# Literature, Truth and Logic

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'Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep' is a sentence familiar to virtually every undergraduate who has begun to engage significantly with the grandfather of analytic philosophy. The sentence plainly has a sense but, on Fregean principles, if the name 'Odysseus' does not have reference neither does the sentence—that is, it has no truth value. Thus Frege roundly declares that:

> In hearing an epic poem, ... apart from the euphony of the language we are interested only in the sense of the sentences and the images and feelings thereby aroused. The question of truth would cause us to abandon aesthetic delight for an attitude of scientific investigation. Hence it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name 'Odysseus', for instance, has reference, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art. It is the striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference.[1]

In a footnote he suggests a special term ('*Bilder*'), translated by Black as 'representations', for signs having only sense—which, he proposes, should cover not merely the words of actors on a stage but the actors themselves.

Here we have what could reasonably be described as the two main features of analytic philosophy's engagement with imaginative literature during at least the first half of this century: the use of literature as a field from which examples may be drawn for logical or linguistic analysis, and the apparent claim that this field lies outside the city of truth. Neither feature, of course, originates with Frege. Keats's *Lamia* has not just Newton but the whole tradition of British empirical philosophy since Locke in its sights with the complaint:

> Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings
> Conquer all mysteries by rule and line.
> (II, ll.234–5)

Insult is added to injury when one remembers Hume's urbane remark that poets are 'liars by profession', with the added comment that they 'always endeavour to give an air of truth to their fictions'

[1] G. Frege, 'On sense and reference', *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, P. T. Geach and M. Black (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), 62–3.



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(*Treatise* I. 3. x)—which if true raises the question why they 'always endeavour' to achieve an effect which according to Frege 'is a matter of no concern to us'.

But if it did not originate them, the logico-linguistic turn associated with analytic philosophy nevertheless sharpened these tendencies. Frege's concern with non-referring singular terms was shared by Russell, powering his theory of definite descriptions which became paradigmatic for the analytic movement. Typically literature was approached as fiction through its positing of 'imaginary objects', the title of the 1933 Joint Session symposium when Ryle described *Pickwick Papers* as 'one big composite predicate' and Braithwaite came close to putting part of Hume's observation into logical dress:

> The sentences in *Pickwick Papers* make sense if either 'Mr. Pickwick' be taken as a variable symbol or if 'Mr. Pickwick' be taken to mean 'the man called Pickwick': they do not make sense if these two ways of meaning are combined. But exactly this, I suspect, is what Dickens was trying to do.[2]

Such fictitious narratives, he maintained, involve a form of 'illicit combination' which 'is calculated to mystify the logician nearly as much as to delight the common reader' (p. 54).

Such use of 'rule and line' to excavate the logical underpinnings of that 'air of truth' of many literary fictions, through the identification of 'illicit' features, was not always taken to exclude those fictions from a positive concern with truth, Ryle maintaining that 'the fact that a romance may convey general truths about human nature does not modify its fictitiousness as a narrative'.[3] But such concern tended to be seen as in two ways secondary. First, Ayer was representative in declaring that the literary artist's 'primary aim is to express or arouse emotion',[4] his or her concern with truth and logic, one infers, is decidedly subsidiary. Second, although many sentences in literary works have a representational as well as expressive function, it typically operates indirectly; Mace's well-known *Analysis* paper on representation and expression (in which, one notes by implication, Frege's representations turn out not to be representational) maintained that the poet typically relies on a subtle

[2] G. Ryle 'Imaginary objects', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. vol. 12 (1933), 39; R. B. Braithwaite, ibid., 53.

[3] G. Ryle, Summary of 1933 paper 'Imaginary objects', *A Synoptic Index to the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1900–1949,* J. W. Scott (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), 0168.

[4] A. J. Ayer, 'The genesis of metaphysics', *Analysis*, 1, No. 4 (March 1934), 57.



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blending of direct reference with what he termed 'the principle of emotive congruence':

> If a proposition p evokes in its apprehension the same subjective element as a proposition q then the assertion of p will serve as a substitute (particularly in the context of a poem) for the communication of q.[5]

So the utterances of poets, we are told (with those of politicians and metaphysical philosophers thrown in for good measure), may be not 'merely expressive of emotion' but instances where 'the specious assertion of one thing may be employed as a technical device for asserting something else'. Poets, that is, are specious asserters by profession.

Mace's paper seeks to reformulate the Ogden and Richards distinction between 'scientific' and 'emotive' uses of language which was decisively popularized through Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. The ramifications and vicissitudes of this distinction and its analogues do not need to be rehearsed yet again. For present purposes it is sufficient to point out that literary language was seen as primarily emotive or expressive and thereby, at least for positivists like Ayer, in the same category as evaluative language—neither having as their primary mode of assessment that of literal truth or falsity: thus non-cognitivism concerning values went hand in hand with non-cognitivism concerning literature. The criteria for assessing literary language, therefore, were quite different from those governing statements with 'literal' (let alone 'factual'), meaning, and this contention underlies Mace's association of the metaphysician with the poet. There was considerable discussion of whether the apparent meaningfulness of 'metaphysical verbiage' (Mace's term) was to be construed in terms of its capacity to express or arouse emotion, or to act as means of moral inspiration, analogous to certain forms of poetry (for Ayer this flattered the metaphysician—Wisdom was more sympathetic), and as late as 1951 Reichenbach's strongly positivist *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* suggested (roughly) that we should treat several of Plato's dialogues as poetry because their arguments are so bad: 'The poetic simile is not bothered by logic ... Plato's philosophy is the work of a philosopher turned poet'.[6]

The distinctively positivist doctrines, of course, have not worn well, but even where there has been no commitment to them the

[5] C. A. Mace, 'Representation and expression', *Analysis* 1, No. 4 (March 1934), 37.

[6] H. Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), 24.



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Fregean contrast of 'aesthetic delight' with 'scientific investigation' has been an apt marker of the analytic movement's separation of the literary from the philosophical, which can be instructively characterized in terms of a version of Hepburn's 'spectrum of language use'.[7] Considered in term of texts, Spinoza's *Ethics* and Russell's 'On Denoting' are philosophical, *Pickwick Papers* and Homer's *Odyssey* are not philosophical but literary, while in different ways Pascal's *Pensées*, Sartre's *La Nausée* and, possibly, Plato's dialogues occupy an ambiguous middle ground which for many is highly suspect. The literary end of the spectrum is characterized in terms of distinctive forms of language use, expressive, emotive, indirect, imagistic, euphonic, fictive, generic, depending on the level of analysis. Only the last category applies to the philosophical end, and that in a subordinate position as the genre that is specified by the appropriate concerns and procedures. Philosophical concerns are with the truth and falsity of propositions about a specifiable range of issues—fundamental to which are those concerning the proper characterization of thought and language—together with the validity or invalidity of the argumentative procedures used in supporting or rebutting these propositions. Such arguments should follow closely the patterns of inference found in deductive (more rarely, inductive or probabilistic) logic, establishing propositions in the order of logical dependence, or confuting them by means of the *reductio ad absurdum*—they should proceed, that is, by 'analysis'.

