Literature and Philosophy: Emotion and Knowledge?

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A major attempt to re-examine the relations between literature and philosophy is Martha Nussbaum's *The fragility of goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). She deplores and attempts to undermine the established sharp division between literature and philosophy by arguing (i) that literary texts distinctively appeal to (or 'call upon') 'emotion and imagination'; (ii) that it is a 'fact' that our engagement with literature in general, and tragic poetry in particular, 'centrally involves emotional response'; and (iii) that this emotional response itself constitutes, or helps to constitute, cognitive activity, or knowledge (pp. 15–16).[1] Thus she attributes considerable cognitive value to the emotional responses associated with tragedy—pity and fear—and claims that Aristotle did so also (pp. 378–94).

The first two stages of her argument may appear uncontentious and even true, so I shall begin with her most original, final claim, turning to the first two later. This final claim actually wavers between saying that emotional responses 'help to constitute' (p. 46) (are components of?) learning or understanding, and that emotional response is 'a piece of' understanding' (p. 45). She clearly wants to make the bold, paradoxical claim that emotional response is understanding (pp. 15–16, 45–7) but never puts it in quite so few words. Instead we get rather vague sets of alternatives: emotional responses are 'pieces of recognition or acknowledgement'; an emotional response is 'a partial constituent of' understanding, 'a piece of practical recognition or perception', 'a kind of knowing' (p. 45). It is never clear whether emotional response is to understanding as a spoke is to a wheel (constituent but distinct part) or as a piece of cake is to a cake (segment of identical matter). Another difficulty is that she substitutes so many apparent synonyms for 'cognitive

[1] Deplores division between literature and philosophy: pp. 12, 15–17, 187. Literary texts distinctively appeal to emotion and imagination: pp. 16, 132–4, 185, 204. Emotional response helps constitute cognitive activity (is informative): pp. 15–16, 45–7, 186, 190–1, 217, 378, 390. Further references to this work appear in the text.

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activity': thinking, understanding, learning, self-understanding, practical knowledge, recognition, acknowledgement, practical recognition, perception. To begin with this difficulty we must first ask, what sort of knowledge, or knowledge of what? This is how our 'conversation' with a work of tragic poetry is characterized (pp. 15–16):

> Our cognitive activity, as we explore the ethical conception embodied in the text, centrally involves emotional response. We discover what we think about these events partly by noticing how we feel; our investigation of our emotional geography is a major part of our search for self-knowledge. (And even this puts matters too intellectualistically: for we shall be arguing that emotional response can sometimes be not just a *means* to practical knowledge, but a constituent part of the best sort of recognition or knowledge of one's practical situation.)

Our cognitive activity 'centrally involves' emotional response; and several sorts of knowledge, or objects of investigation, are suggested. We 'explore the ethical conception embodied in the text'; but we are also investigating our own 'emotional geography' and searching for 'self-knowledge', or 'knowledge of one's practical situation'. All this raises several questions. What is the force of 'centrally involves'? Does this mean 'is very closely connected with', and, if so, what exactly is the connection? Throughout, she appears to want to subsume 'emotional response' under 'cognitive activity'; by arguing that 'emotional response' is a part of knowledge, or 'a piece of practical recognition or perception' (pp. 16, 45), the conceptual distinctness of emotion and cognition is in danger of being lost. Does this matter? And does it matter that she conflates the audience's feelings of pity and fear with the sufferings of the stage characters, attributing the proverbial πάθει μάθος (learning by suffering) to both in the same way (pp. 45–7)? When we read a text how instant is the profit of self-knowledge? Do we read primarily to plot a graph of our emotional responses, and do these responses constitute self-knowledge? In this search for self-knowledge do we simply have to respond emotionally to what we read, or do we have to 'respond' or 'attend' to our responses? With what do we 'respond' to our reponses? What happens if we stop responding emotionally—do we become incapable of further self-knowledge? Is understanding a text (not just its words, but its 'ethical conception') the same as self-knowledge? Compare this argument (p. 388): 'For Aristotle the viewing of pitiable and fearful things, *and* our responses of pity and fear themselves, can serve to show us something of importance

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about the human good .... pity and fear will be sources of illumination...as the agent, responding and attending to his or her responses, develops a richer self-understanding.' I shall first of all state my belief (further argument will follow) that self-understanding is distinct from, even if it is sometimes helped by, understanding a text. In dealing now with the relation between understanding ('cognitive activity') and emotional response I shall take 'understanding' in the sense of understanding a text (again, not just its words but the events which it depicts and its 'ethical conception'), which is a case of understanding something outside ourselves.

Understanding and emotional response are obviously vitally connected: it is their exact relation, especially their order, that is disputed. 'We discover what we think about these events partly by noticing how we feel'; 'pity and fear will be sources of illumination'. Many literary critics would claim with Nussbaum that our emotional response helps us 'understand' a work. I would claim that this view is virtually unintelligible and that the exact contrary is the case. Some interpretation or 'understanding', however chaotic or fragmentary, must precede any emotional response. A feeling of fear or panic does not inform us about or alert us to the fact that there is a fire somewhere: we *notice* (a word denoting sense-perception and thought) something, or several things, and we form some (provisional) interpretation which is then immediately accompanied by the appropriate emotion. The emotion is felt precisely *in response to*, or answering, an interpretation. If we then notice signs that conflict with or finally disprove the interpretation, the emotion either disappears or changes. Nussbaum, significantly, would probably agree with this (on p. 383), except that she would call 'belief' what I call 'interpretation' and would include it in her definition (or model) of an emotion. For her, a belief and a feeling of pleasure or pain together constitute an emotion. But I would argue that empirically as well as conceptually (see text below, and n. 5) the two are importantly distinguishable. As we gradually become convinced that there is no danger our fear subsides. She herself says, 'the belief is the ground of the feeling'. But if it is the *ground* it must come first: the feeling is parasitic on the belief, or, in my terms, the emotion is parasitic on the interpretation. As Aristotle said, 'anger follows [ἀκολουθεῖ] reason in a manner, but desire [ἐπιθυμία] does not' (*Nic. Eth.*, VII.vi.1). It is often a sign of irrationality when a feeling (emotion) becomes the ground of a belief. Further, when an emotional response does precede some understanding or event this is considered extraordinary, strange, and inexplicable—furnishing anecdotal table-talk: 'I had this odd feeling, so I moved a couple of

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feet, and seconds later the whole edifice of flower-arrangements fell to the ground where I had been standing.'[2] The feeling is often described as 'odd' because for a time it seems not to have an object. But literary criticism does not proceed by way of premonitions. Further, how sophisticated would an emotional response have to be before it could help us understand a work of art? Would 'I like this' do? Or 'I find this bit particularly moving'? Are emotional responses at all sophisticated? When I notice, for example, that the ending of *Women Beware Women* always makes me laugh I may conclude that, if not a comedy, the play is a bad tragedy. But does my response precede and help to form an interpretation of the play? If asked why I am laughing I do not say 'I don't know, but I am hoping that my laughter will be a source of illumination for me'. I laugh *because* the ending strikes me as ridiculously contrived; furthermore, my finding the ending ridiculous is based firmly on an appraisal of the entire play up to this point and an acknowledgement of its seriousness. My response of laughter, then, proceeds from an understanding of the play and thence may contribute to a valid criticism of it. But it will be the reasons for the laughter, not the laughter itself, which will form the nub of the criticism. We should be extremely wary of saying that we depend to any degree on our emotional responses to inform us about a work. There is a danger that, in failing to understand, or misunderstanding, a work we may respond with feelings of irritation and boredom—our thoughts baffled—and then attribute these responses *to the work*, as if our 'responses' are always interesting and reliable indicators: so we say 'This work is puzzling, baffling, frustrating, boring' and then, even worse, erect some critical appraisal of the work on the assumption that it was deliberately designed to be so. This sort of thinking, not uncommon among literary critics, is like a scientist declaring that a problem is *interestingly* insoluble—because he cannot solve it. All we can say as critics is that if we find we have a distinct response to a work (and we may not), then we know we have come to a certain (mis)interpretation of it. Analysing our responses (of pity, fear, boredom or amusement) will not illuminate the work. Rather, our interpretation (or failure to interpret) determines our response; and it is our interpretation—however limited or even mistaken—that should exercise the critical faculty, and may illuminate the work.

The same curious thinking about the cognitive nature of the emotions enters Nussbaum's discussion of Plato's *Phaedrus*,

[2] Table-talk at Mrs Kingman Brewster's, University College, Oxford.

