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Introduction

The present issue of the Croatian Journal of Philosophy *is dedicated to the conference* Truth, Fiction, and Literature, A Philosophical Perspective with Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen *held in December 2022 and organized as part of the research project* Aesthetic Education through Narrative Art and Its Value for the Humanities, *funded by the Croatian scientific foundation (https://aetna.uniri.hr/). The conference was honoring the immense impact that Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, in their individual and joint writings, had on literary aesthetics and contemporary philosophy of literature. The conference intended to mark the twenty-eight anniversary of their book* Truth, Fiction, and Literature, A Philosophical Perspective*; we wanted to celebrate its outstanding and unsurmountable impact on all philosophical theories of fiction, literature, aesthetic cognitivism and other topics in literary aesthetics developed since its publication in 1994. As the conference organizers, we are deeply thankful to Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen for their participation at the conference and for delivering immensely inspiring keynote lectures. Our gratitude extends to all the conference participants and the* Croatian Journal of Philosophy *for dedicating this issue to it.*

Since 2024 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Truth, Fiction, and Literature, A Philosophical Perspective, *this issue of the* Croatian Journal of Philosophy *is yet another way to honor the amazing achievement of Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen. In many ways, they set the foundations for the development of the analytic philosophy of literature, enabling us to appreciate why literature is a form of art and providing us with philosophical tools to evaluate it as an art form in its own right. Their collaboration in this book not only established new grounds for how philosophers and literary scholars thought of literature and approached it, but remains, to this day, one of the most fruitful examples of successful interdisciplinary collaboration. The fact that their book has, for thirty years now, been so inspiring to philosophers, literary scholars and literary theorists shows how original and insightful it is. It is certainly not an exaggeration to say that it is one of the most important books ever published in domain of narrative art and it is hard to find a contemporary scholar working on literature who does not engage with ideas developed in this outstanding book. We hope that this issue of* Croatian Journal of Philosophy *will inspire further interest in these topics. We are grateful to all the authors and reviewers for their contributions.*

The papers presented here address some key concerns of the Truth, Fiction and Literature. *In the opening paper,* Peter Lamarque *defends his particular account of literary interpretation, according to which it is a mistake to rely on theories developed by philosophers of language to understand any given work. Instead, he argues, interpretation should be concerned with value, rather than with meaning, it should not focus on individual sentences but on whole works, and it should not be obsessed with authorial intention but should rather focus on the protocols of reading.* Antonia Heigl *discusses some of the ways in which literary works of art can be cognitively valuable. Her analysis is grounded in her comparative exploration of differences in conceptualization of the literary work of art developed by Roman Ingarden on the one hand, and Lamarque and Olsen on the other.* Alex Obrigewitsch *in his paper explores the notion of lyricism and offers an interesting approach to lyric poetry, analyzing the relation between lyricism and language of poetry.* Elisa Paganini *explores how Lamarque and Olsen's notion of appreciation relates to the discussion about the interaction of ethical and aesthetic value in a work of art, and defends the claim that an immoral perspective of a work of art can enhance its aesthetic value.* Stelios Virvidakis *and* Antonia Kosena *discuss the cognitive value of those works of literature that are self-referential, i.e. those in which literary writing refers to and reflects on literature itself. Their discussion is placed at the intersection of aesthetic cognitivism and debates related to the relation between literature and philosophy.* Nellie Wieland *explores a difference between fiction and literature and argues that a norm of literary fiction is to compel the reader to form beliefs about the world as it is.* Rafe McGregor *and* Reece Burns *discuss Richard Rorty's notions of writing vs. righting and bring them in connection to Stephen King's views about writing, in order to argue for the value of social science as part of the intellectual activity of writing and the practice of fiction to that intellectual activity. In the final paper,* Dorit Barchana-Lorand *challenges Lamarque and Olsen's account of literary interpretation and its connection to the society's values, by offering an analysis of the literary censorship which reveals that, in certain instances, a society's nature can be better comprehended by examining the works it seeks to eliminate and denounce.*

In addition to these original papers, this issue of the Croatian Journal of Philosophy *contains a review by* Ema Luna Lalić *and* Iris Vidmar Jovanović *of the recently published* Philosophy of Fiction: Imagination and Cognition, *edited by Patrik Engisch and Julia Langkau.*

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Literary Interpretation is Not Just About Meaning

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The paper proposes a radical change of focus for understanding the fundamental purpose and value of literary interpretation. It criticises an orthodox view in analytical philosophy of literature, according to which theories of meaning in the philosophy of language, in particular Gricean or speech act or other pragmatic theories, offer the most illuminating way to grasp the relevant principles of interpretation. The argument here is that the application of such theories in this context is not just wrong in detail (this or that theory needs revising) but wrong in principle. The focus is wrong. The importation of philosophy of language distorts the essential character of interpretation, which should be seen as involving not so much meaning as value, not individual sentences but whole works, not obsessed with authorial intention but focused on the protocols of reading.

Keywords: Interpretation; “meaning of a work”; Derek Attridge; Noël Carroll; Robert Stecker; Kathleen Stock; Linguistic Fallacy; textual explication; subject; theme; literary value.

1. *Introduction*

Reflecting the title of this paper, my theme is largely a negative one: that when analytic philosophers turn their attention to literary interpretation more often than not they get distracted by their own familiar theories of meaning or intention or fiction and thus miss altogether the peculiar, sui generis features of interpretation, as widely practised, indeed the very features that give point and value to serious reflections on works of literature. It is no wonder that the philosophers’ terminology—utterer’s meaning, utterance meaning, modest actual intention-

alism, hypothetical intentionalism, truth in fiction, and so forth—has gained little traction within literary critical circles. Philosophers on this topic have been mostly talking to themselves. No doubt there are many reasons why analytic philosophy has been ignored by literary critics and theorists, not least their own captivation by other styles of philosophy and other kinds of intellectual concerns about literature itself. In fact, however, it is possible to detect some signs of rapprochement in this standoff—most notably in works by Derek Attridge (2015) and Terry Eagleton (2012)—with more interest in the theorists' camp now shown to questions about value and aesthetics and ethics relating to literature. But I still do not see much interest in the imports from philosophy of language.

My own thought is that scepticism by literary critics about analytical approaches to meaning and intention in the literary sphere, to the extent that they pay them any attention at all, is largely justified. And I will try to say why. But my message is not entirely negative, and I will at least lightly sketch a picture of literary interpretation which breaks away from the philosophical paradigms of meaning and shifts its focus elsewhere: in a word, from meaning to value, from understanding to appreciation, from individual sentences to the achievements of whole works, from a focus on intention to reflection on the very practices of reading.

2. *Examples of literary interpretation*

To give all this some substance we need to know what we are talking about in addressing literary interpretation. The trouble is "interpretation" is a very loose, ill-defined term and covers different kinds of discourse and aims. But I suggest there is a familiar kind of commentary on works of literature that most would agree does exemplify literary interpretation even if there might be disagreement about how central or representative such cases are. Here are some examples to get us started:

> If the personages are mostly bewitched by a false god [money], the novel [*Our Mutual Friend*] as a whole is a work of de-mystification. [...] This is accomplished first through the language of the narrator. The voice the reader hears is cool and detached. [...] This is especially apparent in the scenes of the Veneering dinner parties. These are described in the present tense, in language that is cold and withdrawn, terse, with an elliptical economy new in Dickens. Sometimes verbs and articles are omitted, and the reader confronts a series of nouns with modifiers which produces the scene before the mind's eye as if by magical incantation: 'Dining-room no less magnificent than drawing-room; tables superb; all the camels out, and all laden. Splendid cake, covered with Cupids, silver, and true-lovers' knot.' [...] The ironic detachment of such language makes the consciousness of the narrator (and of the reader) into a mirror uncovering the emptiness of the characters. The reader himself becomes the great looking-glass above the sideboard which shows what money has made of life. This mirror-like detachment to a

greater or lesser degree is the narrative perspective of the entire novel. It allows the reader to escape from the enchantment which holds the characters. (Miller 1964: 908–909)

Othello [...] is about male attitudes towards women—and each other—and thus Desdemona must stand as a symbol of what men destroy. [...] *Othello* is a profound examination of male modes of thought and behaviour, especially with regard to women and 'feminine' qualities. Iago is honest; he speaks the ordinary wisdom of the male world. The consequences of the values he shares with the other males in the play destroy the 'feminine' values held by Desdemona, above all, but also Othello, Emilia, Cassio, Roderigo. And Iago never changes. He remains. He endures without cracking, the only character in the play who never shows a sign of emotion or passion or the weakness he despises, although his behaviour clearly has to be motivated by passion. He talks about lust, but never shows any sign of it. The prime exponent of reason and control stands firm even as the world around him collapses, even knowing that he caused its collapse. Although tortures are promised, things that will make him speak word again, this brilliant verbal manipulator, this poet for whom silence is indeed punishment, stands alive at the end of the play, surrounded by bodies, and is, in our imagination, triumphant. (French 1992: 243)

Do not fear Baas.
It's just that I appeared
And our faces met
In this black night that's like me.
Do not fear—
We will always meet
When you do not expect me.
I will appear
In the night that's black like me.
Do not fear—
Blame your heart
When you fear me—
I will blame my mind
When I fear you
In the night that's black like me.
Do not fear Baas,
My heart is as vast as the sea
And your mind as the earth.
It's awright Baas,
Do not fear.
("The Actual Dialogue" – by Mongane Wally Serote)

'Do not fear Baas': the four words come from nowhere, or from the darkness of my pre-poem anticipation, unannounced, unlocated, unidentified; before I take them in as a statement, they brush against me in the dark as the physical signal of another human presence. Yet when I understand them as a meaningful sequence, they offer reassurance, seeming to know in advance the alarm that they will cause, and offer to allay it even as they produce it. [...] Somewhere in the background, further complicating the tonality, hovers

> the angelic utterance, 'Fear not'. But it is not reassuring to have one's fears predicted, mapped out, at least not by the source of those fears. I have been seen, and seen through, while I remain in the dark. [...] [E]ach time I speak [the words in the poem] I have to choose a particular tone, setting a limit to the range of nuances that play across them. [...] This remains true of the following lines. 'It's just that I appeared': words of explanation and comfort, yet conveying the alarm of an encounter with an apparition, emerging suddenly out of nowhere—the nowhere that people of 'other' races inhabit in a racist culture. 'And our faces met': what could be simpler and more calming. Yet at the same time there is something disturbing about the notion of faces, rather than people, meeting. (Attridge 2004: 115–116)

We can note obvious differences in the passages. One refers to a novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, one to a play, *Othello*, and the third to a short lyric poem, "The Actual Dialogue" by Mongane Wally Serote. They represent different critical approaches: one broadly humanistic, one feminist, and one exemplifying what Derek Attridge calls the "singularity of literature."[1] And they highlight different aspects of the works they discuss: the narrative perspective of the novel, the attitudes of characters in the play, the mood and tone of the poem. But similarities outweigh the differences. Each is a recognizable instance of a familiar kind of literary criticism, in which particularities are given salience under broader themes, affording new perspectives on the works in question. They propose interesting ways of thinking about the works that might not be obvious on a superficial reading, and which potentially add to the rewards to be found in the works.

In spite of the familiarity of this kind of commentary, we should pause to note just how peculiar such discourse is when we stand back and reflect on it. After all, both the novel and the play are narratives with characters, a plot, dialogue, and so on, which in themselves are not difficult to discern and describe. With some attention, we know what is going on, who does what, who says what, what happens to the characters in question. This we might call the *subject* of the works—the stories told.

But the interpretations move well beyond an account of the subjects alone. They look, as it were, above or beyond the subject, to some further significance or interest, underlying it or arising from it: in a word they move from the subject level to the thematic level. And the points made are far from self-evident. After all, is it not strange to be told of *Our Mutual Friend* that "The reader himself becomes the great looking-glass above the sideboard which shows what money has made of life"; or to be told that "*Othello* is a profound examination of male modes of thought and behaviour" and that Iago, who we know in the story weaves a web of deception, is "honest" and "speaks the ordinary wisdom of the male world?" It is not as if the critics are incompetent or getting side-tracked. They are playing a different game. It is not

[1] Attridge also calls this style of criticism "minimal interpretation" (Attridge and Staten 2015).

the game of "what happens in the story?" It is the game of "what else is going on?" or "what sense can we make of this?" It is the same with the Serote poem. Picturing the scene described, grasping the subject, is not difficult. But the critic moves beyond that: he asks about his own visceral, affective, imaginative response prompted by the lines, why they move and disturb him, why he is drawn back to the poem, why it is worthy of further reflection, what value it has, why it has depth for all its surface simplicity.

Let me make one or two further initial observations about these interpretative commentaries. I have deliberately chosen fairly long quotations because any interpretation that merely makes a bald statement but fails to offer support is of little worth. As it is, these quotations are not complete in themselves but each part of a wider exploration of the works in question. Note also that even in these abbreviated extracts there are different things going on. They focus on specific details of the works in question: a description of a dinner party at the Veneerings house in *Our Mutual Friend*, a description of Iago standing firm at the end of *Othello*, and descriptions of the tone and impact of individual lines in the Serote poem. But the interpretations also make wider claims about the works as a whole: that *Our Mutual Friend* is "a work of de-mystification" with regard to the "false god", money; that *Othello* "is about male attitudes towards women"; and that the Serote poem is about "an encounter with an apparition, emerging suddenly out of nowhere—the nowhere that people of 'other' races inhabit in a racist culture." These are themes that the critics have identified or postulated as arising from the works, themes that they believe will help illuminate the works and add to our interest in them. Finally, apropos the context of this discussion, there are no references to authorial intentions, indeed no substantial references to the authors themselves. To ask whether Dickens intended that "The reader himself becomes the great looking-glass above the sideboard" or that Shakespeare intended that Iago "speaks the ordinary wisdom of the male world" seems somehow absurd and irrelevant. We judge these comments on quite different grounds.

3. *Meaning and the "Linguistic Fallacy"*

The problem with intention in this context is that it is closely tied to meaning. What we are really asking is about the intended meaning. But I am not convinced that our sample interpretations are primarily about meaning. And if they are not primarily about meaning then they cannot be primarily about intended meaning. This brings us back to my opening remarks about analytic philosophers and their contributions to this discussion. To my mind, they have been too fixated on meaning—word and sentence and conversational meaning—to notice the quite diverse things that go on when critics offer sustained readings of literary works.

Furthermore—to follow up a point made by Stein Haugom Olsen (1987)—they get off on the wrong foot by insisting on talking about what they call "the meaning of the work". Over and over this phrase gets taken for granted. Yet I doubt these same philosophers would think of applying the phrase to philosophical works. No serious philosopher would suppose that the aim of reading Hume's *Treatise* or Kant's *Third Critique* is to uncover the meaning of these works. To ask, "what is the meaning of Hume's *Treatise*?" or "what does Hume's *Treatise* mean?" makes little sense. What we find in the *Treatise* is not a meaning as such but detailed claims about human thought and reasoning; we reflect on Hume's methodology, the points he is making, his principal arguments, his relations with other philosophers: not on the meaning of the work.

Of course, at another level, we are inevitably concerned with meaning when we read philosophy, what particular words mean, what a sentence or a passage means, and our focus usually, if not exclusively, is what the author meant by these words or sentences. Intention, at this level, is paramount. Something similar is true with literary works: meanings of words and sentences do, of course, concern us. I shall come back to that. But, as we have seen, interpretation moves to a wider perspective—beyond sentence and word meaning—finding value in a work's subject, taking for granted, or at least building on, the presentation of the subject at sentential level. And the mistake of the analytical philosophers is to suppose that literary interpretation discloses *the meaning of the work* in the very same way that semantic or Gricean analysis discloses the meaning of words and sentences.

Robert Stecker is an eloquent example of a philosopher who wants to give special priority to *the meaning of the work* in literary contexts. And he has a clear idea of what it is: "the meaning of a work" he unequivocally asserts, "is identical to its utterance meaning" (Stecker 2003: 59). Elsewhere he says: "I will use 'utterance meaning' and 'work meaning' interchangeably" (Stecker 2006: 430). He elaborates: "Utterance meaning specifies what someone has said or done by using language on a particular occasion" (Stecker 2003: 59). But in the context of whole literary works this is really not helpful. It is not problematic to think of writing as a mode of utterance, but to suppose that a whole work—say, a novel—possesses utterance meaning explained as "what someone has said or done by using language on a particular occasion" seems both reductive and uninformative. If there is a "particular occasion" for the utterance what matters is less some individual act of speech or writing, rather a wider literary, institutional, and historical context, which makes writing of that kind possible.

The problem here is that the wrong model of meaning is being appealed to: the model in effect of speech as the conveying of thoughts using single sentences or small clusters of sentences in well-defined communicative contexts. It simply does not fit literary works conceived

as works of art, read and appreciated within the norms of a distinct practice. A philosopher like Stecker might reply that a literary work is (and can be) no more than the set of sentences that constitute its text, and so the meaning of the work is simply the compound of the meanings—the semantic meanings—of the individual sentences. But even if we could grasp what this compound meaning is, it can at best explicate for us the *subject* of the work, without touching on the wider interests of the kind expressed in our sample passages, interests of a broader thematic nature that are the basis of interpretation.

Noël Carroll quite rightly identifies what he calls a "Linguistic Fallacy" here, that is, "the presumption that all art interpretation can be modelled on the interpretation of the linguistic meanings of a word or a sentence" (Carroll 2011: 121). He applies this directly to literary works:

> Thematic interpretation of entire literary works and even parts thereof is radically different than the comprehension and interpretation of word meaning and sentence meaning. [...] Most literary interpretation, like most art interpretation in general, should not be modelled on the comprehension and interpretation of word and sentence meaning. (Carroll 2011: 124–125)

That is exactly the point I have been emphasising. And Carroll even goes on to suggest something similar to the main idea of this paper, that literary interpretation is not just about meaning.

> This is not to say that literary interpretation may never come down to deciphering word meaning or sentence meaning, as in cases that call for disambiguating certain sentences and phrases. My argument [...] is merely that this is not the form literary interpretation always or perhaps even most generally takes. To suppose it to be so is a mistake—it is to commit the Linguistic Fallacy—which is a fallacy precisely because the objects of interpretation, even with respect to literature, typically go beyond word meaning and sentence meaning. (Carroll 2011: 126)

On the face of it this, encouragingly, sets Carroll apart from philosophers like Stecker, Jerrold Levinson (2016), Stephen Davies (2006), Sherri Irvin (2006), and others, who, as I see it, go wrong in resting their analyses of literary interpretation on the idea of the meaning of the work, drawing on Gricean or speech act theories of meaning to do so. However, Carroll gives with one hand only to take away with the other. In the same paper he returns to a more familiar theme of his: what he calls the "continuum between how we understand the words and deeds of others on a daily basis and the interpretation of art and literature" (Carroll 2011: 127). Stressing such a continuum, particularly in his appeal to a conversational or communicative model of literary works, loses what I proposed at the outset, namely, the uniqueness and sui generis nature of literary interpretation:

> I think that interpretation is [...] best understand as an extension of our ordinary practices of mind reading. [...] If art interpretation is on a continuum with the interpretative activity that we engage in on a daily basis, then some form of actual intentionalism would seem to follow naturally, since

> in the normal course of affairs the object of interpretation is to identify the intentions, beliefs, and desires of others. As we observe the speech, gesture, and behavior of others, we typically do so in order to, as we say, read their minds. (Carroll 2011: 127)

So after all, for Carroll, a speaker's intended meaning in a conversational context remains the paradigm for understanding what literary interpretation is (for further discussion of the conversational view, see Huddleston 2012; Jannotta 2014). Surely that is the Linguistic Fallacy again. And it does little justice to its topic.

4. *Subject and theme*

But we need to get down to finer detail. Recall the distinction between subject and theme that I mentioned earlier in passing. The subject of a literary work, put simply, is the story it tells, the plot, the characters, the events described, the twists and turns, the action, the emotion, the world presented. Many works of fiction encourage attention only to their subject: the pleasure lies in bringing to mind the plot and characters, the excitement, the immersion in a world, the flights of imagination. Works of literature, however, invite something more: they encourage reflection on the subject at a wider thematic level, as we have seen; readers seek ideas that arise out of the subject or cast light on it or can be seen as being explored within it, issues of moral choice, perhaps, or themes of loss or hope or ambition or despair, the sorts of concerns that we associate with the great novels or plays.

In a word we expect more than a story told, something wider, grander, something to exercise our minds. Literary interpretation is in the business of identifying and characterising this broader content. There are two quite different ways of answering the question what a work is about: the first concerns what is actually going on in the world described (subject-aboutness) the second, what ideas are raised and explored beyond the subject (thematic-aboutness). *Othello* is about an aggrieved adjutant bringing about the downfall of his commanding officer; it is also about jealousy, power, distrust, perhaps even "male attitudes towards women".

The relation between subject and theme is complex. Put in simple terms, we can say that the enquiry into a work's subject takes a different form from, even if it is not entirely distinct from, an enquiry into its themes. I take the latter to be the central focus of literary interpretation. What about the former, the enquiry into the subject of a work? There are two related, but distinct modes involved: let us call them, loosely following Monroe Beardsley, *textual explication* and the investigation of the *world of a work* (Beardsley 1981: 401). Explication is most directly concerned with meaning (what the words and sentences in the text mean), the other concerns what is true within the world of the work or what is true in the fiction (assuming the work is fiction).

Literary or thematic interpretation cannot proceed without being grounded in the work's subject, at both the level of textual meaning and the level of truth in fiction. After all, it involves reflections on the subject, and it draws its support from the presentation of the subject. In this sense of course meaning is crucially involved in interpretation: textual meaning helps to define the subject and interpretation reflects on the subject. But this necessary connection in no way weakens the claim that interpretation itself is not primarily in the business of meaning.

5. *Textual explication*

Let us look first at the textual explication of meaning. This is a crucial stage in critical practice, and it might be that the philosophers' toolkit from philosophy of language—the theories of meaning—can gain some purchase here, although I have doubts about Carroll's conversational paradigm. Here is a bit more from Attridge's comments on the Serote poem. I take it he is explicating the meaning of a word and a sentence.

> 'Baas', the universal South African word for 'master' or 'sir' (an Afrikaans word derived from an identical word in Dutch, itself the source of the American English word 'boss'), the word of deference, the word that claims to do homage to me (for I am immediately interpellated by this word as a white man living in South Africa) rings with a dangerous hollowness, coming as it does without pause after the demonstration of pre-emptive superiority. It is a word whose massive potential for satire I, as a white master, am not allowed, or not able, to perceive, yet it is hard to take it at face value when it is linked to an imperative. And yet there is nothing in the words to cancel their positive meaning, the offer of goodwill which they present. If that offer is genuinely there, I cannot afford to miss it, to lose it in the darkness of my fears. Too much is at stake. [...] The appellation 'Baas' can be quite affirmative, and how am I to know how much, if any, positive feeling it carries here? For all their immediacy, the words remain alien, resistant, irreducible; they have no depth, no underside, I can only read them again, go round the possibilities of tone, register the implications one more time. (Attridge 2004: 115–116)

Attridge tells us the literal meaning of the word "Baas" (its Afrikaans origins) but he is more concerned with much richer sources of meaning involving connotation and tone in precisely this context. He finds a "dangerous hollowness" in the opening words, something "alien, resistant, irreducible", potentially working against an otherwise "positive meaning".

In response, let me make a general observation, then three subsidiary comments. The general point is simply this: that if some theory is needed to explain what is going on in Attridge's analysis—and by extension in similar types of textual explication—it is not a philosophical theory of meaning we should turn to but a theory of poetic criticism and its protocols.

My first comment concerns intention. When Attridge asks "how am I to know how much, if any, positive feeling it [the word "Baas"] carries here?" his question is rhetorical; he is not seeking a determinate

answer, certainly not making an implicit appeal to authorial intention. Asking what the poet intended is only marginally relevant here. Attridge's point is surely that not knowing how much positive feeling to find in the lines is precisely part of their power and their alienness. The assumption that Attridge is making—rightly so—is that Serote is a subtle and sophisticated poet. So, the presence of tension and edginess in his lines does not need to be endorsed by trying to establish what the poet intended. His intention was to write just those words embodied in a poem. A good reader recognizes what such words in such a context mean and connote: and I refer not just to the context of apartheid in South Africa, the fears and anxieties on both sides of the racial divide, and so on, but also to the context of how language works in poetry. As so often with literary meaning we do not start with the intention and infer the meaning, we start with the meaning and, if we can be bothered, go on to infer the intention.

My second comment is this. The fact that Attridge finds in the lines nuanced and diverse connotations draws on a deep tradition of poetry and the reading of poetry. Layers of meaning, ambiguity, rich tonal suggestiveness, tensions and resistance, are simply what one expects from lyric poetry (the New Critics highlighted the fact, but the point does not depend on any theoretical dogma). This should be the starting point in reading poetry, not claims about utterer's meaning, or conversational implicature or pragmatic inferences. The importation of some such philosophical or linguistic framework of meaning does not add anything to understanding the mechanisms at work that are not recognised already as integral to the practice of poetry. I suggest that something similar is true in the analysis of narrative fiction. The practice of reading fiction is built on a host of presuppositions, norms, expectations, and standard protocols of interpretation and evaluation, which themselves are likely to have more explanatory force than that offered by theories imported from philosophy of language. I will turn in a moment to examples from narrative.

My third comment brings us back to the relation of subject to theme, more specifically textual meaning and interpretation. The unpacking of the connotations in Attridge's analysis is closely bound up with the higher-order reflections that he offers in his wider interpretation. Here we find a suggestion of the hermeneutic circle. What connotations the words are seen to bear depend crucially on the overall conception of the achievement and power of the poem itself. Yet the wider interpretation draws on and is grounded in the connotations recognised in the individual words and phrases. What looks like a broad thematic statement for Attridge—"I have been seen, and seen through, while I remain in the dark"—is supported by the observation that, at a verbal level, "For all their immediacy, the words remain alien, resistant, irreducible." The reader remains in the dark through this encounter because he does not know how much positive connotation to give to phrases like "Do

not fear Baas." Were the poem to be read in an unequivocally positive manner—as a constructive reaching out—then those connotations of alienness and irreducibility would be lost or diminished. What better indication of the power and the ineliminability of the hermeneutic circle in this case than Attridge's conclusion: "I can only read them again, go round the possibilities of tone, register the implications one more time." The idea that we should consult the author to get us off this hook is just an abdication of responsibility on the part of the reader. The tension and ambiguity that Attridge finds cannot be magicked away by a simplistic appeal to authority. Serote's perfectly reasonable response would be: read the poem again.

6. *Truth in fiction*

Beyond *textual explication* of meaning, the second aspect of identifying a work's subject is determining what is true in the world of the work. This is the focus of Kathleen Stock's book *Only Imagine* (2017). Stock takes what she calls an "extreme intentionalist" stance on this, such that, in summary, "the fictional content of a particular text is equivalent to exactly what the author of the text *intended the reader to imagine*" (Stock 2017: 1, italics in original). I take it that this is not the same as adopting an intentionalist stance on *meaning* in fictional texts; in fact, the claim is not really about meaning at all. Stock does talk about the interpretation of fictional content, but this is not interpretation as I have been describing it or which fits the examples earlier. Nothing I want to say about literary interpretation is incompatible with her intentionalism about fictional content (that is, what is true in fiction).

But I do have one or two remarks to make in the context of talking about the relation between subject and theme and between the meaning of individual words and sentences in a work and thematic interpretation of that work. In fact, Stock does make explicit comparisons between the identification of fictional content and the kinds of interpretation that interest me.

One example she cites is Terry Eagleton's Marxist reading of *Wuthering Heights* where Eagleton says that Heathcliff "represents a turbulent form of capitalist aggression which must historically be civilised." Stock writes:

> However, on closer inspection, this is not best understood as a claim about fictional content, but rather about structural similarities between the character Heathcliff and a capitalist archetype. It seems compatible with this reading that Brontë intentionally represented Heathcliff as having characteristics x, y, and z. This in turn has allowed Eagleton later to recognize that Heathcliff, qua possessor of characteristics x, y, and z, embodies several features of capitalist aggression as he conceives it, and to that extent 'represents' such aggression. In the same way we might say that actual people in the world 'represent' certain forces or ideas, even where they are unaware of them. (Stock 2017: 102)

Another example she gives is the Freudian claim that Hamlet suffers from an Oedipus complex. Yet how could Shakespeare have intended this content? Again, Stock insists that the fictional content itself is just a set of characteristics intentionally ascribed to Hamlet by Shakespeare, which only later get redescribed in Freudian theory as symptomatic of an Oedipus complex.

In many ways the point she is making is telling. Importantly, it shows how interpretations even of a Marxist or Freudian kind must, to have any credibility, be grounded in, and supported by, facts about the subject: in these cases, textually identifiable characteristics attributed to Heathcliff and Hamlet. This looks like a proper constraint on any defensible interpretation. But it does raise some questions. One concerns the limits imposed on fictional content. For Stock neither Heathcliff's manifesting capitalist aggression nor Hamlet manifesting an Oedipus complex is part of the respective content of the two fictions. In both cases, she believes, the matters are indeterminate: "It is simply fictionally *indeterminate* whether Hamlet has an Oedipus complex or not" (Stock 2017: 103, italics in original). And the reason for the indeterminacy is that "no intentions specify the matter either way" although she adds that "audiences may often harmlessly imagine something specific about the matter, going beyond the fictional content of the text" (2017: 103).

It is right that literary interpretations of the kind exemplified at the beginning do go beyond the fictional content. That is the whole point—they go beyond, in the sense that they reflect on, the subject of the work. But it would be strange to think of this as a kind of harmless or idle imagining. It is a search for something profound or interesting that arises out of the subject or gives its elements some overarching unity or connectedness. Fictional content of the kind that Stock explores concerns fictional worlds; interpretation of the kind that interests me concerns the representation of fictional worlds. The focus for interpretation is less on *what* is represented in a fiction as on *how* it is represented.

I will expand on that in a moment but first a final word about fictional content itself as Stock envisages it. How constraining is authorial intention here? Her headline account, remember, is that fictional content is "equivalent to exactly what the author of the text *intended the reader to imagine*." So, what about those "characteristics x, y, and z" of Heathcliff that are intended by Emily Brontë but cannot include capitalist aggression? If the intention constraint is strong then we might need to think not just of characteristics but of *predicates* that are permissible in our redescription of Heathcliff. It seems as if for an "extreme intentionalist", these predicates must be licenced, as it were, by Brontë herself; in other words, they must either be drawn explicitly from the novel or be at least readily accessible to Brontë given her personal nature, knowledge, and historical context. This seriously constrains our thoughts about the content of the novel and adds signifi-

cantly to the range of fictional indeterminacy. It is one thing to deem as inadmissible, terminology associated with Marxist theory, but we forget how much of our own thinking is imbued with presuppositions, linguistic and psychological, alien to a vicar's daughter in Yorkshire in the 1840s. On Stock's account, this places what might seem unacceptably high barriers to a modern reader's legitimate access to the content of such a famous novel.

In fact, Stock pulls back from too austere an authorial constraint on fictional content when she writes: "a reader can defeasibly bring to bear her knowledge of factors such as conventional sentence meaning, conversational implicatures, fictional genres, stereotypes, stock characters, and culturally popular symbolic associations [...] in order to work out reasonable hypotheses about what the author intended her to imagine" (Stock 2017: 81). But once all of that is in play one wonders how constraining authorial intentions actually are in practice.

Also, the hermeneutic circle rears its head again, increasing the amount of fictional indeterminacy. In many cases the attribution of properties to a character is likely to be influenced by an overall conception of the work; and the overall conception, in an interpretation, will draw its support from how the character is depicted. Examples from dramatic performance reinforce the point. Quite apart from Marxism or Freudianism, think how differently characters like Ophelia, or Julius Caesar, or Richard the Third, or Shylock are portrayed on stage. Is Ophelia timid or rebellious, melancholic or just scared? (Lamarque 2002: 296) Many seemingly basic facts about the content Shakespeare intended can easily get overwhelmed by competing visions in performance. Yet how much fictional indeterminacy can be allowed before we lose our grip altogether on the subject of a work?

7. *Conclusions*

I have said that exploring the subject of a work, either through textual explication or the recovery of fictional content, concerns *what* is represented in a fiction, while interpretation characteristically focuses on *how* it is represented. Another way of thinking of the distinction is in terms of internal and external perspectives on a fictional world (Lamarque 2014). From an internal perspective on a fictional world—at least a realistically depicted fictional world—characters are real people, acting, thinking, talking, living, and dying; from an external perspective the characters are merely artefacts of an author, creations in language, they are symbols, representations, rounded or stock characters, comic, heroic, tragic, typical or otherwise of a genre. Interpretations, while drawing on what facts there are from the internal perspective, will tend to adopt the external perspective, looking at modes of representation themselves.

Characteristically, an interpretation will provide a web of concepts to connect, to enhance, to contextualise or generalise the subject-con-

tent of a work. It provides a perspective on that content which shows something interesting or unanticipated about the content. Hillis Miller finds in the descriptions of the Veneerings' dinner parties "language that is cold and withdrawn, terse"; he describes an ironic and "mirror-like detachment" in the narrative point of view throughout *Our Mutual Friend*; he speaks of the "emptiness" of the characters and their "bewitch(ment) by a false god" of money. Marilyn French sees in *Othello* "a profound examination of male modes of thought and behaviour", epitomised by Iago who "speaks the ordinary wisdom of the male world" and who having brought chaos to the world nevertheless stands "triumphant" at the end. Derek Attridge finds a tone of "alarm" and something "alien, resistant, irreducible" in the Serote poem, an uncomfortable tension in its mood, which both attracts and disturbs. To repeat our main motif again, none of this seems especially amenable to analytical accounts of meaning.