The analytic movement's commitment to these procedures explains the suspicion in which 'middle ground' texts have been characteristically held—whether the work of the 'philosophical novelist' or, worse, the 'literary philosopher'. The drive to purify philosophy of non-analytic, non-logical elements (seen in Humean spirit as conducive to 'sophistry and illusion'), led to the view that the literary and philosophical modes did not mix. Reichenbach, one notes, sees Plato as defensible only if one disregards his dialogues' philosophical pretensions:

> His pictures speak the persuasive language that appeals to the imagination—only they should not be taken as explanation.... The story of Socrates who teaches young men by the method of asking questions is a beautiful example of didactic poetry ... We should not take too seriously what Socrates says; what matters is how he says it and how he stimulates his disciples to logical argument.[8]

[7] R. W. Hepburn, 'Literary and logical analysis', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 8, No. 33 (October, 1958), 343.

[8] H. Reichenbach, op. cit., 24.



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But such an approach is plausible only if one can give a coherent account of philosophical analysis in its pure state that gives promise of engaging significantly with issues conventionally regarded as philosophical, and here the burden of proof would appear to be on the analysts for at least two reasons. First, the appropriate philosophical 'purity' is very rare; as Hepburn points out, 'no philosophy may be altogether free of metaphor and analogy'. Second, in assessing the doctrines of even the most rigorous of philosophers we cannot finally avoid questions about the power to illuminate experience which their overall point of view provides; not only is an author such as Spinoza a favourite subject of study in the humanities for reasons other than his pretensions to analytic (or as he puts it 'geometric') austerity, but within the analytic movement itself the contrasting appeals within the past half-century of such figures as Wittgenstein, Austin and Quine, or of meaning in terms of truth-conditions and meaning in terms—directly—of use, are difficult to account for simply in deductive or inductive terms; hermeneutic considerations beyond these would appear to be operative.

This is not surprising, for upon inspection the notion of analysis itself is not unproblematic. The term itself appears to have a metaphorical flavour, transferred from geometry. Descartes had enumerated two methods of proof available to that 'geometrical mode of writing' he proposed as alone appropriate to serious philosophizing, the analytic and the synthetic; the analytic involves the reduction of 'involved and obscure propositions step by step to those that are ... absolutely simple',[9] which has obvious affinities with the programme of logical atomism. Two classic articulations of this orientation are the *Aufbau* and the *Tractatus*; Carnap, however, came to concede that the strict deductive ideal is a mirage ('the theoretical terms are interpreted, but this interpretation is always incomplete')[10] while Wittgenstein went further, rejecting the very notion of analytic reduction to simples;[11] as Ryle put it, 'the ultimates of Logical Atomism took sanctuary in Utopia'.[12]

[9] R. Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes,* E. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (trs.) (Cambridge University Press, 1931), vol. 1, 14.

[10] R. Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World and Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, R. A. George (tr.), 2nd edn. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), ix.

[11] L. Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations,* G. E. M. Anscombe (tr.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) paras. 39–64; *Philosophical Remarks*, R. Rhees (ed.), R. Hargreaves and R. White (trs.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 302.

[12] G. Ryle, 'Introduction', *The Revolution in Philosophy*, G. Ryle (ed.) (London: Macmillan, 1956), 10.



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A less ambitious programme of analysis was developed by Moore, which sought to give correct analyses of the meanings of certain types of concept and proposition; sometimes the proposition in question was a deliverance of common sense that Moore claimed we all know, with certainty, to be true. But this too ran into difficulties analogous to those which plagued the *Aufbau* ('of the truth of these propositions there seems to be no doubt, but as to what is the correct analysis of them there seems to be the gravest doubt').[13] Further, Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* opens with 'If you do know that *here is one hand* we'll grant you all the rest',[14] and it soon becomes clear that Moore's conception of knowing with certainty is deeply problematic, while the programme also encountered the notorious 'paradox of analysis' according to which all analysis is either trivial or false: if the *analysandum* and the *analysans* are synonymous no information is conveyed, but if not the information conveyed is incorrect. Moore conceded that 'I cannot give any clear solution to the puzzle';[15] the standard riposte is that a proposition can be analytic without being trivial, but for this to be sustained a satisfactory account of analyticity must be given in terms of an adequate theory of meaning and this too, to put it at its weakest, has proved problematic.

This latter consideration points to a deeper problem with the whole schematism on which the separation between philosophy and literature is based. The Positivist dichotomy between analytic and empirical statements did not take adequate account of the way that most statements have both analytic and empirical elements and of what Dummett[16] has described as 'the inter-connectedness of language, the dependence of the understanding of one part of the language on the understanding of another'. But if this inter-connectedness throws doubt on dichotomies within Ayer's 'literal' uses of language it needs to be shown precisely why that between representation and expression is not also under threat. Austin, indeed, was driven to the conclusion that the insulation of the constative from other uses of language was unsustainable.[17]

[13] G. E. Moore *Philosophical Papers* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), 59.

[14] L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds), D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (trs.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), para. 1.

[15] G. E. Moore, *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, P. A. Schilpp (ed.) (La Salle, Ill. and London: Open Court and Cambridge University Press, 1968), 666; see also 321–42.

[16] M. Dummett, *The Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 191.

[17] J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).



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But perhaps these difficulties derive from being too literal-minded about the notion of analysis. What is important if we are to avoid philosophical sophistry and illusion is to tie philosophy to logic and exclude all non-logical elements. Descartes allowed for 'synthetic' as well as 'analytic' modes of proof and so, it could be argued, should we. This has affinities with Ryle's proposal. His inaugural lecture characterized a form of *reductio ad absurdum* as 'proper, and even proprietary' to philosophy,[18] and he assigns this type of argument a crucial place in *The Concept of Mind*:

> The key arguments in this book are ... *reductio ad absurdum* arguments.... I do not, however, think it improper to use from time to time arguments of a less rigorous sort, especially when it seems expedient to mollify or acclimatise.... If persuasions of conciliatory kinds ease the pains of relinquishing inveterate intellectual habits, they do not indeed reinforce the rigorous arguments, but they do weaken resistances to them[19]

Here indeed we are provided with a well-defined-criterion for distinguishing 'rigorous' philosophical arguments, which are deductive and probative, from others whose persuasive role is merely 'conciliatory', rhetorical, indeed literary—one is reminded of Reichenbach's Plato whose 'pictures speak the persuasive language that appeals to the imagination' and hence (curiously) are classified as poetic.

