TRUTH AND LITERATURE:
THE RELEVANCE OF TRUTH TO LITERARY VALUE

by

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I examine the question of whether it is ever appropriate to judge a work of literature on the truth or falsity of the statements it contains. I argue that literary works often do assert truths, and that therefore a normal and appropriate element of our critical response to these works involves an assessment of their truth claims. I am therefore arguing against what has come to be called the "No Truth Theory," whose various defenders claim that truth is never relevant to the literary value of a piece of language.

I trace the No Truth Theory in its modern form, through the work of Arnold Isenberg, Sydney Zink, Monroe Beardsley, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen. I identify several common threads in their arguments, and isolate the source of my disagreement with them, namely, their (in my view) mistaken theory of what a work of literature is. While they all consider a work of literature to be a locutionary act, I argue that a work of literature is an illocutionary act, or more precisely, that a work of

literature often has an illocutionary force, and that assessing how well this illocutionary act is performed is a legitimate part of literary criticism. The assertion of truths is, of course, one such illocutionary project, and so the assessment of truths is part of legitimate critical practice. I show that the purely locutionary view of literature, espoused by the NTT, is inadequate, while the illocutionary view has much to recommend it.

I show how the illocutionary view of literature affects our understanding of several key literary concepts, such as metaphor, theme and thesis. I apply my theory to particular cases, and show how an assessment of truth claims is crucial to certain kinds of literary works.

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Chapter 1: Poets and liars

1.1 The Problem

A basic task for the philosopher of literature is to define and explain the value, if any, which is peculiar to works of literature. The role that truth plays in our appreciation of literature has been a topic of particular concern. When Keats wrote “Truth is beauty, beauty truth” he was taking sides, with poetic compactness, in a debate that was famously ancient by the time Plato referred to it in *The Republic*. Plato was examining the then popular view whereby the Homeric epics were considered to be a source of moral teaching, and which assumed Homer to be an expert on the things he described in his poems, such as warfare, horsemanship and medicine:

> Then, said I, have we not next to scrutinize tragedy and its leader, Homer, since some people tell us that these poets know all the arts and all things human pertaining to virtue and vice, and all things divine? For the good poet, if he is to poetize rightly, must, they argue, create with knowledge or be unable to create. [1]

According to the view Plato criticizes, knowledge is necessary for the creation of poetry, and the poet is able to instruct in matters of virtue and vice. Plato’s response to this line of reasoning, as is well known, was that the poet only *seemed* to be an expert:

> Shall we, then, lay it down that all the poetic tribe, beginning with Homer, are imitators of images of excellence and of the other things that they ‘create’, and do not lay hold on truth, but, as we were just now saying, the painter will fashion, himself knowing nothing of the cobbler’s art, what appears to be a cobbler to him and likewise to those who know nothing but judge only by forms and colors? [2]

1. Plato, *The Republic,* trans. Paul Shorey, in *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, eds. Hamilton, Edith and Huntington, Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 598e
2. ibid, 601e

Homer could simulate knowledge of different arts, Plato argues, but only by describing them superficially. So the beauty, and persuasiveness, of Homer's verse was the product of deception. The poet was a kind of liar, one who sacrificed truth for beauty. This charge of dishonesty is one that has haunted literature ever since and, generally speaking, there have been two kinds of response to it.

1.2 The First Response

First, some have argued that literature does indeed discover and express truths. This was, more or less, Aristotle's stance. In the *Poetics*, he claims that poetry is "more philosophical" than history because it is more abstract. Poetry deals with character types, rather than particulars:

> The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with meter no less than without it. The true difference [between history and poetry] is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By universal, I mean how a person of a certain type on occasion speaks or acts, according to the law of probability or necessity. [3]

So, according to Aristotle, Plato was wrong: poetry does derive its value from truth, and a good poem displays the poet's knowledge of human nature. This line of reasoning has had many defenders and has taken many different forms. Nineteenth century French novelist Emil Zola, for instance, held a particularly strong version of it: literature, especially the novel, was to be understood as a branch of science, similar to sociology or psychology. The novelist should strive for realism, and in doing so, advances the cause of science. Naturalism in letters is, he says:

3. Aristotle, *Poetics,* trans. Bywater, I., in *The Complete Works Of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes, Jonathan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1451b 1-10.

