

A Particularist Defence of Cognitivism about Literary Value

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Abstract: The aim of this thesis is to describe and defend a tenable version of cognitivism about literary value. According to the view put forward here, for cognitivism about literary value to be tenable, it must be adopted alongside a particularist view of literary value. The particularism argued for here is a particularism of a McDowellian stripe transposed to the context of literary value. According to the cognitivism I propose, cognitive literary value is a truth-related literary value. This characterisation of cognitive literary value is defended first by indicating how works of literature (which are paradigmatically fictional) can express true claims about the actual world.

Contra a lot of relatively recent philosophical contributions surrounding cognitive literary value, the view put forward in this thesis proposes that we think of cognitive literary value as the expression of understanding of a given subject-matter which is relevant to the artistic aims of the work in question, as opposed to the claim that works of literature can teach readers how to do things which has been repeatedly defended. There are, I argue, two benefits to thinking of the main epistemic value in literary cognitive value in terms of understanding rather than knowledge-how, or even knowledge-that. The first is that in divorcing literary cognitive value from knowledge, we can more easily side-step Platonic objections (and objections in the spirit of Plato inspired by recent developments in psychology) to learning from literature. The second is that thinking of literary cognitive achievement in terms of understanding helps us better capture the complex relationship between literary value and the way the world really is. I argue for this latter point by way of examining a series of case-studies, whose truth-related literary value is best captured in terms of understanding. I propose that understanding in a work of literature can be expressed through what I call factual story-world building as well as by way of challenging readers' pre-conceptions.

Author's Declaration:

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

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Preface

This project as it stands makes a wide variety of statements about how to best engage with the philosophical question of literary value. Some are more straightforwardly spelled out—it is obvious at this point that the sort of cognitive literary value I argue for is part of a particularist framework of literary values. It also quickly becomes apparent that I break away from many cognitivists writing in the past thirty years or so, not only in de-emphasising knowledge-how as the gold standard of cognitive literary value, and instead moving on to discussion of understanding as a cognitive literary value. If successful, this transition from knowledge-how to understanding permits me to make two further methodological statements about the treatment of cognitive literary value. The first is the possibility of recognising literary cognitive value as something more than the potential enrichment to our calibre as moral agents to which the autonomist so adamantly objects. The second is the possibility of employing bad works of literature as case-studies. The use of the latter I have found especially illuminating to the question of what a work of literature misses out on when an aim towards cognitive value on the author's part is not quite attained. It turns out, if I am right, that this amounts to an awful lot more than a failure to educate us as readers.

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Introduction

Truth-related Literary Value?

The claim that works of literature can furnish us with truths about the actual world, and that these truths are part of what explains that work of literature's artistic value strikes us as intuitive. Praise and blame are often allocated to works of literature in virtue the work in question's encoding statements which are true of the actual world. Occasionally, but not always, these true claims stem in virtue of the fact that the story-world in which the work is set resembles the actual world. We will find also that truths in works of literature might also be of a more abstract sort, inviting readers to reflect upon how certain ideals or values play out in the actual world by presenting them with a counterexample to a preconception which would obtain in the actual world. A reader might, for instance, through reading *The Golden Bowl*, that a father might (at any rate temporarily) ruin a daughter's life all the whilst trying to please her. This might be a counterexample to the preconception that ruining a child's life must stem from malice or negligence. Given the way *The Golden Bowl* is, we might imagine that the counter-example obtains in the actual world as well as in the actual world.

For present purposes, we may think of a story-world as simply the world within which the work is set as described in that work. Conversely, the actual world is the world the likes of you and I inhabit. Critical praise for truth-related value in works of literature is by no means a new thing. We find praise for resemblance between story-world and actual world in an early review of Jane Austen's *Emma* widely attributed to Walter Scott, for instance:¹

'The author's [Austen's] knowledge of the world, and the peculiar tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognize, reminds us something of the merits of the Flemish School of painting.' (*The Quarterly Review*, 1815: 197).

The author of this piece not only praises Austen for the extent to which the story-worlds of *Emma* and of her earlier published works (*Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*) resemble the actual world. This resemblance, the author implies, is symptomatic of Austen's 'knowledge' of the world. Unsurprisingly, a claim importantly related to this initial claim that works of literature are valuable at least in part for the truths of the actual world which they express, is the claim that works of literature can furnish us with knowledge of the actual world. The move from the initial claim to this second one is natural, since on the face of it, one can only know claims that are true and knowledge is, at least pre-theoretically, often passed by way of testimony. As we shall soon

¹This attribution to Scott is widespread, but not uncontroversial. Others attribute the piece to Richard Whatley. See Reitzel (1928).

see, the claim as it stands here is far too simplistic to withstand the scrutiny of objections that go at least as far back as Plato. The point, nonetheless, is intuitive enough that we easily find this praise for Austen's *Emma* intelligible and plausible. This suggests that this initial claim, or some version of it, is worth defending.

A second way in which we might value a work of literature for the *prima facie* knowledge with which it furnishes us revolves on the extent to which the work provides us with a treatment of subject-matters which we find also in the actual world—such that the work is suited to get us to think about the way things are in the actual world. For the purposes of this project, we can think of subject-matters as they pertain to works of literature as whatever we take the work in question to be about across different contexts of asking ourselves that question—e.g., in a literature class, in a conversation with a friend where we wonder whether a particular book would be to our liking, etc. As they pertain to ordinary discourse, we can think of subject-matters as whatever that particular piece of discourse—e.g., a conversation or a set of sentences in a conversation—is about.

In the contexts of literary criticism and the philosophy of literature, we often think of themes as the paradigmatic subject-matters. Subject-matters, however, needn't be as grandiose as themes and can also be the characters themselves, elements of the setting, the setting itself, or anything that can be rightly said to bear the about relation to the work as a whole, or certain parts of it.² We find some praise of the treatment of subject-matter within the context of the construction of a story-world in Bernard Shaw's much later discussion of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*:

'Dickens did in fact know that *Great Expectations* was his most compactly perfect book. In all the other books, there are episodes of wild extravagance, extraordinarily funny if they catch you at the right age, but recklessly grotesque as nature studies. Even in *Little Dorrit*, Dickens's masterpiece among many masterpieces, it is impossible to believe that the perfectly authentic Mr. Pancks really stopped the equally authentic Mr. Casby in a crowded street in London and

²The brief proposal outlined here resembles Lamarque (2020) in that the conception we have here is one which draws from what ordinary language and common sense would lead us to believe a work of literature could be about across different contexts.

Lamarque takes the view that the aboutness relationship between a work and its subject-matter is to a certain extent relative to the interest we take in the work. I do not find this proposal wholly persuasive, as underlying this claim is the claim that the truth-conditions for the claim 'work φ is about subject-matter y ' would then be relative to the interest we take in the work. That said, I am sympathetic to Lamarque's claim insofar as different subject-matters become salient depending on the interest we take in the work. This does not mean that the subject-matters in which we are no longer interested are not there when we ignore them. Nothing of what I argue here turns on this disagreement, however.

cut his hair; and though Mr. F's aunt is a first-rate clinical study of senile deficiency in a shred old woman, her collisions with Arthur Clennam are too funny to be taken seriously.

In *Great Expectations*, we have Wopsle and Trabb's boy; but they have their part and purpose in the story and do not overstep the immodesty of nature. It is hardly decent to compare Mr. F's aunt with Miss Havisham; but as contrasted studies of madwomen they make you shudder at the thought of what Dickens might have made of Miss Havisham if he had seen her as a comic personage. For life is no laughing matter in *Great Expectations*, the book is all of one piece and consistently truthful as none of the other books are, not even the compact *Tale of Two Cities*, which is pure sentimental melodrama from beginning to end, and shockingly wanting in any philosophy of history in its view of the French Revolution.' (Shaw, 1999: 632-633).

We find a more contemporary example of this in Leslie Pariseau's L.A. Times review (2020) of Leigh Stein's satirical novel *Self-Care* (2020), which is set in the New York office of a start-up female wellness online platform. Pariseau's praise of the novel stems from how its contents express some sort of truth. She writes:

'Though the turmoil at the center of "Self Care" is entertaining, its twist ending a clawed swipe at the irony of the scarcity myth — the zero-sum foundation of capitalism — it's not the thing that kept me reading. Instead, it was Stein's deft navigation of the shades of superficial feminism, the lexicon of start-up culture and the tone of a generation reckoning with how to be honest with itself. (...) "Self Care" is peppered with delicious, hateful details (...) The pile-on eventually becomes a game for the reader, an updated, feminized riff on "American Psycho". How many yuppie New York allusions can you spot? Are you so steeped in wellness culture you can name the reference point for the meditation studio, the workout method, the yoga bodysuit brand? And if so, should you be ashamed of yourself? And if not, should you be reading this book? (...) Though its copyright page bears the disclaimer, "this is a work of fiction," Stein has drawn up a frightfully true portrayal of days gone by — days of distraction and a deep commitment to denial.' (Pariseau, 2020).

In both these cases we find works of literature valued for the extent to which its story-world resembles the actual world. Shaw explains the 'perfect[ion]' of *Great Expectations* in virtue of the way in which the story-world of *Great Expectations* resembles the actual world far more than the story-worlds of his other works. This is not the entire explanation of the novel's superiority to Dickens's other works according to Shaw, however. Towards the end of the passage, he complains that another popular work of Dickens's, *Tale of Two Cities*, is 'pure sentimental

melodrama'. Plausibly, this set-up of story-world—where melodramatic situations are more wont to obtain than in the actual world—in combination with a particular narrative style—which emphasises these melodramatic story-worldly elements—is what leads to the novel's being 'shockingly wanting in any philosophy of history', despite its portraying of the subject-matter of the French Revolution. *Great Expectations*, on the other hand, because its story-world and narration focus neither on melodrama nor on the creation of characters which are too caricature-like to be taken seriously, provides a fecund ground for the examination of the subject-matters with which the novel deals, or so Shaw's review of the novel suggests. Shaw's evaluation of these novels of Dickens's is suggestive of endorsement of the claim that works of literature are better for portraying and examining worldly subject-matters within the constraints of what is true of that subject-matter in the actual world. Perhaps so that we as readers can then employ these examinations of worldly subject-matters in works of literature as mechanisms for thinking about these subject-matters as they obtain in the actual world—as we might have done if *Tale of Two Cities* had furnished us with more of a philosophy of history. Moreover, some might think of the works themselves as vehicles for coming to know new things about these subject-matters as they obtain in the actual world. Shaw's complaint of the lack of philosophy of history about the French Revolution in *Tale of Two Cities* is ultimately a complaint that the novel does not invite us to seriously reflect upon the French Revolution as it actually occurred, and ultimately, that it cannot teach the minimally cultured reader anything new or interesting about it nor induce him to think interesting thoughts about it.

Likewise, in the case of Pariseau's review of *Self Care*, we find the novel praised for the way in which the story-world created resembles our own, complete with 'delicious, hateful details' and all, and how hyper-realistic story-world operates as a vehicle for us to examine shallow forms of capitalistic girlboss feminism and wellness culture as they obtain in actual contemporary culture. The philosophical claims underlying the praise in all three reviews are first that works of fictional literature are often better for resembling the actual world—whether this resemblance entails making full-blooded true claims about the actual world is a question we will explore more fully in Chapter 2 (I argue that it does to an extent) and second that works of literature are able, in a certain respect, to impart knowledge of the actual world. E.g., in the case of *Self Care*, because the story-world resembles our own at least insofar as girlboss feminism in start-up hustle culture is concerned, and these worldviews turn out to be vapid in the story-world, we can come to learn, from reading the novel, that these world views are also vapid in the actual world and this in turn can help us modify our attitudes and beliefs surrounding girlboss feminism. The claim as it

stands here will also need further elaboration and unpacking if it is to withstand objections that go as far back as Plato himself.

Difficulties for Truth and Literary Value

In his *Republic*, Plato banishes poets from his city-state (the literary authors *du jour*) on the grounds that poetry can dupe us into believing that it expresses truths about the world without delivering on that appearance. The Platonic objection undermines the possibility of the truth-related value in literature (regardless of whether this value is conceived of as a literary value or not) that Shaw, Pariseau, and the author of the *Emma* review take for granted. Plato's poet manages to dupe his audience through the combination of beautiful form and the fact that poetry (and fictional literature in general),³ unlike philosophy or other non-fictional *genres* like history, is not generally in the business of providing one's audience with arguments or evidence for what is stipulated and described in the narration thereof. Versions of this line of argument persist to this day, with Currie's (2020) version perhaps being the most recent of note.⁴

A second complication associated with this claim that fictional works of literature can express truths about the actual world appeals to the nature of what is sometimes called fictional discourse (which amounts rather simply to the semantic and or pragmatic workings of the discourse surrounding the narration of fictions, whether in a bedtime story, a novel, or an epic poem). In a typical philosophical theory of truth, truth-bearers are propositions. And propositions are true, at least pre-theoretically speaking, in virtue of whether they obtain in the actual world.⁵ By contrast, the propositions encoded in a work of fiction do not tell us what is true of the actual world. Rather, they tell us what is true of the story-world therein constructed.⁶ This poses a problem for the proposal that there is truth-related literary value because most paradigmatic works of literature are also fictional. Lamarque and Olsen (1993) have appealed to these analyses of fictional discourse to argue that what works of fiction can offer us, because they stipulate what is true of a story-world rather than the actual world is verisimilitude rather

³ It may surprise some that I call poetry fictional literature here. For present purposes, by fictional literature I mean any work of literature that involves the construction of a fictional story-world. Most if not all epic poetry comfortably falls within this category, as does, I think, a lot of lyrical poetry, since many exemplars of lyrical poetry are from the point of view of a fictionalised speaker.

⁴ I discuss Currie's argument in broad strokes below and in further detail in Chapter 4.

⁵ In saying this I do not mean to commit myself to some sort of correspondence theory of truth. I remain neutral on how propositions are supposed to obtain in the actual world, whether by way of some kind of correspondence, satisfaction, or something else.

⁶ See e.g., Lewis (1978) and Predelli (2020) for two competing and interestingly contrasting ways of conceiving of the story-world. I discuss both these accounts in Chapter 2.

than truth proper. Verisimilitude, they argue, is insufficient to get a case for truth-related literary value off the ground.

Because the concern here is with fictional works of *literature*, a second set of difficulties arises around these works' relationship to truth. Put in broad terms, literature as understood in this context is a term which we apply to certain linguistic artefacts (works) which are worthy of artistic appreciation. In this sort of conception of literature, the difference between a work of literature and an ordinary improvised bed-time story is analogous to the difference between a painting which is worthy of study in virtue of its artistic properties—e.g., its composition, its use of colour, the use of paintbrush strokes, and so on—and an ordinary paint by numbers painting that someone might have completed in order to alleviate their Sunday evening blues. The difference between the artistic and the non-artistic items amounts to the way in which we *value* each of these items. According to this sort of view, works of art (literature being a subclass of art) are precisely those which merit this sort of valuing. And this sort of valuing amounts to appreciating these very properties. The question which concerns us here is a question central to the philosophy of literature—whether a work's expression of truth (or, in light of the Lamarque and Olsen objection raised above, something like it) is a property which makes that work worthy of valuing as a work of art. In other words, the question here is whether a work's instantiation of truth-related value—i.e., the value associated with the expression of truth or something like it which we value in virtue of its potential enhancement of our own set of beliefs and belief forming mechanisms about the world—constitutes that work's *literary* value. As always with these questions, there are three *prima facie* possible answers: always, sometimes, or never. With those arguing 'always' or 'never' rightly pressing the defendants of 'sometimes' into providing a principled and systematic account of what makes the expression of truth (or something like it) constitutive of literary value in some cases and not in others—and different defendants of 'sometimes' offering competing and often incompatible diagnoses of the workings of 'sometimes'.⁷

There are three pre-theoretical observations which colour our intuitions with regards to the above question. The first is that ordinary readers as well as critics tend to value certain works of literature for expressing claims which are also true of the actual world.⁸ The second is that the simple expression of a bald truth is blatantly insufficient to constitute literary value—a work's expression of a true proposition such as 'grass is green' on its own would make for a woeful

⁷ We can find an example of this contrast between diagnoses of 'sometimes' in Gaut's ethicism (2007) and Carroll's contextualism (1996).

excuse of a constituent of literary value. In a similar vein, one might worry that a case for truth-related literary value might make literature subservient to our truth-seeking aims. The third observation which follows from the first two is a worry which any satisfying account of literary value must take seriously. The task at hand is to argue that ‘always’ gives us far more flexibility than the defendants or ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ argue, provided that we are careful in what we admit as truth-related value in a work of literature to begin with. Post-theoretically, we must of course also contend with questions as to whether fictional works of literature can express truths at all. A compelling case for answering this last question in the negative could of course undermine the project of accounting for these pre-theoretic observations at all.

An additional complication relates to the relationship of this truth-related value to other artistic values. The question of which elements of a work constitute the work’s literary value is at the core of the debate between the autonomist and his opponents. For present purposes, we will think of the autonomist as he who denies that truth-related value is a form of literary value, or artistic value more broadly. The autonomist is sometimes but not always a formalist. The defining belief of the autonomist is the denial that artistic or in this case literary value—a subclass of artistic value—could in any way be related to anything separate to the straightforward artistic appreciation of the work. So far, the claim may well strike one as plausible.

The attempt to place, say, a work’s ability to incite social change as a part of a work’s artistic value often comes off—at least initially—as hopelessly misplaced. An illustrative example beloved by those trying to make these points is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁹ The novel’s role in getting the abolitionist movement off the ground—by expressing the truth that individuals like Uncle Tom are worthy of emancipation and respect—may well not make up novel’s artistic failures, such as its famously trite storyline, the one-dimensional characters, and so on. My diagnosis of the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* case differs from that of the autonomist and that of most proponents of truth-related literary value in ways which will become apparent towards the end of Chapter 1. I do, however, wholeheartedly agree with the autonomist that the novel’s artistic value should not be conflated with the historical and political value it had in contributing to efforts in abolishing slavery in the United States. Such an achievement, though cognitive in that it challenged contemporary conceptions of humanity, could be construed as incidental to the oversights of the author’s contemporaries, rather than as a work which persists in challenging our pre-conceptions of the truth across historical contexts. Regardless of which verdict is appropriate for the literary value of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the point here is to distinguish between the didactic ends a work of

⁹ See, e.g., Posner (1997).

literature might serve and the truth-related value which is also a literary value. This second sort of achievement is what I have in mind in my case for cognitivism about works of literature, and which, I propose, are constituents of certain works' of literature literary value, as the reviews above suggest.

A Roadmap to a Proposed Solution

The aim of this thesis is to defend this sort of truth-related value from the objections outlined here. One of the major proposals here will be that in order to meet these objections in such a way that meets my opponents' objections, this truth-related value must be carefully defined, and there must also be an examination of how this value obtains across different actual works of literature. If my diagnoses of these problems are correct, it will turn out that the scope of this truth-related value is broader than previously imagined. As we shall see, there has been a tendency to over-emphasise moral truths in discussions about truth-related value in literature—and also to re-imagine what it is for truth-related value to obtain in a given work of literature.¹⁰ What I have said so far already suggests that to endorse the claim that the statement of any old truth enhances a work of literature's literary value is madness. A proper account of truth-related value in works of literature must therefore take a keen interest in why this sort of value obtains in some cases where the statement of worldly truths is present and not in others. As such, the order of proceedings goes as follows.

Chapter 1 aims at fully sketching my proposal for an account of truth-related literary value which is tenable and brings satisfying responses to the objections we have already seen. The key to tenability, I propose, will be to recognise that not all statements of truths make truth-related value in works of literature—the name of the game is to theorise about truth-related value in such a way that recognises this apparent irregularity. My proposed answer for accounting for this irregularity will be to endorse what I call modest cognitivism in addition to particularism about literary value (I describe each of these positions in details in the section below). In this chapter, I provide a brief demonstration of how each of these positions fares with identifying value in works of literature. I then turn my attention to responding to the objections we have already seen in full. In Chapter 2, I offer a response to the verisimilitude objection, and propose that works of literary fiction can and do encode full-blooded true propositions. In Chapter 3, I make sense of how these true *simpliciter* propositions can amount to literary value. I argue that these true propositions do on occasion amount to the literary value I argue for, but only insofar as they

¹⁰ Much of the debate against the autonomist centres on the question of whether literature can enhance our moral lives—as seen in Nussbaum (1990a; 1990b; 2002), Carroll (1998b), Robinson (2005), or Gaut (2007).

are indicative of a good understanding of some element of the actual world. The focus in Chapter 3 is on how this understanding can be reflected in the construction of a work of fiction's story-world, and in doing so, to connect the epistemic concept of understanding with the truth *simpliciter*. I argue for this position by showing how works of literature which purport to indicate understanding, but lack it, have impoverished possibilities for literary value because their story-worlds are thereby impoverished through the expression of what we might call half-truths at best. In the final chapter, I describe and defend a second respect in which truth-related value can be expressed in works of literature—namely by challenging our existing conceptions of elements of the actual world. This subtype of truth-related value can, but does not always, build upon the sort of story-world building I argue for in Chapter 3. Rather crucially, the challenges posed by these works of literature are of potential epistemic value to their readership because they have the potential to help individuals acquire more propositional knowledge about the world. I finally defend my proposal from the age-old Platonic objection from the incompatibility of poetry with the search for truth by appealing to the particularism about literary value I have been arguing for all along.

Chapter 1

Two Proposals

A Modest Claim with a Grand Conclusion

The line of argument pursued throughout the course of this project will defend two related claims which I propose best shed light on the observations noted in the introduction. The first claim is fairly modest and is in line with the observations already laid out in the introduction: sometimes, a work's expression of a true claim about the actual world (or something like it) is constitutive of its literary value. I say 'a true claim or something like it' here because it turns out that a work of literature's instantiation of truth-related value is far more complicated than the simple statement of truths. This I take to be compatible with the observation that the expression of the true claim that grass is green in a work of literature does not an instantiation of the sort of value picked up on by laypersons and critics make. I further on in this chapter offer an abridged proposal of the sort of truth-related value I envision for works of literature.¹¹ I will, in line with the contemporary debate on this question, which tends to call the proponents of truth-related value in works of art cognitivists about artistic value, and the truth-related value in question cognitive value, call the instantiation of this sort of value as I envision it the expression of a cognitive achievement—which is itself of cognitive value. Making sense of this truth-related value in the broader context of the plethora of possible literary values leads me to make a second, somewhat more ambitious claim about literary value.

The second claim, which I propose follows from the first in its most tenable form, is a kind of particularism about literary value. The flavour of particularism I defend can be characterised by two further claims about literary value. The first is largely uncontroversial—there is a plurality of literary values, of which what I call the expression of a cognitive achievement is only one among many. This claim has important methodological implications for the study of the value of literature beyond the question of whether cognitive value is constitutive of literary value. The most important one being that a tenable theory of literary value will be pluralistic about the values that a work of literature can possibly instantiate.

This second claim is what makes my account of literary value particularistic rather than merely pluralistic, it is also what sets my own flavour of particularism apart from other flavours of particularism on offer in questions of moral and aesthetic value more generally construed. The claim amounts simply to this: that the applicability of the concepts in virtue of which we evaluate

¹¹My reader will find the more extensive version of this proposal in Chapters 3 and 4.

works of literature, e.g., ‘trite’, ‘elegant’, ‘hilarious’, ‘moving’ is itself context-dependent. This claim sets my own particularism apart from other particularisms on offer in that according to me, the context-dependence of the evaluative outcome arises in the applicability of the evaluative concept itself rather than on the weight we attribute to that evaluative concept in the context of the evaluation of the object in question. For instance, Bergqvist (2010) argues that sometimes negative evaluative concepts like ‘garish’ count in favour of a work of art’s calibre and thus can sometimes be a good thing in certain works of art.¹² In contrast, the sort of particularism about literary value I propose here is an application of McDowell’s (1998a and 1998b) claim about the applicability of evaluative concepts in general to the question of literary value in particular. In the broader context of his original proposal, McDowell argues that the correctness of our application of an evaluative concept in a particular context cannot be governed by a set of principles which obtain all particular contexts where the context applies and is thus context dependent. If we were McDowellians about the evaluative concept ‘garish’, for instance, we might have it that the use of loud colours does not necessarily make a work of art garish. I argue, in this thesis, that we ought to be McDowellians about the applicability of evaluative concepts as they apply to literature in particular, but I make no secret of my predilection for the McDowellian approach to evaluative concepts more generally throughout the course of my argument.

As we shall see, the particularism I offer here has some parallels with certain elements of Sibley’s account of aesthetic properties, whereby the evaluation of works of art consists in the attribution of evaluative aesthetic concepts to artworks.¹³ My account nonetheless differs from Sibley’s and indeed from Bergqvist’s in that I do not separate what Sibley, after Beardsley, calls a ‘verdict’ of a work of art from the attribution of the evaluative concepts pertinent to that work of art.¹⁴ A verdict of a work of art in the context of Sibley’s discussion pertains to the extent to which, in light of the evaluative concepts we have applied to the work, we consider the work in question to be artistically valuable. According to me, in contrast, the application of the pertinent evaluative concepts to the work of art (and in this case of literature) *is* the final verdict on that work of art.

As this initial discussion suggests, the aim of this chapter is to specify and motivate what I have identified as the two main claims underlying my thesis: i.e., my modest cognitivism and my

¹² Bergqvist’s claim about aesthetic value is modelled on Dancy’s (2004) particularism about reasons to act. Admittedly, Bergqvist’s claim is about artworks in general, but for this reason it serves the purpose of discussion of literary value well. It is also worth noting that Bergqvist also wants to attribute this form of particularism to Sibley—whether Sibley really is a particularist in this way is an unsettled matter. See Kirwin’s (2011) response to Bergqvist.

¹³ See Sibley (2001a).

¹⁴ See Sibley (2001b). As we shall see, my proposal is in line with the argument McDowell makes in ‘Non-cognitivism and rule-following’.

particularism. I first clarify what exactly is meant by modest cognitivism here and to clarify what I take to underlie it—the expression of a cognitive achievement. I then move on to characterise literary value in light of my account of cognitivism about literature and literary value. My characterisation of literary value will of course be a particularist one. The second part of this chapter will consist in an argument in favour of my own flavour of particularism about literary value. I will more specifically argue, *contra* Gaut (2007), that a robust case against the autonomist requires a particularism like my own. This, as I shall argue, is because a generalist approach about literary value which is sufficiently sensitive to the context yielded by each literary work—as seen in, e.g., Gaut (2007)—can yield a scepticism about literary value (and artistic value more broadly) which the opponent to literary cognitivism would be right to reject.

Defining Key Terms

Cognitivism

I suggested that the form of truth-related literary value I will be examining and defending here could be thought of as a form of cognitive value, and that that this position on literary value could be more broadly be construed as a cognitivism about literary value. Cognitivism as a blanket term in aesthetics can apply to any of the arts. In broad terms, it can be characterised as the claim that a work of art's contribution to (or potential to contribute to) our search for knowledge about the world—i.e., what most aestheticians would call its cognitive value—contributes to that work's overall value *qua* artwork. It is most often defended for concrete art forms with a heavy narrative component, such as narrative literature and cinema.¹⁵ It is worth noting, however, that the cognitivist position has been defended for art forms with less obvious narrative components. E.g., Gaut (2007: 14-25) offers us a compelling case study of two paintings of the biblical character Bathsheba—one by Rembrandt and one by his student Drost—¹⁶which appeals to cognitive value to explain the superiority of Rembrandt's representation of the subject over his student's. Whereas Robinson (2005) argues that some forms of music can offer us what she calls an education of the emotions.¹⁷ We will here only be

¹⁵ See, e.g. Noël Carroll's and Berys Gaut's discussion of cognitive value in these two art forms as presented in Gaut (2007).

¹⁶ It bears noting that whilst not as obviously narrative as a novel or a paradigmatic film, both Bathsheba paintings are narrative paintings, that is to say, paintings which tell a story or part of it.

¹⁷ Admittedly the sorts of painting and music for which a cognitive position is argued have heavy narrative components *for their genres*—they nonetheless do not generally possess the narrative complexity associated with works of literature, and are thus not often seen as prime candidates for the cognitivist position.

It bears noting also that Robinson's account of the emotions is non-cognitive. Nonetheless, some might characterise her view as cognitive not because of its connection to propositional knowledge but in virtue of the fact that it is in the spirit of the cognitive position on art, which can be characterised as the position that works' of art educative elements can have artistic value. Moreover, a stricter cognitivist could easily take her arguments that certain works of art furnish us with an education of the emotions and reject her non-cognitive account of the emotions.

looking at the case for cognitivism in literature. If what I argue here is correct, however, a similar account might be extended to other art-forms.

As is only natural, cognitivism about literature has often been associated with the *knowledge* one might acquire from engaging with works of literature. A crude cognitive account of literary value might state that a work's ability to teach us something about the world contributes to its value *qua* work of literature. This claim has the advantage that it is in line with the intuitions about literary value that we saw in the reviews of *Emma*, *Great Expectations*, and *Self Care*—all of which aim to appeal to the layperson's intuitions about literary value.¹⁸ As often is the case with the intuitions of the philosophically uninitiated, however, more must be done to account for the complications posed by introducing this important intuition to our theory. One of which is, rather crucially, that the statement of bald true propositions looks like an unlikely candidate for a building-block of literary value. This leads philosophers to look beyond knowledge-that in their aim to explain cognitive value in literature.

Robinson (2005) as we saw proposes that certain works of literature (and certain forms of music) can offer an education of the emotions and Nussbaum (e.g., 1990a;1990b; 2002) proposes that certain works of literature can teach us to be better moral agents and citizens. These views are generally construed as cognitive because of their relationship to knowledge, but not necessarily because of an underlying commitment to the claim that knowledge-how ultimately reduces to propositional knowledge. We might think of the attainment of knowledge-how to do something as a cognitive achievement independently of whether we think that knowledge-how in some way reduces to knowledge-that because the newly acquired skill helps us acquire new propositional knowledge in the right sort of way. E.g., we might think that knowledge-how to interpret data without bias is cognitively valuable because it leads to more propositional knowledge.

I will here follow the tradition in contemporary analytic aesthetics of calling these views cognitive because of their relationship to knowledge, whilst remaining neutral on the question of whether knowledge-how is reducible to propositional knowledge. Nothing I argue here turns on this question. It is also worth noting that my discussion here will not focus on cognitive achievements associated with knowledge-how. This is not so much because many of the cognitive positions on literary value currently on offer focus on knowledge-how, but because ultimately, I believe that a cognitive account of literary value that focuses on a third class of

¹⁸ *The Quarterly Review* being a periodical aimed at a well-read, but largely popular audience, the *L.A. Times* being a popular newspaper, and Shaw's introduction appearing in a popular edition of *Great Expectations*.

cognitive achievement—that of understanding—offers us more purchase in responding to the two objections which I consider to be the most dangerous against cognitive accounts of literary value. The first is a sort of scepticism about the transferability of the skills we acquire to better judge what is fictionally the case to judging what is actually the case,¹⁹ and the second the age-old Platonic banishment of the poets from the city-state in virtue of their falsely claiming to have expertise on certain subject-matters. I pursue an argument to this effect in Chapter 4. There I will argue that the expression of understanding is the crucial cognitive achievement in the context of the question of cognitive literary value. This is because it provides us with a more satisfying account of how our ability to judge the fictional scenarios we encounter in works of literature transfers to the scenarios we encounter in the actual world and a more plausible side-step to the Platonic objection.²⁰

Literature

Before moving forward, a brief interlude on what is meant here by literature. When I say ‘literature’ here, I mean the range of linguistic artefacts—some written down, some passed down orally—that merits artistic evaluation. For our present purposes, we can define artistic evaluation as the attribution of artistic evaluative concepts to these works—e.g., ‘elegant’, ‘trite’, ‘witty’. For reasons which will soon become apparent, I am not as such concerned with the scope of artistic evaluative concepts and here simply characterise them, after Sibley (2001a), as those terms which aid us—layperson and critic alike—to articulate whether a work of art (in this case of literature) is good or bad *qua* art. We might for example attribute to a work of literature the evaluative term ‘trite’ due to its ‘one-dimensional’ characters. According to me, the object of our evaluation is a work of literature precisely because it warrants judgements that it is ‘trite’ and its characters ‘one-dimensional’. The next question is of course what sort of linguistic artefacts merit such evaluative attention.

The paradigm cases of works of literature²¹ of course belong to the categories and genres we readily admit as literary. E.g., the novel, the poem, the play and their sub-categories (e.g., the novella and the short-story). Works—even bad ones—that belong to these categories elicit attention *qua* artwork simply in virtue of the fact that they belong to these categories. As Walton (1970) argues, a work’s belonging to a given category of art elicits us to attend to it *qua* member

¹⁹ As we see in, e.g., Currie (2020).

²⁰ I say ‘possibility’ here because often, as we shall see, the possibility that a work teach us something is not actualised. This point is crucial to a tenable response to the Platonic objection.

²¹ I employ the term ‘work’ rather than ‘text’ because I concur with Currie (1991) that the appropriate object of artistic evaluation is not merely the text itself but also the work in the context under which it was conceived.

of that category. And, in Walton's terms, it is standard for works which belong to say the class novel to have elements which are amenable to evaluation *qua* work of literature such as plots, characters, narration, use of descriptive language, and so on. It bears noting first that many of these paradigmatic cases are works of fiction, meaning that they are essentially stipulative of a story-world by way of narration in the way I have outlined.²² This is often the case even in lyrical poetry, which often concerns itself with describing the mental states of a fictional speaker. I, as already stated, concern myself here almost exclusively with paradigmatic fictional cases, and this is rather simply because these are the cases that cause difficulties for the cognitivist position about literary value. Non-paradigmatic cases of works of literature, like the non-fictional novel and the literary essay, are more straightforwardly valuable in virtue of their expression of cognitive achievements and even of the truth *simpliciter* because the establishment of the propositions they put forth depends upon observations of how the world really is and argument to justify how these observations lead to the desired conclusion.

Cognitive Achievement in Literature

As Currie's (2020) survey and arguments against different cognitive accounts of literary value highlights, the explanatory burden of answering the questions of what exactly a work of literature might teach us and how it might teach us it lies on the proponent of cognitivism. By Currie's lights, the accounts offered so far remain unsatisfying. These accounts remain unsatisfying, I shall argue, rather simply because defining the cognitive position on literary value in terms of paradigmatic cases of knowledge turns out to be unprofitable.

We will further examine why this is the case in Chapter 4, but it is necessary at present in order to say more about what I will conceive of as literary cognitive value, to hint at why to overstate the connection between literary cognitive value to the paradigm case of knowledge proves unprofitable. The paradigm case of knowledge is knowledge-that—i.e., the knowledge of a proposition, for example the knowledge of the proposition that $2+2=4$ or that at the time of writing this it is a sunny autumnal day. This paradigm creates difficulty for the proponent of cognitivism because whilst it is evident that we do sometimes gain propositional knowledge from works of literature, it is, as we saw, unlikely that a work's literary calibre is improved by the inclusion of any one statement true of the actual world. E.g., *The Wasteland* would not be made better for the addition of a statement 'grass is green' in virtue of the fact that the proposition therein expressed is true. Moreover, true propositions are at least on the face of it more

²² I colour the view in, as it were, in Chapter 2.

effectively gained elsewhere gives even the most ardent cognitivist cause to pause.²³ Both these observations are explainable at least in part in virtue of the fact that works of literature are generally fictional. A helpful observation towards a distinction between non-fiction and fiction is found in Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe*:

'One fundamental difference between the real world and fictional ones (...) lies in the manner in which we make them. A particular work of fiction, in its context, establishes its fictional world and generates the fictional truths belonging to it. A particular biography or history does not itself establish the truth of what it says or produce the facts it is concerned with.' (Walton, 1990: 101-102).