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250b–251e. By her own exposition, 'we "apprehend it [beauty] through the clearest of our senses as it gleams most clearly" (D1–3); this stirs our emotions and appetites, motivating us to undertake its pursuit' (p. 214). Plato makes a very strong contrast between visible *beauty*, and all but invisible *virtue*: likenesses of justice, temperance, and wisdom in the world lack lustre, and are (scarcely) visible only to a few. But Nussbaum glosses thus (p. 215): 'The role of emotion and appetite as guides is motivational: they move the whole person towards the good. But it is also cognitive: for they give the whole person *information* as to where goodness and beauty are, searching out and selecting, themselves, the beautiful objects.' But Plato is arguing that it is beauty, not 'the good', that is visible, a beauty that arouses in the pure and impure either passionate emotion (ἔρως) or mere appetite (250e–252b). He says nothing whatsoever about the beloved's being good, specifically denying that the virtues similarly stir the senses and thence the appetites and emotions. (If virtues stir the emotions, I should suppose the route would have to be via the intellect.) The emotions and appetites are not cognitive; they give no information about where goodness is, nor even about beauty, *since we already know where beauty is*. *Ex hypothesi*, the perception of beauty arouses appetite and emotion. In other words, emotion presupposes the perception of beauty, it does not inform us about it: it is therefore of course sense-perception which is partly cognitive, or informative. Since this emphasis on the cognitive role of emotion and appetite is always her own interpretative gloss on Plato, we must dispute her conclusion (p. 222) that *Plato* argued that (i) appetites can teach us about the beautiful, and (ii) passions function cognitively, or give us information.

As for Aristotle, Nussbaum argues that he attributes a cognitive value to the responses of pity and fear themselves. There is no evidence for this in the *Poetics*, and therefore Nussbaum has to resort to an unusual interpretation of catharsis, according to which it must be understood in its 'primary, ongoing, central meaning' of '"clarification"' (p. 389). Accordingly, 'we can, then, say without hesitation that all along the meaning "clearing up" and "clarification" will be appropriate and central ones for *katharsis*, even in medical and ritual contexts' (p. 390). But this is not true of the very important uses of *catharsis* in *Politics* VIII.vii, which Nussbaum attempts to dispose of in a note (p. 503 n.18). Here is the crucial passage (*Pol.* VIII.vii.4):

> we should use music for several beneficial purposes, not just one, for example, for the education of the young and for *catharsis* (the

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> meaning of *catharsis* I leave unexpressed at the moment and shall explain more clearly in the *Poetics*), and thirdly for entertainment, for relaxation and relief from tense effort.[3]

What is abundantly clear is that Aristotle is not using *catharsis* in any 'primary' or 'central' sense, for if he were he would not need the warning parenthesis; even if the immediately following context, where he speaks of the medicinal cure and *catharsis* effected by sacred music in those prone to morbid excitement, did not assure us that he is thinking of *catharsis* as a therapeutic purgation, the presence of 'σαφέστερον' ('more clearly') in his parenthesis rules out the meaning 'clarification': if he had meant by *catharsis* 'clarification' he had the exact word to hand for such an easy explanation. Nussbaum argues that Aristotle's remarks are 'unclear': '*Katharsis* is linked in some way with medical treatment; but it is also linked to education' (p. 503). To infer from this a 'comparison of philosophical instruction to medical treatment' (p. 503) reveals a misunderstanding of Aristotle's argument. Education and *catharsis* are not being linked here but separated: music has several different purposes—for education, *catharsis*, and entertainment. *Politics* VIII.vii.4–6 uses *catharsis* in its medical sense but in a context that Aristotle feels is perhaps unusual enough to require the obligatory apology for using metaphor. 'Clarification' will not do here at all, and there is the explicit cross-reference to the *Poetics,* where it will not do either. Nussbaum's suspect translation makes it impossible for us to agree with her interpretation of part of Aristotle's definition of tragedy there ('effecting through pity and fear the *catharsis* of such emotions' (Hubbard, p.97)): 'clarification, for him, can certainly take place *through* emotional responses, as the definition states' (p. 390). Not so: when Aristotle talks about *catharsis* in the *Politics* he talks about *relief*, accompanied by pleasure, *from hysteria,* and *from too much pity and fear*, the relief being a therapeutic side-effect—rather like pleasure. And the cognitive clarification that he argues is produced by tragedy is produced by its *mimēsis* (*Poetics*, Ch. 4, Hubbard, p. 94): only when such cognitive clarification is effected by the *mimēsis* of the action, character, and intellect, are pity and fear aroused. Our reactions of pity and fear do not produce understanding: they are produced by it.

[3] D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, (eds.), *Ancient Literary Criticism: The Principal Texts in New Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), Ch.3, 'Aristotle', translated by M. E. Hubbard, p. 133. This chapter is subsequently referred to as 'Hubbard' in both text and notes.

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Amidst her argumentation Nussbaum at one point confuses the issue by saying that Aristotle delivers the view, shocking to 'a middle-period Platonist', that cognitive clarification is 'produced by *the influence of* pity and fear' (p. 390, my emphasis). This may be a slip, but it is not the same as saying that pity and fear themselves constitute or are constituents of cognitive clarification, which is what she has been saying throughout and goes on to say (p. 391). The difference is important. For while objecting to this latter formulation, the saving phrase 'the influence of' in the former lets in so much that it is possible to agree with it, if we now consider another possible object of cognitive clarification. For it becomes increasingly apparent that for Nussbaum the object of this 'cognitive clarification' is not so much the play (which we had thought was under discussion) but '*ourselves*' and '*our values*' (my emphases, p. 390). Possibly she thinks these come to the same thing and so are not worth distinguishing, for she consistently assimilates them. We are back to the question which I posed at the beginning: are we trying to understand the play or ourselves? Nussbaum never asks: what is this cognitive clarification of? I have been arguing that our emotions of pity and fear are aroused by an understanding of a plot concerning others and that these emotions therefore do not help us understand this plot and set of characters. But now there is a further (different) question: can our understanding *of ourselves* be helped by *the influence* on us *of this emotional experience* of pity and fear? I have indicated that the answer is possibly yes; but more discussion is needed.

Nussbaum is of course correct in saying that in *Poetics* Chapter 4 Aristotle argues that 'our interest in mimesis is a cognitive interest, an interest in learning' (p.388). We have to discover what is being represented—and this implies an act of interpretation—before we can say 'This is that'. So if 'tragedy is a *mimēsis* not only of a complete action, but also of things arousing pity and fear' (*Poetics*, Ch.9, Hubbard, p. 103), what is the point of our pity and fear? It has to be said first of all that Aristotle's mention of things arousing pity and fear is solely to specify the type of action to be expected in a tragedy; so he might well have been puzzled by the question 'what is the point of pity and fear?'. But I would argue further that the audience's pity and fear indicate and are a measure of its identification with the stage characters, and this identification is vital in enabling the audience to learn anything at all from the—usually extraordinary—experiences represented. Identifying imaginatively with what the stage characters suffer enables spectators to see such suffering as a real possibility for themselves: hence pity and *fear*.

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Aristotle can thus almost incidentally, as it were, prove against Plato (by implication) that it is not always bad to have one's emotions aroused, for in this case the aroused emotions may actually *help drive home* to us a piece of learning, rather than interfere with learning, and then are *relieved* (as a natural result of their intensification). Aristotle explicitly links the arousal of pity and fear by tragic action to the arousal of surprise: pity, fear, and surprise are especially aroused 'when things happen unexpectedly but because of each other' (*Poetics*, Ch. 9, Hubbard, p. 103), and it is these two features—unexpectedness and causality—that are vital to our aesthetic pleasure in tragedy: the pleasure of suddenly realising some truth. Our pity, fear, and surprise do not constitute or contribute to the realisation, the sudden understanding: they are aroused by it. It is the *plot*—what Aristotle calls tragedy's 'principle of life' (*Poetics*, Ch. 6, Hubbard, p. 99)—that effects the sudden realisation.[4] *Pace* Nussbaum, then, the way in which our responses of pity and fear can contribute to our knowledge of life or our self-knowledge is extremely limited. It is not our pity-and-fear that enables us to identify with the stage characters: it is, again, the requirement of the *plot* that the characters represented should be like us (*Poetics*, Ch. 13, Hubbard, p. 106). Because they are like us, we can imagine that what happens to them could happen to us. This is identification. Once we identify with the stage sufferings, we must feel pity and fear both for the stage characters and for ourselves. But the dreadful circumstances of that particular pity and fear are already given in the plot; that we should learn further from the tragedy requires us to think about how those circumstances, in altered detail, might have already affected us or might one day affect us. Such thinking may be initiated by the emotional jolt of (or 'the influence of') pity and fear; but it is not done through or with pity and fear, and its object is not the pity and fear but the circumstances which aroused these emotions. We learn (or grow in self-understanding) by applying the truth that the tragedy has shown us to our own lives.

