the crucial point of transition in the discourse. Specifically, there is a moment when Devendra suddenly realizes that he is recalling a past life. A series of memories comes flooding into his mind. This is introduced by a curtain covering his face, followed by a number of superimpositions that represent the past; those images from the past are themselves occluded in turn by the white curtain (see Figs. 2.17–2.20). The sequence is striking in context and certainly calls attention to itself. This signal quality has implications for viewers’—particularly critics’—reception of the rest of the film. Specifically, the partial obscuring of Devendra’s face in the white images should help sensitize viewers to the obscuring clouds of white in the film. It also suggests the association of those clouds with memory.

This use of superimposition to treat Devendra’s past life is thematically resonant in several ways. First, it points toward a sort of paradox about memory and history. On the one hand, memories represent the past. But at the same time their effects are wholly in the present. Moreover, in the present, they have an illusionlike status. This is all nicely suggested by the ghostlike superimpositions, where images from the past obscure Devendra’s face—and, presumably, his vision—in the present. Indeed, when Madhumati’s ghost appears later in the film, she is superimposed with the same partial transparency as in this sequence of memories (see Fig. 2.21). Thus, once again, salient and distinctive techniques in the film suggest the complex thematic interweaving of the personal, the political, and the metaphysical, which is so characteristic of Roy’s work.

In short, there are interpretively consequential, recurrent auteurial patterns in Roy’s work, as there are in Tagore’s. However, in Roy’s case, the patterns are more complex. Specifically, both Tagore and Roy have enduring thematic concerns. But, in Roy’s case, there is a complex of motivic relations among personal, political, and metaphysical ideas along with discursive devices bearing on those ideas. Moreover, these relations are broadly consistent, but not precisely identical from film to film. To
Figure 2.17. Devendra is obscured by a white curtain as his past-life memory begins.

Figure 2.18. Devendra’s past-life memory is marked by extended superimposition.

Figure 2.19. When Devendra fades from the screen, the white curtain passes in front of the memory of Madhumati.

Figure 2.20. The return to the present is marked by the curtain obscuring Devendra’s face.

Figure 2.21. Madhumati’s ghost has the same translucent quality (of superimposition) as Devendra’s memories.
make a terminological distinction, the motivic parallels were not based on fixed symbolic correlations but rather on generative principles. Thus, in Sujata, Roy draws on the metaphysical identity of spirit and nature to oppose caste, whereas in Madhumati he draws on the same model to personify the nation and to address the problem of remembering a traumatic history. Similarly, there are different sorts of figural occlusion in Prem Patra and Madhumati, and these are used somewhat differently. In both cases, they are related to māyā, but the occlusions in Prem Patra are wholly negative, wholly a matter of ignorance (or avidya, a succumbing to māyā). In contrast, in Madhumati, the māyā-like clouds simultaneously suggest the nondifference claimed by Absolute Monism. In this way, Roy begins with a set of concerns, models, and techniques that he interrelates in different ways in order to address distinct problems (e.g., caste or national history). The result is different from the recurring correlation of a particular visual pattern and a particular thematic issue (such as the curving posture of a woman and concern about childbearing).

Of course, if one looked at different topics in Tagore’s work, and a wider range of his work, one would certainly find such generative principles there as well. Indeed, even in the cases just considered, it is really a difference of degree, not of kind. Even Tagore’s gently curving women are not identical with one another, and they differ in whether they have or lack children. Thus these figures too have a degree of generativity. Conversely, there are undoubtedly more nearly fixed patterns in Roy’s work as well. (In addition, it is important to say that generativity is not in and of itself artistically superior to fixed correlations.) In any case, the point is not that Roy is somehow unique. In fact, the point is the precise opposite. These sorts of patterns—both fixed and generative—recur in all authors. They are what give the critical idea of a cross-textual implied author or auteur its interpretive value.

Conclusion

An examination of visual art in relation to narratological discourse analysis leads to several enhancements of the preceding account of discourse. First, and most significantly, it is necessary to recognize the importance of cross-textual implied authorship, separating the implied author of the entire oeuvre from the implied authors of specific works, as well as the real, biographical author. (If one wishes to stress the implied author of a particular text, one may refer to the textual implied
In correlation with this, it is also important to distinguish “motifs,” recurring discourse features and/or story elements. The recognition of motifs and cross-textual implied authorship may contribute to one’s understanding of the represented world and the thematic concerns of a work. They may also play a role in criticism that operates to enhance or modulate emotional response. These points hold for both literature and painting.

