

1 Context, Reception, and the Study of Great Thinkers in International Relations

This is a book about the power of citations. It is about texts that refract and redeploy and about famous thinkers that become events in and of themselves. Citations are remarkable in that they enable the author and her readers to leap across time; we move between historical contexts seamlessly, sometimes with close to no regard for historicity. Citing past texts allows us to tell stories that connect us to the past, that draw continuities between the world of those we cite and the world we inhabit, between the questions we ask and those they strove to answer. The extent to which these continuities are actually meaningful is an endless source of debate,¹ and determining whether this can be settled in absolute terms is far beyond the scope of this book. What matters for our present purposes is how, in the case of Gentili, the connection came to be understood as meaningful in the past, whether the analysis that was made of it can withhold the test of a more rigorous form of historical scrutiny today, and if not, what, then, explains the substance of the narrative we have inherited about him.

As the old saying goes, *Habent sua fata libelli*² – books have their own destinies. The numerous references to Gentili in contemporary works about the history of the laws of war and of the broader development of the states-system show us that the narrative we inherited about Gentili has had a real impact on the construction of collective imaginaries. Beyond assessing the narrative's accuracy, it is thus essential for us to appreciate what it allowed past scholars and practitioners to achieve. Why was Gentili nearly forgotten? Why was he revived with great fanfare over 200 years after his death? What interpretations of his work became most popular, and why?

¹ Within the field of the history of international law, see the ongoing debate between various leading scholars: Orford, *What Is the Place of Anachronism in International Legal Thinking*; Koskeniemi, "Vitoria and Us"; Fitzmaurice, "Context in the History of International Law"; Benton, "Beyond Anachronism."

² This is from the longer saying, "*Pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli*," literally, "According to the capabilities of the reader, books have their destiny."

Some would argue that analyzing the later trajectory of Gentili's work regardless of his original intentions in writing it – what would fall into the category of “historical effects”³ – should be our sole focus.⁴ This chapter seeks to show that the recovery of authorial intention and the analysis of an author's reception can in fact be made to complement each other. The rest of the book then follows this logic, providing first a synchronic, contextualist examination of Gentili's *De iure belli* (*DIB*) before moving to a diachronic analysis of his uneven posterity, with a particular emphasis on the elements of his reception that gave us the popular narrative about Gentili and the emergence of modern war. But beyond the present study of Gentili's mythologization, this chapter also seeks to help develop a more systematic methodological basis for the study of “great thinkers” more broadly, particularly within the field of International Relations (IR).

International Relations has a long tradition of analyzing, celebrating, and appropriating the thought of those it considers great thinkers. For much of the history of the discipline, these figures have been considered sources of transhistorical wisdom: “Machiavelli is a theorist of necessity and reason of state ... Hobbes is the quintessential theorist of anarchy, Grotius of international legal order,” while “Rousseau has a structural realist theory of war, Kant a progressive theory of the democratic peace and global confederation and so on.”⁵ They have also commonly been used as ornaments for relatively ahistorical theories, in order to give a sense of timelessness to the theory being elaborated.⁶ Across the disciplinary spectrum, great thinkers thus have been – and continue to be – an important component of IR scholarship.

Intellectual history and IR, however, have had a rather tumultuous relationship. While much of IR was shifting toward more economics-based approaches in the 1960s and 1970s, the English School doubled down on the importance of diplomatic and intellectual history and maintained a connection with historians. This connection, though, was often precarious in light of the English School's tendency to develop its own idiosyncratic historical narratives. Yet English School scholars did

³ For an in-depth discussion of Gadamer's concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, see Veith, *Gadamer and the Transmission of History*.

⁴ Boucher, *Appropriating Hobbes*.

⁵ Bain and Nardin, “International Relations and Intellectual History,” 214. Bain and Nardin cite various classic texts that rely on great thinkers in this particular way, including Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*; Bull, *The Anarchical Society*; Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*; and Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the use of great thinkers in IR, see notably Vigneswaran and Quirk, “Past Masters and Modern Inventions,” 115–222.

successfully maintain a space for historical inquiry in IR, one which has now developed into a much larger and more rigorous subfield with the discipline's "historiographical turn" in the early 2000s,⁷ a move that signaled IR scholars' intent to "take both history and the history of political thought more seriously."⁸ After a so-called fifty-years rift between IR and intellectual history,⁹ the two fields have thus gone through a significant rapprochement over the past two decades. They now share a particular interest in the history of "international thought," that is, political and legal thought on the relation between states, empires, and other political entities,¹⁰ an area that long remained a blind spot of the history of political thought (HPT), which had generally focused on the state and its internal politics.

With this renewed interest in intellectual history, IR scholars have moved beyond the selective and rather tendentious misreadings of various great thinkers by earlier IR theorists, and particularly those of the English School, whose efforts to delineate some transhistorical "Grotian," "Machiavellian," and "Kantian" traditions or "realist," "rationalist," and "revolutionist" approaches¹¹ inevitably led to "gross abuses" of the HPT.¹² There is now a much more careful, historicist engagement with famous texts, much of it stemming from the precepts of "Cambridge School" contextualism, to which I will return shortly.

Along with this move away from preemptively confining famous thinkers to Procrustean categories, IR scholars have come to reflect more critically on the history of the discipline, accounting for the contingent development of certain approaches and theories and bringing to light their respective normative underpinnings.¹³ Broadly speaking, historically minded IR scholars have emphasized the value of revealing "the

⁷ Bell, "International Relations."

⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹ Armitage, "The Fifty Years Rift." For a detailed analysis of the changing relationship between IR, political theory, and international political theory, see Brown, "Political Thought, International Relations Theory and International Political Theory." See also Martin Wight's classic text, "Why Is There No International Theory?"

¹⁰ See, most notably, Keene, *International Political Thought*; and Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*.

¹¹ Wight and Porter, *International Theory*.

¹² Bell, "International Relations," 123. The criticisms of this approach are numerous and wide ranging. For a broader critique, see Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, parts II and III.

¹³ Efforts to make explicit different theories' normative underpinnings include Reus-Smit and Snidal, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*. Critical works on the history of the discipline of International Relations include Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy*; Guilhot, *The Invention of International Relations Theory*; Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics*.

contingency of prevailing conventions”¹⁴ and thus of undermining the pervasive tendency in the discipline to elevate “relatively recent structures and orientations to the status of enduring historical essences.”¹⁵ More specifically, IR scholars working on the history of international thought have pointed to the way in which a more rigorous engagement with canonical and noncanonical texts enables us to rethink crucial topics in the discipline, including “the primacy of the state, the emergence of the ‘states system,’ the consequences of anarchy and the principles of a just international order,”¹⁶ to name but a few important examples.¹⁷ At the deepest level, this type of work allows us to challenge disciplinary myths by helping IR scholars “understand how the International Relations canon was constructed and for what purposes.”¹⁸

At the intersection of these two developments, a growing number of works have now carefully analyzed the historical reception of certain “great thinkers” into IR, examining the processes through which their ideas became considered foundational.¹⁹ To take just one example, we now know that the coronation of Thucydides as the father of realism was by no means inevitable.²⁰ It emerged out of a rather contingent series of moves and culminated “when a group of highly influential scholars in US academia, such as Robert Keohane, Kenneth Waltz, and Robert Gilpin, identified him as a paramount realist thinker in the late 1970s and 1980s.”²¹ These scholars did so because Thucydides served

¹⁴ Vigneswaran and Quirk, “Past Masters and Modern Inventions,” 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110. The literature around the “myth of 1648” is a case in point. See especially Osiander, “Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth”; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*.

¹⁶ Bain and Nardin, “International Relations and Intellectual History,” 215.

¹⁷ For further reflections on this, see the contributions to a recent forum on IR and intellectual history, especially Bain and Nardin, “International Relations and Intellectual History”; Devetak, “‘The Battle Is All There Is’”; Brown, “Political Thought, International Relations Theory and International Political Theory”; Hall, “The History of International Thought and International Relations Theory.”

¹⁸ Bain and Nardin, “International Relations and Intellectual History,” 213. For a longer discussion of the significance of this kind of inquiry, see Amorosa and Vergerio, “Historicizing the Canon in International Law and International Relations.”