However, insistence on the priority of the 'geometric mode' in philosophy once again runs into difficulties. It is hardly news that the major problem with the axiomatic method in philosophy lies with an argument's starting point; the major problem with Ryle's 'strong' *reductio* (setting aside various technical questions about its separability from Euclid's 'weak' one) lies in its terminus, the claim that a thesis has been shown to be 'absurd'. The notion of self-evident absurdity is no less problematic than that of a self-evident axiom; it is indeed its mirror image. If the test of absurdity is straight self-contradiction then comparatively few philosophical issues can be resolved by *reductio ad absurdum* alone (and in any case, what of the creative use of paradox championed by Wisdom?); usually a less strict understanding of 'absurdity' is involved and then we are in serious danger of *petitio*, for a good deal of philosophy has revolved around arguments concerning what is or is not absurd. Ryle's own reply was that we may safely dismiss a proposi-

[18] G. Ryle, *Philosophical Arguments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 6; reprinted in his *Collected Essays, 1929–1968*, vol. 2 of his *Collected Papers* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 197.

[19] G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), 8.



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tion if it can be shown to exhibit a 'category mistake', but the allocation of propositions to various categories—and the rules governing predication across categories—are themselves determined by appeals to what is or is not 'absurd', thus the whole procedure is open to the charge of circularity; it is worth recalling that Ryle himself closed his main discussion with the question 'But what are the tests of absurdity?', and by 1954 was arguing that proofs have no place in philosophy.[20]

If the *reductio ad absurdum* model does not provide us with a satisfactory criterion for assessing the cogency of philosophical arguments then Ryle's sharp distinction between 'rigour' and 'persuasions of conciliatory kinds' begins to look more than a little myth-eaten; perhaps those persuasions play an essential dialectical, and not merely rhetorical, role in philosophy. But if so, and if on the analytic projection 'interpretation is always incomplete', it is hardly surprising that complete analytic purity in philosophy is so rare. Two types of response are open to this recognition. One is to insist that nothing which does not measure up to the Cartesian standards of geometric purity can count as philosophy, and hence either abandon philosophy and that 'striving for truth' (to use Frege's expression) which is its hallmark—perhaps seeking to change the conversation in the manner of Rorty—or else, after Derrida, use the evidence of endemic 'metaphor in the text of philosophy' to deconstruct it; in that long-running quarrel between philosophy on the one hand and poetry and rhetoric on the other, the latter are ultimately victorious. The other is to recognize that the geometric model for philosophy is at best but partial, that important philosophical argument is inevitably to be assessed in part by such criteria as capacity to 'illuminate experience' and so on, and thus seek to explore and assess these criteria—integrating them into our overall account of rationality and philosophy's striving for truth. To Dummett's claim that 'most sentences … lie somewhere in the middle of the scale' between mathematical statements and reports of observation[21] we may perhaps add that most work of philosophical pretension lies somewhere in the middle of our spectrum; alternatively, we could simply drop the spectrum model, with its underpinning contrasts, altogether.

[20] G. Ryle, 'Categories', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 38 (April, 1938), 189–206, reprinted in his *Collected Essays, 1929-1968*, op. cit.; 'Proofs in Philosophy', in his *Collected Essays, 1929-1968*, 319–325, English translation of the original French in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 8 (1954).

[21] M. Dummett, *The Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, op. cit., 191.



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The consequences of the latter response for what I initially identified as the two main features of analytic philosophy's engagement with imaginative literature are rather different. Providing that logical analysis remains integral to philosophy, even if its dictatorial role has become unsustainable, its application to literary texts and examples retains much of its potential—and indeed much good work has been done towards demystifying Braithwaite's logician.. The focus on fiction has remained important and it has become better realised that a number of discriminations are required. First, not all imaginary objects have the same logical properties: Mr Pickwick and the round square are plainly different, for one can be described coherently and the other not; but it may be that the present King of France is importantly different from Mr Pickwick or Sherlock Holmes. Woods has argued for the latter discrimination on the ground that fictional sentences are 'bet sensitive' in that if, for example, you say that Holmes lived in Baker Street and I wager that he did not, you win the bet; my objection that, being fictional, he lived nowhere and hence not in Baker Street is not automatically to be upheld, whereas these considerations do not apply to 'The present King of France is bald'; Holmes is a 'nonesuch' while the present King of France is a 'nonentity', and sentences containing the one have a different logical structure from those containing the other.[22] If accepted, this provides us with a logician's rejoinder to Braithwaite on behalf of literature; it is not the writer of fiction who is inevitably involved in 'illicit combinations', but the philosophical analyst who has illicitly run together the logic of the nonentity with that of the nonesuch—for the latter Woods proposes a quantified modal logic with the operator 'O' after the Latin '*olim*', 'once upon a time'.

Setting aside problems with his axiom set, it is by no means clear that bet-sensitivity will carry the weight required; as Susan Haack pointed out, 'a bet whether the present King of France was male or female would be won by whoever bet he was male'.[23] But at least the discussion now seems to take serious account of literary features. Haack further argues that we must clearly distinguish between discourse about fiction and discourse in fiction;[24] this seems plausible

[22] J. Woods, *The Logic of Fiction: A Philosophical Sounding of Deviant Logic* (Mouton: The Hague, 1974).

[23] S. Haack, Critical Notice of J. Woods, *The Logic of Fiction*, op. cit., *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6, 2 (June 1976), 303–19.

[24] S. Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 72.



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in principle but the devil, as before, is in the detail. She maintains that whereas when I talk about Holmes there are grounds for the claim that 'there is a sense in which what I say may be right or wrong', when Conan Doyle was writing the Holmes stories 'the question of *Doyle's* getting it right or wrong simply does not arise'; but this could be challenged if we presume that the stories are to be taken as a self-consistent set and we notice the inconsistency in the specification of Dr. Watson's first name (one suspects that on one occasion, through the infrequency of the usage, Doyle simply forgot). Almost certainly further discriminations are necessary; where discourse in fiction is concerned correspondence criteria for truth cannot directly apply, but whether coherence ones can do so will depend on the genre in question: *The Hound of the Baskervilles* should perhaps be analysed differently from *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* ..., and both from *The Satanic Verses*; indeed, criteria even for consistency appear to play differently in realist fiction and in the post-modern novel. Such discriminations may not, however, be ultimately identifiable apart from pragmatic features, which adds weight to Haack's suggestion that

> Whereas one might feel the need for a free logic for discourse about fiction, one might reasonably hope to handle the distinctive features of discourse in fiction by means of a theory of pragmatics .... The most significant difference between telling a story and making a report, so to speak, is not in the difference between the story and the report, but in the difference between the telling and the making. (pp. 72–3)

Attention to at least the informal pragmatics of fiction has not been lacking. Haack herself points to speech-act analyses of fiction, such as that of Searle, though notes some of the difficulties—not only an adequate explication of his crucial notion of 'pretending to assert' but also accounting for sentences in novels which express truths, or purported truths, about the real world to which the author may well be committed. At one stage Currie attempted to deal with such problems by proposing an influential analysis of fiction-making as an illocutionary act, in part specified through Gricean intentions and the notion of 'make-believe', but his more recent *The Nature of Fiction* retreats from the speech-act dimension of the analysis while retaining communicative intentions and the notion of 'make-believe'[25]—a concept, one notes, that is becoming increasingly prominent in aesthetics, as witnessed by Walton's *Mimesis as*

[25] G. Currie, 'What is fiction?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43, 4, (Summer 1985), 385–92; *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).