> . . .a return to nature and to man. It is direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depiction of what is. The writer and the scientist have had the same task. Both have had to replace abstractions with realities, empirical formulas with rigorous analysis. Thus no more abstract characters in books, no more lying inventions, no more absolutes, but real characters with true histories, and the relativity of everyday life.[4]

The “naturalistic” novelist constructs his characters according to the known laws of psychology, puts them in a situation that has been carefully described in economic and sociological terms, and then allows the story to write itself, according to the laws of science. The result is a work that has increased our knowledge of the human condition. Indeed, one of Zola’s important essays is titled “The Experimental Novel”, and this does not refer to a novel that is experimental in style, but rather to the fact that a novel is to be viewed, according to him, as a kind of scientific experiment, a kind of thought experiment. (It is worth noting that Aristotle praises abstraction, while Zola rails against it. There are perhaps two conflicting views of what “science” is. What they have in common, though, is the belief that constructing a successful fictional character requires knowledge of “human nature," however that is determined; the belief that literature expands our knowledge; and the belief that this is the primary value of literature).

Perhaps it is only Zola who ever held such an extreme version of this theory, but other philosophers have claimed that literature can play an essential role in increasing our knowledge. Martha Nussbaum, for example, claims that “certain novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy[5],” thereby suggesting both that some novels contribute to our knowledge, and that this is the primary value of such novels, while Noel Carroll argues that literature:

4. Zola, Emil, “Naturalism In The Theatre” in *Documents Of Literary Realism*, ed, George Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 201.
5. Nussbaum, Martha, *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press 1990), 3

> can afford knowledge of concepts, such as concepts of virtue, by stimulating the reader to an awareness, through reflective self-analysis, of the conditions, rules, and criteria for her application of said concepts.[6]

So one way of meeting Plato's charge of poetic dishonesty is to claim that he is simply wrong: good poetry necessarily involves knowledge and truth. The author requires knowledge to create, the audience is edified by the knowledge displayed. It is characteristic of this response that it considers the truth-telling ability of literature to be its primary virtue: this is why literature occupies the important place in so many cultures that it does. It is very much the business, then, of the literary critic to discuss the truth of the various ideas expressed by any given work. A complete appreciation of a work of literature will involve an assessment of the truth of its statements.

1.3 The second response

The other response to Plato agrees with him that poetry may indeed be a poor source of truth. This, however, does not mean that we should, as Plato did, reject poetry. There are values other than truth. In particular, there is beauty, and it is this that poetry provides. Edgar Allen Poe echoes Plato's claim that the beauty of poetry involves the sacrifice of truth, but he stops short of condemning poetry. In "The Poetic Principle", he writes:

> The demands of truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All that which is so indispensable in Song is precisely all that which she has nothing whatever to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox to wreathe her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood which as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind indeed who does not perceive the radical and chasmal difference between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these

6. Carroll, Noel, "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge." The Journal of Art and Art Criticism, vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter, 2002), 14.

> differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of poetry and truth.[7]

On this view, poetry and truth are polar opposites, and in fact interfere with one another: if you labor to make your language aesthetically pleasing, you will most likely have to sacrifice precision and accuracy of your descriptions. There is however, a “poetical mode of inculcation”; poetry performs some valuable task that has nothing to do with truth:

> In the contemplation of beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement of the soul, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from the truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart.[8]

Poetry’s important work is to elevate the soul by bringing it into contact with beauty.