¹⁹ Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*; Keene, “Images of Grotius”; Williams, “The Hobbesian Theory of International Relations”; Reid, “Reappropriating Clausewitz”; Keene, “The Reception of Thucydides in the History of International Relations”; Boucher, *Appropriating Hobbes*; Molloy, *Kant’s International Relations*; Guilhot, “The First Modern Realist.” For a related but somewhat different approach, see Nabulsi, *Traditions of War*. A number of works also speak to the circulation of ideas across time, though charting the process of reception is not necessarily their primary focus; see, for instance, Bain, *Medieval Foundations of International Relations*; Bain, *Political Theology of International Order*.

²⁰ Keene, “The Reception of Thucydides in the History of International Relations.”

²¹ Keene, 356.

a crucial purpose for them: He “could be used to illustrate what they saw as a fundamental underlying continuity in international relations” – a vital point for scholars seeking to develop a general, transepochal theory of international relations – and more specifically, a story could be weaved around his name to support the claim that this continuity “was expressed through the persistence of power politics and the logic of the balance of power”²² Ultimately, as Edward Keene puts it, “their reading of Thucydides’s *History* was, in a sense, an especially juicy cherry to be picked,”²³ and they did so with a lasting impact in the discipline. Indeed, although a real cottage industry has developed since the 1990s around identifying realist misreadings of Thucydides,²⁴ these works seldom question the reliance on Thucydides in the first place and as such have exacerbated rather than undermined his prevalence in the discipline.²⁵ This is despite the fact that, as Keene suggests, “Thucydides needs not be our only contemporary,”²⁶ and perhaps even more critically, it says nothing about the need to perhaps consider whether Thucydides – or any other classical figure for that matter – should be our “contemporary” to begin with.

A stronger sensibility to these processes is of the essence in IR. Of course, this study of the reception of ideas pertaining to the international echoes a broader move within intellectual history toward the study of the circulation, transmission, and reception of texts, thinkers, and ideas across time and space.²⁷ Yet there is perhaps no intellectual field more in need of these insights than IR’s reconstruction of past thinkers’ ideas. International Relations scholars have had a tendency to substantially overestimate the impact that single thinkers can have on the form and conduct of international relations, seamlessly associating the thought of Grotius with the emergence of the modern states-system, to name but one of the most famous examples. Notwithstanding the delightful anecdote about the King of Sweden going to war with a copy of Grotius’ *De iure belli ac pacis* under his saddle,²⁸ the actual impact of the famed author’s text is often assumed away. The emerging

²² Ibid., 360.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Keene, 359. Citing Welch, “Why International Relations Theorists Should Stop Reading Thucydides,” 307.

²⁵ Graham Allison’s wildly popular concept of “Thucydides’s trap” is an obvious example of this continued prevalence.

²⁶ Keene, “The Reception of Thucydides in the History of International Relations,” 367.

²⁷ See, for instance, Moyn and Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*.

²⁸ Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action*, 172. See also Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, 69.

literature on the reception of canonical texts thus seems a particularly productive avenue for the discipline to turn to in order to track the actual impact of great thinkers.

Even more critically, IR scholars have historically – directly or indirectly – provided influential frames of reference for policymakers even though their readings of the past have often been wildly anachronistic.²⁹ Beyond the aforementioned case of Thucydides, we now know for instance that the English School built its “traditions” based on “a conflation of nineteenth century appropriations of seventeenth century thinkers, such as Grotius and Hobbes, with the ideas of those thinkers themselves.”³⁰ There is thus much work to be done in terms of systematically untangling what these thinkers actually thought – to the extent that it is possible – from what later generations of historians, lawyers, and other practitioners claimed they did. Doing so is what can ultimately enable us to shed light on the actual provenance of our disciplinary narratives and evaluate their political and normative underpinnings.

Existing works open two particularly promising paths for methodologically rethinking the study of great thinkers in IR. The first entails taking stock of the more rigorous approach for studying these figures in their context available in the neighboring field of HPT. This is a now well-established roadmap. Since IR’s historiographical *prise de conscience*, various efforts have been made to import the methodological insight of HPT into the discipline,³¹ and especially the contextualism of the so-called Cambridge School.³² The rest of the chapter draws explicitly on this move.

²⁹ Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, 7.

³⁰ Hutchings et al., “Critical Exchange,” 389. A different but similarly concerning claim is the argument that, because Hedley Bull studied Grotius through the works of Cornelius van Vollenhoven, Lassa Oppenheim, and Hersch Lauterpacht, who were all “instrumental in the development of the ‘Grotian tradition’ of international law in the twentieth century” and whom “Bull considered members of a wider ‘Grotian tradition’,” his understanding of “Grotius as an intellectual entity separable from the ‘Grotian tradition’ ... is in fact situated wholly within what he constitutes as the tradition itself.” As a result, Jeffery rightly notes, it is therefore “not at all surprising that Bull is able to draw a set of ‘remarkable’ resemblances between the two sets of ideas.” Jeffery, “Tradition as Invention,” 79. See also Bain, “Grotius in International Relations Theory.”

³¹ See, especially, Bell, “Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique”; Bell, “Political Theory and the Functions of Intellectual History.”

³² The label “Cambridge School” has often been criticized in light of the profound disagreements between its main figures, most notably Skinner and Pocock. I use it here, as historians of political thought often do, as a shorthand for a loosely coherent set of premises for how to study historical texts that does not preclude remaining well aware of the sharp differences between the scholars associated with this approach.

The second consists in developing an explicit method for examining the reception of these authors' ideas. This is an area where much work remains to be done. Currently, the discipline of IR simply does not provide a method for studying the reception of great thinkers. There appear to be two main reasons behind this lacuna. First, it is partly a corollary of the discipline's aforementioned misportrayal of great thinkers' ideas more broadly, and of its longstanding aversion to methodological reflection on this front. Second, and more importantly, it probably stems from the fact that historians of political thought in the Anglophone academy have themselves seldom explicitly theorized the methodologies required to study the reception of authors.³³ This is of course not to say that historians of political thought have not studied the reception of authors in practice; to cite but one example, in his main works, Quentin Skinner extensively studies the reception of ancient classics such as Aristotle,³⁴ Cicero,³⁵ or Quintilian,³⁶ as well as the reception of continental rhetorical works in Britain in the early modern period.³⁷ The point here is that while reception theory is a well-established subfield in literary studies,³⁸ in the not so distant field of the HPT, the method for studying the reception of famous texts and authors has hardly been theorized in any explicit way, leaving little for IR scholars interested in the reception of great thinkers to draw from. As one scholar puts it, "the practice of writing history and the practice of theorizing about it remain two quite distinct activities";³⁹ here I am explicitly concerned with the latter.⁴⁰

With contextualism now being the most popular methodological starting point for historians of political thought, the most compelling attempts to develop a more systematic approach to the study of the reception of ideas have tried to merge contextualist insights with a concern for the afterlife of classic works and famous concepts. Two such

³³ Though one notable call to address this problem is Thompson, "Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning."

³⁴ Notably in Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 1, 175–87; Vol. 2, 264–85; Vol. 3, 87–41.

³⁷ Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*.

³⁸ The study of reception is also well established amongst media historians. More broadly, scholars across the history of science, the history of scholarship, and media history are currently converging toward a shared field centered around the reception, transmission, and broader circulation of ideas known in the German-speaking world as *Wissensgeschichte*. Marchand, "Intellectual History Confronts the Longue Durée," 486.

³⁹ Thompson, "Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning," 257.

⁴⁰ For a related attempt by IR scholars to systematize the discipline's engagement with history, see MacKay and LaRoche, "The Conduct of History in International Relations."

attempts stand out. The first is the call to pair Cambridge School contextualism with the tenets of *Begriffsgeschichte*.⁴¹ This approach entails “tracing the different meanings and usages of political concepts over time, tracing the shifts and rupture in their employment.”⁴² The focus on the history of concepts is presented as a potential remedy to the “temporal problem” of the Cambridge School approach,⁴³ that is, the overwhelming emphasis that scholars associated with the Cambridge School label (most notably Skinner and Pocock) are – perhaps wrongly – considered to place on the context of writing at the cost of the context of reception.