Understanding is not the same as interpreting, although the latter might presuppose the former. It is possible to understand a narrative and take pleasure from it without adopting any higher-order perspective offered by interpretation. Such a reader merely grasps the work's subject or attempts to do so. Of course, there is no guarantee that an interpretation, however ingenious, will in fact serve to increase an appreciative experience in a reader. For example, a criticism of French's analysis of *Othello* might be that it rests on too stark or stereotypical a conception of what she calls the "feminine" and "masculine" principles: the latter rooted in "control, reason, power, possession" (French 1992: 233), the former in "loyalty, obedience and emotion" (French 1992: 232). But, to counter the objection, the quoted passage shows she finds such principles in characters of both sexes and her accounts of how the principles are manifested, as well as abused and derided, are for the most part illuminating in her Shakespeare readings, offering insights into the scenes and characters she discusses.

In response to the question "what is the point of interpretation?" the standard answer has been that interpretation helps us understand the meaning of a work. A good interpretation is one, presumably, that makes the meaning as clear as possible. That picture is one I have questioned, indeed rejected. It is hard to see what value there might be simply in aiming to recover a work's meaning as if it were a puzzle to be solved. Nor am I persuaded that seeing literary works as kinds of communication—resting on meaning paradigms drawn from communicative speech—is particularly apt or helpful. Instead, I have proposed that we think of interpretation not in terms of understanding, not even in terms of meaning, but in terms of providing a perspective through which the particulars of the work, its subject, can be reflected on in at least partial explanation of why the work might afford continuing interest: in a word where its literary values might lie. If we seek criteria for assessing an interpretation we must ask two questions, both essential: Is it supported by the work itself? Does it serve to enrich our

experience of the work? Any reference to authorial intention or sentential meaning must find its place much earlier in the process.[2]

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[2] Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Workshop on Meaning in Literary/Legal Texts, Senate House, University of London, London, 2018, and the Workshop on Fiction and Modality, University of Graz, Graz, 2019. Ideas in the paper draw on, and further develop, previous work of mine on interpretation, notably Lamarque (2002), (2009), and (2019).

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Beyond Reading: What it Means to Encounter a Literary Work of Art

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What does it mean to encounter a literary work of art? When we talk about them, we refer to literary works as characterizable entities. In a genuine encounter with a literary work, instead, our focus shifts to "what it is about": we bring to mind the intentional objects it invites us to direct our attention to, typically through reading. If what we encounter is a work of art, however, we are invited to do something beyond that even, namely to attune ourselves to disclose something more profound. Through shifting our focus from the individual to the typical and affectively responding to a work's characteristics, we disclose a qualitative character that presents itself as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes a specific kind of thing potentially experienced in the world. Our focus shifts from individual intentional objects, such as a character's view of her partner as standing in need of salvation, to the kinds of values and things manifested therein, such as the peculiar kind of ambiguity inhering a specific kind of commitment. To encounter a literary work of art, I conclude, means to follow the invitation to disclose value essentials, and thus to find a specific kind of truth.

Keywords: Literature; phenomenology of literature; phenomenology of art; Roman Ingarden; artistic truth.

1. *Introduction*

I argue that to encounter a literary work of art consists in an endeavor beyond reading, or, to keep it more broadly: that it consists in an endeavor even more complex than comprehending a fixed linguistic object (such as a fixed complex of sentences in the case of a novel). What I am concerned with throughout this paper might also be put as follows:

What does it mean to experience something not only as a text or even as a literary work, but as a literary work of *art*?

To answer this question, I choose a phenomenological approach as put forth by Edmund Husserl and his early students at the beginning of the 20th century (for a historic and systematic introduction to phenomenology, see Spiegelberg (1982)). The methodological starting point of the following analysis is the pre-reflective, first-personal experience of a literary work of art, or the encounter with a literary work of art, as I prefer to call it. The analysis focuses on the literary work of art *as it appears* in experience, and sets out to describe how it appears in pre-reflective experience from a subsequent reflective point of view. The aim is to pin down the essential features of this kind of experience, in other words, the "logic" inhering this peculiar encounter with the world.

What follows is especially indebted to Kraków born phenomenologist Roman Ingarden (1893–1970). I repeatedly refer to his seminal work *The Literary Work of Art*, which was first published in German (*Das literarische Kunstwerk*) in 1931, as well as to other of his writings. Furthermore, I point out parallels between Ingarden's approach and the analysis of literature by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen as put forth in their seminal work *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, which was first published in 1994. As we will see, there are important similarities to be found between these views, which are embedded in two different traditions of aesthetic theorizing, the continental and the analytic. While the two analyses resemble each other in many important respects regarding the literary work of art, they differ insofar as phenomenology focuses on the experiential dimension of our appreciation of art. It thus takes into account the predominantly affective nature of our proper engagement with literature. In combination with the differing conceptions of truth employed in these two approaches (understood either as a property of propositional content or of experience), this difference eventually yields, as we will see, opposing conclusions about the role of truth for literature.

I first distinguish between two possible ways to deal with a literary work. The first way to deal with it is to refer to a literary work as a bearer of properties, such as when we issue a judgment about it. The second way to deal with it is to "put it to use" as a mediating entity, as when we read it, thereby bringing to mind what it is about: we focus on the complex of intentional objects the work invites us to direct our attention to. At the same time—if we are affectively responsive to how the work directs our attention to these intentional objects—we disclose the literary work's aesthetically valuable qualities.

I then argue that insofar as the literary work we encounter is a work of art, we are invited to do something beyond that even: we are not only asked to bring to mind the intentional objects in the aesthetically valuable way determined by the work, but also to attune ourselves to disclose something more profound in virtue of the former. This

profound "insight," as we might call it, consists in an intuitive grasp of a qualitative character, whereby the latter presents itself to us as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes a specific kind of thing potentially experienced or engaged in in the world or a kind of thing we as human beings are otherwise deeply concerned with.[1] To encounter a literary work of art, I argue, means to successfully follow the invitation to disclose the value essentials of a specific kind of thing through reading in a way that is emotionally responsive to a text's characteristics. Along these lines, my analysis eventually opposes Lamarque and Olsen's famous "no truth" view of literary fiction, when I argue that to encounter a literary work of art means to seek out a specific kind of truth.

2. *Two possible ways to deal with a literary work*

To begin with, we can distinguish two possible ways to deal with a literary work. The first way to deal with it comes to the fore when we talk about literature. In doing so, we refer to the literary work as an entity in the world we can characterize and evaluate. We are thereby directed at the literary work as a bearer of properties. We might say things like:

a) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* is a novel published in 1974," or
b) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* deals with different kinds of personal commitment to someone else," or
c) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* shows the ambiguities of love," or
d) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* is captivating."

These four statements concern different aspects of one and the same entity: Statement a) concerns its classification (as a novel) within the artworld as well as its intersubjectively accessible fixation and subsequent distribution, b) concerns its directedness at something else as a mediating entity, c) addresses one of its possible achievements as a mediating entity, and d) one of its valuable qualities as a mediating entity "at work." Being sensitive to these differences is not irrelevant for what follows, but an analysis of the given statements is not my main concern here. Instead, it is important to highlight that we can deal with a literary work in another manner as well, in which we cease to refer to it primarily as a characterizable entity in the world. We can "bring to life" the directedness inhering it, which is described in statement b) and seek to experience a disclosure of the kind described in statement c).

In this second manner to deal with a literary work, our focus shifts

[1] The qualitative character art eventually confronts us with might also appear to us as characterizing a specific kind of thing that *cannot* be experienced in the strict sense of the word, but that is nevertheless of concern to us as human beings—just think of the afterlife as the subject matter of many religious works of art, for example.

towards "what the work is about": towards its individual characters, states of affairs, happenings, etc. That we can switch between these two manners to deal with a literary work is due to what Ingarden calls the "double sidedness" of "purely intentional objects" (Ingarden 1965: 211–219; 1972: 123–125) to which he counts the literary work: as such, it can appear both as an entity in its own right (this is its structural side, according to Ingarden), and as a content with characteristics of its own (its substantial side). This analysis is in line with the notion of a "dual viewpoint" elaborated on by Lamarque and Olsen in their theory of fiction. They distinguish between an "external" and an "internal perspective" towards fictional content (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 143–145). Through the external perspective, we are aware of the literary work's content as fictional. Regarding the broader context we are considering here, we can say that through the external perspective on a literary work's content (fictional or not), we are aware of it as an aspect of the literary work we deal with. Through the internal perspective on fictional content instead, as Lamarque and Olsen put it with reference to Kendall Walton, we find ourselves "'caught up' in fictional worlds" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 144). In the present context, we can say that we find ourselves "caught up" in what is represented in literature (fictional or not). Our external awareness of the literary work's content only figures in the background, then, while it is not completely silenced either. Our relation to literary works is shaped by this possibility to shift our focus: we can deal with them "from without" or "from within."

To deal with a literary work "from within" means to actualize it as a mediating entity: as an entity that has the purpose to direct our attention to something else and at the same time determines (schematically, to be sure) the way we are directed at that something (its "mode of presentation," to put it in the Fregean terminology employed by Lamarque and Olsen). As such, the literary work determines potential intentional objects, whereas the latter have to be understood in a sense that does not abstract from their being part of an intentional act: the literary work determines potential "objects-as-intended" (or "noema," to use the terminology of Ingarden's teacher Edmund Husserl). We can actualize them by intending them, thus through concrete intentional acts. If we abstract from this experiential dimension (these objects' being intended) and focus on the linguistic dimension, we can refer to them as "intensional objects" whose characteristics are dependent on the way they are described (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 43).

The reason we are in a position to actualize the complex of potential intentional objects determined by the literary work is because it inheres a fixed linguistic object, such as a complex of sentences printed in a book, which renders it intersubjectively accessible (Ingarden 1961: 290; 1997: 200). The printed text figures as a "regulatory signal," as Ingarden would put it, for our encounter with the literary work (Ingarden 1969: 3; 1972: 393). The actualization of the individual characters and

states of affairs of the literary work depends both on the fixed linguistic object and on our imaginative capabilities. In this sense, they are co-created by our imaginative acts. By contrast to other creations of imaginative acts (such as the pink elephant I just happen to imagine, for example), they do not appear to us as the sole creation of our concrete imaginative acts, though. They are, in a sense, "already there," and present themselves to us through the fixed linguistic object we comprehend. They appear as something others have access to as well through their own, concrete imaginative acts (their own "concretizations" of the literary work, as Ingarden would put it).

Bringing to mind "what a literary work is about" typically happens through *reading*: through comprehending the linguistic object it consists of (such as a complex of sentences) in virtue of finding it spatiotemporally manifested in printed characters on paper, for example. But it might also happen through *hearing a recital* of it: through comprehending the linguistic object in virtue of finding it spatiotemporally manifested in speech.

In our engagement with a literary work, we are implicitly aware that the fixed linguistic object in question is intended to serve the actualization of potential intentional objects: the literary work appears to us as an invitation to bring to mind individual characters, states of affairs, etc. in the way it determines.[2] This relates to what Lamarque and Olsen call, with reference to H. P. Grice's theory of meaning, a "Gricean intention," which is characterized by its being rational instead of only causal (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 45, 359): In the present context, we can say that the intention inhering the literary work, namely to make us bring to mind individual characters and the like, is rational, because its recognition gives us reason to do so, and makes us do so *for that reason*.

To be sure, the individual characters, states of affairs, and happenings we bring to mind might appear to us as existing only within the world of the literary work, and not independently of it. We then refer to them as fictional. Their "nature and very existence are dependent logically on the descriptions in some originating fictive utterance" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 88). On the other hand, we might take the individual characters, states of affairs, and happenings we bring to mind as actually existing or having existed in the past independently of the literary work. We then refer to them as real persons, states of affairs, and happenings, but within the process of engaging with the literary work we are nevertheless directed at them in the way determined by the work. We refer to them "*under certain aspects*," as Lamarque and Olsen put it (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 81).

[2] In this regard, Ingarden distinguishes between "free" creative acts, whose intentional objects come into being and cease to exist together with them, and creative acts who tend to "preserve" their intentional objects in an intersubjectively accessible ontic foundation (Ingarden 1965: 204–205).

To illustrate our engagement with a literary work, let us consider a single passage from Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. In the book, the psychotherapist Blaise Gavender discloses in a letter to his wife Harriet that he has a long-lasting affair and a son with a woman called Emily McHugh. The following passage describes Harriet's view of the situation after she has read his letter and learned about his affair:

> *He* was what mattered, and in this mattering she could almost forget about Emily McHugh. It was **as if Blaise had suffered some disaster**, had been maimed or disfigured or subjected to some awful menace, and **only Harriet's thoughts, only her unremitting attention, could save him**. She thought of him blankly and with absolute love and suffered her prisoner's pain hardly knowing what it was. (Murdoch 1976: 146 , all emphases in bold are mine)

In a genuine encounter with the literary work, we actualize it as a mediating entity: we bring to mind "what the work is about." In this case, we bring to mind Harriet's view of the situation, which is schematically determined by the fixed linguistic object (the complex of sentences) we comprehend. To Harriet, it is primarily Blaise who matters, which is why "she could almost forget about Emily McHugh." The situation appears to Harriet "as if Blaise had suffered some disaster." Instead of thinking of Blaise as someone who deceived her and caused her suffering, Harriet primarily thinks of him as someone who was struck by fate, and she thinks of him "with absolute love."

Insofar as we actualize the literary work as a mediating entity, the complex of sentences determines what we are directed at and how we are directed at it. To begin with, we here bring to mind Harriet's individual view of the situation, and we bring it to mind *as benevolent*. But additionally, we are told that Harriet thinks of Blaise as someone "only her unremitting attention could save." He not only appears to her as someone who is in need of salvation—but as someone whom her thoughts alone can save. These moments in the text allow us to bring to mind Harriet's view not only as benevolent but as somehow *self-aggrandizing* at the same time. In our engagement with a literary work, we follow the invitation to grasp, as Lamarque and Olsen put it, "the sense of the sentences uttered; [and construct] an imaginative supplementation of that sense" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 77). The literary work determines what we are directed at through our imaginative act (a particular viewpoint, for example) and how we are directed at it (as being concerned with Blaise; as benevolent and self-aggrandizing at the same time).

Above, I mentioned in passing that the complex of sentences through which we bring to mind the intentional objects of the literary work—Harriet's view, in this case—determines what we are directed at and how we are directed at it only *schematically*. This assumption is reminiscent of Ingarden's analysis of the literary work of art as a schema whose "stratum of represented objects," as he calls it, involves both determinate aspects as well as spots of indeterminacy (Ingarden

1972: §38). It also fits nicely with something at the heart of Lamarque and Olsen's analysis, who speak of the "incompleteness" of fictional characters (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 146).

Again, our exemplary passage from *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* can help to illustrate this feature of literature. The passage involves several determinate aspects of Harriet's view of the situation, among them the ones already mentioned: the complex of sentences determines that it is primarily Blaise who matters, and that Emily McHugh is almost forgotten. In Harriet's view, the situation appears "as if Blaise had suffered some disaster." Blaise is thought of "with absolute love" and as someone only Harriet's own "unremitting attention could save." In a genuine engagement with a literary work, we are asked to take into account such determinate aspects in order to successfully bring to mind what the work invites us to direct our attention to. But any literary work involves indeterminacies, too. What remains indeterminate in the exemplary passage, for example, is *how* Harriet thinks of Emily McHugh. The complex of sentences determines that Harriet "could almost forget about Emily McHugh"—that Emily hardly appears in her view of the situation at all, since Harriet focuses on Blaise. But it remains indeterminate whether, insofar as Harriet *is*—at least implicitly—aware of Emily as Blaise's long-lasting affair, she is aware of her as a vague threat, a victim, a sinner, or an enemy, for example.

In bringing to mind Harriet's view of the situation, we can "fill" this spot of indeterminacy in accordance with the text's determinacies. Taking into account the characteristics of Harriet's character, situation, and worldview we got to know so far, it might be reasonable to consider Harriet to be implicitly aware of Emily as a vague threat. By contrast, it might be unreasonable, according to the work's determinate aspects, to consider Harriet to be aware of Emily as another victim, for example. But to be sure, there is a scope of variability within which we can fill in indeterminacies, thus there might be more than one legitimate fill-in for an indeterminate aspect. While I might consider Harriet to be implicitly aware of Emily as a vague threat, my friend might consider her to be implicitly aware of Emily as a sinner, without us having reason to deny the legitimacy of the other one's actualization of Harriet's view.

An actualization of a work's intentional objects is legitimate only insofar as it takes into account the determinate aspects of the literary work as manifested in the fixed linguistic object.[3] By genuinely engaging with the literary work, we actualize some potential aspects that are not determined by the work but only potentially present, given what *is* determined. We have to actualize those aspects "licensed by the narrative," to use Lamarque and Olsen's phrase (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 81).

[3] This is reminiscent of Ingarden's conditions of legitimacy of the aesthetic object, see Ingarden (1969: 22–24).

Furthermore, insofar as the fixed linguistic object we encounter is a literary work, and not a text of another sort (such as, for example, a user manual, a memo, or a shopping list), we reasonably expect to find qualities of a certain sort in the course of our engagement with it. A literary work is intended (by its author) and reasonably expected (by its readers) to possess aesthetically valuable qualities, in other words, to possess qualities that intrinsically attract or fascinate us as they figure within our engagement with something else (a fixed linguistic object, in this case).

I will not attempt to give a conclusive characterization of the aesthetic here. But since the aesthetic nature of literature can be questioned (see, e.g., Peter Kivy's (2011) prominent characterization of narrative literature as non-aesthetic) a short clarification is in order. Reflection on our encounters with literary works shows, I believe, that insofar as something presents itself to us as literature (and not as a user manual, a memo, or a shopping list, for example) it provides us with what is often referred to as "aesthetic pleasure." I will say more about the affective nature of our encounters with literary works shortly. Right now it suffices to stress that the focal point of aesthetic pleasure is not logically limited to certain kinds of qualities but can encompass sonic, formal, and emotional characteristics of a text just as well as intellectual and moral characteristics of the characters and states of affairs it invites us to direct our attention to.

Whether literature is as aesthetic as other art forms or not is nothing to be decided in abstraction from how we experience a text as a literary work. Like a certain word sound, an emotional upheaval, or a narrative structure can in principle attract or fascinate us in its own right, so can a fictional character's wittiness or ambiguity. Insofar as its word sounds might not be the focal point of the aesthetic pleasure a prose text provides, it can be considered *less sensuous* in character than, say, a piece of absolute music. But this alone, I argue, does not render literature a *less aesthetic* art form.

A text such as a user manual, by contrast, is not as such supposed to possess qualities that intrinsically attract or fascinate us. Instead, it is supposed to instruct us to perform a certain sequence of actions. Of course, we might find aesthetically valuable qualities in a user manual too, but that we do so is nothing we reasonably expect from our engagement with it, whereas it is something we reasonably expect from our engagement with a literary work. "The literary stance," according to Lamarque and Olsen, "is defined by the expectation of […] a certain type of value, i.e. literary aesthetic value, in the text in question" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 256).

In contrast to Lamarque and Olsen, phenomenological analysis takes into account the experiential dimension of finding aesthetic value in a literary work, namely its predominantly affective nature. In this vein, I suggest that our engagement with a literary work differs from

our engagement with a user manual in that the latter is not supposed to please or fascinate us in any way but only to successfully instruct us. Our engagement with a literary work, instead, is supposed to be pleasing or fascinating, in other words: affectively engaging. In this regard, Ingarden speaks of the "preliminary emotion" (Ursprungsemotion) that "opens the proper process of aesthetic experience," (Ingarden 1961: 296) starting with our being struck by an object's quality and eventually culminating in an emotional response to the whole work's aesthetic value (Ingarden 1961, 1997: §24).

The emotional response Ingarden is talking about is not a contingent feature of properly engaging with a literary work—it is essential to it. In this sense, to take "an affective attitude" is not, as Lamarque and Olsen (2002: 103–105) introduce it, merely to be considered an effect the thought of what the literary work directs our attention to might or might not have on us (just like the thought of Harriet's view might cause a feeling of fascination in us). As a phenomenologist, Ingarden is not concerned with *contingent* connections between thoughts and feelings while reading. Instead, he considers emotion a *necessary* mental activity in order for a text to present itself within experience as a literary work. In this sense, being attracted or fascinated by the text's and eventually its intentional objects' characteristics (by how Harriet's view is like, for example), is crucial to properly engage with the text as a literary work.

Only through our affective engagement with the literary work's characteristics can we discover its aesthetically valuable qualities. We can find those, most basically, in the complex of word sounds grounding the linguistic object (we might feel, for example, the solemnity of a text's melody or the vitality of its rhythm). But aesthetic value is not only to be found within a work's sound. Furthermore, we might find aesthetically valuable qualities in the combination and choice of words (such as the clarity or passion of a certain expression). Or we might find aesthetically valuable qualities in one or more of the individual intentional objects we actualize through the work (such as the wittiness of an action, or the ambiguity of a fictional character's view).

We reasonably expect the literary work to direct our attention to something else in an aesthetically valuable way—through a combination of sounds and words, or through individual intentional objects whose characteristics intrinsically attract or fascinate us.

3. *What the literary work discloses insofar it is a work of art*

Insofar as the literary work we encounter is a work of art, bringing to mind the intentional objects it schematically determines in an aesthetically valuable way is not yet the end of the story. There are numerous kinds of works that both successfully invite us to bring to mind a

complex of intentional objects and that do so through a combination of sounds, words and individual intentional objects that possess aesthetically valuable qualities, but which are not thereby works of art: just think of well written memoirs, philosophy essays, or history books. A literary work of art is intended (by its author) and reasonably expected (by its readers) not only to disclose a complex of individual intentional objects in an aesthetically valuable way but to disclose something more profound (a "humanly interesting content," as Lamarque and Olsen would put it) *in virtue* of the former.

In our encounter with a literary work of art, I argue, various aesthetically valuable qualities together form a new polyphonic qualitative character—a specific kind of value.[4] This qualitative character (the tragedy, bliss or ambiguity we find in a work, for example) inheres not only certain parts of the literary work (such as its sound, its choice of words or individual intentional objects) but the work as a whole. It inheres, to use Ingarden's terminology, all of the work's strata.[5] It encompasses the intrinsically attractive or fascinating characteristics of the melodies and rhythms, of the words, and of the intentional objects we are confronted with. Furthermore, the qualitative character we eventually disclose is of a more profound attraction or fascination than singular aesthetically valuable qualities. It presents itself to us as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes not merely an individual complex of sounds, words, or intentional objects, but something of general concern—something typical.[6]

In a genuine encounter with a literary work of art, I argue, our focus shifts from the individual to the typical: it shifts from the individual sounds, words, and intentional objects to the specific kind of thing manifested in the former and directly presenting itself to us through the qualitative character (the specific kind of value) disclosed. This means that the specific kind of thing and the specific kind of value we find appear to us as necessarily correlated. The value we find does not only figure as an intrinsically attractive or fascinating way to

[4] Ingarden compares this formation of various qualities into a new qualitative whole with how several tones form a single chord (Ingarden 1961: 305–307; 1969: 6; 1997: 231–234).

[5] In *The Literary Work of Art* Ingarden elaborates thoroughly on the multiple strata of the literary work of art. He distinguishes between the strata of word sounds, meaning units, represented objects, and schematized aspects. While my elaborations in the preceding part of the paper touched upon what it means to find aesthetic value in the former three, the formation of a new polyphonic qualitative character just introduced eventually amounts, in my view, to find aesthetic value in the latter, namely to emotionally respond to how the literary work represents its intentional objects (to the characteristics of a work's "schematized aspects," to use Ingarden's term). This means to cherish the literary work of art "at work" as a mediating entity.

[6] The view that art discloses something beyond the individual has its roots already in Aristotle's view on poetry: He contrasts poetry, which he considers to strive for the universal, to history, which he takes to deal with particular events instead (*Poet.*1451a38–1451b10).

disclose a complex of individual intentional objects but as an intuitive way for something typical, namely a specific kind of thing, to appear. Works of art, in this sense, enable an insight into what Ingarden calls "qualitative essences," into how specific kinds of things essentially are (Ingarden 1961: 299). They allow us to affectively grasp a qualitative character of general relevance, in other words, the value essentials of a specific kind of thing potentially experienced or engaged in the world or a kind of thing we as human beings are otherwise deeply concerned with—they allow us to disclose a "theme," to use a term central to Lamarque and Olsen's analysis of literature.

In contrast to Lamarque and Olsen, phenomenological analysis takes into account the predominantly affective nature of our identification of a work's theme. Instead of merely allowing us to intellectually recognize it, we reasonably expect the literary work of art to enable us to "feel" what it is about, to eventually experience a particular qualitative character as the value essentials of a specific kind of thing. This predominantly affective process necessarily *involves* but is irreducible to intellectual and imaginative activities on our part, namely comprehending a fixed linguistic object and bringing to mind the intentional objects inhering it.

To be sure, there is no other way for us to disclose the value essentials of a specific kind of thing than through a concretization thereof. We can only gain insight into a value or a kind of thing *in concreto*, either through an actual manifestation of it in the here and now or through a "purely intentional" (or imaginative) manifestation of it, as in the case of literature. In this regard, Íngrid Vendrell Ferran (2023) argues that literature can provide an "imaginative acquaintance" with values—a kind of non-inferential knowledge "in which we do not directly experience a thing but rather experientially imagine it" (Vendrell Ferran 2023: 379). To be sure, what is experientially imagined through literature are individual (dis)valuable objects (such as Harriet's ambiguous perspective on Blaise). Regarding values as such, which we find manifested in the former, I would go further than Vendrell Ferran and claim: Imagining an individual object can, insofar as we are affectively responsive to its characteristics, provide *direct* (instead of only imaginative) acquaintance with the value inhering it—not *in abstracto*, to be sure, but in its concretization as a qualitative character (as a particular "value nuance" or in a new "value constellation," as Vendrell Ferran might put it). Even though imagining an individual object can only yield imaginative acquaintance with that object, it is nevertheless apt to yield direct acquaintance with the specific kind of value inhering it (such as the specific kind of benevolence, or the specific constellation in which benevolence is linked to self-aggrandizement). It can yield such direct acquaintance insofar as we emotionally respond to the imagined object's characteristics. In my view, there applies here what Ingarden says about metaphysical qualities being revealed in the literary work

of art: they appear as qualitatively fully determined as they would appear if they were actually realized. In this regard, they do not differ from their manifestations in real situations (Ingarden 1972: 314). The specific kind of value and the specific kind of thing we eventually disclose through a literary work of art are not *realized* in it, but they are nevertheless *fully concretized* through our actualization of the literary work of art as a mediating entity.

To illustrate these claims about literature, let us consider again Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*.[7] To make us see Harriet's view in an aesthetically valuable manner alone is not what makes Iris Murdoch's work appear to us as a work of art. As a work of art, the novel is intended and reasonably expected to disclose something more profound in virtue of the former. It is intended and expected to disclose a qualitative character of general relevance, in other words, a specific kind of value that characterizes a specific kind of thing potentially experienced or engaged in in the world or a kind of thing we as human beings are otherwise deeply concerned with. The sound of the words in which we get to know Harriet's view, the words used to describe her view, and the way she views and thinks of Blaise together determine the qualitative character we eventually disclose: this particular affiliation of benevolence and self-aggrandizement, this particular qualitative ambiguity. What we disclose, to be sure, is the ambiguity not only of Harriet's individual view, but the ambiguity of a specific kind of personal commitment to someone else, which we find manifested in Harriet's individual view. This particular affiliation of benevolence and self-aggrandizement presents itself as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes a specific kind of thing we as human beings can potentially engage in. The novel enables us to disclose the value essentials of a specific kind of personal commitment to someone else that human beings are capable of. It enables us to take note of it by allowing us to feel what it essentially is like.

Obviously, this particular insight into value essentials is not to be identified with a propositional truth that could be translated or issued in another manner. There is an irreconcilable difference between a judgment like

> The benevolence of a specific kind of personal commitment to someone else, through which we view the other as most important and, at the same time, as suffering and dependent on our attention for their salvation, comes along with a specific kind of self-aggrandizement

and the intuitive grasp of the specific ambiguity that characterizes the specific kind of commitment in question. Ingarden, too, stresses that

[7] I am aware, of course, that my selective treatment of the novel, which uses one tiny part as a representative of the whole, does not do justice to the work as a whole. What the novel potentially discloses to us cannot be captured by taking into account only one of its passages. Still, I think that the extract referred to can help to illustrate the essential structures at work in the kind of disclosure we reasonably expect from a work of art.

the insight gained through a literary work of art cannot be captured in purely conceptual terms (Ingarden 1972: 325). Even though we might come to reach a true judgment about the value of personal commitment (about how a specific kind of personal commitment is like) thanks to our encounter with Iris Murdoch's novel, enabling a true judgment is not the main purpose, and not the main benefit, of the novel as a literary work of art. To gain a propositional truth plays no essential role for our engagement with a literary work of art. The knowledge we reasonably seek to find through literary works of art (and works of art in general, to be sure) is non-discursive. This is why the "truths" disclosed by different works of art cannot contradict each other, be confirmed or refuted, or form a body of knowledge like the statements of science, history, and theology. That they cannot do so presents no good reason to think, as Stolnitz (2019: 292–293) does, that art is cognitively trivial. Instead, this fact only illuminates the specific nature of their cognitive benefit, which can be compared to the one gained by the color scientist Mary in Frank Jackson's (1982) famous thought experiment: the cognitive benefit of experiencing something—colors, in Mary's case, value essentials in the case of art—"in the flesh." Along these lines, it can be argued that there are truths peculiar to art, even though art naturally deals, as Stolnitz (2019: 293) highlights in his argument against such truths, with all kinds of extra-artistic fields of interest that are already (or to-be) examined through the scientific research of specialists. A literary work of art like Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* can yield a truth about a specific kind of personal commitment that, say, psychological research cannot and is not supposed to yield. The peculiarity of "artistic truths" does not lie in their concern for things only art could be concerned with or that art could examine best. Instead, it lies in their peculiar non-discursive, *aesthetic* nature, which renders them disclosable in processes dominated by *feeling* instead of the intellect. Art illuminates the world in a manner that history, science, and research do not, namely through yielding direct acquaintance with value essentials. The literary work of art enables, as Ingarden puts it, "*an intuitive intercourse with qualitative essences*" (Ingarden 1961: 299). Such an "intuitive intercourse" is a non-discursive kind of knowledge, an experience of truth that Husserl calls "Evidenz" in his famous *Logical Investigations*. Truth, in this sense, is understood as the self-givenness of something in experience, a direct acquaintance with something, and only derivatively as the relation of correspondence between a statement and reality.

In this vein, I object to Lamarque and Olsen's famous "no truth" view of literary fiction, according to which the truth yielded by a literary work of art plays no central role in its appreciation. To be sure, my opposition rather concerns their notion of truth, which they take into account solely as a property of propositional content (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 8). If we apply a broader understanding of truth and take it

into account as a property of experience, namely as the direct acquaintance with something "in the flesh," the truth inhering literary works of art (the direct acquaintance with a qualitative character of general relevance) indeed constitutes our genuine appreciation for them.

This is not to say, however, that we necessarily learn from a literary work of art or that it inevitably changes us for the better. Literature might lead to misunderstandings and cognitive deficits. These misunderstandings can both concern facts (I might come to think, after reading Murdoch's novel, that all married women consider their husbands dependent) or kinds of things (I might come to think that personal commitments to other people are necessarily dishonest). Accordingly, literature might have bad practical effects on our behavior or our empathetic skills. Indeed, I agree with Gregory Currie (2020) that whether fiction (and non-fiction, for that matter) induces learning processes, confers discursive or practical forms of knowledge, or trains empathetic and emotional skills is a contingent matter.

However, the fact that our encounters with literary works of art might cause us to believe something false or might change us for the worse is compatible with the claim that our encounters with literary works of art provide the specific kind of cognitive benefit described above. Whilst learning from literature is a contingent matter, the direct acquaintance with a qualitative character of general relevance is part of what it means to encounter a literary work of art. The claim that we learn from literary works of art has to be differentiated from the claim put forth in this essay: insofar as we experience a text as a literary work of art (and not merely categorize it as such), we eventually experience the self-givenness of a qualitative character of general relevance, and thus a specific kind of truth.[8] Literary works of art might at times corrupt our beliefs about where and when such a qualitative character is actually realized. But the possibility of a certain cognitive disadvantage does not undermine the peculiar cognitive benefit a literary work possesses as a work of art.

4. *Roundup and conclusion*

In the preceding analysis, I distinguished two possible ways to deal with a literary work: The first way to deal with it is to refer to the literary work as a bearer of properties—as an entity in the world we can characterize and evaluate. The second way to deal with a literary work is to engage with it as a mediating entity in virtue of reading or otherwise comprehending the fixed linguistic object it consists of.

[8] The two claims can also be differentiated regarding the possible evidence for them. The claim that we learn from literary works of art can only be (dis-)proven by facts. The claim that insofar as we experience a text as a literary work of art we find a qualitative character of general relevance emerging through it can only be (dis-) proven by the logic inhering the facts (the facts, in this case, being our encounters with literary works of art).