To conclude, if Aristotle believed that tragic action could be 'a source of genuine learning' (Nussbaum, p. 382), this is not because of its emotional effects—these are incidental and mentioned in response to Plato—but because of the plot itself: *our knowledge of the sort of thing that happens to a sort of person* (*Poetics*, Ch. 9, Hubbard, p. 102). This is the 'philosophical', truth-giving, 'informational' essence of tragedy. Finally, on the whole people are more emotionally susceptible in youth than in later years; if it were true that emotional response was a necessary part of the understanding

[4] See Hubbard, p. 87.

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of a play, it would follow that most people would understand less as they got older.

Nussbaum's attempt to close the gap between literature and philosophy by arguing that emotional response to literature is a sort of cognitive activity is unconvincing. I asked whether it matters that the conceptual distinctness of 'emotional response' and 'cognitive activity' is in danger of disappearing. I should say it matters very much. It is not surprising that Nussbaum's very definition of emotion involves its swallowing up the concept of belief (p. 383).[5] I have argued that an emotion is a response to an interpretation (of appearances). An emotion is therefore psychologically connected with thought, but it is usefully differentiated from thought by being associated with marked physiological effects: rapid pulse, blushing, sweaty palms, and so on. Most emotions, moreover, notoriously interfere with clear thinking, for which a state of calm, not turbulence, is usually required. It may be helpful however to distinguish between *passing* emotions—of fear, anger, delight, anxiety and so on—which rest on an interpretation or some sort of thought-process, and much *larger-scale*, deeper emotional turbulences that may occur only once or twice in a lifetime and last months or even years, like falling in (or out of) love, or the grief of bereavement. The latter may indeed 'tell us things'—about ourselves and others; but it is still very doubtful that we are enlightened by the emotions, and not rather by whatever triggers the emotion, which we then think about when the immediate physiological effects have died down. For even these larger turbulences can be characterized as a series of smaller ones—a series of large waves, so to speak, not a single tidal wave that blots out everything. It is often the case, to be sure, that at the time we are not fully aware of what it is that has given us a certain feeling; this may become clearer after sufficient reflection, when we finally realize and perhaps say 'I should have known *then*!'. That is, the evidence (or some of it) was available at the time—and it was the evidence that created the feeling—but we

[5] Nussbaum refers to *Rhetoric,* 1378a 31 (Loeb, II.ii.1) on p. 383 n. 11 (p. 501). But in this definition of anger Aristotle nowhere mentions *belief* (δόξα); he refers (with insistence) to 'τιμωρίας φαινομένης διὰ φαινομένην ὀλιγωρίαν' ([a longing] 'for an apparent revenge because of an apparent slight'), where the emphasis is on *appearance*, not belief. Cf. *Rhetoric*, II.viii.1: 'φαινομένω κακῷ' ([pity excited] 'by the sight of evil'), and II.v.1: 'ἐκ φαντασίας μέλλοντος κακοῦ' ([fear caused] 'by the impression of an imminent evil'). The language used to define emotions is not in terms of belief and judgement but in the less intellectual terms of appearances, of how things look (φαίνεσθαι = to have the appearance of being).

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failed properly to understand the evidence, or, as we loosely say, what our feelings were 'telling' us, precisely because feelings *do not explicitly tell us anything*. Now it is surely these larger-scale turbulences which are the subject of most tragedies, and which the stage characters are to be imagined as feeling; but these feelings are quite different from the audience's pity and fear, which, however much elicited or triggered by these imagined large turbulences, are in themselves *passing* emotions, the object or ground of which is a certain interpretation of an action located in a text which is open to inspection in a way that the past (in memory) is not. Hence one cannot allow with Nussbaum that the proverbial πάθει μάθος can be simply transposed from the characters in a play to the spectators; nor assume that the phrase itself—poetically economical—means that emotional turbulence in itself constitutes knowledge. There is, after all, an ambiguity in the Greek: πάθει can mean 'by, through emotion', or 'by, through suffering', and *suffering* is a much more inclusive term than *emotion*. It includes, importantly, all the after-reflection, or the mental work, that may be *set in motion* by the original emotion but *comes after* it.

Greek tragedy—indeed much serious literature—deals with suffering in this inclusive sense, and so deals with far more than the emotions (whether passing or large-scale). In her discussions of individual works Nussbaum implicitly acknowledges this; but in her theoretical statements, and therefore in the first two stages of her argument which I began with, she reveals the assumption, probably Platonic in origin, that 'poetic' means 'to do with the emotions'. Here is a selection from one part of the book, though the assumption (often widened to 'literary') is present throughout:

> Plato...[modified] his own philosophical style so as to include *emotive and rhetorical elements associated with poetry*.
>
> In Plato's *Phaedrus* and in Aristotle's ethical thought, we have an agreement that the pursuit of practical wisdom is fostered by *works that contain poetic elements and address themselves to the emotional 'part' of the soul*.
>
> The style of our chapters on tragedy attempted to be responsive to the *poetic features* of the texts; thus it showed a responsiveness to *metaphorical and emotive language*.[6]

Aristotle used literary examples in his ethical works to illuminate marginal (and sometimes central) cases because he thought that poetic works (more so than history) were intellectually illuminating. The same attitude is everywhere attested in the *Poetics* which

[6] Nussbaum, pp. 391, 392, 394 (my emphases).

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stresses the learning-appeal, the intellectual pleasure, afforded by tragedy.[7] He does not say or imply anywhere that 'poetic elements'—whatever these are—'address themselves to the emotional "part" of the soul'. He does say that two of the three conditions for propriety of *prose* style are that 'the style be capable of expressing emotion and of expressing character' (*Rhetoric*, III.vii.1, Hubbard, p. 145); this hardly suggests that he thought the expression of emotion to be the distinctive essence (or criterion) of poetry, even if poetry 'involves... high excitement' and therefore compound words, plurality of epithets, and unusual terms are especially suited to it (*Rhetoric*, III.vii.11, Hubbard, p. 146). Nussbaum speaks of 'poetic elements' and 'emotive and rhetorical elements associated with poetry'. From Jacqueline de Romilly's study of the relations between poetry, magic, and rhetoric I conclude that it is not easy to isolate such things as 'poetic elements'; the histories of poetry and rhetoric are so intertwined that it is probably impossible to say in general whether the features described in rhetorical terms originated in poetry or prose, though it is possible to say with regard to at least one feature.[8] In 'Gorgias and Magic' de Romilly isolates several features of poetic style—rare and compound words, dignified themes, rhythm, antithesis, and metaphor—precisely to show that these features, because they were considered to have a 'magical' (that is, emotional or inspirational) effect in poetry, were deliberately cultivated in ancient Greek literary prose, particularly by the rhetorician Gorgias. But it is not clear that any of these features even in poetry necessarily express or arouse emotion *by themselves* ('among the means by which poetry could work upon people's emotions, antithesis had its place, *since it enhanced the meaning and made it more powerful*' (p. 9, my emphasis)). And she herself argues that Gorgias's elaborate prose style—full of puns, wordplay, and rhyme—is intellectual and does not count on inspiration: 'it is just style, and an intellectual display of skill. The only thing it appeals to is intellectual surprise, by stirring curiosity, attention, or excitement' (p. 20). This effect can only be explained, she thinks, by supposing that these figures underwent a 'great change' when transposed from poetry into prose—which I doubt. But if she too seems to associate poetry necessarily with the emotions, she also argues most interestingly in 'Plato and Conjurers' that there was felt to

[7] Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.xi.23.

[8] Jacqueline de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), passim; antithesis first used in poetry, pp. 9–10. Further references to this work appear in the text.

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exist a 'magic', equal and opposite to that of Gorgias and the sophists, exemplified in Socrates; it aroused wonder, bewilderment, shame, and great emotional excitement (oddly composed of pleasure and distress) ('corybantic ecstasy', pp. 33–4)—and she might have added anger and hatred—but it was the magic of thorough analysis, inexorable truth, devoted to 'the obstinate destruction of all illusions' (pp. 36–7). So philosophy—intellectual stimulus—can also arouse the emotions (or 'high excitement').