This approach shares much with a second proposal, which is what David Armitage has termed “history *in ideas*”: a new history of ideas based on “a model of transtemporal history, proceeding via serial contextualism to create a history in ideas spanning centuries, even millennia.”⁴⁴ Like historians working within the tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte*, Armitage puts forward a means for doing intellectual history over the *longue durée* through the study of specific concepts over time, such as the idea of civil war.⁴⁵ While Armitage’s call for a shift toward “serial contextualism” is a particularly interesting development for the study of international political thought,⁴⁶ to which I will return, both of these proposed approaches are geared toward the study of the reception of specific concepts rather than of specific authors. Conversely, while there is a

⁴¹ Bell, “Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique,” 334. For a similar call in HPT, see especially Palonen, *Politics and Conceptual Histories*; Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts*. See also Lehmann and Richter, *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts*; Palonen, “Rhetorical and Temporal Perspectives on Conceptual Change.” For a critique, see Bevir, “The Contextual Approach,” 20.

⁴² Bell, “Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique,” 333.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea?,” 494. There has been an explosion of works in *longue durée* intellectual history over the past decade. Other examples of studies of conceptual transformation (works sometimes called “neo-Lovejoyian,” despite the significant differences) include Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*; McMahon, *Happiness and Divine Fury*; Daston and Galison *Objectivity*; Peter Garnsey *Thinking about Property*; Rosenfeld, *Common Sense*; Forst *Tolerance in Conflict*; and Kloppenberg *Toward Democracy*. For more theoretical and historiographical reflections on the relationship between *longue durée* and intellectual history, see Straumann, “The Energy of Concepts”; Potts, *Ideas in Time*; Marchand, “Intellectual History Confronts the *Longue Durée*.”

⁴⁵ Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea?”; Armitage, *Civil Wars*. Another example would be the concept of “empire,” as analyzed in Muldoon, *Empire and Order*. A particularly interesting corollary to this new approach to the diachronic history of concepts is the recent turn toward the role of translation in the diffusion of concepts. See notably the introduction to Burke and Richter, *Why Concepts Matter*; in IR, see Wigen, “Two-Level Language Games.”

⁴⁶ Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea?,” 494.

growing number of studies that examine the reception of great thinkers in IR,⁴⁷ they do not theorize their methodological approach explicitly.

Therefore, what I seek to do in this chapter is to build on the existing methodological reflections put forward by historians in order to offer an alternative form of “serial contextualism,” focused on the reception of an author rather than of a concept and anchored in that author’s original context of writing. In doing so, I am also building on existing studies of actual reception processes in IR, history, and international law, but my aim is to give a more systematic account of how one might go about studying the reception of a famous author and what this type of inquiry can contribute.

The approach is based on a two-part method. The first part entails what may be termed a conventional contextualist analysis, based on a synchronic understanding of context. It is geared first and foremost toward attempting to recover the original intention that the author had in writing the relevant text, and particularly her intention in making one or more conceptual moves within that text. The second part takes stock of the recent shift in intellectual history toward a diachronic understanding of context and seeks to understand the impact of that author’s move by tracing the reception of her text over time. In doing so, it parts with concept-based methods that stem from the history of ideas and draws on the precepts of what is broadly known as “reception theory,” focused on analyzing the reception of a specific author. The serial contexts that are examined are therefore not those in which a concept appears, but those in which the author – or one of the author’s most famous texts – is explicitly drawn on, reinterpreted, and reused. The book puts this methodological approach to work, examining Gentili’s conceptual moves in his original context before analyzing the main receptions of Gentili’s treatise on the laws of war.

In developing this approach, I will make the case that, rather than constitute two separate and potentially irreconcilable forms of methods, namely a classic contextualist analysis of an author’s idea versus a diachronic study of the reception of the said author, these two paths can actually be combined in highly productive ways. There is nothing in the contextualism associated predominantly with Quentin Skinner that precludes the study of reception; on the contrary, contextualism does in fact provide some theoretical and conceptual resources for addressing the issue of reception. The main issue is that its adherents – whether in HPT or in IR – have not discussed them adequately or utilized them

⁴⁷ See *supra* note 19.

explicitly in their work. In this chapter, I therefore bring together some of the methodological insights of Skinnerian contextualism and of reception theory, developing an explicit method for the study of great thinkers in IR and beyond that aims to be eclectic while avoiding the pitfalls of indiscriminate association.

In the first part of the chapter, I begin by outlining the core insights of a conventionally contextualist approach, before highlighting both the possibility and the current limitations of contextualism when it comes to understanding the reception of a particular thinker's ideas. In the second part, I turn to reception theory and I argue that the latter can be effectively paired with a more conventional contextualist methodology in order to better evaluate the journey of an author's ideas over time. I ultimately put forward an approach for the study of great thinkers in IR that is both synchronic and diachronic, but that, unlike recent attempts to reinvent the history of ideas based on the return of the *longue durée*, is focused not on the reception of a particular concept but on that of a particular author. While this approach is relevant to the study of political thought in general, it is particularly potent within IR, where the tendency has been to think about great thinkers diachronically, if without articulating a specific methodology for doing so and resultantly falling into various traps. Using IR's reliance on Kant and Thucydides as brief examples to illustrate my claim, I show the extent to which a more systematic use of this approach would benefit the discipline's engagement with historical works. Importantly, this book does not take a stance on the question of whether or not IR scholars ought to draw any philosophical insights from classical texts without extensive concerns for historicity. The aim here is merely to take into account the very concrete consequences of the frequent anachronistic readings of texts and to consider these moments of rediscovery and reinterpretation in their own historical right, teasing out the stories they tell us about our constructions of the past.

1.1 Taking Context Seriously: Tracking the Aims of Innovating Ideologists

Considering the numerous critiques of IR's abuse of the HPT in the construction of its canon and its traditions,⁴⁸ the value of contextualist methodologies seems fairly self-explanatory. This avenue is particularly promising in light of the recent surge of interest in international

⁴⁸ Bell, "Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique." More broadly, see Jahn, "Introduction."

political thought, both from IR scholars and from historians.⁴⁹ In its broad commitment to historicism, contextualism urges scholars not to consider great thinkers as taking part in perennial debates across time and space, nor to consider them as speaking a common language and providing insights into solving timeless problems, including those of our own period.⁵⁰ More specifically, contextualism emphasizes that texts must be “regarded as extremely complex historical objects, which were written with a purpose in mind” and thus as “a form of action.”⁵¹

What exactly this entails in terms of conducting research has been the subject of fierce methodological battles. Skinner is of course the most famous of the Cambridge School contextualists, and his brand of contextualism, sometimes called “Skinnerian contextualism” or “Skinnerian linguistic contextualism,”⁵² is often associated with the broader label. However, as Bell notes, “not all contextualists are Skinnerian.”⁵³ In fact, Skinner himself seems to have evolved quite significantly over the course of his career and is now rather difficult to place in terms of his own commitment to his initial methodological claims as well as his evaluation of more recent alternatives, most notably postanalytical historicism.⁵⁴ Much of the problem here stems from the incredibly demanding character of Skinner’s original methodological recommendations, which resulted from his stark philosophical stance and which even he struggled to accommodate in his own historical research.⁵⁵ Despite these unresolved tensions and debates, some broad principles for investigation can be drawn out. Indeed, these issues around Skinner’s original philosophical position notwithstanding, contextualists virtually all agree with the general aim of Skinner’s

⁴⁹ This body of works is to be distinguished from the “problem-solving” approach to international political thought discussed (and criticized) by Beate Jahn in “Introduction.” In IR, see especially Keene, *International Political Thought*. In history, see, for instance, Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace*; Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*.

⁵⁰ For the seminal critique of such approaches (most notably that of Leo Strauss), see Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas.”

⁵¹ Bell, “Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique,” 116.

⁵² Sometimes also called conventionalism, particularly by Mark Bevir; see, for example, Bevir, “The Contextual Approach.”

⁵³ Bell, “Political Theory and the Functions of Intellectual History,” 153. Bell is thinking here of the other Cambridge School historians, particularly Pocock and Dunn. See his note 11.

⁵⁴ Bevir, “Contextualism.” See also, for instance, Skodo, “Post-Analytic Philosophy of History.” On Skinner’s “genealogical turn” and its methodological implications, see Lane, “Doing Our Own Thinking for Ourselves.”