To engage with a literary work in this second way means to bring to mind the complex of individual characters, states of affairs and happenings it invites us to direct our attention to. Thereby, we actualize the potential intentional objects inhering the fixed linguistic object by taking into account the work's determinate aspects as manifested in the fixed linguistic object and, at the same time, filling in some of its indeterminacies in accordance with its determinate aspects. In the course of this engagement, we can—if we are affectively responsive to them—disclose the literary work's aesthetic qualities, meaning qualities that are intrinsically attractive or fascinating.

I then argued that insofar as a literary work is a work of art, we are invited to do something beyond that even: we are not only asked to bring to mind the intentional objects in the aesthetically valuable way determined by the work, but also to attune ourselves to disclose something more profound in virtue of the former. In a genuine encounter with a literary work of art, the various aesthetically valuable qualities together form a new polyphonic qualitative character (a specific kind of value) through which something of general concern presents itself to us. Insofar as we experience a literary work as a work of art, our focus shifts from the individual to the typical: it shifts from the individual sounds, words, and intentional objects to the specific kind of thing manifested in the former, and presenting itself to us through the specific kind of value disclosed in our affective engagement with the work's characteristics. I conclude, therefore, that to encounter a literary work of art means to successfully follow the invitation to disclose a qualitative character of general relevance—the value essentials of a specific kind of thing, in other words—in virtue of comprehending a fixed linguistic object, typically through reading, and affectively responding to its characteristics. Such an encounter eventually culminates in a direct acquaintance with something, in other words: in truth.[9]

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[9] A preliminary version of this paper has been given at the conference "Truth, Fiction, and Literature, a Philosophical Perspective" in December 2022 at the University of Rijeka. I would like to thank the organizers and other participants for their particularly helpful questions and comments. Moreover, I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their critical remarks that helped to further improve the paper.

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Intimations of a Lyricism sans Subject: On the Poetics of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe

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The lyric is a form or genre of poetry often intimately related to subjectivity. But is a lyricism divested of the subject possible? By examining the philosophical reflections of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe upon lyricism, poetry, and their relation to subjectivity, this article explicates how an impersonal lyricism is not only possible, but perhaps necessary. If we wish to do justice to the phrasing or saying of poetic language, then we must endeavour to think the displacement of the subject in and by the very language that the poem expresses. Following Lacoue-Labarthe, this article explores the paradoxical turn of lyricism—that it is bound to the subject, but not to its personal expression; rather, to its disappearance, its displacement, in the expression of language itself. By tracing a sketch of Lacoue-Labarthe's poetics, relating this thought to the lyrical theories of Hamburger and Culler, and providing a brief explication of one of Lacoue-Labarthe's "poetic" writings, lyricism is shown to be the testament to the disappearance of the subject, the remainder of a disappearance already passed insofar as the poem remains. What remains is that the lyrical subject would be no "subject" at all—only language itself, intimating its own diction.

Keywords: Lyricism; poetry; subject; phrase; Lacoue-Labarthe.

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> "Who could say 'I am a poet,' as if the 'I' could attribute poetry to itself, […] without this subject being, rather than elevated, immediately disqualified and desubjectified [*désassujetti*] by this inappropriate attribution?"
>
> Maurice Blanchot (2009 [2010]: 171 [153])[1]

What is lyricism? As a poetic form or genre, the lyric has transformed throughout history: the Ancient Greek lyric (as Aristotle notes in the *Poetics*) is the combination of language and music or rhythm (spoken or sung in accompaniment by the lyre, which gives the genre its name and rhythmically marks its figuration), while the modern lyric is demarcated by its being centered upon the poetic subject, as personal expression (often of passions, emotions or feelings, of the most internal or intimate; the *Innigkeit* of the subject, though not necessarily that of the poet themselves), most often under the insignia of the first person, the "I". But here lyricism[2] would already appear to bear a paradox within its very possibility or determination—for how can language, an impersonal medium not proper to any singular subject, adequately express or convey such an *Innigkeit*? Would lyricism not, by definition, demand a pure idiom, a singular language, which would be, qua language, a pure non-sense, *saying* nothing? As expression of subjectivity, lyricism is therefore already unstable; the binding between its form and its content, we might say, is already unmoored. Of course, this problem of lyricism as the language of the subject is not new to philosophy—it is present in the works of Friedrich Schlegel and Hegel, for example, and bears relation to the impossibility of a private language as presented by Wittgenstein.[3]

[1] All references to French texts that have been translated into English are given in the following manner in the text: the French publication date, followed by that of the English translation between brackets; and then the page reference in the French volume, followed by that in the translation, within brackets. Where references to French texts that have not been translated into English are given, all translations are my own.

The text of Blanchot from which this citation is taken was originally published in 1984, as the postface to the Russian poet Vadim Kozovoï's *Hors de la Colline*.

[2] It is important to distinguish between the lyric as poetic genre (as in the French *lyrique*) and the lyrical as a means of saying or expression, as lyricism (as in the French *lyrisme*). The former is the concern of literary criticism, while it is to the latter, the lyrical saying or lyricism, that we shall here be interested. For it is not a question of what defines a poetic genre, or its proper contents (what is said in the poem, *le dit*) that is of philosophical interest; rather, it is the saying (*le dire*), the expression—or statement (*Aussage*), in Käte Hamburger's terms (see Hamburger 1973: 23–31)—of lyrical language which shall concern us here, as well as its work or effect, its *ergon*.

[3] The tradition of the lyric, its composition and study, from the side of poetry as well as from that of philosophy, is far longer and more complex than this all too simple introduction can account for. The story is further complicated by the differing of traditions concerning the lyric upon national bases—that is, between the English, French, and German conceptions (to speak to only a few). For a review of the English tradition, see Culler (2015: 49–77). For the French tradition, see Rodriguez (2003: 17–30). For a recent review which touches on all three traditions, see Antić (2022).

The possibility of lyricism as language of the subject bears upon, or bears within it, an intimation of a deeper problem. For how has the lyric come to be translated, across the divide without strict determination between the ancient and the modern, from a musical or rhythmic expression to the intimate expression of the subject? Or rather, why has the subject interjected the lyrical, introjecting it with the problematic of the "rhythmic knot" (Mallarmé 1945 [2009]: 644 [184]) of the subject? The introjection of the subject into lyricism: that is to say, the throwing of the subject into lyricism, but also the unconscious incorporation of the subject into the form or figure of lyrical saying. However it is heard, this introjection bears questioning, insofar as it bears within it a question still unresolved—why the subject? Must the subject, subjectivity, be the subject (or, in other terms, the object) of lyricism? If lyricism bears, as Kim and Gibson note, "a subject which is attempting to make itself known through poetic means" (2021: 94), then who or what is this subject?[4]

What I hope to convey here is not necessarily an answer regarding this question. Rather, my intention is but to suggest an intimation born out of this question of the relation between lyricism and the subject—namely, that lyricism does not express the fullness nor the effulgence of the subject, but rather its loss, its divestiture and destitution, in terms of what is proper to it: its place, its position, *itself*.[5] Said otherwise, that the subject of lyricism (in all the manifold senses of this phrase) might be *sans* subject—without subject, subjectless, and thus (re)inscribing lyricism as an intimation of a devoided or hollowed out intimacy or *Innigkeit*, the expression of an impersonality and externality displacing the status of the subject by way of the very language which was to express and establish it. To attempt this intimation, the first section of this article looks to the thought of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe concerning this question of lyricism. Lacoue-Labarthe remains an underregarded figure in terms of lyrical studies, and so this article aims to intimate an entry into his poetics. The second section will then seek to compare Lacoue-Labarthe's poetics to the expressivist theories of the lyric held by Käte Hamburger and Jonathan Culler. Finally, the third section shall attempt a brief explication of one of Lacoue-Labarthe's poetic "phrases" in order to give evidence to his poetics. It is to this poetics, then, which I now turn.

1.

I have chosen Lacoue-Labarthe due to the intimacy that this question of poetry and lyricism had in both his life and his thought, cutting across philosophy and literature, through which he traced the ques-

[4] Kim and Gibson alternatively formulate this question as one of voice and expression: "whose voice is it?" (2021: 97).

[5] Cf. Maulpoix (2000: 14), who notes that lyricism "does not represent the plenary expression of the subject, but its devoration."

tion and questioning of subjectivity and language, as well as the loss of subjectivity that language effectuates and attests by way of intimation. "Intimation"—this word has been repeated many times already, yet what does it say? "Intimation," and its multiple threads of sense, are woven for us here into the very saying and questioning of lyrical poetry.[6] The word "intimation" bears the trace of a homographic sense of "intimate," which as an adjective entails a sense of closeness or proximity and invokes a sense of familiarity (the *Innigkeit*, again). As a verb, "to intimate" means to disclose something to someone discreetly. But "intimation" can also entail an announcement or declaration as such—thus without the intimacy as proximity and discretion—and often entails an obscure or ambiguous suggestion or reference. Finally, we might consider that the word is derived from the Latin "*intimatio*," which speaks to a demonstration or exposition, and can also bear the sense of an accusation.[7] In the intimation of lyricism we might hear, then, an exposure which requires discretion, and thus a certain diverted or detoured manner of expression, announcing and enouncing the subject while accusing it, exposing it, calling it to account for its abdication which lyricism presents—the ex-posing or de-posing of the subject, its (dis)appropriation. The intimation of lyrical language expressing the renunciation of the subject (in both the objective and subjective genitive)…

But I have perhaps been indiscreet, moving too quickly in explicating the intimation of lyricism as implicated in the word "intimation" itself. Let us return to the intrication of lyricism and the question of the subject, and how the former expresses the intimacy of the latter. The intimacy of the subject is bound up with language—the language which constitutes and establishes the subject in providing it the power to say "I," to speak (of) itself, to render its passions graspable by the word. But language, as "the possibility of poetry," Lacoue-Labarthe claims, exposes in lyricism a "vertiginy that comes, not from the subject's exaltation, as the reductive interpretation of lyricism always maintains, but from its loss, or rather from the 'forgetting of the self'" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1986 [1999]: 46 [30]; translation modified).[8] What is forgotten, or unacknowledged, of the self in the "reverie" of lyrical language (the word is Lacoue-Labarthe's) is the double movement or double inscrip-

[6] I would note that "*L'Intimation*" was the title of an anonymized dialogue between Lacoue-Labarthe and the poet Mathieu Bénézet concerning poetry, the object of its saying, and the "hatred of poetry" expressed by George Bataille, which also furnished them with the title of the volume (*Haine de la poésie*) to which "*L'Intimation*" acted as introduction. See Lacoue-Labarthe and Bénézet (1979).

[7] This might be related, by way of lyricism, to *deixis* and the gestural monstration (a public showing or exposing) as apophantic expression. On *deixis* as gesture of diction, see Rodriguez (2003: 181). Cf. the discussion of speech act and *epideixis* in Culler (2015: 109–25; 125–31).

[8] Cf. Maulpoix (2000: 17, italics in original), who speaks of lyricism as "the passion or the *ravishing* of the subject in language."

tion which language marks—for the "I" of lyricism is not proper to the poetic subject, to the poet.[9] The "I" marks the empty form or figure of the subject while also, in the same instant, divesting them of what would be their own, what they dream and invest under the sign of this "I."[10] The paradox of lyricism is that the intimacy that it expresses is only that of an "ecstasy"—which Lacoue-Labarthe views at the heart of the above mentioned "possibility of poetry"—or an "extimacy" (a term for the interior being nothing but the outside, coined by Lacan and employed by Lacoue-Labarthe in a number of instances).[11] Lyrical language thus marks an *écart*, a gap or an interval, internal to the constitution of the subject, expressing what Lacoue-Labarthe calls (dis) appropriation. The parentheses around the negative prefix are meant to denote that in the very act of the appropriation of "itself," the subject is also refused the status of what would be its own or proper to it—it inherits a loss, a lack, a void in the place of "itself."

There is thus, as Jérôme Lèbre notes in his own essay on Lacoue-Labarthe and lyricism, an "*écart*, this beating [that is, of the 'heart' of the subject, but also of the rhythm of lyricism], scanned by an I [or a 'me', an 'ego,' the '*moi*'], or rather, by these different Is [the 'I' never properly singular in its neutrality, neither properly me nor you, nor any other], [which] has always been the rhythm of the lyrical subject" (Lèbre 2010: 211). The gap or interval, the void of the *écart*, is thus marked in the very rhythm of lyricism, marked upon its subject. It is important to note here the relation between the *rhuthmos* and the *skhema* (by way of the Latin *gestus*, the gesture), for the rhythm exposes the inscription of the schematism, the figuration which gives figure and form to the presentation of the subject, in this case, in the marking of the void, the *écart*, in the place of the figure of the subject.[12] Lyricism does not figure and present the subject, therefore, except as in its most intimate exposure—in the intimation of its absence, its faltering and its default.

[9] The severance of the identity of the lyrical subject from that of the poet has long been commonplace in the tradition of lyrical study—especially so in the French tradition and its "Romanticism," as opposed to those of the German and English Romantic traditions. On this French tradition, see Rabaté (1996), and in particular, Vadé (1996).

[10] Cf. Jenny (1996: 110), where the lyrical "subject" (of which Jenny denotes the suspension by its maintenance within guillemets) "appears not as a form or a substance, but as an activity of exteriorization and rejection."

[11] For the term "extimacy," see Lacan (1986 [1999]). For a prime example of Lacoue-Labarthe's employment of this term, see Lacoue-Labarthe (2009a: 251–252). For a critical study around the term as contextualized in Lacoue-Labarthe's thought, see Tatari (2010).

[12] The intricacies of this relation between *rhuthmos* and *skhema* greatly exceed the limits of this article. For an entry into the relation and its role in the constitution of subjectivity, see Lacoue-Labarthe (1979 [1998]: 289 [199–200]), and Fynsk (1994: 65). Cf. Antić (2022: 143–146; 238–239), who follows Meschonnic (2009) in viewing rhythm as "the constitution and organization of the subject with discourse and within discourse" (Antić 2022: 238).

Lacoue-Labarthe is thus concerned with lyricism, rather than with the poetic genre of lyric, a *type* of poetry or poesy—for this would already assume the rhythm and its inscription of the schema, a *tupos* which would collectively constitute the character of a certain kind of (poetic) presentation and figuration. It is instead, as Lèbre phrases it, a rhythmic form, "a mode of scansion" or "a rhythm of the subject" (2010: 211) which interests Lacoue-Labarthe. Lyricism is thus considered as a (con)figuration, a schema, for the inscription and thus the rendering present, of the subject.[13] But because the figure of the lyrical subject remains "without content and without character," insofar as "the lyrical rhythm is an empty form" (Lèbre 2010: 212), this emptiness or void "itself" (insofar as one can think *nothing* "in itself") is reflexively doubled, mimetically doubled and divided (in the sense of the French "*dédoublement*"), in the figuration of the lyrical subject "itself." That is, lyricism can only effectuate "a 'default of lyricism'" (Lèbre 2010: 212–213)[14] which ex-presses and ex-poses the subject under the mark of the originary default of "itself"—the displacement of the "origin" and of the "proper"—in a "*défaillance* without solution of the subject itself" (Lèbre 2010: 213).

This French word, "*défaillance*," is central to the thought of Lacoue-Labarthe (on lyricism and otherwise) as it concerns the displacement of the center, thus marking the paradox of centrality and propriety in relation to the margins and the improper. The basic meaning of this word is the expression of a weakness or a dizziness (recalling the vertiginy exposed in lyricism), a falling faint or a failing, marking an absence or a loss of power, the interruption of the subject's habitual mode of functioning, of possibility. There is thus a homophonic echoing in "*défaillance*" resonating and reverberating between "*défaille*" and "*défaite*" which echoes the intricated senses of "failing", "weakening", "defeating", and "undoing" (not to mention the echo of the "*défaut*," defaulting). Though the poetic saying of its intimacy in lyricism should mark the affirmation of the subject, all it can affirm, paradoxically, is its powerlessness, its absence, its hollow figure in the inscription and saying of the "I" which marks the subject as *personne* (that is, as a person, but equally as no-one in particular). In expressing "itself," lyricism only accomplishes the interminable expression of the *default* of the subject—that it never was *anything* "itself" aside from this empty

[13] Cf. Rodriguez (2003), on the lyric as "discursive structuration" (32–37), and as "discursive configuration" "constituting a coherent *form* or *figure* (*Gestalt*)" by way of a "configuring act" of discursivity (72, italics in original). Cf. Antić (2022), who speaks of "*the subject configuration of the poem*" (44, italics in original).

[14] Lèbre notes that this phrase, "*défaut de lyrisme*," is taken from Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1978 [1988]: 287 [99]). The translators of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's book have translated the phrase as "lack of lyricism." This paradox of effectuating "itself" by means of (auto-)default, which turns around the double genitive of the phrase, give figure and expression to Lacoue-Labarthe's thought on the lyrical subject, (de)constituted in the contradictory double movement of lyricism.

placeholder intimating an anterior disappearance of what never could be presented as present in any present. Lacoue-Labarthe will refer to this attestation of its intimate default, the default of its intimacy, as the *douleur*, the *pain*, of the subject.

"A poetry of pain […] that," says Lacoue-Labarthe, "is lyricism" (1986 [1999]: 139 [99])—the ex-posure of the default *of* the subject (in the double genitive), as marked in the tear or rupture of the rhythmic *écart*. But why this lyrical expression, this attempt at saying itself, if lyricism is only bound to reiterate, to reinscribe and repeat, the experience of rupture and pain, in the default and disappearance of the subject, exposed in its void absence-in-presence? As Lacoue-Labarthe explains, it is because this experience of pain—as traversal at the limits of traversal, traversal of a (mortal) peril, in the sense of the Latin *ex-periri*[15]—entails what he calls an "*émoi*." This word expresses an emotion, but one of turmoil or turbulence, of a troubling or disquieting of the subject.[16] In *émoi*, the subject is displaced, the I or me, the ego or *moi*, is effaced (taking the prefix "*é-*" in its sense of a negation or privation, akin to the Greek alpha-privative). The subject experiences the loss or disappearance of "itself," the *é-moi*.[17] And yet, paradoxically, at the limit which is exposed in this experience of default and *défaillance*, there is an affirmation amidst the void negativity of the nothing which appears in the place, the innermost interior, of the subject. For in the ex-posure of the subject to this exteriority of its *Innigkeit*, lyricism poses the subject as outside "itself" in the exposure which language effectuates. In its pain, lyrical saying not only exposes the subject as other than "itself" in being "itself"—but in this "being other" *as* "itself," the subject is placed in an intimate relation with what is other,

[15] On the explication of this Latin root of the word "experience," and its relation to poetry, see Lacoue-Labarthe (1986 [1999]: 30 [18]). This is derived from Roger Munier's etymological explication in "Expérience," published in *Mise en page* 1 (May, 1972).

[16] Cf. Collot (1996), who speaks of "lyric emotion" as "this transport and this deporting which bears [*porte*] the subject to the encounter of that which overflows it of the inside as outside" (114), which relates this emotion or *émoi* (Collot will refer to it as "*é-motion*" (115)) to the internal exteriority of extimacy (see note 11, above). Vadé (1996: 17) refers to this "alterity" within the intimacy of the subject by way of Augustine's famous "*intimius intimo*," the most intimate intimacy which lapses into exteriority. Lacoue-Labarthe (re)cites Augustine's "*interior intimo meo*" in a similar manner. See Lacoue-Labarthe (2009c: 197, 2009a: 251), where he relates this phrase explicitly to extimacy. Finally, Rodriguez (2003: 116) writes that "the dynamic of emotion [*émotion*], as 'setting outside of oneself' [«*mise hors de soi*»], corresponds to the movement of destabilization of the reflexivity of the *ego*, and it plunges the subject into the pathic abyss."

[17] I would note that this term denoting the impossible experience of the subject's loss of "itself," its "own" ungrounding, becomes all the more prevalent in the writings of Lacoue-Labarthe in his later years, including in his *Écrits sur l'art* (*Writings on Art*), his posthumously published, incomplete study of Maurice Blanchot (Lacoue-Labarthe 2011 [2015]), as well as in his "literary" works, such as "Phrase V," of which the subtitle is "(*L'Émoi*)"; see Lacoue-Labarthe (2000 [2018]: 43–48 [29–32]).

and thus with the other (though never the other person as atomized subject—only ever the other person, *autrui*, as the neutral figuration of the other, *l'autre*; that is, as no-*one*, as the other of every identity, as *personne*).[18]

"Pain, which is not exactly suffering," writes Lacoue-Labarthe, "attains and touches the 'heart', the most intimate of the human [*l'homme*], this extreme interior where, in its nearly absolute singularity (its absoluteness)[19] the human [*l'homme*]—and not for an instant the subject —is pure waiting-for-another, hope of a dialogue, of a way out of solitude" (1986 [1999]: 48 [31], translation modified). It is important to note that this linking of pain to the exposure to the other in lyrical language eschews and effaces the subject in its instantiation ("not for an instant the subject")—we are thus in the distance opened by this *écart*, which is also a proximity (an *é-loignement* or *Ent-fuhrnung*, a de-distancing), opened to a saying which suspends the metaphysics and philosophy of the subject. We are in the caesural suspension—the "tragic transport," to recite Hölderlin's phrase (1952 [2009]: 196 [318])—of *écriture*; of *writing* or of *literature*.

Literature is the echo or double, then, of philosophy—though it must be stressed that these terms, as well as that of *mimesis* which is bound up with them, do not entail a temporal secondarity, but rather displace the binary hierarchization of this relation. That is to say, both literature and philosophy are exposed as echoes of an anterior absence, (re)inscribed and (re)iterated as though each "for the first time" or "in the first instance." Thus Nicolas Murena, in his recently published monograph on Lacoue-Labarthe as a writer of literature as opposed to a philosopher, claims that "the question of lyricism" is "an echo, in the poetic domain, of the philosophical question of the subject" (Murena 2022: 12)—that is, the double formulation or figuration of the question turning between lyricism and the subject which we have been intimating.

The origin is always already doubled, insofar as it is absent in and of "itself"—all that remains, all that appears, is the intimation of a reiteration, a refiguration, founded as though upon the abyss. And whereas the philosophical response lapses in its desire to think this originary default, to appropriate it and thus "itself" (by means of the

[18] Cf. Kim and Gibson (2021: 106–108), who refer to the lyrical subject as a "generalized subject" (108) which expresses and exposes a perspective of no-one (in particular), which "do[es] not appear to belong to any *particular* person at all" (108, italics in original). This appears to be a figuration of the lyrical subject as neutral *personne*—the someone who is no-one in particular. Cf. Collot (1996: 114), on the lyrical subject as belonging to the other rather than "itself."

[19] That is, its radical distancing or severance from everything else, including "itself" (as un-conditioned or dissolved-away, *ab-solutus*). Lacoue-Labarthe (2009a) speaks of this same "ab-soluteness" in relation to intimacy *as* extimacy (see note 11, above), as what "refuses all return to self" (251) in exposing a "liberation without remainder, its detatchment, […] always anterior, and as such inappropriable and unmasterable" (252).

logos), perhaps literature might renounce such an impossible task, and seek only to respond to this absence, in attempts at reiterating it, otherwise.[20] Literature would therefore reiterate this task (and its impossibility) *as such*, in echoing the silence of what was never said, and thus never heard—an expression, that is, of the *a-logos* (an expression which would be, as we have seen, the exposure of *algos*, of pain).[21]

Of course, we need the *two*, the duplication and the play of duplicity which is dissimulated between them—there can be no end, any more than there could be a beginning, an origin. Neither philosophy nor literature can avail, on its own (for each lacks what would make it, integrally, "itself"—lacking its "own" or "proper"). Dialogue is necessary, in the interplay and echo between the two, which evinces, perhaps, the intimation of something which is not "something," yet neither is it *simply* nothing, in the very *between* of these voices, these languages, these discourses or sayings. Dialogue, which is what is hoped for in lyricism as its exposure of pain and *défaillance* addressed to the other, is of course fundamental to philosophy as well. The doubling of voices, of language—itself already doubling, neutralizing, as we saw with the neutralization or depersonalization of the lyrical I—is thus marked in the place of origin; each voice, echoing another; a phrase, perhaps, silent and unsaid. "Language is the origin," Lacoue-Labarthe writes, in an epistolary exchange with Jean-Luc Nancy entitled "Dialogue on the Dialogue" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 2013: 98), and, he continues, "language is essentially—originarily—dialogical." "The address is the condition of language," he concludes—but in this originarily doubled address, who, or what, is being addressed? Lyricism, as the saying of language "itself," is an address from no-one to no *one*, addressing every*one*, bearing the exigency of response which the double movement of language inscribes, and which effectuates the intimate exposure of the subject as displaced, as *personne*, once more.

2.

Having addressed the poetics of Lacoue-Labarthe regarding lyricism, I now turn to two of the major figures of contemporary lyrical studies in order to disclose how Lacoue-Labarthe's poetics might relate to and extend the discussion. I will take up the figures of Käte Hamburger and Jonathan Culler, in turn.

Both Hamburger and Culler argue against taking the lyrical I as a fictional character or persona, and instead argue for a particular form of expressivism. Both distinguish their position from that of a Romantic

[20] Cf. Stierle (1977), who views lyrical saying as the transgression of discursive and generic schemas, and thus problematizes the identity which would be founded upon or through them. Cf. Antić (2022: 71–3), on Stierle's article.

[21] Cf. Kim and Gibson (2021: 99), on the "expressive *use*" (italics in original) of lyrical language, through which the reader or poet becomes vehicle or passage, as it were, for language and what it seeks to express.

expressivism, which argues for the lyrical saying as personal expression of the poet and their *Innigkeit*. According to Hamburger, the lyrical saying is taken as "statement," "*Aussage*" (literally, a saying-out or -away), an apophantic expression[22] which is to be regarded not in terms of meaning or sense of what is said, but in the sense of *apophainesthai*, of what is brought into appearance by means of its saying. It is for this reason that "the statement-subject alone, and not the statement-object, is of consequence" (Hamburger 1973: 31) in her conception of the lyrical subject. And this statement-subject, the subject which appears in and by saying, is precisely the lyrical I (234). Hamburger claims that the statement of this subject is a "reality statement [*Wirklichkeitsaussage*]," an actual and effectuating expression, not because of the reality of its object, of what is said, but because of the reality of the subject which expresses it (45). But what is meant by "real" in this sense? For Hamburger does not mean that the lyrical subject can be equated to a real, empirical speaker; the identification of the lyrical subject with the poet remains, for Hamburger, a suspended possibility. We lack the criterion for deciding and determining whether the lyrical I is or is not the I of the poet (274–275), and she remarks that the lyrical subject "is not to be understood as an individual one peculiar to this particular poet, or indeed as one which might be biographically explained, but instead solely as logico-linguistic" (244).[23]

The lyrical subject is thus, for Hamburger, an identity which remains suspended, neutralized as mere product and self-production of language. With this lyrical saying, "we are dealing only with *that* reality which the lyric I signifies as being *its*, that subjective, existential reality which cannot be compared with any objective reality which might form the semantic nucleus of its statements" (285, italics in original). This subjectivity is therefore of a transcendental nature, proper to no single individual and yet constitutional of every subject as speaker. This brings us into relation with the lyrical subject as *personne* which we have elaborated upon above, though while Hamburger maintains the subjectivity of this statement-subject, Lacoue-Labarthe proposes instead that we must think of this subjectivity as hollowed out, as it were, revealing the void of identity in the vacuous place of the "I." The continuous slippage inherent within every saying, every statement, from the first-person to the third-person (from "I" to "*il*," "he" or "it"), haunts every enunciative act—every saying affirms my existence in saying, while also displacing "me" in the work of language as neutral force proper to no single subject.[24] "My" words are never my own, and

[22] Hamburger (1973: 24) views "*Aussage*" as translating Aristotle's *logos apophantikos*.

[23] Cf. Culler (2015: 105), who notes that for Hamburger "this is not a return to the notion of the *Erlebnislyrik*, or 'lyric of experience,' in which the subject is the person of the poet. The statement-subject is not a personal 'I' but a linguistic function."

[24] Cf. Rodriguez (2003: 164), who writes that the "I" "does not name any lexical entity and characterizes itself by a semantic void. Furthermore, it cannot be identified

the *Aussage* which is expressed exposes "me" in and to "my" reality, ever displaced and distanced from "myself," in the paradoxical exposure of extimacy, of the intimate interior (the reality of the subject which is *its* own) being nothing other than external (improper, impersonal, the work of language).[25]

Jonathan Culler, in his influential *Theory of the Lyric*, also posits a particular form of lyrical expressivism. Culler views lyrical saying as an act of enunciation, as an event of language, and suspends the determination of the identity of the lyrical subject. Along similar lines as Hamburger, Culler disagrees with conceiving of lyricism as "the speech act of a fictional persona: the fictional imitation of a real-world speech act" (Culler 2015: 7). He also views lyricism as apophantic and epideictic, as "addressing and illuminating the world" (8) by means of a saying which is "fundamentally nonmimetic, nonfictional, a distinctive linguistic event" (7). "The lyric is, at bottom," Culler claims, "a statement about this world rather than a projection of a fictional speaker and a fictional world" (350)—a claim which positions him in relation to Hamburger, as he acknowledges—and therefore "our attention should be directed to experiencing the poem itself as an event, not to discovering what the author might have experienced" (350). As an epideictic expression, lyricism is thus to be taken as an event of disclosure—to which Lacoue-Labarthe would certainly agree—not only of the world, but implicit in this the experience of the subject as well.[26] But whereas Culler remains concerned with the lyric as genre (cf. Culler 2017: 10), Lacoue-Labarthe is concerned rather with lyricism, taking a more philosophical approach to lyrical saying, its work and effects (its *ergon*) in relation to subjectivity and existence, rather than a literary-critical perspective focused on the poem as a work.[27]

with a particular individual, for it has the possibility of being enounced and assumed by all those who speak. 'I' constitutes itself as a blank which determines itself in every situation of communication."

[25] Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe (2000 [2018]: 45 [30]), where a profound experience of language is poetically exposed as speaking from "in me outside of me [*en moi hors de moi*]" (translation modified). Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe (2009b: 160), where he refers to the "in us outside of us [*en nous hors de nous*]" as relation not to any being (or, in Hamburger's terms, any objective reality) but rather to nothingness, to the pure and empty power of language "itself."

[26] It is for this reason that Antić (2022: 99) views Culler's thought as "crucially linked to subjectifying."

[27] Rodriguez (2003: 5) focuses on lyric (*lyrique*) rather than lyricism (*lyrisme*), taking the former as a "typical structuration of discourse," and the latter as a "notion historically situated in the Romantic tradition, which engages an imaginary something of poetic creation and renders aesthetic an existential attitude." Rodriguez further elaborates on this distinction on pages 18–19. Antić (2022: 40n.17) affirms this distinction. But Lacoue-Labarthe engages with this Romantic tradition in attempts at disconnecting lyricism from the sense of the subject with which it is implicated. He engaged in this attempt throughout his life and works, most explicitly perhaps in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1978 [1988]).

We might therefore position Lacoue-Labarthe on the side of the particular expressivist positions espoused by Hamburger and Culler, though with a particular modification. Call it a negative expressivism, perhaps[28]—for the lyrical expression is of no-one, of language "itself," the poem as an echo of the powers of language tracing the limit between the possible and the impossible. The event of language marked by lyricism, in the same suspended instance of enunciation, suffers the catastrophic down-turn in which the event is experienced "in the null form of the pure non-event" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1986 [1999]: 31 [18], translation modified), for what occurs in saying is nothing, no-thing. What appears is without appearance, suspended in the saying of language which can but withdraw in the rendering present of any(thing) said. "What occurs thus," in the (non)event of lyrical expression, "without occurring (for such is what by definition cannot occur), is—without being—nothingness, the 'nothing of being' (*ne-ens*)" (32 [19]). Lyricism *says* nothing, (re)articulating the nothingness at work in and through language, in response to what remains, by the very double movement of language as drawing the limit between the possible and the impossible, ever unsaid, what would be *nothing* as sayable. "A poem has nothing to recount," Lacoue-Labarthe claims, "nothing to say: what it recounts and says is that from which it wrenches itself away as poem" (33 [19–20], translation modified). The catastrophe of language is exposed in lyrical expression, its pain and passion as radically passive or powerless, insofar as what is expressed or said is but the echo or remarking of its own interdiction—the fault of all saying in responding to the unsayable, ever in default of all saying, yet demanding a response nonetheless. This impossible exigency is at the heart of the "expressivism" of Lacoue-Labarthe, for what seeks expression is what remains outside and yet intimately interior to lyrical language and its attempt at saying—an anterior nothingness which language traces, and which Lacoue-Labarthe has hazarded to call the phrase.