It is as mistaken as it is tempting to seize upon lists of rhetorical terms and declare that they are the elements of poetry, and even more mistaken to claim that they are therefore emotive. Although he would not agree with my line of argument, T. S. Eliot has rightly pointed out that 'the greatest poetry can be written with the greatest economy of words, and with the greatest austerity in the use of metaphor, simile, verbal beauty, and elegance'.[9] Eliot's observation was prompted by Dante's *Inferno*, and it is hard to imagine a more elegant rhyme-scheme than *terza rima*. Nevertheless, his main point stands. Since, for all his talk of 'escape' from personality and emotions, the expression and arousal of emotion is absolutely central to Eliot's conception of (great) poetry, as his criticism everywhere attests, he would not need convincing that when elaborate figures of thought and speech do occur in poetry (or prose, for that matter) their effect is very far from being necessarily emotional.[10] Figures of thought (for example, personification, allegory, euphemism, irony, litotes, metaphor) and figures of speech (which are to do with word-order—chiasmus, asyndeton, oxymoron, anaphora, alliteration, antithesis, rhyme) on the whole have an aesthetic rather than an emotional purpose and effect; though figures of thought may lend themselves to a style of heightened emotion more easily than figures of speech—except perhaps for anaphora. After all, poets have to do most work—resort to elaboration and artifice—when nothing very much is happening (either emotionally or in the action); and when things are happening a too elaborate style will frequently spoil the effect.[11] This can happen in prose too: de Romilly has suggested that Gorgias's style may in some circumstances be criticized for 'preventing us from paying attention to what is actually said' (p. 19). But many literary devices can be used properly and effectively in prose, even philosophical prose, where the writer can be just as

[9] 'Dante', in *Selected Essays*, third ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 252.

[10] 'Escape' from personality and emotions: 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', ibid., p. 21.

[11] Compare Aristotle, *Poetics*, Ch. 24, 1460b 2–5 (Hubbard, p. 126).

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interested in aesthetic (or stylistic) features—word-order, balance and sound of sentences, a sinewy argument—as in his bare sense. Some special stylistic features, moreover, even when they do occur in poetry, can be purely technical, used to announce the operation of a generic convention, like epic or Attic tragedy, and again do not necessarily appeal to the emotions.[12] Someone desperate to assert that poetry is essentially emotional might here object that I have ignored the crucial elements, metre and rhythm. Surely we all know that rhythm appeals to the emotions. As a generalization this is patently false (in music as well as verse, as the experiment of clapping one's favourite tune shows). In combination with other features, *some* rhythms, *some* of the time, may do so; metre is essentially a patterning device and may be cleverly manipulated, or deliberately broken, to reinforce the sense: if this happens to be an emotional sense the effect of the rhythm at that point may be to move the reader. But you cannot have permanently 'significant' rhythm; special effects are made against a humdrum background—which is nonetheless rhythmical or metrical.[13] So great is Aristotle's desire to claim *mimēsis* as the criterion of poetry that he rejects the use of metre as such a criterion (*Poetics*, 1447b ff. and 1451b ff., Hubbard, pp. 91, 102, 103). But in addition to *mimēsis* Aristotle offers the criterion of dignity of style (to match dignity of subject-matter); excellence in poetic style is defined as what is 'both clear and out of the ordinary' (*Poetics*, 1458b, Hubbard, p. 121). Poetic style is not mean or commonplace (though *mimēsis* may require occasional lowering of tone (*Rhetoric*, III.ii.3, Hubbard, p.137) and clarity may demand the judicious use of standard vocabulary). Hence the emphasis on the rare or unusual: dialect, metaphor, and 'decorative terms' (the meaning of which is obscure) (*Poetics*, Ch. 22, Hubbard, pp. 121, 119 n.5). By contrast, good prose style should above all be clear, and 'neither mean nor too elevated': like poetic style it should arouse the wonder due to strangeness, but only where appropriate and with a care to appearing natural; it should not draw attention to itself obviously but be familiar without being mean (*Rhetoric*, III.ii.1-7, Hubbard, pp. 137–8). The contrast is at root

[12] I owe this point to Miss M. E. Hubbard.

[13] Cf. Paul Fussell on metre: 'It is apparent that m. does not do the same things in lyric that it does in poetic drama; nor does it do the same things in narrative poetry that it does in satiric. Its function is mnemonic in "Thirty days hath September" and in the metered genealogies of epic; musical and hypnotic in *Kubla Khan*; and oratorical and analytically pedagogic in the *Essay on Man*.' *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger, enlarged ed. (London: Macmillan, 1975), *s.v. meter*.

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one of subject-matter: that of prose is less elevated, more ordinary. It is not necessarily less emotional.

To say that poetry is mimetic, or fictional, will not solve all our problems because we know that there are some kinds of poetry – lyric, descriptive, and philosophical (or didactic)—which are not obviously mimetic.[14] But it will save us first from over-emotionalizing poetry, and secondly from the affective fallacy. This last may be defined as a preoccupation with the *emotional effect of a work* to the neglect or underestimation of its sense; the 'affective fallacy' was so called in a well-known article by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley.[15] But despite the fact that its dangers have been identified for so long, it is still very pervasive in drama criticism. This may be for several reasons. In counter-attack to Wimsatt and Beardsley, David Daiches asked: why is the affective fallacy in any sense a fallacy?[16] Daiches reprinted this essay in 1966, saying 'My qualifications of the "new criticism" are now generally accepted, so in a sense this essay has dated' (p. vi), so it is worth going back to it in the hope of challenging this general acceptance at least with respect to the affective fallacy. Though he says many sensible things in passing, he misses the point of the criticisms of the affective fallacy by resolutely ignoring the word *affective*. He speaks of 'effect' and 'impact'—sometimes 'communicative impact'—when what is at issue is whether this is (exclusively) emotional. 'The value of literature surely lies in its actual or potential effect on readers'—admittedly on readers who have developed 'a proper responsiveness and discrimination' (p. 173): 'To deny this is to fall into the "ontological fallacy" of believing that a work of art fulfils its purpose and achieves its value simply by *being*, so that the critic becomes concerned only to demonstrate the mode of its being by descriptive analysis.' Daiches' 'ontological fallacy' is an 'Aunt Sally' since no one, least of all Wimsatt and Beardsley, succumbs to it: a painting

[14] Aristotle knew also: see *Poetics*, Ch.1, 1447b 13–20, Ch. 3, 1448a 22–3 (Hubbard, pp. 91, 93). Descriptive poetry may be representational without being fictional, the latter requirement being lost by the English translation of *mimēsis* as 'representation', but yet perceptible in 'imitation'. See Gerald F. Else, ibid., *s.v. imitation*.

[15] 'The Affective Fallacy': first identified as such by W.K.Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley in *Sewanee Review*, 57 (1949), 458–88; rpt. in *The Verbal Icon* (London: Methuen,1970).

[16] David Daiches, 'The "New Criticism": Some Qualifications' (1950), in *Literary Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956; rpt. with corrections 1966), pp. 167–79; p. 173. Further references to this work appear in the text.

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must of course be seen, music heard, and literature read by people; the mere existence of works of art would be meaningless if there were no one to enjoy them. Daiches does not analyse what he means by 'effect' or 'responsiveness' or 'communicative impact', with the results that he does not begin to grapple with the issues raised by Wimsatt and Beardsley—even if they raise them in a not totally satisfactory way—and involves himself in self-contradiction (pp. 171, 176):

> A poem is an immense complex of meaning which is nevertheless simple and immediate in its impact.
>
> The 'appreciative' critic will use any means at his disposal—analytic, descriptive, histrionic, yes, even historical—to arouse alert interest, to produce that communicative impact without which all further critical discussion is useless.

If we are beholden to the critic for producing the communicative impact it cannot also be true that the impact is either simple or immediate. This is a complex area but perhaps one substantive point can be made: that the *effect* of a poem, play or novel on us is often to make us want to read something else: other poems, plays, novels; history; biography; criticism; philosophy. This is, I dare say, a universal experience, and it is an effect of arousing our interest, not our emotions.

If Daiches' essay has been taken to have rescued the affective fallacy from the charge of fallaciousness, this is one possible reason for its continued prevalence. But there are others. There is a widespread tendency to assimilate 'dramatic effect' and drama audience to rhetorical effect and the audience of an orator, which is exactly the same mistake that Aristotle discerned and corrected when he contrasted a statement made in a poem/play with an identical statement made in a work of history (*Poetics*, Ch. 9, Hubbard, p. 102 n.1). It is to confuse poetry with rhetoric, a work of art (or imitation) with actual (or real) life. In de Romilly's discussion of the close relations between poetry and rhetoric she talks about the ancient assimilation of rhetoric to poetry as regards their aims—to arouse the emotions, so she argues—and their means. Before tragedy, poets claimed only to be able to create 'the magic peace and pleasure connected with inspired music' (p. 5). With the development of tragedy Gorgias added to these unemotional feelings the two specifically tragic emotions of fear and pity (p. 5): 'He insisted on the possibility of thus creating a personal reaction to the good or bad fortune of other people, which was to remain characteristic of

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tragedy. It is almost too obvious to point out that Aristotle's description is exactly the same, and that these two emotions are exactly those he mentions as the aim and result of tragedy.' We have already seen that Aristotle does not argue that the *aim* of tragedy is to arouse these two emotions; and of course he never identifies poetry and rhetoric (and de Romilly does not suggest he does). But she argues convincingly that 'the very aim of rhetoric was... fixed at the start by Gorgias' reference to the irrational influence of poetry, and particularly of tragic poetry' and that 'by a sort of reciprocal influence, poetry was more and more treated as a kind of proto-rhetoric' (p. 7). The result, which we can see clearly reflected in Plato (in the *Ion* and *Gorgias*), was that poetry became infected with all the bad associations of rhetoric—lies, deception, flattery, and the aim of swaying listeners by working on their emotions (pp. 7, 25–6, 40). It is probable, then, that the common assumption, which de Romilly seems to share (pp. 9, 13), that (all) poetry has to do with the emotions is rooted in this false generalization based on tragedy; and even deeper than this, in the old confusion between poetry and rhetoric. For the emotions of pity and fear aroused by tragedy, while they may be strong enough to drive a point home, are not the same as the raw emotions of pity and fear aroused in actual life by orator or demagogue. After all, it is Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, not his *Poetics*, which features an analytical list of the emotions. Although such a confusion has a very long history, then, the confusion of poetry with rhetoric in contemporary criticism of Renaissance drama (seen in its emphasis on effect) may have been exacerbated by scholarly work on the influence of ancient and Renaissance rhetoric on the drama. But the distinction must be upheld. Almost anything may go into a work of art, but the end-product has aesthetic status. There may be a rich *display* of rhetoric in Shakespeare's plays (particularly the early ones) but we never mistake this for the play as a whole.