⁵⁵ On the tension between Skinner’s metatheoretical projects and his actual historical research, see Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts*, 135–36.

project, that is, “the historicisation of political thought and the attempt to locate texts within their original terms of reference.”⁵⁶ Studying texts with no regard for the context in which they were written, they argue, is bound to lead to gross errors of interpretation.⁵⁷

Outlining all the theoretical underpinnings of this broad contextualist project is beyond the scope of this book,⁵⁸ but it is important here to note a few essential aspects of a contextualist approach. While Skinner’s early methodological writings were part of a general intellectual wave now known as “interpretivism” (written in dialogue with scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Clifford Geertz) that made claims about society as a whole, and while Skinner would hardly have considered his early methodological writings to be solely aimed at instructing readers about how best to read old texts, Skinnerian contextualism is now associated first and foremost with the objective of recovering the intention of the author, and with the idea that the author’s intention is necessarily suited to achieving a particular objective in a particular context. This entails acquiring a deep understanding of the socio-political context as well as – very importantly – the linguistic context of the author. There are some broad guidelines for achieving this understanding, mainly the study of “both minor and major texts that existed at the time of writing of the particular text under examination, in order to gain an understanding of the various political languages employed, and the links between them,” and the attempt to relate them to “the general historical environment.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, in reading the text of interest, it is essential to grasp both its locutionary and its illocutionary force. This distinction, drawn by Skinner, separates the mere lexical meaning of words (locutionary force) from what the author was actually doing in using them (illocutionary force). The two are deeply intertwined, and capturing the intention of the author ultimately depends on being able to distinguish them and truly grasp the illocutionary force of the text. In order to achieve this aim, Duncan Bell suggests that it is “highly advisable” to use “a dose of methodological pluralism”⁶⁰ rather than strictly follow Skinner’s original methodological precepts, as suggested

⁵⁶ Bell, “Political Theory and the Functions of Intellectual History,” 153.

⁵⁷ Skinner’s seminal critique provides numerous examples of these errors. See Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas.”

⁵⁸ For comprehensive theoretical accounts of contextualist methods in intellectual history, see Hunter, “The History of Theory”; Hunter, “The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher,” 200; Pocock, *Political Thought and History*; Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 1.

⁵⁹ Bell, “Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique,” 332.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* More broadly, see Dunn, *The History of Political Theory and Other Essays*.

by Skinner's own practice in *Liberty before Liberalism* and even more strikingly in his "Genealogy of the Modern State."⁶¹

Crucially, to the extent that one can recover authorial intention through a contextualist methodology,⁶² the purpose of doing so is not mere antiquarianism. In Skinner's words, it enables one to speak to contemporary concerns by showing "how the concepts we still invoke were initially defined, what purposes they were intended to serve, what view of public power they were used to underpin."⁶³ Here, it is important to note that if Skinner has expressed a certain skepticism toward the history of concepts, and particularly the study of unit-ideas as advocated by Lovejoy, he does not reject the study of concepts altogether. In his own words, the argument is simply that "there can be no histories of concepts; there can only be histories of their uses in argument."⁶⁴ This caveat does not mean that it is impossible to write about concepts altogether; ultimately, Skinner himself finds it sufficiently manageable to write about concepts such as liberty or the state. Simply, he reminds us that "concepts must not be viewed simply as propositions with meanings attached to them; they must also be thought of as weapons (Heidegger's suggestion) or as tools (Wittgenstein's term)."⁶⁵ As a result, one can only understand a particular concept and the text in which the concept occurs if one knows "who is wielding the concept in question, and with what argumentative purposes in mind."⁶⁶

Skinner provides some specific tools for analyzing the use of concepts under this specific angle, two of which are of particular importance for our purposes: the idea of an "innovating ideologist" and the related notion of what Skinner calls "evaluative-descriptive terms." The innovating ideologist seeks "to legitimate a new range of social actions which, in terms of the existing ways of applying the moral vocabulary prevailing in his society, are currently regarded as in some way untoward or illegitimate"⁶⁷ The innovating ideologist does so through speech acts centered

⁶¹ Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*; Skinner, "A Genealogy of the Modern State (British Academy Lecture)."

⁶² There is, of course, a broader debate within hermeneutics about whether it is at all possible, or even desirable, to recover authorial intention in the first place. I engage with this question in greater detail in an earlier version of this chapter published in article form as Vergerio, "Context, Reception, and the Study of Great Thinkers in International Relations."

⁶³ Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 110.

⁶⁴ Restated by Skinner in 1988, in "A Reply to My Critics," 283. For a critique of this position, see Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 110–11.

⁶⁵ See Quentin Skinner's contribution in Collini, "What Is Intellectual History?"

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Skinner, "Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action," 112.

on “evaluative-descriptive terms,” that is, words that are used both to describe and to either commend or condemn certain actions. These terms are of particular importance because, as Skinner puts it, “it is essentially by manipulating this set of terms that any society succeeds in establishing and altering its moral identity.”⁶⁸ The innovating ideologist thus seeks to manipulate the meaning of concepts (and/or their application) with the aim of modifying political behavior. In my analysis of Gentili in his context, I identify the Italian jurist as an innovating ideologist and take the concept of the “enemy of mankind” to be an evaluative-descriptive term that Gentili sought to manipulate in his writings on war in order to redraw the boundaries of “public war” and defend an absolutist position.

The insights provided by a close analysis of innovating ideologists and of their use of evaluative-descriptive terms, and by a contextualist approach more broadly, present a real potential for critique in IR. This potential has been laid out in some detail by scholars such as Duncan Bell,⁶⁹ Beate Jahn,⁷⁰ Gerard Holden,⁷¹ as well as Darshan Vigneswaran and Joel Quirk⁷² and to some extent Richard Devetak,⁷³ and I will not restate their arguments here. Suffice it to say that this approach can shed significant light on the role of language in the constitution of political and social life, particularly in terms of how the vocabularies of a given time can both enhance and constrain political legitimacy, and how they can be consciously manipulated in attempts to impact political behavior. As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, “since to possess a concept involves behaving or being able to behave in certain ways in certain circumstances, to alter concepts, whether by modifying existing concepts or by making new concepts available or by destroying old ones, is to alter behavior.”⁷⁴

There are, however, two broad types of limitations to this contextualist approach. First, as mentioned earlier, Skinner has not always been consistent in applying his own methodological precepts, and various critiques have been made of Skinner’s original philosophical stance, most notably by Mark Bevir.⁷⁵ These are part of an ongoing debate on the modalities of textual interpretation, the details of which stem from

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Especially in Bell, “Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique”; Bell, “Political Theory and the Functions of Intellectual History.”

⁷⁰ Especially in Jahn, “Introduction.”

⁷¹ Holden, “Who Contextualizes the Contextualizers.”

⁷² Vigneswaran and Quirk, “Past Masters and Modern Inventions.”

⁷³ Devetak, “A Rival Enlightenment?” For a more skeptical view emphasizing the limits of contextualism in IR, see Hall, “The History of International Thought and International Relations Theory.”

⁷⁴ MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2–3.

⁷⁵ For an introductory discussion, see Bevir, “The Contextual Approach.”

disagreements about the philosophy of history that are beyond the scope of this book. Second, and more urgently for our purposes, Skinnerian contextualism currently presents some limitations when it comes to analyzing the reception of texts. Once they have been published, texts take on a life of their own – sometimes for centuries – which often leads them to be understood in novel ways and used for purposes that have little to do with the author’s original intention so carefully unearthed by a Skinnerian approach. In other words, there is often an important divide between the context of writing and the context of reception.

Skinner has repeatedly come under fire for what is perceived as his overly restrictive understanding of context, focused almost exclusively on the immediate context of the author at hand, and for his resulting failure to address the reception, transmission, and translation of texts.⁷⁶ This is not so much inherent to Skinner’s methodological approach, as merely the result of his deliberate prioritization of the recovery of authorial intention over other pursuits, a point which Skinner has made explicitly.⁷⁷ Though his methodological writings have focused predominantly on the question of how best to recover authorial intention, in his substantive works Skinner has in fact analyzed processes of reception and the multiplicity of contexts they call upon. In examining, for instance, the revival of Aristotle’s *Politics* in the second half of the thirteenth century or in qualifying its impact through an emphasis on the weight of Roman moralists and historians (especially Cicero and Sallust) decades earlier,⁷⁸ Skinner makes it very clear that classical texts were participants in a range of different debates across time and space.