A fundamental distinction between non-fiction and fiction as observed here by Walton, is, in a nutshell, that a work of fiction can establish what is true in a fictional world by way of stipulating that the fictional world is so.²⁴ Works of non-fiction do not establish fact in this way. Rather, works of non-fiction, or at any rate serious works of non-fiction, appeal to claims as to how the world really is to establish that the thesis they defend is so. This gives rise to an important distinction as to what is standard in works of fiction as opposed to works of non-fiction most recently elaborated upon by Currie (2020). Works of non-fiction aim to persuade us to believe the claims they put forward by way of argument—the reader then must rely on his own critical faculties to decide whether the arguments warrant belief in the claims put forward. Fiction, on the other hand, is not generally concerned with offering arguments of this sort. Rather, the concern in fiction is to stipulate the way a story-world is so that we make-believe these stipulations. The reader is thus not persuaded to believe of the actual world what is stipulated of a story-world in a work of fiction. Moreover, even where fictional works of literature do offer us true facts about the world, as in e.g., the infamous chapter on whales and whaling in Melville's *Moby Dick*, the complaint is often that knowledge of these propositions would be more profitably acquired elsewhere.²⁵ If what I argue throughout this thesis is correct, however, objections which appeal to the fact that one oughtn't to go about believing the propositions put forward by works of fiction willy-nilly will not take my opponent very far. Nor will the objection that these propositions are more profitably found elsewhere.

²³ Nussbaum, a famous champion of what is often considered a more plausible cognitive thesis, in e.g., (1990a; 1990b, and 2002) famously proposes that we think of the epistemic enrichment associated with works of literature as other than straightforward propositional knowledge.

²⁴ I later call this narrative stipulation.

²⁵ See e.g., Kieran (2013) and Currie (2020).

Here are some reasons for thinking that my confidence is well-placed. First, although it is undoubtedly true that fictional discourse—by which I mean simply the sentences embedded in the appropriate fictional context which make up a work of fiction—and in particular narration within fictional discourse is essentially stipulative of the way the story-world is, the resemblance between a given story-world and the actual world is constitutive of the story-world’s literary calibre, or so I shall argue in Chapter 3. An objector at this point might quip that verisimilitude does not equal truth—²⁶and thereby does not equal the true propositions we might come to know. And the objector would of course be right in making this point. My response to this point is twofold. First, and as I argue in Chapter 2, it is entirely possible for fictional discourse to express true propositions, and, moreover, it is possible for readers to grasp that these are true propositions and thus potentially come to learn them (this second point is further elaborated upon in Chapter 4). Second, and more to Currie’s point, cognitivism needn’t and shouldn’t centre on the claim that works of literature can increase their readers’ repertoire of known true propositions.

My proposal is that for cognitivism to be tenable, the separation between the expression of truth—or something like it—in a work of literature and readers’ learning from works of literature is necessary. My point amounts to simply this. A work of literature is often better for expressing a certain number of propositions that are true of the actual world. This is often because the expression of the true proposition aids in building a story-world which permits us to examine the actual worldly subject-matters the author wishes us examine—as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3. In addition to this, I will be arguing in Chapters 3 and 4 that a work of literature is often better for displaying what I will term an accurate *understanding* of some worldly subject-matter.

A crucial component to this project of separating the cognitive value in works of literature from the acquisition of propositional knowledge is that of the expression of a cognitive achievement in a work of literature. The expression of cognitive achievement has two crucial elements. First, cognitive achievement as it arises independently of the context of literature, and second the expression thereof as it occurs in literature. In what follows I address each element in turn. The concept of the cognitive achievement as it appears in this project is an open one—I do not in any place offer a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for cognitive achievements in literature. Rather, what is offered and defended here is a set of principled guidelines for spotting cognitive achievements in works of literature.

²⁶ As Lamarque and Olsen (1993) argue.

Let us start with the idea of a work's expressing a cognitive achievement. A cognitive achievement, construed in terms more general than the scope of this project, and independently of its expression, can be understood as any achievement which enhances our epistemic standing in the world. Within the paradigm of knowledge-that, we might think of it in terms of, say, an individual's discovery that a previously unbeknownst proposition is true. If we increase the scope of our conception of knowledge to also accommodate for knowledge-how, we might also include in our conception of cognitive achievement an individual's learning how to do something, especially where this knowledge-how has the potential to lead to new discoveries of unbeknownst propositions—as in our previous example of learning how to analyse scientific data whilst free of confirmation bias might be construed as a cognitive achievement because it leads to the acquisition of the right sort of belief from one's dataset. The more useful cognitive achievement for our purposes, I have proposed, however, is understanding.

Understanding as I shall be conceiving of it is most saliently the cognitive achievement which permits us to discern the applicability of concepts across different situations. For instance, a good understanding of an evaluative concept like 'kind' permits us to determine where the concept applies across a multiplicity of contexts, whereas an impoverished understanding might keep us from seeing where the concept applies or fails to apply in non-paradigmatic contexts of its applicability (or non-applicability). A naïve understanding of the evaluative concept 'kind' might leave us thinking that the concept applies invariably across contexts where seemingly paradigmatic acts of kindness have taken place. Presumably, one such paradigmatically kind act is talking to a lonely person at a party. Someone with an unsophisticated understanding of the concept might take it that all tokens of the type talking to a lonely person at a party satisfy the conditions for kindness. On the other hand, the possessor of a more sophisticated understanding of 'kind' recognises that there is the world of a difference for our evaluative purposes between speaking to a lonely person at a party simply because one wishes to put one's interlocutor at ease in what might be a tense social situation and taking advantage of the person's loneliness so as to, say, seduce them. The more nuanced understanding of the concept of kindness is what enables us to see the difference between these two tokens of the action-type.

A second way of thinking about understanding which will be important for the present project is Zagzebski's proposal that understanding is the grasp of a structure (2019). These structures can pertain to any subject-matter, and can subsequently be architectonic, astronomical, biological, psychological, or even abstract. On this picture, to understand, say, a loved one, is to understand the structure of their personality and whatever else we think makes up the individual on an emotional and intellectual (though perhaps not biological) level. Likewise, to understand a proof

on this account, is to understand its structure. I discuss this way of thinking about understanding more extensively in Chapter 3, but it is worth noting now that both ways of thinking about understanding proposed here are related to one another. One way to visualise the applicability of a concept might be to think about the structure of the scenarios within which it applies. It is worth noting that both Zagzebski's structures and the concepts we'll be talking about can be construed as subject-matters within the right context. What matters most to the very immediate goals of this chapter, however, is that understanding is a promising avenue for explaining cognitive achievement in literature precisely because it often concerns itself with describing the nuances between different tokens of the same type of action. The proposal, nonetheless, is not without its own difficulties.

As Zagzebski (2009: 145) points out, that understanding cannot be straightforwardly transmitted by way of testimony. It is therefore difficult to see how it could be transmitted, or even expressed, in a written text. Moreover, my discussion of cognitive achievements—and understanding in particular—so far suggests that cognitive achievements are the sort of thing that is had by persons rather than by works of literature. As already hinted at, it is here that the notion of the expression of a cognitive achievement becomes crucial. As we shall see, we ordinarily take an element of a work of literature to be the expression of a cognitive achievement when we see evidence of that cognitive achievement.

As we I further elaborate in Chapter 3, understanding of a given subject-matter is most often expressed indirectly in works of literature. More often than not by way of a display of evidence of understanding of that subject-matter. Instances of evidence of understanding can be found, for instance, in an especially nuanced diagnosis of a morally ambiguous scenario—this would serve as evidence of understanding of the applicability of moral evaluative concepts. Or, to move away from the context of moral evaluation, the prediction of a hostile nation's reaction to a diplomatic decision, if the object of one's understanding is geopolitical. Note that what is grasped in this latter case can easily be construed as the structure of the geopolitical tension.

Often, the expression of true propositions can count as evidence of understanding—e.g., that the hostile nation will choose to invade if concessions are not made in the last example. As already hinted at, understanding can be had about any given subject-matter, not just evaluative concepts, it just so happens that evaluative concepts offer us a helpful initial illustration of the sort of thing I have mind.²⁷

²⁷ This expression of cognitive achievement I have in mind here somewhat resembles what Noël Carroll (1998b) characterises as clarificationism, with four major differences. The first is that whilst Carroll emphasises the

In order to grasp how the expression of understanding takes place in works of literature, we must first examine how such an expression takes place in the far less complicated context of ordinary conversation. In the context of ordinary conversation, we might think of the success of the expression of understanding as a consequence of an individual's intention to communicate such an achievement, alongside adherence to the linguistic and behavioural conventions surrounding expression—by which I mean observation of the conventional meaning of words such that the sentences expressed are intelligible to our interlocutor as well as adherence to (or intentional non-adherence to in a way that registers as an implicature to our interlocutor) the Gricean maxims of communication or something like them.²⁸

According to Grice, successful communication generally occurs as follows. In the midst of a conversation, a speaker and his interlocutor tacitly set the aims—i.e., the sort of information which shall be exchanged—for a particular conversation. In the felicitous case, each interlocutor cooperates to attain this end. The end in a conversation where a cognitive achievement like understanding is expressed might be the exchange of information on a certain subject-matter. The success conditions of the expression of the cognitive achievement are linked to adherence (or deliberate non-adherence) to the Cooperative Principle so as to implicate something about the subject-matter in question.²⁹ The expression of a cognitive achievement in ordinary

clarification of moral precepts in particular, I take the clarification of moral concepts to be one of many kinds of concepts that can be clarified with our engagement with literature. I take it that the emphasis on moral concepts has more than a little to do with the fact that the applicability of moral concepts at least on the face of it resists generalisation, as I discuss in Chapter 4. As we shall see, however, concepts needn't be straightforwardly evaluative to be clarified or enhanced by the sort of understanding that a work of literature can bring forth. As already mentioned, works of literature can also bring forth the understanding of concepts understood as subject-matters—by which I simply mean that which a piece of discourse (literary and fictional or otherwise) is about—and these subject-matters needn't be moral. For instance, Hilary Mantel's *A Place of Greater Safety* is good *qua* historical novel (and thus as we shall see good *qua* work of literature *tout court*) to the extent that it brings forward a rich understanding of the historical events leading up to the Reign of Terror. A second difference between Carroll's account and my own is that *pace* Carroll, my particularism resists the claim that evaluative judgements are amenable to generalisation in the form of moral principles he describes. Principles thus described can be understood as rules for the applicability of concepts, whereas as we shall see, I follow McDowell in proposing that the applicability of concepts is best accounted for in a piecemeal manner which resists rule-following. Third, my brand of cognitivism separates the expression of cognitive achievement in a work—which is at least sometimes a constituent of literary value—from whether readers actually learn from this cognitive achievement. My reasons for separating these two claims are twofold. The first is that a learning opportunity had is not always a learning opportunity taken, as anybody who has ever taught will know. Second, I propose, in my discussion of Plato's objection to learning from works of literature, that in order to truly learn from a work of literature, one must first scrutinise the understanding put forth in the page, and this process is separate from passively reading a work of literature and thus entirely optional. The final and perhaps most crucial distinction between Carroll's clarificationism and the form of clarificationism I put forward here is that in arguing for cognitivism, I concede an important point to the autonomist—the sort of cognitive value I argue for here does not attach itself to the ulterior motives works of literature might serve, as we shall see.

²⁸ By behavioural convention I mean, for example, the body language which might also add to meaning—say if upon asking me whether I have finished a task I reply 'absolutely', but precede my remark with a snort, my snort suggests that I mean the contrary of what I have said. Use of tone might also shape meaning.

²⁹ See Grice (1989: 28-30).

conversation is of course most straightforward when said cognitive achievement is simply the expression of a true proposition within the context of a cooperative conversation with the end of the exchange of information on a given subject-matter. The expression of a true proposition can serve, as we have seen, as evidence of understanding. This might be taken to disqualify works of literature from the expression of understanding, but it needn't.

A disanalogy between conversation and works of literature sometimes observed is that the conveyance of information in the case of a work of literature is one-sided. One may object on these grounds that there is no Cooperative Principle at play here. This shouldn't give us too much reason to fret. There are ways in which the author (in guise of fictional narrator) can cooperate and fail to cooperate in the goal shared with the reader of the author's (in guise of fictional narrator) furnishing us with information either about a story-world, in the case of works of literature which are often fictional, or with information about the actual world, where the work is non-fictional. Authors' failure to cooperate very much resembles the way in which an interlocutor in ordinary conversation might fail to cooperate. They might offer the reader less information than is optimal for the reader to know exactly what happened and make implicatures by intentionally breaking the Cooperative Principle in such a way that is recognisable by the reader.

If I am correct that the exchange of information is a goal shared by author and reader, and what I argue in Chapter 2 is correct—that there can be overlap between story-world and actual world truth in such a way that can furnish the reader of a work of fiction with true propositions in the actual world—then evidence of the more complex cognitive achievement, understanding, to be brought across by way of intending to express that evidence by way of the expression of propositions which are true in the actual world, or which would be true in close possible worlds which replicate the fictional stipulations of the work.³⁰ As I already noted, the expression of a true proposition sometimes counts as evidence of understanding.

An Objection

Another reason why the expression of cognitive achievement becomes more complicated in works of literature because of the possibility of what Stock (2017) calls 'layers of meaning' in a

³⁰ An example of what I have in mind as evidence of understanding exhibiting what might be true in a very close possible world where the fictional stipulations of the work in question obtain is for instance a work of fiction which gives us what would happen in a possible world close to our own, e.g., where basic human psychological facts are the same, and facts norms surrounding the social and political dimensions of our lives are the same, where we have suffered a catastrophe which has brought about the destruction of Western civilisation. Such a work would exhibit evidence of an understanding of the norms which this close possible world shares with the actual world—i.e., of basic human psychological facts and facts surrounding the norms of our social and political lives.

work of literature, such that the use of symbolism, imagery, and other formal elements in works of literature can convey meaning in a manner that at least generally is more far-fetched than the way in which meaning is made in the context of ordinary conversation. Lamarque (2002) takes this to be a reason to abandon the project of accounting for meaning in literature—and by extension what we can extrapolate as authorial intention in a work of literature—by means of appeal to the pragmatics of ordinary conversation altogether. I for one think that this rejection of Lamarque's is too quick. It is certainly true that we generally do find more instances of these layers of meaning in works of literature, and this because it is standard in Walton's (1970) sense for members of the category of works of literature to make use of rhetorical devices that make such layers of meaning possible. Moreover, it is constitutive of our practices surrounding literary criticism to think of these rhetorical devices as contributing to the overall meaning of the work in question. The fact that one might import the conventions surrounding rhetorical devices to ordinary conversation—think, e.g., of the sort of sharp, bathetic aphorism the likes of Oscar Wilde might quip at a dinner party—suggests that what is needed here is not a severance between our accounts of ordinary conversational and literary meaning, but rather an account which construes the more complex conventions surrounding so-called literary language (which might also be employed at a dinner party) as existing within a continuum with the more bare-bones conventions surrounding ordinary language.

The aim here is to indicate the lines along which a tenable account of such conventions might go, so as to indicate how works of literature occasionally express cognitive achievements. Central to the pragmatics of ordinary conversation I have discussed is the notion of intention to communicate a given meaning, alongside the pragmatic and linguistic success-conditions associated with the communication of the intended meaning. It so happens that one of the central disputes in the philosophy of literature is the extent to which authorial intention plays a role in the determination of meaning in works of literature. The case for a work of literature's expressing an author's cognitive achievement becomes significantly more complicated if it turns out that authorial intention plays no role in the determination of meaning in works of literature, and this is rather simply because the tie between the author's cognitive achievement and the expression within the work is severed if an author's intention to express such an achievement in his work plays no role in the determination of the meaning of that work.

Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) argue against the claim that authorial intention determines meaning in works of literature by positing what they call the 'intentional fallacy', which holds that it is a mistake to appeal to authorial intention in our explanation of the meaning of a work of literature—the family of views which adhere to the authorial fallacy or something like it is often

called anti-intentionalism. Conversely, the family of views which accepts authorial intention as a legitimate source of meaning in works of literature is called intentionalism.³¹ The anti-intentionalist position in its strongest iteration would have it that any material outside of the text of the work itself which might help illuminate the context under which the work was conceived should be ignored in a reader's determination of a work's meaning.³² Whilst few would endorse this strongest version of the anti-intentionalist position, there is a question as to the extent to which the intentional fallacy ought to be taken seriously in our practices surrounding the extrapolation of meaning from works of literature, with special attention paid to what can legitimately be brought up in addition to the work itself in the enterprise of interpreting it.³³ Moderate positions on the question of authorial intention often permit us to think about what the authorial intention might have been given overall historical evidence of the context under which the work was conceived but force us to exclude private documents such as an author's diaries as evidence of such intentions.³⁴ Stock's (2017) extreme intentionalism—a strong version of the intentionalist position—holds that authorial intention counts every bit as much towards the determination of meaning in works of literature as speaker intention does in ordinary pragmatics. As Stock (2017) points out, however, intention in literature, much as in ordinary pragmatics, is not the sole determinant of meaning. Rather, meaning is also determined by the aforementioned communicative conventions associated with ordinary conversation in addition to whatever else is required to get at the conventions surrounding meaning in literature. Some of these conventions surrounding meaning in literature are genre-specific, e.g., the breaking of metric conventions when writing a sonnet can help emphasise that particular line in the poem, thus making it a more salient element to the overall meaning of the poem, or the use of enjambment to create a *double entendre* are both conventions surrounding poetry and particularly sonnets in the former case, and just poetry in general in the latter case. An author may well intend to bring a certain meaning across, but clumsy use of form or an inadequate grasp of the conventional meaning of words might mean that the author's intention is defeated and thus the meaning of the work is not the meaning intended. Such a failure of communication is compatible with an intentionalism like Stock's, but all that is needed to get my account rolling is a recognition that intention plays a role in the determination of the meaning of works of

³¹ Anti-intentionalism is by no means a phenomenon exclusive to Anglo-American philosophy. Another famous paper against the claim that authorial intention plays a role in the determination of a work of literature's meaning of course comes from Barthes (1968).

³² Even Beardsley, who alongside Wimsatt coined the term 'intentional fallacy' would allow for certain contextual factors to play a role in the determination of meaning in a work of literature.

³³ Whether you construe it as authorial intention or the context under which the work was conceived will depend on your stance on intentionalism.

³⁴ See, e.g., Currie (2004).

literature—a more modest intentionalism would not, I think, impede one from accepting my proposal.

A Second Objection

A second potential objection to what I have detailed so far might go as follows: works of philosophy often express cognitive achievements of the sort I have described and (very) occasionally also exhibit literary value. Plausibly, we might say that Hume's discussion of scepticism is philosophically superior to Locke's in virtue of the fact that it exhibits a greater understanding of the subject-matter at hand. The question my objector could pose here is whether this superior understanding in turn is what makes Hume's discussion of scepticism superior to Locke's *qua* literature. What I have been arguing here after all suggests that the expression of cognitive achievement is constitutive of that literary value, and here we are conceding that Hume's work is superior to Locke's in virtue of the fact that it expresses a superior cognitive achievement. My response to this objection is twofold. On one hand, I concede that the superior cognitive achievement in one of the works is partly what would explain its superior value *qua* literature, and this leads me to my second point. Constitutive to literary value is, I propose, the successful expression of cognitive achievement by way of manipulation of literary conventions, of which one is the successful use of rhetorical devices. Hume's understanding of the sceptical threat is not only superior to Locke's, but also better expressed. The superior expression is what provides us with evidence of the superior understanding of the threat that scepticism poses to the philosopher, and this is how cognitive achievement is tied to literary value when we choose to evaluate works which are not paradigmatically literary as literature. This suggests that the claim that part of what makes Hume's work on scepticism better *qua* literature (as well as *qua* philosophy) than Locke's is the superiority of the cognitive achievement expressed in Hume's work is not as off-putting as it seems at first.

Modest Cognitivism

My proposal, then, is that cognitive achievements are expressed in works of literature by way of the successful expression of authorial cognitive achievement, which in turn takes place through the successful manipulation of both pragmatic and literary conventions. This leads the important question of how exactly this plays out in an actual work of literature. My answer to this question is more extensively discussed throughout the thesis in the case-studies I offer to argue for my position.

Above, I proposed that one important sense of understanding is that of the cognitive achievement which permits us to determine the contexts in which certain concepts apply. It is

also what permits us to extrapolate what the outcomes of a certain counterfactual situation might be or to determine plausible motives for individuals' actions. As we find, for instance, in the more compelling historical novels, where there is a careful study of a historical character's actions and a set of particulars (e.g., motives or other missing historical contextual factors) is imagined in order to explain those actions. These novels are better, I will argue, where these imagined particulars are plausible given what we know of the historical figure in question. Plausible imagined particulars serve as evidence of understanding of the relevant subject-matters, e.g., of the historical figure, the context in which the figure acted, as well as some facts of human psychology. It is plausible to think that the imaginative tasks that go into creating an interesting and challenging story-world even outside of the genre of historical fiction requires understanding of the relevant subject-matters from the author's part. Works of literature, and works of fictional literature in particular, often provide insight into such counterfactual scenarios, and the cognitive achievement in these cases lies in demonstrating a plausible understanding of how the relevant concepts would apply to this new scenario—this of course also requires a suitable grasp of the structure of the world—i.e., the way the world is. Evidence of this understanding is often exhibited through the expression of propositions which are true—e.g., a historical fact of the actual world that sets the context for the historical novel—or that would be true in the actual world—e.g., when the author comes up with a compelling explanation of a character's motives.

Opponents to a proposal like this might reject it on the grounds that it offers an overly didactic conception of literary value. As we have already seen, the autonomist position about literary value often arises from a concern with protecting art and its value from instrumentalization for moral and political ends, beyond all doubt a noble and worthy cause. Often, this leads to claims about what appropriate attention towards a work of art looks like. Where we have the likes of Stolnitz (1978) adopting the Kantian conception of disinterestedness—which amounts to the appreciation of an object's beauty without concern with the existence or possession thereof—as crucial to the discernment of what constitutes a legitimate constituent of artistic value and which values we simply acknowledge because we would like those values to for the pursuit of ends independent from what might be called the aesthetic appreciation of the artwork.

That the legitimate appreciation of a work of art requires a disinterested attitude has been called into question repeatedly since Dickie's (1964) influential paper, where he argues that one can attend to the sort of properties which constitute artistic value even according to the strictest autonomist whilst still valuing the work in question for instrumental ends. One might, e.g., read a Henry James novel in preparation for a literature exam whilst still attending to its artistic value. That said, accounts of artistic appreciation inspired by Kant's doctrine of disinterestedness are

far from defunct. More recent suggestions, like McGregor (2016) suggest that we adopt the Kantian axiology as spelt out by Korsgaard (1983) and value artworks as final rather than instrumental or even intrinsic goods, which he thinks blocks the possibility of cognitive literary value.

I am sympathetic to the autonomist claim that we should not conflate literary value with incidental instrumental values that the work might also instantiate. I do, however, disagree with the autonomist that this excludes cognitive value from the set of literary values. This is in part because *even* if we accept the formalist thesis of form content-inseparability—or at any rate the parts of the thesis which are tenable—³⁵to which many autonomists appeal in their arguments, it becomes impossible to separate the cognitive achievement expressed by the work as I define it here and those elements which merit aesthetic attention.

How to best interpret the thesis of form-content inseparability, which finds its origins in Bradley's famous inaugural lecture 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake', is not an uncontroversial matter. Those who argue against the autonomist tend to interpret the thesis in a manner which the autonomist (e.g., Lamarque and McGregor) take to be uncharitable. In what follows, I will assume that the interpretation that the likes of Lamarque and McGregor think best get autonomism off the ground is correct. As I have pointed out, there is an element of their interpretation of Bradley's thesis which according to me will turn out to be untenable,³⁶ and this is largely what the ensuing case-studies in this thesis aim to argue against.

In order to understand their preferred interpretation of Bradley, it is important to first understand what is meant here by form and content. In his lecture, Bradley mainly has poetry in his sights, and we can think about the content of the poem (or work of literature more broadly) as the *what* of the poem—that is to say, the subject-matters portrayed therein. Form, on the other hand, is the *how* of the poem (or work of literature). That is to say, the way in which the subject-matters are portrayed by use of the conventions of language, literary conventions, and so forth.

According to Lamarque (2014) and McGregor (2016: 48-52), the thesis of form-content inseparability is best understood as the claim that neither the what nor the how of the work can tenably be judged as separate from one another in the artistic evaluation of that work. This is because, according to both them and to Bradley, both are inseparable in a reader's *experience* of the work. By which here we will take to simply mean the work as read or listened to. All this I

³⁵ Much of Chapter 3 turns on arguing against the part of the thesis which is untenable.

³⁶ Regardless of whether this view can legitimately be attributed to Bradley himself.

will concede to Lamarque and McGregor in my argument. The untenable part of their interpretation, I propose, stems from what they take the thesis to imply for our engagement with the content of a work of literature.

McGregor (2016: 52) writes the following on the topic: ‘The content of *Paradise Lost* is the characters and events as portrayed *in the poem*, and although they are similar to the characters and events in the story of The Fall, they are not identical.’ From this claim Lamarque and McGregor take it to follow that to evaluate *Paradise Lost* as if it were portraying the characters of The Fall is to make a category error. To make an analogous point on a subject-matter whose existence is more decidedly worldly and where we can consequently have uncontroversial truth-values, we might take it that human psychology as it appears in a Henry James novel is very similar to human psychology as it appears in the actual world, but it is not identical. This of course is true—the former obtains in a story-world and gives us, if anything, an imperfect glimpse of the latter. I contend that it does not follow, however, that it is a category error to evaluate the factual elements of *The Golden Bowl*’s portrayal of human psychology against human psychology as it obtains in the actual world. This, I argue is for two related reasons. The first is that these comparisons arise quite naturally when one is reading or otherwise experiencing a work of literature, and often, what it is to understand the literary genius behind the presentation of a given subject-matter is to grasp its cognitive value, or so I argue in Chapter 4. The second is that the extent to which worldly subject-matters are presented in a story-world in a factual manner often impacts upon a work’s potential literary value because the oversimplified presentation of a subject-matter in a story-world means that there are fewer opportunities to instantiate even purely formal value, or so I argue in Chapter 3.

The conclusion that I argue for with regards to the thesis of form-content inseparability is essentially this. With the acceptance of the claim that form and content are inseparable, comes, as the autonomist argues, the conclusion that we ought not to evaluate the content of the work separately from the way in which it is presented in the work. But what this ultimately means, *contra* the autonomist, is that the way in which the content is presented is liable to scrutiny of its cognitive value. This is rather simply because the oversimplified presentation of content leads to limited potential for literary value in at least some cases. For instance, a story-world with an overly simplistic conception of human psychology cannot have as rich and interesting characters as one which has a complex conception of human psychology. The proposal as it stands here is of course too simple—not all works of literature aim to compel us with rich and interesting characters. The operative word here, it will turn out, is ‘aims’. My particularist approach to literary value of course means that truth-related value need only obtain sometimes for it to be a

legitimate literary value. That said, I hope that the range of my chosen case-studies indicates that the extent to which cognitive value (and the lack thereof) plays a role in literary evaluation which concedes the version of form-content inseparability I endorse is striking, provided that the reader looks for it in the right places. It will turn out, as my discussion of the expression of cognitive achievement already indicates, that the right places are highly variable across different works of literature, and these relate to the aims of the works in question.

Particularism About Literary Value

I have already made clear that the sort of cognitivism I defend comes alongside my preferred form of particularism if it is to be tenable. This, I argue, is the most tenable explanation for the seeming variability of cognitive value's being of literary value. The disagreement between Gaut (2007) and Carroll (1998a) illustrates this seeming variability and the difficulties in explaining it well, even if the disagreement is about moral cognitive value in particular. I propose that the debate can easily be reframed to be about all cognitive value that can possibly be expressed in a work of literature. This is first because moral value as characterised by Gaut and Carroll is a cognitive value—i.e., it is a truth-related value because on the view put forward by either of them, moral claims are truth-apt and at least some positive moral claims are true. Second, the scope of the debate can be broadened to be about cognitive value in general because here too we encounter the question of how we account for the fact that cognitive value as expressed in a work of literature is sometimes but not always a constituent of its literary value.

According to Carroll, not all moral cognitive achievements in a work of art are of artistic value. Gaut objects to what he calls the contextualist approach to the question, on account of his claim that contextualism makes things all too easy for the autonomist. Gaut rightly contends that if the claim is that the cognitive achievements expressed in works of literature are sometimes but not always of literary value, the autonomist might retort that because we have not given a systematic explanation as to why this is the case, he has the explanatory advantage by claiming that there are no cases where cognitive value is of literary value. Gaut's (2007: 60-64) preferred response to this objection is by appeal to *pro-tanto* principles. According to Gaut, a work of literature is always better *qua* literature *insofar* as it expresses a (moral) cognitive achievement. I extend his argument, in what follows, to apply to all cognitive achievements instantiated by works of literature.

The *pro-tanto* principle as construed here is akin to what is sometimes called reasons-weighting in meta-ethics. Where reasons-weighting in meta-ethics is proposed as a model of moral

deliberation, where there are reasons for and reasons against for performing a certain action.³⁷ E.g., a reason for me to give money to a certain charity might be that it is a worthy charity that helps people in need, whereas a reason against it is that I am low on cash this month. Depending on the extent to which I am low on cash this month, this second reason might defeat the reason for giving to charity on this model. Rational moral deliberation on the reasons-weighting approach purports to appropriately give each reason the right weight so as to come up with the right decision with regards to our deliberation. McDowell objects to the reasons-weighting model for the case of moral deliberation on the following grounds:

‘Suppose we take it that a virtuous person's judgment as to what he should do is arrived at by weighing, on the one side, some reason for acting in a way that will in fact manifest, say, courage, and, on the other side, a reason for doing something else (say a risk to life and limb, as a reason for running away), and deciding that on balance the former reason is the better. In that case, the distinction between virtue and continence will seem unintelligible. If the virtuous person allows himself to weigh from the present danger, as a reason for running away, why should we not picture the weighing as his allowing himself to feel an inclination to run away, of a strength proportional to the weight which he allows to the reason? So long as he keeps the strength of his inclinations in line with the weight which he assigns to the reasons, his actions will conform to his judgment as to where, on balance, the better reason lies; what more can we require for virtue? (Perhaps that the genuinely courageous person simply does not care about his own survival? But Aristotle is rightly anxious to avert this misconception.) The distinction becomes intelligible if we stop assuming that the virtuous person's judgment is a balancing of reasons for and against. The view of a situation which he arrives at by exercising his sensitivity is one in which some aspect of the situation is seen as constituting a reason for acting in some way; this reason is apprehended, not as outweighing or overriding any reasons for acting in other ways which would otherwise be constituted by other aspects of the situation (the present danger, say), but as silencing them. Here and now the risk to life and limb is not seen as any reason for removing himself.’ (McDowell, 1998a: 334-335).

Here McDowell discusses the main problem with the reasons-weighting model of moral deliberation as it applies to Aristotelian virtue ethics. According to this model of ethics, the virtuous agent acts rightly (and for the right reasons) in contrast with two defective agents, the continent and the incontinent. Where the continent agent takes the right course of action for the

³⁷ More recent versions of this sort of proposal can be found in Lorde and Macguire (2016). The way contemporary reasons-weighting theorists think about moral deliberation can at least in part be attributed to W.D. Ross (2002).

wrong reasons. Finally, we have the incontinent agent who cannot resist the temptation to act wrongly. We might imagine the contrast between these three kinds of agent as follows. On one hand we have the virtuous individual who refrains to steal his friend's wallet whilst house-sitting because it would never occur to him to steal from his friend. The thought never even crossed his mind. Second, we have the continent individual who has to try very hard to overcome the temptation to steal his friend's wallet. Finally, there is the incontinent agent who is tempted to steal his friend's wallet and gives into that temptation. McDowell's point here is that in order to properly distinguish between the continent and the virtuous agent, we must do away with the notion that the virtuous agent takes the temptation to steal the wallet (to move to our example) as a reason to be weighed against the reason of the immorality of stealing. Moving beyond the Aristotelian model of virtue ethics, this point is an important one for evaluation more broadly. In a word, if we cannot distinguish between a deliberative verdict which is come to for the right sort of reason from an identical one which is come to for the wrong reasons, this leads to a sort of scepticism about the relationship between the right sort of reason and the correct verdict. This, I propose, is as true of aesthetic evaluation (and more specifically of artistic appreciation) as it is of moral deliberation.

Gaut's proposal with regards to the question of the appreciation of a work of art is that the expression of a (moral) cognitive achievement always gives us a reason to positively judge the artwork, even if other reasons defeat the reason yielded by cognitive value for positively judging the artwork. As already noted, the problem with such a proposal is that it ultimately leads to a sort of scepticism about the evaluative force of the properties which are supposedly assigned weights in a *pro-tanto* model like Gaut's.³⁸ We might, on a model like Gaut's, have a work A which presents a morally commendable position in a trite manner, and in this case conclude that the work is nonetheless artistically valuable on account of the (moral) cognitive achievement it expresses. We could also have a work B, which presents an equally morally commendable position in an even more trite manner, such that the triteness with which the position is presented means that we do not ultimately deem the work to be of artistic value. Perhaps *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is like work of literature B. This might lead one to question, once again, whether work B really is better in virtue of the cognitive achievement it expresses, even if the achievement is ultimately defeated. We might ask ourselves whether explaining the value in work A in terms of the cognitive achievement it expresses rather than, say, the absence of this more

³⁸ We have the same problem in moral deliberation, hence McDowell's proposal (1998a) that defeated reasons are 'silenced' when we deliberate virtuously, and why he proposes that the applicability of moral concepts is context dependent.

offensive triteness, is truly plausible. The variability of the value of the cognitive achievement in each case—in that it was defeasible in one case and not in the other—is I think what ultimately gets us in trouble. It will turn out that such scenarios are impossible on my account of artistic evaluation.

Crucially, this problem can be extended to any positive aesthetic or artistic evaluative property in a work of art. For instance, we could have two works C and D which are elegant in a vapid sort of way,³⁹ but C is less vapid than D. In C, the vapidness is insufficiently offensive to defeat the elegance, but in D, the vapidness defeats the elegance. If elegance is defeasible in this manner by vapidness, it is not clear, yet again, whether it is the presence of elegance in C which led to the positive aesthetic verdict of the piece, rather than the (relative) absence of vapidness. More worrying is the case of D (or of B for that matter), where we ultimately cannot tell whether it is the vapidness or the elegance itself which leads to the negative aesthetic outcome. Elegance and positive evaluative aesthetic and artistic properties more generally could easily lose its explanatory role in our verdicts on these works if we explain value in this manner, especially given that properties like vapidness and elegance are not generally quantifiable in the way I have stipulated here. This leads to questions which could lead us to be sceptical of the evaluative force of elegance in our aesthetic evaluations of works of art. The argument presented in Bergqvist (2010) illustrates the difficulty I envision well. It bears noting that Bergqvist (2010) interprets Sibley (2001a and 2001b) to be saying that a work's instantiation of a positive aesthetic property—e.g., elegance—always provides us with a reason for thinking that the work of art instantiates positive aesthetic value in virtue of the possession of that positive evaluative property. She writes:

‘Suppose that *w* is harmonious, and possesses no other inherent merit-property, and that being harmonious is a *prima facie* merit. Now Sibley is committed to thinking that *w* must be valuable for being harmonious. But suppose that *w* is a piece of futurist art. Would this not reverse the polarity of the *prima facie* reason, so that *w* is actually disvaluable for its harmony? If this sounds plausible, then it means that we cannot restrict the relevant interactions to just those between merit-properties (being a futurist work is not a merit-property), and so even works which possess only one merit-property may not be suitably isolated for establishing the polarity of *prima facie* value.’ (Bergqvist, 2010:11).

The problem expressed here is rather simply that the appeal to pro-tanto principles to explain the positive value which certain attributes of a work of art instantiate brings with it the

³⁹ Let us momentarily pretend that there is such a thing.

complication that pro-tanto principles can be defeated, and this in turn creates difficulties for retaining the evaluative force of the evaluative terms which yield the pro-tanto principle to begin with. If we go back to the context of Gaut's proposal for the relationship between the expression of cognitive value and artistic value, the appeal to pro-tanto principles also obscures the evaluative role which cognitive value is supposed to play in our judgements of works of literature—considering that terms like 'enlightened', 'insightful', 'profound', or 'inspired'—or their contraries, like 'ham-fisted' or 'trite'—are evaluative terms which often denote literary value (or disvalue) of what could at least on the face of it be termed as cognitive achievement. Bergqvist's proposed solution to this problem is that we apply a particularism of the stripe offered by Dancy and his followers to the aesthetic case:

'Dancy employs the notion of 'default' to preserve the pre-theoretical distinction between, say, shoelace colour and cruelty with regard to moral relevance. There are different ways of thinking about default reasons, but for present purposes, it will be useful to think of them as reasons that do their work without any help from additional features of the context. The core idea is this: default reasons are not dependent on some further feature or features of the context; but they are dependent on the absence of defeaters. Dancy illustrates this point with an analogy of getting over a stile:

"I can get over it without your help, but not if you get in the way. Absence of impediment is not presence of necessary help; it enables, permits me to get over the stile, but does no more than that. If you don't get in my way, I can get over it all by myself."