Finally, a third discernible cause of the longevity of the affective fallacy is the deplorable twentieth-century preoccupation (though it too has a longer history) with what a work of art is supposed to do to us (emotionally) at the expense of what it might be *saying* to us: the tendency to see (all) literature in either expressionist or emotivist terms (and sometimes both) as affording just another sort of emotional uplift (or 'high') or another sort of manipulation. The influence of emotivism, long appreciated by philosophers, and its invasion into literary criticism, which is not the concern of philosophers unless they happen to be aesthetic theorists, do not seem to have been noticed by many literary critics. Beardsley is the only

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major philosopher I have found who has noticed the implications to literary criticism of the ethical theory of emotivism.[17]

The *rapprochement* that Nussbaum is seeking between literature and philosophy is scarcely served by the twin assumptions that 'poetic' means 'to do with, or appealing to, the emotions', and that 'poetic' language is always 'emotional' or 'emotive' ('moving').[18] Yet these assumptions pervade her discussion of Plato's *Protagoras* and Sophocles's *Antigone*, 'Interlude I: Plato's anti-tragic theater', in which she first puts forward the points of contact between Plato's dialogues and 'works of tragic theater'—principally their use of dialogue, and their concern with ethical questions—and then argues for the distance between them. The latter part of her argument is conducted with particular reference to *Protagoras* and *Antigone*, and it is this which concerns us: that *Protagoras* is 'philosophy as drama', 'drama' insofar as it uses dialogue, but opposed to tragedy and opposed to 'the merely literary' (p. 134). Distance from tragedy is taken to be distance from the literary. But we shall see that a large part of the distance that Nussbaum discerns between *Protagoras* and 'the merely literary' is imported by her own assumptions. These are betrayed by statements about poetic texts 'that teach by appeal to emotion and feeling', about 'theater's characteristic appeal to powerful emotion' (p. 133), texts 'with an irrational or emotive character' (p. 134), and poetic speech being 'associated with the increased activity of the emotions' (p. 132). These generalizations about poetry may originate, as I have suggested, in taking tragedy as the archetype of poetry; but such presuppositions lead not only to a systematic over-emotionalizing of poetry (and all literature) but also an over-emotionalizing of tragedy itself—in this case *Antigone*—and an underestimating of the emotional and playful aspects of the philosophical dialogue under discussion, such as to perpetuate the gulf between literature and philosophy that she is trying to narrow. Since she often uses 'to philosophize' as the equivalent of 'to think', we are thrown back on the old, straightforward dichotomy: philosophy is equated with thought, intellect, and rationality, while literature is equated with emotion, imagination, irrationality.

[17] M. C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, second ed. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1981): 'Affective Terms' (pp.41-43), 'Import and Purport' (pp. 116–19, 147–8), 'Literature and Emotive Language' (pp. 119–22), 'The Emotive Theory' (pp. 474–8, 496–7).

[18] These assumptions are everywhere in Nussbaum but see (e.g.) p. 204 n.5 (p. 470) (the 'moving poetic language' of *Phaedrus*). She also tends to link the imagination only with the emotions (pp. 16, 185).

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Having discussed the most important feature common to tragedy and the philosophical dialogue (namely dialogue, the essence of drama), she turns to those features she takes to be distinctive of each. The first is the actual verbal style of the opening of *Protagoras*. This she rightly characterizes (pp. 129–30) as 'a simple conversational Attic prose', 'unmetrical' and 'anti-rhetorical'; it is 'plain, unvarnished speech', 'flat and unadorned'. (Actually, 'flat' is an overstatement: the style has charm and humour.) 'To set such speech on the page is by itself to declare one's difference from the poets and rhetoricians, who deploy the resources of rhythm and figure so as to influence the non-intellectual elements of the soul.' Later, she refers to its 'unemotional and unemotive style' (p. 224). But it is a fallacy that simple, 'plain, unvarnished speech' cannot appeal to the emotions; and that rhythmical and figurative language necessarily does. Shakespeare's plays frequently expose this fallacy, both by example, and by having characters explicitly remarking on the fact that rhetoric can chill and plain speech move. It is connected with another fallacy she betrays—one propagated by the emotivists—that there is a 'language that appeals to... emotion' (p. 132), that there are certain words or types of word, certain 'figures', or rhythmical combinations that must arouse our emotions: that there is a kind of language that is *emotive*. This view has one very important corollary: that literature is all about emotional manipulation, and that philosophy, which does not employ this kind of language, is necessarily less emotional than literature. But I must simply state here that the arousal of emotion is dependent on *content* and *context*, not on a certain sort of vocabulary. If the opening of *Protagoras* is not emotional, that is because of its content and context. (Almost immediately after the opening passage quoted by Nussbaum (pp. 129–30) the dialogue actually depicts the excitement of Socrates' companion at the first mention of Protagoras; and Socrates 'places' this amusingly by his satirical portrait of Hippocrates' similar excitement and desire to learn from Protagoras.) Simple prose may not be found in the tragic theatre of Plato's time; but it is certainly not exclusive to philosophy for it is found in historical and comic writing. The fact that Plato distinguishes his work from *poetry*—again, both by example, writing in prose, and explicitly, as at the end of the discussion of Simonides in *Protagoras* (347c–348a)—does not mean that he was distinguishing it from *the literary* in the way Nussbaum suggests (p. 134): 'In Plato's anti-tragic theater, we see the origin of a distinctive philosophical style, a style that opposes itself to the merely literary and expresses the philosopher's commitment to intellect as a source of truth.' It is a barren exercise to

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try to distinguish tragedy (or 'literature') from the philosophical dialogue on the grounds of *verbal style*. The opening of the *Protagoras,* stylistically speaking, could occur in a play. It might be objected that Nussbaum has just picked a bad example, and that later parts of the dialogue would furnish conclusive evidence of a distinctively philosophical *style of argument*, and I would agree. I am not arguing that there are no differences between philosophy and literature. I am arguing that the dialogue's eschewing of (tragic) poetry does not declare it to be non-literary. Nussbaum herself notes (p.122) that in the *Poetics* Aristotle 'classifies the [Platonic] dialogues as prose dramas, alongside the realistic urban mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus'. Aristotle may have been 'at a loss' (p. 122) to characterize them *exactly*—though our ignorance about Sophron and Xenarchus rather suggests that it is we who are at a loss—but he obviously considered them a type of literature.

Nussbaum further argues that *Protagoras* has no tragic *action*: it does not have 'Creon, Antigone, their struggle; anger, *erōs*, grief, pity. In short, (1) characters engaged in an action that is of the deepest importance to their entire lives, and (2) the non-intellectual elements of the human soul' (p. 130).To be sure, *Protagoras* does not depict the story of a deeply emotional struggle, it depicts an argument (or arguments); but it also depicts passionate interest in these arguments, general enjoyment, pleasure (in the story Protagoras tells), a conversation that threatens to fall apart in dispute saved by friendly and interested intercession, satirical characterization, playful irony, wounded vanity, a contest in poetry exegesis, extended stylistic parody (Prodicus, Hippias, Protagoras's story), and some close reasoning. There are thus present many depicted emotions, and many literary, or fictional, features, but those associated with comedy (intellectual comedy), not tragedy. But can we say that the emotions depicted are the equivalent of 'the non-intellectual elements of the human soul' that are found in *Antigone*—its 'anger, *erōs*, grief, pity'? How non-intellectual are they? The first point is that there is depicted no emotion deeper than a mild embarrassment and those emotions (and virtues) surrounding learning: (zeal), (lively interest), (emulation), admiration, enthusiasm, friendliness, and enjoyment. These are not the most intense emotions. The second point is that intense emotions are not aroused *by* the work, despite its being assuredly literary and full of interest, charm, and humour. Its mimetic features or events (enumerated above) are not incidental but perfectly natural concomitants—even components—of intellectual debate, and they form a sort of comic action. To prove that Plato intended to create a new,

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distinctively philosophical, anti-literary genre, it is not enough to prove that his work is anti-tragic; it has to be proved that it is anti-comic, and this plainly cannot be done.