This view comes in different strengths as well. Poe seems to be arguing that poetry and truth are in actual conflict: a piece of language that succeeds as poetry will, for that very reason, fail as a statement of truth. Likewise, a statement that attempts to express the truth accurately will be forced to avoid all the trappings of poetic language. Other versions of this response merely have it that whether a piece of language is true or not is simply irrelevant to whatever literary value it might have. A poem may well contain statements that are true, but this will be a matter of coincidence. This is the view of Arnold Isenberg, the philosopher whose essay ‘the Problem Of Belief” is the standard philosophical expression of this school of thought. Here he writes:

> People are influenced in their responses to works of art by the beliefs that they hold on all sorts of questions and by the way which those works seem to impinge upon those beliefs. It might well be an object of interest to psychologists to study these influences. Critics and aestheticians, however, find themselves raising the strange question of the

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7. Poe, E. A. “The Poetic Principle”, in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, eds. E. H. O’neill and A.H. Quinn (New York: Dorset Press 1989) ,1025

8. ibid, 1026

> "legitimacy" or "relevance" of these belief reactions. Some think them improper and intrusive while others hold them to be quite in order. The question, though not excessively clear, has been much debated; it is possible to speak of "sides." I take one side, holding as I do the extreme view that belief and aesthetic experience are mutually exclusive.[9]

That belief has some effect on our enjoyment of literature may be granted. It is just that, according to Isenberg, this will have nothing to do with a genuine critical response. The nature of this influence is a matter for the psychologist, not the critic.

1.4 The Autonomy Of literature

These in, rough outline, are the two main responses concerning the nature of literary value and its relation to truth. The second response, the claim that literature has nothing to do with truth, has much to recommend it. It is the one that seems to take literature at all seriously. The first, Aristotelian, theory seems to reduce literary value to some other set of values. The benefit that literature provides could just as well be provided by something else. After all, if literature is more "philosophical" than history, and this is why we value literature, then we should prefer philosophy to literature, since philosophy will be more "philosophical" still. And, if Zola is correct, and literature is one scientific method among many, then we are forced to conclude that, as a method, it has not produced results equal to genuine experimental science. What novelist has discovered as much about the human brain as a cognitive scientist? If truth is what we want, literature is a poor way to achieve it, and we would perhaps do well to discard the inefficient method of "poeticizing" for the more reliable methods of the laboratory.

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9. Isenberg, Arnold, "The Problem of Belief", The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Mar., 1955), 395

In addition, this second response accords well with certain intuitions that are widely shared among readers of literature. It is entirely possible to enjoy a literary work that is wildly fantastic, or with whose moral one disagrees. Indeed, a work of literature with an overly didactic theme is often disliked for that very reason. A moral lesson can easily ruin what was otherwise an enjoyable story. We reject such works as “too preachy”, even where we agree with what is being preached. Poe calls the insistence that a story have a moral the “didactic fallacy” and he savagely parodies it in his story “Never Bet the devil Your Head”:

> Every fiction should have a moral, and what is more to the purpose, the critics have discovered that every fiction has. Philip Melanchthon, some time ago, wrote a commentary upon the “Batrachomymachia”, and proved that the poet’s object was to incite a distaste for sedition. . . Pierre La Seine, going a step further, shows that the intention was to recommend to young men temperance in eating and drinking. . . Just so, too, Jacobus Hugo has satisfied himself that, by Eunis, Homer meant to insinuate John Calvin; by Antinous, Martin Luther; by the Lotophagi, protestants in general; and by the Harpies the Dutch. Our own modern scholiasts are equally acute. These fellows demonstrate a hidden meaning in “The Antediluvians”, a parable in “Powhatan”, new views in “Cock Robin” and transcendentalism in “Hop O’ My thumb”. In short, it has been shown that no man can sit down to write without a very profound design. Thus to authors in general much trouble is spared. A novelist, for example, need have no care for his moral. It is there- that is to say it is somewhere- and the moral and the critics can take care of themselves.[10]

Perhaps, Poe seems to suggest, a critics time is better spent examining the poem, rather than trying to discover the “truths” that the poet is trying to express. Attention paid to the “truth” is attention that is not paid to the poem itself.