In his collection of "poems" entitled *Phrase*, Lacoue-Labarthe puts into practice his poetics. Each "phrase" contained in the work is not the expression of the *phrase* (which would be nothing in terms of language or linguistic expression); rather, each is an attempt at responding to and echoing the (non)event of language which is experienced as the exposure to the silent phrase. And each, in this exposure, aims to enunciate and effectuate an address, to establish a dialogue. Not, however, to address a reader, to dialogue with another person. Rather, these writings seek to address the anterior phrase—the silent pre-scription of what he has elsewhere called "*écriture avant la lettre,*" "*writing before the letter*" (1975 [1998]: 268 [137]), which I take to be intimation

[28] One might trace the genealogy of such a "negative expressivism" through the writings on writing, and the writings of, such figures as Mallarmé, Blanchot, Bataille, and Roger Laporte—all figures whose names appear throughout Lacoue-Labarthe's writings (both literary and otherwise), impressing and expressing their indelible mark upon his poetics.

of the anterior absencing or disappearance, the default of origin, which marks language in the *diaphora*, the struggle of difference, underwriting and conditioning any possible dialogue. This phrase, however, can never be *said*, (re)iterated, for it would thus fall under the decision of a side, of a language and discourse, which would translate it and thus alter it.[29] The phrase, echoing the faltering and defaulting of the subject, thus exposes us in our attempt at addressing it, at saying it (however faulty or aborted such an attempt may be, necessarily)—for lyricism "encounters, at the limit of the inaccessible and forever-concealed gaping, the naked possibility of addressing" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1986 [1999]: 136 [96]). For though it remains "forever-concealed," unspeakable *as such*, it demands the attempt at responding, at addressing, nonetheless. It demands, what Lacoue-Labarthe calls in the nineteenth "phrase" (subtitled "prose"), a "just diction" (2000 [2018]: 113 [79], translation modified)[30]—a response not to what there is, or that there is (that there is something and not nothing), but to the void which effaces itself prior to any being, to all being, and which exposes the very possibility of relation *as such*.

Lacoue-Labarthe, in *Poetry as Experience*, published in 1986, speaks of "the possibility of the poem as the possibility of 'relating oneself to' in general" (1986 [1999]: 119 [84], translation modified), which is also the possibility of "addressing oneself to"—the power, we might say, of language, which is not properly ours, however; for, as Lacoue-Labarthe here notes, "language is the other in the human [*l'homme*]" (135 [96], translation modified). And yet, in 1999-2000, with the composition of "Phrase XIX (Prose)," Lacoue-Labarthe will speak of this power in language as one of *prose* rather than of poetry (2000 [2018]: 113–15 [79–80]). Of course, this is not a naïve prosody opposed to poetry—it is rather a complex question, bound to the study of Hölderlin and his "sobriety," as well as Benjamin concerning the Romantics. What matters to us here, however, is the justice of the address, in relation to the unpronounceable (to summarize the opening lines of this "phrase"), capable of "respecting the unpronounceable" as the closing line says (2000 [2018]: 115 [80]).

All of this to say that even these writings bear a "renunciation"—an enunciation, that is, which withdraws itself from the affirmative claim of establishing a figure in truth.[31] Yet if such literary works, as Antonin Wiser phrases it (in relation to Lacoue-Labarthe's other, early prose-poetic writings collected under the suspended title of *L'«Allégorie»*), "take the place of nothing" and are thus an "allegory of a nothingness" (Wiser 2010: 208), then what remains of lyricism beyond an infinite

[29] On the pain and struggle of engaging with the phrase—the impossible, yet necessary, demand of language and poetry—see the "Postscriptum" to "Phrase II (Clarification)," in Lacoue-Labarthe (2000 [2018]: 19–23 [13–15]).

[30] On this "just diction," see as well Bailly (2011b).

[31] On the relation drawn between renunciation, enunciation, and the Ancient Greek *phrasis*, see Lacoue-Labarthe (2000 [2018]: 13 [9]).

paraphrase of the unsayable? Perhaps all we can do is repeat, reiterate, and thus intimate, lyrically, the demand for an infinite justification.[32] It remains a question of justice, then—justice without answer, without ground. How to do justice to that which ever abdicates from the position of a "that" or a "this," the referent, the *todé ti*—an enunciation in which the enounced (*énoncé*) withdraws in the very act of enunciation? Would this not entail the infinite reiteration of our justifications—said ever again, held in question in and by the exposure of the open question which lyricism intimates? For in the experience of lyricism is exposed not only the fault and defaulting of the subject, but of language itself. A faltering which (re)marks (upon) the demand for another saying, another experience, which might render justice to this excess of nothingness which underwrites all language.

3.

In the absence of closure, and not to create the illusion of an end to this endless demand which the lyric expresses, I propose a reading of the opening "phrase" of Lacoue-Labarthe's poetic work. The hope is not to *justify* the poetics by means of an interpretation of the "poem," but instead to attempt to explicate the *justification* which the lyrical saying seeks to attest. That is, to explicate how the lyrical expression has nothing to say but its saying, its bearing witness to what remains to be said—the poetic or lyrical exigency.

"Phrase I"

1 … let—let come (ceding, probably,
or welling up, though barely),
that which will not come and cannot arrive or happen, fault
would it only be of an infallible shore
5 and because it is manifest that in you, it is elsewhere,
of no part where you trouble yourself that this streams
or collapses (I don't know, I think
of an extenuated face, betrayed, covered in tears,
etc.—in fact, of supplication);
10 let, yes, let grow old in you and decline
this which has not taken place:
we are held to it, constrained, of the same as to
the irrevocable which, the one forever according to
the other, separates us, the one apart from the other binding us;
15 for we expose that the echo, in us, were nearly
of no voice; the things, around us

[32] That is, to repeat the attempt at response, to let language speak and express "itself," insofar as "lyricism *goes towards language in language*" (Maulpoix 2000: 17, italics in original). To let language (re)iterate "itself" in the exposure *of* nothing giving over to all occurrence, in a saying which is "not mimesis of a voice but *voicing*" (Culler 2017: 9)—the voiceless voicing of *personne*.

(this garden, for example, there,
this meadow, always the same),
trace, of course, no passage.

20 And do not say: it's horrible—"do not implore,"
do not be frightened either.
It is, it is true, without appeal, and we are
uncontestably deserted. But accept, all the same,
"don't turn yourself away," accept, as
25 when you redress yourself, shameful, knowing nothing
of what you lose, this slow catastrophe
or this exodus, rather, which more or less we are.

(*July 20, 1976*)[33]

The expression of the poem folds back upon itself, calling to "let come" (l. 1) what can only come in the call of lyrical saying—that is, the event calling for language, for a saying or expression, but "which will not come and cannot arrive or happen" (l. 3). What is called for cannot arrive or happen because, as event of language, it is no event—nothing happens, strictly speaking; the absence to which only language can attest is testified to in its failure to appear, the "fault" (l. 3) necessary to this saying which responds to the impossible. This fault or non-appearance is also made to appear in the voicing of the poem itself, in neutralizing the voice of any reader—"it is manifest that in you, it is elsewhere, / of no part where you trouble yourself" (ll. 5,6). The poem thus seeks to attest to the displacement and extimacy of the subject (be they writer or reader), as linked to this lyrical voicing of *personne*, intricated with the non-appearing of the event (of being). There is thus doubly inscribed, by language, the fault and default of language and of subjective identity, equally bound to the neutrality of all saying (here given the figure of a passionate or painfully afflicted face [ll. 8,9]).

The "phrase" then affirms the breech or fault of "this which has not taken place" (l. 11), demanding that this non-event of a saying to be responded to be "let grow old in you and decline" (l. 10), further relating this exigency to our mortal existence, as the beings at once established and effaced by language. This nothing of the non-event, bound to lyrical saying, is something to which we are "constrained" (l. 12), at once separating and binding us (l. 14) to it, even as this tears us apart from "ourselves" in the double-movement of de-distancing, in the double-play of *personne* —"the echo, in us" of what is exposed as "nearly / of no voice" (ll. 15,16), which speaks in every lyrical expression as the echo of "our own" voice, and yet of which our voice is also, in displacement,

[33] Lacoue-Labarthe (2000 [2018]: 9–10 [5]). This translation is my own. I have consulted Leslie Hill's translation, though have opted for a slightly more "literal" translation, more syntactically near to Lacoue-Labarthe's original (in line with Lacoue-Labarthe's own tendency toward "literality" in his translation practices). Line numbers have been added for ease of locating citations in the explication that follows.

but an echo. Language, this other in us yet outside us, thus suspends the determinate positing of origin and echo, redoubled in the poem as a whole being the echo of an originary absence, silence, ever in default.

In marking and remarking itself as the event of language, attempt at saying itself in the process of addressing the loss which it incites and intimates, the second stanza of "Phrase I" (re)iterates the response of the subject to the displacing which the lyrical saying destines them. The lyrical subject speaks (to the reader? to "themselves"?) of not being frightened by this loss which is afflicted by and attested to in lyricism (ll. 20,21), and instead of affirming, by the response of poetic expression as experience undergone (as *pathos*) that "without appeal" "we are / uncontestably deserted" (ll. 22, 23). The poem thus marks a renunciation, affirming what it cannot say, affirming as well the loss of self so profound that the subject knows "nothing / of what [they] lose" (ll. 25,26). This loss which language demands and imparts, which the lyrical expression attests to and effectuates in rendering itself as the saying of a loss always already anterior to subjectification, leaves itself to appear as but the echo of a (non)event already passing, an intimate catastrophe of exposure. The lyricism of this opening "phrase," opening the work of the same name in (re)calling the return to this loss without place and nearly without figure, intimates our mortal exigency as beings in and of language, marking and marked by (as the closing lines attest) "this slow catastrophe / or this exodus, rather, which more or less we are" (ll. 26, 27). More or less, for though this subject would be what "we are," there remains the suspension of both identity and being which the poem attests in folding back upon itself, exposing the poetic or lyrical exigency binding the subject to an exile and exodus, an errant wandering from "itself" as the existence of "itself."[34]

The event of lyrical expression thus marks the impossible exigency binding the subject to nothingness, to the void which language traverses and traces, in the experience of intimation as the intimation of an experience belonging to no-one, yet encompassing us all. Though it is true, as Blanchot writes to Vadim Kozovoï, friend and poet, that "the poetic exigency, it is another register, it is wholly in fact apart" (Blanchot 2009: 78), it is also the case that this distance and proximity of the *écart*, this apartness, is intimate to our being, and intimated by language "itself." It is this poetic exigency, of which theory can *see* nothing, and which the lyrical saying can but respond to in attestation, that Lacoue-Labarthe seeks not merely to think, but to render as experience—to write, that is, to intimate.

[34] Cf. Blanchot (1969 [1993]: 187 [128]), where the prefix "ex-" is made to resonate this ex-perience of displacement between the words "exile, exodus, existence, exteriority and strangeness [étrangeté]" (translation modified), designating "distance [*l'écart*] and separation as the origin of all 'positive value.'"

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Aesthetic Value of Immoral Fictions

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Can one have an aesthetically valuable experience of fiction that takes an immoral perspective? Some have argued that one can. However, some important objections have been raised against this idea. Two objections are: that the immorality involved is confined to fictional reality, and that the aesthetic value of immoral fiction is dictated by a pluralistic attitude that not everyone accepts. My aim is to respond to these challenges and to argue, on the basis of two examples, that even an unlimited immoral perspective can enhance a widespread aesthetic value.

Keywords: Aesthetic value; immoral fiction; moral concepts; human values; fictional/actual ethical defects.

Suppose you are confronted with a fiction whose perspective is immoral by your standards. Some have argued that such a fiction can produce an experience of aesthetic value. The objections to this claim are that, in such a case, (i) the immorality is confined to the world of the fiction, and (ii) the aesthetic value is dictated by a pluralistic attitude that not everyone accepts. I argue instead that even an unrestricted immoral perspective can enhance a widespread aesthetic value.

I will first outline how philosophers have come to argue for the aesthetic value of immoral fictions or works of art (§1). I then present two objections that have been raised against this view and outline a response to them (§2). Finally, I consider two case studies in support of my response (§3 and §4).

1. *Immorality, art, and fiction*

Ethical criticism of art was accepted and encouraged from the dawn of philosophy (see Carroll 2000: 350) until modern times, when philosophers began to advocate the autonomism of art, according to which "artworks are valuable for their own sake, not because of their service

to ulterior purposes" (Carroll 2000: 351). While radical autonomists claimed that no moral evaluation could be given to works of art, moderate autonomists acknowledge that moral considerations can complement aesthetic ones in the evaluation of an artwork with moral content; but they all claim that "the ethical value or disvalue of an artwork has no bearing on the aesthetic value or disvalue" (Carroll 2000: 360).

The radical division between aesthetic and moral appreciation can be argued by appealing to the difference between the truth-dependence of morality and the truth-independence of aesthetic appreciation in the following way:

> Moral reasoning is concerned with truth, with 'getting it right', whether the nature of moral reasoning is thought of as the application of general rules or as discriminating between conflicting moral claims in a complex situation and balancing them against each other. However, […] appreciation of a literary work can proceed independently of judgements about the truth of the work (or its content). (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 389)

This division is challenged by radical moralists, for whom, on the contrary, the appreciation of a morally committed artwork depends on the truth of moral evaluations. Berys Gaut, for example, argues that

> Responses outside the context of art are subject to ethical evaluation […] The same is true when responses are directed at fictional events, for these responses are actual, not just imagined ones. […] If a work prescribes a response that is unmerited, it has failed in an aim internal to it, and that is a defect. (Gaut 1998: 194)

A crucial assumption in the radical moralist's argument is that a work of art must be morally instructive whenever it deals with a situation of ethical significance; on this basis, a work that prescribes an ethically incorrect attitude is defective in its educational role and therefore aesthetically flawed.

The role of artistic moral education is reconsidered and deepened by the moderate moralist Noël Carroll, who distinguishes between two aspects of moral education: (1) "having access to abstract propositions and concepts" and (2) "apply[ing] [such concepts] appropriately" (Carroll 1996: 230). The first component develops independently of artworks through our relationships with the world, while the second component is enhanced through artworks because "in *exercising* […] pre-existing moral powers in response to texts, the texts may become opportunities for enhancing our already existing moral understanding" (Carroll 1996: 237, original emphasis; see Carroll 1998: 153–154). This means that truth-dependent morality is acquired outside our engagement with artworks, as the autonomists argued, but the deepening of this acquisition can be achieved through such engagement, and this is the space for moral education/miseducation through artworks.

Within this "exercise" way of interpreting the moral education offered by art, the relationship between morality and aesthetics has been explored. Morality (or immorality) in works of art—if present—is sought in the "purposiveness" or "work's *perspective* on its ethical

content" (Clavel-Vázquez 2020: 145),[1] while external aspects such as the process or means of production, the author's actual interests or intentions,[2] and harmful effects on the audience[3] are not considered relevant, nor are internal factors such as the unethical characters or situations depicted. As for the aesthetic dimension, it is assumed, with Carroll, that "the bottom line, aesthetically speaking, with respect to narrative works is that we are supposed to be absorbed by them" (Carroll 1996: 235). And with such a definition of the moral and aesthetic dimensions, it is admitted that:

> A narrative may be more absorbing exactly because of the way in which it engages our moral understanding and emotions. […] And in such cases the way in which the narrative addresses and deepens our moral understanding is part and parcel of what makes the narrative successful. (Carroll 1996: 236)

Now, the interesting question that moderate moralists and immoralists have focused on is whether an immoral perspective in a narrative can contribute to the aesthetic value of the work.[4] The moderate moralist Carroll observes that an artwork can have aesthetic value if the immoral perspective escapes people, even the morally sensitive audience (see Carroll 2000: 378). Immoralists, on the other hand, note that the immoral perspective allows for the "exercise" of moral faculties, i.e. "the immoral character of the imaginative experience afforded by a work may directly *deepen our understanding*" (Kieran 2003: 63, my emphasis). Daniel Jacobson, for example, notes that "a cunning political cartoon can make you *see someone* in a manner which you would repudiate as a judgment. Then it is a good caricature, albeit a bad political statement" (Jacobson 1997: 187, my emphasis). And A. W. Eaton adds that "the capacity to make an audience *feel and desire* things inimical to their considered views and deeply held principles is for this very reason and to this extent an aesthetic achievement" (Eaton 2012: 281, my emphasis). Immoralists thus argue that the immoral perspective

[1] Clavel-Vázquez reports that, on this characterization of morality inherent in fiction, Gaut (1998, 2007), Eaton (2003, 2012), Devereaux (2004), Stecker (2005) and Harold (2006) all converge.

[2] On a different attitude towards the actual interests or intentions of the author see Clavel-Vázquez (2020) and Matthes (2022).

[3] See Wimmer et al. (2021) for experiments showing that fiction does not have cognitive effects on audiences.

[4] Both the moderate moralist and the immoralist maintain that moral defects may contribute to aesthetic valuation. For moderate moralism, see Carroll (1996: 236, my emphasis): "This is moderate moralism. It contends that […] sometimes the moral defects and/or merits of a work *may figure* in the aesthetic evaluation of the work." Immoralists claim that sometimes moral defects *figure* in the aesthetic evaluation of a work. Therefore, moderate moralism is not challenged by immoralism as Carroll observes: "I have been agnostic about immoralism, while also conceding that if it were true, immoralism would nevertheless be logically consistent with moderate moralism" (Carroll 2013: 371). I am indebted to a reviewer for asking me to clarify the relationship between the moderate moralist and immoralist claims.

draws us into the fiction through understandings, visions, feelings and desires that are at odds with our habitual ways of thinking and acting, and therein lies the aesthetic value of the work of art.

2. *Two weaknesses*

Two weaknesses have been identified in the arguments of the immoralists; I will call them the Quarantine Limitation and the Value Challenge. My aim in this work is to overcome these difficulties and to allow for a different interpretation of how an immoral perspective in a narrative work can constitute an aesthetic value.

2.1. *The Quarantine Limitation*

Adriana Clavel-Vázquez (2020), drawing on Tamar Gendler (2000, 2006), distinguishes between works whose immoral prescriptions are quarantined in fiction without reference to actual situations—that is, they have *fictional ethical defects*—and works whose immoral prescriptions involve actual attitudes to real events—that is, works with *actual ethical defects*. In her words,

> Fictional ethical defects fulfill the following conditions: 1) works present an unethical perspective, that is, they express and prescribe unethical attitudes toward narrated events and characters; 2) authors recognize, and the intended audience is put in a position to recognize the unethical character of the attitudes expressed and prescribed; 3) the unethical attitudes are directed only at fictional events and characters. (Clavel-Vázquez 2020: 148)

while

> Actual ethical defects fulfill the following conditions: 1) works present an unethical perspective, that is, they express and prescribe unethical attitudes toward narrated events and characters; 2) authors do not recognize, and the intended audience is not meant to recognize, the unethical character of the attitudes expressed and prescribed; 3) the make-believe moral outlook mirrors an unethical real-world outlook actually endorsed by agents (both artist and intended audience); 4) the unethical attitudes are directed at both fictional and actual entities. (Clavel-Vázquez 2020: 150)

She observes that immoralists have convincingly argued that works with fictional ethical defects can have aesthetic value; but—she claims—the main concerns are about works with actual ethical defects, which cannot have aesthetic value (Clavel-Vázquez 2020: 153). I argue instead that actual ethical defects can contribute to the aesthetic value of a narrative work. But before arguing for this, I need to consider what the aesthetic value of a fictional narrative is; this is what I will present in response to the Value Challenge.

2.2. *The Value Challenge*

Noël Carroll (2000), considering Jacobson's defense of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* "not [being] good in spite of its moral defec-

tiveness, but because of it" (Carroll 2000: 380), challenges the immoralist supporters of artworks with actual immoral perspectives to explain the aesthetic value in them in the following terms:

> Whoever praises *Triumph of the Will* for its artistic value owes us an explanation here. That it can be made to serve educative needs in a pluralistic society does not sound like an artistic value in any traditional sense. It sounds like a strategic value from a certain, perhaps liberal, point of view. If indeed it is an artistic value, more needs to be said to connect it with better-known sources of artistic or aesthetic value. (Carroll 2000: 381)

Carroll does not consider it an aesthetic value that fictions with immoral perspectives allow us to experience viewpoints that we do not and would not experience in real life, because this evaluation is dictated by a pluralistic attitude that may be of value to some but not to others. He claims that it is necessary for the artistic or aesthetic value to be defined as a value that is more widely shared.

In my view, a useful starting point for attempting to define pervasive artistic or aesthetic value is the following observation by Lamarque and Olsen:

> The interest which literature has for human beings, it has because it possesses a *humanly interesting content*, because what literature presents or says concerns readers as human beings. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 265, my emphasis)

The expression "humanly interesting content" refers to content that has to do with characteristics that are shared by humanity and that arouses interest in whoever is able to recognize them.[5] This does not mean that every human being, whatever her point of view, whatever she does or believes, can recognize the characteristics she shares with every other human being; there are misanthropists or people who have no interest in other human beings. But when people are interested in the humanity of others and recognize human qualities where they didn't expect to find them, they can have the rewarding experience that their understanding of humanity is broadened by this recognition, and this is the experience of "humanly interesting content."

We can recognize people who are open to the experience of "humanly interesting content." A case in point is Chremes, a character in Terence's II century B.C. comedy *The Self-Tormentor*, who has a deep interest in the concerns of his neighbor Menedemus and manifests it with the following words: "I am a human being; nothing human is alien to me" (my translation; see Terence 2006). In these words we recognize the receptive attitude of anyone who is open to "humanly interesting content."

[5] On the human value of aesthetic experience, see also Murdoch (1970: 65): "what we learn from contemplating the characters of Shakespeare or Tolstoy or the paintings of Velasquez or Titian […] is something about the real quality of human nature." See also Lamarque (2012: 279) for an interesting analysis of what it takes to seek "transcultural instead of culture-specific truths."

The suspicious reader may reasonably ask why we need literature (or art) to understand what is humanly interesting. The reason has to do with the fact that we are all educated in morality and social conventions, which have their own virtues: they give us the tools to distinguish right from wrong, to behave sensitively towards other people, to interact in a useful and constructive way. But they also have a downside: by teaching us to classify actions and people, our education can prevent us from seeing our common humanity, which we are not always able to experience.

Literature and art—at their best—have the power to pull back the curtain of classifications that we have every right to make, and to make us recognize some human qualities even where we did not expect to find them. This creates surprise, confusion, and from this perspective, different from that of our classifications, we think we can recognize our humanity more fully. When this happens, we feel that we have had a valuable aesthetic experience.

The nature of this valuable aesthetic experience is, in my opinion, very well expressed in the following passage by Joseph Conrad, an author who is able to make us recognize humanity in unexpected and exceptional situations:

> the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition—and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty and pain. (Conrad 2017: 6)

In my view, the crucial observation in the above passage is that our experience of interesting human content does not depend on "wisdom," on what we have acquired through moral and social education, but is seen as a "gift" that is human and available to anyone who wishes to exercise it.

This consideration allows us to reconsider the two levels of moral education proposed by Carroll, namely (1) "having access to abstract propositions and concepts" and (2) "applying [such concepts] appropriately." Carroll suggests that our engagement with morally relevant art enables us to exercise the second aspect and to seek aesthetic value in it, while the first aspect is acquired outside of artistic works. But even the second aspect depends on education (or "wisdom") and is not a "gift." Lamarque-Olsen-Conrad proposes another level of moral education that is a gift and does not depend on education: (3) the discovery of humanity behind any moral or social classification.

The two perspectives (that offered by Carroll on the one hand and that offered by Lamarque-Olsen-Conrad on the other) are considered as alternative ways of interpreting the aesthetic experience of fiction with moral concerns. Instead, according to the present proposal, whenever we have a valuable aesthetic experience of a work with moral implications, we activate both the exercise of our independently acquired moral concepts (i.e. a wisdom) and the experience of humanity (i.e. a

gift) (in more schematic terms: levels (2) and (3)). And these two aspects may not be in harmony with each other; in particular, when we experience a work with ethical defects, the two aspects may not be coordinated, they may require recalibration, and this is part of the valuable aesthetic experience of the work.[6] My suggestion is that whenever a work approaches a moral concern, the aesthetic value is not simply the absorption in the work together with the application of moral concepts, but the discovery of interesting human content together with our agreement or disagreement with its moral evaluation.

In the following sections, I consider two case studies in which narrative works with actual ethical defects provide valuable aesthetic experiences. The examples can be seen as thought experiments in which works with actual ethical defects allow us to recognize the humanly interesting content, and these are cases in which actual ethical defects allow for aesthetic virtue.

3. *Actual ethical defect: Condemning homosexuality*

The perspective offered by Dante's *Divine Comedy* has many actual ethical defects. Among them, it considers homosexuality a moral defect to be punished in the afterlife. The fictional author does not recognize, and the intended audience is not meant to recognize, the unethical nature of the attitudes expressed and prescribed. The fictional moral outlook unfortunately reflects an unethical real-world outlook that is actually endorsed by the author and the intended audience. It is clear from the work that the unethical attitudes are directed at both fictional and real entities.

In Canto XIV of *Inferno* [*Hell*] Dante encounters homosexuals—sodomites, as they were called at the time—and in Canto XV Dante meets Brunetto Latini, a literary scholar who had such an influence on Dante's thought and literary career that he revered him as a mentor. Brunetto predicted Dante's literary fame and showed great admiration for his pupil. Dante shows him respect and friendship. Brunetto, like all sodomites, is condemned to walk naked on the burning sand and to be struck by tiny flames falling on him.

Now, it is obvious that the contemporary reader may have a very different attitude from that of the time in which Dante wrote. In the Middle Ages it was generally accepted that homosexuality was a sin, and even today there are people who maintain this belief. But fortu-

[6] Eaton observes that immoral fiction may elicit "pro and con attitudes" (Eaton 2013: 376). I agree with her that the experience of immoral fiction is conflictual, but the terms of the conflict are different: Eaton claims that it is a conflict between the application of moral norms and our experiences of immorality, I claim that it is between the application of moral norms and the discovery of humanity beyond such norms.

nately, most people today have developed a critical attitude towards it, recognizing the moral error underlying such a belief.[7]

It may be interesting to observe that, whatever one's moral attitude, reading Canto XV for the first time can be a disorientating and rather unpleasant experience. What is perhaps most disturbing is that Dante has placed someone as esteemed and admired as Brunetto Latini among the sodomites, subjecting him to cruel humiliation. But then something may happen that changes the first impression.

Reflecting on punishment, one realizes that the experience of walking on burning sand—an experience almost everyone has at the beach in summer—is the experience of suffering from having a body. It is not only the sand that burns the feet, but the person experiencing it has a desire to lose the earth's gravitational pull and to avoid contact with the soles of the feet, which are the source of suffering. And this experience is intensified if we imagine small flames falling on the body. The body becomes the cause of suffering since it is because of it that the condemned cannot avoid suffering. Reflecting on this, we realize that the image of the otherworldly punishment of sodomites reflects the torment that homosexuals who believe they have sinful desires must suffer in life.

This discovery changes the perspective on Canto XV: the actual ethical defect endorsed by the fictional narrator is not a limitation of the work, but it allows us to understand what it is like to have certain moral beliefs and the suffering they cause—at least in earthly life—to some gay people. When confronted with this transformative experience, we may forget the enormous difference in moral perspective between Dante, who does not discuss the sinfulness of homosexual attitudes, and the prospective reader, who does not consider them worthy of moral condemnation. But the difference is there, and the greatness of Dante's perspective is not that he did not condemn homosexuals (he did, there is no evidence to the contrary), but that he was able to see the human condition as dictated by the moral conventions he endorsed. And that is a valuable aesthetic achievement.

It is interesting to note that once the perspective has been changed, the whole of Canto XV assumes a different reading. The relationship between the fictional Dante and his teacher seems to be dictated by a deep understanding of the teacher's human condition, and Brunetto's physical and moral suffering makes us see his intellectual life and his generous attitude towards the narrator in a different light.

4. *Actual ethical defect: Endorsing Nazism*

In Jorge Luis Borges' *The Aleph*, there is a short story entitled *Deutsches Requiem*. It is the transcription of a manuscript written by the fic-

[7] I am indebted to a reviewer for suggesting that I make these different perspectives explicit.

tional deputy director of the Tarnowitz concentration camp on the eve of his execution for crimes against humanity. It is clear that the perspective adopted by the author of the manuscript is indeed ethically flawed: not only is he responsible for horrific tortures and murders, but he also writes: "I have no desire to be pardoned, for I feel no guilt, but I do wish to be understood" (Borges 1999: 229). The fictional author does not recognize, and the intended audience is not meant by the fictional author to recognize, the unethical nature of the attitudes expressed and prescribed. And the unethical attitudes are directed at both fictional and real events.

It may be objected that Borges was not a Nazi, and that the fictitious immoral outlook does not reflect Borges's actual attitude,[8] so that the short story is not an example of an actual ethical defect. According to Clavel-Vázquez, "the *ethical value* of intrinsic ethical flaws depends on a reconstruction of historical authors," which "is not only based on available evidence in the work, but also on authors' sociohistorical context, their oeuvre as a whole, and even their public self" (Clavel-Vázquez 2020: 153, original emphasis). This is a prescriptive rule that is not reflected in the case in question; the reader who is aware of Borges's actual political attitude cannot read this text by quarantining the fictional author's perspective, but is forced to export it.[9] Even if the work does not meet the given definition of "actual ethical defects," it does meet the general requirement for "actual ethical defects:" "Actual ethical defects involve prescriptions that are licensed for export because the real-world perspective that accompanies the make-believe perspective expresses and prescribes unethical attitudes toward actual entities" (Clavel-Vázquez 2020: 150).

It is very difficult for me to reconstruct the reaction of a real Nazi to this text, but I can report the reaction of readers who have no desire to experience empathy with the main character. I believe that most readers approach this text without any desire to understand or forgive the fictional author, but with the sole intention of condemning him. The actual ethical flaws are therefore not shared by the readers (at least in most cases). But in reading this text, the readers encounter the disturbing, humanly interesting content: they encounter the humanity of a person they deeply despise; the experience is disturbing and unsettling, and therein lies the aesthetic value.

Readers discover that the protagonist has literary, philosophical, and musical sensibilities, thus dispelling the hope that cultural sensibilities can save people from evil. They learn that the author decides that Nazism and his work in the concentration camp allow him to better

[8] See Burgin (1968: 104), where it is reported that Borges said: "People have known all along that I was, let's say, against Hitler." I am indebted to a reviewer for helping me to be explicit on this objection.

[9] Borges himself encourages this attitude when he said: "I imagined that Nazi, and I wrote the story. Because there were so many people in Buenos Aires who were on the side of Hitler" (Burgin 1968: 31).

serve his political ideals through constant engagement, thus shattering the expectation that Nazi ideals were tolerated rather than chosen. But the climax is reached when the reader is told how he suppressed in himself all traces of mercy and sensitivity to others and cultivated the new ideal of violence, which is self-perpetuating because those who wish to suppress it exercise it; in the face of this, we are stunned by the depths of horror that humanity can reach. This destabilizing experience is aesthetically valuable because it forces us to confront the distortions that people like us can endorse.

5. *Concluding remarks*

I have argued that if the aesthetic value of fiction dealing with morality/immorality can be sought in the combination of the exercise of independently acquired moral concepts with the experience of humanity, we can find it even when the fictional immoral perspective is unacknowledged by the fictional author, reproduced by real agents, and applied equally to real and fictional events or agents.[10]

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Drawing Reflections: What Kind of Knowledge Does Self-referential Literature Yield?

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As part of a larger effort to explore the multiform relations between philosophy and literature—a research field that attracts growing attention—we focus on the philosophical aspects of literature. Our project tackles the subject of literature's potential to generate knowledge. In our paper we intend to dwell on self-referential literature. This intriguing dimension of literary expression is associated with works in which self-reflective moves can be traced, that is, texts in which literary writing refers to and reflects on literature itself. The self-reflection of self-referential literature assumes many shapes, affecting in various ways the constitution of both content and form. Thus, our aim becomes twofold. First, we look into variants of literary self-reflection, while pondering the philosophical implications of each of those. Here, we are going to draw on examples from the writings of Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Valéry, Maurice Blanchot and Clarice Lispector. Second, we propose to consider the necessary conditions and the prospects for obtaining some kind of knowledge by means of self-referential literature. In so doing, we examine alternative conceptions and kinds of knowledge which could be taken into account.

Keywords: Philosophy and Literature; self-reflection; self-referential literature; cognitive function; value of literature.

1. *Introduction: philosophy and literature*

Philosophy and literature, as two spheres of human intellectual activity, exist and develop through a vast number of texts. This self-evident

observation is a necessary reminder of the multiformity of both philosophical thought and literary creation. Similarly, the character of the works-sites of their encounter and intersection is also polymorphous. In particular, we can detect literary qualities in philosophical texts and philosophical elements in literary works. On the one hand, authors (such as Dante, Goethe, Dostoyevsky, Mann, Borges, and Kundera) often engage with abstract concepts and problems and create literary works of philosophical interest. On the other hand, philosophers and thinkers (such as Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel, and Wittgenstein) frequently take good care of the form of their writings and the linguistic rendering of their theses and arguments, imposing on them a variety of styles.[1]

As part of a larger effort to explore the multiform relations between philosophy and literature—dwelling on a research field that attracts growing attention—we focus on the philosophical aspects of literature. In other words, we are interested in literary works where we can find concerns and issues also recognized as philosophically significant. It suffices to consider the writings of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Mann, Proust, Beckett, and Kundera to realize the extent of the presence of "philosophical" themes in literature. By "philosophical" we mean, as Jukka Mikkonen (2011: 21) aptly remarks, the examination of fundamental issues related to ethics (Dostoevsky, Tolstoy), metaphysics and ontology (Borges), logic and language (Carroll), philosophical concepts, such as "time" (Mann, Proust), and human existence (Sartre, Kundera). In fact, authors seem to integrate their reflections in their literary compositions, wich are sometimes shaped by pre-existing philosophical positions or even explicitly linked to the theoretical work of a particular philosopher. Furthermore, in some texts, authors elaborate on themes with philosophical implications and attempt to raise questions or illustrate the import of philosophical problems using their literary apparatus. In these cases, literature's aptitude to incite original reflection on issues of philosophical interest is evident.