Nussbaum's separate discussion of *Antigone* (in Chapter 3) does full justice to its intellectual aspects and appeal; but in these theoretical statements she falls into the old simplification. Set against *Protagoras*, *Antigone* is presented as appealing primarily to the emotions (p. 131): 'Both works demand our active engagement and response. But the dialogue engages our wits. It demands that we be intellectually active. Its dry and abstract tone [*sic*] positively discourages the arousal of emotions and feelings .... Dramatic elements are used to engage us initially: once we are engaged, it is intellect that this work claims.' In the context (pp. 130–1), it is clear that 'dramatic elements' are those that are emotionally 'engaging' . But she has already argued that the opening of *Protagoras*, its scene-setting, is flat, unmoving, quotidian. So where are the 'dramatic elements'? No: there is nothing initial about the work's 'dramatic elements'; they inform the entire dialogue because it is (by her own admission) dialogue that is the essence of drama. But then she would be forced to the unwanted conclusion that the entire dialogue is emotionally engaging. There is inconsistency and confusion here, and what seems to have gone wrong (in part) is that the meaning she attaches to 'dramatic elements' seems to change. The dialogues, *qua* dialogues, are 'dramatic representations through and through' (p. 126 n.17 (p. 455)), but then 'dramatic elements' are said to engage us only initially, as the dialogue moves 'from particular characters to general accounts, and... from the emotions and feelings to the intellect' (p. 131). I suspect that what she means by 'dramatic elements' is mimetic elements, since these are perhaps most striking at the beginning; and that once, as she sees it (with some oversimplification), the philosophical discussion gets under way, we have, not *mimēsis*, but actual philosophizing.[19] Operating here seem to be equations between the dramatic, the mimetic, and the emotional. But of course where you have fictional dialogue you must have *mimēsis*, which therefore continues throughout; and there is nothing

[19] It has been suggested to me privately by Margaret Hubbard that Plato's own view of *mimēsis* may be partly responsible for Nussbaum's confusion. 'The crucial passage is in the *Politicus*, where absence of knowledge is an essential characteristic of *mimēsis*. If someone acts like the true statesman without knowledge, that is *mimesis* and bad; if he acts like him with knowledge, that is not *mimēsis* but another instance of the real thing. So Plato's dialogues, one could argue, are not *mimēseis* of people philosophizing but instances of philosophizing.'

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intrinsically or necessarily emotional about *mimēsis*, in this case fictional prose dialogue. Here, in the idea that *mimēsis* is necessarily emotional, we have either the root or the consequence of the assumption that literature is emotional. Plato's dialogue, it seems, is emotional where, insofar as, it is mimetic, or literary.

I wish to argue, however, not just that philosophy can be dramatic but (the converse) that drama can be philosophical, and that whether either is emotional or 'engaging' is another question. The clash of argument, of intellectual standpoints, is essentially dramatic, and essentially interesting—whether it appears in a work of philosophy or a play. And what is interesting, 'gripping', or fascinating, is not necessarily the same as what is emotionally arousing. If I am intellectually excited by a book, the only physical symptom of this may be that I fail to look up if someone comes into the room, that I cannot easily be distracted or roused. It would be very odd if the intruder should ask, 'What are you so wrought up about?' or 'What's the matter?'. Conversely, we can be infuriated by things or people that we do not find interesting. Nussbaum speaks of 'theater's characteristic appeal to powerful emotion' (p. 133). There is no such 'characteristic appeal'. The theatre has always been a useful forum for the debate of ideas—and these may but need not be emotionally arousing ideas; theatrical experience is not always intensely emotional. Even tragedy, which by definition depicts a pitiful and fearful action, also explores it. That is, if *Antigone* does have present in it 'the non-intellectual elements of the human soul'—'anger, *erōs*, grief, pity'—this by no means exhausts what it has. Further, what is emotionally arousing is equally associated with historiography, biography, novels/romances, and some philosophy. As *Protagoras* depicts, the very process of learning—whether in the study or the theatre, whether reading philosophy, history, (auto)biography or a fictional work in verse or prose—can arouse the emotions directly, insofar as the process is accompanied by stabs of shame at realizing one's former ignorance or folly, or joy at understanding something or solving a problem.

I come now to Nussbaum's last point in her discussion of the distance between philosophy and poetry: that the Platonic dialogue aims at grasping some general truth, whereas tragic dialogue is confined to the exploration of a particular case and cannot aspire to anything more general (p. 134). This is powerfully disputed by Aristotle in his celebrated distinction between the particular, *historical* statement 'Alcibiades did X', which is not validly extendable to others, and the *literary* statement, 'Alcibiades did X', which is, because it means that Alcibiades is the sort of man who would do

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this in such circumstances (*Poetics*, Ch. 9, Hubbard, p. 102). Obviously there are literary works (some realistic novels?) which only depict individual idiosyncracy; but tragedy is not like this. Nussbaum concedes that we could not learn from tragedy at all 'without generalizing to some extent, applying Creon's learning, *mutatis mutandis*, to our own case' (p. 134). But this still blurs the vital point that Creon is not presented as a real-life, or historical person; he appears in a tragedy and as such is seen as a certain type of person, though, as Aristotle pointed out, endowed with a proper name. Nussbaum's view of tragedy seems to assimilate it too closely to life (p. 134): 'It continually displays to us the irreducible richness of human value, the complexity and indeterminacy of the lived practical situation. Our primary responsibility is always to the particular rather than the general.' Aristotle argued precisely the contrary, and to the contrary conclusion (Hubbard, p. 102):

> The difference between the historian and the poet... is that the one tells us what happened and the other the sort of thing that would happen. That is why poetry is at once more like philosophy and more worth while than history, since poetry tends to make general statements, while those of history are particular.

As Hubbard explains (pp. 102, 86), the statements of poetry,

> though in form the same as the historians', are in fact taken to be statements of the greatest generality that its subject-matter allows.
>
> The tragic poet, presenting individually characterized people in specific situations, makes us aware of moral facts and moral possibilities relevant to more than the situation he envisages.

Nussbaum acknowledges Aristotle's argument in a later section (p. 186 n.38 (p. 468)) but does not reconcile it with her final argument in 'Interlude 1'.

I have been arguing with the reasons Nussbaum gives for the distance between philosophy and literature, not for the view that there is no distance. We have seen that philosophy can be dramatic (and not necessarily very emotional) because dialogue is the essence of drama. The Platonic dialogue is a hybrid form, literary (or artistic) in being mimetic, philosophical in its concern with the truth (or knowledge) about the actual world, with sound and unsound arguments, with conceptual analysis, and clear definitions. Let this be a definition of philosophy adequate for my purposes. Now, is the converse true, that drama—whether Sophocles or Shakespeare—can be philosophical? This proposition seems to rest on the assertion that

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dialogue is the essence of philosophy. Nussbaum's assumption that it is dialogue that drama and philosophy have in common actually conceals an important difference signalled by my speaking earlier about *fictional* dialogue. Of course in a very loose and extended sense all writing is 'dialogue' in that we are either talking to ourselves or to others (not present), or engaging with their views. But mimetic dialogue is not the essence of philosophy. And although philosophical activity takes place in speech as well as writing, conversation—or 'real-life' dialogue—does not necessarily constitute philosophy either. It becomes obvious that the difference between philosophy and literature cannot be located in terms of either style or genre, but in terms of the concerns with truth and clarification that are not exclusive to philosophy but that philosophy pursues primarily, if not exclusively. Philosophy does not have to be mimetic; but it *may* be written in verse (witness Parmenides, Xenophanes, Empedocles) and it may take trouble with matters of style. And we have noted that not all literature is mimetic. The distinction between literature and philosophy is not absolute but a matter of degree. I want to argue that works of literature can with justice be termed philosophical when they betray a strong interest not only in 'philosophical ideas'—ideas which have traditionally been discussed in philosophical treatises—but also in conceptual clarification and connections. I also want to argue that what distinction there is between philosophy and literature does not cut along the same line as the distinction between intellect and emotion-cum-imagination. (And this tendency to assimilate imagination and emotion is itself highly questionable.) To do this I only have to show that there are works of imaginative literature as much intellectual as emotional. But as I have already suggested in my comments about the emotions connected with learning, I shall also show that even non-mimetic philosophy can be emotional—that is, can either arouse emotion or be written under emotional pressure. Without repudiating the distinction in principle between intellect and emotion, I repudiate the dual equations of philosophy with pure intellect and literature with pure emotion-cum-imagination—as if the purest (best) philosophy would be found to be entirely without passion and imagination, and the purest (best) literature would be entirely without intellectual rigour (precision and cogency).The first part of this enterprise would ideally need more argument but can still be adumbrated as I close this paper; the second can be done very briefly here.