Transposed to the present context, consider once again the aesthetic value contribution of harmony. If a work's being harmonious is to constitute a default reason for the work being valuable, then no help is needed from any of the work's other qualities, and we would expect the justification of a positive judgement to stop with 'because it is harmonious'. If, on the other hand, we were to think that a work's being harmonious is *not* a default reason, then help would be needed for the harmony to make a positive contribution from the work's other qualities. If harmony is a default reason, then it is so independently of normal or privileged conditions, but rather in virtue of the presence of harmony itself. Note that this is not the same as Sibley's notion of *inherence*, since the Dancyan holist does not want to say that harmony is valuable independently of the context, but rather that harmony is such that it requires no help in order to contribute positive value. Of course *generic* enablers are required, the harmony must exist in a complex whole, but there need not be any *specific* additional property present for the harmony to contribute positively. This metaphysical account of

defaults provides us with a way of maintaining a non-flat aesthetic landscape in a way that upholds the central idea behind Sibley's own view, namely that 'because it is graceful' counts as an appropriate justification of a positive judgement in a way that 'because it is garish' does not. So even if the garishness of Pedro Almodóvar's films contributes positive value, we cannot end our justification with 'because they are garish'. (Bergqvist, 2010: 11).

Bergqvist's proposal is that aesthetic concepts with positive evaluative force provide us with 'default' reasons for positively judging a work of art, such that when explaining why a certain work is good, saying that it is profound or elegant will provide us with sufficient reason for judging it to be so. The converse would be the case for aesthetic concepts with negative evaluative force such as garish. This echoes Gaut's *pro-tanto* principle explanation in that both explanations propose that certain evaluative properties are default explanations, which, unhindered, contribute to the overall aesthetic quality of the work in question. The particularist flavour of this response arises from the question of what happens in cases where the evaluative force of the property in question does not do what it does by default—such as in the scenario where the garishness of an Almodóvar film counting in favour of its calibre *qua* work of art—or moral cognitive achievements in other places.

The issue here is resolved according to the particularist of this stripe by contending that a work's elegance does give us a sufficient reason for explaining a work's calibre *qua* work of art, whereas its garishness does not. This, the particularist of this sort argues, permits us to retain the evaluative force behind different aesthetic properties and still allow for variable verdicts of the quality of works of art which instantiate a same specific aesthetic property. Such a response, I think, leaves us with another instance of intolerable scepticism about the evaluative force of aesthetic properties. For one, it is not clear why such an asymmetry between positive and negative evaluative aesthetic concepts should be so easily granted. We have already seen in the cases with cognitive achievement and elegance, that it is difficult, once aesthetic properties are defeasible, to explain our positive verdicts in terms of—say—the presence of elegance rather than the (relative) absence of vapidness, or, more worryingly, our negative verdicts in terms of the presence of vapidness rather than the presence of elegance. Recall that I stipulated that both C and D are equally elegant.

Once again, the explanatory burden falls on the proponent of the claim that aesthetic evaluative properties are defeasible, and the explanation offered here does not go beyond 'it depends on the nature of the context', leaving the position open to attack from the autonomist at best and the sceptic at worst. This yields a case analogous to Gaut's objection against contextualism about

cognitive moral value counting in favour of a work of art's calibre in that the sceptic can simply respond that there are no contexts where such values count in a work's favour. In this case, the scepticism is more global because it applies to the evaluative force of aesthetic properties *in general*.

Not all is lost, however. If I am right, McDowell's (1998a and 1998b) proposal that we can rather simply remedy this problem by preserving the tie between evaluative concepts and their evaluative force serves us well here. According to McDowell, what is liable to context-dependence is not as such our evaluative judgement of a given evaluative property as it obtains across contexts. E.g., it is not, according to McDowell, that our evaluative judgement of garishness varies as it obtains in different contexts. Rather, garishness only obtains when it the use of colour, or whatever, in an artwork leads us to judge the work in question negatively. On this model, the attribution of garishness to an artwork that is the negative evaluative verdict of that artwork.

My reader might at present query the plausibility of such a claim. In what follows I propose it is an awful lot more plausible than it first appears. The judgement—that say, Almodóvar films are garish—is not fine-grained enough to get the case against an account like mine going. Whilst I concede that, for example, the colours used in the set-design of Almodóvar's *Volver* are bright and therefore could be conceived of as garish, the judgement that this makes the film in its entirety garish is misplaced. A more desirable diagnosis would detail that the set-design in the context of what the film aims to indicate about its characters and setting is effective, and thus appropriate, and therefore ultimately not garish, given that garishness suggests a certain out-of-placeness. Likewise, symmetry, or whatever might pass as harmonious in a futurist work of art, is not really harmonious—it clashes with what we expect the artist to do—in such a manner that if it is successful, it is not harmonious at all because it clashes with expectations, and if unsuccessful it is jejune rather than harmonious because once again, the artist is clashing rather than harmonising. Moreover, 'harmonious' implies a sort of artistic success whereas the futurist in the second scenario has failed. The particularism I defend here is a particularism about the obtainability of these properties across the contexts of different works of literature, though I suspect the claim could easily be extended to other classes of artworks.

My preferred particularism about works of literature also goes *contra* Sibley's (as well as Bergqvist's) conception of aesthetic evaluation, which separates the attribution of evaluative concepts to artworks from final verdicts as to whether the works are good or bad. He writes:

‘Some aesthetic judgements employ a characteristically aesthetic term (‘gracefill’ [sic], ‘balanced’, ‘gaudy’) while others do not (‘it’s not pale enough’, ‘there are too many characters*’); I am concerned with both sorts. About a third and much discussed class of judgements, however, I have nothing to say in this paper. These are the purely evaluative judgements; whether things are aesthetically good or bad, excellent or mediocre, superior to others or inferior, and so on. Such judgements I shall call verdicts. Nor shall I raise any other questions about evaluation; about how verdicts are made or supported, or whether the judgements I am dealing with carry evaluative implications.’ (Sibley, 2001b: 33-34).

In this passage, Sibley clearly indicates a preference for separating evaluative concepts from their evaluative force by separating the use of the evaluative concept from the verdict which would ensue from detecting it. This goes precisely against the position I argue for here, since the central point is that my particularism does not separate the evaluative concept from the verdict. In this project, then, I will be investigating contexts where cognitive achievements obtain, and others where they do not (despite perhaps appearing to do so) and explain how my particularistic diagnoses of these cases help explain how cognitive achievement really obtains in works of literature and consequently, how it truly constitutes literary value.

The final question I address in this chapter is how this particularism provides us with a more robust case for cognitive literary value. The answer to this question is in some way pre-empted by some autonomist complaints against their cognitivist opponents. Let us go back to the autonomist’s beloved *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The novel is famously trite, but, if the cognitivist as the autonomist conceives of her is correct, it must instantiate literary value of the highest sort, since the novel furnished large swathes of the population with an education on the humanity and worthiness of the then enslaved African American population.

One of the proposals of this thesis is that the applicability of the terms associated with literary cognitive value—such as ‘insightful’, ‘challenging’, ‘lucid’, and so forth—is dependent on the context yielded by the work of literature in question. It is insufficient (and, as we shall see unnecessary) for the sort of cognitive achievement I have in mind here for a work to teach its audience something about the world. Fairy-tales aimed at children often teach their audience some platitude about the world, such as ‘don’t take apples (or any other foodstuffs) from strangers’. This, whilst educative for a certain sector of the population, does not count as a cognitive achievement of the sort I describe. The lesson of the world the fairy-tale provides us with relies on unimaginative stereotypes of the way the world is—e.g., it has been suggested that witches in fairy-tales like Hansel and Gretel arise from the misogyny of the time as well as the

anti-Semitic blood libels of Medieval Europe—⁴⁰ and ultimately the truth with which it furnishes us is more a truism than an insight about the world. None of this is to say of course, that Grimm Brothers type fairy-tales are devoid of literary value, there might even be cognitive value, but it will not be found in the way in which the story-worlds are designed. A more plausible cognitive achievement instantiated by these tales might be in giving us insights into how older European generations imagined certain elements of the world to be like, in is expressing an understanding of this older European imagination. This cognitive achievement, if it is of literary value, is of a very different sort to the first kind of cognitive value I discussed in relation to these stories.

To return to the autonomist's beloved putative counterexample, if *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is really so trite as the autonomist says, what the autonomist wants to say is the cognitive achievement associated with a novel like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a depiction of two-dimensional characters making a ham-fisted case for a desirable conclusion. If this diagnosis is correct, then we could not correctly attribute to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the sort of literary evaluative concept—e.g., 'insightful', 'lucid', 'challenging' and so forth, which I have proposed is tied to cognitive achievement in literature.⁴¹ There would therefore be no counter-example for the autonomist to appeal to, and this is thanks to the thesis of form-content inseparability, which tells us that we cannot scrutinise the lessons in African American humanity which the novel might offer us in isolation from the way in which African Americans are presented in the novel.

Where I am Now

In this Chapter, I have outlined the structure of my case for cognitivism about works of literature. I have distinguished my cognitivism from others on the current philosophical market first by de-emphasising moral cognitive achievement in works of literature and by offering my own explanation of the apparent variability of literary value of cognitive achievements in works of literature.

I argued in favour of this explanation by proposing that a tenable case for cognitivism must pay special attention to the question of *when* the apparent expression of a cognitive achievement is a constituent of a work's literary value. The expression of cognitive achievement that interests us here, which has associated with it the applicability of evaluative terms like 'insightful', 'provocative', or 'profound' is always constituent of a work's literary value. Conversely, the

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Owens (2014).

⁴¹ I for one think this verdict might be a little harsh, but the point here is not so much about whether this verdict is appropriate for this particular novel, but merely to demonstrate that such a verdict is possible for works of literature which contain elements of didactic value which are not suitably denominated as complex, profound, and so on and thus do not constitute what I have named here a cognitive achievement in a work of literature.

applicability of evaluative terms like ‘ham-fisted’ or ‘trite’ is always constituent to a work’s literary disvalue. *Contra* most other cognitivists and their autonomist opponents, my particularism holds that not all works which present us with the sort of opportunity instantiated by this sort of cognitive achievement, and this is often because the means employed to yield the desired conclusion is trite or ham-fisted and thus not much of an achievement. Ultimately, my answer to the question of whether truth-related value or cognitive achievement contributes to literary value is that it always does. We must, however, be very cautious in our attribution of cognitive achievement or truth-related value to works of literature.

A defence of cognitive achievement as a truth-related literary value is for naught without a compelling account of how truth obtains in fictional works of literature. As such, the next question we must answer is how works of literature express truths *simpliciter*, in order to see how this impacts upon a work’s literary value. The first task I undertake in Chapter 2 and the second in Chapter 3—with particular attention in Chapter 3 to how the truth *simpliciter* impacts upon what I call factual story-world building and how factual story-world building can change a work’s literary calibre. Chapter 4 is devoted to moving beyond cognitive achievement associated with the truth *simpliciter* and on to the sorts of cognitive achievement associated with bringing forth a particularly illuminating, challenging, or suitably cognitively stimulating understanding of the applicability of a given concept in a work of literature.

Chapter 2

Truth and Fiction

The Objection

An important objection to a cognitivist account of literary value stems from the claim that works of fiction cannot really contain claims that are true of the actual world. The distinction between fact and fiction is difficult to pin down in part because fiction can denote both a kind of claim, i.e., a claim about a fictional story-world—as well as to the *genre* of the linguistic artefact (written down or otherwise) that concerns itself with describing these story-worlds and their happenings. The distinction I am trying to pick out here between the different uses of ‘fiction’ is akin to the way in which we use ‘fact’ and ‘non-fiction’.

The former we define as a true statement about the world, and the latter as a *genre* of works of the written word which concerns itself with describing the actual world or a description of the actual world as it really is. Facts, being true claims about the world, are precisely the sort of thing one hopes a work of non-fiction contains in abundance. Works of fiction, on the other hand, needn’t include any facts about the actual world. Moreover, for this reason fact and fiction and their corresponding *genres* are often construed as incompatible with one another, such that there couldn’t be such a thing as a work of fiction with a factual claim. This construal appears to fit our practices surrounding claims of each kind within their corresponding *genres*.

For instance, it is not unusual, when, say, scrutinising a news-story one has happened upon, to ask whether an attention-grabbing headline corresponding to the news-story is factual—i.e., true and thereby dependent on how the world really is—or fictional—which in the context of this particular comparison amounts to a fabrication of some sort. And in this case, the claim that the headline is fictional is plausibly incompatible with its being factual. Here, once again, we must distinguish between a claim’s fictional status and the fictional status of the *genre* to which the work belongs.

That a claim within a work cannot be both fictional and factual is more straightforwardly plausible than the claim that a work of fiction or non-fiction might not contain fictional or factual claims respectively. We might, in defence of the latter claim, propose that a work of non-fiction is worse for containing fictional claims and a work of fiction is neither better nor worse for containing factual claims. This line of defence will not quite cut it, however. A work of non-fiction might contain a fictional thought-exercise to illustrate a point and be better for it—and a

work of fiction, or so I shall argue, can be better for containing true claims.⁴² Moreover, the claim that a given claim's being fictional precludes it from being true is not as easily secured as it seems to be initially. For one, what precludes a claim from being true is its falsehood, and falsehood is, at least on the face of it, not a necessary condition for a claim to be fictional. An important upshot to the argument I pursue here is indeed that the distinction between even fictional and non-fictional claims is not as clear-cut as the observations discussed above would imply.

A way of distinguishing fact from fiction which accommodates the intuitions behind the observations discussed above is Walton's proposal—which we discussed in Chapter 1. Walton points out that the difference between works of fiction and non-fiction does not arise because works of fiction *cannot* express facts about the actual world. Rather, it arises because works of fiction needn't express facts about the actual world.

The truth value of a proposition in a work of the written word does not tell us whether the work within which it is encoded is fictional or not. Telling a fictional story (whether orally or in writing) is a stipulative act. It stipulates the way the story-world (the world in which the contents of the fictional story take place) is. The question remains open as to whether the way the story-world is coincides also with the way the actual world is, and thus whether the work encodes propositions that are also true of the actual world. On the other hand, reporting on facts is not stipulative in this way—their status as facts of course depends on the world's being the way the statement tells us it is. The bread and butter of the non-fictional author is to persuade us that the world is the way he says it is, and this, it will turn out, will be the crucial distinction between works of fiction and works of non-fiction for the purposes of securing the form of cognitivism about literary value I am after. The important question for Chapters 2 and 3, it will turn out, will not be as to a work of fiction's ability to express true propositions—though I do argue for this claim here—but rather, first how these true propositions and other expressions of understanding constitute a work's literary value, and second how well-placed these works are to potentially demonstrate understanding through the expression of true propositions.

Setting these two central questions momentarily to one side—one cannot, after all, go about answering these questions before dealing with the more foundational problem of truth and fiction—pressing objections to the important claim that works of fiction can express true

⁴² I say 'can be' because an essential element of my cognitivist account of literary value is of course that this claim only applies to some specific cases which I aim to flesh out in this chapter.

propositions remain. The aim at present is to respond to these objections, and in order to do so, we must first understand what motivates them.

These objections stem from the question of the extent to which the semantics of fictional storytelling resembles the semantics of ordinary discourse. A question of particular concern here is whether the sentences which make up works of fiction can refer to the actual individuals, places, and objects they name in the way these names refer in ordinary discourse. This particular question is especially pressing to our present enquiry because reference is central any plausible account of truth, regardless of what one's preferred theory of truth happens to be.⁴³ The conception of truth espoused here is largely a pre-theoretical one—a statement is true only if it tells us something about the way the world is—without therein committing myself to a correspondence theory of truth. The conception of truth employed here is, as I say, *largely* pre-theoretical. My discussion pre-supposes, for example, that reference, in virtue of naming the thing about which a given statement is made, is what determines the truth-conditions of a given statement. I also pre-suppose that the paradigmatic truth-bearers are propositions, without therein committing myself to a particular metaphysical conception of propositions. Implicit in the view I espouse here is the claim that statements or sentences are truth-apt insofar as they express propositions. Another implicit commitment here is that the interpretability of a given sentence relies upon there being ostensible truth-conditions associated with the sentence.⁴⁴

Where we understand interpretability as the modest enterprise of extracting sense and force from sentences. The question of reference in works of fiction is a pressing one rather simply because in order for a statement to tell us something as to how the world is, it must pick out the thing in the world about which the statement is. Reference acts as a tether between statement and world in this manner, and in doing so determine the truth-conditions of the statements which contain them. Without truth-conditions, a statement cannot be truth-apt, and is rendered uninterpretable.

The charge that names in sentences in works of fiction do not refer is most naturally made of the names of fictional names—e.g., 'Mordor' or 'Mickey Mouse'— at least on the face of it there is nothing in the world for these names to pick out.⁴⁵ Perhaps more surprisingly, the charge has

⁴³ I do not here adhere to a particular theory of truth.

⁴⁴ By the interpretability of a sentence I mean the possibility of extracting sense and force (i.e., meaning) from that sentence rather than some higher-order enterprise of literary interpretation. See Davidson (1973) and McDowell (1998c). Note that Davidson's claim for the interpretability of a sentence being tied down to its truth conditions can and should be taken independently from his claim that this amounts to a correspondence theory of truth (he later denies this). See also Davidson (1990).

⁴⁵ The question of how to deal with fictional names is both fascinating and puzzling. See Cartwright (1963) for a useful discussion of the difficulties associated with fictional names and reference.

also been made of extra-fictional names—i.e., the names of actual world individuals and places as they occur in fictions, like ‘Paris’ or ‘Napoleon’ as they appear in a novel like *War and Peace*. The charge that not even extra-fictional names in works of fiction can pick out anything in the actual world is a serious one against my account of cognitivism because it would suggest that there is no such thing as a true claim in works of literature. Proponents of this view generally think that a name like ‘London’ as it appears in a work of fiction does not pick out the Capital of England, but rather operates as a stand-in for the definite description of ‘London’ as it appears in the novel.⁴⁶ The sentences containing ‘London’ in a work of fiction would thereby be truth-apt—‘London’ picks out the aforementioned description—but would not denote actual London. This account of extra-fictional names is argued for by appeal to an additional claim—namely that the context under which the extra-fictional names occur is an opaque one, which in turn does not allow for the substitutions of the extra-fictional names for co-referential terms *salva veritate* in the way the name would allow in a transparent context in ordinary discourse. E.g., in a transparent context in ordinary conversation, I could substitute ‘London’ for ‘the city where Boris Johnson lives’—it would, however, be odd at best and inconsistent with the fiction at worst to substitute ‘London’ as it occurs in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* with the description ‘the city where Boris Johnson lives’. Or so the claim goes.

This line of argument, if correct, would sever ties between fictional and actual London in such a way that it would be impossible for a work of fiction that names London to make a true claim about actual London. Because most paradigmatic works of literature are fictional, such a result would be devastating to my cognitivism, which cites the statement of facts as a potential avenue for the expression of cognitive achievement. Another charge against this characterisation of the expression of cognitive achievement which is germane to our present discussion stems from the fact that works of fiction depict story-worlds rather than the actual world. Thinking along these lines, one might be tempted to conclude that stipulating a story-world which resembles the actual world makes for verisimilitude rather than truth, and that thus the expression of true statements must be irrelevant to the question of literary value.⁴⁷

The present order of business is to respond to each of these charges in turn. I first turn my attention to the question of reference, first as pertains to extra-fictional names. I argue that extra-fictional names do indeed pick out their actual world referents unless otherwise stipulated in the fiction. However, the work of fiction does not tend to yield a context such that the extra-

⁴⁶ See Lamarque and Olsen (1993). Lamarque (2020) too makes a point to this effect.

⁴⁷ Lamarque and Olsen (1993) make this point.

fictional name can be substituted by the unrestricted range of descriptions one might attribute to the referent in transparent contexts in ordinary discourse. This, I argue, is not inconsistent with the extra-fictional names' picking out their actual world referents. I then turn my attention to the question of fictional names indicate that there are at least two respectable accounts of fictional names which accommodate the claim that sentences in works of fiction are truth-apt and thus in certain contexts can be construed as true.

Crucial to my argument will be the distinction between contexts under which the telling of fictional stories and the discussion of their contents takes place. I will, throughout the course of my argument, motivate the distinction between two kinds of context which arise in the telling of fictional stories, their re-telling, and the discussion of the fiction either *qua* work or socio-historical artefact or *qua* series of fictional happenings in such a way that does not constitute a play-by-play re-telling. The first kind of context is the fictional—which amounts to the telling of the story such that the narrator is at liberty to stipulate the way the story-world is. The second kind of context is meta-fictional. This kind of context can amount either to the re-telling of the fictional story, such that the narrator is not at liberty to stipulate the way the story-world is, but rather must stay faithful to the stipulations made in the original telling of the story, reports of the way the fictional story-world is, or discussion of the context of the fiction *qua* literary or historical artefact.

I argue here that the way in which extra-fictional names refer depends upon the context within which they are embedded. Such that there are contexts where the restrictions on the substitutivity of extra-fictional names as placed by the story-world stipulations do not apply, even though we are speaking of the extra-fictional name in relation to the work in question. This, if correct, suggests that extra-fictional names refer to their actual worldly referents and thus that sentences in works of fiction can say something true of the world. I then observe that the making of true statements is only one of the ways in which cognitive value in works of literature depends on the way the world really is. This places me in good stead to turn to the question of story-world-building in works of fiction in Chapter 3, where I pursue the conclusion that successful story-world-building often depends upon the way the actual world is, in such a way that it can supply the expression of understanding of a given subject-matter and enhance the potential for literary value in that work. This second form of expression of cognitive achievement pertains to a work's verisimilitude rather than its statement of truths, but my argument, if correct, will demonstrate that verisimilitude in a work of literature is not as independent of truth as the likes of Lamarque and Olsen (1993) might suggest.

Some Clarification on Names in Fictional Discourse

First things first. In order to proceed with a fruitful discussion of fictional and meta-fictional contexts, the workings of fictional and extra-fictional names in these contexts, and the relationship between story-world building and actual world truth, certain points on the debate of the nature of names in ordinary semantics must be clarified, as well as a further fleshing out of what here will be called fictional discourse. Let us begin with the debate on names as it occurs outside the context of fictional and extra-fictional names.

An important question in the semantics of ordinary discourse is how to make sense of the meaning of names. There are, broadly speaking, two major approaches to this question—the descriptivist and the causal. The first account of names, against which Kripke (1981) argues, is the descriptivist account of names. The account holds, broadly, that a name—say, ‘Aristotle’—is a stand-in for whatever definite descriptions the individual name ‘Aristotle’ happens to satisfy. For instance, ‘the great philosopher who was Alexander’s teacher’, ‘the author of *De Anima*’, or ‘the famous philosopher who is also Nicomachus’s son’. Kripke argues that the problem with such an approach, at least insofar as ordinary (as in not fictional) discourse is concerned is that such an approach to names fails to account for their rigidity. For instance, having ‘Aristotle’ as a stand-in for ‘the great philosopher who was also Alexander the Great’s teacher’ yields the perturbing result that the referent of ‘Aristotle’ could not have done other than to satisfy that definite description. This is patently false, for it is possible (though perhaps unlikely) that Aristotle did not take to philosophy or pedagogy at all. Aristotle might have satisfied the definite description ‘the Stagiran physician who was Nicomachus’s son and who fell into oblivion’, among others. In contrast, in our counterfactual talk about Aristotle, the name ‘Aristotle’ rigidly designates Aristotle, even where we discuss the possibility of Aristotle’s having gone by another name. This is because in actuality, Aristotle’s name is Aristotle and we employ his actual name to pick him out even in counterfactual situations where his name is not Aristotle.⁴⁸ This argument, or a more detailed version thereof, is no doubt compelling for names as they occur in ordinary discourse. This descriptivist account is, as we shall see, far more tempting for the question of fictional names.

This second major approach to names hinted at above is the Millian or causal approach, championed by e.g., Kripke (1981). The account conceives of names as rigid designators and thereby has it that a name like ‘Aristotle’ means, in the case of ‘Aristotle’, whatever individual happens to have been given the name ‘Aristotle’—regardless of whether he takes to philosophy

⁴⁸ See Lecture 1 in Kripke (1981). Especially his discussion on ‘Nixon’ in 51-53.

and pens *De Anima*—or even if the individual in question had failed to be called Aristotle. The account is no doubt appealing when it comes to actual individuals like Aristotle or Napoleon but poses the causal theorist with a seemingly insurmountable difficulty when it comes to accounting for fictional names—there is no such actual individual for names like ‘Harry Potter’ to pick out. One of what I shall call the respectable accounts of fictional names we will discuss further on—Predelli (2020)—argues after Kripke (2013) that this initial objection is not devastating for a causal account of fictional names. It bears noting that the question of whether fictional names really do operate in this manner is separate from the question of whether we should make-believe, unless otherwise stipulated in the fiction, that the causal semantic theory of names is true in the story-world in question, and thus also independent from the related question of whether we are to make-believe, when we engage with a story in a fictional context, that the names do pick out an individual rather than a definite description in the way the causal theory says it would in the actual world. Along these lines, we might also choose to distinguish, following Kripke (2013), between what a name like ‘Harry Potter’ means in a purely fictional context and in a meta-fictional context where we are able to pick out the cultural construct that is the fictional character bearing the name of Harry Potter.⁴⁹

One of the difficulties posed by the amalgamation of the apparent untenability of a causal account for fictional names and the apparent untenability of descriptivism for the names of actual individuals, is that it could leave us with a fragmentary account of names, where we might simultaneously prefer a causal account of names of actual things, and a descriptivist account of names as they arise in fiction.⁵⁰ One way to side-step this problem which relates to one potential explanation of fictional discourse can be found in Lewis’s (1978) account of fictional discourse. Very broadly construed, we can think of fictional discourse—i.e., discourse which occurs within what I have called a fictional context—as inviting us to make-believe the propositions stated as actual fact that which the narration of the story stipulates as true of the story-world.⁵¹ For Lewis, fictional discourse occurs within an operator which determines that the sentences in the work of fiction are being stipulated as true *in the fiction* (i.e., in the story-world) rather than in the actual world.

⁴⁹ See the discussion on ‘Moloch’ and ‘Hamlet’ in Kripke (2013; 81-82).

⁵⁰ As we shall see, the question of where extra-fictional names would fit in such an account is by no means settled at this stage.

⁵¹ Not much turns for me on whether we choose to think of engagement with the propositions which describe the story-world and its happenings in a work of fiction as make-belief, after Walton (1990) or as f-belief, after Stock (2017). What matters to my account is what both these accounts of engagement with fiction have in common. Namely that the object of the f-beliefs or make-beliefs is, in the case of works of fiction, the world (i.e., the story-world) where the happenings and the individuals described in the work of fiction are supposed to reside rather than the actual world.

The Lewisian fictional operator is helpful because it allows us to make sense of the fact that one can make reports on works of fiction which are true—e.g., ‘in the fiction *Emma*, it is true that Emma Woodhouse is handsome, clever, and rich and lives in Surrey’—without therein committing oneself to the claim that the referent of ‘Emma Woodhouse’ actually lived in Surrey. In what follows, I follow Lewis in taking both fictional and meta-fictional discourse to be embedded in a similar operator—such that in the fictional context where *Emma* is narrated, the object of the stipulations embedded in the novel’s narration is the story-world where *Emma* takes place, and in the meta-fictional context where I answer true or false questions for my reading comprehension test, my assertion that it is true that Emma lives in Surrey and is handsome, clever, and rich can be marked as correct without therein committing ourselves to an actual Emma. *Contra* Lewis, however, I will not in saying this, commit myself to the claim that the operator ‘in the fiction’ takes us to a set of possible worlds where the contents to the story are told as known fact.⁵² I propose that his counterfactual modelling of fictional stories proves undesirable because of the consequences it yields for fictional names and for the nature of fictional worlds. I now address each of these points in turn.

According to Lewis, names, in fictional as well as in ordinary discourse, pick out individuals across possible worlds. For instance, ‘Celia’ picks me out in the actual world—which according to Lewis’s modal realism is one of many (indexically actualised) possible worlds—and my counterparts in other non-actual possible worlds where there is such a counterpart. Names, then, on the Lewisian account operate as an intensional function that pick out the relevant individuals across possible worlds. This account of names, Lewis argues, can be extended to fictional names. Such that ‘Harry Potter’ picks out nobody in the actual world but picks out actual individuals in the possible worlds where the happenings detailed in Rowling’s novels take place. A point in favour of Lewis’s proposal is of course that it promises to unify our accounts of names in both fictional and ordinary contexts. There are, nonetheless, two reasons to tread with caution insofar as this proposal is concerned.

⁵² I say ‘narration’ rather than ‘narrator’ because if a narrator in a fiction is unreliable, this is worked into the narration of the story. Were one to follow Lewis, the set of possible worlds one takes into consideration in modelling a particular work of fiction will depend upon which of Lewis’s analyses one finds more plausible. If one were to go with Analysis 1, one would take into consideration the worlds where the story is told as known fact and most closely resemble our own—this has the unappealing result that we might have to take things like recently discovered scientific facts as true in story-worlds corresponding to works of fiction pre-dating this discovery. If one goes with Analysis 2, then one takes into consideration the worlds where the story is told as known fact and where the community beliefs correspond with those of the work of fiction’s community of origin. As Stock (2017) points out, both analyses pose the additional difficulty that they place a disproportionate amount of weight on our practices surrounding the engagement with fictions with the answering of what Walton (1990) calls silly questions, as we shall see. See Lewis (1978: 42-45) and Stock (2017: 54-58).

An initial concern with such an account pertains to the truism that fictional names are fictional. As Kripke points out with regards to unicorns, part of what it is to be a unicorn according to the meaning of ‘unicorn’ is to be a fantastical creature.⁵³ This means that if we discovered indubitable archaeological evidence of the existence one-horned horses and that these horses had all the other properties which we would attribute to unicorns according to our legends about them, these one-horned horses would not be unicorns because what we mean when we say ‘unicorn’ is the fantastical creature. Likewise, part of what it is to be Harry Potter is to be fictional. Any Potter counterpart we might pick out in a possible world would not be Harry Potter because one cannot be picked out by the name ‘Harry Potter’ (as used by Rowling *et al.*) unless one is fictional and if one is fictional, then one cannot be picked out in a possible world. This argument of Kripke’s compels me to look elsewhere for an account of fictional names and fictional discourse.

According to me, a tenable account of fictional names and fictional discourse must respect the fact that fictional names are fictional and that the story-worlds where we pretend these fictional characters reside are incomplete. I am also compelled not to import bespoke semantical rules for fictional discourse unless it proves impossible to account for it without such semantical machinery. An aim of this chapter is to argue that no such machinery is necessary. The approach I adopt here, then, is pragmatic rather than semantic. I take it that fictional discourse is at its core discourse of the sort that invites its audience to make-believe the stipulations made by the narration at hand of a story-world corresponding to these stipulations. Because the aim of the present project is to defend cognitivism about literary value rather than to create a new account of fictional discourse, the task in the present chapter is not to offer a fully fleshed account of fictional discourse—a herculean task in its own right—but rather to indicate how one might go about pursuing an account of fictional discourse that is independently tenable and is able to accommodate the sort of cognitivism I defend here.

Now to the second point which according to me counts against the Lewisian account. By definition, the Lewisian possible world is complete. It must, in other words, have truth values set for all propositions in order to be a possible world. It is, on the other hand, not clear whether story-worlds must have truth-values set for all propositions. It is unlikely, for example, that there would be a fact of the matter as to whether Tess in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* has a mole on her left

⁵³ It is worth noting that there is a degree to which Lewis does acknowledge this point. He clarifies that a name like ‘Sherlock Holmes’ should not pick out an individual in the actual world, and any instance of an unbeknownst great Victorian detective by the name of Sherlock Holmes and so on in actuality would not get picked out by the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ as we use it to denote the fictional character—see Lewis (1978:39). My point here is that Lewis’s claim that the name can pick out non-actualised *possibilia* goes against the spirit of the Kripkean objection, given the stipulation that the character is fictional.

elbow. For the story-world of *Tess* to be a possible world, however, a truth-value to the proposition that Tess has a mole on her left elbow must be set. Lewis does provide us with a candidate solution to this problem through his various analyses of fictional discourse. Crucially, he proposes that we determine truth in fiction by employing *sets* of possible worlds where the story in question is told as known fact. It will be true in all possible worlds where the happenings of *Tess* are told as known fact, for example, that Alec fathers Tess's illegitimate child because this is a proposition that is stipulated as true of any story-world that corresponds to this story. On the other hand, because the fact of whether Tess has a mole on her left elbow is undetermined in the stipulations set out by the novel, the set of worlds that correspond to the story-world in *Tess* will include both worlds where she does and does not have a mole on her left elbow.

There are, nonetheless, according to the Lewisian picture, facts of the matter in a work of fiction which had best been left unsettled. Whilst the question of whether Tess has a mole on her left elbow might vary in the set of possible worlds we might deem relevant to the determination of truth in the fiction of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the question of whether $E=mc^2$ in this story-world is fixed at the same truth-value in all the worlds included in the set of possible worlds we take as relevant to the determination of truth in that particular fiction. Lewis offers us two alternative analyses for determining how to settle this particular question. Analysis 1 would have us only consider the possible worlds where the story of *Tess* is told as known fact which are closest to the actual world. This would determine that in all the possible worlds which are relevant for the determination of truth in this fiction, the proposition that $E=mc^2$ is true.⁵⁴ On the other hand, we might choose to determine the fact of the matter in this fiction by way of Analysis 2, which tells us that the set of worlds relevant to the determination of what is true in the fiction of *Tess* is the worlds which match what was widely believed in the novel's community of origin (Lewis, 1978: 45). Given that this particular community of origin did not have access to this particular proposition, it would be set at false across the set of relevant possible worlds for the determination of truth in this fiction. The question remains as to why these two options are bad ones. I contend that it is because these options do not capture the way in which we generally engage with works of fiction.

As Stock (2017: 52-58) argues, setting a truth value for a proposition of the stripe of $E=mc^2$ for a novel like *Tess* at all is inappropriate, given the nature of our engagement with a work of fiction of this sort. Aiming to settle the fact of the matter places disproportionate weight on this question and thus does not capture what the competent reader would do when imagining the

⁵⁴ See Lewis (1978: 42).

relevant story-world. To use a different, but related example of Stock's, let us consider Wodehouse's Jeeves novels. It is not explicitly stipulated in these novels that the excessive consumption of alcohol leads to health complications. Nothing, nonetheless, is stipulated to the contrary of this assertion. It follows from both of Lewis's analyses, then, that this fact is true in the Jeeves universes—the claim was believed in the novels' community of origin and it is true in the set of possible worlds where the stories are told as known fact closest to our own. Imagining that this proposition is true in the Jeeves story-world, however, would not be in line with the tone of the novels. For one, the cheery tone of the novels suggests that we are not supposed to imagine that Bertie Wooster is likely doomed to a middle-age of ill-health due to the complications associated with the amount of alcohol it is stipulated that he consumes. Lewis's analyses tell us otherwise.

Moreover, as Stock points out, there are genre-specific implications of the way a given story-world is which are not captured in Lewis's two analyses. Lewis himself brings out one straightforward case: it is not clear what to do with the question as to whether a dragon in a work of fiction breathes fire if this is not specifically stipulated in the fiction. Clearly the set of worlds closest to our own have no dragons, and the set of worlds which traces the beliefs of the community of origin may also have no dragons in them (Lewis, 1978: 45). It is thereby difficult, on either of these counterfactual models, to determine whether it is the case in this fiction that the dragon in question breathes fire. In this vein, there is a more pressing case set out by Stock:

‘A different kind of implied fictional truths unaccounted for on the counterfactual [Lewisian] model is those fictional truths that follow as a result of understanding symbolism. As is frequently noted (Walton 1990: 165; Lamarque 1990a: 336; Levinstein 2007: 68–9) use of symbols can be a means of generating implied fictional truth in a text. We have already seen one example of this in the passage from *Jane Eyre* quoted earlier, describing the famous red room in which she was locked as a child (Brontë 1966: 45). Critics have argued that it is important to understand, as a fictional truth for this text, the psychological effect upon Jane of losing a mother in early life (Rich 1973). This is indicated by a number of symbolic objects included by Brontë in the text, not least the famous womblike red room. But on Lewis's view, the significance of the red room in generating fictional truths about Jane cannot be accounted for, as in a world in which *Jane Eyre* was ‘told as known fact’, no (collectively believed) facts about Jane's motherless state and its strong psychological effect on her would follow from the fact of Jane's being locked in such a room as the red room, no matter how womblike it seemed. For a reader to grasp symbolic meaning, here too she must relate to the text other than simply as if told as known fact.’ (Stock, 2017: 53).