One of these issues is the nature of literature itself. Indeed, there is an intriguing dimension of literary expression associated with works in which self-reflective moves can be traced; that is, texts in which literary writing refers to and reflects on literary expression itself. Such texts highlight the philosophical dimension of literature, offering thoughts on the phenomenon of literary creation, posing and exploring relevant questions through the use of purely literary devices and materials.

[1] There are different ways of approaching the immense subject of the relationship and intersections between philosophy and literature. Philosophers such as Alexander Nehamas, Michael Frede, and Charles H. Kahn examine this issue through the study of philosophical texts displaying essential literary features (Nehamas 1985; Frede 1992; Kahn 1996). Conversely, philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum, Stanley Cavell, and Philip Kitcher attempt to interpret the relationship between philosophy and literature through philosophical readings of literary texts (Nussbaum 1990; Cavell 2003; Kitcher 2013).

This reflection on literary works is related to issues of ontological interest, which primarily concern the properties, possibilities, and nature of literature. In particular, the process and the constitutive elements of writing, as well as the functions of language, the raw material of literature, become key objects of investigation.

The self-reflection of self-referential literature assumes many shapes, affecting in various ways the constitution of both content and form. We shall look into the main variants of literary self-reflection while pondering the philosophical implications of each. In other words, it seems necessary to proceed to a conceptual clarification of the features of self-referential literature by examining its self-reflective tropes. In the course of this enterprise, questions arise concerning the ability of self-referential literature to produce knowledge. We propose to consider the necessary conditions and the prospects for obtaining a type of such knowledge.

The cognitive potentialities of literature have attracted the attention of a multitude of contemporary scholars. In fact, in order to lay the foundations of the theoretical background of our approach to knowledge that self-referential literature may be able to generate, we find it necessary to refer to theories that discuss the cognitive function and value of literature in general. Through the critical discussion of these theories, we expect to attain a better grasp of the dimensions of literary knowledge. In addition, we will become acquainted with the questions and the issues that emerge from literature's correlation with the pursuit of knowledge. For instance, in contemporary bibliography, especially in the analytic tradition, the issue of literature's cognitive function has been directly related to the question of the truth that a literary text is likely to convey.[2] This step is essential to understand the cognitive potentiality of self-referential literature.

2. *Forms of literary knowledge: analogies with philosophical knowledge*

There are many issues regarding the cognitive import of literary texts that we should take into account, before focusing on the peculiar kind of knowledge that we believe could be attributed to the self-referential texts we are interested in. There are many wide-ranging debates, involving different aspects of these issues, the details of which extend far beyond the reach of our analysis in this short paper. In what follows, we shall summarize only the main points we want to touch upon, with a view to sketching the premises of our reasoning, which will be further illustrated by particular examples, leading to some tentative conclusions.

To begin with, one has to deal with well-known serious objections to the very idea of substantial literary knowledge, some of which are also

[2] For more on this issue, see Davies (2016), Donnelly (2019), Currie (2020) and Young (2021).

put forth by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen in their seminal work, *Truth Fiction and Literature* (Lamarque and Olsen 1994). These objections are often buttressed by sceptical claims that are presented through some version of the so-called "banality argument," the "no evidence argument" and the "no argument argument." Noël Carroll discusses and tries to counter such arguments, pertaining to the cognitive dimension not only of literature, but also of art in general (Carroll 2010 [2002]) and we are going to draw on his work. However, we must first focus on the main conceptions of knowledge we will be considering.

Epistemology textbooks distinguish among three forms of knowledge that may be pertinent to our concerns: a) Propositional knowledge or knowledge of facts (knowledge *that* something is the case); b) knowledge by acquaintance (direct awareness of, or connection to and familiarity with something or someone—an experience or a person); c) knowing *how* (knowing how to perform a task, often involving the exercise of a skill) (Russell 1912; Geuss 2005). Moreover, these forms are respectively associated with different kinds of scientific and conceptual, or mundane, moral, practical, and technical knowledge, which make it possible for us not only to represent facts and states of affairs, but also to cope with various circumstances, and solve problems we are confronted with in our everyday lives.

Philosophers, and especially analytic philosophers, seem to be interested mostly in propositional knowledge, although, in recent times, they have been increasingly turning to the study of the other main forms of knowledge, exploring their relations with the former. Of course, there are still ongoing debates about the definition of propositional knowledge, involving truth and the justification of beliefs, often leading to sceptical dead ends.[3]

Now, when one approaches literary texts she may ask herself which of the above forms and kinds of knowledge are afforded by the experience of writing and of reading them. We think that she may find it more plausible to look for and aspire to some varieties of conceptual, moral and/or practical knowledge, providing a better grasp and a perspicuous understanding of possibilities, and relating to what it is like to live in a certain way, or, if one does not object to engaging in normative pursuits regarding such matters, how one *ought to live in order to live well*. Thus, we are also confronted by the problem of the possibility of *normative* knowledge.

At this point, it is worth exploring parallels and analogies between the kind of knowledge philosophy seems to be aiming at and the knowledge which we may expect to find in and through literature. Naturally, different genres and kinds of literature may allow us to obtain different varieties of knowledge. These include mainly prose, but also po-

[3] Here, one would have to refer to epistemological discussions of Gettier counterexamples to the traditional definition of knowledge, regarding whether knowledge can be fully understood as "justified true belief" (Dancy 1985).

etry: short stories and mostly novels, especially realist and historical fictional narratives, works of phantasy and science fiction, epic and lyric poems, drama, etc., extending in a multitude of directions of literary creation, which we cannot attempt to survey in the context of the present discussion. As we have already noted in the introduction of this paper, we intend to investigate and highlight the cognitive implications and, perhaps, the achievements of self-referential fictional texts, particularly modernist and post-modernist, which often assume experimental forms.

Actually, it can be observed that there are also queries about the possibility and the nature of *philosophical* knowledge. Despite the fact that the norms guiding philosophical inquiry are mainly cognitive or quasi-cognitive, some thinkers claim that the goals they set cannot be fully attained, not only in practice, but also in principle. They may even think that, properly speaking, these goals should not be considered to be cognitive. For example, one may wonder whether we do seek knowledge when we engage in the activity of elucidating concepts and of exploring modalities of linguistic usage, or in the practices of dissolving traditional metaphysical problems, pursued by Wittgenstein and some of his followers, which may be motivated by a *quietist* intent and perform a *therapeutic* function.

Without embarking upon a detailed presentation of alternative metaphilosophical conceptions of the nature and the forms of philosophical knowledge, we could perhaps isolate three or four families of positions: a) According to naturalistically and scientifically minded philosophers, the knowledge supposedly aimed at by philosophical thought differs from scientific knowledge only in generality or breadth and depth, not in nature. Philosophy should try to imitate the empirical sciences and even emulate their methods. b) The logical and conceptual work of philosophy may come before or after the sciences to provide methodological tools and to clear the ground for cognitive endeavours, but it doesn't itself display an essentially cognitive character; philosophy is not and cannot be one of the sciences. c) Philosophy offers some peculiar or even paradoxical knowledge (or self-knowledge) of the mind, of its activities, and of its relations to reality, sometimes dubbed "transcendental"; the insights it affords cannot be compared to the results of scientific investigations (involving gathering empirical evidence, forging hypotheses to be tested and verified or falsified). It could perhaps reveal possibilities of viewing the world and of endowing it with meaning in particular domains, aiming at some form of systematic elaboration and arrangement, or at reaching a "reflective equilibrium" of concepts and principles of thinking on the one hand, and of quasi-"experiential" data, usually in the form of intuitions, on the other (Putnam 1978; Granger 1988; Gutting 2009). Now, if we do follow a certain path of development of the transcendental tradition in the domain of continental philosophy, we could perhaps speak of a certain form of *negative* knowledge. d) Last but not least, philosophy may yield practi-

cal knowledge of the significance and of the role of moral, aesthetic, and other values, guiding our action and conferring meaning to our lives. Thus, through the study of philosophical thinking, we do obtain knowledge of rules of conduct and, more generally, of many possible forms of an art of living (Nehamas 1985; Hadot 1995; Kitcher 2013).

We would like to argue that it is the third of the above options, and perhaps, to some extent, the fourth, which could be fruitfully employed to cast light on the form of knowledge we may legitimately look for in self-referential literature. We believe that this dimension of literary expression and the kind of texts to which it gives rise and in which it is embodied can be regarded as essentially philosophical in an important sense. We find in them an internal link between literary creation and philosophical reflection. Such reflection upon the act of literary writing itself reveals the expressive potential and the limits of language and of the mind, casting light on conceptual contents and specific mental acts which are shaped by linguistic means. Literary texts that are partly or wholly self-referential help their authors and readers perform thought experiments of a peculiar form. And it is widely acknowledged that thought experiments are a method par excellence of philosophical inquiry in various domains and levels.[4]

Now, there are many questions to which we have already alluded to and which we should take into account. Here, we shall simply formulate some of the most central ones to which we may eventually have to come back, after a brief discussion of a few cases of relevant literary texts: Should we give up completely appeals to truth, apparently necessarily related to definitions of propositional (and representational knowledge), insofar as the main marks or features, not only of truth as correspondence, but even of minimalist conceptions of truth[5] do not seem to apply to the kinds of non-propositional knowledge, supposedly provided by the texts we want to examine?[6] Should perhaps the speech-acts and the linguistic performances of extensively and essentially self-referential literature be construed as destructive, nihilist moves, undermining claims to objective truth as a whole, by detaching the text from all its referents in the external world? If this were so, we would have to ask ourselves to what kind of "negative" knowledge the outcome of such move would amount? Or, could we rather turn to more

[4] Referring to the main arguments against literary knowledge, Carroll writes: "It is extremely peculiar that philosophers should raise these particular objections against literature, since philosophy employs a gamut of techniques to produce knowledge and learning that are analogous to those found in literature. What I have in mind here specifically are thought experiments, examples and counterexamples that are often narrative and generally fictional in nature" (Carroll 2002: 208 and ff). Concerning literary works as thought experiments, see also Davies (2007), Egan (2016), Elgin (2014) and Vidmar (2014).

[5] Features such as objectivity, uniqueness, etc.—see Wright (1992).

[6] There are similar worries about such knowledge—and truth—especially regarding poetry (Geuss 2005).

metaphysical notions of truth, verging on the mystical, often associated with some romantic authors and put forth by continental thinkers, such as Heidegger?

3. *Self-referential literature: conceptual clarification and examples*

We may consider an artistic or literary work to be self-referential when it refers to itself as such and/or when the author refers through it to himself (for example) as its creator. In other words, in a self-referential work, the author refers, in an explicit and/or implicit way, to the means and rhetorical strategies employed in the literary text itself as well as to his ideas and queries regarding the nature of his literary status and practice. As is to be expected, self-referentiality manifests itself in various ways in both poetry and prose. As mentioned above, writers and poets use literary materials and proceed to treatments that manifest their peculiar concern for the process and the main factors of their creative activity, exploring questions of ontological interest, concerning primarily the properties, possibilities, and nature of literature. Thus, we see that the self-reflective dimension of self-referential texts arises at different levels and in different guises.

In fact, it could be pointed out that, strictly speaking, a poem or a work of literary fiction is self-referential when its theme and the way it is elaborated highlight its own composition *qua* a *particular* literary object, e.g. reflecting on its content, as well as on its form. However, self-referentiality may involve reflection, more generally, on the nature of literature, its aesthetic and other functions and its modes of expression. It is this broader sense, which we believe becomes prominent in modernist and post-modernist texts. The discussion that follows focuses on works which exemplify both senses of self-referentiality and the self-reflection that it entails.

Indeed, one of the cardinal objects of self-reflective works, among others, is language as used in creative writing; the raw material of literature. In particular, we note that in the last two centuries, many writers have attempted, through their poetic and prose compositions, to explore issues related to the role and functions of language. Although their reflections are expressed in the works' content, in some cases they are also evident at the level of form. To put it in another way, the reflective content is organically linked and/or manifested through linguistic experimentation and stylistic innovations that depart from the classical formal paths, contributing to their expansion. In what follows, we refer to self-referential works, both poetry and prose, in which we trace these reflective movements. It seems necessary to examine closer texts that capture the self-reflective activity of literary writing and—as we do when we place microorganisms under a microscope—to focus on their inner movements but also to observe their particular characteristics. In this way, we will have taken another necessary step toward

understanding how self-referential literature can serve as a source of original reflection with philosophical implications and cognitive import.

3.1. *Stéphane Mallarmé: Fly so towards your lips/ Exclude from it if you start/The real because it's cheap.*

Mallarmé's poetic work embodies a kind of reflection that is also found in his theoretical writings but is fully activated within the poet's literary creation. In the case of Mallarmé, the self-referentiality of poetic language is associated with a particular conception of a negative, canceling function that also pictures its relation to reality. Here, then, literature is thematized as an experience of the Null. That is, the poem and its smaller units, the lines, exist only as the negation of reality. Literature itself is treated as a negative activity that results in Null. Through poetic practice, or as Mallarmé himself describes it, through "digging the verses," the poet's aesthetic perception is crystallized. The poetic text is a set of linguistic similarities and differences, and with it, the author "imitates" real objects' impressions, by substituting linguistic signs for them, and thus abolishing their real ontological status, while at the same time also annihilating himself as a subject.

Thus, for Mallarmé both the poetic subject and the objects of external reality are negated as existing beings and reified in writing. This conception is in line with a more general materialist conception which treats the spirit and its derivatives as transformations of matter. Mallarmé's approach permeates his poetry and is not expressed through the formulation of arguments, but is mainly demonstrated through the poetic work itself. This interpretation of the importance of the poetic process is present in many of Mallarmé's poems. In one of his literary compositions (Mallarmé 1895 [1992, 2018]) in the form of an English sonnet, we read:

> All summarised, the soul/ When slowly we breathe it out/ In several rings of smoke/ By other rings wiped out// Bears witness to some cigar/ Burning skilfully while/ The ash is separated far/ From its bright kiss of fire// Should the choir of romantic art/ Fly so towards your lips/ Exclude from it if you start/ The real because it's cheap// Meaning too precise is sure/ To void your dreamy literature.[7] (Mallarmé 2018: 57)

The poem has a meta-poetic tone and a strong self-reflective character. Here, the poet is implicitly likened to a smoker and the main theme of the work is the banishment and transformation of reality that takes place within the poetic work. This process of nullification is described in the first two verses of the poem through the use of the image of the smoker. The composition of a work is presented as transforming the substance of reality and of meaning into the ethereal material of tobacco, which however burns itself and disappears. In the first two stanzas, the condition of this transformation is clearly stated. And the poetic subject itself dies within this authorial experience. It is a spiri-

[7] Antony Kline's translation (2018).

tual death that is vividly described in the second verse as a gradual exhalation of the soul. The poet as a part and manipulator of the process of effacement and transformation of reality, as described by Mallarmé, should follow a corresponding course within the framework of his poetic creation.

Thus, for Mallarmé, the process of writing constitutes the framework within which reality and the poetic subject undergo an essential concentration that annihilates and realizes them simultaneously. In this poem of the poet's late writing period, the idea that the spirit is the power of negation and that which negates itself is now crystallized. It is a rather complex and sibyllic position, which Mallarmé attempts to explore through his literary writing. What is interesting here, as Campion observes, is that Mallarmé discovers that literature can and must reflect on itself (Campion 1994). For in this way, and within its own activity, it is itself actualized, but at the same time abolishing its object, its subject, and itself. Mallarmé's idiosyncratic poetic reflection and experimentation expanded the boundaries and possibilities of literature and influenced many modernist writers (and continental philosophers), offering insights into the experience of writing and raising questions about its constitutive elements.

3.2. *Paul Valéry: In myself I renew my gods, my enigmas…*

The movement of thought, the function of consciousness, and their ability to form a unique perception of the reality of the spirit through poetic expression are also depicted in the work of Paul Valéry. Valéry's perspective is developed both in his poems and in his theoretical writings. There, he defends and gives prominence to the literary artist's ability and capacity to reflect through her writing. In his text *Poetry and Abstract Thought* (1939 [2007]) Valéry argues as follows:

> Every true poet is much more capable than is generally known of right reasoning and abstract thought. […] I have said, nevertheless, that the poet has his abstract thought and, if you like, his philosophy; and I have said that it is at work in his very activity as a poet. I said this because I have observed it, in myself and in several others. […] Well, every time I have worked as a poet, I have noticed that my work exacted of me not only that presence of the poetic universe I have spoken of, but many reflections, decisions, choices, and combinations, without which all possible gifts of the Muses, or of Chance, would have remained like precious materials in a workshop without an architect.[8] (Valéry 2007: 61)

In his seminal poetic composition *La Jeune Parque* (*Young Fate*), with which he broke his twenty years of literary silence, the symbolist poet deals with issues of existential and ontological character that also concern philosophical thought. The "mystery of life" and the "mystery of

[8] The extract is taken from a lecture Valéry delivered in 1939 at the University of Oxford entitled "Poetry and Abstract Thought." The English translation by Denise Folliot used here was first published in 1958 and republished in 2007 in *The American Poetry Review*.

being" are at the thematic core of the poem. Valéry, using his literary tools, describes the stages the reflective alertness of human consciousness goes through when it engages in the quest for a "total form of knowledge." The description of this mental process discloses the realization of the ultimate failure of human consciousness in its effort to cast light on Being. This "odyssey" is outlined in the following lines:

> And I alive, erect/ Stubborn, and secretly armed with my inner void,/ …Ah! how much may it grow in my questing night,/ That secret half of my divided heart,/ And my art grow deeper from obscure probings!.../ …In myself I renew my gods, my enigmas,/ My pacings interrupted by words to the heavens,/ My pauses, on a step bearing a reverie/ That follows in a wing's mirror a varying bird,/ Wagers a hundred times void against sun,/ And burns, at the dark goal of my gaping marble. (Valéry 1977: 209—211)

The attempt to decipher the movements of thought that are expressed through poetry reveals the need to examine the particular nature of poetic language, its relations with the meanings it expresses, and with the reality to which it refers. This need is also understood by Valéry when he proceeds to describe the particular movements that take place within the context of poetic writing and leads to reflecting on the function and the dead ends of the use of poetic language. Starting from the reflection inherent in his literary texts and in the light of his experience as a poetic subject, Valéry puts forth a paradox. He likens poetry to a pendulum that moves from a sensation toward some idea or some feeling, returns toward some memory of the sensation, and toward the act which reproduces that sensation. This analysis is intended to show that the value of a poem lies in the inseparability of sound and sense, or in other words of "Voice" and "Thought". However, it is a condition that seems to require the impossible. Although he argues that there is no relationship between sound and the sense of a word, the poet's task, according to Valéry, is to provide a sense of the inner unity between the two, which is a "wonderful achievement."

When Valéry points out the non-existence of a relation between "Voice" and "Thought" or else between "sound" and "the meaning of the word," he is underlining the contingent relation among words, concepts and things they denote. However, he claims that it is the mission of poets to undertake through their art to try to establish a corresponding relationship and to create a sense of this "unbreakable unity" between "Voice" and "Thought." Consequently, in the case of Valéry, the readers come to be recipients of a reflection on the literary experience itself, on the limits and possibilities of poetic language. In addition to the development of his theses in his theoretical works, his reflection appears and develops in a *symbolic* way in his poetic work. As he writes in the "*Young Fate*": "In myself I renew my gods, my enigmas". In this way, then, Valéry's poetic writing becomes a field for exploring ideas and questions concerning literary creation and language.

3.3 *Maurice Blanchot: and I'm barely myself anymore, but that's what it means to write*

Maurice Blanchot's literary work is a prime example of self-referentiality and self-reflection. Literature is also an object of examination of his theoretical and critical work. From his earliest critical essays, Blanchot engaged, as Peter Pál Pelbart observes, with issues that many of his contemporaries have taken up after him: the necessary proximity between speech and silence, writing and death, work and erosion, literature and demolition, language and anonymous literary experience, and the breakdown of the writer (Pelbart 2007: 203). These themes recur in his literary texts and constitute the center around which each narrative is structured. In Blanchot's case, his literary texts become vehicles for the realization of his theoretical approaches and a space for the investigation of the experience of writing.

One of these texts is *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas* (*The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me*). It is a work that belongs to the narrative category of the *récit*, a subgenre of the French novel. The peculiarity of récits is that they give voice to the impossibility of the narrative itself, to the non-appearance of the events they strive to narrate (Hill 2012: 10). Most of the literary works Blanchot wrote in the 40s, 50s, and 60s, at the height of his literary production, belong to this literary genre. Despite their differences, these are first-person narratives that are largely concerned with literary language, writing, and more specifically, with writing themselves as récits. As such, the narrators are presented as writers who, by virtue of their status, are caught up in the process of their own depersonalization, and their self-elimination within the writing. In other words, the principal theme of Blanchot's récits, as we shall see regarding *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas*, is that working with language highlights an intermediate space for the narrative subject "between the self as the producer of words and the self as produced by words" (Mole 1997: 139).

In the case of *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas*, the simple narrative unfolds in the form of a conversation between the narrator and his estranged self. The narrator, locked inside his home, tries to overcome the distance between them through writing, but to no avail. He, the Companion, the Other, functions as a stranger that the narrative subject tries to reach out to, only to meet his withdrawal:

> According to him, I came closest when I decided to write. He had taken a strange ascendancy over me in all these things, so that I had allowed myself to be persuaded that writing was the best way of making our relations bearable. I admit that for a while it was a pretty good way. But one day I realised that what I was writing was always more about him and, albeit indirectly, seemed to have no other purpose than to reflect him. This discovery struck me in the extreme. I saw in it what could paralyse me the most, not because I would henceforth try to escape this reflection, but because I would perhaps on the contrary make greater efforts to make it manifest. It was then that I clung to myself. I knew, but I didn't know precisely, that the ability to

> say 'I' would allow me to better control my relationship with this reflection. However, the consequences for my life were disastrous. Not only did I have to give up what is called a normal life, but I lost control of my preferences. I also became afraid of words and wrote less and less, although the pressure inside me to write soon became dizzying.[9] (Blanchot 1953: 9–10)

Gradually we realize that there is only one character that is split into three others. They are the narrator, who speaks in the first person, his companion, who manifests himself only through words, and the ghost behind the window, who does not speak. The relationships between the three cases of the narrative are exclusively writing relations. We are dealing with a writing that seeks to recover itself in the present of its realization. The narrator wants to maintain this alteration of itself, to accentuate it rather than dissolve it, because he senses that this is the condition for the advent of writing. What is at stake is the passage from "I" to "he" within the narrative case (Majorel 2011: 201). The narrator in a moment of tension realizes the following:

> […] and I cannot conceive of breaking this circle, I cannot conceive of it since I belong to this circle, and I may, indeed, not write because I cannot do it and I am almost no longer myself, but that is what it means to write. (Blanchot 1953: 92)

Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas is a "parable" of the writing process and the literary experience. The entire work functions as a self-referential and self-reflexive vortex that absorbs the readers into the spiral unfolding of repeated events. Blanchot does not construct this suffocatingly enclosed récit in order to convey explicitly his interpretation of literature as an existential experience, from which many questions arise concerning the meaning of concepts such as the work and, the author, and actions such as "reading" and "writing". Instead, his *sui generis* literary writing aims at illustrating and trying to elucidate these questions within its own practice. Hence, we would argue, in Blanchot's case, the reflective nature of literature is thematized and presented as a necessary condition for writing.

3.4 *Clarice Lispector: […] Writing is a query. It's this: ?*

Clarice Lispector's *Um sopro de vida* (*The Breath of Life*) was published in 1978. This work is the Ukrainian-born Brazilian author's swan song. It is a text that is governed by her innovative and idiosyncratic writing. The plot of the work does not take conventional paths. We follow the thoughts of a writer and his conversations with the character he has just created, Angela Pralini. The narrator-writer, when writing about Angela Pralini, sees himself in front of an inverted mirror. Gradually, the heroine becomes self-aware and frees herself from the Author. The self-referential nature of this text is evident before Angela's appearance, from the first few pages where the Author reflects:

[9] The translation of all the passages from *Celui qui ne m'accompagnait pas* is ours.

> Does 'writing' exist in and of itself? No. It is merely the reflection of a thing that questions. I work with the unexpected. I write the way I do without knowing how and why—it's the fate of my voice. The timbre of my voice is me. Writing is a query. It's this: ?[10] (Lispector 2012: 14)

The Author informs us that the introduction to the book was written after its completion and its role is to alert readers to the specificity of the discussion that takes place in the following pages. Reflections on the nature of writing, lyrical outbursts, philosophical and theological musings, loneliness, and fear of death are some of the elements that constitute the main body of the narrative. The conversation that takes place between the Author and Angela does not have the typical form of question-and-answer sessions. There are very few passages in which the two give the impression that they are communicating. The Author himself wonders whether this is a dialogue or a double diary:

> AUTHOR: Is this ultimately a dialogue or a double diary? I only know one thing: at this moment I'm writing: 'at this moment' is a rare thing because only sometimes do I step with both feet on the land of the present: usually one foot slides toward the past, the other slides toward the future. And I end up with nothing. Angela is my attempt to be two. Unfortunately, however, because of the way things are, we resemble one another and she too writes because the only thing I know anything about is the act of writing. (Lispector 2012: 29)

Elsewhere in the text, of course, the Author engages in a soliloquy and admits that Angela and he are his inner dialogue. This admission takes on the character of a motif that introduces the Author's thoughts about writing. He desires to steer towards a new kind of fiction, beyond good and bad, right and wrong. However, the theme that runs through the entire text, from warnings of the initial pages until Angela's presence fades at the end, is writing itself:

> AUTHOR: What I'm writing now is meant for no one: it's directly meant for writing itself, this writing consumes writing. This, my book of the night, nourishes me with a cantabile melody. (Lispector 2012: 60)

Um Sopro de vida is an experimental text that functions as meta-fiction. With Angela's anti-heroic birth and presence, Lispector manages to express her reflection on the fine line between author and characters in a literary way. The Author, Angela, and the relationship between them constitute the proper ground for exploring the terms of artistic creation. Furthermore, through them, literature's ability to pose questions of an ontological nature is highlighted, by the means of constructing scenarios and imaginary situations concerning the authorial experience. Lispector's self-reflexive writing does not use arguments external to it, but by utilizing literary devices she shapes a work which reflects its own creation. We believe that texts such as *Um Sopro de*

[10] All extracts are taken from one of the latest English translation of Lispector's work published in 2012.

vida, can constitute an occasion for reinvigorating the debate concerning the kind of knowledge that literature can offer. By studying how authors like Lispector explore and expand the boundaries and possibilities of literature, directly revealing the perspective of the author, we can draw conclusions about the authorial experience and the ways in which literature can produce thought, and raise queries concerning its own nature and its constitutive elements.

4. *Concluding remarks*

We can now try to take stock by summarizing the results of our analysis and proceed to draw some tentative conclusions. Could we contend that we have obtained some form of knowledge from the study of the texts we have just referred to? What is it—if anything—that we have learned?

We would like to point out that the cognitive goals we may have attained by the thought experiments proposed to the reader by Mallarmé, Valéry, Blanchot and Lispector are distinctly philosophical in nature. Actually, we are dealing with *philosophical* literature par excellence and we have already alluded to the fact that our claims regarding the knowledge it may provide are bound to be controversial, at least as controversial as the conclusions of ambitious philosophical arguments.

Indeed, Mallarmé's conception of the negation of natural reality through his construal of the self-annihilating experience of literary writing, seems to sustain some peculiar metaphysical understanding of the work of the spirit and of its relation to the world. Valéry conveys essential insights about the attempt of literary creation to make possible a new poetic reality through the mysterious forging of an apparently impossible bond between language and thought. Blanchot and Lispector illustrate an essential dimension of the experience of self-conscious writing in the course of the construction of a literary work continuously wondering about its ontological constitution in which the reader is also invited to participate.

To be sure, all the above seem to be to an important extent aporetic, and the entire enterprise described through its actual enactment, may be regarded as somewhat frustrating. Hence, we may be tempted to talk about a kind of "negative" knowledge, leading to dead ends. And it may sound preposterous that we want to qualify as knowledge nihilistic conclusions about the ability of language to represent or express more or less familiar reality by leading to its ultimate negation. No wonder that many critics shall denounce the purport of such philosophical thought experiments as sterile and anti-humanist without any positive cognitive significance ("no humanly interesting content" in Lamarque and Olsen's words).

However, we do believe that we should recognize the importance of the study of texts of this kind, insofar as they help us understand the limits of the expressive potential of language, of our mental abilities

and of our opening to what we take to be the real world in which we find ourselves, and which we may partly negate and create ourselves. Moreover, all this is realized through some ineffable acquaintance with the experience of literary creation embodied in the self-referential writing of the kind we have tried to discuss.

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Escaping Fiction

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In this paper I argue that a norm of literary fiction is to compel the reader to form beliefs about the world as it is. It may seem wrong to suggest that the reason I believe p *is because I imagined* p*, yet literary fiction can make this the case. I argue for an account grounded in indexed doxastic susceptibilities mapped between a fictional context and the particular properties of a reader, more specifically the susceptibilities in her beliefs, attitudes, and psychological states. Works of fiction can be about different things at the same time, some of which are fictive and some of which are factual. Since belief can be weak or strong, partial or complete, tenuous or robust, opaque or clear, there are susceptibilities throughout a doxastic set out of which new beliefs are formed. Skillful works of fiction exploit these susceptibilities and create new ones. This is an aesthetic achievement of such works: they take what should be a norm-violating practice of belief-formation on the basis of imaginative engagement and they make it so.*

Keywords: Cognitivism; fiction; imagination; belief.

> "The duty of literature is to fight fiction. It is to find a way into the world as it is" (Knausgaard 2018).
>
> *What moves you most in a book?* "The skilled and gradual unveiling of hidden truths" (Feiffer 2020).
>
> "Fiction is a lie, and good fiction is the truth inside the lie" (King 2000).
>
> "Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you the illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion" (Williams 1945).

1. *Norms of belief, norms of fiction*

Here is a commonsense claim: I have failed to apply the norms of belief when I come to believe that someone loves me just because I imagine that he loves me.[1] I will almost be arguing against this commonsense claim in what follows. I will argue that, in some cases, the acceptance of belief on the basis of acts of imagination is both common and reasonable, for some content. It is, in fact, a norm of literary fiction. And when it works, it is both an aesthetic and an epistemic achievement.

The first epigram of this paper is that it is the duty of literature to fight fiction and to find a way into the world as it is. I am softening this in a couple of ways: first, I will not be talking about *fighting* fiction, but instead *escaping* the epistemic limits of fictional contexts. Second, I will not be talking about the *duties* of literature, but rather aesthetic goals or *achievements*, including achievements that are unintentional. It will be important for my argument to acknowledge the plurality of goals of any work of fiction. These goals may include the imparting of truths, but may also include engagement, entertainment, profit, and others. One of the mistakes in discussing how we might learn from fictions is getting distracted by the other elements in fictional texts with parallel goals, which are only sometimes relevant. Finally, I argue that all of this is more plausible when our attention is on the reader. The consumer of fiction makes possible the justification for believing-that-*p* on the basis of imagining-that-*p* because of what I will term their indexed doxastic susceptibilities. A fair amount of attention has been paid to how works of fiction can or cannot convey knowledge, and in this it is easy to get distracted by the intentions of the author, the perspective of the narrator, and the position to reality. Since I argue that a reader can learn from imaginative engagement alone, we do not—in principle—need to worry about how the work is constructed or the attitudes it may be advancing.[2] There will be cases of learning from fiction independently of the intentions of the author and the construction of the world. Nevertheless, I argue that the crafting and construction of the work by a skilled author is typically what facilitates the development of beliefs about the actual world in accomplished literary fiction.

For the purposes of this argument, my primary attention is not on the attitudes of the author, narrator, or characters. While all of that is, in principle, irrelevant, it is still the case that a well-constructed piece of literary fiction finds a way to escape its limits and create a map from the epistemic space of the fiction to the reader's epistemic space by

[1] Nothing will turn on it here, but we can take truth to be the norm of belief, or we can take the functional properties of belief to be such that they are clearly distinct from imagination—in functional behavior and inferential relations (Sinhababu (2012); cf. Velleman (2000); and objections in O'Brien (2005), Noordhof (2001), and Van Leeuwen (2009)).

[2] For the noncognitivist position, with a view quite opposed to what is defended here, see Stolnitz (1992), as example.

way of her imagination. This is central to the argument that is developed here: learning from fiction depends on the interaction between the epistemic susceptibilities of a reader and the craftwork of an author in identifying those susceptibilities.