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*Make-Believe*.[26] It may be that the speech-act analyses of literary fictions are now showing symptoms characteristic of a degenerating research programme.

A perhaps more promising approach to the pragmatics of literary fiction has been taken by Olsen and others, challenging the expressive and emotive accounts of literature and avoiding primary recourse to speech-act analysis, while nevertheless resisting any construction of literature as informative discourse; the latter is constituted by 'the existence of a practice involving a series of utterances related to each other in a dialectical process of challenge and support', but this forms no part of literary practice.[27] Rather, he argues, in treating a work as literary we attribute to an author certain aesthetic intentions which are conventionally determined and the author has no 'special authority when it comes to interpreting' them (p. 118). These conventions allow us to single out passages as segments and explore their interrelations under descriptions of gradually increasing generality, using the familiar criteria for interpretative validity in structured fashion, until 'all the segments are interrelated in a network of descriptions which articulates the "meaning" of the work' (p. 83).

This is a significant step forward but it is perhaps not radical enough, for Olsen's exploration of the logic of literature still keeps literature firmly divorced from truth; the specification of the intentions as 'aesthetic' functions to exclude the cognitive and the practical in a manner reminiscent of Frege's contrast of 'aesthetic delight' with 'scientific investigation'. Thus we are presented with an understanding of literature which excludes any text which 'enters into the goal-directed normal functions of language' (p. 165), and any attempt to allow a work to 'change one's way of seeing the world is non-literary' (p. 206), for 'it is a category mistake to let judgments about the truth of a piece of discourse interfere with' one's reading of it as literature (p. 58). The concern of Hume's poets with verisimilitude derives not, as this might be taken to suggest, from a supposed proneness of readers to category mistakes, but from the fact that a fictional 'description full of mistakes [his-

[26] K. A. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990). See also the use by Gareth Evans (*The Varieties of Reference*, J. McDowell (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) of Walton's earlier development of the concept, in part to criticize the possible worlds analysis of truth in fiction proposed by D. K. Lewis ('Truth in fiction', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, 1 (January 1978), 37–46).

[27] S. H. Olsen, *The Structure of Literary Understanding*, (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 54.



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torical or other] will leave the reader in doubt how to construe it'; the problems of verisimilitude are 'not problems of reference and truth'.[28] On such an account Reichenbach's category of 'didactic poetry' would seem to represent an oxymoron (the apparently didactic poetic output of Milton, Rochester, Pope, Johnson and Wordsworth providing, *prima facie*, obvious counter-examples), and not only was Alexander the Great's response to Homer clearly non-literary, but so have been many standard readings of Dante's *Commedia*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Indeed, there appears on the face of it to be some tension between Olsen's own reading of the *Hippolytus* as showing that 'man stands superior to the forces that break him in his sympathy and charity',[29] and his insistence that the 'possibility of applying thematic concepts in literary appreciation does not contribute to philosophical or theological insight' and that literature does not 'complement' philosophy.[30]

In conjunction with Lamarque, Olsen has recently clarified some of these issues, their case being focused, as is appropriate, in terms of a literary example:

> What gives the Lydgate story in *Middlemarch* depth is not so much that it implies a true proposition, but that it can be interpreted as about humanly interesting concerns—for example, the nature and consequences of noble human desires. The thematic statement that noble human desires and aspirations are thwarted by forces beyond an individual's control gives focus to the treatment in the novel. No doubt a different artistic treatment could present a theme of equal interest albeit formulated in a proposition which is the precise negation of this one. It is the *content* of the proposition, what it is about, not its truth as such, that confers interest on the Lydgate story.[31]

But, as Novitz has pointed out, 'one perfectly ordinary (and perhaps inevitable) way of displaying one's interest in the content of a general proposition is to wonder whether it describes things as they

[28] S. H. Olsen, *The End of Literary Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 175.

[29] S. H. Olsen *The End of Literary Theory*, op. cit., 179; P. Lamarque, and S. H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994), 401.

[30] S. H. Olsen *The End of Literary Theory*, op. cit., 194–5; P. Lamarque, and S. H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, op. cit., 410.

[31] P. Lamarque, and S. H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, op. cit., 329–30.



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really are'.[32] Confronted with literary works that present themes of 'equal interest' to those identified by Lamarque and Olsen in the *Hippolytus* and *Middlemarch* but apparently constituting their 'precise negation' (and it may be significant that no such examples are offered), one response could well be that of Cavell in relation to Eliot and Beckett—allowing one vision to test another in the light of our own experience:

> Eliot's Christianity ought to raise raw the fundamental aesthetic question of the relation of belief to art, since it contains the highest versions of both—where his belief is organizing his art and his art is testing his belief. If the direction Eliot descries can really be described, then Beckett's vision can be encompassed within Christianity.... But can we really believe all this, or *must* these explanations be given in bad faith, blinding us to what we *do* believe? Beckett tests this because he is the contemporary writer complex and single enough to match with Eliot.[33]

Lamarque and Olsen would resist any such move because of their specification of literary practice through constitutive concepts and conventions which exclude evaluation in terms of truth, and 'the concept of literature itself as well as the literary stance can be characterized and explained only with reference to this framework'.[34] These conventions embody a distinct set of aesthetic values 'universally valid for those who adopt the practice' (pp. 441–2), and if Cavell—like Alexander the Great—flouts them then, presumably, he has failed to judge a work 'as literature'.

Yet the authority of these conventions remains problematic. They can hardly be taken simply as summarizing how literature has always been conceived, for Lamarque and Olsen concede that they conflict with 'the *dulce et utile* dichotomy, which has provided the framework for every discussion of the relationship between philosophy and literature since Plato' (p. 410). Instead, they together seem to constitute a persuasive redefinition, reminiscent of the attempt to define meaning in terms of the verification principle, and similarly apt to spawn implausible conclusions; in Plato's ancient quarrel, these philosophers simply define the poets as residing outside the city of truth—soon, one suspects, they will be over the wall. Rather

[32] D. Novitz, 'The trouble with truth', Critical Discussion of P. Lamarque, and S. H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, op. cit., *Philosophy and Literature* 19, 2 (October 1995), 355.

[33] S. Cavell, 'Ending the waiting game' in his *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 162.