Regardless of whether we find this particular reading of the red room in *Jane Eyre* plausible, the fact literary works of fiction are such that these readings are possible—i.e., it is possible that the way the fictional world is supposed to foreshadow events not yet narrated or to tell us of past events that have occurred off-stage, as it were—motivates the point that story-worlds often do not resemble the actual world in the way Lewis’s analyses requires us to imagine they do. Such considerations drive me to conceive of story-worlds as different to the actual world in that they are incomplete and are not necessarily like the actual world in their workings—often in works of fiction much less is coincidental than in the actual world. The next question, then, is how we go about accounting for fictional discourse in such a way that honours the observations remarked upon here.

Extra-Fictional Names in Context

One question we must ask ourselves is which semantic markers set a fictional context aside from other contexts, if any. The semantic markers of a fictional context might warrant a bespoke treatment of both fictional and extra-fictional names as they occur in fiction. Moreover, and more to the purposes of this project more generally construed, the semantic characteristics of fictional contexts and their resemblance to the semantic characteristics of the contexts of ordinary discourse determines the extent to which truth is a legitimate dimension of evaluation for works of literature that are paradigmatically fictional. The extent to which the question of the semantics of fiction interests me here is insofar as it impacts upon the question of truth as a dimension of literary evaluation. If sentences in works of fiction cannot encode propositions, then the idea of a truth-related literary value becomes absurd. If the propositions they encode cannot refer to elements of the actual world, then talk of truth and literary value becomes strange at best. My aim here is to indicate an independently plausible manner of dealing with the semantic features of fictional discourse which renders talk of truth and literary value neither absurd nor strange.

As we have seen above, philosophers of fiction have followed Lewis in characterising the semantics of fictional discourse as yielding intensional operators and intensional contexts.⁵⁵ Currie endorses this claim, as do Lamarque and Olsen to an extent.⁵⁶ As discussed above, for Lewis, the intensional operator is a function of the definite description which would pick out different particulars in a given set of possible worlds.⁵⁷ Lewis’s intensional function is derivative

⁵⁵ See Lewis (1978).

⁵⁶ See Currie (1988) and Lamarque and Olsen (1993).

⁵⁷ The number of worlds within that given set depends upon which analysis of Lewis’s (1978) we endorse.

of the less theoretically loaded claim in semantics that an intensional (i.e., opaque) context is a context whereby we cannot substitute one co-referential term for another *salva veritate*—in contrast with extensional (i.e., transparent) contexts where such substitutions are permitted *salva veritate*. Lamarque and Olsen’s argument in support of the claim that extra-fictional names do *not* denote their non-fictional referents relies upon a conception analogous to this conception of intensionality in fictional discourse. This argument is by analogy only because Lamarque and Olsen take it that the preservation of truth is not what is fundamentally at issue in our interpretation of fictional discourse. Rather, what is at stake here is what they call *salva fictione*. They claim that extra-fictional names, should, within fictional contexts, be characterised as standing in for the descriptions which are licensed for that name in the fiction. They write:

‘[C]ertain peculiarities of the fictive stance provide powerful reasons for invoking sense—or connotation or content—to explain the functioning of proper names in fiction. The main reason is that the fictive stance generates something like a non-extensional context: only ‘something like’ because this is strictly an analogy the common tests for extensionality are:

- (1) Substitutivity of co-referential terms *salva veritate*, and
- (2) Applicability of the rule of existential generalization (‘a is F’ to ‘something is F’).

Although extra-fictional names in fictive utterances do submit to existential generalization, they are subject to something analogous to failure of substitutivity *salva veritate*. As truth is not at issue, let us speak instead of *salva fictione*. In short, story-identity is not preserved under some co-referential singular terms in fictive utterances.’ (Lamarque and Olsen, 1993: 80-81).

Lamarque and Olsen take this argument to secure the claim that in a particular fictional story, say, *Little Dorrit*, an extra-fictional name like ‘the Marshalsea’ means whichever descriptions we can find for the Marshalsea in that work, rather than the actual Marshalsea (the debtor’s prison where Charles Dickens’s father was imprisoned for his debt to a baker)—regardless of whether outside of fiction, a causal account of names is preferable. Here is one such description:

‘Thirty years ago there stood, a few doors short of the church of St George, in the borough of Southwark, on the left-hand side of the way going southward, the Marshalsea Prison. (...) It was an oblong pile of barrack building, partitioned into squalid houses standing back to back, so that there were no back-rooms, environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls duly spiked at top. Itself a closed and confined prison for debtors, it contained Offenders against the revenue laws, and defaulters to excise or customs, who had incurred fines when they were unable to pay’ (Dickens, 1999: 48).

From this description found in *Little Dorrit*, we can synthesise—if synthesis is permissible on this account—⁵⁸that ‘the Marshalsea’ in *Little Dorrit* means a debtor’s prison in Southwark which stood thirty years prior to the telling of the tale, the prison is oblong in shape and so on. It bears noting that this description, though it does resemble the sort of description one might synthesise (if one had one’s heart set on a descriptivist account of names in general) of the non-fictional Marshalsea, is not co-extensive with such a description. Lamarque and Olsen’s proposal no doubt stems from the observation that it appears on the face of it undesirable to equate ‘the Marshalsea’ in *Little Dorrit* with ‘the notorious nineteenth century debtor’s prison in Southwark, which now houses a library’. Nothing in *Little Dorrit* stipulates that the Marshalsea would one day house a library. The proposal that we resist that ‘the Marshalsea’ in *Little Dorrit* denotes the Marshalsea, whilst effective at blocking this seemingly undesirable implication, ends up also blocking other ways of talking about the Marshalsea in relation to *Little Dorrit* which are desirable in virtue of their alignment with our practices surrounding engagement with works of fiction. On Lamarque and Olsen’s account, it would also be impermissible to say that ‘the Marshalsea’ in *Little Dorrit* co-refers with ‘the prison where John Dickens was incarcerated for his debt to a baker’.

That is to say, if Lamarque and Olsen are to have their way the name as it appears in *Little Dorrit* should not ever bring to mind that description. This consequence strikes me as undesirable, despite there being no mention of John Dickens in *Little Dorrit*. This is rather simply because John Dickens’s time in the Marshalsea is an important factor of the genesis of his son’s novel. It is thus an important fact about the Marshalsea in at least some contexts where we discuss the novel. It is not, however, immediately licensed by the descriptions of the Marshalsea we find in the novel, which suggests that it would not be permitted if we accept Lamarque and Olsen’s argument. Lamarque and Olsen are of course entitled to bite the bullet on this point—they have offered up a principled reason for doing so—but the conclusion yields an account of engagement with works of literary fiction which is entirely out of line with our practices surrounding such engagement. We must now ask ourselves about the premises that lead to such an undesirable conclusion. For Lamarque and Olsen, ‘the Marshalsea’ in *Little Dorrit* attains its descriptive meaning by way of its appearance within a fictional context. As pointed out above, they take accounting for fictional and extra-fictional names as an endeavour theoretically independent from the account of names outside of the fictional context. This is at least in part in virtue of the semantical nature of the fictional context as they construe it.

⁵⁸ I return to this point in brief.

For Lamarque and Olsen at this stage, the referential opacity of fictional contexts can only be secured through analogy. This is because they do not think that fiction is fundamentally concerned with truth,⁵⁹ and the preservation of truth—*salva veritate*—is what constrains us from substituting co-referential terms in ordinary opaque contexts. For Lamarque and Olsen, the notion of *salva fictione* is what secures this constraint in fictional contexts; where we understand *salva fictione* as that which secures story-identity. *Salva fictione* is, in other words, what guarantees that when we report on the fictional happenings, or when we retell them, that we in fact are reporting on the original story. A question which will arise as we examine Lamarque and Olsen’s notion of *salva fictione* is the contexts in which the referential restrictions arise. For one, as we shall see, the context of meta-fictional discussion, i.e., when we are talking about the fiction outside of the narrative itself, is, at least on the face of it, more permissive than the meta-fictional context where we report on the happenings in the story. In the meta-fictional context where we discuss the story independently of its narrative and move on to discuss the work’s status as a literary and socio-historical artefact,⁶⁰ it is permissible to comment that Dickens sets his novel in the Southwark prison where his father landed for his debts. Plausibly, this substitution is not permissible when I simply report on what is true *in the fiction*. Lamarque and Olsen here do not specify how the referential opacity they appeal to would vary across different contexts and this is what in part leads to confusions in their account. Because they do not specify the context they wish to flesh out with this argument, I read them as taking their argument to apply both to fictional and meta-fictional contexts—both of which may involve the relaying of the events within a given story.

Lamarque and Olsen’s argument is no doubt motivated by certain apt observations about fictional discourse. It is undeniable that some sentences within fictional stories are referentially opaque (see the example below) and it is plausible that even where some co-referential substitution is permitted, perhaps not all substitutions acceptable in the context of ordinary discourse are licensed by the fiction at hand. This may well be taken to warrant the claim that the referential restrictions needed here differ from the *salva veritate* which governs intensional referential restrictions in ordinary discourse. It is doubtful that Lamarque and Olsen’s notion of *salva fictione* accurately diagnoses the distinction between fictional sentences where some substitution is permissible, and referentially opaque sentences. This at least part because their

⁵⁹ It is not entirely clear to me what status they envision for the propositions expressed by sentences in fictional discourse (if indeed there are any on their account) and how they envision such an account would impact upon the intelligibility of the sentences encoded in works of fiction.

⁶⁰ Which incidentally is one of the markers of discussion of fiction *qua* work of literature rather than fiction *qua* bedtime story by Lamarque and Olsen’s own lights—I followed them in asserting this in Chapter 1.

notion of story identity, upon which presumably *salva fictione* relies, remains undeveloped. One might interpret it in compliance with their later comments on David Lewis's account, where they approvingly state:

'Lewis rightly emphasizes the importance of the act of story-telling in identifying fictions (...) Acts of story-telling are individuated not just by story-tellers but by the mode of telling. If Cervantes had retold his story with slight variations it would have been a different act and would have generated a different fiction' (Lamarque and Olsen, 1993: 93.)

The reference to Cervantes pertains to the thought-experiment in Jorge Luis Borges's 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'. The central conceit of the story is that Pierre Menard, a fictional twentieth century French author, sets out to write *Don Quixote*. By way of accustoming himself to early modern Spanish, and so forth, his goal is to produce a work verbatim to Cervantes's *magnum opus*. The question Borges's short story raises is whether Menard has written the same novel as Cervantes. Lamarque and Olsen follow Lewis in saying that not only is it not the same novel, it is also not the same fiction. Fictions are, according to Lewis, as well as according to Lamarque and Olsen, individuated by tellings—and Menard's telling is distinct from Cervantes's. According to this sort of account, then, the identity of a fiction,⁶¹ i.e., what we are trying to preserve when we discuss fictional contexts in terms of *salva fictione*—supervenes on a given event which is the telling of a story. This, if accepted, does not yield the results desired by Lamarque and Olsen. This is because if we accept that the identity of a fiction stems from the individuation of a particular telling, then it follows that any given feature that individuates that particular telling will be a feature which determines that fiction's identity.

Plausibly, one of the things which individuates a particular telling are the precise words used to recount the fiction. Tellings are distinguishable not only through speaker and time, but also through the words used. This implies that any constraint determined by *salva fictione* construed as the preservation of an identity of a fiction as individuated by tellings will demand that in order to preserve the identity of the fiction, no recounting of the happenings within that fiction can be paraphrased. In other words, the constraint would apply not only to referential terms like names, but also to all other words which constitute the sentences of the telling. This result is undesirable on two accounts. First, it cannot give Lamarque and Olsen what they want because it shows nothing about extra-fictional names *in particular* within fictional discourse. If we construe *salva*

⁶¹ Not to be confused with the separate, but related issue, of the identity of the work. The individuation of works and fictions seem to be co-extensive on this account, but this needn't be the case if we have a laxer way of individuating fictions.

fictione in this manner, then no words in the fiction can be substituted *salva fictione*. Second, the result yielded by this understanding of story identity is clearly false. For one, this understanding of the preservation of story-identity in our reports of a story goes against our practices surrounding the meta-fictional discourse surrounding the re-telling of a story in, say, a literature exam—it implies that paraphrasing in this context would mean that the object of our re-telling is not the story we aim to talk about, thus making an examination on the happenings in a work of fiction impossible unless the candidate were to learn the contents of the work *verbatim*.

Perhaps also available to Lamarque and Olsen is a less stringent conception of *salva fictione* where we understand it as that which only permits the substitutions as licensed by the fiction, where we understand this licensing as more generous than *verbatim* retelling. The question remains as to how one may go about determining the substitutions a fiction might license. Arguably, one way of going about this is by way of the careful interpretation of the sentences which comprise these fictions. Where we understand interpretation not as Monroe Beardsley's 'expos[ition] of what [Beardsley] call[s] the "themes" and "theses" of a literary work', but the rather more modest and ubiquitous enterprise of extracting sense and force out of sentences (Beardsley, 1970: 38-39).

This too, however, will not get Lamarque and Olsen the results they want. As we shall see, observing the substitutions licensed within the fiction (i.e., in a fictional or meta-fictional context which observes the restrictions placed upon us by the operator 'in the fiction') does not require us to postulate a bespoke account for extra-fictional names. Second, interpretation in the manner construed here necessarily implies, *contra* Lamarque and Olsen, that truth is at stake here at least insofar as the enterprise of interpreting fictions is concerned. Interpretation as I have been conceiving of it requires us to extract from the text or from the speaker's utterances which propositions are stipulated as *true in the fiction*. A crucial point here is that *salva fictione* tenably construed does not require a bespoke account of extra-fictional names from us. I now aim to argue that the ordinary constraints placed by the proper interpretation of the sentences in fiction already provide us with the necessary referential constraints, and this is because the context-sensitivity of ordinary discourse already provides us with the constraints we need to secure truth in a given fiction.

An initial point to consider before detailing the constraints of fictional and meta-fictional contexts is the fact that even meta-fictional contexts which are bound with the 'in the fiction' operator needn't be opaque. Take this passage from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to indicate how we might think of the opacity of extra-fictional names:

‘I wonder if I [Alice] shall go right *through* the earth! How funny it’ll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downward! The Antipathies, I think—’ (she was rather glad no one *was* listening, this time, as it didn’t sound at all like the right word)—‘but I shall have to ask them what the name of the country is, you know. Please, Ma’am, is this New Zealand or Australia?’ (Carroll, 2009: 11).

A plausible interpretation of this passage might go something like this. Alice imagines herself going through the Earth and arriving at the other side of it—she reckons that the other side of the Earth, where people ‘walk with their heads downwards’ is New Zealand or Australia. When reporting on Alice’s imaginings here, we plausibly cannot substitute what she calls ‘the Antipathies’ for ‘the Antipodes’. After all, the fiction stipulates that she does not know the correct name for the amalgamation of New Zealand and Australia. One might be tempted here by the proposal that the fiction simply doesn’t support the representation of the amalgamation of Australia and New Zealand as ‘The Antipodes’, but to give in to this temptation this would be to ignore an important literary dimension of this excerpt.

This passage is a humorous one, and part of what makes it so is the fact that we know something Alice does not—that the correct name for the amalgamation of New Zealand and Australia is ‘the Antipodes’ rather than ‘the Antipathies’. The fiction must thereby license us to think of ‘the Antipodes’ as denoting New Zealand and Australia. It simply does not permit us to substitute the terms when we report on *Alice’s* beliefs about New Zealand and Australia as being beliefs about the Antipodes. What follows is a plausible recount of the events of the story in a meta-fictional context which is bound by the ‘in the fiction’ operator: ‘Alice imagines herself going through the Earth and confuses The Antipodes for the Antipathies when thinking of what her destination might be’.⁶² If my evaluation of what is permitted in the present context is correct, the opacity here is secured by none other than the usual restrictions which come about when we aim to report on propositional attitudes. It is not a case of extra-fictional names denoting differently within fictional discourse as they do in ordinary discourse. Were we to think this to be the case, we would miss out on the humour of the passage.

So far I have rejected both the claim that works of fiction operate as functions to possible worlds and that works of fiction require a bespoke account of extra-fictional names. I have, in doing so, proposed that fictional discourse is made up of propositions embedded in an operator which indicates that the propositions stipulate the way a story-world is and that the audience is invited to make-believe that the stipulations of the story-world are actualised. I have also more

⁶² Admittedly this recount of events isn’t particularly funny.

controversially proposed that extra-fictional names within fictional discourse—where the work of fiction stipulates that the extra-fictional name denotes the actual place—refer as they ordinarily would. I argued for this result by distinguishing between two kinds of context which arise from fictional discourse—one is the fictional discourse itself—and the second is meta-fictional discourse. I now further distinguish meta-fictional discourse from fictional discourse and explain how the existence of meta-fictional discourse supports my claim that truth is a legitimate evaluative dimension in works of literary fiction.

Distinguishing Fictional and Meta-Fictional Contexts

In my argument so far, I have distinguished between two types of discourse surrounding the creation and discussion of works of fiction—the fictional and the meta-fictional. Within these two types of discourse, I have identified subtypes, each with their own contextual restrictions insofar as the substitution of co-referential terms is concerned. In what follows I detail what each of these subtypes are and what I envision their corresponding contextual restrictions to be. In doing so, I remain neutral on the question of whether these contextual restrictions are best secured by semantic or pragmatic means.⁶³ The question of what each of these contexts looks like forces us to account for what the truth-conditions of the statements made in each of these contexts looks like. Crucially for my overall project, I conclude that nothing outside of what we might expect to need in order to account for contextual restrictions in ordinary discourse is needed to secure the contextual restrictions necessary to account for truth in fiction and our practices surrounding engagement with works of fiction. I envision two major sub-types of fictional discourse—tellings and re-tellings and two major sub-types of extra-fictional discourse—reports on the story-world and discussions of the fiction *qua* work. An important point to address before elaborating on the particularities of each of these contexts is what the distinction between fictional and meta-fictional discourse consists in according to this view.

The distinction between these two kinds of discourse is aptly captured by Kripke's discussion of his ontology of fictional characters:

‘The introduction of the ontology of fictional characters is in some sense a derivative or extended use of language, at least on the picture that I was presenting. When one originally introduces the term ‘Hamlet’ there is merely a pretense of reference, and there is no referent—period. But then we find a referent by the ontology of fictional characters, so that we can say

⁶³ I leave this question to the likes of Recanati (2003).

‘the story refers to a fictional character’, if we like, or ‘the sentence refers to a fictional character’, or we can say, when we talk about Hamlet, that we refer to a fictional character.

One shouldn’t confuse the extended use in which the term ‘Hamlet’ really has a referent (not just ‘in the story’) with the original picture according to which ‘Hamlet’ would have no referent—according to which Hamlet would not exist. And when one makes the contrast between, as I might call them, real entities and fictional entities, one should think of things as follows. First, there are kinds of entities, such as people, that would be around in the absence of any fictional works. There are also kinds of entities (...) that are themselves products of fiction (or mythology).’ (Kripke, 2013: 81-82).

The distinction Kripke wishes to draw here is one between contexts where we pretend that ‘Hamlet’ picks out a certain melancholy Danish prince, and contexts where ‘Hamlet’ picks out a fictional character. Regardless of whether we buy into Kripke’s particular account of fictional names, this distinction is helpful because it gets at the crux of what characterises a fictional context. The key here is the invitation to pretend that the events as stipulated in the story are actual. For Kripke, this entails the pretence that the name ‘Hamlet’ picks out an actual entity.⁶⁴ It is the invitation that the audience pretends that the propositions stipulated are actual that distinguishes fictional from meta-fictional contexts on my account. There are, according to me, two major subtypes of fictional discourse. The first we might call inventive narration and is the sort of narration where one stipulates what is true in the story-world. In this subtype we find the narration of original works of fiction as well as things like the improvised telling of a bed-time story—e.g., inventing on the spot and telling a child a story about an anthropomorphic blue bear who wears a yellow hat on her first day of school on the child’s request. According to me, this sort of discourse is embedded in an operator which tells us what we are supposed to make-believe.⁶⁵ What separates this first subtype from the second subtype is the fact that this first subtype puts in place the stipulations of what is true in that particular fiction.

The second sub-type of fictional context is what I call a fictional re-telling of a story. Re-telling as I use it here entails that the audience is invited to make-believe the contents of the original story—this kind of context often arises when a particular bed-time story is demanded, and one

⁶⁴ Perhaps there is some understanding of the Lewisian account where we pretend that ‘Hamlet’ picks out an actual individual on his indexical understanding of actual, rather than an inhabitant of a possible world causally isolated from our own. On this understanding, the notion of pretence would also be crucial to capturing what makes a fictional context fictional.

⁶⁵ Some might prefer to think of inventive fictional discourse as embedded in a particular sort of speech-act rather than an operator. I think much of what I say here can be taken on board even if one prefers the purely pragmatic account of inventive fictional discourse.

does not have the book in question to hand and no other story will do.⁶⁶ This second subtype is embedded within a similar operator as inventive fictional discourse—the audience is invited to make-believe that such a story-world and its happenings are actualised. Because this second sort of fictional context is characterised by the re-telling of an original story, the operator in this context points us towards the story-world stipulated in the original narration of the story. Retellings can be true or false in that they can truly or falsely report on what was stipulated as true in the story-world in the original narration of the story.⁶⁷ It is in this particular context that I think Lamarque and Olsen's *salva fictione* best fits. As indicated above in my discussion of *Alice*, however, I think the relationship that a retelling bears to the original narration is best captured in terms of good old-fashioned truth in fiction rather than in terms of *salva fictione*. This is rather simply because on the face of it—there is a complication which I get to momentarily—the truth of a retelling depends on what is stipulated as true in the original narration.

Admittedly the distinction between inventive narration and fictional re-telling is not always as clear-cut as I have been making out here. The restrictions of fictional re-tellings as I have laid them out can arguably be broken in such a way that the re-telling remains a re-telling. This has ramifications for how we take truth in the original work, at least when we engage with it in relation to its re-telling. I suspect that whether a newer work of fiction which reprises the happenings of an older work of fiction—in the way that Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* reprises the happenings of *Jane Eyre*—counts as an inventive narration in its own right with a special relationship to another original work or as a re-telling that purposefully challenges the way in which the story is told in the original, thus implying that the original narration got the (fictional) facts wrong—is a question that is best answered on a case by case basis. That said, that we might take *Wide Sargasso Sea* to be a retelling of *Jane Eyre*, even though it does stipulate new truths about what might be considered to be the same story-world, does not amount to an insurmountable objection to what I have proposed here.

Two important elements about the relationship between the retelling and the original narration are of note for present purposes. The first is that there are at least two respects in which *Wide*

⁶⁶ The question of whether translations of works of fiction into foreign languages are re-tellings in this manner is a complicated one. A translation of a novel of course requires certain semantic restrictions of the sort we have been discussing here, but the change of the semantic rules of one language for the semantic rules of another make it difficult to say whether the translation would give rise to its own new fictional stipulative context. Nothing in my argument hinges on whether we think of translations as meta-fictional re-tellings or fictional tellings which have restrictions in virtue of their honorific attachment to another work of fiction. The question is nonetheless worth acknowledging and thinking about.

⁶⁷ This point is separate from the point that in the context of inventive narration, fictional narrators might be used by an author or non-fictional story-teller as a means to mislead us as to what is stipulated as true in the story-world. In the context of a fictional re-telling, one might simply get the stipulations wrong.

Sargasso Sea bears an (irreverently) deferential relation to *Jane Eyre*. Whilst it is admissible to regard the story-world stipulations of *Jane Eyre* in isolation from the story-world stipulations in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it would defeat the purpose of Rhys's exercise to regard the story-world stipulations of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in isolation from the story-world stipulations in *Jane Eyre*. A second and related point is that where the facts as stipulated in *Wide Sargasso Sea* differ from facts as stipulated in *Jane Eyre*, it is accompanied by an explanation of how *Jane Eyre* departed from the facts. For example, it is stipulated in *Jane Eyre* that the mad woman in the attic is called Bertha. In *The Wide Sargasso Sea* it is stipulated that *contra* the narration in *Jane Eyre*, the referent of 'Bertha' in the *Jane Eyre* story-world is really called Antonia. According to the narration in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha is a name picked out by Mr Rochester to demean his creole wife Antonia.⁶⁸ This stipulation in *Wide Sargasso Sea* implies that Jane Eyre, the fictional first-person narrator of *Jane Eyre*, was insensitive to the facts of her corresponding story-world, perhaps due to racism or internalised sexism causing her to be repulsed by Bertha and to take Mr. Rochester's word for things.

The point here is that in order for a reader to appreciate the relationship between these two works of fiction, what is stipulated as true in one story-world impacts upon whether what was stipulated as true in the other was a true representation of the story-world. Where *Wide Sargasso Sea* undermines the truth-stipulations of *Jane Eyre*, it does so by calling the veracity of the latter's perspective on the facts. Thinking of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a retelling in this way does not undermine the stipulative nature of original narrations more generally, but rather makes use of the conventions surrounding the truth-conditions of retelling as I have detailed them here in order to suggest that the narration in *Jane Eyre* is more unreliable than we first realised. And unreliable narration, of course, is a widespread element of original narration.

My proposal here about the relationship between even seemingly deviant retellings and the original narrations heavily implies that the notion of truth in fiction is a crucial element in the successful engagement with works of fiction. Arguably, what gets an irreverent re-telling like *Wide Sargasso Sea* off the ground is the objection that the narration of *Jane Eyre* gets the actual experiences of Caribbean women emigrating to England in the nineteenth century wrong. This is especially the case in works of ostensibly realist fiction like *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, though it could in principle be achievable in less realist genres which nonetheless retain certain realist elements (e.g., a fantasy novel that retains some facts about human psychology of the

⁶⁸ Strictly speaking 'Bertha' denotes Antonia in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (or at any rate it does towards the end of the novel) but it is stipulated that it is not the name she was given at birth nor a name she likes to be known by, *contra* what is strongly implied in *Jane Eyre*.

oppressiveness of city life).⁶⁹ The fact that the question of which context is most representative of a particular work is a question which captures some of the literary interest around what is often called intertextuality is no doubt a point in favour of distinguishing between these two subtypes of fictional discourse.

Bearing in mind cases like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we can say the following. In the context of inventive narrations, everything asserted of the story-world corresponding to that work of fiction is true in that fiction unless otherwise stipulated by means of, e.g., unreliable narration. What is true in fictional retellings depends upon what is true in the original narration. As argued above, the relationship of a retelling to an original narration is not so restrictive that a true re-telling requires a verbatim retelling of the original. It does, however, in cases which do not challenge the original narration of the story, require that the re-telling honour the specific opaque contexts within the work itself. As argued in the example above, when one re-tells *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, one must, in order for it to be a true re-telling of the story, honour the stipulation that Alice does not know that she is imagining her arrival to the Antipodes rather than to the Antipathies.⁷⁰ In order to stay true to the original fiction one should also avoid employing co-referential terms for extra-fictional names which imply stipulations of the referent of the extra-fictional name which are in violation of that which is stipulated in the original narration of the referent of that extra-fictional name. To use my previous example, I should not, when re-telling *Little Dorrit* in the context of a fictional retelling, substitute 'The Marshalsea' for 'the prison where Charles Dickens's father was imprisoned for his debt to a baker'. This is because nowhere in the fiction is it stipulated that there are such men as Charles Dickens and his father. This, however, does not imply that 'The Marshalsea' in *Little Dorrit* does not denote the actual prison in London. Rather, the invitation here is to imagine that the actual prison in London has the characteristics stipulated of it in the fiction. To imagine that the name refers to a fictional counterpart of the Marshalsea rather than the Marshalsea itself would cause us to lose some of the poignancy of the social commentary Dickens makes of life in this prison.

Crucially, some of the observations Dickens makes of life at the Marshalsea in the novel are not only true in the fiction of *Little Dorrit*, but also true of the Marshalsea of his childhood. The fact that we can take 'The Marshalsea' to denote the actual Marshalsea means that in certain meta-

⁶⁹ There are certain supernatural elements in *Wide Sargasso Sea* but it is not clear whether these supernatural elements are to be imagined as furnishings of the story-world or as superstitions of its inhabitants. The story otherwise has realist elements insofar as it aims to capture a socio-historical reality of an actual place in a given historical period. This is why I say 'ostensibly realist' rather than 'realist'.

⁷⁰ Unless if in one's re-telling one aims to undermine the original narration's stipulation of Alice's momentary lapse in geographic knowledge, à la Rhys.

fictional contexts, we are licensed to discuss whether the stipulations made of the Marshalsea in the fiction were true in the actual world. I will argue that in novels like *Little Dorrit* which aim to offer commentary on the actual world, the determination of whether certain stipulations made in the fiction of a referent of an extra-fictional name is an important step in determining whether the commentary offered by such a work has the potential to further our understanding of the actual world.⁷¹ Before moving on to this point, however, more must be said about meta-fictional contexts.

I have proposed the following distinction between fictional and meta-fictional discourse: the former invites us to make-believe that the story-world stipulations made therein are actual and in the latter there is no such pretence, but a report on the stipulations as made of the story-world is nonetheless *de rigueur*. Consequently, there is the world of a difference between the truth-conditions for statements occurring in fictional and meta-fictional contexts. Moreover, as with fictional contexts, there are several sub-types within the category of meta-fictional contexts. Each, I propose, have their own distinctive truth-conditions for the statements made within these contexts. Examining how these contexts and their sub-types operate sheds light on how truth in fiction interacts with truth in the actual world. The remit of meta-fictional discourse as I have been discussing it here is broad. In my discussion I have located two major subtypes of meta-fictional discourse—though it is entirely possible that there are more subtypes of this sort of discourse than what I have located here. That said, here is my approximation of the two major subtypes.

The first subtype of meta-fictional discourse my discussion identified is reports of the happenings within a story-world in such a way that does not elicit that we make-believe that these stipulations are actual. As such, if we were to adopt the Kripkean account of fictional names, it would be the sort of context where a name like ‘Hamlet’ would refer to an abstract fictional character and we do not pretend that it refers to a flesh and blood prince of Denmark. This sort of context might arise when a *précis* of a work is required—either, for example, for

⁷¹ It bears noting that ostensible realism is not a necessary condition for social commentary or for extra-fictional names to refer to their usual referents. The central premise of Neil Gaiman’s fantasy novel *Neverwhere* is that there is that London’s underground stations are inhabited by fantastical creatures that most Londoners do not usually perceive. In fact, when Londoners do perceive these creatures, it is a sign that the Londoner in question is in trouble. That the London of Gaiman’s novel has properties that we would not attribute to London in the actual world, does not mean that ‘London’ does not denote London or that the novel does not offer commentary on actual London. Rather, the conceit is that we make-believe that actual London actually has the properties that Gaiman stipulates for it in *Neverwhere*. It is suggested in the novel that the reason Londoners don’t tend to see these fantastical creatures is because they are too absorbed in the dreariness of their careers, their superficial relationships, and so on to notice the world around them. This can only be taken to be a social commentary on the way the grind in London is if we think of ‘London’ in *Neverwhere* as denoting London.

one's interlocutor to determine whether they might like to read the work in question, or to, say, indicate to one's English teacher that one has indeed done the assigned reading. This subtype is embedded in a somewhat different operator to re-tellings. This operator reports on what the original fictional narrative stipulates, such that we are still saying that certain propositions are stipulated as true in a given fiction, without therein inviting us to make-believe these stipulations. The truth-conditions of such reports differ from the truth-conditions of retellings in that reports are unable to invite us to re-imagine the happenings as stipulated in an original narration. In other words, reports are not in the business of calling into question the reliability of the original narration, unless it is explicitly stipulated in the original narration that certain narrators are unreliable. One such example might be the stipulations about the narrator in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, where it is stipulated towards the end of the novel that the narrator has invented a happy ending for her sister. In the context of reports, it is once again crucial to honour the specific opaque contexts that arise in the work, as well as the other stipulations made of the world in general, including the referents of extra-fictional names. For instance, when reporting on the happenings in *Little Dorrit*, we must honour the stipulation that in *Little Dorrit*, certain descriptions that we would attribute to the referent of 'the Marshalsea' in the actual world, do not apply in the story-world. Likewise, certain attributions we would make in the fiction of the Marshalsea in the fiction, e.g., Amy Dorrit's place of birth, do not apply to the actual world—it is understood that we are talking here about what is stipulated in the fiction.

The second and final meta-fictional context I wish to discuss is what I have so far been calling here the context where we discuss a work of fiction *qua* work or socio-historical artefact. In describing this context in these terms, I am helping myself to an account of the work of literature as proposed by Currie (1991). According to Currie, there is a distinction to be drawn between a text—i.e., the words of which a work of fiction, e.g., a novel is comprised—and a work of fiction, which takes into account the context under which the work was conceived. Currie makes us aware of the importance of this distinction for our theory of literature by inviting us to imagine that a text identical to that of Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is discovered as an unpublished manuscript of Anne Radcliffe's. Let us say, for the sake of this example, that the fact that these two texts are indistinguishable from one another is entirely coincidental. Were we to discover such a manuscript, we would attribute different properties to the manuscript as authored by Radcliffe than we do to the novel as authored by Austen. For one, *Northanger Abbey* as authored by Austen is famously a parody of Radcliffe's earnest gothic novels. We might, then, were we to attribute the manuscript to Radcliffe, imagine that this version of *Northanger Abbey* is in earnest, and would be less likely to judge certain passages as humorous. For my present purpose, this

distinction matters because it brings to light that which this final meta-fictional context is licensed to do which the other is not, namely to discuss the stipulations of a given story-world as constitutive of a work of literature. Such a context permits us to eschew story-world stipulations so as to make statements like ‘Dickens set *Little Dorrit* in the Marshalsea, where his father was imprisoned for his debt to a baker’ and ‘In *Neverwhere*, London is imagined as the home to some very powerful supernatural creatures’ true. The truth-conditions of statements made in this context are how the actual world really is, where we imagine facts of the actual world to include facts about the way an author has stipulated the narration in a given work of fiction.

An important question arises at this point as to whether we can expect the semantic and pragmatic mechanisms of ordinary discourse (in addition to the fictional operator I have proposed) to account for the variability of the standards of truth-conditions of statements made across fictional and meta-fictional contexts. In the discussion above, I proposed that there are four main categories of statements one can make in a fictional or meta-fictional context, of which the next four statements are representative:

- (1) ‘Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, “and what is the use of a book”, thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?”’ (Carroll, 2009: 9)
- (2) ‘Once upon a time there was a little girl called Alice who was really bored of watching her sister read a book, which she saw had no pictures or conversations in it. She wondered what the use of a book with no pictures or conversations in it could be.’
- (3) ‘The story opens with Alice being really bored of watching her sister read what she felt was a pointless book in virtue of its lack of pictures or conversations.’
- (4) ‘Lewis Carroll spent a summer’s day telling Alice Liddell a story which opens with her getting bored watching her sister read a book without any books or conversations by a riverbank’.