Returning to that commonsense claim: we can suppose that truth is the norm of belief, or something similar to this. It is, after all, better to have true beliefs than false ones. As such, the norms of belief are clearly distinct from the norms of the imagination (whatever those may be). It may be that truth is not a norm of the imagination, and that it is no better or worse to have truth-oriented imagination. But could truth be a norm of fiction? Can fiction be truth-oriented? *Should* it be? These are somewhat odd questions. A standard answer, for most fiction most of the time, is that if a work of fiction says something true, it is, at best, accidentally true.[3] How we take this is often a matter of genre conventions. We expect that much of the story in a work of historical fiction will be factual in many respects: dates, places, primary actors, major events. But we also assume that it is merely fictional in others: private conversations, internal thoughts, compressing or collapsing of characters or events for storytelling purposes. It seems reasonable that we abide by unspoken norms here about what fictions are permissible: the setting and time period of Thomas Cromwell's rise to power could not be other than what it was, even though the private conversations are surely entirely contrived in *Wolf Hall*. In *Shuggie Bain*, the story is said to be only very loosely autobiographical, so it is reasonably assumed that the dates, places, primary actors, and major events of the story are entirely fictional. But not the characterization of Glasgow in the 1980s. Surely that should bear a great deal of resemblance to the real place. As such, in reading *Wolf Hall* or *Shuggie Bain*, I can quite reasonably learn something true—acquire a true belief—about political events in sixteenth century England or life in 1980s Glasgow. I do not want to go too far afield here, but rather I want to sow the first seed of doubt that works of fiction ought not be truth-oriented (Friend 2008). I want to push this doubt quite a bit further, by arguing for a much more general sense in which readers learn from literary fictions such as *Shuggie Bain*, and beyond just those background features of the city in which it takes place. But before pressing on let us review other ways in which beliefs are changed on the basis of fictional engagement.

Two caveats before proceeding. Throughout I will use terms like "learning" and "belief-change" and I will refer to coming to have new beliefs and knowledge. Obviously, these claims have to be made with

[3] Gregory Currie (1990) describes it in this way. See Friend (2008) for a helpful discussion. Fictional works often state that any resemblance to real persons and events is merely coincidental and that what one is reading or viewing is a pure fiction. Of course, readers recognize that this is said largely to avoid liability and not because the author believes it. It would be odd, to use the example below, if fictional Glasgow resembled real Glasgow *accidentally*. The former is, of course, based on the latter.

care. However, learning, as a process, may not always lead one clearly or directly toward truth, even if, as a process, it may increase understanding, and change beliefs as it goes along. Learning is somewhat untidy in this way. Its untidiness may be especially pronounced in the context of imaginative engagement or in thinking about the actual world as reflected in fictional entities. It would be a mistake to treat this kind of learning as of a piece with other kinds of learning. I will flag the messiness as I go without scrubbing it entirely.

The second caveat is that, throughout, I am only considering literature, and not fiction generally understood. While the arguments herein could apply to any fictional work, readers will have a harder time seeing the application to *The Walking Dead* or *Friday the 13th*. The argument is not meant to conclude that every work of fiction imparts substantive belief change; in fact, it is explicitly not that. Rather, it concludes that readers' epistemic engagement with works of fiction is particular to them and to the extent the work represents the world in ways that exploit readers' epistemic vulnerabilities. It is in virtue of a work's literary ambitions that it identifies these epistemic vulnerabilities successfully.

2. *Fiction and belief change*

There are many ways in which beliefs can change on the basis of imaginative engagement with fictional contexts. I am setting aside elemental belief change—such as developing beliefs about the fiction itself. Instead, I am interested in belief change about the actual world. The most obvious is the acquisition of *propositional* knowledge, either particular or general. I may form the belief *that Baker Street is a street in London* (Lewis 1978). This is an instance of the kind of propositional knowledge that a reader can acquire when a work of fiction has endeavored to present a historically accurate presentation of a person, place, or event.

I may also enter into *crossover* states. These are states where my doxastic attitudes in real and fictional contexts are blended, albeit irrationally. For example, I may come to believe that the local waters are more shark-infested than they are after watching *Jaws*. Or I may be more susceptible to stories of exorcism based on my religious upbringing. These crossover states, compellingly described by Richard Gerrig (1993) are not truth-oriented (see also Currie 2020). A reader's beliefs about sharks and demonic possession change (Smuts 2010), but they *ought* not, and they do not for many readers. Most readers and viewers will experience a heightened emotional state while engaging with a fiction, and that heightened emotional state may be heightened again in similar settings (for example, on a boat), but only occasionally do their beliefs change. I will return to this phenomenon below and offer a more detailed model.

Finally, readers experience belief change about *what something is like*. It is plausible to think that authors and artists are better at char-

acterizing actual people, or people types, than anyone else. It is part of what it means to be an aesthetically skilled author or artist that one is better at seeing the actual as it is. The rest of us may be distracted, or indifferent, or perceptually and epistemically stubborn. Charles Dickens, on the other hand, captured the essential properties of person types in very precise distillations, often captured (famously) in their names alone—Scrooge, Dodger, M'Choakumchild come to mind. I may construct or affirm a *what it is like* of late-stage alcoholism through a viewing of *Leaving Las Vegas*. This may be the mimetic sense of "true" that we commonly have in mind when we describe fictions as true-to a type of person or experience. They tell the truth insofar as they are better at representing the actual than even the actual presents itself. A minor, partially drawn but particularly evocative character may better identify that which is real about certain complete and living persons in the actual world. All experience and representation is cultivated, but good literature is just better at it. We have never lived enough to know all of what there is (Nussbaum 1990). Of course, this is nothing new; those who engage with a lot of literary fiction know that this can be the case and are especially distressed when it fails.

These three forms of belief change are relevant to a fuller and, I think, more interesting, model of belief change on the basis of imaginative engagement. Readers form beliefs about the actual on the basis of their doxastic susceptibilities and to the extent that the work's pure fictions are true-to on the relevant parameters. I will draw out this claim in a few ways.

3. *What fictional works are about*

However we think learning from fiction occurs, we should assume that there are content constraints. For example, it may be easier to accept learning from fiction with respect to psychological content, emotional content, or ethical assessment, but more difficult to accept with respect to other kinds of content about the world. I may come to believe that it is a psychological or emotional fact that people are disposed to respond in certain ways on the basis of certain treatment given my imaginative engagement with some fiction. I may also come to believe that such treatment of one another is not ethical, again, on the basis of my imaginative engagement with that fiction. What I do not come to believe is that the fictional persons or places or events are real on the mere basis of my imaginative engagement—or at least I ought not if my epistemic system is functioning.

Works of literary fiction have layers of content, or layers of *aboutness*. A given story can be about its characters, and their relations, about the place and time in which they live, and the events that transpire between them. It can also be about concepts, ideas, feelings, or sensations. A work can be entirely fictive in the construction of characters, relations, places, times, and events and as such invite the fictive

stance for its internal coherence and interpretation. It can also invite the fictive stance about something real, such as Glasgow in the 1980s.[4] This is not uncontroversial. The nature of fiction can be characterized to preclude such a possibility and can call the correspondence to the real "accidental." This is counterintuitive. Ceteris paribus, a fictional Glasgow is based on the real Glasgow, and unmotivated deviations from a true representation inhibits make-believe. For example, it may drive a fiction forward to describe Glasgow as having warm and sunny winters, but if this is assumed in the fiction without motivation it would distract and confuse readers' ability to incorporate it into their make-believe.

There is a concrete sense in which a given work is *about* these purely fictive constructions, and any fictionalized real elements. For example, there is the straightforward answer to the question "what is *Shuggie Bain* about?" It is about a boy named Shuggie, growing up in poverty with his alcoholic mother, Agnes, whom he loves immensely, set in Glasgow in the 1980s. This is one level of the *aboutness* of the work.

It is also about growing up, a relationship between mother and child, the cruel economics of the time and place, and the despair of addiction. The story is about Agnes and Shuggie, but also about mothers and sons. It is about Shuggie getting enough to eat, and about Thatcherite policies. This is another level of the *aboutness* of the work. Finally, it is also about love, loss, and belonging. This is a third level of abstraction. It is about Shuggie's love for Agnes, sons' love for mothers, and about love, an unbounded love, more generally. This is another level of the *aboutness* of the work. Any of these act as answers to the question, "what is *Shuggie Bain* about?" It is about Shuggie and Agnes in Glasgow, *and* it is about mothers and sons and alcoholism and poverty, *and* it is about love and loss and belonging. These layers of content have dimensions of internal and external coherence and correspondence. For example, depending on the goals of the work, there should be some internal consistency to the character Shuggie, and some kind of accuracy in the depiction of poverty, but this should extend to accuracy in this particular experience of poverty in 1980s Glasgow, under the particular social and economic policies that were in place in the real world. This hardly makes it historical fiction; rather it is a means of presenting the *what it is like* to a pure fiction. It requires internal and external coherence

[4] See Currie (1990); see also Davies (1996), Lamarque and Olson (1994), and for discussion Friend (2008). If there is something like a fictive stance it is not reserved for what we take to be fictional constructions within the arts. Within philosophy we talk about many forms of fictionalism, but versions of fictive stances are required for things like quotation, reference at a distance, and other forms of storytelling and representation, even about the actual (Wieland 2021). More germane to this discussion is that I do not think a fictive stance reflects the sum of how fictional contexts are approached. Our doxastic susceptibilities, and the levels of content in a work, make it so that only some aspects of any given fictional context are taken-as fictive, and not taken-as something with which we can engage as we do the actual (Matravers 2014). The catch is that whether something should be taken-as fictive is only sometimes a property of the work or a component of the author's intentions.

and consistency to build out the true. The building out of this through line is what will take the reader, via her imagination, from the purely fictive spaces, to belief change about the actual world.

This is quite a bit different from standard cognitivist and noncognitivist formulations of the question. That approach is to look to the use of any given sentence as fictive, as metafictive (Currie 1990), as expressing a meaning or a secondary meaning (Weitz 1943), or as being interpreted in a narrow or broad context (Kaplan 1989). I am starting from a different initial position that is reflective of the reader's stance. The reader's stance for any given work of fiction is indexed to her doxastic set. As will become clearer below, I do not think that the fictive stance or the fiction/non-fiction distinction is definitive here (Matravers 2014). This is because any given work, or sentence within that work, can be about pure fictions, real world entities, and real, but abstract, ideas and concepts at the same time. Part of the problem with trying to capture this through a distinction between direct and indirect speech acts is that it may be stipulating what is being directly and indirectly said (García-Carpintero 2019; Voltolini 2021) (for example, why think that claims about unbounded love are indirectly rather than directly stated in *Shuggie Bain*), and it is unclear how to delineate which speech acts are said or are emergent across an extended work.

We should be careful here. It would be wrong to say that any given work, such as *Shuggie Bain*, needs to depict real economic history just so in order to capture the *what it is like* of the story. Authors are, of course, allowed license in just this area; Glasgow could be reimagined as a sunny and tropical city, alcoholism as a romp. But there are limits, I will argue, and these limits are just where we can learn in the most interesting way from fiction. These limits are in this third level of aboutness in the case of this example. Insofar as a work is about love, loss, and belonging, or grief, pain, friendship, childbirth, and other grand themes, these are not fictive. They are not, in an important sense, malleable by the license of the author. Wanting to belong is something real, and a story about wanting to belong is a story about something real. It can be taken as belief-directed, as true to the world. Of course, it can (and often does) go wrong. Not getting this wrong is what makes great works great. The aesthetic achievement, as I will characterize it below, is when the fictive presents the real. The fictive utterances create a work of imagination which is a characterization of something which is real or true across the levels of its content. This characterization of the real and true, when presented through these fictive means, is only realized in the susceptibilities in a reader's doxastic set.

4. *Susceptibilities in belief*

Every doxastic set is uniquely formed. It is not just a set of beliefs, but beliefs counted in various ways: along axes of retrievability, certainty, completeness, and relation to attitude or emotion. The suggestion here

is that any given doxastic set is a such a combination, p_1, p_2, p_3,...p_n. When asked to identify a belief, say for pedagogical purposes, we tend to lead with something simple and clear, easily retrievable, and not laden with emotion: I believe *that snow is white*. We have many such beliefs, most of which are so evident that we never attend to them at all. Within this belief set there are also "susceptibilities"—this is a deliberately vague term to capture the range of weaknesses in a doxastic set. These beliefs can be weak or strong, partial or complete, tenuous or robust, opaque or clear.[5] A susceptibility can be present merely because of ignorance: *I have never heard of Thomas Cromwell*, but those are the less interesting cases. A more interesting case is a susceptibility due to weak credence or because of incomplete doxastic or inferential networks: *This experience was like* x*, but I do not know whether that means that I should believe* p*, or whether I should believe that this experience is shared by others or has* F *additional characteristics*. There are beliefs which we hold as certainties, and others for which we have some justification but could use more. There are also doxastic states that are not fully accessible to us, and which we can come to realize that we believe.

Doxastic susceptibility is also due to intersections between doxastic and conative states or sets. For example, a person may want to believe p_1, but lack the confidence to do so, or be fearful of what it entails, or is moved by her desires and positive affect to ignore countervailing evidence. There can be beliefs that the holder is embarrassed by or regrets; and beliefs that are arrived at by way of courage or conviction. This is difficult to see for more particular beliefs about the world: I believe *that snow is white*; but easier to see for beliefs which are less concrete or more diffuse across states or time: I believe *that you can be disappointed in motherhood*; or are about a what-it-is-like: I believe *that even late stage alcoholics want to keep living, even from their own first-person perspective*.

As such, there are strengths and susceptibilities throughout a doxastic set. A given reader has a belief set p_1, p_2, p_3, [ ]...p_n, containing within it gaps and conative overlays. A given literary work constructs a fictional context in which there are elements that are meant to be taken fictively, and which are typically taken as such. The craftwork of their construction is what moves the reader to take other claims factually. Those factual claims may be at other layers of aboutness, although presented concurrently in the fictional context. These factual claims can then change a reader's beliefs about the actual world at those places where her beliefs are susceptible to change—these are doxastic susceptibilities. Think about this thematically—a great work of literature typically deals with those very themes which intersect at the points where our beliefs and attitudes are vulnerable. There are more techni-

[5] Suits (2006: 383–384) offers a compelling case regarding degrees of belief with respect to imagining fictions, and how beliefs can be "pushed" and "pulled", "peripheralized", and brought into attention.

cal ways of thinking about this: as pragmatic encroachment or pragmatic conditions on justification (Fantl and McGrath 2002; Stanley 2005) or belief (Weatherson 2005), or as imprecise credences (Armendt 2013), as a partial list. The clarity with which we hold beliefs, the extent to which they are retrievable or evident to us, and the interactions between our beliefs, desires, values, and aspirations, are all relevant when engaging in make-believe or imagining a fiction. Similarly, there is conceptual content, events, ideas, or histories, to which we stand in various conative relations, or have various attitudes toward (Gendler 2008). At some points in a life, one can be unmoved by stories of family, and at other times, deeply moved. These attitudes and states, of course, change throughout one's life as one accrues experiences, and sheds convictions and memories.

Many of our most important beliefs are partially formed, vague and inchoate. These can include our beliefs about the duties of friendship, what is fair in wartime, how to raise a child. There is a reason that philosophers find depth in the basic questions about a life. We also have doxastic states and doxastic sets that have become disjointed and faded snippets (perhaps about trigonometry or, famously, what childbirth is like). Some of this can be recalled with effort and concentration. Yet a dim and fragmented set of mathematical beliefs are not unlike beliefs a reader may have about many other things. He may believe that mothers let you down but let themselves down more. He may have beliefs about the depths of grief, or loving and not being loved, what it might feel like to be willing to die for someone, or what it would feel like if someone died for him. In such examples, the reader is likely to have an incomplete or indeterminate belief overlaid with emotional force. And they rise and fall in clarity and salience throughout one's life.

Readers, viewers, and audiences are all bringing these doxastic sets to fictional contexts. And each one of these sets has hard spots, where convictions are obvious, evident, and clear, that to which one has given much careful thought and study, or around which one organizes one's life. Each set also has soft spots along axes of retrievability, certainty, completeness, and relation to attitude or emotion. We are susceptible in those cases where we are apt to change our minds, or where we cannot yet tell, or cannot yet retrieve, what we believe. Coming to form or find these beliefs is a kind of self-revelation.

Self-revelation can be understood as the change in beliefs about *oneself* on the basis of imaginative engagement with fictional works. We can cast this as something that emerges from the properties of certain forms of literary fiction and of individual persons. Yet, I do not want to claim that the kind of learning with which we should be primarily concerned is self-knowledge, merely in the narrow sense. All belief change is personal in the sense that it happens from the first-person perspective. A reader can take in new information or entertain imaginative states, and in both cases come to form new beliefs. Either way,

the inferential process is internal to the reader and as such all learning is self-revelation. It need not be confined to belief change about one's own state or identity: *I now understand why I am lonely*, *I think I may be lovable*, but can also include general inferences: *Motherhood and childhood contain uniquely structured forms of disappointment*. This can still be a revelation to a person insofar as it changes their beliefs about the world.

5. *Inference out of fictional spaces*

Let's imagine that I read a fiction in which a person with a certain set of characteristics faces long odds at finding love, but does find love. In imagining this fiction, in engaging in this act of make-believe, I come to realize that *if that unlucky and doomed person can find love, then I can too*. Take it to be the case that this is revelatory to me and constitutes genuine belief change and, perhaps even knowledge. And why not? There are many ways in which belief can change and imaginative engagement is one of them. Before thinking that this is some empty self-discovery, or one that was realized outside of the fiction, it is worth considering more nuanced cases and what makes these possible.

In our example of Shuggie, his mother is an alcoholic who eventually drinks herself to death and in the process deprives Shuggie of even the rudimentary securities of home. But she is also a magnetic and compelling person whom he loves deeply. Some readers, with some set of properties, may conclude on reading the work *that they have been extraordinarily fortunate in life's material circumstances* but also *that they have also never experienced such a deep and abiding love for another person*. So, fortunate in circumstance but unfortunate in love. These inferences are simple, but they can be quite complicated, drawn on the basis of a very particular mapping between the properties of the work and the properties of the reader. They may also be revelatory. It may be revelatory for a reader to come to realize that her circumstances, however wanting, could have been worse in very particular ways; and, correspondingly, that her love for her family members, however strong, pales in comparison to the love evinced in Shuggie. These inferences can be just as particular as the intersecting epistemic spaces—the reader's and the fiction's—allow. They need not be only general claims about the human condition (*things could be worse!*) but may be much more specific (*I am lucky to have never had to take money from the pockets of men visiting the house in order to buy enough food to eat*). A reader may draw further conclusions about themselves, or about the universality of their own disappointments as a child, or failures as a parent. And that in turn may offer despair or relief. These conclusions may be quite particular about unique faults and have nothing at all to do with what the author of *Shuggie Bain* intended. If a reader progresses from a nascent to fully-formed belief about her own alcoholism or her own child or any number of other things, these are not explicitly

or implicitly implied by the work; they are neither conversational nor conventional implicatures of the work or any sentence within it. The reader can come to have a new belief—which may be revelatory—and it will not be based merely on her prior beliefs about the actual world. It will be a form of learning, and learning about the particular.[6] It will not always be intended by the author or present in the work, except for the fact that the work is written with an open texture that allows for the exploitation of a reader's opaque beliefs about childhood, parenthood, addiction, love, etc. The "open texture" is the construction of a fictional world which allows for these throughlines to the soft spots in a reader's doxastic sets. A work that circumscribes this too narrowly, by closing off imaginative possibilities, or leaving no room for the interpolation from the fictive to the actual, one which fails to build layers of content that are both fictive and factual, is a work that will accomplish less literarily. This is a fine line, argumentatively, that I am trying to draw here. On one hand, I am presenting this from the reader's side: learning from fiction is something grounded in the susceptibilities of a reader's doxastic set. On the other hand, I am positing that that these susceptibilities are identified through an author's craftwork: the factual claims about the actual world emerge out of the skilled construction of the fictive elements, which, if done well, identify just those doxastic weaknesses which are central to most readers. This is no small feat.

Inference out of fictional spaces can be approached by thinking about the epistemic spaces that fictional works exist in. The idea of the "fictive stance" and the "fictional epistemic space" retains utility for certain kinds of analysis. But it is not as helpful or as informative as it might be on its own, as I have argued here, and it stymies efforts to understand the varieties of truth-telling and belief-change that take place. An alternative proposal is that fictional epistemic space is important for the world-building that makes first-order belief or make-believe possible. In the fictional epistemic space of a particular work we learn about the members of a family, their relations, their employment, and so on. We understand what is the case in this space and we build inferential networks between the facts and events that are built up. Similarly, we do the same thing in our actual epistemic spaces, learning about actual people, their relations, their employment, what

[6] This same revelation in imagining a fictional context is just what could explain the rationality of choosing a transformative experience. Choosing a transformative experience is said to be irrational since a transformative experience by definition is an experience you have not had which will make you a person you are not now (Paul 2014). And that person may have entirely different values which guide different decision-making. Spending time in imagining fictional contexts, especially those told from the first-person perspective, is exactly the kind of justificatory throughline which obviates the irrationality of choosing a transformative experience. For example, a reader may imagine transformative experiences in fictional contexts such as parenthood, or re-locating one's sexual orientation or gender, or deep grief or loss, or living through wartime, and has a reasonable claim to mitigating the irrationality of making certain choices.

is and is not the case, and the inferential networks between the facts and events that are built up in those spaces.

These spaces are overlapping.[7] They are overlaid on one another in configurations indexed to individual readers.[8] They overlap exactly at the susceptible places, and these are not fixed.[9] In my examples above about childhood and parenthood, they overlap at the places where readers may have opaque, weak, soft, ambivalent, or undiscovered and unarticulated beliefs about aspects of these life experiences.[10] This will be true for many people since everyone has experienced a version of childhood and many people have experienced a version of parenthood. On the other hand, these texts will likely be read quite differently before and after parenthood, just as literature about grief, loss, love, wartime, poverty, or disaster will reveal different doxastic strengths and weaknesses depending on one's indexed relations to those events. It depends on how the fictional manages to find groundedness in individual feelings about childhood, marriage, loss, loneliness, self-esteem, and so on.

I want to emphasize that the features of the spaces I am mapping does not have to do with what one has experienced, or how one identifies, but has more to do with the robustness of one's prior beliefs and commitments. So, the shared epistemic space between the fictional and the actual is mapped in just this way and emerges from the facts around particular belief sets. A good fictional construct exploits these doxastic susceptibilities in readers. A really good fictional construct creates new doxastic susceptibilities. The justificatory through-line is the mapping between the epistemic space of the fictional world—including the facts of the fiction, and how they are assembled—and the prior doxastic and conative states of the reader. Learning from fiction is easier to accept once we see how much of it depends upon the reader and not the writer and not the work. The skill lies with the writer and manifests in the work, but the epistemic processes depend largely on the prior doxastic states of the reader and the inferential work that she puts in. The shared epistemic space—between the fictional and the actual—comes from this, and not from a fictive stance. Moreover, this explains why readers have such varied epistemic experiences in their engagement

[7] For a skeptical analysis of the possibility that these epistemic spaces are overlapping in the way that would allow for inference, see Nichols (2006).

[8] See Suits (2006) for an account of how readers do not have to have exclusive beliefs about fictions. He rejects what he calls "doxastic exclusivity." This notion is relevant here in that I argue that one can have make-beliefs about the world of the fiction alongside beliefs about the actual world as represented in the fiction. This is a consequence of the levels of aboutness in any given fictional representation.

[9] And the corresponding may hold in response to the paradox of fiction in Fictional Emotional Spaces and Actual Emotional Spaces.

[10] See Stock (2016) for an account of how fictional works provide testimony that compels belief about the actual world. In the argument of this paper, fictional works could provide testimony, but they also could merely provide a representation which is "true-to" in such a way that it compels inferences on the part of the reader, even if not directly testified to, implicated, or intended by an author.

with fictional and literary works. The indexing to readers alters the configuration of doxastic susceptibilities but it also alters inferential power. Inference, like imagination, and the adoption of perspectives outside of our own, are skills unevenly distributed.

6. *Aesthetic achievement*

Finally, I would like to return to the claim I made at the outset about aesthetic achievement. If truth is not a norm of the imagination, and, if truth is the norm of belief, then it is an epistemic achievement if a person adopts a new belief on the basis of imagination in a fictional context. The epistemic achievement is aesthetic if this occurs using the craft of make-believe (Eaton 2012; Kieran 2006). This is the significance of the story and the craftwork in telling the story. Since stories have levels of aboutness and interpretation, it is an achievement to produce a story that makes the particular about something more general, and for it to have a texture that is open enough to find overlay with many different doxastic sets. Some of this is done through fairly obvious means: it is not accidental that so much notable literature deals with themes common to most lives (love, loss, betrayal, coming of age, etc.). The more difficult piece of craftwork comes in the construction of the fictional elements of a work as true-to in just the way that allows the reader to move from the fictional epistemic space to her beliefs about the actual.

Belief change, and the inculcation of knowledge, should not be the goal of imaginative engagement, nor should it be normative. Yet it occurs. This is explained by the craftwork of the fiction-building as better at displaying the real along some relevant parameters than the actual world is. It is also explained by content constraints as indexed to individual persons with some set of doxastic susceptibilities. In this paper I have narrowed my focus on content constraints down to inferences based on some mapping that creates unified epistemic spaces, but that is not the only content available for such mapping. The aesthetic achievement is the exploiting and creating of these soft spots.

7. *Learning from fiction*

I started by considering the claim that the goal of literature is to "fight" fiction, or to escape fiction. And I have drawn out a particular way in which this occurs through inference which can be specific and revelatory, that happens on the basis of what I have called indexed doxastic susceptibilities on the reader-side, and craftwork on author-side, and finally how this can be an aesthetic achievement since it overcomes the norms against forming new beliefs or drawing new inferences merely on the basis of imaginative engagement. While I have softened and qualified a number of claims along the way, it should still sound counter-intuitive. The intuitive claim is that the goal of literary fiction is to get the reader to make-believe parts of the work, to represent the

fictional world, to understand the inferential relations within the fictional world, to be entertained, or moved, or challenged. I have instead offered a way of thinking about the goal of literary fiction as exploiting and creating soft spots in a reader's doxastic and conative systems such that they change their beliefs about the actual world.

Part of the reason that we get hung up on learning from fiction is that the model of knowledge comes from philosophy. When we look at the plurality of goals in a creative work it seems like knowledge is sidelined. Similarly, when we compare the kind of knowledge derived from philosophical thought experiments in contrast with the much more complex thought experiments of fiction it does not seem like they could possibly be knowledge-oriented. But, that is in part because of the narrowness of goals. Philosophy is not aiming to be true-to. Neither is it constructed with a kind of open texture which allows for exploitation of doxastic susceptibilities in a way that is indexed to particular audiences under particular epistemic circumstances.

I will close with something that I think is obvious to all serious readers or consumers of art and literature: that of course we learn from fiction and from engaging our imagination. While we may not always use our imagination to explicitly derive knowledge from fiction, we do build our imaginative capacity itself by seriously engaging with fiction. This strengthening of the imaginative muscle makes us better able to be knowers, and recognizers of the truth, in all epistemic spaces.

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Social Science as a Kind of Writing

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The purpose of this paper is twofold: to argue for the value of (1) social science as part of the intellectual activity of writing (rather than righting) and (2) the practice of fiction to that intellectual activity. Writing is a mode of representation that eludes our complete and objective knowledge and always remains partial and temporary. While righting, in contrast, is concerned with the absolute truth and the revelation of the right answer. This paper argues that writing is a more productive, creative, and necessary way of engaging with reality than righting, and that it can offer insights and perspectives for both theory and praxis. Drawing on Stephen King's view on writing fiction, this paper will also argue that fiction constitutes a kind of writing and employs a particular form of truth that is conceived as a relation between representation and reality. The paper will conclude by suggesting the need for criminologists—and social scientists more generally—to adopt the perspective of writing to gain a better understanding of the phenomena with which they are concerned.

Keywords: Writing; philosophy; fiction; truth; criminology.

1. *Introduction*

In this paper, we explore the value of "writing" and "righting" as two different ways of communicating through discourse that have implications for how we understand and engage with reality. Writing and righting can be seen as opposing intellectual activities that reflect different assumptions about the nature of knowledge of reality. Writing views knowledge as contingent, interpretive, and temporally situated that can engage in an infinite forms of understandings. Righting, on the other hand, views knowledge as objective, universal, and certain. Righting claims to reveal an absolute Truth and operates within a fi-

nite paradigm of comprehension. Righting, as we shall demonstrate in more detail throughout the paper, limits and distorts reality by imposing a false certainty and authority. Where writing requires humility and openness to different perspectives, righting requires pretentiousness and avoidance to criticism or challenges. We focus on the role of fiction as a form of writing that offers valuable insights for criminology and the broader social sciences. Criminology, as we discuss, consists of several ontological and epistemological frameworks with the recent development of "critical criminology" that is concerned with harm, injustices, and the role of dominant truths and knowledges in reproducing such harm. We argue that fiction is a form of writing that reflects a particular version of reality ("real" or otherwise) and establishes a relation between fiction and truth. Fiction engages in the infinite process of understanding by exploring a multitude of different and changing aspects of harm and experience. Fiction represents reality, regardless of the accuracy of the representation. The recipients of fiction enter a quasi-experience of a specific version of reality that belongs to an intersubjective truth (Summa 2017). This subjective experience modifies their understanding of the non-fictional world and makes them aware of the possibility of different imagined realities. We will identify the connection between fiction and truth by distinguishing two types of truth: accuracy and authenticity. We further argue that fiction provides criminology with theoretical and practical value by engaging in a fluidity of truth-making in productive and creative ways.

The foundation of the paper builds on the theoretical framework of Richard Rorty (1978). Rorty was one of the most famous public intellectuals in the US at the time of his death in 2007. His career is notable for his development of neopragmatism and for his crossing of the philosophical Rubicon. Rorty was trained as an analytic philosopher, completing his PhD at Yale in 1956 and being awarded a professorship at Princeton in 1970 (Gross 2008). He became increasingly disillusioned with the tradition during the 1970s and turned his back on it with the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty 1979), which rejected truth as the criterion for philosophy. Rorty was sympathetic to James (1907: 42), for whom truth is simply "the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite assignable reasons." If truth is to be retained by the natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities, it must be truth as usefulness rather than truth as providing direct access to reality. Rorty concluded his academic career at Stanford, where he was Professor of Comparative Literature from 1998 until his retirement in 2005. He was not, however, embraced by the phenomenological-hermeneutic tradition, being regarded as too conservative to be placed in the same category as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault in virtue of his commitment to liberalism. Rorty's (1982) second book, a collection of essays entitled *Consequences of Pragmatism*, demonstrated his affinity for Dewey and the originality of his own contribution to the pragmatist tradition.

Both Rorty and Dewey were concerned with destroying the distinctions among philosophy, science, art, and religion, but Rorty's pragmatism was distinguished by his overriding desire to place philosophical inquiry entirely at the service of democratic politics (Voparil 2021). For Rorty, philosophical or other inquiry is only "true"—or valuable—to the extent that it facilitates and enables democracy. Our particular interest in Rorty (1978) is in an essay he published in the literary studies journal *New Literary History*, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida," which was a response to and continuation of one of James' (1907) lectures, "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy."

The remainder of this paper will be structured as follows. First, we shall introduce the theoretical framework of Rorty (1978) which distinguishes between the conceptions of "writing" and "righting" and shows their implications for understanding the notion of "truth" or rather, a hegemony based on truth claims. Secondly, we will explore how the difference between writing and righting relates to the views of Kantian and poststructuralists philosophers on our ability (or inability) to access reality. Third, we draw on the insights of Stephen King (2000) to show how fiction is a kind of writing that aligns with phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy and fosters creative and critical thinking. Next, we will examine whether representation always fails to capture reality, and why this idea goes against the expectations of those who make representations, along with the relevance to the social sciences. Then, we will frame this within the context of criminology by associating righting with positivism and writing with constructionism, however, our preferred approach is critical realism. We will also suggest that righting—asserting that one has discovered the Truth—can be equivalent to causing harm. Lastly, the paper will conclude by suggesting the need for criminologists, and social scientists more generally, to adopt the perspective of writing to gain a better understanding of the phenomena (both in theory and praxis) with which they are concerned.

2. *Philosophy as a kind of writing*

Rorty (1978: 141) begins by presenting two different and conflicting ways of understanding the field of physics, "right and wrong" (i.e., normative ethics or ethical theory), and philosophy. He uses these contrasts to show the two traditions of philosophy. Rorty (1978: 143) subsequently introduces Derrida and characterises his project as addressing the question of why analytic philosophers oppose the notion of philosophy being regarded as a "kind of writing," i.e., a literary genre whose limits are determined by convention rather than by form or content. Writing as a mode of representation, according to Rorty, is a hindrance to be negotiated for Kantian philosophers and positivist scientist: they want to *show* us their findings, to *point* the truth to us rather than represent it in writing. Truth, however, can be substituted *for the trace*: Writing is one of the representatives of the trace in general, it is not the

trace itself. *The trace itself does not exist*. Rorty's summaries the two intellectual traditions as two forms of activity: "writing" and "showing." Showing, which shall henceforth be referred to as "righting" for reasons that will become obvious, is not restricted to the institutions of analytic philosophy and positivist science, but is also the preferred activity of religious institutions. Scientists and priests alike want to show us the Truth (truth-with-a-capital-t) or God (god-with-a-capital-g) without the interference of representation.