[34] P. Lamarque, and S. H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, op. cit., 257.



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than attempt to define literature in terms of literary practice, specifying the latter in terms which (as Novitz suggests) may be disturbingly dependent on fashion, it may be better to define literature ostensively and literary practice in terms of the potentialities of literature—a matter to which I shall return.

Against such 'aestheticizing' of literature it might be urged that literary practice contains forms of dialectical 'challenge and support' that provide analogues to the dialectic of more centrally informative discourse, and that the interconnectedness of language is of relevance here too; one notes that the relation of truth to dialogue, and that of both to literature, has been a leading topic in recent European hermeneutics. This suggests that the separation I have attempted between the two leading features of analytic philosophy's engagement with imaginative literature—its use of literature as a field for logical and linguistic analysis and its exclusion of literature from engaging with what Frege termed 'the question of truth'—are not finally separable; concern with the first inevitably involves issues to do with the second.

This latter topic is perhaps best approached indirectly. If we are to avoid reintroducing into the discussion problems arising from the spectrum model it may be as well to consider the role in philosophical discourse of elements conventionally regarded as 'literary' before considering what bearing texts conventionally regarded as literary may have on issues where truth and falsity are at issue, or how far literature's capacity to illuminate experience may with rational propriety change one's way of seeing the world. Here one notes that much of the analytic movement's prose is couched self-consciously in what, from a rhetorical point of view, may be characterized as the 'plain style'. The irony that has been a pervasive feature of philosophy from Heraclitus to Bradley is not prominent, narrative rarely plays a role analogous to that in Descartes's *Meditations* where the autobiographical narrative has established in the reader's mind a very particular 'I' before the ego is established by the *Cogito* and in the sequel as a thinking substance, while Ryle's penchant for similes and metaphors plays a subordinate role as use of 'persuasions of conciliatory kinds'—Quine's 'web of belief' can not unreasonably be construed in similar fashion.

But of course there is at least one major exception, Wittgenstein. The oracular *Tractatus* has been argued to carry out 'for philosophy what symbolist theory hoped to see in other modes of statement',[35]

[35] R. Kuhns, *Literature and Philosophy: Structures of Experience* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) 226; a comparison with Valéry is rewarding.



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and in the *Philosophical Investigations* we find a complex interweaving of different elements—including narrative, dialogue between different 'voices' (particularly that of temptation and that of correction), questioning, metaphor and aphorism. This stylistic richness has played a significant role in the way that many contemporary philosophers prefer to keep their intellectual distance from Wittgenstein, but it is worth considering whether there is rational justification for this departure from the plain style. Cavell has recently focused on the later Wittgenstein's use of the aphorism, arguing that form and content are here connected;[36] according to the *Investigations*,

> The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.—Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem.[37]

Given this aspiration the sharp focus provided by the aphorism is, one might think and as Cavell insists, peculiarly apt; for example, '"A proposition is a queer thing!" Here we have in germ the subliming of our whole account of logic' (para. 94). But there is a catch. Consider Bacon's famous advocacy of the aphorism:

> ... deduction and connection are cut off; descriptions of practice are cut off; so there is nothing left to make the aphorisms of but some good quantity of observation. ... Aphorisms, representing only portions and as it were fragments of knowledge, invite others to contribute and add something in their turn.[38]

This would seem to fit rather well, save that 'quantity of observation' might give one pause. However, if one inserts the missing opening to the sentence the matter looks rather different: 'For illustration and excursion are cut off; variety of examples are cut off'. The latter clause is not equivalent to 'the series of examples can be broken off'; for Wittgenstein, examples are crucial. Indeed, the infrequent aphorisms are connected, as we have seen, in a

[36] S. Cavell, 'The *Investigations*'s everyday aesthetics of itself' in *The Cavell Reader,* S. Mulhall (ed.) (Blackwell: Oxford, 1996).

[37] . L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit., para. 133.

[38] F. Bacon, '*De Augmentis Scientiarum*', in *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon: Reprinted from the Texts and Translations, with the Notes and Prefaces, of Ellis and Spedding*, J. M. Robertson (ed.) (London: George Routledge, 1905), vol. vi, ii, 531.



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number of ways that are far from aphoristic—and an adequate treatment of the *Investigations* would need to take account of their variety.

Wittgenstein is atypical, thus his departure from the plain style can easily be shrugged off; in this respect, one might retort, he was not an analytic philosopher. But perhaps this is too short a way with dissenters. Given the problems with analysis as a self-sufficient philosophical mode that I have sketched, it may be that Wittgenstein's idiosyncrasy is a sign of insight. One of his most distinguished pupils, John Wisdom, argued at length in his Virginia Lectures that what he called the 'case-by-case procedure' was indispensible in philosophical argument, even more fundamental than deduction, for it is required to establish the premises of such arguments (or indeed the unacceptability of the terminus of a significant *reductio*).[39] The procedure—a disciplined form of argument by analogy—has closer affinities with the use of precedent in the law courts than of axioms in mathematics, but it is none the less rational for that.

> The idea that the justification of a statement must be either of the inductive sort ... or of the deductive sort ... has played a double part in metaphysics. It has encouraged and distorted its growth and also nearly brought about its premature death by hoisting it by its own inadequate petard.[40]

As long ago as 1948 he argued against Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* that attitudes may be altered by 'rational persuasion':

> This is done by drawing attention rhetorically to the features of what we are talking about, insisting upon how different it is from this, how like to that, passing insensibly from the purely factual through the semi-factual, semi-critical, to the critical predicate at issue. Only this mixture is critical proof and the name of it is rhetoric.[41]

Seven years earlier he had made en exuberant character in one of his philosophical dialogues declare 'Logic is rhetoric, proof persuasion,

[39] J. Wisdom, *Proof and Explanation: Virginia Lectures* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991); see also D. C. Yalden-Thomson, 'The Virginia Lectures', in *Wisdom: Twelve Essays*, J. R. Bambrough (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

[40] J. Wisdom, *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 268–9.

[41] J. Wisdom, 'Note on the new edition of Professor Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*', *Mind* 57, No. 228 (October 1948), 419; reprinted in his *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis*, op. cit., 246.



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and philosophy logic played with especially elastic equations',[42] but he never beat the Rortyesque retreat from proof to conversation with the abandonment of truth as a regulative ideal. Rhetoric, rather, is reconceived as a suitable tool for philosophical self-analysis, and for this to be possible on Wisdom's terms it is necessary to discriminate rational from non-rational forms of persuasion without simply falling back on the well known procedures of deduction and induction. Here ancient traditions of rhetorical analysis and more modern procedures of hermeneutics and literary criticism, together with analyses of patterns of legal reasoning may all have their part to play.