Clearly, on my account, (1), (at least as written down by Carroll on Alice Liddell’s request),⁷² is true in the narration set out by Carroll because it is stipulated in this original narration. (2) is a true re-telling of the story insofar as it is consistent with the stipulations put forth by Carroll. For the same reason, (3) is also a true report of the events as narrated by Carroll. (4) differs from the

⁷² Perhaps, because of the circumstances of the genesis of this particular work, the text we have of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is in itself a retelling but let us take the text as the original narration in virtue of its being that to which we have access for the sake of argument.

previous statements because it refers to the actual original narrator of the story and to the actual little girl of whom it is widely held the story was made up. If what I have been arguing so far is correct, however (4) would be a false report of the story-world and a false re-telling of the story, because nowhere explicitly stipulated in the narration itself (at least as written down by Carroll) do we find reference to Carroll as the narrator of the story, nor to the fact that the story was told on a summer's day spent with Alice Liddell. The present question is how we go about explaining this variation of truth conditions across contexts without appealing to something like the Lamarquean opacity of narrative.⁷³

A phenomenon similar to the one I have been describing can be found in Recanati's (2003) observations about the context-sensitivity of the truth-conditions of propositions. An example which appears throughout his discussion is that of a mother telling her child 'you are not going to die' when he is crying from getting a minor cut. The proposition that the child is not going to die viewed *ex nihilo* is, provided that the child is not some sort of supernatural being, false. This, Recanati suggests, is not the proposition which we evaluate when we determine whether what the mother says is true. Rather, she is saying to the child that he will not die of this cut, which is presumably true. Another example which appears frequently is the statement that 'the ATM swallowed my card', where, despite knowing that ATMs do not have the *apparatus* to swallow anything at all, we immediately understand the underlying claim to be that the machine has not released our card when we entered it. According to Recanati, it does not make sense to think of these two statements independently of the contexts under which they are uttered, since the statements *ex nihilo* yield truth conditions which have very little bearing on what the statements mean within the proper context. The question of how to best deal with the discrepancy between the truth conditions of the statements within their proper context and the truth conditions of the statements *ex nihilo* is beyond all doubt up for debate, and it is not my within my remit to offer up an answer to this question. The point I am trying to make here is that it is very much within the scope of the semantics and pragmatics of ordinary language to account for the discrepancy of truth conditions between statements *ex nihilo* and statements made in a particular context. Moreover, this problem in the context of ordinary discourse is analogous to the problem I have been diagnosing in the context of fictional and meta-fictional discourse, and the only mechanisms necessary to solve the second problem are whatever we need to account for contexts in ordinary discourse and a fictional operator that allows for fictional stipulation.

⁷³ See Lamarque (2020).

If we apply Recanati's observations to the present problem, we cannot make sense of 1-3 independently of some sort of fictional operator, which in the case of 1-2 invites us to make-believe the states of affairs, and in the case of (3) merely reports on that which we have been invited to make-believe elsewhere, and this is precisely what sets the truth conditions for these first three statements. It would be very odd indeed to immediately jump to the conclusion that an individual utterance any of these first three statements is saying that Alice Liddell was actually beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister and spotted a rabbit sporting a waistcoat. Rather, when somebody says this, we generally take them to be saying that it is true in the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It would be similarly odd and unhelpful to assume that the utterer of (4) to be reporting on what is in the story when the way the actual world is can help us make better sense of what the utterer of (4) is saying. To briefly return to extra-fictional names, it may well be the case that the fictional operator in 1-3 impedes us from substituting 'Alice' for 'Alice Liddell', despite these being co-referential terms. If this is so, it is because nowhere in the stipulations is it mentioned that Alice's surname is Liddell and the diagnosis is the same as we discovered for the Marshalsea in relation to *Little Dorrit*.

Before moving on to a brief discussion of the problems posed by fictional names, I wish to address a potential objection to my proposal as raised in Lamarque (2020). Here, Lamarque suggests the sort of interest we might take in a work of fiction so as to make statements like (4) is incompatible with taking an interest with the work *qua* work of literature—e.g., the fact that we'll take 'Alice' in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to denote Alice Liddell, that we might read the story and imagine Carroll (or Dodgson, for that matter) as the narrator of the story as they row on a summer's day somewhere in the vicinity of Oxford, or, to go back to our earlier example, to imagine the Marshalsea as the place of Dickens's father's imprisonment. He writes:

In fact, opacity is apparent in three related but distinct occurrences in certain kinds of narrative itself, in reports of narrative content, and in propositional attitudes (such as thinking, imagining, believing) taken towards narrative content. As far as narrative itself is concerned, it is important to note (...) that any narrative can be read either opaquely or transparently. A transparent reading of a narrative looks, as it were, through the narrative to a world depicted (events, actions, agents) without giving undue attention to the manner in which the world is presented. Readers direct their attention not to narrative modes themselves but to the abstracted content of the stories told, tolerantly indifferent to alternative renderings. In contrast, opaque reading does give focus to the narrative itself, reflecting on the content *through the modes of presentation*. Opaque reading is characteristic of reading *from a literary point of view*. Only where the mode of narration is salient—in other words, where the form in which a

story is told matters in the appraisal of narrative—will co-referential substitutions be blocked.’ (Lamarque 2020: 142).

Because Lamarque’s discussion is not framed in terms of fictional and meta-fictional contexts, it is tricky to know what the remit of what he calls a reading might be. One way of interpreting what Lamarque means by reading a work of fiction here is the act of making sense of the stipulations made by the author of the story-world and making believe that they are actual, in line with what a fictional context invites us to do. Critics and literary scholars especially, however, do not simply read works of fiction in order to make-believe that the happenings in a particular story-world are actual or to apprehend the way in which the story-world is presented independently of the actual world (though no doubt both these activities are crucial to respectable literary criticism). Such individuals often read works of fiction in such a way that requires the reader to take the fictional context to one side and to think about, say, an author’s decision to set a melodramatic novel in the same debtor’s prison where his father was kept for his debt to a baker. If we think of engagement with literary texts as engagement with them *qua* work of literature, which, as Currie argues, includes the historical context within which they were conceived, then there must be occasions where reading a work *qua* literature in fact requires us to make the co-referential substitutions which are blocked by the make-believe stipulations of the original narration. As such, it fits the purposes of making sense of the acts of fictional narration and our engagement with it far better to think of ‘Alice’ as denoting ‘Alice Liddell’ and ‘the Marshalsea’ as denoting the Marshalsea in fiction with certain contextual restrictions, than it does to think that these names denotes the descriptions stipulated of them in their respective works.

An Interlude on Fictional Names

So far, I have argued that extra-fictional names refer as they ordinarily do—such that the opacity of reference is ordinarily context-sensitive in the case of fictional discourse as it is in the case of ordinary discourse. The aim in arguing for this claim was twofold. On one hand, I had in my sights the connection between truth in fiction and actual truth which I aim to exploit in my discussion of the expression of cognitive achievement through story-world building in the next chapter. A second, more fundamental goal, was to determine, through the individuation of fictional and meta-fictional contexts, how the truth-conditions of the propositions expressed in works of fiction and about works of fiction operate. All this is for naught, of course, if it turns out that fictional names cannot be accounted for in such a way that guarantees that there are at least some contexts where we can take a work of fiction to encode a full-blooded proposition. As hinted at in my discussion so far and as those familiar with the problems surrounding the

semantics of fictional discourse will know, there are two families of approaches (barring the Lewisian approach I discussed above) we might take when alleviating the problem of fictional names. The aim of this interlude is to present my reader with what I take to be one plausible representative of each of these families of solutions, so as to indicate that there are philosophically respectable ways of guaranteeing truth in fiction, at the very least in the contexts that matter to the evaluation of works of literary fiction.

Descriptivism

As we saw above, a *prima facie* palatable option for accounting for fictional names is to take a descriptivist approach to them. Rather than taking fictional names to pick out a non-existent individual, it is tempting to say that regardless of whether such an account works for extra-fictional names, that fictional names are essentially shorthand for the descriptions stipulated of those names within the original fictional context. We find one such proposal in Currie (1988).

The proposal is that we characterise fictional names as acquiring their meaning from the definite description ‘a perfectly informed, retentive and rational reader’ would formulate, upon reading the relevant story (Currie, 1988: 477). This characterisation leads to the question of how we ought to define the scope of such a definite description. The question at hand, is, in other words, which elements of the story such a definite description ought to incorporate, and indeed, as we shall see soon enough, whether the inclusion of information not included in the story itself is ever permissible in the formation of the definite description. According to Currie, the correct scope covers the descriptions given of the character bearing the name in question *within the story* and *in their entirety*. Currie has it that any one sentence about a fictional character (which appears in more than a single sentence of a story) cannot independently express a proposition. ‘[F]or’, according to Currie, ‘it is not semantically independent enough’ to do so—‘[o]nly the whole story expresses a proposition, for there are quantifiers that have as their scope the whole story, picking up variables along the way’ (Currie, 1988, 476). In other words, such sentences cannot independently express propositions because in order to derive the meaning of the fictional name, one must take into account *all* of the descriptions attributed to that character in the story, so as to appropriately predicate the quantifier corresponding to the fictional name. One cannot extract a proposition from a sentence featuring a name unless one knows what that name means, and in the case of Currie’s descriptivist fictional names, one can only derive the meaning of such names if one takes the story as a whole.

There is an important difficulty that arises from this descriptivist proposal as it stands. The first facet of that difficulty is that the account is blatantly ill-equipped to deal with works of fiction

which offer alternative narrations within a single work. One such example might be a choose your own adventure story, where depending on the course of action we choose for our character, there will be different predicates attributed to that character and the supporting characters of the story—e.g., the character might get eaten by crocodiles in Chapter 2, get murdered by a merchant in Chapter 8, or make it home safe and sound depending on the order in which we choose to read the book. Note that the alternative courses of action impact upon the description we would attribute supporting characters like the merchant—he might be murderous in one scenario and a perfectly pleasant and helpful chap in another. A second, more high-minded example of a work which poses this sort of difficulty is Cortázar's *Rayuela*. Cortázar here offers us two alternative orders for reading the chapters in the novel, each offering a slightly different turn of events for the characters. If the description that secures the reference of a character's name can only be derived from a work in its entirety, this yields the consequence that novels like *Rayuela* and choose your own adventure novels not only offer alternative narrations, they also offer alternative sets of characters with each reading. This consequence would make the format of a novel like *Rayuela* unintelligible to its readership—the alternative sequences of chapters is interesting because it offers a slightly alternative course of action and set of thoughts for precisely those same characters. If a descriptivist account of fictional names is to work out, we need alternative means of attaching the relevant description to the fictional name in question.

A second facet of this difficulty is posed when we think of the descriptivist proposal in light of Kripke's objection to the Lewisian account of fictional names that we saw at the beginning of this chapter. The description—much like the name itself—can act as an intensional operator picking out individuals in possible worlds. The problem is of course that we do not want an account with the consequence that fictional names pick out possible individuals—this defeats the point of their being fictional at all. Currie attempts to side-step the problem by suggesting that 'Tying characters to texts, along with a nice attention to the individuation of texts, enables us to avoid Kripke's problem' (Currie, 1988: 479). The problem with this sort of solution is that the 'nice individuation of texts' might leave us with difficulties of the stripe of the *Rayuela* problem above. It would yield the result that there are several Oliveiras (the protagonist of *Rayuela*) corresponding to each alternative sequence of reading the chapters. But this is a problem not only for the more experimental elements of twentieth century literature. Currie's proposal faces a problem raised by intertextuality more generally.

For instance, we might find conflicting accounts of mythological characters—e.g., King Arthur—across the *corpus* of legends told about them. In the case of Arthur and his wife Guenevere, we have on one hand the turn of events as narrated in Geoffrey Monmouth's

Historia regum Britanniae, where Guenevere is merely introduced as ‘a woman called Guenevere’ and within two matter of fact sentences, she and Arthur are married (Pearsall, 2003: 11). On the other hand, in Robert Wace’s *Roman de Brut*—which is purportedly a French translation of Geoffrey Monmouth’s work—Guenevere is described as being very beautiful and Arthur is described as having been madly in love with her (Pearsall, 2003: 15). If we were to adopt Currie’s account of fictional names, we would be obliged to say that ‘King Arthur’ and ‘Queen Guenevere’ refer to different characters in each of these works. A descriptivist approach to fictional characters is best found elsewhere.

A recent proposal by Glavaničová (2021) suggests that Currie’s mistake is to analyse the roles that fictional characters officiate—and indeed the definite descriptions for which their names are stand-ins—as intensional operators.⁷⁴ Analysing these offices as intensional operators in the Lewisian sense inevitably yields the possibility that these intensional operators might have extensions—i.e. individuals who satisfy them—in the actual world. On a Lewisian framework, intensional operators, are, as we have seen, operators which pick out different individuals across different possible worlds where there is an inhabitant which satisfies the operator—most notably definite descriptions—and their extensions are the individuals they pick out. Empty names are, by definition, names which do not have extensions. The functions which define them, then, simply cannot be functions which pick out extensions in possible worlds. Rather, Glavaničová proposes, discourse containing fictional names is to be analysed within a hyperintensional context—and the hyperintensional function here picks out the role of the fictional character in question, understood as the abstract set of properties which make up the character and which by definition does not have an extension, and thereby does not exist. The proposal, if tenable, side-steps Kripke’s problem because it blocks the possibility of a fictional name’s having an extension—i.e., it blocks the possibility of the name’s picking out an individual in any possible world. Blocking Kripke’s objection in this manner means that Glavaničová need not appeal to the ‘nice individuation of texts’ which I proposed get Currie’s view in trouble.

In my discussion of extra-fictional names, I argued that a key component to a tenable theory thereof was the careful distinction between *salva veritate* restrictions in fictional and meta-fictional discourse. The upshot of my examination of Lamarque and Olsen’s account of extra-fictional names was that extra-fictional names must refer to their actual referents in order to allow for

⁷⁴ Currie (and Glavaničová for that matter) follows Pavel Tichý in characterising roles as offices. He writes: ‘The Presidency of the United States is an office; a function from worlds to individuals, which takes the value Ronald Reagan in some worlds, George Bush at some other worlds, and no value at yet others’ (Currie, 1988: 842). The difficulty with such a position is that it is not clear how an office operates as anything other than a particular sort of definite description. Kripke’s problem is, on the face of it, alive and well.

meta-fictional discourse to operate in the way in which we need to support our actual discussions of works of fiction. I argued that the intensionality and hyperintensionality of fictional discourse containing extra-fictional names could occur in virtue of one of two independently obtaining factors obtaining within the discourse. The first could be that the preservation of story identity—*salva veritate* in the fiction—requires that there is no substitution of one co-referential term for another. This restriction would not be exclusive to extra-fictional names but would apply to any turn of phrase within the story. I drew the conclusion that such a result would be an unlikely restriction for meta-fictional discourse and remained neutral on whether any such substitutions would bear on story-identity in fictional discourse proper.

The hyperintensional analysis of fictional discourse yields the result that no substitution of co-referential terms is *guaranteed* within fictional discourse. And this is because unlike in intensional contexts, even the co-referential substitutions dictated by necessity are not guaranteed in hyperintensional contexts.⁷⁵ This result may well be correct. There is, at any rate, a case to be made for the thought that the substitution of terms impacts upon fiction-identity. Such a result would be compatible with the doctrine of narrative opacity, which has it that the content of a narrative and the way in which it is delivered (i.e. its form) are inseparable from one another. There are, as we have seen, reasons to be sceptical of such a doctrine. A problem which arises for accepting such stringent referential restrictions on fictional discourse is that it is not clear what would entitle us to the substitutivity which is crucially characteristic of meta-fictional discourse. A possibility is of course that the only decidedly hyperintensional elements of meta-fictional discourse are the fictional names themselves. This could be argued for in principle, in virtue of the claim that fictional names refer to abstract roles, analysed in terms of the cluster of properties which makes up the character and which necessarily has no extension and thus cannot be intensional.⁷⁶ Three initial difficulties arise for such a proposal.

The first difficulty for a view like Glavaničová's is the fact that meta-fictional discourse allows for some substitution of co-referential terms for fictional characters. Take the case of the name 'Amy Dorrit' as it appears in *Little Dorrit*. One of the crucial plot-points in this novel is that the impoverished Little—Amy, that is—Dorrit is the beneficiary of the wealthy Mr Clennam's will. This fact is for a large part of the novel known only by Mrs Clennam, who does not realise that Little Dorrit—the girl who goes to her house to sew—is in fact Amy Dorrit. This situation is

⁷⁵ See Nolan (2019).

⁷⁶ Glavaničová prefers an analysis whereby these *abstracta* are understood as created rather than eternal and where such *abstracta* are considered to be real. She does not, however, rule out in this paper the possibility of anti-realism about such *abstracta*. I remain neutral on all these points.

interesting because in fictional and meta-fictional contexts where we are in the business of reporting on Mrs Clennam's beliefs, substitution between 'Little Dorrit' and 'Amy Dorrit' of course remains blocked. But this is not the case across all meta-fictional contexts—a successful report of what is true in the fiction must allow for the stipulation that 'Little Dorrit' and 'Amy Dorrit' are co-referential terms which can be substituted when we are not reporting on certain characters' beliefs. Perhaps the solution to this problem lies in the word 'guaranteed'. Meta-fictional discourse, if true, must be supported by fictional discourse. When reporting on fictional discourse, it is perhaps not *guaranteed* that I can substitute 'Amy Dorrit' with 'Little Dorrit', but this does not mean that the substitution is flat out impermissible in all cases.

A second complication lies in Kripke's Pretence Principle. According to the principle, the puzzle around fictional names arises precisely in this distinction between fictional and meta-fictional discourse. This is because the principle would have it that our pretence, in engaging with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is not that we are engaging in make-believe about a fictional character who is a melancholy prince of Denmark. Rather, the pretence is that we are engaging in make-believe about a flesh and blood melancholy prince of Denmark, called Hamlet.⁷⁷ Perhaps the hyperintensional proposal could allow that when we engage with *Hamlet*, we do pretend that 'Hamlet' refers to a flesh and blood prince of Denmark, though really when we are theorising about it, the name refers to this abstract role. This, if it works, would save us from the difficulties which arise from Kripke's proposal that meta-fictionally we refer to the construct of the fictional character of Hamlet, but within the fiction the name pretends to refer to a flesh and blood person. If my reader does not think this underpins the workings of the pretence, then this is not the proposal for him. My aim here, however, is not to conclusively defend this view, but rather to bring it to my reader's attention as a plausible if imperfect as of yet candidate which is compatible with what I wish to say about truth in fiction.

The final complication stems from the way in which we isolate the cluster of properties which we would use to analyse the role of a given fictional character. I have already argued that Currie's completist model is implausible, given the structure of novels like *Rayuela*. It is also unlikely given the fact that we find fictional names intelligible even before we have access to the complete list of properties in terms of which we would analyse the character's role. The tenability of the hyperintensional proposal is dependent not only on the independent plausibility of a hyperintensional semantics, but also on the solution of two further problems, then. The possibility of analysing a fictional character's role in an incomplete yet non-arbitrary manner and

⁷⁷ See Kripke (2013: 55-61).

properly accounting for the relationship between fictional and meta-fictional discourse about fictional characters. Provided that these difficulties are not insurmountable, this gives us a possible avenue for guaranteeing the truth-aptness of fictional discourse in the way that we need. Given that the view is not without difficulties, however, here is an alternative proposal.

A Kripkean Alternative

A plausible alternative to the sort of descriptivism I detailed above comes from Predelli (2020). Predelli endorses a broadly Kripkean account of names and thinks that the standard objection put forward against such accounts—namely that fictional names provide us with a counterexample for this theory of names is entirely moot. This is because he, like Kripke, adheres to the Pretence Principle.

The theoretical cost of endorsing the sort of account of fictional names Kripke favours puzzles him at the end of his lecture series. The flip side of the Pretence Principle is that not only is the reference of the fictional names pretended within fictional discourse, but also the propositions which the sentences within fictional discourse purportedly express. Kripke's positive account allows for there to be two levels within which fictional names can be said to refer. On the meta-fictional level, the name 'Hamlet' refers to a fictional character, and we can happily say this if we appeal to an ontology of fictional characters. Which, on Kripke's view, does not commit us to the belief that there once was a flesh and blood prince called Hamlet who saw the ghost of his father, and so on, but rather simply commits us to the belief that Hamlet is a fictional character in a play, and it is the play that really exists (Kripke, 2013: 70-75). The ontology to which we appeal here is thus one which arises from social construct. As Kripke's discussion of the contrast between Hamlet, a fictional character, and Gonzago, a fictional fictional character shows, however, such a straightforward treatment cannot be for Hamlet as he appears within strictly fictional discourse. This is because according to the Pretence Principle, when we engage with the fiction of *Hamlet*, we are not pretending that Hamlet is a fictional character. Rather, we are pretending that he is a Danish prince made of flesh and blood. If we are pretending that anybody within the world of *Hamlet* is a fictional character it is Gonzago, who appears in *The Murder of Gonzago*—a play which exists within the world of *Hamlet*, but does not exist in our meta-fictional ontology of fictions. In other words, there is no such play outside of the world of *Hamlet*.

The Pretence Principle creates trouble for the likes of Kripke because what lies beneath the pretence that 'Hamlet' within fictional discourse refers to a flesh and blood Danish prince. Namely the claim that 'Hamlet', within fictional discourse, and pretences aside, refers to nothing at all. Such a claim, though perhaps plausible leaves us in difficulty because if 'Hamlet' refers to

nothing at all in fictional discourse, then there are no propositions—at least insofar as fictional names are concerned—expressed in fictional discourse. The result is a pernicious one for anybody who finds views of this stripe plausible, for it is not clear—if sentences within fictional discourse do not express propositions, and interpretation is the enterprise of extracting sense and force from sentences—how sentences within fictional discourse can make any sense at all. This result of course lies contrary to the fact that we can and do make sense of sentences within fictional discourse containing fictional names.

Kripke leaves us with uncertainty as to how to resolve the issue. Predelli, on the other hand, more happily bites the bullet on the claim that sentences within fictional discourse express no propositions at all. He creates an account tailored to explain the intelligibility of fictional discourse in spite of this complication. Central to Predelli's account is the idea of a sentence-type. When I utter the sentence-type 'Alex is upstairs' and 'Alex' refers to a particular Alex and 'upstairs' refers to the upstairs of a particular building, I have successfully uttered a token of that sentence. This is what gives sentences in ordinary discourse their meaning, and it is in virtue of this that sentences express propositions. As we have seen, sentences in fictional discourse, at least insofar as they include fictional names, cannot refer in this way. On Predelli's account, then, the author encodes a sentence-type, for instance:

'The players all played at once without waiting for turns, quarrelling all the while, and fighting for the hedgehogs; and in a very short time the Queen was in a furious passion, and went stamping about, and shouting "Off with his head!" or "Off with her head!" about once in a minute.' (Carroll, 2009: 74).

Because the Queen in question here is the fictional Queen of Hearts, Carroll's encoding of this sentence-type does not, on Predelli's account, yield a sentence-token. Sentence-types, as they appear in fictional discourse, do not acquire their meaning in virtue of being a token of a sentence-type. Rather, meaning is imparted on them by a narrator. What is imparted here is to be seen as the rules for the games of make-believe in Walton's sense of the term.⁷⁸ For Predelli, the narrator in fictional discourse is a construct created by the author. This is true of both homodiegetic narration—where the narrator is a character in the story—and of heterodiegetic narration—where the narrator is an anonymous and more often than not omniscient observer.⁷⁹ In each case, the narrator enables us to engage in the pretence that the sentence-types in the fiction encode propositions and thus that the fictional names refer. This is because within the

⁷⁸ See Walton (1990: 38-43) and Predelli, (2020: 1).

⁷⁹ See Predelli, (2020, Chapters 2 and 3).

narration lie instructions to imagine that fictional names have referents, and which referents we should imagine them to have (Predelli, 2020: 28-29). Predelli's account is a promising one which begins to explain the intelligibility of sentences in fictional discourse.

The narrator gives us instructions, by way of what Predelli calls impartation, to imagine the sense of these sentences and we can thus extract this imagined sense from these sentence-types. The narrator's impartation is made possible in virtue of his tellings being fictional. In the case of homodiegetic narration, this is easier to grasp. The author inserts a character into the story who fictionally tells the story by getting us to make-believe sense into the encoded sentences. But this cannot tell the whole story. From heterodiegetic narration, Predelli draws the lesson that narration must occur in what he calls the narrative periphery. The story here goes as follows. What is true about the narrative periphery needn't be true about the story-world it describes. In the case of *Emma* when we read it in English, it is true of both the periphery and of the narrative story-world that the narration takes place in English and that fictionally, the inhabitants of Highbury speak English (Predelli, 2020: 48-51). This, however, needn't be the case. If a novel concluded with the sentence-type 'nobody lived to tell the tale', what is true in the narrative periphery is clearly not true in the story-world. This can also be true of instances of homodiegetic narration where e.g. the narration takes place in English, but it is fictionally the case in the story-world that the characters speak Russian. Predelli's account is a plausible one. It does, however, appear to pose a difficulty for the account of truth in fiction that I have proposed here. The difficulty being that it would be strange to talk about the truth-conditions of statements made in fictional contexts if the statements are not fully propositional. The response to this difficulty is rather simply that the stipulations which are intelligible to the reader are the propositions we pretend the sentences to encode—these stipulations would set the truth conditions for re-tellings, reports, and other relevant meta-fictional discussions, including the determination of the work in question's truth-related value.

The difficulty with an account like Predelli's lies with the fact that pretend-sense is not straightforwardly accounted for. In Predelli's account, there is no detailed story as to how the narration is able to stipulate how the pretence is prescribed to take place. In a word, it is not clear how, if a name like 'Harry Potter' is actually empty, and in the absence of an explicit instruction, the reader is supposed to know to pretend that 'Harry Potter' denotes a wizard boy who lived. Perhaps this issue can be addressed in a refinement of Predelli's account of narrative impartation. Another difficulty is of course that the sentences encoded in fiction are not *really* about the fictional characters they pretend to name. Whether an account like Glavaničová's or Predelli's is correct depends upon a correct line of argument for either of these points, which lies

beyond the scope of what I am able to do here. I instead content myself with offering an account of truth in fiction which accommodates two viable (for now) options. The question now is how each of these accounts are compatible with what I have said so far about story-identity and truth in fiction.

Where I am Now

In this chapter, the aim has been to secure the truth-aptness of statements made in both fictional and meta-fictional contexts. In my argument, I explored the difficulties of establishing truth-aptness for statements made in these contexts—namely the difficulties surrounding reference in fictional discourse. I divided my discussion of reference into that of extra-fictional and fictional names. I concluded that extra-fictional names in fiction do not pose any difficulties specific to fictional discourse once we account for the differences between fictional and meta-fictional contexts. I provided such an account in my individuation of two sub-types of fictional and two sub-types of meta-fictional contexts. I then turned my attention to fictional names, where I suggested that securing the truth-aptness of claims made in fictional contexts turns out to be more difficult. I proposed two potential solutions to the problem, without therein committing myself to either. One possible solution, the descriptivist solution, has the advantage that it can guarantee full-blooded truth-aptness even to statements made in within fictional contexts, which invite its audience to make-believe that the statements made of that story-world are actual. Descriptivism about fictional names as I have described it has two major disadvantages—the first is that it is likely to be at odds with what we take to be the most plausible account of names outside of fictional contexts, so appeals to such an account in the case of fictional names must be explained in a principled manner—the second is that it is not clear which descriptions we would tie to the different fictional names so as to not make this descriptivism arbitrary. I then considered a Kripkean alternative to descriptivism as proposed by Predelli. The main difficulties here are first that such an account does not guarantee the truth-aptness of statements made in purely fictional contexts. Rather, the sentences occurring in purely fictional contexts encode sentence-types which we pretend encode propositions because we are able to pretend that the fictional names refer. These pretended propositions are what give the truth-conditions to statements made in a fictional re-telling—we can assess the re-telling in terms of whether the pretended propositions uttered here are consistent with the pretended propositions made in the original narration—as well as in the meta-fictional contexts of reporting and discussion of the work of fiction *qua* work—where the pretended propositions become full-blooded propositions within the ‘in the fiction’ because we can take a fictional name to refer to a fictional character *qua* abstract entity in our ontology of fictional characters rather than pretend that it refers to a flesh

and blood individual. An additional difficulty with this view is explaining how we know to pretend that a fictional name refers to something in particular to a work of fiction, given that most works of fiction do not come with an explicitly spelled out meta-language to explain how the pretended references are supposed to work. Which of these difficulties we find insurmountable will depend on our pre-existing intuitions about fictional discourse. My purpose here was rather simply to show that there are philosophically respectable accounts that allow for the truth-aptness I need to explain the expression of a cognitive achievement in works of fiction in the next two chapters.

Chapter 3

Factual Story-World-Building and Cognitive Achievement

Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that works of literature can and often do encode propositions which are true of the actual world. The current question at hand is what bearing this has on the question of literary value and the cognitive achievement underlying the sort of literary value which concerns us here. I stated in Chapter 1 that claiming that a work's literary value is enhanced in virtue of its encoding any old true (i.e., true of the actual world) proposition would make for a woeful explanation of that work's literary value. I suggested instead that the way to account for the truth-related value we find in works of literature is to evaluate the understanding of the actual world as exhibited in that work of literature, and to take the encoding of those true propositions as evidence of that understanding. According to this view, the encoding of true propositions can serve as evidence of a good understanding of an element of the actual world (i.e., of a subject-matter pertaining to the actual world) because it can (1) contribute to factual story-world-building in such a way that contributes to that work's literary value by permitting the author to examine a subject-matter in service of the artistic aims of the work, and (2) make (actual) true statements on the applicability of a certain concept—often evaluative concepts—to the particular state of affairs portrayed in the work. My aim in this chapter is to develop my proposal of true statements as evidence of overall understanding as developed by a work of literature, in particular with regards to works which display understanding in line with (1).

I develop this proposal by example, by putting forward two case-studies where I think the varying success at (1) contributes to (where it succeeds) or diminishes (where it fails) the work's overall value *qua* literature. One such case-study, Katie Roiphe's novel about the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, I will take to be artistically successful to the extent to which it succeeds at (1). The second case-study, Richard Braithwaite's autobiographical novel *To Sir With Love* I argue is also successful to the extent to which it succeeds at (1). I argue that the artistic flaws in both these cases are explicable in terms of the limitations of the understanding of key subject-matters put forward in each novel. I argue that the limited understanding of the actual world each work exhibits limits the artistic possibilities of that work—this is especially apparent in the case of *To Sir With Love* because here the possibilities of narrative and character are limited by the understanding of pedagogy and racial and socio-economic tensions the work puts forward. Finally, I discuss how the relationship between the understanding of the actual world put

forward in a work of literature's world-building and its artistic value bears in the cases of works of literature which are set in story-worlds which are very distant from our own. I propose, in my discussion of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, that even in these cases, the story-worlds pertaining to these works must be factual, or have some underpinning in fact, insofar as the subject-matters the author aims to examine are concerned. If the line of argument I pursue in this chapter is correct, then we have good reason to believe there is such a thing as the sort of cognitive literary value with which this thesis concerns itself. I further develop my case for (2) in the next chapter. Before moving on to talk about (1) in further detail, more must be said about understanding as it is expressed in works of literature, and how a work's encoding of statements which are true of the actual world—i.e., the statement of the truth *simpliciter*—can serve as evidence of understanding in a work of literature.

Understanding and the Expression of Cognitive Achievement

I stated in Chapter 1 that I would explain the sort of truth-related value we find in works of literature in terms of the expression of a cognitive achievement—where the main sort of cognitive achievement we find in works of literature is the demonstration of understanding of a given subject-matter such that it contributes to the artistic aims of the work. This demonstration of understanding, as stated above, can facilitate the exploration of a subject-matter and in doing so promote the artistic aims of that work, either through the creation of a story-world which resembles the actual world in the right sort of way or by way of challenging the reader on the applicability of concepts across different contexts. There is an important epistemic claim underlying my proposed conception of cognitive achievement in works of literature in that I take the epistemic value—that is, for present purposes, the cognitive value of literature—to amount to the understanding expressed in a work rather than the knowledge with which that work might furnish us. This claim poses problems of its own.

Unlike knowledge—where we take the paradigmatic stuff of knowledge to be true propositions—understanding poses the additional complication, as Zagzebski (2009) points out, that it cannot directly be transmitted by way of testimony.⁸⁰ Because understanding cannot be passed directly through testimony in the manner propositional knowledge can—i.e., in the case of propositional knowledge, by way of the mere statement of the known proposition—it is also more difficult to put one's finger on exactly what amounts to a demonstration or expression of understanding. The question becomes particularly poignant when we ask whether the demonstration of understanding amounts simply to the exposition of true propositions. This

⁸⁰ The same difficulty might be posed viz. knowledge-how, but this question does not concern us here.

question explains the temptation found in Currie (2020) to reduce the concept of understanding to the concept of propositional knowledge. In his challenge to the proponent of understanding as the epistemic concept which best explains literary cognitive value, Currie writes the following:

‘One possibility is that understanding is simply knowledge, and contrasts purporting to be between understanding and knowledge are in reality contrasts between adequate and inadequate knowledge. Knowing that Harold lost at the Battle of Hastings is not going to count as understanding the battle but adding a lot more knowledge of the battle’s causes, course, and consequences ought to amount, in the end, to understanding it. Understanding is often closely connected with having an explanation: I understand your actions when I can explain them in terms of your beliefs and preferences, and I understand the seasons when I see that they are explained by the tilt of the earth. But then understanding is just propositional knowledge; knowledge of that which explains something, together with the knowledge that it explains. And since explanations can generally be filled out endlessly with further detail, we can see why understanding comes in degrees; some explanations are fuller and more informative than others.’ (Currie, 2020: 89).

Currie’s question, as it pertains to present purposes, rather simply is this: what is it to demonstrate that one understands a subject matter e.g., Harold’s defeat at Hastings beyond stating the propositional claim that Harold was defeated in Hastings?⁸¹ The response I have in my sights goes as follows. Although the bulk of evidence indicative of understanding of a particular subject-matter in a work of literature (or even, say, in an undergraduate’s philosophy essay) is often the statement of true propositions, this by no means forces the conclusion that the concept of understanding is reducible to propositional knowledge in such a way that renders my account of cognitive achievement in works of literature in terms of the expression of understanding fruitless. This is because once we clarify what is meant here by understanding, it becomes clear that not any old statement of any old proposition will do as evidence of good understanding of a subject-matter. Moreover, as we shall see, the statement of propositions which would be true in a scenario which is not actualised can also serve as evidence of understanding of subject-matters.

Two complementary conceptions of understanding are of use here. The first, articulated by Moravcsik (1979), has it that understanding permits us to discriminate the true propositions about a subject-matter from the false ones, and what will guarantee, in the right context, that we know how to extrapolate our understanding appropriately across different contexts, such that we

⁸¹ Let us leave to one side the fact that the defeat did not occur in Hastings itself.

are able to grasp the object of our understanding in a manner that permits us to better ascertain whether the concept will apply in other contexts. In order to motivate this conception of understanding as a sort of basis for discernment of true from false propositions, Moravcsik considers the case of understanding a proof:

‘We shall start with considering types of cases showing that knowing a lot about a proof, as well as what a proof is, need not amount to understanding the proof.

The most obvious type of case involves memorization. One can memorize a proof, and thus be able to reproduce it, one can also memorize what justifies each step of a proof, and thus be able to answer the relevant questions calling for the right sort of propositional knowledge.

Still, none of this guarantees that the learner understands the proof. Lack of understanding can be discovered by evidence that the learner does not see the consequences or significance of the proof, or does not know how to apply the rules involved to justify the various steps, in different contexts.’ (Moravcsik, 1979: 206).

Going back to the subject-matter of Harold’s defeat at Hastings, we might think that simply stating that Harold was defeated at Hastings is insufficient evidence for understanding, say, the consequences and overall historic significance of Harold’s defeat at Hastings. We could easily catch out the weaker History student by asking him about the significance of the defeat. Even though the candidate’s ignorance would be made evident presumably through the utterance of propositions which are either false or do not entirely capture the significance of the defeat, that of which he is ignorant in this case is not the proposition that Harold was defeated at Hastings, but rather what he lacks is the understanding of the historical significance of the defeat.

But Currie’s objection has it precisely that this further understanding of the significance of the defeat can be explained in terms of knowledge of propositions. That of which the candidate is ignorant are the further propositions associated with the consequences of the defeat, its historical significance, and so on. This objection appeals to the plausible claim to the effect that we could express the significance of the historical event in propositional form—and this is in fact how we typically do express our understanding of subject-matters like historical events. Such an objection, however, misses the point of Moravcsik’s observation. The epistemic disposition Moravcsik is trying to draw out here is not the knowledge of the propositions themselves—one could memorise and thereby plausibly come to know any number of propositions relating to the historical significance and consequences of Harold’s defeat at Hastings—but rather the ability to see how the propositions fit together and the subsequent ability to extrapolate how one known

proposition bears on another so as to gain access to new true propositions with regards to the subject-matter at hand. It bears noting also that understanding of the historical significance of the defeat could be expressed in a large number of propositions, whereas knowledge of any one of these propositions is made evident through the expression of that one proposition. The point here being that the claim that understanding can and is expressed in propositional form is not incompatible with the claim that understanding denotes a different epistemic mechanism to knowledge. The former being this ability which Moravcsik brings out with his example and which serves as an organising and discerning mechanism for the latter.