If anything, questions of reception and transtemporal transmission have long been staples of Cambridge School contextualism, both in Skinner’s famous *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* and, even more conspicuously, in the works of another Cambridge historian, John Pocock, who gradually came to place “much more emphasis upon the historical significance of reception, reading, and the modes of interaction among author, text, and reader,”⁷⁹ and whose concerns for Kuhnian “paradigms” and competing “languages” speak directly to these issues.⁸⁰ As such, the claim here is not so much that the study of the reception of texts constitutes an addition to Cambridge School contextualism,

⁷⁶ For various critiques of Skinner’s strict understanding of and emphasis on context, see notably McMahon and Moyn, *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, particularly the essays by McMahon, Gordon, Müller, and Moyn.

⁷⁷ Skinner, “A Reply to My Critics,” 271–73.

⁷⁸ See notably Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 2, 10–38.

⁷⁹ Thompson, “Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning,” 271.

⁸⁰ See notably Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*.

but rather that it is an immanent possibility within this form of contextualism that has not been sufficiently theorized as a methodological approach for studying great thinkers in IR and beyond.⁸¹ In order to further develop and systematize this approach, I therefore turn to the tenets of what broadly falls under the label of “reception theory.”⁸²

1.2 From Context to Contexts: The Diachronic Lives of Great Thinkers

First, it is worth noting that, within the study of international political thought, an important attempt has already been made to address the perceived shortcomings of Skinner’s brand of contextualism: David Armitage’s notion of a history *in* ideas, based on the notion of “serial contextualism.” Echoing the usual line of critique, Armitage argues that since Skinner’s famous 1969 piece,⁸³ intellectual historians who identify as contextualists have “construed context synchronically and punctually: that is, defined with a narrow chronology and implicitly discontinuous with other contexts.”⁸⁴ By contrast with this approach, Armitage suggests “deploying the distinctive procedures of Anglo-American intellectual history, but by doing so diachronically as well as synchronically.”⁸⁵ His method entails “the reconstruction of a sequence of distinct contexts in which identifiable agents strategically deployed existing languages to effect definable goals such as legitimization and delegitimation, persuasion and dissuasion, consensus-building and radical innovation.”⁸⁶ As I have noted, in practice, this approach is actually hardly different from what historians associated with the Cambridge School label – including Skinner – have done in their own work. And indeed, Armitage concedes that Cambridge historians have pursued this approach to a certain extent, pointing to Pocock’s *Machiavellian Moment*,⁸⁷ Tuck’s *Rights of War and Peace*,⁸⁸ and Skinner’s “Genealogy

⁸¹ The fact that, in a certain sense (and depending on how one defines a “text”), historians who focus on authorial intent (“intentionalists” such as Skinner) and historians inspired by reception theory undertake compatible tasks that simply seek to unpack different aspects of given texts is briefly discussed by Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 58.

⁸² Importantly, reception theory is itself a broad form of “contextualism.” The so-called Cambridge School contextualism is merely the dominant strand of contextualism amongst historians of political philosophy; see Bevir, “The Contextual Approach,” 11.

⁸³ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas.”

⁸⁴ Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea?” 498.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 497.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 498.

⁸⁷ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*.

⁸⁸ Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace*.

of the Modern State.”⁸⁹ Ultimately, he seems to suggest that what is revolutionary in his approach is not the practice of studying series of contexts, but the fact of explicitly theorizing context in diachronic terms.⁹⁰

Generally speaking, the renewed focus on *longue durée* intellectual history is a promising move for IR scholars who share with intellectual historians an interest in international political thought. Constructing diachronic histories of “big ideas,” that is, “central concepts in our political, ethical and scientific vocabularies,”⁹¹ based on serial contextualism is certainly a fruitful enterprise, if also a tremendously challenging one in light of the knowledge of each context required for a rigorous application of this method. This book, however, is concerned with the impact that a specific author can have as such, in light of the reception of his texts, rather than with the broader impact he may have once a concept he has contributed to shaping travels and is applied by others, with the author’s name receding into the background. As a result, this book also takes stock of the potential of diachronic histories, but it does so from an altogether different angle. Concept-based diachronic approaches, whether those like Melvin Richter’s stemming explicitly from *Begriffsgeschichte* or those like Armitage’s that seek the “reinvention” of the history of ideas altogether (hence the “history in ideas”), do not provide an explicit methodology for the study of how a specific author – rather than a specific idea – travels. In order to outline such an approach, it is necessary to turn to reception theory and examine the value of combining its insights with those of contextualism in the study of great thinkers in IR and beyond.

Though it initially struggled to travel from its German bases to the Anglophone academy,⁹² reception theory has now been used extensively across numerous fields,⁹³ but it has not had much success in IR despite the existence of a handful of works that directly examine the reception of certain great thinkers.⁹⁴ These few forays have emerged in the context of the aforementioned turn toward the study of international political thought, but they remain the exception in a field that continues to acclaim and appropriate original texts without examining how these

⁸⁹ Skinner, “A Genealogy of the Modern State (British Academy Lecture).”

⁹⁰ Armitage, “What’s the Big Idea?” 499.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 497.

⁹² For the original texts, see mainly Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*; Grimm, *Rezeptionsgeschichte*; Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*. For a discussion of the lukewarm reaction to reception theory in the United States, see Holub, “Trends in Literary Theory.”

⁹³ For a brief survey of the history of reception theory, see Burke, “The History and Theory of Reception.” For a general introduction to reception theory, see Holub, *Reception Theory*.

⁹⁴ See *supra* note 19.

texts came to form part of the disciplinary canon in the first place. The neighboring field of HPT has a longer and more sustained tradition of engaging with these questions in practice, but as Armitage argues, it has not explicitly theorized how to study context in diachronic terms either. The extensive literature on the reception of classical thinkers in the medieval and the early modern period⁹⁵ – with Aristotle and Tacitus being two of the most famous cases – is an obvious testament to this substantive engagement, while the literature on the reception of late medieval and early modern thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though noticeably slimmer, is another promising avenue of research in the discipline.⁹⁶ In another closely related though much younger field – the history of international law – some work has notably emerged on the revival of Vitoria by James Brown Scott in the early twentieth century,⁹⁷ with Anne Orford making an explicit call for the wider study of the reception of great thinkers in international law, a call that is now being answered.⁹⁸

Examining the reception of great thinkers is an obvious – if, in IR, insufficiently exploited – means of assessing the actual impact of their ideas by evaluating the way their concepts were used, reused, and misused in their intellectual afterlife. While IR scholars can draw some insights from the way the reception of various authors has been analyzed in HPT, it is essential to develop a clearer, explicit method for doing so systematically. In what follows, I thus draw two core insights from reception theory that allow for a more rigorous study of the reception of particular authors and then highlight two crucial payoffs of applying these methodological precepts.

⁹⁵ Ancient historians and classicists who focus on the legacy of classical antiquity in the later history of political thought include Peter Garnsey, Fergus Millar, Wilfried Nippel, Paul Rahe, Elizabeth Rawson, and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, cited in Straumann, *Crisis and Constitutionalism*, 13. The broader reception of classical and biblical authors is an increasingly popular area of research with its own outlet, the *Classical Receptions Journal*.

⁹⁶ See, for instance, Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*; Botting and Zlioba, “Religion and Women’s Rights.”

⁹⁷ Orford, “On International Legal Method”; Orford, *What Is the Place of Anachronism in International Legal Thinking*.

⁹⁸ See, especially, Amorosa, *Rewriting the History of the Law of Nations*, which notably provides a more in-depth investigation of the revival of Vitoria by James Brown Scott. For earlier studies of this kind, see especially the work of Elisabetta Fiocchi Malaspina on the reception of Vattel’s *Le droit des gens* in the nineteenth century: Fiocchi Malaspina, “Emer de Vattel’s ‘Le droit des gens’”; Fiocchi Malaspina, “Le droit des gens di Emer de Vattel.” Fiocchi also provides some broader, fascinating insights into processes of appropriation and reproduction of the doctrines of international law during the nineteenth century; see Fiocchi Malaspina and Keller-Kemmerer, “International Law and Translation in the 19th Century.”