As already mentioned, the essay begins with two contrasting descriptions of physics, selected by Rorty because it is the model of inquiry that analytic philosophers attempt to emulate. The positivist description of physics is that "there are some invisible things which are parts of everything else and whose behavior determines the way everything else works" (Rorty 1978: 141). For the pragmatist, "physicists are men [*sic*] looking for a new interpretation of the Book of Nature" (Rorty 1978: 141). In the former, physics proceeds in a linear fashion, building on previous progress and aiming for the point when it will, quite literally, be able to reveal the Truth about everything. The latter draws on Thomas Kuhn's (2012: ch. 8 and 5) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which was first published in 1962 and distinguished between "normal science" and "revolutionary" science. Periods of normal science are interrupted by scientific revolutions that involve a shift to a new paradigm, initiating a new version of normal science which is incommensurable with the previous one. As such, scientific progress from Ptolemy to Copernicus to Newton to Einstein is non-linear and there is no indication that physics will reach an end point that is not itself subject to a paradigm shift. In his next two examples, Rorty examines ethical theory and philosophy in the same way, decoupling both of them from the concept of truth. Referring to all three of physics, ethical theory, and philosophy, he (Rorty 1978: 143) concludes that there are two separate activities under discussion and that writing "takes science as one (not especially privileged nor interesting) sector of culture, a sector which, like all the other sectors, only makes sense when viewed historically." Rorty proceeds to a discussion of Derrida in which he frames deconstruction as providing a sketch of how the intellectual landscape might look in the absence of a Kantian, truth-based hegemony, in a similar manner to that in which Derrida's predecessors detached morality from religion. As might be expected, Rorty focuses on Derrida's prioritisation of writing over speech as a form of representation that provides a reminder of language's inability to make reality present. This is because of the arbitrary and unstable relationship between words and concepts.

With its publication shortly before the release of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, there is a strong sense in which Rorty's essay is a declaration of and rationale for his disenchantment with analytic philosophy. It is also noteworthy that this declaration was made in a literary studies journal rather than either an analytic or phenomeno-

logical-hermeneutic philosophy journal—literary studies is a discipline dedicated exclusively to writing and it is inconceivable that there could be literary theory or literary criticism without writing. Rorty, however, can be situated in the context of the pragmatic tradition of philosophy, which is neither analytic nor phenomenological-hermeneutic, as inaugurating neopragmatism and very likely saving the "third way" in philosophy from extinction at the end of the 20th century. Rorty's focus in the essay is, for the most part, on Derrida and pragmatism is not even mentioned. James is mentioned, but only once and not cited. Peirce, Dewey, Addams, and Locke are not mentioned at all. It seems that this is thus a declaration of Rorty's support for phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy (specifically, for Derrida's deconstruction within that tradition) rather than pragmatism. That would be an accurate summary of the essay, but a more enlightening summary would be that it is a declaration of and dedication to writing rather than righting. Writing is an activity undertaken by philosophers in both the phenomenological-hermeneutic and pragmatic traditions, distinguishing them from philosophers in the analytic tradition, who undertake the activity of righting.

3. *Writing vs. righting*

Rorty does not actually define either writing or righting in the manner of the necessary and sufficient conditions favoured by analytic philosophy (which would be inconsistent with the aim of the paper), but describes writing in more detail and makes the explicit link with Derrida, providing further elucidation. What we are referring to as *righting* and what Rorty describes as showing is most clearly set out in the fourth and final part of his essay. For Rorty, analytic philosophy eschews writing as an impediment to its revelatory power—its capacity to reveal the Truth—because revelation involves direct access to reality. Rorty (1978: 166, emphasis in original) values Derrida for (among other things) demonstrating how to conduct inquiries without aiming at truth:

> Kantian philosophy, on Derrida's view, is a kind of writing which would like not to be a kind of writing. It is a genre which would like to be a gesture, a clap of thunder, an epiphany. *That* is where God and [hu]man, thought and its object, words and the world meet, we want speechlessly to say; let no further words come between the happy pair. Kantian philosophers would like not to write, but just to *show*.

Kantian philosophers, like their religious counterparts, desire revelation and revelation does not come via the written or spoken word but by the perception of the thing itself. If we do not already perceive the Truth, then we may need someone to show us where it is, to point us in the right direction, to give us a push along the path. None of the showing, pointing, or pushing require writing—or, indeed, words—at all and to represent the Truth (by language or pictures) is precisely to

not reveal it: if I am reading about Truth, I am not looking at it; I am looking at a description (representation) of it. What physicists, philosophers, and priests want is therefore *righting*—revelation of *the* right answer—which is distinct from writing. Rorty (1978: 156) elaborates on this distinction by using Kuhn's (2012) distinction between normal (positivist) and revolutionary (realist) science:

> In normal physics, normal philosophy, normal moralizing or preaching, one hopes for the normal thrill of just the right piece fitting into just the right slot, with a shuddering resonance which makes verbal commentary superfluous and inappropriate. Writing, as Derrida says in commenting on Rousseau, is to this kind of simple 'getting it right' as masturbation is to standard, solid, reassuring sex. This is why writers are thought effete in comparison with scientists—the 'men [*sic*] of action' of our latter days.

Revolutionary, realist, or critical scientists and philosophers are writers rather than righters. *Writing* is an activity in which disciplinary claims of providing direct access to Truth are rejected in favour of interdisciplinary approximations of a truth to which access will always be partial and temporary. For Kantians and positivists, writing is a necessary evil, a flawed but unavoidable means to the end of communicating their Truth(s). The key point for Rorty (1978: 156–157, emphasis in original) is that Kantians and poststructuralists are engaged in two different activities, not inquiring into different subjects:

> The important thing to notice is that the difference between the two forms of activity is not subject matter—not, for instance, a matter of the difference between the flinty particles of the hard sciences and the flexible behavior of the soft ones—*but rather is determined by normality or abnormality*. Normality, in this sense, is accepting without question the stage-setting in the language which gives demonstration (scientific or ostensive) its legitimacy. Revolutionary scientists need to write, as normal scientists do not. Revolutionary politicians need to write, as parliamentary politicians do not. Dialectical philosophers like Derrida need to write, as Kantian philosophers do not.

Writing is thus an activity that is a means to an end for Kantians and the end itself for poststructuralists. Poststructuralists and pragmatists know that there is no final or absolute truth—no Truth—that will be reached, only ideas, concepts, and theories that are better or worse for the ends to which we wish to use them. Harcourt's (2020: 46) reconstruction of critical theory, which aims to transform rather than interpret the world, is very relevant here:

> a reconstructed critical theory precisely represents an endless unveiling of illusions to demonstrate how our beliefs distribute resources and material conditions. It traces the effects of reality of our beliefs and material practices, recognizing that, as it unveils illusions, it creates new ones that will need to be unpacked later. It is relentless in this way. It engages in a form of recursive unmasking—an infinite regress—that endlessly exposes the distributional effects of belief systems and material conditions.

For writers—as opposed to righters—knowledge is always only partial. A writer aims to improve on what has gone before by providing ideas, concepts, or theories that are more useful or that unveil more of

the illusions of the righters, but expects—indeed *hopes*—that her own writing will be criticised, unveiled, and replaced. Part of what it means to be a writer rather than a righter, one of the features of Derrida's project that Rorty develops, is a lack of respect for the divisions between disciplines. Once one differentiates between righting and writing and makes a commitment to the latter, then no sphere of culture (science, philosophy, religion, or art) is any more privileged than any other. They are all simply tools that are better or worse at achieving certain ends. Writing itself—the activity of pragmatic philosophy, deconstructive critique, and critical theory—is not (and has never been) the preserve of pragmatists, literary critics, or critical theorists, but of anyone who undertakes the activity of writing. The activity of writing is undertaken in this paper with a commitment to Derrida, Rorty, and Harcourt. A significant part of that writing, which will be the topic of the next section, will involve the analysis and evaluation of a different kind of writing—fiction, communicated in the linguistic and hybrid modes of representation.

4. *Fiction as a kind of writing*

If pragmatic philosophy is a kind of writing, then it has more in common with other kinds of writing—like phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy, art, and fiction—than with analytic philosophy, positivist science, and religion. As such, insight into writing can be found from sources beyond academia and one of the most useful is Stephen King's (2000) *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, which combines autobiography with an exploration of writing as an activity. King is one of a handful of authors who has sold hundreds of millions of books.[1] He is best known as a writer of horror fiction, specifically as the author of: *The Shining*, *Carrie*, *'Salem's Lot*, *Misery*, *Pet Sematary*, and his apocalyptic masterpiece, *The Stand*. In an interview in 2022, King listed his favourite five stories, which includes only one of his bestsellers (Russell 2022): "Survivor Type," *Misery*, *Lisey's Story*, "The Body," and *Billy Summers*. What is particularly interesting about this list is that only one of his favourites has a supernatural element (*Lisey's Story*), much of which is represented with great subtlety. *On Writing* is divided into five uneven sections: "C.V.," "What Writing Is," "Toolbox," "On Writing," and "On Living: A Postscript." The first and last of these are autobiographical and our interest is in the middle three. The answer to what writing is, is straightforward (King 2000: 77): "Telepathy, of course." King uses "telepathy" literally rather than metaphorically, introducing writing as an activity with the capacity to transcend both time and space. Telepathy requires clarity of communication, for which King (2000: 85) recommends that the writer assemble a *toolbox*:

[1] Karen Heller (2016) claims that King has sold 350 million books, but this claim appears to be based on a 2006 estimate so the figure is no doubt substantially larger now, seven years after the publication of Heller's article.

> I want to suggest that to write to your best abilities, it behooves you to construct your own toolbox and then build up enough muscle so you can carry it with you. Then, instead of looking at a hard job and getting discouraged, you will perhaps seize the correct tool and get immediately to work.

King's toolbox consists of four levels, with the most common tools, vocabulary and grammar, on top. The second level is style and the third the paragraph, which is where the activity starts for King (2000: 103): "I would argue that the paragraph, not the sentence, is the basic unit of writing—the place where coherence begins and words stand a chance of becoming more than mere words." The fourth and final level is structure, the development of paragraphs into sections or chapters and sections or chapters into a manuscript draft. Social scientists who have marked student assessments; peer-reviewed journal articles, book proposals, and grant applications; and edited journals and books will immediately recognise the value of the toolbox beyond the kind of writing we call fiction. Vocabulary, grammar, style, and structure are indeed essential to clarity of communication and they are also so often undeveloped. Many social science texts suffer from jargon, ambiguity, and inconsistency, which prevents them from conveying their ideas effectively and persuasively. By using the four levels of the toolbox, social scientists can enhance their communication skills and make their words more meaningful and impactful.

Having assembled his toolbox, King explores writing as an activity by discussing three of its core features: practice, environment, and routine. The writer must practice her craft often and regularly and practice includes both reading and writing. "If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut" (King 2000: 112). If social scientists want to write well, we need to write a lot and read a lot. Second, King links his professional success to a stable and ordered environment for practicing the craft, which in his own case involved good health and a happy marriage. "The biggest aid to regular […] production is working in a serene atmosphere. It's difficult for even the most naturally productive writer to work in an environment where alarms and excursions are the rule rather than the exception" (King 2000: 120). Finally, King prefers a routine, which he justifies by comparing the activity of writing to the (in)activity of sleeping. This comparison and his conception of *creative sleep* is worth quoting in full (King 2000: 122):

> I think we're actually talking about creative sleep. Like your bedroom, your writing room should be private, a place where you go to dream. Your schedule—in at about the same time every day, out when your thousand words are on paper or disk—exists in order to habituate yourself, to make yourself ready to dream just as you make yourself ready to sleep by going to bed at roughly the same time each night and following the same ritual as you go. In both writing and sleeping, we learn to be physically still at the same time we are encouraging our minds to unlock from the humdrum rational

> thinking of our daytime lives. And as your mind and body grow accustomed to a certain amount of sleep each night—six hours, seven, maybe the recommended eight—so can you train your waking mind to sleep creatively and work out the vividly imagined waking dreams which are successful works of fiction.

King's conception of creative sleep suggests that writing is not only a rational and conscious activity, but also a creative and subconscious activity. He implies that writers need to access their imagination and intuition, which are often suppressed or ignored in the daytime. By establishing a routine and a private space, writers can create the conditions for their minds to produce original and vivid stories. Creative sleep can also be applied to social science writing, which often requires more than logical and analytical thinking. Social scientists can benefit from tapping into their imagination and intuition, which can help them generate new insights, perspectives, and hypotheses.

5. *Truth-Telling?*

King's exploration of the activity of writing provides exemplary insight into the activity as a whole rather than just fiction as a kind of writing. If we, however, are looking to King as a guide to the activity of writing, then it seems we are no longer interested in truth, in which case one might well ask what is left for pragmatic philosophy. The distinction between Rorty and King is broken down and while we might hold the two of them in equal regard, one seems to be writing about reality (even if he admits that he can never reveal it) and the other about fantasy (impossible, improbable, and unlikely versions of reality). The same could be (and is) said of *The Shining*, *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, *Misery*, and *Pet Sematary*—they are science fictions and fantasies, representations with only a tenuous and fragile link to reality.

This is a concern expressed in many different ways and is one of the reasons that the criminologies have been reluctant to engage with fiction. The two criminologies one might expect to have made the most use of fiction—narrative and cultural—either fail to recognise the link between fictional representation and actual reality (the former) or understand the link in terms of a mirror that always distorts the reality (the latter). Even in the very niche area of what can be called pulp criminology (i.e., the criminological engagement with fictions outside of the cultural criminological framework and ultra-realist theory), the character of the link is highly disputed. As writers rather righters, we are not interested in Truth; rather, we are interested in truth, conceived as a relation between representation and reality.

The first point to note is that if there is a relation between representation and reality, it would be curious if that relation always, i.e. necessarily, distorted the reality. If a link is admitted, then there is always the possibility of accurate representation, even if that is rarely achieved in practice. Once one admits a link, it seems likely that representations

can either represent reality, misrepresent reality, or combine representation with misrepresentation. If representations *always* represent or *always* misrepresent, then the burden of proof lies with those making this counter-intuitive claim and there yet remains to be a convincing argument for the latter from cultural criminologists (McGregor 2018, 2021, 2023). Mirrors do distort reality (by swapping left and right), but once one understands that distortion, they provide a pretty accurate representation of the object they reflect. But what about *fictional* representations, what could the relationship between protagonist Andy Dufresne and the world in which one reads "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption" possibly be? The relation between fiction and truth (but not Truth) is neither paradoxical nor puzzling—or was at least not regarded as such until the birth of modernism in the second half of the 19th century.

The relation between fictional characters, settings, and actions and contemporary or historical people, places, and events is one of reference to universals rather than reference to particulars. The notion is from Aristotle's (Murray 2004) famous observation on the superiority of poetry over history: history refers to what has happened (particulars) and poetry to the kinds of thing that can happen (universals). In other words, nonfiction (history) is about particular contemporary or historical people, places, or events and fiction (poetry) is about types of people, places, or events. "Andy Dufresne" refers to a fictional character and the relation between "Andy-Dufresne-in-Rita-Hayworth-and-Shawshank-Redemption" and the world in which one reads King's ([1982] 2000) novella is the relation between the fictional particular and an actual universal, which might be "a banker who is wrongly convicted of murder" or, less prosaically, "a man of great patience and resilience." People like Dufresne—apparently unremarkable, but possessing an almost superhuman resilience and apparently limitless patience—have and do exist. The relation between fictional particulars and actual universals applies not just to characters, settings, and actions, but to works of fiction as a whole. "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption" might thus be considered to instantiate the universal of "the redemptive power of hope" or, of more interest to the criminologist, "the dehumanising quality of incarceration." If the reference of "Andy-Dufresne-in-Rita-Hayworth-and-Shawshank-Redemption" to "a man of great patience and resilience" seems too distinct from the reference of "Rita-Hayworth-in-Rita-Hayworth-and-Shawshank-Redemption" to (the historical) "Rita Hayworth," then there is—again—a simple way to differentiate what we might call two types of truth: accuracy and authenticity. "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption" is accurate if, for example, King's description of (Dufresne's poster of) Hayworth corresponds with her actual appearance. The novella is *authentic* if, for example, Dufresne is a credible instantiation of "a man of great patience and resilience." Truth in fiction is usually (but not always) concerned with the authenticity of themes, characters, settings, and

actions. One of the many merits of *On Writing* is the extent to which King is concerned with truth, which can be understood in terms of authenticity. The first explicit mention is at a crucial stage of the activity, once the writer's toolbox is assembled and she is about to put fingertip to key (King 2000: 123, emphasis in original):

> So okay—there you are in your room with the shade down and the door shut and the plug pulled out of the base of the telephone. You've blown up your TV and committed yourself to a thousand words a day, come hell or high water. Now comes the big question: What are you going to write about? And the equally big answer: Anything you damn well want. Anything at all… *as long as you tell the truth*.

Shortly after, King (2000: 124) comments on the specific relationship between representation and reality or authenticity and accuracy that characterises writing: "the job of fiction is to find the truth inside the story's web of lies." He explains this relationship in more detail in a discussion of John Grisham's novel, *The Firm* (King 2000: 126–127, emphasis in original):

> Although I don't know for sure, I'd bet my dog and lot that John Grisham never worked for the mob. All of that is total fabrication (and total fabrication is the fiction writer's purest delight). He was once a young lawyer, though, and he has clearly forgotten none of the struggle. Nor has he forgotten the location of the various financial pitfalls and honeytraps that make the field of corporate law so difficult. Using plainspun humor as a brilliant counterpoint and never substituting cant for story, he sketches a world of Darwinian struggle where all the savages wear threepiece suits. And—here's the good part—*this is a world impossible not to believe*. Grisham has been there, spied out the land and the enemy positions, and brought back a full report. He told the truth of what he knew, and for that if nothing else, he deserves every buck *The Firm* made.

The first clause of the last sentence is equally important for social scientists: we must tell the truth of what we know and our knowledge must be acquired by methods that are both valid and reliable. Similarly, social science at its best—whether an article or a monograph—presents *a world impossible not to believe* (often, a world of cause and effect). King ([2006] 2011: 609) makes a similar point in *Lisey's Story*, through author surrogate Scott Landon, "Some things just have to be true, Scott said, because they have no other choice." King is also concerned with the joy of the activity of writing, taking pleasure in the process as well as the product, which he describes with an example from writing *The Stand*:

> At one moment I had none of this; at the next I had all of it. If there is any one thing I love about writing more than the rest, it's that sudden flash of insight when you see how everything connects. I have heard it called 'thinking above the curve', and it's that; I've heard it called 'the over-logic', and it's that, too. (2000: 162–163)

The *sudden flash of insight when you see how everything connects* will be familiar to social scientists. It might come after weeks, months, or even years of hard work on a particular project or it might not come

at all. King (2000: 200) returns to pleasure when identifying his motivation for becoming and remaining a writer: "I did it for the pure joy of the thing. And if you can do it for joy, you can do it forever." When King says he writes for the joy of it, one is surely inclined to believe him. Social scientists must also find joy in their work, especially when they discover something new or meaningful which requires creative approaches. Joy, however, is not always easy to achieve or maintain in the social sciences because of methodological limitations, political and financial pressures, and institutional expectations. Social scientists, therefore, need to cultivate a passion and a curiosity for their topics, and to value both the process and outcome of their ideas in a creative and engaging way.

6. *Criminology as a kind of writing*

Like philosophy, criminology is divided into two traditions: mainstream and critical. Broadly construed, mainstream criminology is concerned with criminal justice and aims to reduce or prevent crime while critical criminology is concerned with social justice and aims to reduce or prevent harm, regardless of whether that harm has been criminalised. The difference is significant because the latter recognises that the criminal justice system can itself be harmful and perpetuate or even exaggerate socioeconomic inequality. This critique is usually focused on the power relations underpinning the criminal justice, legal, and political systems within a particular state or region (Ugwudike 2015). In practice, critical criminologists lean towards the theoretical and qualitative, and mainstream criminologists towards the empirical and quantitative. The disciplinary division is more recent that in philosophy—since the end of the 19th century—but nonetheless substantial, with the same consequences: the two traditions are almost unrecognisable as belonging to the same discipline and it is extremely rare to find a criminologist who finds value in both (Van Swaaningen 1999). From a philosophical point of view, one may be tempted to align mainstream criminology with analytic philosophy and critical criminology with phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy. In the terms set out by Rorty in his essay, one might further bracket analytic philosophy, normal physics, and conventional criminology as righting and phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy, pragmatic philosophy, revolutionary physics, and critical criminology as writing. This would, however, be a gross oversimplification. For starters, it would not do justice to the substantial amount of rigorous, sophisticated, and pragmatic research being undertaken in the tradition that is, somewhat dismissively, referred to as "conventional" criminology (or, with outright contempt, as "administrative" criminology).

Rorty's distinction between writing and righting is more relevant to broad approaches to the social sciences than to either criminological frameworks or criminological theories. An *approach* is a set of onto-

logical and epistemological assumptions about social science research. There are three broad categories of approach, although they are identified by several different (and at times confusing) terms: positivism, constructionism, and realism. These approaches can, again broadly, be distinguished by their relationship to truth (or, more accurately, to truth value). *Positivism* is an approach to social science that assumes the social world is an external reality, that social facts have a truth value, and that researchers can access the reality and discover the truth values. *Constructionism* assumes that the social world is experienced as an external reality, but that researchers can only observe and describe the experience, in consequence of which social facts do not have a truth value. *Realism* assumes the social world is an external reality and that social facts have a truth value, but that researchers have only partial access to reality, in consequence of which criminological knowledge is approximate to rather than correspondent with reality (McGregor 2021).

The last of these, which is our preferred approach, can be described as "critical realism" (McGregor 2021: 56) in order to draw attention to its relation to Roy Bhaskar's (1975, 1987, 1989) approach to natural science and Jon Frauley's (2010: 2) "perspectival realism". There seems to be a straightforward (if, perhaps, superficial) set of relations among analytic philosophy and positivism, phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy and constructionism, and pragmatic philosophy and realism. As the discussion in this paper suggests, righting can be described in terms of positivism and writing in terms of either constructionism or realism. Criminologists can thus either undertake the activity of righting or writing; they are righters if they adopt a positivist approach and writers if they adopt a constructionist or realist approach.

The kind of writing we call fiction has significant pragmatic value for criminology, both for the reasons explained in this paper and because the distinction—and usefulness—between fictional and nonfictional narratives is questioned, especially when those narratives are complex rather than basic (McGregor 2018). The argument is that even criminologists who do not recognise the value of fiction or who (as in the case of the aforementioned cultural criminologists) misrecognise its valence as negative, should recognise that the activity they are undertaking is writing. One does not have to write about writing, but unless one recognises that what one is doing is writing, one is likely to perpetrate harm by asserting that one has discovered the Truth. Rorty (1978) insists first on the fallibility of writing and then on the desirability of that fallibility. When we write, we understand that the next writer may rewrite our social scientific significance (by developing or criticising us), write us out of the disciplinary canon (by pointing out flaws we failed to perceive), or indeed write us off (by ignoring us). When we right, we gesture towards a Truth that society fails to recognise at its peril and act with the conviction such revelation brings. Harcourt (2020) refers to critical theory (and the praxis with which it is

intertwined) in similar terms, as an infinite—but not vicious—regress in which we as social scientists work towards a better understanding of phenomena, an understanding that will never be complete because we will never be able to access reality directly. Harcourt's goal is, like Rorty's, to be rewritten, to have his critical theory developed by others and transformed into more nuanced and useful critical theories in the future. Writing as an activity thus involves a degree of humility that righting does not and the thought that we might be wrong—or that someone else might have a better way of doing things—is essential when it comes to putting our writing into practice, whether the praxis that accompanies our critique is teaching, activism, or something else.

7. *Conclusion*

Throughout the previous sections, we have identified several primary arguments to support the claim that writing is a more productive, creative, and necessary way of engaging with reality than righting and that fiction constitutes a kind of writing that employs a particular form of truth. We have shown that writing is practiced by philosophers in the phenomenological-hermeneutic and pragmatic traditions, fictional writers, and criminologists who adopt a constructionist or realist approach. Righting, on the other hand, is practiced by analytical philosophers, positivist scientists, religious institutions, and criminologists who adopt a positivist approach and are limited by their own assumptions and methods. Writing allows for multiple perspectives and forms of truth, while righting operates within a finite paradigm of comprehension. Our argument is that, regardless of the methods used, engaging with Truth involves engaging with a representation, because we cannot access reality directly. Fiction has a great value for the practice of writing because it can create imaginative representations that challenge and transcend the boundaries of righting. This paper argues that criminologists can gain a deeper and more critical understanding of harm and injustice by self-consciously pursuing the practice of writing and utilising fiction as an insight to that practice. Fiction can help criminologists explore alternative scenarios and solutions, as well as empathize with diverse experiences and perspectives. Engaging with fictional realities provides alternate forms of understanding that makes us aware of the intellectual inadequacies when we face perennial problems. Writing, therefore, is a method of creating new possibilities and realities to which fiction acts as powerful tool for that method. Righting, however, is a method of imposing and enforcing a single vision of reality that may be harmful and oppressive.

We have also argued that writing can offer insights and perspectives for both theory and praxis. Our reasons for this, as discussed, are: (1) writing accepts that knowledge is always partial and aims to improve on its ideas, concepts, or theories; (2) writing weakens the superiority of disciplinary claims to truth and allows for more open-

minded and creative interdisciplinary work; (3) fiction as an activity of writing reveals the complexity, ambiguity, and diversity of reality that engage us in creative thinking that is necessary to overcome the many adversities with which we face; and (4) fiction provides a reflection and experience of diverse realities and can serve as reconceptualisations in practice, such as social scientific practice. There are, of course, many research areas to which this subject can be applied: language and phenomenology, existential anthropology, media studies, cultural criminology, and narrative criminology. In summary, we have shown the value of writing that engages with reality in creative and critical ways, and the value of fiction as a practice that enhances and enriches this writing. Fiction, as a kind of writing, ignites an experience of different truths and imagination, an experience which, we argue, can challenge and enrich the social sciences.[2]

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The Dark Side of Cultural Sensitivity: Right-Wing Anxiety and Institutional Literary Censorship in Israel

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In their discussion of the interpretation of the literary work of fiction, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen explain that: "Literary appreciation is the appreciation of how a work interprets and develops the general themes which the reader identifies through the application of thematic concepts. […] The thematic concepts are, by themselves, vacuous. They cannot be separated from the way they are 'anatomized' in literature and other cultural discourses" (Lamarque and Olsen: 399). The subtle unravelling of the work's thematic concepts relies on the context of its reception, with its idiosyncratic sensitivities and cultural sensibilities of that time and place. However, cultural sensitivity also has a dark side as it may occasionally ignite a sort of allergic reaction to a work, identifying it as a threat that must be eliminated. My paper examines the case of literary censorship in Israel. Three partially banned works of fiction reflect three aspects of the Israeli right-wing anxiety concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The futility of sacrificing Israeli soldiers' lives, the acknowledgement of the Palestinian perspective, and, finally, the possibility of deflecting the animosity between the two nations to a point of allowing for mutual love.

Keywords: Literature; censorship; literary education; Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In their discussion of the interpretation of the literary work of fiction, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen explain that:

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> vacuous. They cannot be separated from the way they are 'anatomized' in literature and other cultural discourses. (Lamarque and Olsen 1996: 399)[1]

Indeed, the subtle unravelling of a work's thematic concepts heavily relies on the context of its reception, with its idiosyncratic sensitivities and cultural sensibilities of that time and place. However, this notion of a thoughtful and nuanced reception by an understanding and culturally imbued audience also carries a darker aspect. Occasionally, cultural sensitivity can trigger an adverse reaction to a work, labeling it as a social or national threat that needs to be eradicated. While exemplary works of art often evoke feelings of unease and discomfort, there seems to be a tipping point at which this agitation becomes unbearable for individuals or groups within society. Consequently, when the work provokes a significant group, who are institutionally represented by influential policymakers, it may be subjected to censorship, either full or partial. In such instances, Lamarque and Olsen's framework for interpreting the work within the context of its reception can be inverted: a society's nature can be better comprehended by examining the works it seeks to eliminate and denounce.

In the following, I would like to peruse the case of institutional literary censorship in Israel. While conducting a comprehensive survey is beyond the scope of a single paper, exploring three notable instances can shed light on the national narrative and the resulting political deadlock. The partial banning of three works of fiction in Israel, one by the Central Region Major General and two by the Israeli Ministry of Education, reflects the right-wing[2] anxiety in Israel regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The futility of sacrificing Israeli soldiers' lives, the acknowledgement of the Palestinian perspective, and the potential for fostering mutual love and overcoming animosity between the two nations. Although these themes can be considered "topical themes" as described by Lamarque and Olsen (1994: 426), analyzing them as

[1] See also Lamarque (2015).

[2] According to Galnoor and Blander (2013), "right" and "left" in Israeli politics denote the general stance towards matters of foreign policy and national security. In brief, left-wing parties express optimism about peaceful solutions with Israel's Arab neighboring countries, and particularly those Palestinian refugees in the territories occupied after Israel was attacked by Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, in the 1967 war, and lean towards collaborations between Jews and Arabs within Israel. Right wing parties consistently express pessimism about the possibility for peaceful solutions, especially towards the Palestinian refugees, and lean towards emphasizing the need to use force against Israel's enemies. Since the appearance of settlements in the occupied territories, this became another important focal point in the politics of left and right, whereby left-wing parties consistently declared an objection to settlements (or at least the willingness to evacuate them towards a peaceful solution), whereas right-wing parties emphasize the biblical Jewish right over these lands (or at least their strategic importance for the safety of Israel's existence) (Galnoor and Blander 2013). In a more recent analysis of the political map, while Skorek (2021) shows a deviation towards right by previously considered left parties, he, in fact, shows that "right" still reflects a more militant perspective towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

societal themes through the act of censorship holds broader methodological potential. In all three cases, I focus on how these works are valued based on their instructional purpose. In other words, I would like to analyze the fingerprints of right-wing culture in Israel, not via the concepts of the literature it endorses, but through the main themes of the literature it rejects, establishing, to paraphrase Matravers (2014), a *dis*-engagement with literature.

Before delving into these three cases, I would like to clarify certain aspects regarding censorship in general and the case of Israel. Firstly, I define censorship as the restriction or limitation of the distribution or access to information (in a wide sense, including visual information and various forms of expression) in defense of an individual or a group of people. I categorize censorship into two types: military censorship, which withholds information from external audiences, typically the enemy, and moral censorship, which restricts information within internal groups. The following discussion addresses only moral censorship. Secondly, it is important to note that while the case of Israel possesses its unique circumstances and characteristics, the call for moral censorship is not an exclusive occurrence.[3] In some regard, the call for censorship reflects the existence of pluralism and coexistence among diverse communities with varying values. Authors are free to create works that may conflict with certain values within these communities. In a stable totalitarian regime, where only one perspective prevails, there would be no need to censor new works since authors would not have the freedom to write and distribute them in the first place.[4] For instance, consider the headline from *The Telegraph*: "Religious parents want *Harry Potter* banned from the classroom because it 'glorifies witchcraft'" (Espinoza: 2015).[5] This demand demonstrates the existence of an audience

[3] According to Fellion and Inglis, "censorship is inevitable because people impose limits on each other's actions" (2017: 11). They also note that typically, the decision to censor does neither lie with a single individual nor with a single direct act but works subtly involving various people and groups.

[4] A good example of this is the use of coded metaphors in Polish poetry during the late 50s. Due to the ban on certain topics, poets resorted to "self-censorship" (Kloc 2016: 122) by employing allegory or metaphor instead of direct speech. This form of "veiled speech" (Baltussen 2015: 1) has been a longstanding practice "of self-regulation" in the ancient world and throughout history (Baltussen 2015: 7). Similar attempts to conceal thought in modern totalitarian regimes have been explored by Cardone (2010), Karimi-Hakkak (2019) and Oliveira (2019). Becnel and Moeller (2021) demonstrate how even American school librarians may self-censor book recommendations due to job insecurity or social concerns.

[5] According to Erlanson et al., the contemporary political landscape leads to censorship of literature while "its freedom remains a topical issue […]. The literary medium can thus be said to occupy a dual position: on the one hand deemed necessary to control, and on the other utilized as an instrument of control" (2020: 10). Gaffney argues that conservative parents often direct their activism towards censoring Young Adult Literature, thereby supposedly "defending community values, protecting children, or making public institutions more 'family friendly'" (2017: 100). The *Harry Potter* series, a popular subject for conservative complaints,

that shares the same geopolitical and educational background as the intended readers of the book series, despite their religious differences. What may be harmless fantasy fiction to one community, is perceived as promoting Satan worshipping by another. However, when the call for censorship not only emerges from within a specific community but is also carried out by state officials, the infringement on artistic freedom becomes more significant. Therefore, in this discussion, I address not the mere dissatisfaction with works of language arts, but three instances of moral censorship spearheaded by representatives of the state. All three instances are instances of partial censorship. In other words, none of the works were entirely eradicated from the state, but in all these cases the initiators of the censorship used their power to ban the works entirely within the limited area of their jurisdiction. All cases caused significant media and public reactions and remained ingrained in social memory years later.

This discussion requires some local context. My interest in censorship in Israel stems from teaching introductory classes in aesthetics. In these classes, I introduce Plato's *Republic* early on. Plato's logical progression from the desire for luxuries to the necessity of censorship is of relevance. According to Plato, for the state to expand and provide luxuries, it must engage in warfare and conquer neighboring territories. This requires a standing army. To build such an army, the state must educate its children, shaping them into future soldiers. Crucially, this process primarily involves literary education. Consequently, the state assumes the responsibility of overseeing the stories used in children's education.