But one important dimension is available from recent developments in the study of language by analytic philosophy itself, particularly those concerned with polysemy, metaphor and implicature. Ross, for example, has focused on the phenomenon of analogy in language, understood as applying to all words; the networks of analogy that allow us to drop stitches, friends, and hints without merely equivocating over the word 'drop' put in serious doubt the possibility of constructing a lexicon, with all the ramifications of meaning each word may have, that would fit into a classical truth-conditional theory for a natural language of the sort aimed at in formal semantics;[43] the semantics of natural languages, one might say, cannot be kept pragmatics free. Key concepts here are those of context, linguistic inertia and linguistic force. Some types of utterance are so associated with a particular range of contexts that their utterance in an apparently different one drives the hearer to reinspect the current context or to reinterpret the utterance; linguistic inertia leads one to attempt to construe the words according to the standard patterns, but when the verbal or other context renders such construals unacceptable, the phenomenon of linguistic force comes into play to force adaptations of meaning—metaphor and irony being prime examples.

Such an account can be integrated with a version of implicature. Unlike implications, which are truth-functional, implicatures as expounded by Grice are radically context and relevance dependent.[44] Holdcroft has extended them from conversation to all dis-

[42] J. Wisdom, 'Other minds IV', *Mind* 50, No. 199 (July 1941), 215; reprinted in his *Other Minds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 86.

[43] J. F. Ross, *Portraying Analogy* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[44] Papers collected in H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1989); see especially 'Logic and conversation', originally published in *Syntax and Semantics, vol 3: Speech Acts*, P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds) (New York: Academic Press, 1975).



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course types,[45] and Sperber and Wilson related them closely to psychological reality, grading them in terms of strength. Weaker implicatures are detached from their Gricean dependence on speaker's intention with no sharp cut-off point between assumptions strongly backed by the speaker or writer, and assumptions derived from the utterance but on the hearer's sole responsibility. In the case of metaphor, 'in general' the wider the range of potential implicatures and the greater the hearer's responsibility for constructing them, the ... more creative the metaphor. ... The surprise or beauty of a successful creative metaphor lies in ... condensation, in the fact that a single expression ... will determine a very wide range of acceptable weak implicatures.[46] Integrating these two approaches may help resolve some well-known difficulties with implicature. Grice's insufficiently nuanced account of what it is to 'say', as distinct from 'implicate' something[47] can be greatly enriched by use of Ross's account of linguistic inertia anchored by benchmarks, which also provides a notion of initial context rather more plausible than the assumption of initially undifferentiated data which underlies the Sperber and Wilson account. Reciprocally, analysis of the gradations between stronger and weaker implicatures casts light on the dynamics of the relation between linguistic inertia and linguistic force. An adequate analysis of context-dependent inferences which takes account of the workings of analogy in language may well throw light on the proper workings of Wisdom's 'case-by-case procedure', and provide ways of assessing the philosophical legitimacy of such 'literary' elements in philosophical discourse as the metaphor—and, indeed, the aphorism. It might also illuminate what has been called the 'narrative turn' in philosophy associated with Taylor and MacIntyre, though their attention to the dynamics of narrative as analysed by, for example, Ricoeur—let alone to distinctively literary features—is so far remarkably underdeveloped. A sophisticated theorisation of the 'case-by-case procedure' could well throw light on the rational credentials of attempts to compare apparently competing narratives—not least one from Husserl to Derrida as contrasted with one from Frege to Dummett.

If such 'rhetorical' features may play a legitimate philosophical role, the sharp division between philosophy and literature blurs yet further, and with it the justification for excluding the field of liter-

[45] D. Holdcroft, 'Speech acts and conversation', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 29, No. 115 (April 1979), 125–41.

[46] D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 236–7.

[47] See, for example C. Travis, 'Annals of Analysis', *Mind* 100, No. 398 (April 1991), 236–64.



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ature from the city of truth. But how should one characterize this city? *Language, Truth and Logic* was remarkably short with this issue, simply taking over Ramsey's redundancy theory of truth in a couple of pages, analysing truth in terms of assertion and leaving the concept of assertion very largely unexamined. Such examination is part of the theory of force, and this is interdependent with that of meaning. As Dummett insists,[48] 'concepts of meaning and truth are inextricably bound together', and this puts in question the intelligibility of the classical theories of truth—correspondence, coherence and the like. This knot remains to be unravelled.

In the meantime, however, one can provide what, in a loose sense, may perhaps be termed material adequacy conditions for any adequate account of truth. Some, of course, are the relatively formal ones specified by Tarski, but others are also important. If a concept of truth is to play a significant role in distinguishing between those of reality and delusion it must be one that is independent of judgment, whether of individuals or of communities, and yet sufficiently socially contextualized to be accessible to those individuals and communities. Doubt that this is possible powers much of the contemporary suspicion of the notion but Wiggins's account of the 'marks' of a minimal concept of truth is suggestive in this respect. These marks include its independence of judgment, its ruling out of something, and also its propensity to 'convergence', including convergence of belief:

> If x is true, then x will under favourable circumstances command convergence. and the best explanation of the essence of this convergence will require the actual truth of x.[49]

If truth is independent of judgment, in maintaining that x is true one is ruling out a state of affairs which is independent of one's own judgment; hence one must be able to conceive how others could in principle recognize such a state of affairs as obtaining and claim that if they held that it did so there would be something defective in the circumstances; under favourable circumstances beliefs should converge. But convergence of belief is only a mark of truth where there are not better explanations available (habit, deference, group dynamics, fear and so on); it may be that the notion of the 'best' explanation here may only be sustainable as a regulative ideal, but this is no objection so long as the requirement is taken to imply that for this mark of truth to be present the cultural story (or whatever) told by way of explanation must be such that the 'actual truth of x'

[48] M. Dummett, *The Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, op. cit., 15.

[49] D. Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, Aristotelian Society Series, Vol. 6 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 147.



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plays an integral role in its putative acceptability. On such an account (and there have been, of course, alternatives proposed—eg by Wright[50]—to that of Wiggins) a truth predicate for beliefs may well be contextualized in the sense that it carries no commitment to an Enlightenment, 'absolute', concept of truth, without making it subject to the totalizing ideology of a given community or imploding in a Rortyesque manner.