First, recipients are not passive followers, and what is received or inherited is not necessarily what was given or handed over.⁹⁹ In other words, those who “receive” the texts of great thinkers have a considerable amount of agency, and they may alter the text in significant ways, whether they directly add elements to it or simply reinterpret it for their own purposes.¹⁰⁰ Aquinas’ famous formulation is often cited on this point: *Quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur*: whatever is received is received according to the manner of the receiver.¹⁰¹ It is thus much more useful to think of the process of reception as one of translation rather than transmission. This is a crucial point in thinking about the impact of a specific author’s ideas, but as Peter Burke remarks, “[a]lthough the famous epigram attributed to Karl Marx, ‘I am not a Marxist,’ has been circulating for a long time, the implications for intellectual history of the distance between founders and followers have rarely been made explicit.”¹⁰² A particularly useful tool for further conceptualizing these differences is the concern with the “horizon of expectations” (*Erwartungshorizont*), found notably in the works of the aforementioned Hans-Georg Gadamer and his student Wolfgang Iser. The underlying idea here is that different readers will approach a specific text with different expectations – including different questions and concerns associated with their own environment – and that this will shape the way they understand the text in various respects. The results can be conceptualized through terms such as “appropriation” (Ricoeur) or “re-employment” (Certeau), or as a form of intellectual “*bricolage*” (Lévi-Strauss) that turns consumption into a form of production in itself.¹⁰³

Second, and relatedly, this emphasis on active/creative rather than passive/faithful reception suggests that in order to understand the importance of an author’s text, we must examine it not just in its original context but in the various contexts in which it came to play an important role. In other words, it is crucial to examine not just the “reception” of a text, but its multiple receptions, across different groups, countries, and epochs. Through this process, one may conceptualize the multiple embodiments of the same author, used for different purposes under

⁹⁹ Burke, “The History and Theory of Reception,” 22.

¹⁰⁰ On this phenomenon in the context of international law, see notably Wallenius, “The Case for a History of Global Legal Practices.”

¹⁰¹ Aquinas 2015, 1a, q. 75, a. 5; 3a, q. 5, cited in Burke, “The History and Theory of Reception,” 29.

¹⁰² Burke, “The History and Theory of Reception,” 23. Burke mentions Schwartz, “Some Polarities in Confucian Thought,” as an important exception.

¹⁰³ Ricoeur, “Appropriations”; Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien*, cited in Burke, “The History and Theory of Reception,” 25.

different circumstances – or, for example, under the same circumstances but for different political purposes. For instance, Kinch Hoekstra speaks of “multiple Thucydides” in the early modern period and highlights the gap between Alberico Gentili’s Thucydides and Thomas Hobbes’ Thucydides.¹⁰⁴ The impact of a particular text can thus become kaleidoscopic, refracted through the many contexts in which it is creatively put to use. In analyzing this process, two related avenues of investigation seem particularly fruitful. On the one hand, one should compare the original reception of the text, the impact the author had in her original context, with later receptions, which may have altered the author’s reputation quite drastically.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, one should pay particular attention to the impact the text will have when it is seized on by influential individuals who actually have the means of giving the text a renewed importance and of redefining what is in fact important about it.

Applying these two methodological tenets opens the way for a number of productive intellectual moves, two of which stand out as especially fruitful payoffs. First, studying an author not just in her original context but through her different receptions over time is a methodological approach that answers David Armitage’s call for a return to *longue durée* intellectual history, though in a different way from his own application of it.¹⁰⁶ It is an approach that is deeply committed to examining the author and her work diachronically, sacrificing some of the depth of traditional contextualist investigations for the breadth of transepochal comparisons. This seems a particularly useful approach within IR, a discipline in which scholars almost invariably analyze great thinkers diachronically despite lacking an explicit methodology for how to do so adequately. Of course, the point of a diachronic approach based on reception theory is not to study authors in a decontextualized manner, applying their categories and concepts indiscriminately across time and space, but rather to pay close attention to the various contexts in which they were explicitly received, potentially stretching the story of their impact over continents and centuries. As such, it distances itself from the English School’s concept of traditions¹⁰⁷ as well as from the broader

¹⁰⁴ Hoekstra, “A Source of War”; Hoekstra, “Hobbes’s Thucydides.”

¹⁰⁵ This is the approach taken in Lee and Morley, *A Handbook of the Reception of Thucydides*, for instance. The *Handbook* juxtaposes a chapter on Thucydides’ ancient reputation with one on his reception in the Renaissance.

¹⁰⁶ Armitage and Guldi, “The Return of the Longue Durée”; Guldi and Armitage, *The History Manifesto*. For a brief discussion of the study of receptions as an example of *longue durée* intellectual history, see Straumann, *Crisis and Constitutionalism*, 20.

¹⁰⁷ For an early discussion of these traditions, see Dunne, “Mythology or Methodology?” For a more recent analysis, see Keene, “Three Traditions of International Theory.”

practice of diachronically examining the history of a concept through a long collection of great thinkers.¹⁰⁸

Second, reception theory provides a particularly useful set of tools for analyzing the construction of intellectual canons.¹⁰⁹ The importance of “canons” and “traditions” has not escaped IR scholars,¹¹⁰ and indeed, Bell points out that while Skinner is right to be suspicious of “claims about easily delineated transhistorical ideational bodies,” we must also “recognize the vital role of *perceived* traditions,” that is, “the relationship theorists sustain with those they consider to be their intellectual progenitors.”¹¹¹ As Freeden explains, “[i]nasmuch as people come to attach importance to reified traditions, however erroneously conceived the latter are, they become factors in the formation of human thought and in the explanation of human behavior.”¹¹² Perceived traditions can of course be based on various elements, including concepts, as in the case of liberalism,¹¹³ or authors, as in the case of a “Grotian tradition” of international law and political thought.¹¹⁴ With respect to the latter, an approach that focuses first and foremost on the reception of the

¹⁰⁸ For instance, this is a particularly popular approach in the field of just war theory with regard to the study of the “just war tradition”; see notably O’Driscoll and Brunstetter, *Just War Thinkers*.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, “Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning,” 249.

¹¹⁰ Though some have been explicitly critical of any attempt to construct them, such as Brian Schmidt, who sees these traditions as developed either for polemical purposes or as a way to legitimize contemporary ideas; see Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy*, 24. For a more sympathetic approach, see Nabulsi, *Traditions of War*, 66–79; Nabulsi and Hazareesingh, “Using Archival Sources to Theorize about Politics.”

¹¹¹ Bell, “Language, Legitimacy, and the Project of Critique,” 333. For a similar emphasis on the importance of “invented traditions” in IR, see also Jeffery, “Tradition as Invention.”

¹¹² Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 110. This echoes Hobsbawm’s concern with “invented traditions,” the study of which “throws a considerable light on the human relation to the past ... For all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.” Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 12. Importantly, these approaches differ from Mark Bevir’s own concept of tradition as explained in Bevir, “On Tradition.” Bevir is also concerned with traditions and their legitimating power, but he has a different understanding of what a tradition consists in. For him, “[a]n account of a tradition must identify a set of connected beliefs and habits that intentionally or unintentionally passed from generation to generation at some time in the past” (Bevir, “On Tradition,” 46), which is a separate endeavor from the study of retrospectively established “traditions” that often rest on imaginary links between otherwise separate individuals and pursuits. More broadly, see Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*. On the value of using his understanding of “tradition” in IR, see Hall and Bevir, “Traditions of British International Thought.”

¹¹³ Bell, “What Is Liberalism?”