I take three examples of philosophical writing 'uncontaminated' with *mimēsis* and dialogue, one ancient and two modern. In all, the *subject-matter,* though not the treatment, is found to be intrinsically

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emotional. In *Rhetoric* II.ii-xi Aristotle describes in great detail the necessary conditions which must obtain for each emotion to be felt, giving only a few literary or historical examples. For the most part, then, we flesh out his exact definitions with examples which readily come to mind from our own lives; this causes us to remember and re-experience earlier emotions which are therefore often more real or immediate than those aroused by literature (fiction). And this fits with the fact that our emotions tend to be more aroused by, and we tend to take more pleasure in, a work of art or literature insofar as it overlaps with our own experience (and therefore personal understanding). (Not that emotional arousal and pleasure necessarily go hand in hand: a book that arouses our emotions at the time is not necessarily one which in the end gives us most pleasure, which we end up 'loving' or feeling most deeply *about*.) Such anyway is implied in Aristotle's theory of *mimēsis*. E. M. Cope comments on *Rhetoric*, I.xi.23 : 'The *inference* is from the copy to the original, which must have been seen before, if any pleasure is to be derived from the imitation; and the learning arises from the observation of the two and the comparison of them whereby we acquire some knowledge of what the things really are.'[20] So in reading Aristotle on the emotions we may contribute entirely our own specific experience while following his analysis of the general paradigm. And in this case the reawakening of emotion need not interfere with learning: we may even learn which emotion we felt (for example, ζῆλος (emulation) rather than φθόνος (envy) or vice versa). Aristotle's accounts are rational, analytical, abstract, and general; *and* they appeal strongly to the imagination and hence, here, even if unintentionally, to the emotions.

There are emotionally arousing subjects—love, death, our dwelling-places, how we are governed—and literature often deals with them; but they can also be dealt with in geography, history, and philosophy. Quite apart from the demand that philosophers use their imaginations, philosophy can in a literal and conventional way appeal to the imagination, and where it deals with emotional issues can be emotionally disturbing and show signs of having been written under emotional pressure even if it treats these in a rational way. David Wiggins's style in 'Claims of Need' is a case in point.[21] In few

[20] *The Rhetoric of Aristotle with a Commentary*, ed. E. M. Cope, rev. J. E. Sandys, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1877), I, pp. 217–8; 'the natural pleasure which attends all acquisition of knowledge... is assumed as the foundation of the love of imitation' (p .218). See also Hubbard, pp. 86, 94, 134, 150.

[21] David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, second ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), Essay I, 'Claims of Need', pp. 17–8.

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words he expounds the views of detractors of the concept of need, conjuring up vividly to the imagination and to the feelings a terrible picture of 'urban blight', which, these critics say, has been caused by a series of measures inspired by the idea of human need. The word *terrible* is used advisedly: the facts, or results, are terrible, and so are the reasons for them, for it is frightening to see the harm done by good intentions and ill-considered condemnation (in both senses) of entire neighbourhoods, without imagining what worse might be under complacency and corruption. The passage, though conspicuously well-written, is not an isolated piece of description, but itself a piece of argument and part of an argument seeking to show the architectural, social, and economic consequences of accepting uncritically a certain over-simple concept of human need: and this in turn is part of a wider argument about the concepts of need and justice. The arguments in the passage are couched in strongly evaluative language—'the bleak monotonous environment, the graceless stereotyped architecture'—and in fairly polarised words for good and bad things: piecemeal improvement, practical initiative, trees, grass, local industry and business are set against wholesale 'slum' clearance, the paralysed client condition of tenants, tower blocks connected by windswept walkways and pedestrian underpasses and divided by higher capacity roads, the dispersal of industry and business. The account is evaluative, and in this case, because of the subject-matter, the vital interest we all have in our environment and where we live, it is also charged with, and arouses, both fear and indignation. The description is written from the point of view of one who 'deplores and laments' these 'dismal scenes', and it is clear that Wiggins shares this view and acknowledges the force of the arguments of the detractors of the concept of need; but his larger argument is concerned with how far the idea of need (properly understood) really is to be blamed, and what refinements in our appreciation of need are necessary to rescue it from summary dismissal from our political and philosophical vocabulary. Certainly this piece of philosophical writing is moving; but its aim is to invite us to think about ideas and their practical consequences.

These two examples are relatively small-scale. My third is an entire book which has impressed many with its vigour and drive, and which was avowedly written under the influence of the heightened emotions occasioned by the Second World War: Sir Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies*, particularly Volume One, *The Spell of Plato*. The horrors of invasion and occupation by a totalitarian foreign power, and consequent war, focus thought on what is worth preserving and fighting for: and perhaps it is to its

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'fighting spirit' as much as to its intellectual and literary excellence that it owes its exhilarating effect on its readers. This effect is predominantly caused by intellectual, not emotional, excitement, even though its subject is government, and its treatment may arouse awe and admiration.

Like works of history and fiction, then, philosophy can bear marks of the circumstances under which it is written, and be nonetheless 'timeless' or 'universal'. We seem in this last example to be approaching the area where *emotion* becomes *motive*, so I should want to distinguish all three examples from the very basic emotional involvement we may feel in our work, interests or hobbies. People get emotionally involved in whatever is important to them, and this can be almost anything, from mathematics and astronomy to motorcars and postage stamps. This sense of something's being important (intense though it be, amounting to a 'burning interest') is not in itself an agitation, interfering with intellectual activity, but the essential driving force (motor? motive?) of such activity. Popper must have had this too; but it is different from the emotional pressure discernibly originating from the War.

Like Martha Nussbaum, I deplore and want to undermine the sharp division between literature and philosophy, but by arguing in a quite other direction. For she seems repeatedly to reinforce the distinction she is trying to break down by assuming that fictional literature appeals to the imagination and feelings—as if philosophy does neither, and as if literature makes no appeal to the rational intellect. In particular, I hope to have shown that her two-pronged argument that it is the distinctive feature of literature to evoke an emotional-imaginative response, and that this is itself cognitive, is wrong in both parts. I want to argue that literature can be as intellectually challenging as philosophy, and that we do not have to be emotionally aroused by it. Further, much philosophy demands imaginative involvement; may arouse the emotions if it happens to deal with emotional subjects; and (if it is very good) may be so exciting that an emotional response of wonder (awe, admiration) is appropriate (witness Alcibiades in the *Symposium*). The province of the imagination is not coterminous with literature and certainly extends to philosophy, physics, and mathematics. There may be distinctions between literature and philosophy but they are not to be drawn in terms of either emotional or imaginative response.

Nussbaum's assumptions do not help us discover the distinctions that can usefully be made between philosophical and literary activity. Any adequate definition of philosophy would have to include its basic and pre-eminent concerns with validity of reasoning and

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conceptual clarification, and the use of these instruments to question conventional wisdom, or 'received ideas'. But this is only its skeleton: it can be fleshed out in the exquisite prose of Hume or the scenic and humorous dialogues of Plato. Such a skeleton often informs many other disciplines too, so that philosophy often seems to be concerned with the tools of thought required for any discipline. All I wish to argue here is that it is not the case that all literary experience, by definition, has to be characteristically emotional; and it is not the case that philosophy, by definition, never appeals to the emotions. Nussbaum's arguments result in the view that insofar as philosophy is emotionally arousing it must be approaching poetry (p. 226); and (the corollary) that insofar as literature is not emotionally arousing it must be approaching philosophy. We cannot use the blanket distinctions emotional/ intellectual (or feeling/thought), or emotional/ unemotional, to distinguish between literature and philosophy. Nor are 'emotional' and 'imaginative' interchangeable terms. My purpose here being to show that the distinction between literature and philosophy is not a hard and fast one, I wish now to adumbrate how philosophical ideas (or ideas which have usually been handled in philosophical treatises), philosophical method (the sifting of ideas), and philosophical questioning about ultimate values, all find a natural place in at least some works of literature. That is, they are concerned with the making of correct conceptual distinctions in situations which are fully imagined and embodied in particular fictional people and places. Of course this has always been said about Plato's dialogues—but apparently so often accompanied by the emotional/intellectual distinction (according to which they are emotional insofar as they are literary). It has not been seriously demonstrated in Shakespeare's plays. Exactly *how* philosophical these are is a matter of perception. For I argued above that the plays are not works of rhetoric just because they contain bits of rhetoric; and I do not want to argue that they are works of philosophy because they contain bits of philosophy. Whether such hybrid works arouse emotion or not is a further question (and one which proves not very interesting). The plays I have considered require of readers or spectators imaginative involvement certainly; but they also require conceptual analysis. How much emotion is ever aroused depends on the content of the play and on the individual spectator. I can only assert here that there is no such thing as an 'emotive language' which is characteristically 'poetic', or found in poetry and absent in philosophy.