Rabindranath Tagore’s paintings are particularly well suited for exploration via narratological discourse analysis, due in part to their great ambiguity. As such, they highlight something that is true of all works, but is not always so obvious. First, these paintings forcefully convey how a work involves not a single expressive meaning but rather a receptive profile of ambiguity. That ambiguity is sometimes enhanced by narratorial texts (such as titles) or post facto commentaries by the painter. Those texts and commentaries manifest various sorts of unreliability and irony. In Tagore’s case, one’s sense of this profile of ambiguity changes as one locates his works in the various levels of receptive intent defined by the implied painter and implied author. Recurring narrative, emotional, and thematic commitments—here, recurring concerns bearing on attachment relations—suggest possible inferences about the depicted world while simultaneously altering one’s encoding of the paintings themselves (e.g., leading one to notice the lifted left arm of the second figure in plate 156/Fig. 2.2). Recurring motifs also suggest that some thematic interpretations are less plausible than they might have seemed initially, while others are more plausible. In connection with this, the paintings indicate that the study of narrative discourse may contribute to the theory and criticism of visual art, just as the study of visual art may contribute to the theory and practice of narrative discourse analysis. Moreover, both sorts of study may enhance the sense that Tagore’s paintings are not only aesthetically affecting and interpretively rich, but valuable sources for theoretical reflection as well.

In film studies, an idea similar to that of an implied canonical author was developed in auteur theory. However, there have been many problems explaining just what an auteur is and how auteurist continuities operate across films in a particular oeuvre. These problems are partially solved by the idea of receptive, implied authorial intent. However, further problems arise immediately.

First, receptive intent seems definitive only when the same person is responsible for the productive intent. That is often not the case in film (e.g., the cinematographer may produce the camerawork that the
director merely approves). Second, there may not even be a single receptive intent for a film. In any case, there are embedded receptive intents (e.g., the director approves the cinematographer’s selection of an option proposed by a camera operator). Third, even if there is a “culminating” receptive intent (e.g., even if the director receptively approves all contributions), that intent may have encoded selections only minimally. For example, the director may approve the lighting based only on the clarity of visual information while the lighting director established the lighting for its emotional effects as well.

But, in fact, none of this undermines the idea of an auteur or a cross-textual implied author. Rather, it expands the concept to different possible auteurs and makes the precise distribution of intentions in any given case an empirical question. It also foregrounds the degree to which implied authorial interpretations are a matter not simply of patterns across an author’s canon but of at least partially distinctive patterns. More exactly, the arguments against auteurism suggest that there may be many implied authors in any given film. One understands, interprets, and appreciates those authors by reference to different canons—one for the director, one for the cinematographer, and one for each of the other individuals involved in the production of the work—again, insofar as these canons involve distinctive properties. As to a film as a whole, the director does remain the most prominent candidate for an encompassing receptive implied intent. This is particularly true for directors with great autonomy relative to producers, expertise in various aspects of film production (e.g., cinematography), involvement in the script (most obviously as author of an original script), and in general greater integration into the various processes that converge to make the film.

Differences in auteurial function may be understood in terms of three components of film production—the definition of broad guiding principles, the particularization of those guidelines, and the evaluation and selection of resulting particulars. This threefold pattern recurs at various levels in the production of a work. For example, the first component ranges from a large vision for the film as a whole to guidelines about lighting for a particular shot. Moreover, the various contributors to a film engage in cycles of guidance, particularization, evaluative feedback with a change in guidance, further particularization, partial selection, and so forth. Here, too, the director is the one who most obviously makes the fullest evaluative and selective decisions. He or she is, in the usual case, most fully involved in establishing guidelines as well. In some cases, he or she may even be deeply involved with particularizations.
Finally, the case of Bimal Roy reveals some of the possible complexities in auteurial canonical patterns. These patterns need not only be a matter of relatively fixed, recurring correlations between storyworld patterns, thematic or emotional concerns, and discourse techniques. They may also be a matter of more diverse, generative principles. These principles may produce a variety of mappings from diverse models and techniques onto various story interests and thematic issues. In Tagore, there was a connection between women in a particular postural orientation, the emotion of grief, the loss of children (in the storyworld), and a thematic concern with the burdens placed on women in an inegalitarian society. In Roy, metaphysical ideas were brought to bear on a more diverse set of personal and political themes through a range of narrational and stylistic techniques. Rather than a fixed linkage, there was a looser generative principle requiring that the metaphysics address the personal and political dilemmas and that a few highlighted visual and/or aural techniques contribute to developing or illustrating the thematic points of the work and enhancing its emotional effects.