Having taught the same text at Rutgers University in the US, I find teaching it in Israel much easier, and not solely because I am more comfortable teaching in Hebrew. The logical chain presented by Plato resonates deeply with Israeli students. In fact, it is so ingrained in their understanding that I exercise caution, avoiding any overtly political interpretations that may incite antagonism. To ensure clarity, my presentation slides include direct citations from the text, demonstrating that I am not fabricating or employing figurative language in conveying this logical chain: greed leading to occupation, which in turn requires an army, and an army necessitates a careful indoctrination since childhood. I pose the question to students: why does Plato emphasize education as vital for future soldiers? What sets this profession apart? While American college students would stare back at me with blank expressions, failing to perceive the distinctiveness of being a professional soldier compared to a farmer or a builder, Israeli students, many of whom have fulfilled their military obligations, readily

"was targeted in the Frankfort, Illinois, school district because it 'contains lying and smart aleck retorts to adults' and attacked in Bucktown, Pennsylvania, in 2001 for 'telling children over and over again that lying, cheating, and stealing are not only acceptable, but that they're cool and cute'" (2017: 107). See also Ivey and Johnston (2018), Lindsköld (2020), and Dávila (2022).

respond that soldiers may sacrifice their lives in battle. Such willingness contradicts human nature and thus necessitates indoctrination from a young age.

"Soldiering" holds a significant presence within Israeli culture. One illustrative example is an advertisement for Lis, a maternity ward at a central hospital in Tel Aviv. This advertisement was part of a series that depicted fetuses as future achievers in various professions. The ad portrays a fetus, seemingly suspended in its mother's womb, donning a military cap and saluting. The text in the upper right corner reads: "Receiving the President's Award for the year 2038 (Probably be born in Lis)." Even before his birth, the male fetus is already associated with its military destiny. Although the ad was swiftly removed due to protest, it exemplifies a distinct Israeli perspective on male embryos. Another notable example is a comic strip by Daniella London–Dekel (2015). The notion that fetuses are destined to become soldiers extends beyond a mere advertising blunder for her. In the emotionally charged strip, she recounts her reaction upon discovering, during a routine pregnancy ultrasound scan, that she is carrying a male fetus. The following panel depicts her in the solitude of her car, moments after this revelation, overcome by tears because a boy signifies a future soldier who may be drafted to a combat unit. The potential for loss and the specter of death already hovers in her thoughts, even before giving birth to her son. The weight of soldiers' lives being at risk in war—the very reason Plato's *Republic* emphasizes the necessity of education to instill the willingness to sacrifice—profoundly impacts Israeli culture. Unlike in American society, Memorial Day in Israel is not synonymous with shopping. It is a day when radio stations play mournful songs about fallen soldiers, and television programs feature interviews with their grieving families. The extent of the collective grief is immense, as countless families are affected.

The tragic cost of war and the impact on fallen soldiers looms prominently in the first case I wish to discuss. This incident occurred in rather unconventional circumstances for a cultural event. It took place during the War of Attrition between Egypt and Israel in 1969 when the Israeli Defense Forces' Infantry Ensemble performed in front of a large audience of soldiers about to enter the battlefield. The Infantry Ensemble is a part of the extensive military educational system in Israel. As most 18-year-olds are drafted, serving in the army becomes the Israeli equivalent of a college experience: the first adventure of life away from the family home, where individuals encounter people from diverse backgrounds, and, crucially in this context, complete their educational journey. The IDF's Education and Youth Corps oversees a range of programs and activities, including the Infantry Ensemble, a musical band composed of soldiers whose purpose is to uplift morale.

The occasion I am referring to involved a performance by the ensemble featuring a new song written by Yaakov Rotblit. Rotblit, having

lost his leg (Pikerk 2006) and several of his brothers-in-arms in the previous war against Egypt, the Six-Day War in 1967, was unable to partake in the jubilation that swept Israeli society following the splendid victory. He saw the sacrifices made as futile. Those who lost their lives in the war had lost everything, gaining nothing from the triumph of one army over another. His song protested the celebration of military victories by giving voice to the insights of the ultimate victims of war: the deceased soldiers. The premise of the song is that nothing can bring the fallen soldiers back. Therefore, they implore the living to reject war and strive for peace. The lyrics and melody draw inspiration from American anti-war musical *Hair*.

A Song for Peace

Let the sun rise
light up the morning
The purest of prayers
will not bring us back

He whose candle was snuffed out
and was buried in the dust
bitter crying won't wake him up
and won't bring him back

Nobody will bring us back
from a dead and darkened pit
here neither the victory cheer
nor songs of praise will help

So just sing a song for peace
don't whisper a prayer
Just sing a song for peace
in a loud shout

Allow the sun to penetrate
through the flowers
don't look back
let go of those departed

Lift your eyes with hope
not through the rifles' sights
sing a song for love
and not for wars

Don't say the day will come
bring on that day –
because it is not a dream –
and in all the city squares
cheer only for peace!

The song eventually became the anthem for the left-wing peace movement and tragically became associated with the assassination of Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin in 1995. Rabin sang it during a peace rally, which culminated in his assassination. Symbolically, a bloodstained printout of the song was later discovered in his shirt pocket. However, when the song premiered in 1969, Central Region Major General, Rehavam Zeevi, was infuriated by the performance and banned the Infantry Ensemble from performing in the Central Region. Zeevi's anger stemmed from the anti-war theme of the song, particularly its implication that the victory of war holds no meaning for the fallen soldiers. This leads to the logical conclusion that death in war represents the ultimate sacrifice, which is ultimately futile. Furthermore, the depiction of the world of the dead as a "darkened pit" certainly does not contribute to the morale of soldiers. Compare with this passage from Plato's *Republic*:

> […] if he believes in the reality of the underworld and its terrors, do you think that any man will be fearless of death and in battle will prefer death to defeat and slavery? By no means. Then it seems we must exercise supervision also, in the matter of such tales as these, over those who undertake to supply them and request them not to dispraise in this undiscriminating fashion the life in Hades but rather praise it. (386b)

Zeevi's banishment of the Infantry Ensemble seems to align with Plato's logic, as it aims to avoid presenting death as a terrible thing in the education of soldiers. To boost morale, dead soldiers should be praised, just as Plato holds in this passage from *Republic*:

> And shall we also do away with the wailings and lamentations of men of repute? […] we shall be right in thus getting rid of them […]. What we affirm is that a good man will not think that for a good man […] death is a terrible thing. (377d)

This Platonic notion that lamentations should praise death in battle is evident in the memorial statue of the roaring lion in Kfar Giladi, which commemorates the eight warriors who died in the Tel Hai battle of March 1st, 1920. The plaque reads: "It is good to die for our country," a sentence attributed to the last words of Joseph Trumpeldor, one of the honored warriors. This sentence has become a focal point in the History syllabus for elementary schools in Israel. The memorial plaque represents a broader phenomenon of glorifying soldiers' death deeply ingrained in the school system. The Israeli school system, according to Tami Hoffman (2016), subtly promotes militarization, including trips to death camps in Poland that connect the Holocaust to army service. Officers in the IDF also make symbolic visits to the death camps, ghettos, and synagogues in Poland during their military service. According to Ben-Amos and Hoffman, these trips perpetuate the belief ingrained in the educational system that the holocaust could happen again if it were not for the IDF and the willingness of young men to serve in the army (Ben-Amos and Hoffman: 2011). "A Song for Peace" challenges the necessity of war, threatening this carefully established consensus.

While the case of "A Song for Peace" highlights the neglect to view war from the standpoint of the young men who are sacrificed on its altar, the next case exemplifies the disregard to consider the standpoint of those labeled as "the enemy." Dehumanization, whether intentional or unintentional, is a technique employed to portray others as dangerous. Studies on the dehumanization within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict show that it is a mutual characteristic characterizing the perspectives of both sides (Bruneau and Kteily 2017).[6] However, here I focus on an aspect of dehumanization of the Palestinians from the Israeli perspective:[7] the denial of allowing the Palestinian voice to be heard within the school system.

This case was seasoned with reservation from the get-go: the inclusion and later the exclusion of poems by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish from the Israeli school curriculum. Darwish's history with Hebrew-speaking Israeli reception has always been politically charged. The translator of the extensive Hebrew collection of Darwish's poems, Reuven Snir, confesses that for decades the task of translating Darwish from Arabic to Hebrew was considered too subversive to handle, since "Darwish was synonymous with the Palestinian people's fight for freedom and self-definition. His poetry is viewed as representing the national Palestinian moral conscience" (Snir 2015: 13). However, now Darwish is possibly the poet most translated to Hebrew perhaps because "at an early stage in his poetic way, Darwish rejected the usage of stereotypes of the Jewish or Israeli enemy that were prevalent in the Arabic society, in favor of a humane view of the person behind the mask" (Snir 2015: 20). Darwish declared that as a poet, he must consider his art before his political agenda. The Palestinian people's fight may benefit from Palestinian poetry only if it is first and foremost good poetry (Snir 2015). Moreover, Darwish saw himself as an Arab poet more than a Palestinian poet (Snir 2015). His early poetry includes recurring motifs linked both to fight for land, and to his life in exile (Snir 2015).[8] Yet later Darwish's references to the Palestinian fight become more and more allegorical, faint, and indirect. While some of his poems do express opposition to the state of Israel, including "Those Who Pass Between Fleeting Words," which repeatedly calls for the Israeli people

[6] For further exploration see also Harel et al. (2020).

[7] Gani and Jamal (2019) and Abdelrazek (2021) explain how dehumanization has become ingrained in the Israeli perspective towards Palestinians. Abdelrazek (2021) discusses an example of its consequences, recounting how Israeli soldiers mocked young children during a night-time search of their residence: the children were lined up, photographed, and instructed to say "cheese!" While there may be worse scenarios in soldier-child interactions, this seemingly harmless incident (although undoubtedly traumatic) illustrates the emotional success of the dehumanization perspective. The young soldiers, lacking empathy, failed to recognize the children's plight and found the situation amusing. See also Kemp (2015).

[8] However, as Saif and Al-Sowaidi (2023) argue, Darwish's style is typified by the numerous allusions to the Quran.

to "be gone" (Darwish 1988), they reflect more of a wishful thinking rather than explicit directives.

In March 2000, the Israeli Knesset discussed the suggestion to include poems by Darwish in the Literature school curriculum. This proposal was raised by Education Minister Yossi Sarid. Likud member Uzi Landau linked this decision to Sarid's commemoration of the Kafr Qasim massacre, where Israeli border police executed over forty Palestinians who had broken curfew in the village in 1956 (No author 2000). By juxtaposing the commemoration of the massacre and the inclusion of Darwish, Landau marks Darwish as a symbol of Israeli guilt for atrocities and war crimes. However, Landau viewed the acknowledgement of guilt as a sign of weakness rather than a means of atonement, considering it a dangerous act of self-deprecation.

When considering the political situation in Israel, it is crucial to acknowledge the constant risk of violent turmoil. Sarid's suggestion to include Darwish's poems coincided with a hopeful period of Israeli-Palestinian history, characterized by a peace-seeking Israeli government engaging in negotiations with the PLO. However, a few months later, the second Intifada erupted—a multifaceted Palestinian attack or retaliation against Israeli occupation. This led to a loss of hope and the subsequent rise of a right-wing government. Minister of Education Limor Livnat aimed to reverse the previous changes, prominently symbolized by the exclusion of Darwish from the curriculum.

Livnat's decision had little to do with the benign content of the poems and everything to do with their general symbolic value. Darwish was—and still is—a Palestinian "cultural icon" not only for his poetry but also for his involvement in drafting a declaration of independence for the Palestinian people, as requested by the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (Butt 2018: 55). [9] His poetry together with his political involvement have led to his "remarkable achievement" in carving "out a national identity for the Palestinian nation" (Butt 2018: 70). Nonetheless, most of his poetry reflects an individual's perspective and acquires political significance within its cultural context. Darwish's poems often employ a first-person narrative, personalizing their message (Butt 2018). Thus, the poems that Sarid wished to include were only subtly and remotely political. One of these poems is Darwish's renowned "My Mother," written during his imprisonment in Israel for violating a curfew (Meron 2015). The poem expresses a longing for a sense of childhood comfort and security, and even if read symbolically, as expressing a yearning for a homeland, it poses no real challenge to Israel's right to exist when read in the context of an Israeli Jewish school.

[9] According to Saif and Al-Sowaidi, Darwish "is one of the most important Palestinian, Arab, and international poets whose name remains associated with the poetry of liberation, resistance and the Palestinian *waṭan*, or homeland" (2023: 409, emphasis in original).

My Mother

I long for my mother's bread
My mother's coffee
Her touch
Childhood memories grow up in me
Day after day
I must be worth my life
At the hour of my death
Worth the tears of my mother.

And if I come back one day
Take me as a veil to your eyelashes
Cover my bones with the grass
Blessed by your footsteps
Bind us together
With a lock of your hair
With a thread that trails from the back of your dress
I might become immortal
Become a God
If I touch the depths of your heart.

If I come back
Use me as wood to feed your fire
As the clothesline on the roof of your house
Without your blessing
I am too weak to stand.

I am old
Give me back the star maps of childhood
So that I
Along with the swallows
Can chart the path
Back to your waiting nest.

Adding to the understanding that the problem with including Darwish in the curriculum was more symbolic than content-related is the fact that two of his poems were already part of the Arabic as a foreign language curriculum, predating Sarid's announcement (Yona 2007). Sarid had intended to include more of Darwish's poems in the Literature curriculum, but his announcement caused public attention, leading to upheaval and subsequent backlash.

From the right-wing perspective, the concern with Darwish's poems is not about defaming Israel or inciting terrorism but rather about challenging the dehumanization of the enemy, specifically recognizing Palestinians as human beings. Knesset member Michael Kleiner openly expresses this viewpoint on including Darwish's poems in the curriculum:

> I want to tell you, […] Mahmood Darwish is just the harbinger. […] The real plan of the minister of education is to set a net of mixed Jewish and Arab schools, an education net where children will get acquainted closely, learn to stop hating, learn to love, learn to fall in love, maybe to get married, maybe to have children, and in the heat of their love—to put an end to the Jewish-Arab conflict […] the national danger in such a mixed education system […] threatens the Jewish identity of each and every child and of the entire state. (Yona 2007: 77, my translation)

Kleiner's astounding speech highlights the deep-seated apprehension provoked by the inclusion of Darwish's poems. The desire to censor his poems stems not from concern over their subtle poetic messages, but from the indirect legitimization that comes with their very inclusion. The resistance to including the poems reflects a rejection of an inclusive approach to the Jewish-Arab conflict. Darwish is seen as threat not as part of a Palestinian resistance from without, but as a potential trigger to transformation of mindset within the Israeli-Jewish community: a shift towards overcoming generations-long animosity and fostering amicability, even potentially a romantic love that would dissolve the divisions between the two groups. This last notion leads the discussion to my third and final case.

Dorit Rabinyan's novel *All the Rivers* explores the theme of romantic love between the first-person narrator, Liat, a Jewish-Israeli female writer, and Hilmi, a Palestinian male artist. It is set in New York City in 2002 amidst the lingering trauma of 9/11. The novel begins with a false alarm when FBI agents invade Liat's apartment, mistaking her dark olive skin and black hair, combined with her Hebrew writing, as potential signs of terrorism. This incident was triggered by a misinterpretation at a café where she was reported and followed. Ironically, the novel itself faced a more disturbing suspicion. Although Rabinyan dwells on her protagonist's Middle Eastern appearance as a cause of her mistaken identity, she could not have anticipated that her novel would suffer a similar fate. The novel was accused of promoting treason and endorsing terrorism, leading to its removal from the literature school curriculum.

The love story between Liat and Hilmi, realistically depicted, is doomed. Despite their ability to temporarily escape the burden of their national identities in cosmopolitan New York City, they know this love story cannot last. Although I accept Lamarque and Olsen's stance regarding literary truth,[10] this literary depiction finds support in contemporary research.[11] In a pivotal moment in the fourth chapter, as Liat develops feelings for Hilmi, she recalls an Israeli radio commercial, warning Jewish women about the seduction and kidnapping by Islamic

[10] For a challenge of Lamarque and Olsen's stance on the relation between literary truth and literary value, see Pitari (2022).

[11] For an analysis of the problems experienced by couples of interfaith marriage in which a Jewish-Israeli woman is married to a Palestinian man, see Sabbah-Karkaby (2022).

men. Although the organization behind the commercial in the novel is fictitious, it anticipates "Lehava" (Hebrew acronym for "the Prevention of interfaith in the Holy Land"), an organization founded in 2009 by Jewish supremacist activists.[12] Liat may antagonize Jewish supremacy, but she does decide to end the relationship with Hilmi upon their return to Israel. In an interview, Rabinyan describes Liat as a "soldier of Israeli education. She is the most obedient, practical and has self-control. And because of who she is, because of her fear […] this is more of a long process of resistance to love, than it is a love story" (Sela 2014, my translation). As evidence of her past, Liat still possesses a release form from her time in the army, which she explains to the FBI agents who invade her apartment at the novel's beginning:

> 'That's from the IDF—the army,' I explained. 'It says I'm allowed to leave Israel as I wish.' Before he could unleash another barrage of questions, I added, 'Military service is compulsory in Israel. Women serve two years and men three. I served in a unit that takes care of soldiers' social welfare. I enlisted in 1990 and finished in '92'. (Rabinyan 2015: 15)

Carrying her expired military service form in her passport pocket marks her military service as part of her core identity. While the form grants her permission to leave Israel, she cannot escape the lasting impact of her military experience. Thus, her romance with Hilmi, a representative of Israel's enemy, becomes a constant struggle between her cosmopolitan intellectual self in New York and her internalized identity as an Israeli soldier. Liat's encounters with Hilmi trigger memories of growing up in Israel after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, exposing the animosity between Israelis and Palestinians. When she overhears Hilmi speaking Arabic on the phone, she experiences a mixture of familiarity, having been exposed to Arabic throughout her life in Israel, as well as a sense of estrangement and distance. This estrangement is portrayed as both enticing and daunting. However, as a realist, Liat acknowledges that their relationship has no future. In contrast to *A Trumpet in the Valley*, another novel depicting a tragic love affair between a Jewish woman and an Arab man, where fate separates the couple through the man's untimely death, in *All the Rivers*, Liat and Hilmi's decision to separate precedes his eventual drowning. Their relationship is destined to fail in the reality of Israeli society.

However, even though the novel practically illustrates the failure of romance in transcending the political conflict, it was removed from the

[12] For an analysis of the stance towards interfaith marriage between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinians, see also research by Litvak-Hirsch, Yahya and Boag (2016), with its telling title "'Sadly, Not All Love Affairs Are Meant To Be...' Attitudes Towards Interfaith Relationships in a Conflict Zone." Hakak addresses the perception by far-right movements such as "Lehava" and right-wing politicians, that the coupling of a Jewish-Israeli woman with a Palestinian man is particularly "undesirable" (2016: 977), allegedly due to the coercion of the helpless woman by her forceful male spouse. See also Gaya (2022).

Literature curriculum[13] by the Ministry of Education due to the belief that "intimate relationships between Jews and non-Jews threaten the separate identity" (Kashti 2015)[14] of each group. The decision to censor the novel was not based on its literary or truth value in portraying the challenges of such a relationship, but rather on the portrayal of a forbidden theme. Moreover, the ministry of education's declaration expressed the concern that "adolescents lack the wide perspective that includes regard for the preservation of the people and the meaning of interfaith marriages" (Kashti 2015). The novel was thus banned despite the protest of the Professional Committee for Literature Education, including the committee chair. Following the decision, two committee members resigned (Kashti 2016). The decision was also met with the protest of school principals and literature teachers, some of whom reacted to the decision by reading aloud excerpts of the novel in their classes (*Walla* Editorial 2016). Nonetheless, the Minister of Education at the time, Naftali Bennet, who supported the decision, stated that "the educational system should not promote values that contrast the values of the state" (*Walla* Editorial 2016, my translation). From a philosophical viewpoint, this is an interesting declaration. It highlights not only the obvious link between political agendas and the education system, but also the perceived power of the humanities, prompting decisive actions to prevent the unwanted dissemination of ideas through education. Compare this with the words of Socrates at the end of book 2 of *Republic*:

> When anyone says that sort of thing about the gods, we shall be wroth with him, we will refuse him a chorus, neither will we allow teachers to use him for the education of the young if our guardians are to be god-fearing men and god-like in so far as that is possible for humanity. (Plato 383c)

As this passage exemplifies, education, particularly literary education, has historically served as a platform for promoting certain themes deemed socially valuable while suppressing others. As Hartsfield and Kimmel argue,

[13] Importantly, the novel was never an obligatory read, but appeared in a list of contemporary Israeli novels, for teachers to choose from. Teachers were never coerced to teach the novel if they found it inappropriate.

[14] Following the exclusion of *All the Rivers*, a similar fate befell *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (1987) by Sami Michael, another novel portraying a tragic Palestinian-Jewish love affair (Skop 2016a, 2016b). While not officially banned from the literature curriculum, a committee aimed at including Eastern (Sephardi) Jewish culture in the curriculum made another novel by Sami Michael mandatory for final exams. Since teachers would not likely teach two novels by the same author, this implied that *A Trumpet in the Wadi* would not be taught, resulting in censorship by default. As Dávila explains, "even if teachers could curate class sets of titles" (2022: 379) technical restriction may practically limit their choice. Interestingly, it serves to illustrate that Rabinyan's novel was not a discrimination against a woman author (a phenomenon explored by Russ in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983)), but rather censorship targeting novels depicting interfaith romance between Jews and Arabs. Despite the tragic nature of both novels (both ending with the death of the male protagonist, eliminating any possibility of a life together), the Israeli curriculum rejects even the notion of temporary love between such couples.

> educators must make decisions about what to include (or not) in the curriculum or the library. On one side of this decision-making process is selection. When educators engage in selection, they exercise their professional judgment, choosing books and materials based on principles such as literary excellence, curricular relevance, appropriateness, interest, and appeal to adolescent readers. Yet, on the other side of this decision-making process is preemptive censorship. Selection becomes preemptive censorship when a book aligns with selection principles but is rejected because of fear of controversy. Preemptive censorship occurs when educators purposefully keep a book's content and ideas away from students. (Hartsfield and Kimmel 2020: 443)

The case of *All the Rivers* demonstrates that preemptive censorship is not contingent on the way a theme is presented. The novel depicts the possibility of a shared future for an interfaith couple in a manner that aligns with a right-wing perspective of the conflict, portraying it as a distant and unrealistic fantasy achievable only in a sterilized remote environment. Nevertheless, it still sparked strong resistance. The mere mention of the theme, even its innocuous exploration, was seen as a threat to the core values of the Israeli nation, rendering the theme itself taboo.

In *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, Lamarque and Olsen argue that "the ideas constituting the large themes of our culture, the mortal questions, are in part literary ideas" (1996: 455). What I hope to have shown here is that "the ideas constituting the large themes" of the Israeli right culture are in part the mirror images of the literary themes that it rejects. Quite ironically, this also portrays a society that ascribes literature an incredible power, thereby exemplifying the words of Lamarque and Olsen, that "Literature is embedded in the value-scheme of our culture" (1996: 445). The situation of literary censorship in Israel since the occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank reveals the reluctance of right-wing parts of Israeli society to consider the Palestinians as potential allies. Moreover, while all three cases are examples for a partial censorship, that limits the distribution of literary works, rather than entirely restrict its existence, in all three cases the extent of the censorship is the widest possible relating to the jurisdiction of the particular state's official who endorsed it. Given the current far-right government, the call for censorship may soon be nostalgically missed, as the threat to Israeli democracy may transform into a grim reality of dictatorship. In such a scenario, voices advocating for peaceful solutions are likely to be silenced, and the writing of papers like this one may become precarious. Reworking on this paper after the breaking of the war on October 7th, 2023, with the atrocities performed by Hamas in the south of Israel, and following the IDF's retaliation, my heart bleeds. The bodies of soldiers are piling up again, not to mention the unfathomable casualties in the Gaza strip, and the flickering hope for peace is difficult to sustain. However, beyond its depiction of a specific state of affairs, this paper offers a model for analyzing thematic concepts in reverse: from

literary works to society. By tracing the evolution of moral censorship over time, one can uncover a society's story, or rather, one of its stories. Thus, the skill of literary interpretation becomes the skill of reading a society through the narratives it excludes.

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Book Review

Patrik Engisch and Julia Langkau (eds.), The Philosophy of Fiction: Imagination and Cognition, New York: Routledge, 2023, 296 pp.

Some of the most challenging questions in the philosophy of art concern fiction: how should we understand the notion of fiction, our engagement with fiction and the difference, so hard to explain but so fundamental to our intellectual and creative practices, between what is fictional and what is factual? For the better part of the last thirty years, Kendall Walton, Greg Currie and Peter Lamarque's theories have dominated our philosophical theorizing of fiction. *The Philosophy of Fiction. Imagination and Cognition*, edited by Patrik Engisch and Julia Langkau, challenges such theorizing, primarily by concentrating on imagination and its role in understanding fiction and our engagement with it.

The book is thematically organized into three parts, each of which deals with one of the questions that the editors deem crucial in our philosophical attempts to, as they argue in the introduction, understand what sets fiction apart from nonfiction and what motivates our engagements with either form of representation: that of defining fiction, of accounting for our engagement with it and of explaining its cognitive value. The problem of defining fiction is tackled in the first part, entitled "Imagination and the Definition of Fiction," which opens with Richard Woodward's paper. Woodward is critical of the traditional approach to fiction, according to which the distinction between fiction and non-fiction was explained by invoking the intentions of the author. As Woodward argues however, in doing so, insufficient attention has been directed towards differentiating between a work being fiction and it merely being treated as such. For this reason, he focuses on determining how treating something as fiction matters to how we approach a given work, primarily in our classificatory and evaluative practices. Such expressivist theory is thus less concerned with discovering the nature of fiction and more with explaining our treatment of it. Patrik Engisch sets out to strengthen Derek Matravers' challenge to the "consensus view of fiction," which is grounded in the prescription to imagine something rather than to believe it. In doing so, he argues that Currie and Stock's arguments against Matravers do not hold and that one should differentiate between objects and representations that allow for confrontation and those that do not, rather than between fiction and non-fiction. Engisch maintains that one engages competently directly with confronted objects since one has a direct access to them. Competent engagement with a representation is different because the indirect access to an object leads to a greater role played by representation's content than the object itself.

Consequently, there is a difference in psychological states that underpin actions that confronted objects and representations lead to, which affects the impact that these actions have. Derek Matravers defends his original take on fiction vs. non-fiction, defending his main idea (our engagement with fictional and non-fictional representations are not fundamentally to be understood in terms of imagining vs. believing) against David Davies' criticism to it. Margherita Arcangeli challenges the traditional assumption according to which it is creative imagination that we rely on in creating fiction, and recreative imagination that is operative in our engagement with it. On Arcangeli's account, recreative imagination is best suited to play a role in creativity because it provides a substantial background for cognitive processes that underlie creativity, such as associative thinking. Recreative imagination is also employed in our engagements with fiction because it enables the subject to form non-imaginative mental states such as belief and perception and immerse themselves into a fictional world. In this sense, appealing to recreative imagination can elucidate the emergence of both imagination and non-imaginative states in engaging with fiction.

In the second part, entitled "Imagination and Engagement with Fiction," authors explore aesthetic, ethical, epistemic and artistic modes of engagement with fiction. Manuel Garcia-Carpintero discusses the role of covert narrators, claiming that they are "effaced" and only serve an aesthetic purpose and should not be factored in epistemic considerations such as those concerning the status of their fictional beliefs and knowledge. Garcia-Carpintero's account is based on the notion of "silly questions," which suggest that it is misguided to pose inappropriate or irrelevant questions about fictional characters. Eileen John discusses three aspects of our engagement with fiction which she sees as typical for fictional engagement (even if they may not be defining aspects of fiction). These include representativeness, i.e. the fact that fiction depicts individuals as representing kinds; the fact that the audience enjoys descriptions without considering any further purpose of them (an aspect John calls minimal epistemic-aesthetic interest); and judgment freedom, i.e. the fact that our experiences of fiction allow us to register and make evaluative judgments. Magdalena Balcerak Jackson and Julia Langkau challenge the standard interpretation of the orthodox view of fiction, according to which fiction is defined in terms of the necessary use of imagination. Their account emphasizes the crucial role of imagination in our engagements with fiction; as they argue, fiction requires our imaginative engagement with it in a normative way. The crucial aspect of fiction is experiential imagination, which is marked by experientially imagining fictional content, i.e. imagining what a certain experience would be like. Fictional status of poetry is debated by Anna Christina Ribeiro, who rejects the notion of poetic persona and defends the view that lyric poetry promotes engagement with the actual poets, i.e. with their thoughts and sentiments. Such account of their lived experience goes beyond autobiographical statements and represents a source of knowledge about lived experiences, thoughts and feelings. Fiora Salis discusses the paradox of fiction, which problematizes the capacity of fiction to generate emotions. After exploring the possible solutions to the paradox, Salis opts for the approach she calls "broad cognitivism," according to which the emotions we experience in the course of our engagement with fiction are genuine.

The third part of the book is concerned with fiction as a source of knowledge. Entitled "Imagination and the Cognitive Role of Fiction," this part opens with a paper by María José Alcaraz León, who discusses the role of imagination not only in our definitions of fiction, but, more centrally to her interest here, for the cognitive value of fiction. Alcaraz Leon analyzes different artistic media in order to determine different kinds of experience they generate, and specific cognitive value that such experiences can have. As she claims, each artistic medium reflectively concerns some aspect of ordinary experience, and engagements with such artistic fictional works requires that we pay attention to the particularity of each medium and the specific experience it can afford. Such experiences are nevertheless cognitive, claims Alcaraz Leon, in that they allow experiencing or becoming aware of certain condition under which we experience and represent the world. Olivia Bailey analyzes the relation between fiction, imagination and empathy, exploring the extent to which imaginative experience of others that fiction affords can expand our range of knowledge of such experiences. Bailey introduces the concept of "s-empathy," which is a type of empathy in which one embraces other person's sensibility by means of first-person simulation and evaluative apprehension. Fiction enables the development and cultivation of s-empathy because it offers a unique look at variety of different perspectives from the eyes of the fictional characters. Anna Ichino discusses the relation between conspiracy theories and fiction. She claims that conspiracy theories can be best understood as fiction if one uses Kendall Walton's (1990) notion of fiction, i.e. "walt-fiction" based on his concept of make-believe. Walton's account of fiction is, in Ichino's opinion, the best candidate for explaining idiosyncrasies of conspiracy theories. Based on the cognitive processes that underlie endorsement of conspiracies, Ichino claims that Walton's notion of make-believe is best suited to explain why their endorsement seems to be resistant to evidence. As such, conspiracy theories are best viewed as props in games of make-believe that provide a prescription to imagine scenarios that oppose the official explanation of the event to which the theory refers, not as beliefs proper. The book closes with Amy Kind's exploration of the ways in which reading fiction can support the growth of one's imaginative capacities. Kind argues that imagining is a skill which can be developed, and that fiction plays a key role in this development, and goes on to elaborate how precisely this happens by analyzing Martha Nussbaum's notion of empathetic imagination and empirical research on it. On Kind's account, fiction cultivates our imaginative skills by providing us with new source material (i.e. experience of different fictional characters that surpass our real life experience) and with opportunities to recombine material already familiar to us in new ways. Furthermore, given the engaging aspect of fiction, it keeps us motivated to explore fictional worlds (which is, on Kind's view, a kind of imaginative practice). She concludes the chapter by exploring what is distinctive of fiction, in relation to other imaginative activities such as pretense or thought experimentation, that makes it better suited than these activities to cultivate our capacities to imagine.

This rather superficial summary of individual chapters can hardly do justice to the insights available in this great collection; nevertheless, we hope we have managed to show why this book is worthy of serious consid-

eration. In addition to providing insights into most contemporary research regarding fiction and imagination, the book is insightful in offering a very comprehensive perspective on how theories of fiction have been developing over the last thirty years and in suggesting new directions in which these theories may develop in years to come. Moreover, the book is not only insightful in its take on fiction, but also in how it contributes to our understanding of what it is to imagine something, and in exploring the imaginative processes that are operative in our cognitive and emotional functioning. Many questions arise from individual papers and we are convinced that scholars from numerous disciplines will be motivated to engage with the views presented here. We strongly recommend the book to everyone interested in fiction and all the areas related to it, from literature, film and other forms of narrative art, to aesthetics, media studies, cognitive sciences, narratology, and the like. As the papers collected here show, the problem of fiction runs through many other areas of philosophy: our ethical theories are concerned with the capacity of fiction to make us better, or worse, moral agents; epistemology seeks to understand how fiction can be a source of knowledge, metaphysics is primarily concerned with explaining the ontological status of fictional entities and philosophy of language looks at ways of understanding the meaning of fictional discourses. All of these questions come together in philosophy of mind, where philosophers try to understand the nature of our cognitive, imaginative and emotional processes that are operative in our experience with fictional, as opposed to factual, representations. *The Philosophy of Fiction* is an immensely informative source for addressing precisely these questions, giving us new directions in which to expand the philosophy of fiction in analytic tradition for years to come.[1]

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