¹¹⁴ Lauterpacht, “The Grotian Tradition in International Law”; Bull, “The Grotian Conception of International Society”; Kingsbury, “A Grotian Tradition of Theory and Practice”; Jeffery, *Hugo Grotius in International Thought*; Van Ittersum, “Hugo Grotius.” See also Nabulsi, *Traditions of War*.

author's text(s) appears essential and fulfills a distinct purpose from one focused on the transformation of concepts. As such, for author-based traditions, it becomes essential to track the complex story of the reception of the author, particularly as, in the case of a discipline such as IR, the interpretation of an author will have been shaped and reshaped many times before entering the field. Ultimately, the novel interpretation put forward by the receivers "may have shaped core concepts in the discipline," in which case "a historical recovery of their roots is one way of opening up these concepts for critical reflection."¹¹⁵

If one wishes to understand the emergence, evolution, modification, and reproduction of a canon and ultimately the development of perceived traditions or legacies based on particular authors, it thus becomes imperative to examine the context(s) of an author's reception, closely examining the shifting representation(s) of that author over time and space. The attribution of "greatness" to a thinker, her enshrinement into a disciplinary canon, is an active, conscious process. Forgotten thinkers are unearthed and branded as great by those who want to claim them for their own camp, while the rightful legacy of an established "great thinker" can be a source of extensive debate.¹¹⁶ Inventing a tradition linking one's ideas to those of a long-dead, respected, famous mind is one of the many ways in which one can defend something by giving it "the sanction of perpetuity."¹¹⁷ As a result, once an author is placed in the category of "great thinkers," her name comes to bear a certain weight, to provide a certain degree of legitimacy to those who invoke her as their forerunner. Since reception theory is explicitly geared toward understanding the factors that "shape" the reception of a text,¹¹⁸ it is thus particularly relevant for shedding light on the dynamics behind the canonization of an author. It is notably attuned to the role of political agendas in shaping reception,¹¹⁹ a factor that is likely to be found at play in the construction of disciplinary canons.

¹¹⁵ Jahn, "Introduction," 13.

¹¹⁶ For example, on the role of Hobbes as the presumed founder of liberal political theory, and the emergence of this conception of his legacy in the twentieth century, see Farneti, *Il canone moderno*. See also Vaughan, "The Decline of Sovereignty in the Liberal Tradition." For a critique of IR's perilous caricature of Hobbes, see Malcolm, "Hobbes' Theory of International Relations." On the similarly divergent receptions of Rousseau, see Lifschitz, *Engaging with Rousseau*.

¹¹⁷ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 2.

¹¹⁸ Burke, "The History and Theory of Reception," 32.

¹¹⁹ Consider, for instance, the various receptions of Erasmus, notably in Spain and Italy. Silavana Seidel Menchi emphasizes the fact that Erasmus' Italian readers had their own agenda, which included disguising their Protestant beliefs and legitimating a political attack on the papacy; see Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia, 1520–1580*, cited in

Ultimately, while the claim here is that we must distinguish between a study of the reception of ideas based on concepts and one based on authors, it may be said that in the case of the canonization of an author, the author itself becomes, in some way, a form of concept. Invoking the author in question becomes a means to refer to a set of ideas, to a particular understanding of what abstract and contested terms such as “power politics,” “sovereignty,” or “liberalism” might mean. In the broadest sense, Bell reminds us that “[t]raditions are usually constructed around a canon of renowned thinkers, which serves simultaneously as a reservoir of arguments, an index of historical continuity, and a powerful source of intellectual authority.”¹²⁰ But more specifically, an author’s name can become associated with a precise position, providing a shorthand for what may otherwise necessitate extensive – and possibly contestable – elaboration. When one invokes, for instance, Thucydides, Hobbes, or Kant within a tradition, the reference is often not so much to the individuals, with their idiosyncratic lives and the specific aims they had in writing their canonized treatises, but rather to the intellectual statement they provide within a debate, to the positions that are automatically associated with their person. Their name entails a set of arguments (or many different sets, if one takes into account the different interpretations of a single author), a collection of assumptions and their associated ramifications, in a way that is not dissimilar to the role played by a concept such as “absolute sovereignty” or “liberalism.” In using great thinkers as such, the receivers of the text come to “decontextualize” the author they are engaging with in order to make her fit their own context and aspirations while nonetheless claiming her historic heritage. In this sense, the emphasis in this chapter on the distinction between the study of authors and the study of concepts is made primarily to highlight a shift in terms of the object of study and therefore of the chosen methodology, keeping in mind that a more diligent study of authors and of their reception may in fact underline the

Burke, “The History and Theory of Reception,” 26–27. Another example is the case of Locke, whose diverse receptions come to light in Mark Goldie’s fascinating anthology *The Reception of Locke’s Politics*. On the diverging receptions of Locke in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and the ultimate establishment of his “liberal” credentials, see Bell, “What Is Liberalism?” For a fascinating case beyond the history of political thought, see notably Martial Poirson, *Ombres de Molière*, on the reception of Molière in France from the seventeenth century onward, the evolution of which was dictated by political events from the necessity to reclaim Molière for the French republican tradition in the late eighteenth century to the desire to challenge the supremacy of an overbearing Britain and its equally imposing Shakespeare in the nineteenth century.

¹²⁰ Bell, “What Is Liberalism?” 686.

extent to which authors can become concepts, fulfilling similar discursive functions and sharing the same purposes as heuristic devices.

1.3 A Combined Approach

While it is common to read studies of authors in their original context, and possible to find a number of works that examine the subsequent reception of their ideas, contributions that combine the two have remained the exception. In this final section, I wish to conclude by emphasizing the methodological potential of an approach to the study of great thinkers that combines a synchronic analysis based on the methodological insights of Skinnerian contextualism with a diachronic analysis drawing on the tenets of reception theory.

An emphasis on the reception of a great thinker's ideas may seem at first as a complementary but separate project from the examination of the author's ideas in their initial context, and particularly from a close analysis of the author's original intentions. Indeed, reception theory long ignored the question of authorial intention or "authorial intended meaning" altogether, preferring to focus on the issue of "received meaning,"¹²¹ and historians of political thought traditionally kept reception theory at bay just as cultural and intellectual historians were engaging with it at length. Yet two main arguments can be made for a unified approach that relies on these two avenues of inquiry at once in the study of great thinkers. First, and in the most obvious sense, any project that seeks to understand both the emergence and the impact of a particular author's idea will find this methodological approach greatly relevant. In IR, a discipline that has historically paid significant attention to the thought of a few great authors, emphasizing the continued importance of specific concepts within their thought (whether it be Hobbes on sovereignty or Kant on perpetual peace, to name but the most famous ones), developing an approach that encompasses both a rigorous understanding of the author's context and an analytical commitment to the *longue durée* would seem a valuable endeavor.

The call for such an approach is reinforced by the fact that the discipline of IR has sometimes erred in its appreciation of authors' ideas specifically because it remained abysmally unaware of the process of reception. If greater efforts have been made to tease out the normative assumptions of each theoretical approach,¹²² surely the fact that IR

¹²¹ For a detailed discussion, see Thompson, "Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning," 257–65.

¹²² Reus-Smit and Snidal, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*.

textbooks continue to propagate a history of the modern states-system and of its presumed intellectual architects constructed by nineteenth-century counter-revolutionary historians¹²³ should be an immediate source of concern. If the study of IR's "great thinkers" continues to be an important part of the discipline, particularly in light of the turn to international political thought,¹²⁴ this untangling exercise can form the basis for a more rigorous approach both to the nature of their thought and to the impact they had through their actual reception over time.

Second, and more specifically, there is a rather straightforward case to be made for the continued methodological relevance of a more traditional, synchronic analysis of an author as a highly insightful component of the study of an author's reception. Naturally, reception studies encourage scholars "not to limit themselves to the reconstructions of major thinkers, but to ask a much wider range of questions about recontextualizations, responses, uses, and so on,"¹²⁵ pointing to "the illusion of perfect communication" and, in that process, "undermining the importance of the intentions of writers."¹²⁶ However, the intention of the author remains an important component of reception for a simple reason: It constitutes a benchmark against which one can measure the extent to which the text has been reinterpreted by the receivers. Burke emphasizes that in studying reception one must "look for what is 'lost in translation', or what is distorted," reminding us of Cervantes' famous observations that reading a text in translation is "like viewing Flemish tapestries from the wrong side."¹²⁷ In other words, he explains, one has to measure the "degrees of distance from the original."¹²⁸ It is not clear, however, how one might be able to achieve this without some understanding of what the text was originally intended to achieve.

In other words, and to push Cervantes' metaphor a step further, is it only by viewing both sides of the tapestry that one can appreciate the contrast between the two images. If we only view the "wrong side," we

¹²³ Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, 13–14. For a more detailed analysis, see Devetak, "Historiographical Foundations of Modern International Thought." Noting Armitage's remark that "the pivotal moments in the formation of modern international thought were often points of retrospective reconstruction," Devetak shows the extent to which historians played a role in the depiction of the modern world as a "world of states."

¹²⁴ Though for a call to locate "international political thought" beyond a canon of "great thinkers," see especially Keene, "International Intellectual History and International Relations." For a related call to examine the thought of practitioners, see Rothschild, "Arcs of Ideas," 220.