Zagzebski (2019) defines understanding as the grasp of the structure of the object of one's understanding. She clarifies her conception of structure as 'what gives an object unity' and what ultimately permits us to view 'an object *as* an object' (Zagzebski, 2019: 124; author's emphasis). By 'object' Zagzebski here simply means whatever happens to be the object of our understanding—here I have been calling what she means by 'object' a subject-matter, and this can apply to *abstracta* like theories, proofs, concepts, or events as well as concrete objects like an organism, a solar system, or even a particular person. Structure, according to Zagzebski, permits us to see the object of our understanding *as* an object because it shows us how the way in which it is organised makes it an individual structure, rather than a smaller part of a larger structure or several smaller structures that are misidentified as a single structure. Defining understanding as the grasp of the structure of the object of one's understanding is helpful because it is plausible that, to go back to Moravcsik's example, grasping the structure of the proof is what permits us to see its consequences, its significance, and so forth.

It is not clear to me how helpful the notion of understanding as the grasp of structure is when we think of the case of understanding a concept and its applicability across different contexts. Concepts do not have obvious structures in the way biological or astronomical entities do, and the analogy in this case is more difficult to capture than it would be for an abstract entity like an historical event, where we can think of its structure in terms of its causes and consequences. That said, Zagzebski's conception of understanding is still helpful to us here because her emphasis on structure is indicative of ways in which understanding can be articulated which are not straightforwardly propositional or where propositional, not strictly speaking true of the actual world. E.g., by way of drawing a map or by developing an analogy to an object with a significantly similar structure—like Kepler's discovery of his three laws of planetary motion by noticing an analogous structure in certain geometric rules and the rules regarding musical intervals (Zagzebski, 2019: 134). This is helpful because it helps to emphasise this notion of

understanding the means by which we organise those propositions that we do possess on a given subject-matter.

Perhaps, if we continue in this vein, the light that the notion of structure sheds on the case of understanding a concept is precisely that we do often articulate the understanding of a concept by way of presenting contexts which are saliently analogous to one another to indicate that the concept in question applies to both these contexts in virtue of the analogy. Conversely, an understanding of a concept might be indicated by way of presenting us with scenarios which are not analogous to one another, and by indicating the disanalogy, one might show why the concept applies in one case but not in the other. The analogy or disanalogy between scenarios would be shown by indicating the analogy or disanalogy between the *structures* of these scenarios, in such a way that justifies (or not) the applicability of the concept one is trying to clarify. Interesting for our present purposes is that the understanding of a concept is often articulated by analogy, and that the analogous scenarios presented in service of shedding light on that concept needn't be factual. What is indicative of the understanding of the concept in these cases is whether the concept does indeed apply in these cases. This form of conceptual clarification by way of fictional scenario is of course very prevalent in philosophical writings. Here is one such scenario:

'Mary is a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black and white room via a black and white television monitor. She specialises in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like 'red', 'blue', and so on. She discovers, for example, just which wave-length combinations from the sky stimulate the retina, and exactly how this produces via the central nervous system the contraction of the vocal chords[sic.] and expulsion of air from the lungs that results in the uttering of the sentence 'The sky is blue'. (It can hardly be denied that it is in principle possible to obtain all this physical information from black and white television, otherwise the Open University would of necessity need to use colour television.)

What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a colour television monitor? Will she learn anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. But then it is inescapable that her previous knowledge was incomplete.' (Jackson, 1982: 30).

There is—as far as I can tell at any rate—no Mary and no black and white room. The scenario operates in such a way to indicate a conclusion about the nature of knowledge about colour. In

particular, if correct, the argument indicates that those who argue for the reduction of the concept of colour to a given set of physical properties are missing out on the phenomenal element of colour, which too, Jackson argues, constitutes knowledge about colour.⁸² The scenario, if Jackson's diagnosis is correct, achieves this because he presents us with a scenario where, according to the proponents of physicalism, the concept of colour knowledge should apply, but does not. He indicates the disanalogy with scenarios where it does apply by indicating that the structural difference between these scenarios is the acquaintance with the phenomenology of colour. The next question is of course how this bears on works of literature. As indicated above, I envision at least two ways in which it does.

The first way in which the presentation of scenarios analogous to actuality in works of literature is indicative of understanding of the actual world is by way of the very creation of the story-world. The author's deliberate choices of how the story-world is and its analogies and disanalogies with the actual world can permit her to explore certain structural elements of the actual world, thereby potentially expressing an enhanced understanding of that certain element of the actual world. We find a good example of this analogous sort of world-building in comedies of manners, like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Much of the humour for which the novel is famous is explicable in terms of the understanding the novel expresses of the occurrences in parlours of the gentry in Regency Britain. This understanding is expressed through the creation of a story-world where relationships analogous to the ones Austen encountered in the actual parlours of the gentry obtain. This creation of story-worlds with elements analogous to those we encounter in the actual world is the element of the expression of understanding in works of literature which I aim to explicate here. I also offer an explanation as to why this form of expression of understanding is constitutive of a work's value *qua* literature. The aim of Chapter 4 is to make a parallel case for the question of the understanding of the concepts explored in the work themselves—here too the presentation of scenarios analogous to those we might find in the actual world present us with a vehicle for the expression of understanding. The cases presented in Chapter 4 perhaps have more immediate parallels with the Mary case presented above.

Story-World-Building and Truth in Still She Haunts Me

I envision the sort of world-building I argue for here as a truth-related value in a work of literature because the creation of a story-world which is relevantly and interestingly analogous to

⁸² There is of course the further point that Jackson is trying to motivate a kind of dualism. This point is not relevant to my argument.

our own indicates an understanding of what is true in the actual world. Moreover, as we shall see, in certain cases the statement of claims which are true *simpliciter* in the actual world is crucial to building a story-world which resembles the actual world so as to make the point about the actual world towards which the work aims. We find a straightforward case of works of literature which require a good deal of statements of propositions which are true *simpliciter* in the genre of historical fiction. The statement of true propositions, however, does not fully explain the truth-related value instantiated by good historical novels. As we shall see, historical novels also demonstrate understanding of the subject-matters they convey by way of providing us with plausible explanations of their subject-matter—and in doing so reveal a grasp of the structure of their subject-matter, as Zagzebski would put it. I argue that this sort of demonstration of understanding is an important element of cognitive literary value not only in the case of the historical novel, but also in literature more broadly construed. That said, historical novels provide us with the most straightforward example of the sort of cognitive achievement I have in mind and provide us with the clearest case study of the relationship between the statement of true propositions and the overall expression of understanding in a work of literature. As such, it makes sense open the present line of argument with the discussion of a historical novel.

Katie Roiphe's *Still She Haunts Me* (2001) illustrates the relationship between the statement of propositions which are true *simpliciter* and the literary value associated with the expression of understanding through the provision of plausible explanations of the subject-matter with which it deals. The subject-matter of *Still She Haunts Me*—the relationship between Charles Dodgson (more widely known by his *nom de plume* Lewis Carroll) and Alice Liddell (the putative subject of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)⁸³ in the months leading up to Dodgson's falling out with the Liddell family—is one which especially lends itself to the sort of explanation a historical novel can offer, and is one which has been widely speculated upon both in academic settings and in the broader context of popular culture.

The reason as to why this question has been so widely speculated upon is at least in part because there is a very conspicuous gap in the information we have with regards to this turn of events in Dodgson's life. Dodgson was a keen diarist—there are thirteen known volumes of his diaries, spanning, according to his nephew, from his tenth year to close to his death.⁸⁴ Several volumes

⁸³ I say 'putative' here because whilst it has been widely speculated that Alice Liddell is the protagonist of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and despite the facts that original telling of the story was to the Liddell sisters, and that the story was originally written down as a Christmas present to Alice Liddell, Dodgson himself denied that the fictional Alice was modelled on any child in particular.

⁸⁴ His nephew's biography, Collingwood (1912), is the earliest Carroll/Dodgson biography and cites journal entries from the now missing Volume I which date back to Dodgson's childhood.

and certain pages of his diaries, including the pages corresponding to the falling-out with the Liddells and the volume corresponding to the bulk of his friendship with Alice, are missing.⁸⁵ Moreover, Dodgson was a keen letter-writer, writing tens of thousands of letters in his lifetime.⁸⁶ He famously maintained correspondences with many little girls, of which it is said Alice Liddell was one. Many such letters survive,⁸⁷ but Dodgson's letters to Alice were, according to Alice herself, destroyed by her mother.⁸⁸ Another reason why the particulars of Dodgson's life have given rise to speculation is because he was, by all accounts, a man of many contradictions. He was on one hand a serious Oxford mathematics don, the son of a clergyman, and an ordained clergyman himself. In this vein, he was said to be a stickler for the rules, often arguing with Henry Liddell (Alice's father and the dean of Christ Church, where Dodgson was employed) about reforms surrounding life at the college. On the other hand, he is also the author of one of the most whimsical and irreverent children's books in the English language, he was a friend to artists and poets, a frequent and avid theatre-goer, maintained correspondences with actresses, and an early enthusiast for photography.⁸⁹ Famously, many of his photographs are of girls, some in varying states of undress.⁹⁰ He was also a very private man, who did not want it widely known that he was Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—in spite of having kept detailed records of the *minutiae* of his life.⁹¹ Dodgson also never married, giving rise to widespread speculation about his sexuality. Perhaps the most popular explanation (perhaps because it is so provocative) of the rift between Dodgson and the Liddells today is Cohen's (1995) hypothesis that Dodgson made known his putative intention to marry Alice Liddell. Leach (1999) vehemently denies this, and suggests instead a romantic involvement with either Mrs Liddell herself or with the girls' governess. She also suggests that what the Dodgson family were so keen to conceal after the author of *Alice's* death were his dalliances with grown women (Leach, 2002).

Roiphe's novel takes all the information cited by Dodgson's biographers and creates a fictional explanation of what happened in the lead-up to Dodgson's rift with the Liddells. In what follows

⁸⁵ There is disagreement as to whether the volumes were lost due to carelessness or in virtue of their potentially incriminating content. There is also disagreement as to whether the particular pages removed from the diary were removed by Dodgson himself or by well-meaning relatives who survived him. The website of the British Lewis Carroll Society has useful entries with regards to the missing volumes and pages of Dodgson's diaries.

⁸⁶ Cohen (1982) estimates the total to be about 103,721 letters from around his twenty-ninth birthday (when he began to keep a record of the letters he wrote) to his death.

⁸⁷ My reader can find some such letters in print in Cohen (1982).

⁸⁸ Liddell tells us this in a recollection of Carroll she wrote for *The Cornhill* towards the end of her life.

⁸⁹ A fascinating discussion of these contradictions can be found in Cohen (1995).

⁹⁰ It bears noting that nude photographs of pre-pubescent girls were seen as pure and tasteful in the Victorian era, contrary to present mores with regards to this matter.

⁹¹ We can see in some of the letters collected by Cohen (1982) his reluctance to be known to be Lewis Carroll, as well as his pretence that Carroll was someone other than Dodgson. See especially the letter to Catherine Laing (100).

I aim to spell out what I take to be this relationship between the expression of truths *simpliciter*, and the literary value associated with the expression of understanding whilst employing Roiphe's novel for illustrative purposes. I argue that the novel's success (insofar as literary value is concerned) depends upon this expression of understanding and the statement of propositions which are true *simpliciter* (both cognitive achievements) and that this is because these cognitive achievements are tied with the novel's artistic aims. I take the artistic aim of this novel to be to provide us with a compelling explanation for the rift between Dodgson and Liddell.

As already hinted at, a difference between a historical novel and a biography like Cohen's or Leach's is that historical novels are able to speculate more openly and deeply about the motives of historical characters. Historical novels can re-imagine what an individual's mental process behind certain known decisions might have been like, and can include details such as flashbacks and hallucinations, where biographies can at most provide us with conjectures about less intimate causes of the course of events in a historical character's life. This is because biography, as a non-fictional *genre*, is concerned with only making the sort of speculation which can be strictly substantiated by the body of evidence available to the biographer. Whereas the historical novel, being a fictional novel, can stipulate facts of the story-world created such that they support the speculation offered in the novel. That the historical novelist has *carte blanche* to re-imagine the intimate details of a historical character's life does not mean that she is unconstrained by the facts relevant to that character's life in her re-imagination. And this is in virtue of the fact that at least in most cases of historical novels, the artistic aim is to provide us with a plausible speculation or re-imagination of the turn of events described, and this plausibility is determined by compatibility with what is actually factual of this turn of events.

As stated in the introduction, I take Roiphe's novel only to be successful to an extent at meeting this goal of providing us with a plausible re-imagination of Dodgson's life surrounding his rift with the Liddells. This uneven success, I propose, is due to a fluctuating faithfulness to the way the world really is. On the face of it, Roiphe's novel is clearly well-researched and is replete with factual evidence backing her imaginative speculation of Dodgson's internal life. All the letters included the novel, except for the two written to Alice,⁹² are letters which Dodgson actually wrote. Roiphe exploits the expression of claims which are true *simpliciter*—such as the fact that Dodgson took the Liddells rowing with his friend Duckworth, the fact that he was a keen diarist and letter-writer, his political tensions about college life with Liddell, his friendships with the

⁹² Of which according to Alice Liddell herself the actual counterparts were destroyed by her mother. See also Roiphe's author's note (2001: 225-228).

Rossettis, and his sessions with the speech therapist Hunt to treat his famous stutter—to express a good understanding of that which actually preoccupied Dodgson at the time when the novel is set. She does this by stipulating these propositions as true in the story-world, and by building them into the narration.

Bearing all of this in mind, one of the more successful elements of Roiphe's narration is her inclusion of letters and journal entries into the narration of the novel. She quotes letters that Dodgson actually penned, with the exception of the letters to Alice which have been lost. She also carefully re-imagines the journal entries of Dodgson's which have been lost, in order to begin to answer those questions which the historical novelist can answer, but the historian cannot. Both these narrative devices serve to create a story-world analogous to our own because it is true that Dodgson was a keen diarist and letter-writer, and would have plausibly expressed the thoughts Roiphe attributes to him—if indeed he really did have these exact thoughts—by means of letters and journal entries. This resemblance between the story-world and the actual world serves to provide us with a more plausible explanation of Dodgson's inner life in the days leading up to the rift with the Liddells.

The fact that Roiphe's painstaking research into Dodgson's life is apparent throughout the novel might appear to be a double-edged sword. *Observer* critic Anna Schapiro (2001) criticised the novel on account of being 'corpulent with what is known and thin on all we turn to fiction for'. Schapiro's point, I think, amounts to the claim that the novel draws heavily on what is widely known about the author and does little by way of original or interesting speculation about the author. This criticism of the novel, if correct, could undermine my claim that the successful historical novel must draw heavily on what is known in order to create the building-blocks of its story-world. But it needn't.

In what follows I agree with Schapiro's assessment of the novel, whilst still maintaining that Roiphe's painstaking research is the most artistically successful element of the novel. In my argument, I concede to Schapiro the observation that there are points where the use of the actual facts as building-blocks for the way the story-world of *Still She Haunts Me* could have been used more imaginatively. We see one such example in the following passage, where we get a glimpse of Roiphe's imaginings of Mrs Liddell's (Alice's mother) reservations about Dodgson's photographing Alice so frequently:

'Mrs Liddell leaned against the doorway and watched him [Dodgson] walk down the path. She would be the first to admit that her fears were irrational—it was perfectly acceptable, in fact,

extremely fashionable, to have a photographer do dress-up portraits of little girls, but she was worried.’ (Roiphe, 2001: 42).

Many will find it difficult to meet such a passage with a straight face. This is because the claim that it was in fact ‘extremely fashionable’ and ‘perfectly acceptable’ to have a photographer take dress-up portraits of one’s daughters in Victorian England whilst true, would make for an unlikely statement from an actual Victorian. Precisely because the facts of extreme fashionableness and perfect acceptability would be so built-in to the Victorian world that a Victorian would be unlikely to point to them in quite so explicit terms.⁹³ A passage like this could be taken for a counterexample to my claim. Here we have a claim which is true *simpliciter* of the actual world and that would be an important building-block of a story-world whose artistic aim is to explore the relationship between Dodgson and Alice Liddell, whom he photographed so frequently in costume in a world where it was fashionable and acceptable to have one’s child photographed in costume by famous photographers. The inclusion of this claim in the narrative stipulations of the novel is symptomatic of understanding the actual world in a way that is relevant to the building of the story-world in such a way that promotes its artistic aims. So what went wrong?

The problem here, I propose, has to do with the way in which the claim was introduced into the novel. As already stated, it would be unlikely that a *bona fide* Victorian would reflect upon what is acceptable and ‘extremely fashionable’ in such explicit terms. The introduction of the claim in this manner suggests a lack of understanding about how an actual Victorian mother might reflect upon her reservations about having her daughter repeatedly photographed by Dodgson. The claim, then, whilst true *simpliciter*, is not included in the narration in a manner that is true to the way the world really is. A story-world which can provide us with a plausible explanation of the rift between the Liddells and Dodgson need also honour the psychological complexities of the characters involved. And where these are unknown, the workings of the story-world must honour the complexities of human psychology more generally if it is to support a plausible explanation of the rift. As well, of course, as the facts about fashion and acceptability, where appropriate.

⁹³ Some might take the very explicitly articulated concerns with what is proper and fashionable we find in contemporary works of literature like *The Importance of Being Earnest* run counter to what I am claiming here. This needn’t be the case. It is important to remember that the likes of *The Importance of Being Earnest* are parodic comedies written by individuals with *exceptional* perceptiveness of the *mores* of their time. The characters *Still She Haunts Me* by contrast, are not heightened or parodic in this manner, so would be unlikely to express their concerns with fashion and decorum in the manner of the likes of Lady Bracknell. Moreover, the realist yet as deeply steeped in questions of decorum and fashion as Lady Bracknell, Mrs. Liddell as presented in the novel has nothing of the self-awareness that inspired Wilde’s most devastating remarks.

A story-world which can successfully meet the artistic ends at hand, then, would also have built into it actual truths about human psychology, including how human beings behave in and reflect upon a world which reflects their own *mores* and tastes. Cognitive achievement as it relates to the truth *simpliciter*, then, is not the mere statement of claims which are true *simpliciter*. Rather, it is employing claims which are true *simpliciter* for the construction of a story-world which promotes the artistic aims of the work at hand in such a way that is compatible with the other truths which are necessary for the construction of a successful story-world. Ultimately, Roiphe's novel is wanting precisely because it largely fails to honour the human complexities surrounding what is known about this time in Dodgson's life.

Perhaps this shortcoming of the novel's is most blatant in Roiphe's chosen *dénouement* of the novel. In the fiction of *Still She Haunts Me*, it is stipulated that Dodgson and the Liddells fall out because Dodgson photographs Alice in the nude without her parents' knowledge. Confused, Alice languishes after the event, but does not tell her parents what happened. Her jealous younger sister, Edith, discovers the offending photographs when going through Alice's things and shows them to her parents, who proceed to advise Dodgson that 'It is no longer desirable' for Dodgson to spend time with the Liddell family (Roiphe, 2001: 1; 206). Dodgson then proceeds to sneak into the Liddells' garden with machinations to take Alice with him to Paris, but changes his mind at the last minute.

As far as we know, the actual Dodgson took no such photographs of the actual Alice. As mentioned above, however, it is known that Dodgson did photograph other young girls in the nude. Roiphe supports the plausibility of such a turn of events by citing letters which Dodgson wrote to mothers of other children asking for permission to invite them to his house, to kiss the girls, and to photograph them in the nude.⁹⁴ That these behaviours and the request for permission to perform strike the modern reader as odd is neither here nor there. Let us concede, for the sake of argument, that claim made by many that a certain avuncular closeness which is not sanctioned today between single men and children to whom he was not related was not only usual, but also *de rigueur* if the children belonged to friends of the bachelor in question. Let us concede, moreover, that Mrs Liddell's observation about Victorian society as quoted above is also true. Given these concessions, it is odd for Roiphe to employ these letters as evidence for

⁹⁴See the letters to which I refer reproduced in Cohen (1982: 97; 271). In the Roiphe, they are quoted in pp. 170 and 191, respectively.

untoward behaviour from Dodgson's part towards Alice. These letters, if anything, demonstrate a desire from Dodgson's part to avoid anything of the sort.⁹⁵

Roiphe also supports her fictional explanation of Dodgson's rift with the Liddells by inventing an incident in Dodgson's childhood where he accidentally sees his older sister naked and this shapes his sexuality later in life. She writes:

'He was eight. His sister Elizabeth was ten. He opened the door to her room late one afternoon, twisting and rattling the knob till it gave, in order to retrieve the puppet theater he had left there after that morning's rehearsal, and she was standing there naked. Dressing for the guests. He should have known. He slammed the door. Which had never been more than three quarters open. He had seen an expanse of peach-pink skin rising and spreading through the room. And then he focused again, his sister's neck, shoulder blades, back, buttocks, thighs (...) the guilt made him nauseous, made it impossible to eat the candied apricots the nurse brought to the nursery later that evening (...) Every now and then it came back to him, the child's figure, so tinged and outlined with the fear he felt' (Roiphe, 2001: 169-170)

The flashback as Roiphe describes it is stipulated to play a major part in the make-up of Dodgson's personality. Imagining such flashbacks, as I said, lies very much within the remit of the permissible for authors of historical fiction. The historical fiction writer's permission to imagine such things does not guarantee that such imaginings will successfully promote the artistic aims of the novel. Here, I think, is the problem with this particular flashback. On one hand, the use of the flashback as support for the fictional explanation that the novel brings forth suggests a stereotypical portrayal of individuals with deviant sexualities. Namely that the individual has one suppressed memory from childhood that suggests the nascent sexuality and that this memory goes unresolved well into adulthood. Now, I am not in saying this, denying that there are individuals out there with unresolved or suppressed memories from early childhood which suggest sexuality or other elements of the personality in adulthood. Rather, my qualm is that the way in which the novel presents this one memory suggests an oversimplification of a personality as complicated as Dodgson's by use of stereotypes promoted by pop psychology. For one, if anything, the flashback as it is written is more suggestive of an incestuous attraction

⁹⁵ It also bears noting that the letters Roiphe cite were penned decades after the Liddell incident. In the author's note, Roiphe admits to having 'altered geography, chronology, and history where it served the purposes of the novel' (Roiphe, 2001: 225). It is unclear what stipulating the pretence that these letters in particular were penned before the incident does towards 'serv[ing] the purposes of the novel', particularly given that it is unlikely that a man who has consistently been cautious about not overstepping parental boundaries would begin overstepping such boundaries. The manipulation of history in this case appears to undermine the 'purposes of the novel' rather than serve them.

towards his sister than it is of the nascent paedophilia that Roiphe attributes to Dodgson. If the narrative point here is that one form of deviant attraction (incest) can serve as shorthand for another, then this narrative device suggests a failure of the imagination from the author's part. It relies on the stereotypes as to how sexuality (deviant or otherwise) comes to be. This narrative resource impoverishes the calibre of the work itself because it provides us, by its use of stereotype by way of explanation, with a trite portrayal of its characters. Below, I argue that triteness is an artistic flaw because it narrows the artistic possibilities in a work of art. If what I argue is correct, this triteness constitutes an artistic failure as well as a cognitive one. The failure is artistic because the world the work presents is in this respect uninteresting and derivative—'trite' can be employed as an evaluative term with regards to art after all. As we shall see in the next section, triteness of this sort is an artistic failure also because it impoverishes the plot and characters that make up the story-world and its presentation. The failure is also a cognitive one because it presents us with an unhelpful overgeneralisation of certain elements of the workings of the actual world.

Story-World-Building and Truth in To Sir With Love

An objection which might be placed before my proposal as it stands at present is that this relationship between world-building and reality might behold the historical novel in a way which does not apply to other sub-genres of literature. An argument to this effect might go something like this. In light of the proposal put forward in Walton's seminal 'Categories of Art' (1970), we might think that a standard property of works of historical fiction is their verisimilitude. If we accept this to be the case, we might say that the cognitive artistic flaws I argued for in the above section obtain not in virtue of *Still She Haunts Me* being a work of literature, but rather in virtue of its being a work of historical fiction. This would suggest that the cognitive artistic flaw I have been describing obtains only in a small sub-category of works of literature and tells us not very much about literary value overall. My response to this objection will take up the rest of this chapter as well as the beginning of the next. In this chapter, we will examine a second case-study, Braithwaite's *To Sir With Love* (2005).⁹⁶ This novel, in virtue of its being a memoir, might fall prey to a similar objection to the one I have just articulated against *Still She Haunts Me*. In what follows of this chapter, I will argue that the lack of verisimilitude in the world-building in this novel impacts upon the novel's artistic quality not only because it is unlikely that the events were quite as retold by Braithwaite, but also because the story-world upon which narrative relies is built on overgeneralisations that can be construed as trite in the same way certain elements of

⁹⁶ Originally published in 1959.

Roiphe's novel are trite. This artistic flaw, as we shall see, is also possible in works of literature which are neither memoirs nor historical fictions. I will also argue in Chapter 4 that the converse to this artistic flaw is the artistic achievement of posing a challenge to the reader's own overgeneralisations. This can manifest as a challenge to the reader's pre-conceptions of the applicability of a concept, a novel recombination of concepts which permits us to examine our preconceptions about those concepts, and the exploration of a particular concept.

Braithwaite's novel is of undoubted interest to the historian of racial tensions in post-war Britain. It tells the story of Braithwaite's own experiences as a black Guyanese (Guyana was once the British colony British Guiana) man who had sought an education in New York City, joined the RAF during World War II, earned a doctorate in physics from the University of Cambridge, and despite all of this had found it impossible to find an engineering job in Britain after the war, openings for which were abundant at the time. This difficulty securing a job leads Braithwaite to apply for a teaching position, and he is sent to one of the worst schools in one of the roughest parts of the East End of London. *To Sir With Love* tells the story of the encounter of this educated, black man with underprivileged, mostly white students. At the beginning of his teaching job, the students mistrust him, partly due to his race and partly due to the obvious socio-economic disparities between them. The bulk of the novel concerns itself with telling us how Braithwaite wins over the students and makes model citizens of them. The process of edifying these students begins in earnest after an open confrontation with them when Braithwaite's female students attempt to burn a used sanitary pad in the classroom as an act of defiance against their new teacher.

The novel is of particular interest to us not because it is of value to the historian for offering a very particular perspective on the racial tensions in Britain in this historical period, though no doubt Braithwaite's perspective is unique and interesting. Rather, it is of interest to us because in spite of the insights it offers us it is in certain respects a very bad novel.⁹⁷ It is a bad novel because the very things that the memoir is supposed to reflect upon are reflected upon badly, indicating a flawed understanding of the world and ultimately providing us with a novel with limited artistic value. My proposal is that understanding the flaws in this novel sheds light on the way in which works of literature are artistically impoverished when their exploration of actual-world concepts provides us with an impoverished, and in that respect erroneous, understanding

⁹⁷ The 1967 film adaptation doesn't do any better with critics. One such critic calls it 'such a foolishly simple-minded movie that it wouldn't be worth mentioning mutilate an 'important' subject—teaching the unteachable' (Farber, 1967: 50). Interestingly, the flaws Farber identifies in the film are similar and derivative of the flaws I identify in the novel.

of those concepts. I propose that the crucial concepts in question here are those of the racial and class tensions in post-war Britain as well as the teacher-student relationship. As we shall see, many of the complaints lodged against this novel *qua* work of art relate to the story-world's tenuous relationship to the way the world really is.

In an early review of the novel, Birbalsingh (1968) writes:

‘Having suffered many rebuffs of discrimination looking for work, he [Braithwaite] eventually secures a teaching job in a less affluent neighbourhood where the delinquency of the children greatly accentuates the enormous difficulty of social assimilation already created by his colour. But by revealing the same qualities of intelligence and cultivated behaviour that he is expected not to possess, he wins the respect of the pupils, staff, and people in the immediate vicinity of the school. Unfortunately, the narration of Mr. Braithwaite’s problems in *To Sir With Love* is greatly weakened by the rapid and simple solutions that he offers: the sanitary napkin is deliberately placed in the class-room, the author simply reprimands the class concerned and appeals to their sense of decency, and five minutes later he returns to find that the offending article has been repentantly removed: also, a girl who rudely barges into the room responds instantly to a judicious touch of mild sarcasm from Mr. Braithwaite and, to the astonishment of her impressed classmates, re-enters ‘with a grace and dignity that would have befitted a queen’: and towards the end of the book, when the same girl has been staying away from home without explanation, Mr. Braithwaite, in response to an appeal by her distracted mother, talks to the girl in a tactful manner and at once obtains her promised co-operation for the future.

These instant results, which come from wishful thinking rather than sound psychological analysis, indicate an unrealistic attitude to educational theory and practice and inadequate understanding of the social problems that confront Mr. Braithwaite. They represent superficial gestures that conceal his real difficulties and reveal instead his own vanity: for it isn’t the causes of the children’s delinquency that are investigated, nor the motives for their racial prejudices that are considered. As his frequent acceptance of glowing tribute from admiring colleagues suggests, what chiefly concerns Mr. Braithwaite, regardless of the problems at hand, is the satisfactory projection of his own image as a rather talented and thoroughly civilised black man.’ (Birbalsingh, 1968: 74-75).

Birbalsingh’s charge against Braithwaite *qua* author of the novel is that rather than create a story-world which resembles the actual world to an extent sufficient to examine the actual difficulties faced by Braithwaite in his appointment at the school, Braithwaite instead creates a story-world

where he can easily fix the problems he faces in virtue of his being exceptionally talented and civilised. This causes the artistic calibre of the novel to suffer not only because in choosing to craft a self-congratulatory world rather than one where the interest and difficulties of Braithwaite's situations are explored, it damages the novel's veracity *qua* memoir. Rather crucially for my purposes, Braithwaite's impoverished story-world impoverishes the novel's plot and characters, thus yielding an impoverished work of art.

As pointed out by his critics, many of the artistic limitations posed by the limited understanding that the novel brings forth is made apparent in gaps in the plot. As Birbalsingh points out, the 'unrealistic attitude' towards educational theory leads to a swift, and often unbelievable narration of the events portrayed in the novel. Anybody who has ever been faced with a classroom full of unsympathetic teenagers knows that the quick turn in the students' attitude towards Braithwaite after the sanitary towel incident—which Braithwaite cites as the turning point in his relationship to his students—is glossed over at best and delusional at worst. Braithwaite writes:

'Matters came to a head one afternoon during recess. I had gone to the staffroom to fetch a cup of tea and returned to the classroom smoky from an object that was smouldering in the grate of the fireplace. Several girls and boys were standing around joking and laughing, careless of the smoke and making no attempt to smother or remove its source. I pushed through them for a closer look, and was horrified to see that someone had thrown a sanitary napkin into the grate and made an abortive attempt to burn it.

I was so overcome by anger and disgust that I completely lost my temper. I ordered the boys out of the room, then turned the full ash of my angry tongue to the girls. I told them how sickened I was by their general conduct, crude language, sluttish behaviour, and their free and easy familiarity with the boys. The words gushed out of me, and the girls stood there and took it. By God, they took it! Not one of them dared to move or speak. Then I turned to their latest escapade [...]

When I entered the classroom and the end of recess, the fireplace was washed clean, the windows were open, and the children were sitting quietly in their places. The girls seemed sheepish and refused to meet my glance, and I realised with something of a shock that they (at least most of them) were ashamed; the boys, on the other hand, were watching me expectantly, as if waiting for me to say something.' (Braithwaite, 2005: 66-67).

Immediately after this incident, Braithwaite lays out the law of the land in his classroom:

‘[T]here are certain courtesies which will be observed at all times in this [Braithwaite’s] classroom. Myself [Braithwaite] you will address as Mr. Braithwaite’ or ‘Sir’—the choice is yours; the young ladies will be addressed as ‘Miss’ and the young men will be addressed by their surnames’ (Braithwaite, 2005: 69)

Four pages later, the students are ‘very pleased to be treated like grown-ups’ and ‘already showing their stuff’ (Braithwaite, 2005: 73). By page 76, the students express genuine intellectual curiosity in visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum, by page 89 the students ‘would have been a credit to the best of schools’ and accept what Braithwaite says ‘completely, unquestioningly’. The swift progression in narration suggests that Braithwaite’s simple gestures—the demand of basic etiquette in the classroom, the borderline fantastically gentlemanly defeat of his most defiant student in a boxing match in PE class, and the trip to the Victoria and Albert—are the root cause of this almost magical transition from ‘sluttish’ students to model students. In making the choice of glossing over the transition between sluttishness to being a credit, Braithwaite impoverishes the plot of the novel and the story-world itself. The plot of the novel is impoverished because the narration heavily implies that the sole cause of his students’ transformation is Braithwaite’s own talent as a teacher.

In this story-world, it is true that all these students needed to overcome their delinquent ways, was an exceptional teacher willing to make three gestures—no hard work or examination of students’ homelives or socio-economic situations necessary. This plotline is an impoverished one because its implausibility in the story-world which Braithwaite purports to present us with—that is, one that strongly resembles the actual bombed-out East-End of London after the Second World War—constitutes a sort of *deus ex machina*, with Braithwaite as a sort of god-like figure who miraculously restores these children’s sense of decency and appreciation for their fellow man. It impoverishes the story-world because it implies that Braithwaite’s story-world is such that *deus ex machina* scenarios are not only possible, but also the likeliest explanation. Having a story-world where such simple explanations are likely means that, as Brindalsingh points out, Braithwaite misses out the opportunity to examine why his students behave in such a delinquent manner and why they display racist attitudes towards him. In missing this opportunity, he fails, on one hand, to furnish us with a sufficiently complex and enriching conception of the teacher-student relationship and of the racial and class tensions he encountered in the East End. By providing us with these impoverished conceptions, Braithwaite creates a story-world populated by one-dimensional characters whose motives he can easily manipulate. Such a story-world can only make for uninteresting story-telling, and consequently for a work of literature of limited

literary value. The actual world that Braithwaite purports to report on is far richer and far more interesting.

If my diagnosis of this case is correct, what McLeod calls ‘the book’s solipsistic and highly self-concerned perspective’ (McLeod, 2012: 68) is of interest to us not so much because *To Sir With Love* is a memoir that presents us with an unbelievable turn of events about a black teacher taking a job in a rough school in the East End of London right after World War II, but rather because the solipsistic perspective or understanding of the events limits the very stuff that novels are made of: story-worlds with turns of events (plots) and characters. This in turn limits the artistic value that such a novel can instantiate. This suggests that at least in some cases, verisimilitude in story-world construction is an important building-block for literary value of both the purely formal as well as the cognitive kind. It can be a building-block of more formal literary value in that, as we have seen, it contributes to the sorts of plots and characters so often count for or against the calibre of a narrative work of literature’s value *qua* work of art. Story-world construction of the sort I have suggested would have benefitted the artistic value of *Still She Haunts Me* and *To Sir With Love* also serves as evidence of the sort of cognitive achievement which constitutes the cognitive value I have proposed is also a literary value. If I am right, this sort of story-world building is what enables authors to adequately examine the concepts they wish to examine. Another interesting upshot of my diagnosis of these two cases is that these two literary values—thematic or conceptual exploration and adequately complex plot and characters—are deeply intertwined with one another. Because of their dependence on adequately factual story-world building, it will be difficult to successfully examine the relevant concepts without adequately interesting plots and characters, which in turn arise from adequately factual world-building.

Middle Earth: The Scope of the Claim

It is clear at least on the face of it that in a fantasy novel, the extent to which adherence to the facts in story-world building is necessary for cognitive achievement differs from the extent to which adherence to the facts in story-world building in the cases I have just discussed. My objector might retort at this point that this is rather simply because memoirs and historical novels have certain standard features that fantasy novels do not. This response can only take my objector so far, however. Many of the fantasy novels and science fictions that we admire employ the remoteness of their story-worlds to make certain commentaries of the actual world. The story-worlds that serve as backdrops for novels like Orwell’s *1984* or Gaiman’s *American Gods* differ from our own significantly. We have not (yet) descended into the authoritarian dystopia

envisioned by Orwell and the world is not (as far as we know) inhabited by ancient gods trying to survive off the worship of mortals. Likewise, there is no Middle Earth as far as we can tell. The present question is what, if anything, does factual world-building have to do with building story-worlds like Middle Earth or the United States as it is depicted in *American Gods*. An awful lot, it will turn out, if I am correct.