But what are 'favourable circumstances'? Here literature may provide us with richer models than are often to be found in the classical philosophical texts favoured by the analytic tradition. In different ways both Cavell and Nussbaum have recently been exploring the capacity of literature rationally to illuminate experience in such ways as to properly modify our ways of seeing the world. To instance just one leading theme from each, Cavell sees philosophical scepticism as a form of that human aspiration to transcend finitude which is also mapped by Romanticism and whose defeat, as Shakespeare shows, can lead to tragedy. On Cavell's account, an adequate grasp of what is wrong with Leontes' opening question to his son, 'Art thou my boy' in *The Winter's Tale* will diagnose the depth of the sceptical predicament and help us to see that criteria may not confer impersonal certainty; judgment and acknowledgment may be required in the service of self-transcending regulative ideals which defeat all appeal to established or self-justifying rules but are nevertheless far from irrational.[51]

From one point of view such an invocation of Shakespeare may be taken as an instance of the familiar use of thought experiments, employing the detail of a sophisticated dramatic narrative to help avoid thinness and lack of subtlety. For the purposes of this paper, however, what is of interest is the sort of contribution made to this avoidance by the narrative's specifically literary characteristics, and even an adumbration of this requires further attention to the notion of the 'literary'. Following Aristotle, and in contrast to Lamarque and Olsen, 'literature' is traditionally defined in terms of the genres of which it is composed and, although these are notoriously fluid, ostensive definition is possible: literature is a category made up of those genres that 'students of literature' usually study—poems, plays, novels and their many generic subdivisions. No doubt there are many borderline or otherwise problematic cases, but there are also exemplary ones; here too example leads theoretical definition. Nevertheless there are a good many works—Emerson's *Essays*, the

[50] C. Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[51] S. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 76–101.



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*Biographia Literaria*, or Macaulay's *History* for example—which one would like to include in even a strict notion of 'literature', but which represent genres not *ex officio* literary: memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, letters, etc. Such forms are, as it were, honorifically literary; they become assimilated to 'literature' if they exhibit markedly certain excellences traditionally associated with conventional literary forms. Equally, genres which are closely related to traditional literary forms—as is the philosophical dialogue to the form of drama—may in certain circumstances be worth considering under the heading 'literary'. Thus the brief for literary criticism—the study of literature—is always an open one: it being one purpose of literary criticism to help us decide which works are sufficiently excellent in the appropriate ways to be so classified.

Cavell is here clearly treating *The Winter's Tale* in terms of mimetic canons, and it is in part through its approximation to and transcendence of these canons that the play's power to change one's way of seeing the world resides; analogous considerations apply to his companion piece, playing Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' off Kant's account of the noumenal (pp. 50–65). No doubt all sorts of difficulties may be raised with the instances given—not least a concern that the historical range of reference is selected through a remarkably strong metaphysical and epistemological filter. More generally, one may well query whether the notions of 'judgment' and 'acknowledgment', as Cavell develops them, are too embedded in the contemporary cultural currents of modernity for them to have the detachment to which philosophy has traditionally aspired—a worry with a certain family resemblance to Novitz's objection to the status of the constitutive conventions of literary practice proposed by Olsen and Lamarque. However, the key point for my purposes is that, both in his engagement with such writers as Shakespeare and Coleridge and in his focus, noted earlier, on the relation between form and content in Wittgenstein, Cavell takes seriously the categories developed by literary criticism to help us grasp and assess the capacities of imaginative literature to transform our understanding and sensibility, and it is by no means clear that any such project must fall foul of the Cavellian problems.

Nussbaum argues more specifically for an interdependence between literature and moral philosophy, maintaining that each needs the other. Works of literature characteristically address themselves, more or less implicitly, to readers' questions about how one should live which are also the province of philosophy; but

> ethical understanding involves emotional as well as intellectual activity and gives a certain type of priority to the perception of



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> particular people and situations ... [which finds] most appropriate expression and statement in certain forms usually considered literary rather than philosophical.[52]

She argues that this ethical conception is 'superior in rationality and in the relevant sort of precision' to alternatives framed in terms of 'abstract rules', and hence 'we must broaden our conception of moral philosophy' to include appropriate literary texts (the novels of Henry James being well to the fore).

As in the case of Cavell, one may question her accounts at several levels, including the adequacy of her attention to the relation between literary narrative and philosophical commentary, which relates to Horton's objection that 'there is an important sense in which novels are *just* stories' and thus 'literature may allow us to experience our emotions "on the cheap", and ultimately encourage a peculiarly aesthetic deformation of our moral sensibilities'—he instances the response of someone moved to tears by a dramatisation of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* but 'stonily indifferent to the vagrants he passes on the way from the National Theatre'.[53] At a different level of analysis, one may question the way so much literature is made to subserve Nussbaum's Aristotelian ethic; it may be that literature cannot be captured by any one ethical conception and that it is here that the true tension between philosophy and literature lies (quite possibly a Platonic thought). But despite these difficulties, which may again be local, such integration of the intellectual with the emotional in an expanded conception of rationality provides a convenient marker for how far some have come from the days when literary language and ethical language were both expressive and non-cognitive rather than representational, and only representational language could be assessed for rationality in that it operated according to the principles of classical logic.

No doubt a variant of the case-by-case procedure, testing each detailed argument on its merits, is relevant to the assessment of such claims. But such testing, as we have seen, is apt to be carried out in terms of more general conceptions of literature and its capacities in general, and I shall conclude with some reflections on a powerful recent attempt to engage with this broader issue directly. In general terms one can characterize the issue as how, if at all, literature can stand in a positive relation to belief. Put this way it is, of

[52] M. C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), ix; see also 193–4.

[53] J. Horton, 'Life, literature and ethical theory', *Literature and the Political Imagination*, J. Horton and A. T. Baumeister (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 86.



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course, an ancient one. In his *Apology for Poetry*, notoriously, Sidney attempts to have it both ways; having eaten his cake by claiming that 'the poet ... nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth'[54] he promptly claims still to have it, maintaining that poesy is an 'art ... of true doctrine' (p. 130). At the start of his *Inconvenient Fictions* Bernard Harrison seeks to resolve the issue by giving priority to disconfirmation over confirmation. The 'mission' of literature, he maintains, 'is not to impart Great Truths but to unhinge and destabilize them'.[55] He seeks to show, through a combination of theoretical argument and practical criticism, 'the existence of a genuine power on the part of literature to rebuke and discipline the products of our purely theoretical intelligence' (p. 7); an analogy is drawn with the 'Popperian picture of disconfirmation as constituting the interface between Reality and our never finally adequate attempts to describe it' (p. 250). The 'inconvenience' of being led (often uncomfortably) to 'transcend limitations of perspective' is brought about through 'the disseminative potency of language' (p. 5), which is most sharply focused in the phenomenon of metaphor (p. 276). The Fregean notion of a sense which picks out a reference is ultimately only defensible (for reasons very similar to those adduced by Ross) if it is construed as a criterion of relevance, rather then simply of recognition (the province of Mr. Gradgrind), and metaphors display analogies between standard criteria of relevance and circumstances to which the associated criteria of recognition do not apply, thereby providing a semantic channel 'through which feelings attached to one set of words and what they mean may flow and embrace other words and what *they* mean' (p. 274). What such *dissémination* provides is not detached and theoretical, but 'dangerous knowledge; knowledge the price of whose acquisition is the risk the reader runs of being changed in his or her self by what he or she reads' (p. 4). It is achieved not by the hermeneutics of suspicion, but by allowing oneself 'to trust and move with the text' (p. 6).