¹²⁵ Burke, "The History and Theory of Reception," 32.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

may well be aware that it is indeed “wrong” to some extent and that the actual image is bound to differ in some way, but we remain within the realm of speculative abstraction; the actual image may be slightly different, or it could be entirely unrecognizable – we will never know. To the extent that one is interested in analyzing the construction of traditions and unveiling the scaffolding of intellectual canons, having a concrete understanding of what the gap between the original and its derivatives entails becomes essential. In fact, an awareness of the original is much more critical within this context than is suggested by Cervantes’ example. If, in the example of the tapestry, the original and its flip side are literally co-constitutive of each other, this is clearly not the case when we speak of the reception of texts. Indeed, the reinterpretations can depart from the original to remarkable extents, as some receivers may use the text with few concerns for the dead author’s original intentions.¹²⁹ One particular instantiation of this point is the fact that certain parts of an author’s text can be heavily emphasized¹³⁰ while others are entirely ignored or even concealed.¹³¹ As Bevir puts it, speaking of traditions more broadly, “because people want to improve their heritage by making it more coherent, more accurate, and more relevant to contemporary issues, they often do respond selectively to it; they accept some parts of it, modify others, and reject others.”¹³² In this context, authorial intention truly has an essential role to play in the study of an author’s reception, and a commitment to the *longue durée* can thus be paired with a more traditional contextualist investigation.

There are, of course, certain limitations to this approach, or at least certain challenges that should be flagged. First of all, in studying the

¹²⁹ Though a notable point is that other receivers will read the text through their own understanding of the author’s original intention. According to one approach (“reader-response criticism,” broadly speaking), what the author actually intended is in this case ultimately a moot point; it does not matter, and it cannot be recovered. Mark Bevir, in *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, has put forward a compelling attempt to bring together the insights of intentionalism with those of reader-response criticism, emphasizing that the meaning of a text stems from the meaning it was given by individuals, whether these are the author herself or her later readers.

¹³⁰ For instance, in the case of Locke, Bell explains that “[w]hereas parliamentary constitutionalism was central to the British appropriation of Locke (via the retrojection of the Whigs), it was religious toleration (via the retrojection of key elements of Puritanism) that did much of the ideological labour in the United States.” Bell, “What Is Liberalism?” 701.

¹³¹ One notable example is the dismissal of Grotius’ arguments for the legitimate character of divisible sovereignty; see Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, 40–59. This particular move in the reception of Grotius’ writings in IR had a significant impact on the discipline, as it restricted the available set of conceptual tools in a way that largely undermined the study of empires.

¹³² Bevir, “On Tradition,” 39. More broadly, see Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*.

reception of an author, one must address the various silences that can occur around the author's work. This can be the case when, as I have suggested, certain ideas or elements of the text appear to be central to the original work but disappear during the reception process. Under such circumstances, one is left to carefully speculate as to what might explain the surprising omission. Even more strikingly, one must consider the fact that over the course of an author's afterlife, there will be periods during which her work may recede into the background or be ignored entirely. This can occur for various reasons, including mere neglect, a controversial reputation, or a falling out of favor of certain types of argument. In light of this, a serial contextualism based on an author rather than on a concept may well be episodic, with important chronological gaps between the different receptions. There is thus an important difference between the *longue durée* entailed by an author-based serial contextualism and that entailed by a concept-based one, as concepts are more likely to appear under different iterations in the work of various writers. When studying an author and her reception, a *longue durée* approach is just as much about continuity as it is about discontinuity; the expansive chronological coverage allows one to analyze the moments during which an author's popularity surged and to trace the construction of a seemingly continuous tradition of thought around that author's name, but also to shine a light on the various moments during which the author was not in fact considered particularly remarkable. The latter, of course, is a way to problematize the existing stories of continuity and to highlight the contingency of the established canon.

1.4 Conclusion

Though a growing number of scholars have now examined the reception of certain "great thinkers" in IR, there has been little explicit methodological reflection as to what these types of studies entail. The purpose of this chapter has been to dissect the different elements involved, drawing on reception theory to highlight the most significant methodological insights to keep in mind if one is to examine processes of reception rigorously and systematically.

Bringing together various methodological insights from HPT, intellectual history more broadly, and literary studies, I have made a case for the importance of first examining an author in her initial context in order to acquire a benchmark against which the characteristics of the reception process can be measured. This is in contrast to current approaches to intellectual history that focus either on analyzing an author's thought within her original context, or on examining the

reception of the author at various points in time, without explicitly linking the two. The dual contextualization I propose may be applied to a single work, by analyzing it closely both in the author's original context and in the various contexts of the author's reception. Alternatively, a study seeking to focus more heavily on the reception process may establish this benchmark by drawing on the more classically contextual (i.e., "Cambridge School," broadly speaking) secondary literature to acquire a sufficient sense of what the author's original intentions were, if these are already relatively well established. It is worth noting that while processes of reception have received quite a bit of attention in the case of the rediscovery of classical authors between the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the same cannot be said for the reception of early modern authors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The proposed methodological approach will thus be particularly relevant for future studies that seek to account for these understudied, more recent processes – which are of course particularly relevant to the discipline of IR – and its precepts can be applied to authors beyond the specific field of international political thought.¹³³

While the growing number of works examining the reception of various great thinkers in IR is a very encouraging development, these processes of reception still remain an under-researched area in the discipline, and this comes with some significant costs. Systematically applying the present method in IR will allow for a better understanding of what great thinkers actually intended to express in their original context, and of the type of interests that shaped their legacies and gave us our contemporary interpretations of their works in the discipline. This is important for three reasons. First, as I have sought to highlight through various examples about the treatment of early modern authors in IR (Grotius, Hobbes, Thucydides), the histories of these authors' receptions into the discipline underline the extent to which our dominant understandings of their works were produced by later individuals with agendas of their own. As long as we simply accept these narratives, we are condemned to remain bound to these past agendas and to have little understanding of what insights these "great thinkers" can presumably provide us with.

Second, and more importantly still, the approach I put forward provides the tools for investigating the processes of instrumentalization – or even mere unintentional misreading – of famous texts by both scholars

¹³³ One example is the recent work on the emergence of a field of scholarship around Adam Smith; see Tribe, *The Economy of the Word*, 139–70; Liu, "Rethinking the "Chicago Smith" Problem."

and practitioners and to assess the impact of this phenomenon on international relations. As I have discussed, great thinkers are often rediscovered or celebrated anew at opportune moments, when they can be put to various broadly political uses. The glorification of their ideas and the novel forms under which these authors are celebrated in their new contexts often result from a conflation of contingent elements, be they of a personal, institutional, social, or more traditionally political kind. In providing an explicit method for studying these processes, the proposed approach offers a rigorous roadmap for assessing how ideas actually come to have an impact in practice, when they are for instance used as legitimating devices for various political projects.

Third, and relatedly, this approach calls for those interested in “great thinkers” in IR to perhaps turn a more significant part of their attention to the makers of greatness: the intermediaries who select various authors for canonization and seek to use them in particular ways and for particular purposes. Whether as scholars or as practitioners, they might not be particularly well known, but in their choices of whom to glorify, they can indeed have a significant impact both on disciplinary developments and – if they are lawyers or diplomats for instance – on the conduct of international relations. When great thinkers are used as weapons to defend particular projects or ideologies over others, the agency lies with those who wield their name, and the intellectual force of a Hobbes or a Grotius comes to be heavily mediated through the minds of those who claim these authors’ legacy for themselves.

This brings us back to Alberico Gentili and his place in contemporary narratives about the emergence of modern war. Like the other famous figures I mentioned, Gentili’s ideas came to us via the minds of various intermediaries, men who lived in other epochs, who had concerns of their own, and who, through their own priorities and idiosyncrasies, came to shape the Italian jurist’s posthumous journey. Applying the methodological precepts put forward in this chapter, the rest of the book first examines Gentili’s intentions in reshaping the definition of war within his own context before proceeding to a diachronic analysis of his reception across centuries. In doing so, I provide a critical account of the contemporary narratives about Gentili and modern war, unearthing their nineteenth- and twentieth-century origins and shedding light on what their rendition of history ultimately obscured.