I argued above that the reason a story-world that is far removed from actuality can impede the effective examination or clarification of a concept is because the story-world is insufficiently complex for the examination or clarification of the concept in question. The key to understanding the relationship between factual story-world building to literary value, then, lies in which concepts we can plausibly take the author to have intended to examine or in some other way engage with in producing the work and ask ourselves whether the story-world built in the work can sufficiently support this aim of the author's. Those who object that this heuristic is overly intentionalist might find that my claim in previous chapters that one need only appeal to the intentions of the author's which are apparent to us given the work itself and the context of the work's genesis in order to get this going. One need only, in other words, appeal to the information that is readily available to us for the purpose of extrapolating the author's intentions, as we do in ordinary discourse when we work out why someone might have performed a particular speech-act. This claim about the relationship between factual story-world building and cognitive achievement and literary value is a particularist one because whether factual story-world building relates to literary value depends entirely on whether the author aimed to employ story-world building to examine an element of the actual world (what I have been discussing in terms of the exploration of a concept). It does not follow from what I am saying, then, that factual story-world building is a necessary condition for literary value in all works of literature. Rather, it is a necessary condition for a particular kind of literary value where the aspiration towards actualising the value is apparent in the work. It bears noting also that the author's aim might be to actualise that sort of value with respect to certain story-world elements but not in others.

For instance, if we take Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as a series of novels which aims to examine the struggle between good and evil, we are, according to my proposal, to evaluate the factual elements of his story-world building only insofar as the elements of good and evil are concerned. We might ask ourselves, for instance, whether good and evil as they obtain in Middle Earth more generally (i.e., in *The Hobbit* and in the *Silmarillion* as well as in the *Lord of the Rings*) are overly simplistic because the contrast between good and evil in Middle Earth is far starker than it is in the actual world. That is, the good are obviously good and the wicked are obviously wicked—

and generally physically ugly to boot. This may well be a legitimate criticism of the novel and if correct, the judgement would detract from the literary value of Tolkien's *opus*. It bears noting that the extent to which *The Lord of the Rings* is to be read as a commentary on the struggle between good and evil is not obvious. Tolkien for one vehemently denied that his work should be read as an allegory of the struggle between good and evil, or an allegory of any sort for that matter.⁹⁸ I remain neutral on whether we should take him at his word on this particular claim. Delving into its accuracy would require an acquaintance with Tolkien's works and the context within which they were conceived which lies beyond the scope of the present argument.

Regardless of whether we should read *The Lord of the Rings* as an examination of the concepts of good and evil and the struggle between the two, there are other respects in which story-world building in this work of literature contributes to its value *qua* literature. Famously, the world-building in Tolkien's creation is admirable because he creates sets of cultures, each with distinct and complex languages and mythologies. Tolkien's works very much aspire to flesh out these cultures with their respective languages and mythologies, and the fact that he portrays these cultures with a level of nuance comparable to the one we employ in our historical enquiries into ancient cultures is very much a case of story-world building which contributes to a work's literary value. My objector might ask how the artistic value of Tolkien's creation, which is far from actual—as far as we know angels did not create dwarves because they got tired of waiting around for God to create elves in the actual world—have anything to do with the way things really are. Once again, I contend that the answer is an awful lot.

I have already said that what makes Tolkien's creation admirable is the intricate detail, which is akin to the detail in which we aim to know about actual ancient cultures. Tolkien was an accomplished philologist, with intimate knowledge of medieval languages like Old English and Old Norse. The story-world building in *Lord of the Rings* contributes to a cognitive achievement in the work because the story-world with its intricate mythologies and languages is one made in the image of the medieval mythologies and languages Tolkien studied and admired. As Burns (2005) points out, for each people Tolkien represents, Tolkien created a language (or parts of) a language which in some way give us an insight into what these Middle Earth peoples are like. Burns writes:

‘And beyond all this, Tolkien created his own languages, a ‘secret vice,’ to borrow his own phrase. In both *The Lord of the Rings* and the invented mythology he began writing long before *The Hobbit*, samples of Tolkien's languages appear repeatedly – elegant, graceful

⁹⁸ See Tolkien's ‘Forward to the Second Edition’ (Tolkien, 2012: 12-13).

languages with echoes of Finnish and Welsh (in the Quenya and Sindarin spoken by the Elves); the Dwarf language, with its Old Norse names but with words intentionally Semitic; and Black Speech, the Dark Lord's language, a language that jars on the ear like the articulation of hate. Where no complete or fully developed language exists for a particular people or race, Tolkien suggests their speech by a sample phrase or two. The long-living, pondering Ents include in any single word a rich association of ideas; hence the Entish a-lalla-lalla-rumba-kamandalind-or-burúmë, as Treebeard tells Pippin and Merry, is only a part of his name for the rock shelf where he and the hobbits met.' (Burns, 2005: 6).

That the mythopoeia surrounding *The Lord of the Rings* is so intricate as to include carefully created languages attributed to each people indicates a cognitive achievement of the sort I have been describing here, even if there is no Middle Earth and no Elvish dialects. This is because in creating his story-world, Tolkien has imported the complexities of the actual world into the story-world, and in doing so has furnished a story-world that is complicated enough to be interesting to us in its own right. Moreover, we should admire the story-world building which is factual in its complexity if not in its actual substance in *The Lord of the Rings* and its accompanying works precisely because the cognitive achievement Tolkien had in his sights when crafting these works was a mythopoeia which complexities and intricacies resembling those of actual peoples of the past. We see this if we look at the Forward to the Second Edition cited above, where Tolkien states that he 'much prefer[s] history, true or feigned', to the allegory which is so often attributed to his work (Tolkien, 2012: 12). And it is when we read *The Lord of the Rings* and its accompanying works as a feigned history, that we see the cognitive achievement that is building a story-world analogous in our own in its cultural, mythological, linguistic, and historical complexities. This cognitive achievement might pass us by if we scrutinise the verisimilitude of the story-world in respects in which the author did not mean to examine. In saying this, I am not proposing that we must read an author's mind in order to ascertain the respects in which we might scrutinise a work for its story-world related cognitive achievements, or even that we appeal to documents independent from the works themselves, such as authorial forwards or letters. I said above that I wish to remain neutral here on the methodological point of what counts as a legitimate source for ascertaining authorial intention—it is plausible that we might come to the conclusion that Tolkien had in his sights a mythopoeia with complexities paralleling actual mythologies by accessing only the texts of *The Lord of the Rings* and its accompanying works. The upshot of this point is that even the story-world furthest removed from the actual world might aim at the sort of cognitive achievement which I argued for in this chapter, and that in order to

achieve it, the story-world must be built with special attention to the way things really are, at least in the respects relevant to the cognitive achievement aimed for.

Where I am Now

In this chapter, I have spelled out how factual story-world building is a cognitive achievement that can and does contribute to a work's literary value. I have done so by noting the relationship between a story-world's containing elements which are analogous to the counterparts of those elements—as well as stipulations that certain claims which are true *simpliciter* in the actual world are also true in the story-world—we find in the actual world and the artistic possibilities for value in that work, e.g., in terms of plot and character. I argued that this relationship between factual story-world building and the possibility of literary value is not limited to works which are on the face of it concerned with hyperrealism—as might be the case of literary *sub-genres* such as the historical novel or the memoir. I proposed that even in works of fantasy like *The Lord of the Rings*, we find certain elements of story-world building which are supposed to be taken as analogous to counterparts in the actual world and which are there to serve as examination of certain actual world subject-matters. In the case of *The Lord and the Rings*, we might think of Middle Earth as a vehicle for re-imagining how the mythologies and languages of actual cultures could fit together if they obtained in a world which differs greatly to our own.⁹⁹ I proposed that we employ our extrapolation of authorial intention—with the means reasonably available to us—as a litmus test for whether the element of the story-world which we are examining for verisimilitude is a legitimate one for that particular work. From this proposal, it follows that it is at least possible that not all works will have the examination of a subject-matter or concept as part of its artistic aims. My proposal, then, is not that we negatively evaluate all works which lack verisimilitude in story-world building. Rather, it is that we evaluate the verisimilitude in the story-world building where this verisimilitude can be legitimately taken as constitutive to the attainment of the work's artistic aims.

It bears noting also that if my diagnosis of the relationship between factual story-world building and literary value is correct, then we have here found a handful of counterexamples to what I characterised in Chapter 1 as the untenable implication of the thesis of form-content inseparability as interpreted by McGregor (2016) and Lamarque (2014). In Chapter 1, I proposed that there is an element of the thesis of form-content inseparability that I would concede to the autonomist, namely that we cannot judge the content of a work—e.g., the story-world and the

⁹⁹ Burns (2005) makes a case for reading *The Lord of the Rings* and Middle Earth more generally as the re-imagining of how Norse, Celtic, and Anglo-Saxon cultural and linguistic elements might fit together.

elements within it—in isolation from the way in which that content is presented in the work. From this, Lamarque (2014) and McGregor (2016) conclude, that any artistic judgment against a work of literature which proceeds as if elements of the story-world depicted—say, post-war London or the student-teacher relationship—are depicted as their actual counterparts, and thereby should resemble these actual counterparts in some important respects, is not a legitimate artistic judgement of the work in question. If my diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of the works examined here is correct, then this claim of Lamarque and McGregor's cannot be so. This is simply because in order to explain the artistic deficiencies in these novels' plot, story-world, and character constructions, we have to turn and compare the truth as depicted in these novels to the truth *simpliciter*.

Chapter 4

Epistemic Value and Cognitive Achievement

Introduction

In the last Chapter, I argued for a form of cognitive literary value which is straightforwardly related to what I have called the truth *simpliciter*. This particular form of cognitive literary value permitted us to say that *Still She Haunts Me* displays literary value (where it does) because it draws on claims about Lewis Carroll's life that are true *simpliciter* in the construction of its story-world. I proposed that achievements of this sort are most obviously apparent in *subgenres* like the historical novel and the memoir. I argued, however, that the cognitive achievement associated with building the truth *simpliciter* into story-worlds appears in many fictional works of literature outside of these *subgenres*.

The central questions posed in this chapter is how the way the actual world is bears on the second sort of cognitive achievement I have proposed in this thesis—a work's ability to invite us to examine a pre-existing notion of a concept. The sort of truth-related cognitive achievement we find in great works of literature is often of this stripe, inviting us to apply our pre-existing concepts to the new context provided by the work. This potentially increases our sensitivity to what it takes for a concept to apply in new contexts and can thus lead to new true beliefs about situations where the concept applies (or fails to apply) in the actual world. I propose in what follows that the increased understanding of concepts that could ensue from engaging with works of literature certain cases—there is after all, no necessary connection between a learning opportunity and a learning opportunity taken—amounts to this increased sensitivity to the applicability of concepts across contexts.

The process necessary for the revision of our concepts and potential improved understanding of these concepts is this challenge to our pre-existing conceptions. Such challenges are often built into the formal structure of the work, such that one cannot attend to the more straightforwardly artistic qualities of the work without also attending to the way in which these qualities impact upon our examination of our concepts as we engage with them. The work's formal elements, insofar as they are supposed to lead to these challenges, are only successful insofar as they successfully lead to these challenges. This is, I argue, what makes such cognitive achievements a literary value in their own right.

The position I pursue here is clarified in light of case studies. I first examine a case where this sort of cognitive achievement obtains—Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*—and proceed to examine

objections to Martha Nussbaum's proposal of broadly construed cognitive value within this novel (1990a, 1990b). In particular, I examine and respond to Greg Currie's narrative noise objection, and argue, *contra* Currie, that narrative noise is what makes works of literature all the more conducive to challenges to our pre-existing conceptions (Currie, 2020). I then turn my attention to poetry. One might get the impression that the line of argument I have been pursuing applies only to straightforwardly narrative literature—i.e., plays and novels. I argue, using T.S. Eliot's 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as a case study, that poetry too can be structured in such a way that it creates cognitive challenges in its readers. I argue, in addition to this, that because poetry generally develops comparisons and metaphors, that poetry lends itself particularly well to create in the reader the sort of cognitive challenge described here. I then further refine my account in light of the Platonic challenge to cognitive achievement in works of literature—that we cannot rely on literature to furnish us with knowledge or any other sort of epistemic achievement in virtue of the facts that poets are not experts in the subject-matters they depict and that literature often contains statements which are false. I propose that the particularist conception of cognitive value in literature is especially well-placed to respond to the Platonic challenge, as one of the tenets of the particularism I propose is precisely that we cannot assume that all works of literature will instantiate exactly the same sort or even sorts of value. This approach to works of literature encourages readers to be alert to the sort of value that a work does instantiate and makes a reader likelier to take a critical approach to the question of whether a particular work indeed exhibits cognitive value as argued for here. I then revisit the formalist challenge that the cognitive achievement argued for here does not constitute a literary achievement and respond to it by building on the argument articulated in Chapter 3 that cognitive achievement plays a part in determining the formal success of the work. Finally, I go on to describe the implications of adopting my account of cognitive achievement as a literary value—the implication being the grand conclusion of particularism about literary value.

The Applicability of Concepts

I have suggested already that one of the reasons Currie's (2020) argument does not hold is because the conceptions of knowledge and learning upon which his line of argument relies are overly simplistic. Currie here holds that the conception of knowledge and learning briefly described above and discussed in Chapter 1, whereby knowledge is to be understood as its paradigmatic case of knowledge—that and learning, consequently is the learning of propositions. I argued previous chapters that a conception of knowledge and learning like Currie's does not allow for the difference between memorising a set of propositions (like Moravcsik's proof) and understanding their significance, thereby gaining an ability to judge whether new propositions

within that subject-matter are believably true. and that this ultimately is all the worse for Currie's conception of knowledge and learning. If I am correct in supplementing my conception of cognitive achievement with this notion of understanding, then from Currie's claim that there is no substantive propositional knowledge to be had from works of literature, it needn't follow that there is no cognitive achievement associated with great works of literature. The cognitive achievement in question, if I am right, sits more comfortably in the epistemic category of understanding than of propositional knowledge. Even if this result would suffice for my purposes, Currie's argument is worth examining more carefully.

In his discussion of the different sorts of epistemic achievement different philosophers of literature have identified in works of literature, Currie points out a distinction of two sorts of knowledge traditionally construed which goes back to Gilbert Ryle (2000). Knowledge-that—which amounts to the propositional knowledge I have been discussing so far—and knowledge-how—which amounts to skill, e.g., knowing how to ride a bike or how to bake a Victoria Sponge¹⁰⁰ (Currie, 2020: 77-95). Philosophers of literature have argued that the sort of knowledge works of literature offer us is knowledge-how—be it how to be better moral agents, or to feel more empathy towards the plight of individuals, or simply to lead richer emotional lives.¹⁰¹

It bears noting that Currie (2020: 83) characterises Nussbaum (1990a and 1990b) as arguing for novels like *The Golden Bowl* offering us a sort of knowledge-how to be better moral judges. Independently of whether this is the most just characterisation of Nussbaum's project, this is not the sort of cognitive achievement I aim to defend for great works of literature. My claim is, simply put, that novels like *The Golden Bowl* have the capacity to call to question our command of the applicability of certain concepts—evaluative concepts in particular—by showing us situations where unbeknownst to us, the concept might apply or surprisingly fail to do so.

This may well have the result of making us into better deliberators, but the sort of cognitive achievement I propose here is not necessarily linked to enhancing our deliberative skillset, nor does it amount to an increase in our empathetic capacities (another claim entirely separate from my own). The claim that a novel might help refine our understanding of how a concept applies across different situations makes these additional outcomes possible, but such outcomes are by

¹⁰⁰ For the sake of argument, let us think of 'knowing how to bake a Victoria Sponge' not as the propositional knowledge of a certain recipe for a Victoria Sponge, but rather the sort of skill required to bake a cake of this sort without following a particular recipe for it—potentially 'eyeballing' the ingredients and making substitutions when one is out of a certain ingredient.

¹⁰¹ See Robinson (2005).

no means entailed by the sort of cognitive achievement I have in mind. My reasons for preferring an explanation of literary cognitive achievement in terms of understanding rather than in terms of knowledge-how become more apparent in my discussion of Plato's objection in the next section. Currie's objection to explaining literary cognitive achievement in terms of understanding is, as we saw in Chapter 1, that understanding is reducible to propositional knowledge.

I have already conceded that there is a certain degree to which Currie is correct—understanding does indeed relate to propositional knowledge—and, generally, the further one understands a subject-matter, the more propositional knowledge one will hold of a given subject-matter. Where our discussion of knowledge emphasises holding the right sort of epistemic relation to true propositions, our discussion of understanding relates to how a good epistemic agent organises these true propositions around a given subject-matter, and how he takes these true propositions to relate to one another. As we saw, it is understanding a set of propositions as opposed to merely memorising that set of propositions that leads to having the sort of grasp on a subject-matter that can lead to further knowledge to it.

Moreover, it is difficult to see how understanding as it relates to the applicability of concepts across contexts is reducible to a set of propositions. According to this account, a good understanding of a concept leads to sensitivity to the appropriate applicability of that concept. Plausibly, if we follow Zagzebski (2019) this is because a good understanding of the applicability of a concept enables us to see whether the contexts where the concept could apply have a relevant structural resemblance to one another. In 'Virtue and Reason', McDowell argues that it is a mistake to think that the applicability concepts—evaluative or otherwise—is the sort of thing that can be reduced to a set of rules or true propositions. In order to illustrate the point he has in mind and its globality—by which I mean simply that the point need not apply only to the applicability of evaluative concepts—he quotes the following insight from Stanley Cavell about the acquisition of language:

'We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal,

when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life." Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (because it is) terrifying.' (McDowell, 1998a: 338-339).

Cavell's point here being, as McDowell points out, that nothing about the way we teach individuals the meanings of words and their applicability across certain contexts can predict the individual's success in appropriately applying this word within a new context. That it is a perfectly ordinary occurrence does not make it any less remarkable. According to McDowell, the 'terrifying' nature of this fact tempts us in to thinking that we can predict an individual's reasoning the applicability of a concept under a new context by way of a finite set of rules we can set out in a propositional form. Succumbing to this temptation, McDowell maintains, is a mistake. Earlier on in the paper, McDowell describes the ability to distinguish between right and wrong reasons—which can be understood as a sensitivity to evaluative concepts—as a sensitivity which cannot plausibly be codifiable in terms of propositional knowledge:

'Presented with an identification of virtue with knowledge, it is natural to ask for a formulation of the knowledge which virtue is. We tend to assume that the knowledge must have a stateable propositional content (perhaps not capable of immediate expression by the knower). Then the virtuous person's reliably right judgments as to what he should do, occasion by occasion, can be explained in terms of interaction between this universal knowledge and some appropriate piece of particular knowledge about the situation at hand; and the explanation can take the form of a "practical syllogism," with the content of the universal knowledge, or some suitable part of it, as major premiss, the relevant particular knowledge as minor premiss, and the judgment about what is to be done as deductive conclusion.

This picture fits only if the virtuous person's views about how, in general, one should behave are susceptible of codification, in principles apt for serving as major premisses in syllogisms of the sort envisaged. But to an unprejudiced eye it should seem quite implausible that any reasonably adult moral outlook admits of any such codification. As Aristotle consistently says, the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. If one attempted to reduce one's conception of what virtue requires to a set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind; rather, one's mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula' (McDowell, 1998a: 336).

An objective of McDowell's argument, as noted in Chapter 1, is to describe a tenable Aristotelian virtue ethics. That said, if his argument is correct, it follows that Aristotelian virtue ethics of the sort he is describing is the only tenable form of moral theory, or at the very least a form of moral theory which defies propositional codifiability. This, according to McDowell, is simply because mature moral outlooks do not arise on the basis of rules which can come out as wrong as soon as we apply them to non-paradigmatic cases. As the inclusion of Cavell's statement about the acquisition of language indicates, McDowell has it that the point about the applicability of moral rules is far more global than his present argument might suggest. The more global point is that any mature theory of the applicability of concepts defies codifiability—a certain term will be appropriate in one context, but not in a very similar one and the mature language-user does not appeal to rules when justifying to himself the use of a term in a given context. For our purposes, the fact that the argument holds in the context of evaluative concepts more broadly construed is what really matters here.

Let us examine a mundane example for illustrative purposes—say 'cool' in its evaluative sense. If the likes of McDowell and myself are correct, the absurdity of looking for a set of rules for the applicability of the concept lies not in the fact that there are more pressing philosophical projects at hand (no doubt there are). It stems from the fact that what determines the applicability of a concept in a given context is dependent on the particulars of that context.

Were one to engage in the project of extrapolating rules for the applicability of the concept of coolness, one might begin by coming up with examples of particulars where the concept applies. One such particular is undoubtedly the Fonz. One may, from examining this one particular, conclude that all other exemplars which in some way emulate the Fonz also merit the application of the concept. This, in some cases, will lead to the right result. There are many others, however, where it is not. A student showing up late to a philosophy seminar dressed like the Fonz and behaving like him would not, I imagine, merit the application of the concept 'cool'. Determining when and where fonziennes merits the application of the concept cool does not entail memorising a set of rules of the applicability of cool. For one, any set of rules we come up with would need to have an innumerable set of exceptions to go along with it—of the stripe of 'wearing a black leather biker jacket is cool unless you wear it to a philosophy class whilst emulating the Fonz'. What McDowell proposes—with concepts admittedly more philosophically interesting and plausibly more immutable than coolness—is that we take this as an indication that what we do when we apply such concepts is not apply a set of rules for their applicability with the built-in innumerable exceptions which we have somehow internalised. What is at play here according to McDowell is an understanding of the concept itself and an awareness of the

evaluative elements in a particular context which might cause the context to merit (or not) the applicability of the concept in question. This may well begin with a propositional knowledge of a dictionary-like definition of the term, but this, as we have seen, can only take us so far. If I am correct in my claim that the sensitivity required to appropriately apply a concept across contexts is not reducible to a set of (propositional) rules, then it follows that understanding is not quite just more knowledge-that. Insofar as my argument is concerned, then, the concepts of knowledge and understanding as they are presently understood should be taken to supplement rather than compete with one another. That said, there are four further objections of Currie's that proponents of learning from works of literature would do well to take seriously, all of which arise from the way in which literary fiction is written.

Narrative Noise: Some Hurdles

In Chapter 3, I brought up Frank Jackson's Mary thought-experiment as an example of a fiction which might aid our understanding of a concept. I suggested that the thought-experiment, if successful, shows us how the concept of knowledge might apply to phenomena which are not explainable in strictly physicalist terms, thus suggesting that there are such phenomena at least in relation to colour-perception. In drawing this parallel, my suggestion was not that works of literature tend to operate in exactly the way this and other philosophical thought-experiments do. For one, the conclusions we might draw as to what the author is trying to say in a work of literature is far more open-ended than anything we might encounter in a philosophical work, particularly if we take the more contemporary academic philosophical paper as the paradigm of the philosophical genre, as Currie appears to. Moreover, the suggestion that building towards a cognitive achievement in a work of literature operates exactly in the way it would in an academic philosophy paper ignores that works of literature often have an interpretive open-endedness which academic philosophy papers do not.

For instance, in her discussion of Edith Wharton's *The Reef*, Jenefer Robinson (2005: 187-188) suggests that Wharton's classism shines through in her treatment of Sophy (the governess) at the end of the novel and this might warrant a Marxist reading of the text, even if this was far what Wharton intended us to focus on in our engagement with the text. This, if Robinson is correct, is because there is an evident blind spot on the author's part which a theory like Marxism picks up on. This point might surprise my reader. I proposed in Chapter 3 that we should generally evaluate the world-construction of a work of literature in terms of the subject-matters which the author evidently aims to examine in constructing that story-world. The point about the applicability of Marxism to *The Reef* might strike one as incompatible with this claim, but it

needn't be. I proposed that the applicability of Marxism to *The Reef* depends upon the determination that there is a blind spot in the construction of that novel which Marxism picks up on. This is made evident by our examination of the subject-matters Wharton intends to examine, and seeing where this examination is lacking. The treatment of Sophy in *The Reef* is classist (if it is classist) because it conflates the value of Sophy's person and her just desserts with her socio-economic standing, thus presenting us with a novel where the study of human desires is examined hyper realistically (and the author's intention is evident through the construction of the novel) except in the case of Sophy. This suggests a blind spot on the author's part.

The open-endedness of works of literature, whilst indicative of the difficulties surrounding the determination of how a given work is supposed to challenge our use of a concept, is by no means insurmountable. The presence of a particular challenge in a given work can be ascertained by whether it is sufficiently salient in that work. The term 'sufficiently salient' of course suggests that the question of which elements are sufficiently prevalent in a work to warrant its status as an element of the subsequent literary evaluation of the work is largely a matter of judgement, but this in principle should pose no difficulties for my case because it is possible to coherently argue about the salience of a certain element in a text, as much critical discourse about works of literature shows. Moreover, such a suggestion is very much in line with a particularist approach to literary evaluation. This open-endedness of works of literature is nonetheless indicative of Currie's qualms with the notion of cognitive achievement in works of literature.

Three further objections, as Currie writes, are first that even if we were to engage with the work in a way which attends to all of the relevant features of the work, authors do not argue for the conclusions they are inviting us to draw. Second, it is not clear why we should take literary authors to be authorities on the subject-matters they depict. Finally—given the first two objections—we might think that the literary style is antithetical any sort of cognitive achievement. I engage with the first and third objections here. I respond to the second in my discussion of the Platonic objection below. I take my observation of the open-endedness of literary interpretation, the putative lack of argument in works of literature, and the claim that literary style is antithetical to offering us information we can adopt for our epistemic lives in the actual world to in fact constitute the same objection—namely that literary writing is such that it would be a category error to think of it as a potential avenue of enrichment of our epistemic lives. Currie engages with the possibility of great works of literature as a potential enhancer of our epistemic lives by thinking of them as candidate thought-experiments like Jackson's Mary. He writes:

‘Concern with complexity in fiction, as I have expressed it here, is a concern with the content of fiction. Fiction’s capacity to produce thought experiments is also put into doubt by parallel concerns about the narrative or vehicle of content—my third argument. Writing fiction is an invitation to style: style as authorial voice and as a way of accentuating the response of a reader. We think of style in relation particularly to ‘literary’ fiction but fictions of any kind with no discernible style rarely gain an audience. And style is an enemy of the kinds of thought experiments that fictions are supposed to offer us: those which explore human thought, feeling, and motivation. As I noted in Section 8.3, we find it difficult to distinguish the sources of our emotional reactions to things: Are we responding to some aspect of the content of the story, or to some stylistic feature of the vehicle of content? Very likely our reaction is to an indissoluble mixture, to content-as-expressed-in-the-vehicle. Philosophical thought experiments that purport to enlighten us on matters of conduct such as those of Thomson, Singer, and others would be regarded with suspicion if they were presented in a heightened style and elaborated over hundreds pages with the artful withholdings of information and garden-path strategies we so often get in fiction.²⁸ As David Egan remarks, ‘None of Thomson’s critics allege that the character of the hospital director in her narrative lacks clear motivation or is clichéd or two-dimensional.’²⁹ Fictions can hardly be expected to function in any way similar to that of TEs when they answer to quite different expectations.³⁰ (Currie, 2020, 143-144).

The objection expressed here goes that the narrative we encounter in certain works of literature, like James’s *Golden Bowl* is so complex that it is difficult to know what is playing a role in influencing the possible shift in propositional attitude. Moreover, because literary style is such that in general the author does not straightforwardly argue for conclusions, the question of how, if at all, our propositional attitudes are supposed to change as we read the work is further complicated. And, insofar as these objections go, I largely agree with Currie. I proposed already that the way in which a work like *The Golden Bowl* might enrich our epistemic lives is not by offering us a grand conclusion in the way Jackson offers us a grand conclusion about Mary. Rather, by showing us a particular scenario with special care towards portraying the internal lives of his characters, James is inviting us to challenge some of our pre-conceptions on the applicability of certain evaluative concepts. This might turn out to have an impact upon how we apply these concepts in situations we encounter in the actual world, but this is a point additional to the one I make here. As Nussbaum proposes, *The Golden Bowl* might be read as an invitation for us to step, alongside Maggie, beyond the naïve conceptions of morality which underlie her moral perfectionism (Nussbaum, 1990b). This proposal, independently of whether we find

Nussbaum's reading of the novel appealing, is in line with what James took himself to be doing when writing the novel.

Cognitive Achievement in The Golden Bowl

The Golden Bowl, like *What Maisie Knew* and many other of James's novels finds its genesis in some gossip James heard. In her introduction to the novel, Ruth Bernard Yeazell writes:

'James's original conception of the novel gave no hint of its turn. As early as 1892, he had recorded in his notebook the outline of the 'situation' that would eventually become *The Golden Bowl*—a situation apparently suggested to him, as so often, by a bit of gossip that someone had passed on. In this case the gossip concerned the simultaneous engagement of an American father, and his only daughter, with the further provision that the father, 'a widower and still youngish', was to marry another American very much the same age as his child. No sooner had James recorded these circumstances, however, than he became to impute motive and spin out complications—imagining the father has married in order 'to console himself in his abandonment', for instance, only to find himself less abandoned than he had anticipated, since the failure of his daughter's marriage has thrown her back on him more than ever. While father and daughter cling to one another, the father's new wife—whom James now sees as 'prettier and cleverer' than the daughter—poses a temptation for the daughter's husband' (Bernard Yeazell, 2009: xiii-xiv).

This datum suggests that James, much like the historical novelist we discussed in the previous chapter, took a state of affairs of which he only knew the general historical facts (i.e., the engagement, the characters' nationalities, relationships to one another, and their ages) and imagined a possible set of motivations which could compel one to find oneself in such a situation, and how one might be inclined to operate were one to be in this situation. The novel is challenging (and for that matter interesting) in part because the situation James chooses as the basis of his novel is an uncomfortable one. One cannot help but ask oneself what sort of father would become engaged to a woman who is of a similar age to his daughter and moreover must be an acquaintance of hers—it is unlikely that the well to do American diaspora in London was large enough at this time that two young ladies of a similar age would not know each other—and, to add insult to injury, would also steal his daughter's thunder by announcing his engagement at a so close a time to her own marriage. James, in writing *The Golden Bowl*, provides us with a possible answer to these questions. And part of what makes *The Golden Bowl* an excellent novel, I propose, is that the possible answer it provides to this question invites us to reflect upon the complexities surrounding human nature and familial relations. The novel is a

fecund ground for reflection, in a word, because its actors are not remotely as villainous as the actors we would normally imagine for such a situation.

A far easier and less imaginative possible answer to the questions listed above might be that the father figure is in some way selfish or creepy and that his daughter resents him for exhibiting these dispositions. It would, of course, be possible to provide an answer to the questions such that the father or the daughter are more overtly morally culpable than they are in *The Golden Bowl* and where we still end up with an interesting and provocative novel, but part of what makes this novel a prime example of the sort of literature that challenges our command of concepts is that it shows us how motives which we might not even have imagined as possible or likely in this context can in fact be very plausible. By seeing signs of virtue in characters who find themselves in a morally uncomfortable situation of their own making, it challenges us to think of the applicability of an evaluative term like ‘virtuous’—or even ‘creepy’—in the situation presented in the novel.

Chapter IV of Book II offer us some of the more uncomfortable passages in the novel, where Adam Verver’s motives for asking Charlotte Stant to marry him are in part revealed in a conversation with his daughter Maggie after her marriage to the Prince:

‘Should you really,’ he now asked, ‘like me to marry?’ He spoke as if, coming from his daughter herself, it *might* be an idea; which for that matter he would be ready to carry straight out should she definitely say so.

Definite, however, just yet, she was not prepared to be, though it seemed to come to her with force, as she thought, that there was a truth in the connexion to utter. ‘What I feel is that there’s somehow something that used to be right and that I’ve made wrong. It used to be right that you hadn’t married and that you didn’t seem to want to. It used also’—she continued to make out—‘to seem easy for the question not to come up. That’s what I’ve made different. It does come up. It *will* come up (...)

It was as if you couldn’t be in the market when you were married to *me* [Maggie]. Or rather as if I kept people off, innocently, by being married to you.’ (James, 2009: 150-151).

In one of the rare instances where the conversations between Maggie Verver and her father take centre-stage in the novel, we find Adam enquiring about Maggie’s feelings in the aftermath of her marriage, which clearly—as seen in Maggie’s suggestion of turning the ‘right’ into ‘wrong’ in this passage—is difficult for both of them. The uncomfortably close bond between father and daughter is shown by Maggie’s description of their relationship prior to her marriage to the

Prince as their being *married* to one another, echoing the Freudian horror Robinson (2005, Chapter 7) locates in Edith Wharton's *The Reef*¹⁰². Their failure to let go of one another is in part what gets the situation which James first envisioned for his novel off the ground. Moreover, it is Adam's eagerness to please Maggie and Maggie's moral perfectionism—seen here once again as a way to make 'right' something '[she's] made wrong', i.e., her perceived abandonment of her father—which underlie Adam's motives to select an ostensibly inappropriate partner as his wife.¹⁰³ It bears noting that Maggie does not urge her father to marry her friend, but it is Adam's eagerness to please Maggie that pushes him closer to Charlotte. Later on in this conversation between Maggie and her father, we get the following exchange:

'What do you want' he demanded, 'to do to me?' And then he added, as she didn't say, 'You have something in your mind.' It had come to him within that minute of beginning of their session there she had been keeping something back, and that an impression of this had more than once, in spite of his general theoretic respect for her present right to personal reserves and mysteries, almost ceased to be vague in him. (...) 'You've got something up your sleeve.'

She had a silence that made him right. 'Well, when I tell you you'll understand. It's only up my sleeve in the sense of being in a letter I got this morning. All day yes—it *has* been in my mind. I've been asking myself if it were quite the right moment, or in any way fair to ask *you* if you could stand another woman'

It relieved him a little, yet the beautiful consideration of her manner made it in a degree portentous. "'Stand" one-?'

'Well, mind her coming' (...)

'She [Charlotte Stant] writes me, practically, that she'd like it if we're so good to ask her.' (...)

'That *I* [Adam] should ask her?'

He put the question as an effect of his remnant of vagueness, but this also had its own effect. Maggie wondered an instant, after which, as with a flush of recognition, she took it up. 'It would be too beautiful if you *would*?' (James, 2009: 154-155)

This exchange, in close proximity with Maggie's and Adam's discussion of the possibility of his marriage relies on an ambiguity of what 'ask[ing]' Charlotte Stant might entail. Maggie appears to

¹⁰² It bears noting that much like in *The Golden Bowl*, the incest—if it can be termed as such—in *The Reef* occurs between the would-be in-laws rather than the blood relatives.

¹⁰³ Nussbaum (1990a) also discusses Maggie's moral perfectionism.

have asking Charlotte to visit in mind, presumably to cheer up both Charlotte and her father. It is unclear, at this stage, whether Maggie is aware of the romantic history between Charlotte and the Prince. It is also unclear whether Adam's motives in asking Charlotte to marry him stem purely from a desire to please his daughter combined with a misunderstanding of what her desires really are, and the degree to which his misunderstanding of his daughter's desires is wilful. The fact that Maggie replies 'as if with a flush of recognition' to the question of whether Adam should ask Charlotte suggests that Adam might be projecting onto his daughter the second sense of the prospect of asking Charlotte. Regardless of how wilful the misunderstanding of Maggie's desires is here, it is clear that the motivations behind Adam's choice of a second wife is not as dishonourable as one immediately privy to a piece of gossip like the one James first heard might assume.

My proposal here is the fact that the motives here are far more complicated and not as reprehensible as one might assume places a challenge on our pre-suppositions on situations like these, and on our speediness to apply certain negative moral evaluative concepts to a situation like this in the abstract—i.e., without being privy to further detail. The possible lesson here is that certain particularities of a context impact upon the applicability of certain evaluative concepts. *Contra* Currie, I propose that the style in which this passage is written in fact helps bring forth this challenge to our preconceived notions of the way in which moral evaluative terms apply to this situation. As my discussion of the passage indicates, the style in which these passages are written help us see that regardless of whether Adam's decision to marry Charlotte does to some degree stem from wishful thinking of what his daughter's desires might be, he is clearly concerned with pleasing her, and his daughter is very concerned with ensuring her father's happiness. His consistent asking what his daughter wants of him demonstrates this, as does his taking her strong desire to make right of what she perceives as a wrong seriously. That this is apparent even in light of the ambiguity I highlighted in the last passage is telling. And the exposition of the characters' complex motives surrounding the situation at hand is precisely what operates as an argument for us to challenge our notions of the ways in which our evaluative concepts apply to situations like the one described in *The Golden Bowl*. E.g., we could assume that a story like this one would call for us to evaluate the father as negligent or cruel, but James shows us a situation where no evaluative concept could be less applicable do the father figure.