Harrison defends a Wittgensteinian-*cum*-Merleau-Pontyan view of language, and in terms of this aligns literature with Merleau-Ponty's 'constitutive language' which, in contrast to informative language, is in a sense 'occupied solely with itself'; but it is at a second-order level informative, for it makes the workings of our own language visible to us. The language of narrative fiction and poetry,

[54] P. Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poesy*, G. Shepherd (ed.) (Manchester University Press, 1973), 123.

[55] B. Harrison, *Inconvenient Fictions: Literature and the Limits of Theory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 11. The account and criticisms that follow draw on my review in *Philosophy* 68, No. 263 (January 1993) 105–7.



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Harrison claims, is 'constitutive language' which 'makes constituted language visible, by displacing its categories and internal relationships' (p. 52);

> it does this by setting (our own language) against an alternative language, another way of talking about the same things. It shows us our familiar ways of talking ... as *arbitrary* in the Saussurian sense (p. 50);

it thereby 'always and intrinsically poses a potential threat to the continued integrity of the self of the reader'. Hence the narrative metalepses of such as Dante, when he endows himself with the role of a character in his own fiction, unhinging 'the reader's sense of where reality ends and fiction begins' (p. 67).

Well, perhaps. Certainly one can recognize in this account certain characteristic features of literature in general and poetry in particular. One remembers Mallarmé and Eliot in their concern to 'purify the dialect of the tribe' and, going further back, Blake's concern with the cleansing of the 'doors of perception'. It is difficult to think of any work of literature that has stood the test of time to become canonical which does not have the power to unsettle and destabilize one's everyday perceptions. But, and this is the rub, it does so too for those whose everyday perceptions reflect an easy scepticism as it does for those never awoken from their dogmatic slumbers. Blake's 'memorable fancy', it is worth remembering, maintains that 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear as it is, infinite'—which is finely balanced. It presupposes that it is proper to credit a particular claim about reality, but the claim in question points to the impossibility of closure. Much the same applies to Mallarmé and Eliot. Harrison's account of literature in terms of disconfirmation provides a powerful theorization of the impossibility of closure, but apparently at the expense of the positive aspects of the poet's prophetic voice. Lamarque and Olsen notwithstanding, literature certainly appears to have the capacity to destabilize and disconfirm belief, but it has often also been held capable—not least by the poets themselves, Shelley's 'unacknowledged legislators of the world'—of a more positive purifying role. It is worth considering whether this alleged positive, confirmatory, function can also be theorized.

Harrison sees the problem, at certain stages of the argument retreating from the apparently purely negative knowledge his official disconfirmatory account of literature sponsors. Dante, for all his metalepses, writes in the service of a 'Great Truth', and Jane Austen's manner of 'challenging our finest discrimination' (p. 148; a Leavisian tag, quoted with approval by Harrison in relation to her



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work) is not best conceived in terms of 'unhinging' it; rather, as Harrison concedes, she 'may make one aware of just moral discrimination, which one had never noticed'—and this may be more a matter of sharpening and purifying an already given outlook than subverting it. Harrison points out that 'other novels offer other worlds, other air, which we can as easily learn to breathe as the air of Highbury or Mansfield' (p. 153) but notes the strangeness of this. He may well do so, for he does not subscribe to a simple relativism between such worlds: that of Sterne is 'one from which we ourselves could learn something' (p. 97) and this 'something' appears to be a 'vision of things' more just than Locke's; and the workings of New Testament parable are said to enable 'the necessary duality of self-transcendence: the slow climb to successively more adequate levels of vision' (p. 239). But what, on the terms already given, can be the criteria of adequacy?

Harrison is thus led to abandon the claim 'that literature cannot sustain or confirm', attempting to rebut the suggestion that this follows from his position by invoking the notion of 'renovation'.

> My central claim is that the disturbance and renovation of *language* is both the fundamental business and the fundamental technique of literature; and that the renovation of language is inseparable from the renovation of the vision of reality which we share as speakers. ... The renovation of language as the central business of literature cuts deeper than ... the question of whether a given work is found by a given reader to be disturbing and unsettling. or on the contrary affirmative and sustaining. (pp. 59–60)

We are back with Mallarmé and Eliot, but this alleged 'central claim' is not fully worked out, nor is the relation of 'disturbance' to 'renovation' plotted in any detail. We start with the ringing claim that the 'mission' of literature 'is not to impart Great Truths but to unhinge and destabilize them', only to find a fine brash hypothesis dying the death of a number of, inadequately theorized, qualifications.

But perhaps they could be theorized by reference to Harrison's engagement with Frege and a fuller working out of the associated notion of 'relevance' (which of course also subserves Sperber and Wilson's account of implicature and metaphor). If, as Harrison maintains, it is 'impossible to separate the possession of a language from the ability to apply to experience a repertoire of responses and practices' (p. 60), and yet language can transform one's vision of reality through dissemination, it would appear that the disseminative process must take account of matters standardly relegated to pragmatics. On occasion Harrison seems to concede this, as with his



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expressed sympathy for Cavell's[56] 'conception of the interaction between meaning, practice and people's estimates of the possibilities of life' (p. 12), but his account of metaphor appears to operate simply in terms of 'semantic machinery' (p. 273). Perhaps, though, this is only an appearance, for his revision of Frege's 'sense' in terms of a 'criterion of relevance' imports what looks like a pragmatic notion firmly into the heart of semantics. It may be that there is some interdependence between criteria of relevance and criteria of adequacy—such that the nature of the relevance of Sterne's language to the Lockean, taking proper account of the differences of genre and the canons of judgment appropriate to each, enables us to see the greater adequacy of the Sternean vision—and that both sets of criteria converge on the notions of 'disturbance and renovation' in such a way as to clarify their interrelations; but this remains to be seen.

'There is from of old' remarked Plato's Socrates, 'a quarrel between philosophy and poetry', regretfully excluding the 'honeyed Muse in lyric and epic' from the *Republic*'s city of truth; in that dialogue at least, philosophic reason and poetic imagination are in genuine tension, and only the former holds out credible promise of enabling us to see the world clearly and see it whole. In the first flush of enthusiasm, as we have seen, the analytic movement was at once less tactful and more sweeping in its exclusions. But it was not long before warning voices were raised, and it has become clear that the Fregean contrast between 'aesthetic delight' and 'scientific investigation' can be misleading—for the canons of rationality available to aesthetic judgment bear significantly on those investigations that for Frege were 'scientific', enriching that drive to broaden our conception of what it is to exercise our rationality characteristic of a significant strand in contemporary analytic philosophy. Much more nuanced accounts of the interrelations of philosophy, poetry/literature and rhetoric are required than has usually been recognized, not least for an adequate self-understanding of philosophy.

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[56] S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein. Skepticism. Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 177.



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