I have argued that the *rapprochement* Nussbaum is seeking between literature and philosophy is scarcely served by the

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assumption that 'poetic' means 'to do with the emotions' and that 'poetic' language is always 'emotive'. It is with the same aim, however, to seek such a *rapprochement*, that I have approached some of Shakespeare's plays in an Aristotelian spirit, concentrating on their *mimēsis*, on what is represented by means of their normative (or morally evaluative) vocabulary. What we actually learn depends of course on what is represented. Our conclusions will be, to use some of Nussbaum's own examples (p. 388), not the simple one, 'That's a horse', but the more complicated, 'That's a cowardly action', or 'That's a case in which deprivation of loved ones has dislodged someone from eudaimonia'. This last is perhaps even as an example unsatisfactory in its generality. I would offer more specific ethical identifications—of a type less obvious than 'This is a case of a prodigal' (which does not distinguish between Prince Hal, Bassanio, and Timon). To take *Troilus and Cressida*: 'This is a case of emulation based on lack of self-worth' (Troilus); 'This is a case of emulation together with acrasia' (Hector); '...emulation based on pride' (Ajax); 'This is a case, not of emulation, but of its close relation, envy' (Thersites). For in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare not only makes Hector allude explicitly and most aptly to Aristotle, thus drawing attention to the relevant touchstone, but explores a well-defined group of vices and virtues that are treated by Aristotle, namely pride (magnanimity), emulation, envy, wantonness (profligacy), and incontinence (unrestraint or acrasia). *All's Well that Ends Well* is less obviously Aristotelian but because of the play's action and its very distinctive normative vocabulary the subject of true judgement is constantly raised: how *bold*, *modest*, *confident*, and *presumptuous* are our judgements? At the conceptual level—that is, in the deeper characterization and motivation that Shakespeare injected into his source story—*All's Well* was clearly enriched by Montaigne, as probably by Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning*, in its exploration of the relations between pleasure and pain, restraint and courage, presumption and humility, honesty, knowledge, truth, and belief. In *All's Well* too is embodied the distinction between μαλακία (softness) in Parolles and καρτερία (endurance) in Helen. We may see here a possible development from Shakespeare's interests in *Troilus and Cressida*; for Aristotle argued that the opposites, endurance and softness, are related to pain, as self-restraint and unrestraint to pleasure (*Nic. Eth.,* VII.vii).

Macbeth shares with *All's Well* a concern with (misplaced) confidence, true courage, betrayal, imposture, and healing; and a preoccupation with deliberation, choice, action, and the means and ends of action. It may well have been influenced by Aristotle's treatment

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of voluntary, 'non-voluntary', and involuntary action, and of the relation between courage and temperance; but it is possible to make a case for the influence of Plato and Augustine also, and in this play the moral questioning seems to go beneath any specific moral vice or virtue down to a metaphysical level of inquiry about the nature of good and evil, truth and lies. I have argued elsewhere that *The Merchant of Venice*, while not concentrating exclusively on a particular cluster of closely related ethical terms as Shakespeare's later plays tend to do, presents exactly the same chain of tight conceptual connections that we find forming the entire logical backbone of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: happiness, pleasure, virtue, the mean, choice, equality, reciprocity, justice, liberality, and friendship.[22] A much later play, *Timon of Athens,* also imbued with Aristotle, opens with a very striking collocation of scenes, whereby I.i depicts 'plurality of friends', and the following scene 'flattery'—a logical sequence of ideas made explicit in two of Plutarch's moral essays translated by Philemon Holland in 1603 and found to have echoes in the text of *Timon* itself: 'Of the Pluralitie of Friends' and 'How a man may discerne a flatterer from a friend'. Act One thus begins to describe the relevant conceptual field occupied by this deeply questioning philosophical play: friendship and flattery, honour, liberality, prodigality, justice, reciprocity, anger and resentment. Indeed, once these conceptual relationships, and their provenance, are recognized, many other features of the play are illuminated; for example, the function of III.v, long found puzzling, is found to epitomize the play's concern with friendship, justice, ingratitude, anger, resentment, and faction—in relation to Alcibiades at that moment, but in relation to Timon later.[23]

It is on the basis, then, of interpretative judgements such as these that we will be better equipped to understand the particular constellation of values each play crystallizes and explores, and hence its *intellectual structure*. Only at this stage can we expect to have a full aesthetic response and (if any) emotional response. I have argued that our capacity to 'respond'—either emotionally or aesthetically—lies dead or dormant until we understand what a work is saying, and

[22] Isabella Wheater, 'Aristotelian *Wealth* and the Sea of Love: Shakespeare's synthesis of Greek philosophy and Roman poetry in *The Merchant of Venice*', *The Review of English Studies* New Series, 43 (1992), 467–87 and 44 (1993), 16–36.

[23] Shakespeare's indebtedness to Plutarch's *Moralia* and to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in *Timon of Athens*: argued in my D. Phil. thesis 'Moral Theory and Shakespeare's Use of Normative Vocabulary' (Oxford, 1986), Part III, ch. 3.

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how it is saying it. We may even think we understand a work, and have all sorts of appropriate responses, only to discover flaws in our interpretation, the modification of which then produces different responses. If a work simply puzzles our critical understanding, we have no response, and it is only honest to admit this. I suspect therefore that I must reject T. S. Eliot's influential dictum, which has done much harm by being quoted out of context, that 'genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood'.[24] Although 'communicate' is obscure, this seems to say that we can enjoy or respond to (genuine) poetry before we can understand it. Such a view, I have argued, is unintelligible; so it is interesting that in the course of the essay it becomes clear that this is not exactly what Eliot means. He actually means that Dante's poetry can be understood and appreciated at one level—the allegorical level—before it is understood and appreciated at a deeper level—the level 'beneath' the allegory.[25] This interpretation is endorsed by Eliot himself when he summarizes his view in a less paradoxical, less striking, and truer way (p. 268): 'in good allegory, like Dante's, it is not necessary to understand the meaning first to enjoy the poetry, but... our enjoyment of the poetry makes us want to understand the meaning'—where *meaning* clearly means 'further, deeper or fuller meaning', released by repeated readings and the cultivation of scholarship, and producing a deeper understanding that supervenes on the initial, superficial verbal understanding and excitement. Eliot's dictum has relied on an equivocation on 'understood' for its impact. Finally, I have also been arguing that it is our interpretation of a work—that is to say, *what* we understand and appreciate about its content and style—not our responses of pleasure, excitement, boredom, and so on, which is of interest critically: not our responses, but their objects. The dead-end that greets followers of the theory that it is our responses to, or 'experiences' of, literature that we are to examine and evaluate must be apparent to anyone who has struggled with the views of I. A. Richards, another believer in the 'emotive power' of words, and one of the inventors of the false distinction between 'emotive language' and 'referential' or 'descriptive' language, which alone is said to make statements.[26]

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[24] Op. cit. note 9, 238.

[25] ibid., 243, 245, 250, 253.

[26] I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, second ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,1926), passim; *Practical Criticism*, second impression (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1930). There is in

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Richards a blend of emotivism and expressionism. Emotivism: *Practical Criticism*, pp.5-6, 181, Appendix A n.1 passim, p. 364 n.5. Poetry as primarily emotional: *Practical Criticism*, pp. 186, 187, 191, 210–24, 229, 301. Expressionist aesthetics generally: *pretty, beautiful, splendid, glorious, ugly* are mere expressions of feeling (pp. 220–1). For Richards, the 'experience' of reading a poem is to have 'the whole state of mind, the mental condition, which... *is* the poem' produced in us (*Practical Criticism*, pp. 204, 11); 'the adjustment *of our feelings*' is the source of our satisfaction in reading poetry, which is 'a means for reorganising ourselves' (pp.229, 252); in his psychological terms: 'behind our rejection or acceptance (even of a minor poem) we feel the sanction and authority of the self-completing spirit' (p. 304). On 'experiences' of art see Beardsley (n. 17 above), Ch. 1, para. 4 'The Object and its Presentations', pp. 43–56; but Richards' emphasis on 'experience' is congruent with his concern with *emotional effect*. Max Black makes some valid criticisms of Richards and Stevenson in 'Questions about Emotive Meaning' (*Language and Philosophy: Studies in Method* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1949), pp. 203–20, 255–57), though his criticisms of emotivism do not go far enough.

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