Currie's conception of what might constitute learning from a work of literature (though as we shall see, the claim that a work of literature contains a legitimate challenge to our pre-conceptions needn't mean that we take a work up on such challenges) leads him to ignore the sort of possibility I describe here. As we have already seen, one of the upshots of his rejection of

the possibility of understanding as anything other than straightforward propositional knowledge is that if novels enhance our understanding of anything, this understanding might straightforwardly put in propositional form.

Lamarque (2014) argues that the project of synthesising the so-called morals of works literature into propositional content often leads us to a banal statement about the work's thematic content. To say simply of the scene quoted above in *The Golden Bowl* that it argues towards some universal proposition like 'people's internal lives are not immediately reflected in their actions as they are gossiped about' by no means does the novel justice. For one, it is the sort of truism that any mindless teen movie or soap-opera could readily offer up. It would therefore be a mistake to think of the novel's potential cognitive contribution as a general proposition of this sort.

An argument like Lamarque's, if my diagnosis of the applicability of 'cool' is correct, however, would see as exceptional to literature a problem which is far more widespread—namely the difficulties we have already seen surrounding the generalisation of the applicability of concepts. We would, if I am right, be wrong to transfer the judgements we make about, say, the applicability of a concept within a particular context to a more general context. We saw above with 'cool' that trying to generalise the rules of its applicability can lead to statements which are either too *ad hoc* or too general to be meaningful—e.g., that biker jackets are cool, but not if one wears them whilst emulating the Fonz in a philosophy seminar or that what counts as cool in a philosophy seminar differs from what counts as cool in mid-century American television. A similar claim can be made about the sort of general statement one might make about the cognitive achievements within *The Golden Bowl*—e.g., on one hand that Mr. Verver would do well not to engage in quite so much wishful thinking or on the other that moral perfectionism leads to undesirable results. We find the same problem in the decidedly non-literary problem of generalising about the applicability of 'cool' than we do in generalising the cognitive achievement I observed in *The Golden Bowl*. That the cognitive achievement associated with great works of literature does not require a special epistemic category of its own should provide comfort to a certain class of objector to my claim. It seems that anything related to understanding the way in which a concept applies across situations will face the same difficulty, rather than the fact that these questions often arise when we examine the cognitive content in works of literature.

To take Lamarque's observation against literary insight as straightforward propositional content as evidence that there is no such cognitive achievement to be described, if I am correct, is to greatly impoverish the sense we can make of the discomfort James puts us through in his depiction of individuals well-rounded, complex individuals with intelligible motives acting in

ways which on the surface are just straight out reprehensible. In other words, it stunts our access to what James took to be the central element of one of his great novels. The value of the cognitive achievement I describe here is related to truth because *The Golden Bowl* can only offer us a plausible challenge to a certain class of evaluative concepts, if the motives he crafts for each of the characters are plausible. The plausibility of their motives, moreover, is determined by whether the author has been mindful of truths about human psychology in crafting these motives. My proposal is that he has.

Moreover, I agree with Currie that the knowledge-how avenue is not promising in itself. *Pave* Nussbaum, I take it that what a novel like *The Golden Bowl* could illuminate might have an impact on our calibre as moral agents, but it is not moral agency itself, construed as an Aristotelian skill, that it illuminates, or at any rate not immediately. My proposal is far more modest than all this. To sum it up, it is that what *The Golden Bowl* might contribute to our epistemic lives as a possible counterexample to the way in which we imagined the applicability of evaluative concepts to situations like the one which gave *The Golden Bowl* its origin. The novel puts forward the analogue of an argument towards this challenge by offering us a sustained vision of the characters' internal lives. If the novel teaches us something, it is because it shows us how we can be mistaken in our assumptions about the applicability of certain concepts. Moreover, it so happens that the concepts which apply to this particular novel are evaluative, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, this sort of challenge to our conceptions is not limited only to the moral sphere.

Poetry

Given what I have argued so far, the temptation to think that what I have put forth applies only to works of literature with a heavy narrative component—particularly novels and plays—is not unreasonable. Nor is the assumption that only evaluative concepts are clarified by great works of literature. In the present section, I examine the cognitive achievement associated with TS Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. The motives behind my selection of this particular case study are as follows. First, the poem does not contain a heavy narrative component—it centres on the speaker's not doing something rather than a progression of actions in the way epic poetry might. If my argument for the conclusion that 'Prufrock' contains a cognitive achievement which is in some way dependent on truth in the actual world is successful, then it follows that it is possible for works of lyrical poetry to contain this sort of cognitive achievement—independently of whether some or even most do not. Second, 'Prufrock' is reflective of Eliot's efforts to articulate the difficulties one finds to put words to exactly the state of mind one means to evoke

when writing poetry (Mays, 2006).¹⁰⁴ What is more, the state of mind in which we find the speaker of this poem is so complex, that some have proposed that the only way to describe it, besides the poem itself, is what John Benson calls ‘prufishness’ (Benson, 1967: 339). It bears noting, as well, that the effort to articulate this complex state of mind as I describe it is not as such a moral cognitive achievement in the way the achievement I observed in *The Golden Bowl* is. I propose in what follows that the fact that the poem aims to get at a state of mind which is only just describable, and thus in a way brings us to the edge of our conceptual ability, is part of what makes this poem a prime challenger of our conception of this difficult state of mind which Benson called prufishness, but is in fact rather more universal than the name would suggest. Because they bear most heavily on my argument, I will only fully quote the second and third parts of the poem here. I will refer to earlier and later parts where germane to my argument:

‘And should I then presume?

And how should I begin?

.....

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets

And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes

Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of
windows?...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

.....

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!

Smoothed by long fingers,

Asleep...tired...or it malingers

Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,

Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)

brought upon a platter,

I am no prophet—and here is no great matter;

¹⁰⁴ The point here is of course not that there is one specific state of mind one is always trying to evoke when one writes poetry, but rather than generally in writing a given poem, one is attempting to evoke a given state of mind.

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat and,
snicker.

And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To have rolled towards some overwhelming question,
To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say, 'That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.' (Eliot, 1999: 5-6).

This part of the poem serves my argument well because it is effectively a synthesis of what comes before it. The poem as a whole famously portrays a man—the speaker—in dialogue with himself as he tries to persuade himself to go and ask a certain lady a certain question (though the lady and the particularities of the question remain unspecified throughout the poem). The 'you' in 'Let us go then, you and I' in fact refers to the speaker himself, as he tries to persuade himself to pluck up the courage to go about his errand (Mays, 2006). In this attempt to persuade himself, he describes the walk through London to get to the lady in question and the 'taking of toast and tea' which will ensue the 'overwhelming question'. He then tries to talk himself out of the errand by persuading himself that 'indeed there will be time', in a passage of the poem eerily reminiscent of *Ecclesiastes* 3:1-8. In the part replicated above, we find the speaker asking himself what exactly he is to say to the lady once he places himself to pose his question. In asking himself what to say were he to buck up and do as he sets out to do, he synthesises what his thought process has been so far. From the walk through smoggy London, to the reflection on his own mortality, to the fact that he has once again been unable to express what he wanted to say, and thus leading himself to procrastinate on his errand once again.

At the heart of this poem is the consequence of not doing what we aim to do for fear of getting it wrong—namely the cautionary note that the more we procrastinate, the likelier we are to die

before we get it done at all. Hence the eery allusion to the verses in *Ecclesiastes* in Prufrock's statement that 'indeed there will be time'. At the heart of this poem, then, is a question which is at once both profound and banal—the question of whether to procrastinate today. The question is a profoundly uncomfortable one for being both awe-inspiring and ubiquitous—this is reflected in the imagery throughout the poem and is especially concentrated in the excerpt replicated above.

The excerpt starts with the quotidian— 'the dusk through narrow streets' and the 'men in shirt-sleeves'—moves on to the minute— 'I should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas'—and culminates with the appearance of the Angel of Death in the guise of *the* 'snicker[ing]' 'eternal Footman' and the entirety of the universe itself '[squeezed] into a ball'. Even in this culmination of the grand universal question of what comes after death—one of the great metaphysical questions—there is a significant bathetic element. Death here is represented as a snooty Footman who snickers at taking the speaker's coat. Suggesting that the question itself is as grand as it is banal, and so are Prufrock's and perhaps our own feelings about the question. This part of the poem in particular challenges our conceptions surrounding these questions—and the state of mind it takes to tackle them—precisely because the state of mind surrounding the question is presented with the bathetic juxtaposition with the petty and the banal. A poem like this serves as an invitation to regard the universal question of whether to procrastinate with both the humour and utter seriousness that the question requires. Moreover, the fact that poetry, and lyrical poetry in particular, is so compact a form—Eliot has to express what he aims to express in far fewer words than James and with metrical restrictions—serves as an opportunity to bring forth such invitations for reflection in a compact manner.

Another important point is that it is standard—in Walton's (1970) sense of the term—for poetry to contain metaphorical language. This means that poetry lends itself to be a means through which to challenge our conceptions surrounding these difficult questions through the metaphorical language. Changing the Angel of Death into a snooty footman allows us to quite literally laugh at the face of death whilst also recognising our fear of it. The enjambment of these lines 'And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat and,/snicker' create a pause before the 'and' sets up the punchline of the 'snicker' in such a way that relieves the tension of what comes before in the stanza, e.g., the speaker '[weeping]' and '[fasting]' and '[praying]' alongside the grandiose comparison to John the Baptist. The relief here is by no means accidental and serve, among other things, as a reminder that humour remains as a powerful coping mechanism for these difficult questions.

This sort of value exhibited by ‘Prufrock’ relates to truth because the way in which the state of mind is conveyed—with its seemingly chaotic shifts from the grandiose to the banal—is reflective of the way in which this sort of state of mind is experienced by many individuals. Some might be tempted by the objection that this sort of state of mind, because it is universal, must be expressed in clichés in order to remain authentic to this fragment of the human experience. This, however, could not be further from the truth. Take a passage from a second poem— William McGonagall’s ‘Tay Bridge Disaster’—which also deals with the subject-matter of death:

‘Beautiful Railway Bridge of the Silv’ry Tay!
Alas! I am very sorry to say
That ninety lives have been taken away
On the last Sabbath day of 1879,
Which will be remember’d for a very long time’ (McGonagall, 2006).

This poem is famously a very bad one. The question of interest here, however, is what exactly makes it so. Much like ‘Prufrock’, it contains a reflection on death. Though this time the death reflected upon is not the speaker’s own, but rather that of the victims of the Tay Bridge disaster of 1879. This reflection is executed badly, I propose, partly because it fails to even begin to articulate the grief and shock associated with the loss of those ninety lives. Rather, the poem relies on clichés to make its point—‘I am very sorry to say’—and the effect of this is humorous rather than solemn as the author intended. Some indications that the language of this poem is clichéd arises from the way in which descriptive language is employed. The collapsed bridge is here simply described as ‘Beautiful’. Even if we set to one side the point that it is unlikely that the Tay Bridge could every aptly be described by that adjective, this particular adjective, in virtue of its being a thin evaluative term, does not tell us very much about the bridge itself. Likewise, the deaths are described in very general terms. The imagery also appears to be determined by what appears to be an imaginative failure on the author’s part. It is very tempting to think that the speaker is only ‘very sorry to say’ that the ninety lives were taken because it is obvious that ‘say’ rhymes with ‘Tay’. Likewise, the event will be remembered ‘for a very long time’ because of the half-rhyme with ‘1879’. If my assessment of the poem so far is correct, it is clichéd because it relays the story of the Tay Bridge Disaster in terms too general to aptly express a reflection on this particular human experience—the truth about this human experience expressed in the poem is not true in any interesting way. No doubt one would be ‘very sorry to say’ that ninety lives had been lost upon the collapse of a bridge. There is nothing in this poem which builds to a challenge of a reader’s pre-conceptions.

My objector here might be tempted to point out that the thematic treatment of procrastination and mortality in ‘Prufrock’ generalised would yield some banal propositional statement such as ‘the question of human mortality is both awe-inspiring and laughable’. This, I contend, is not a fair appraisal of the cognitive achievement this poem has to offer. Rather, and as argued above both for *The Golden Bowl* and for ‘Prufrock’, my proposal is that the achievement comes from the fact that our preconceptions of these difficult questions, and our states of mind when we do apprehend these questions, are challenged by the juxtaposition of grand, minute, and bathetic imagery in this poem. The challenge takes place when the take the poem up on its invitation to reflect upon our pre-conceptions of this question—and the reflection, where it ensues, is a challenge on our perspective or understanding of the question, potentially inviting us to attribute new evaluative concepts—such as ‘humorous’—to the question of our own mortality. Moreover, on this proposal, it is the narrative noise—or perhaps in the case of poetry, poetic noise—which allows for such reflections to take place.

It is worth also touching on a point I made in Chapter 1 about form-content inseparability—I return to this point more fully towards the end of this chapter. In Chapter 1, I claimed that the aesthetic evaluation of literary form requires the reader to determine whether the author has effectively employed form to fulfil his ostensive intention to communicate claims with regards to a given subject-matter. It bears noting that what I have said with regards to ‘Prufrock’ and ‘Tay Bridge Disaster’ can only be made sense of if we endorse this claim about the relationship between literary form and content as the expression of cognitive achievement. If my evaluation of these poems is plausible, then this is because my claim about form-content inseparability is also plausible.

Plato’s Objection

Although Plato’s arguments for banishing the poets from his city-state are manifold, only one such argument concerns us here. This is because the other arguments rely on his theory of forms and his tripartite account of the soul, both of which we can safely take to one side. The argument which concerns us here is succinctly summed up in 601a-b of the *Republic*:

‘So shall we classify all poets, from Homer onwards, as representers of images of goodness (and of everything else which occurs in their poetry), and claim that they don’t have any contact with the truth? The facts are as we said a short while ago: a painter creates an illusory shoemaker, when not only does he not understand anything about shoemaking, but his audience doesn’t either. They just base their conclusions on the colours and shapes they can see. [...]

And I should think we'll say that the same goes for a poet as well: he uses words and phrases to block in some of the colours of each area of expertise, although all he understands is how to represent things in a way which makes other superficial people, who base their conclusions on the words they can hear, think military command or whatever else it is that he's set to metre, rhythm, and music. It only takes these features to cast this powerful a spell: that's what they're for.'

The objection to cognitive achievement in works of literature that Plato puts in Socrates' mouth here can be synthesised as follows. The nature of poetry is such that it can leave us under the impression that authors are experts on the subject-matters they represent in their works. Literary authors (or poets, in Plato's old-fashioned terminology) are only experts in their craft of literary art—which Plato characterises as an art of creating artificial representations—and not in the subject-matters which they portray. What poetry's '[powerful] spell' does, then, is leave us under the illusion that the work of literature we have read has taught us something, whereas in actual fact it does not.

This objection, which Currie as described above echoes, merits serious treatment, not least because it is indeed true that the standards of our practices surrounding the production and reception of works of literature are not as strictly bound to the truth as those surrounding the production and reception of works in, say, academic research. Moreover, whereas we are wont to check the credentials of authors of works in fields of academic research before we take their claims seriously, we gladly accept a work of literature from even the most obscure author of fiction—provided the work provides us with some sort of entertainment or aesthetic pleasure. This objection, whilst serious, does not prove devastating.

What Plato's argument successfully undermines is the *necessary* connection between works of literature and learning. In other words, it provides us with a well-founded cautionary note against the *expectation* that any given work of literature might teach us something about the world. In my case-studies so far, I have been careful to distinguish between the possibility of increased understanding of worldly subject-matters in certain works of literature from the fact of actually *learning* something. An opportunity to learn something, is, no doubt not necessarily an opportunity taken. Moreover, my particularism is such that I deny that *all* works of literature in fact need instantiate learning opportunities of the sort I have been arguing for. Plato and I are in agreement insofar as the falsehood of the *necessary* connection between works of literature and learning is concerned.

A question in the spirit of this Platonic objection which arises naturally from what I have just said is how we are to know whether the work before us is of the sort that is simply duping us into believing that it is contributing to our understanding of the world rather than truly contributing to our understanding in the way we believe it is. Plato takes it that enough of us are sufficiently hopeless at distinguishing between these two possibilities that the case against learning opportunities in literature is as good as closed. My response to this sort of answer to the Platonic question is twofold. On one hand, by admitting that the connection between literature and learning is not necessary, I invite the reader of works of literature to take a critical stance towards what he reads, with a heightened awareness to the seduction which is characteristic of works of literature. Second, the critical and well-informed reader will often be inclined to corroborate whether the understanding of the world put forward by his reading does in fact rely on truths about the world. To offer a straightforward example, the critical reader of a Hilary Mantel novel, aware that what he is reading is a novel rather than a work in history, will, if he is interested in taking into his set of beliefs some of the assertions made in the novel, be inclined to check whether these assertions are true by reading around the historical subject-matters conveyed in the novel in question. It is then that he will really see the cognitive achievement which Mantel's novels instantiate.

The case for the critical stance taken for works of literature like *The Golden Bowl* and 'Prufrock' is, of course, more complicated. And this is because the connection between the understanding of the world these works offer and truth is more complicated than that of the historical subject-matters of a Mantel novel and truth. Nonetheless, such corroborations are indeed possible if what I have been saying so far is correct. The connection between works like *The Golden Bowl* and 'Prufrock' I have envisioned so far is one whereby the questioning of our preconceptions as we encounter these works is only a cognitive accomplishment if it relies on true observations of the human life. I argued that *The Golden Bowl* is successful because it offers us a plausible and complex answer to the question as to what motives might lead a father and daughter to be married at the same time. James's answer to the question is plausible because it does not set to one side the truth of the complexity of human motives, by not allowing the motives to be coloured by overly simplistic conceptions of what it means to be morally pure and morally corrupt. In a similar vein, the success of 'Prufrock' as a poem in part relies on the fact that Eliot's depiction of the speaker's reflections on his own mortality are such that yet again they remind us of the way in which thoughts of one's own mortality might reside in one's mind. Our imminent death is a prospect which at times we might meet with gloom and despair, and yet in others we might encounter it with humour—and often, these thoughts are encountered with a

complex mix of both classes of sentiment. ‘Prufrock’, I propose, is in part successful because it offers us a suitably complex possible answer to the question of how it can be that we can feel so many ways about the prospect of a single question. My response to Plato’s objection entails certain important implications for the epistemic status of the cognitive achievement we encounter in works of literature.

It is not uncommon for proponents of cognitive value about works of literature to conclude that the sort of knowledge great works in particular confer upon us when we engage with them is the knowledge of how to do something. As we have seen, Martha Nussbaum (1990a, 1990b) proposes that a great work of literature like *The Golden Bowl* can teach us how to be better moral deliberators. On a similar note, Robinson (2005) proposes that works of literature can increase our emotional aptitudes, teaching us how to appropriately emote around the situations we encounter in our actual lives. A proposal in a similar vein to these first two is the suggestion that engagement with the right sorts of works of literature can help us become more empathetic in our dealings with others. This last proposal, and by extension, the two prior to it, has been met with scepticism by the non-cognitivist about works of literature. Most recently, Currie (2020) presents an argument which caution us against endorsing too strong of a conclusion to this effect—and it is a warning to which the sensible cognitivist ought to heed.

In his argument for caution against making too much of the claim that certain works of literature teach us to do something—in particular that they teach us to be more empathetic or more effective moral or emotional agents—stems from the empirical literature on self-licensing (Currie, 2020: 211). The psychological literature on self-licensing suggests that when human beings have taken themselves to do something morally praiseworthy, they have a tendency to be less morally vigilant on their subsequent actions. This essentially makes them more morally complacent in their moral deliberations subsequent to the action the individual perceives as morally praiseworthy. Currie discusses the survey on research on the matter conducted by Effron and Conway (2015), where certain researchers found that if individuals performed morally praiseworthy actions early in the day, they were likely to become more complacent about their actions later that day. Similarly, another group of researchers found, in a study about water conservation, that those who adhered to action plan to reduce their water usage also ended up using more electricity than they would have otherwise. This, Effron and Conway suggest, is indicative of the human tendency to allow oneself liberties one would not otherwise take if one takes oneself to have been ‘good’ in some other respect. Currie raises an important concern when it comes to the idea that reading certain works of literature is morally edifying. If in reading *The Golden Bowl* we take ourselves to be doing something good and moreover, we overestimate

the empathetic advantage that such engaging with such a novel would give us, there is a risk that we might then take this as permission to become more morally complacent in our dealings with others. Moreover, as Currie points out, empathising with characters in works of literature is far more ‘low-cost’ than empathising with others in our day-to-day lives—not to speak of acting on that empathy. Reading even the right sort of work of literature in this scenario may well lead to, Currie worries, more morally complacent behaviour than would have ensued had the works not been engaged with at all. I agree with Currie that this concern is a serious one that should caution us against overstating our conclusion. Moreover, it is indicative of the fact that the claim that works of literature systematically teach us to do anything at all is to grossly overestimate the implications of the cognitive thesis about works of literature.

The literature on self-licensing serves as a cautionary note against moral complacency more broadly. If a thesis like Nussbaum’s or Robinson’s is to be tenable, then it must take into account that the worldly cognitive benefits of works of literature only obtain when the right works of literature fall into the hands of the right reader. The right reader is, in this scenario, the sort of person who is sufficiently self-critical not to overestimate the moral achievement associated with reading the likes of Henry James, and who is able to judiciously apply the conceptual challenges brought forth in such novels in his day to lives, precisely because he reads such novels as a caution against moral complacency. The claim that engaging with the right sort of work of literature teaches us things which are applicable to our daily lives should thus be kept separate from the claim that great works of literature often instantiate a sort of literary value which stems from truth. I propose that my model of the cognitive value of literature—whereby literature can enhance our understanding of subject-matters by way of challenging our preconceptions—has the advantage over knowledge-how accounts of cognitivism in literature precisely because it is better able to keep these two claims separate. Moreover, and as argued above, the question of whether such truth-based value is instantiated by a particular work of literature can only be suitably judged by a sufficiently critical reader, addressing problems stemming from epistemic complacency. My particularism is well-suited to responding to Plato’s objection precisely because it places the onus on the reader to only take a work to embody a cognitive achievement when he has correctly ascertained that there is a legitimate cognitive achievement in that work. Before moving on to further clarify the particularist conclusion that I take my modest cognitivism about works of literature to entail, I wish to address a second objection to my thesis as I have defended it thus far.

The Formalist Objection Revisited

There is a final formulation of the formalist objection I have not yet considered in full and is important for the clarification of the view I put forward here. We have seen that according to a certain stripe of formalist—e.g., Lamarque (2020) and McGregor (2016)—to read a work of literature for its potentially educative content is antithetical to the engagement of that work *qua* work of art. Taking a leaf from Kantian axiology as interpreted by Christine Korsgaard (1983), McGregor argues that to read a work of literature *qua* work of art is to treat it as a final good, whereas to read it for educative purposes is to instrumentalise it in such a way that we are no longer reading the work *qua* work of art. In a similar vein—and as I pointed out in Chapter 1—a view which Lamarque has defended extensively holds that literature is best defined in terms of the practices surrounding both the production of and engagement with works of literature.¹⁰⁵ Constitutive to the practices surrounding our engagement with works of literature, Lamarque holds, is to read works of literature *qua* works of art, such that we refrain from appropriating a work’s artistic value towards educative ends. An objection in the spirit of these two proposals might hold that to read works of literature for the cognitive challenges it contains—as I recommend here—is to fail to read these works *qua* work of literature. This objection, if successful, would force the conclusion that the truth-related value I have been defending here is not a literary value as such, as reading for this sort of value would be to fail to read the work *qua* work of art, and thereby also *qua* work of literature. The point here is amounts to something similar to the one discussed in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter about form-content inseparability. The formalist about engagement with works of literature holds that a work’s content cannot be appreciated in isolation from its form. To read a work for its cognitive value, the autonomist who is also a formalist holds, is to read a work for its content in isolation from its form. In what follows, I argue that this objection is not successful against the sort of cognitive value I have proposed here, on account of the cognitive challenges as they obtain in the works I discuss arise precisely from our attention to the works in question *qua* works of art.

In her defence of a claim not dissimilar to my own, Robinson argues that the apprehension of the content to which the formalist objects as appropriately constitutive to a work’s appreciation *qua* work of art actually arises from attention to the elements of a work of art which are the core of the formalist conception of engagement with a work of literature *qua* work of art (Robinson, 2005: 195-228). In other words, the content which a formalist like McGregor or Lamarque might term as *verboten* if we are to treat the work as a final good in fact arises as the *effect* of the work’s

¹⁰⁵ As seen in e.g., Lamarque and Olsen (1993) and Lamarque (2020).

formal structure. And nothing, I contend, could be more formalist than examining the effects of a work's formal structure.

Let us look once again at my discussion of 'Prufrock' to clarify the point I have in mind. I argued that the cognitive challenges to our pre-conceptions about our own mortality brought forth by the work are in very large part the effect of the juxtaposition of mundane and grandiose imagery. In the stanzas reproduced above, we saw that the juxtaposition between, for example, the speaker's comparing himself to John the Baptist whilst commenting on the baldness of his head as it is 'brought upon a platter' serves as a humorous reminder that as grand and all-encompassing and these thoughts may feel, 'here is no great matter'. The fact that 'platter' and 'matter' are the end words of the lines and fully rhyme with one another also serve to hammer the point home. It is, in other words, only by attending to this poem *qua* work of art in the likes of Lamarque and McGregor endorse that we really come to the existential content that this piece has to offer us.

It bears noting that both Lamarque and McGregor could concede a version of what I have said so far on this point. From the point that the form in 'Prufrock' builds up to pose questions about the speaker's mortality, they would contend, it does not follow that the cognitive challenges brought forth by the poem should be applied to our own reflections on mortality as they obtain in us in actuality. Nor does it follow that the value of these challenges is in some way dependent on the careful and truthful examination of this element of the human experience that Eliot brings puts forward. To examine Eliot's treatment for truthfulness would, on their account, to lie beyond the remit of engaging with the piece *qua* work of art. More appropriate according to them would be the treatment of the effects of the formal choices I described as the exploration of a theme as it obtains in this poem and only in this poem, lest we overgeneralise the thematic content and end up with expressing the cognitive achievement of the poem in the form of some sort of abhorrent propositional truism of the form of 'human beings occasionally experience their thoughts on mortality are simultaneously profound, terrifying, and ridiculous' or 'you can procrastinate doing things until the day you die'.¹⁰⁶

I have already argued that the view I put forward here does not reduce the cognitive achievement of works of literature to propositional truisms. The point that interests me here is whether it really is inappropriate for our engagement with the likes of 'Prufrock' *qua* work of literature to allow it to impact upon the quality of our own meditation of the question of human mortality. On this point I insist that if properly done, nothing could be more appropriate to our

¹⁰⁶ See Lamarque (2014).

engagement with the work *qua* work of literature. ‘Prufrock’ is powerful *qua* work of literature precisely because to engage with it is to face a set of questions we have posed to ourselves before and perhaps in the case of some readers, it has offered us a means of articulating the unease we have when thinking about it that was unavailable to us before encountering the poem. To employ Lamarque’s terminology, the thematic content of a poem like ‘Prufrock’ is of interest to us because it in some way parallels thoughts which we have either experienced in the past or are wont to experience. Eliot’s articulation of course applies most precisely to Prufrock’s case rather than to our own, but this does mean that in apprehending Prufrock’s case, we cannot learn something new about our own. To be faced with a challenge to our own way of thinking about problems similar to the ones encountered in a work of literature is one of the pleasures we find in many great works of literature, and to deny it its place in literary evaluation is to ignore a large source of the pleasure we derive from such works.

Literary Particularism: The Grand Conclusion

I claimed in Chapter 1 that a tenable cognitivism about literary value entails a second, more ambitious thesis about the methodology we ought to employ in our enquiries into the value of literature. I named this second more ambitious thesis particularism about literary value. Particularism about literary value as I conceive of it, my reader will recall, is the conjunct of two theses. The first is that there is a plurality of values works of literature can instantiate—here we have focused on one such value— i.e., pluralism about literary value. The second and perhaps more distinctive thesis is that the way in which a particular value can instantiate itself across works can vary. For instance, the truth-related value I have argued for here obtains differently in a work like *Still She Haunts Me* than it does in a work like ‘Prufrock’, such that the onus is on the reader’s judgement to detect whether such value really obtains in a particular work. I argued in Chapter 3 that the truth-related value in *Still She Haunts Me* arises (where it does) from the construction of a story-world which displays an understanding of certain subject-matters within the actual world. The cognitive achievement in ‘Prufrock’, on the other hand, stems from a very specific expression of understanding of the actual world—that of juxtaposing two seemingly opposed elements of the actual world—i.e., mortality and humour in this case—to create an invitation for the reader to revisit their pre-conceptions about these seemingly opposed elements. I argued that in each case, the onus is on the reader to determine whether the work of literature in question really does express the cognitive achievement one might naively attribute to it. And this, I propose, is how we should evaluate (and determine the presence of) cognitive achievements in works of literature in general.

What I mean here by the onus being on the reader is merely an echo of the remarks of McDowell's I discussed previously. In 'Virtue and Reason', McDowell argues that we are under the impression that the right sort of deliberative evaluation—i.e., the decision to act in a morally praiseworthy manner—obtains in virtue of knowledge of the right sort of systematic moral theory is fundamentally incorrect. He proposes that in order to theorise about moral deliberation and morality more broadly in a manner which accommodates for the complexity of the way in which moral considerations obtain—i.e., in such a way that would be relevant to the final outcome of the deliberation of the virtuous agent—across the plethora of moral situations in which a human might find himself is to accept that the rules we take to apply across these decisions are in fact a gross oversimplification of the way in which the virtuous agent actually does evaluate these situations. Rather than systematically apply rules, the virtuous agent evaluates each situation in its own terms, to see which considerations apply to that particular situation. My proposal is rather simply that we find a parallel to the moral evaluative case in literary evaluation, where we find the analogue to the considerations in moral deliberative situations in the candidate building blocks of literary value we find in a given work of literature.

Some examples of candidate building blocks of literary value we have found in works include the use of form in 'Prufrock' which seem to lead us to meditate upon the 'overwhelming question' of procrastination and our impending death, and the factual care with which Roiphe recreates certain elements of Carroll's life. Both these cases resemble one another in that both are instances of a certain truth-related value in literature, but the way in which we arrived at the conclusion that these are instances of truth-related value in literature is very different in each case. I have already pointed out that the relationship between the truth-related value instantiated by *Still She Haunts Me* and its building blocks—i.e., the painstaking research into the personal histories of Carroll where it is employed successfully—is far more straightforward than it is in cases of 'great literature' that also instantiate this form of value. But even cases of 'great works of literature' that instantiate this sort of value do not instantiate it in the same sort of way. The case I made for 'Prufrock' instantiating this sort of value is very different to the case I made for *The Golden Bowl*. This is in part due to the formal features of each work—the first is a poem and therefore more concise whereas the second is a novel which famously treats us to an extensive picture of its characters' inner lives. It would be a mistake, however, to place too much weight on this point, especially insofar as it might serve as a basis for a systematic rule towards the way in which this sort of value might obtain in a particular work. In the case of novels we might be tempted to think that the sort of value I described here only obtains in novels which share this Jamesian feature of a narratology thoroughly descriptive of characters' deliberative thoughts or a

Jamesian penchant for hyperrealism more broadly. But this needn't be so. Certain members of the category of the *nouveau roman* might surprisingly also instantiate this sort of truth-related value in their own way.

André Breton's *Nadja* is the surrealist retelling of a ten-day long affair the author experienced with an actual woman. The novel's protagonist—André—eventually goes off Nadja because he cannot bear the thought of her being a flesh and blood person, rather than the ideal he has held of her in his mind since meeting her. The surrealist comparisons which denote the ideal Nadja appear in stark contrast with the dreary descriptions of his daily routine, to which he expressly does not want Nadja to assimilate. There may be a case to be made for the contrast made possible by the novel's unconventional narratology and surrealist imagery relays a plausible and, in this respect, truthful portrait of a young man's idealism, and how it colours his experiences of the ordinary and extraordinary. It might, on a related note, also offer us insight into the question of why young men who are rather pleased with themselves behave in callous manners towards romantic interests, potentially offering us one possible answer to that difficult question. The moral of the story here is that the serious reader of works of literature would do well not to come to the task of evaluating a work of literature *qua* literature without too many preconceptions of the sort of value a member of a particular literary genre might instantiate. Many things can amount to the sort of cognitive achievement that is of literary value, and that one of the joys of reading works of literature and of criticism is to ascertain how the works which do express a cognitive achievement come to express that achievement.

On a similar note, literary particularism warns us against an overly narrow conception of what it means to read a work *qua* work of literature. If my proposal from Chapter 1 that to read a work *qua* work of literature is to read it with special attention to the value it instantiates, and, if I am correct in asserting that the values a work of literature can instantiate are manifold, as are the ways in which these values might manifest in a particular work, then it follows that reading a work for the value it instantiates will entail reading a work with attention to the elements which make up literary value in that particular work. This, as we have seen, varies from work to work, entailing the conclusion that overly prescriptive or formulaic conceptions of what one must attend to in order to ascertain a work's intrinsic value are bound to lead us astray.

It now remains for me to say how the truth-related literary value I have argued for entails particularism about literary value in the way I have described it. The entailment obtains rather simply because the literary cognitivism I have argued for is very modest—as Currie (2020) points out, an account of literary cognitivism which does not fall prey to the sort of objection he sets

out is bound to be messy. Such an account is bound to be messy because rather than to purport to offer a systematic approach which applies to works of literature in general, it will instead have to investigate how cognitive value obtains in particular works in a piecemeal manner. In other words, the modesty of the claim I proposed is such that in order to ascertain the presence of cognitive—and potentially any other sort of literary value in a work—one must proceed to evaluate it in a particularist manner. The speed with which Currie describes this sort of cognitivism before moving on implies his discomfort with such a way of theorising about cognitive value as it applies to literature. This conclusion is indeed uncomfortable in the way the ‘vertigo’ described by McDowell in ‘Virtue and Reason’ is uncomfortable. Nonetheless it is, if I am correct, the only way to account for the value instantiated by works of literature without oversimplifying and thereby underselling their value.

Concluding Remarks

If I have been successful in what I set out to do, I have, through defending cognitivism from the usual objections with which it is charged, created a tenable account of literary cognitive value. In order for such an account to be viable, I have argued, it is important to concede two very important points to the autonomist. First, that we oughtn't to conflate literary value of any sort with the moral, political (or whatever) ends that a work might attain independently from a work's formal properties. Second, that we oughtn't to confuse a work's cognitive value with its teaching us things. I proposed—through the particularism I put forward—that not all didactic ends as attained by a work of literature satisfy the conditions for cognitive literary value. Cognitive literary value as I construe it here is intertwined with a work's formal properties. Often, I argue, the formal properties are there to actualise the artistic aim of expressing understanding of the actual world.

Another important point made here is that cognitive literary value, as characterised here, is a truth-related value. As such, the case was made for works being able to express full-blooded truths about the actual world when viewed in the right context, and for how this ability impacts upon a work's value. If the line of argument I presented here is correct, then cognitivism about literary value is quite different to the proposals we have seen in the past thirty years or so and which have more recently been rightly attacked. My particularism means that I only see cognitive literary value as constitutive of a work's literary value where there is a clear aim by the author (actual or implied) to express a cognitive achievement through the creation of this work. I have here identified two ways in which this sort of value is actualised—the first is through factual story-world creation and the second is through presenting the more perceptive reader with challenges to her pre-conceptions. The account as it stands—being particularist—remains open to other proposals of how understanding might be expressed in a work of literature. The emphasis on understanding rather than knowledge-how, permits us to observe elements like story-world building and cognitive challenges in a new light, particularly since understanding is something which can be attained not only of skillsets—of which the knowledge-how proponents especially like to emphasise emotional intelligence and deliberative abilities—but also of facts more broadly. This means, crucially, that our examination of a work of literature's cognitive value can move away from the examination of a work's moral or emotional stance, and we can thus move away from works of turn of the century psychological realism as our sole sources of case-studies, and take an interest in what a broader selection of works of literature have in store for us insofar as truth-related value is concerned.

Finally, in addressing the Platonic objection with the gravity it deserves, I have put the onus on the reader in discovering whether a given work really does instantiate cognitive literary value. This, I hope, captures the intellectual and aesthetic pleasure that comes with engaging with a work of literature with the attention it deserves.

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