Other writers have made very much the same criticism, detecting an element of Puritanism in the need to find truth in literary works. The science fiction novelist Ursula K Le Guin, for example, defends the simple enjoyment of fantasy literature against the insistence that

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10. Poe, E.A. "Never Bet The Devil Your Head" in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, eds. E. H. O’neill and A.H. Quinn (New York: Dorset Press 1989) , 365

literature must be "good for you", meaning that it must have some use. The pleasure that literature affords should be reason enough to value it, she argues:

> To read "War and Peace" or "The Lord Of The Rings" plainly is not "work"- you do it for pleasure. And if it cannot be justified as "educational" or as "self-improvement", then, in the puritan value system, it can only be self-indulgence or escapism. For pleasure is not a value to the puritan; on the contrary it is a sin.[11]

The insistence that literature be "true" simply hides a rather low opinion of literature: it is not worth reading for its own sake.

So if literature is to be taken seriously, we need to isolate, and appreciate, those qualities that are unique to it. We should appreciate the work of literature for its own sake, as an end in itself. As Cleanth Brooks puts it, "The position developed in earlier pages obviously seeks to take the poem out of competition with scientific, historical and philosophical propositions."[12] I am quite sympathetic to this impulse.

Having pointed out the merits of this response, however, I would like to argue that it is wrong: truth and beauty are not completely independent values, at least not in the context of literature. The "philosophical novel" is hardly a rarity. Novels such as "Nausea" and "The Stranger" are valued for their philosophical insight as much as for their style. And certain genres, such as science fiction or historical romance, rely crucially on the accurate depiction of certain facts. In short, the truth of a poetic or novelistic statement may well contribute to its literary value.

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11. Le Guin, Ursula K. "Why Are Americans Afraid Of Dragons?" in *Languages of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction (*New York: Perennial Press, June 1995), 40.
12. Brooks, Cleanth, "The Problem of Belief and the Problem of Cognition" in *The Well Wrought Urn* (New York*:* Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1970), 252.

1.5 The No truth Theory

The view that Poe and Isenberg defend has come to be called “The No truth Theory” of literature. It was given this name by R.K. Elliot in his 1975 essay “Truth And Poetry” in which he argues against it, and which was a response to Isenberg’s “The Problem Of Belief” written in 1955.

One of the problems with arguing against the No Truth Theory (or even arguing for it) is that, as I have mentioned, there have been many different versions of it. It is perhaps even inaccurate to speak of *the* No Truth Theory. As Isenberg says in “The Problem Of Belief”, the question is not “excessively clear”. This is an understatement. In the simple formula “truth is relevant to literature”, there is hardly a word that is uncontroversial. What is “truth”? Whose definition of “literature” do we use? What theory of “aesthetic relevance” shall we rely on? Depending on how we answer these questions, the No truth Theory will seem more or less plausible. Indeed, many who have written about this question seem to be on both sides at once. Thus, we can find the fifteenth century critic and poet Sir Philip Sydney claiming, in his “Defence Of Poesy,” that the poet “nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth, [13]” thereby apparently agreeing with Poe that poetry does not assert truth at all. Later, however, in the very same essay, we find him claiming:

> For if it be, as I affirm, that no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poesy, then is the conclusion manifest, that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed.[14]

And further:

13. Sydney, Philip, “An Apology For Poetry” in *Criticism: Major Statements*. eds. Kaplan, Charles and Anderson, William, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 132
14. ibid. 132

> And first, truly, to all them that, professing learning, inveigh against poetry, may justly be objected that they go very near ungratefulness, to seek to deface that which, in the noblest nations and languages that are known, hath been the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk, by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges. [15]

On the one hand, Sydney wants to acquit poetry of Plato's charge of lying, but, on the other hand, seems unwilling to admit that poetry has no cognitive value whatsoever.

And then there is Poe himself, who we have seen as the enemy of the Didactic Fallacy, and who wants to draw a sharp distinction between poetry and science, but who elsewhere claims:

> But truth is often, and in very great degree, the aim of the tale. Some of the finest tales are tales of ratiocination[16]

And Poe often included scientifically verifiable facts in his stories. "The Gold Bug," for instance, describes a method of code breaking that actually works.

The novelist and critic Iris Murdoch says the following, and she appears to be on both sides of this dispute at once:

> I don't think the artist, qua artist, has a duty to society. A citizen has a duty to society, and a writer might sometimes feel he ought to write persuasive newspaper articles or pamphlets, but this would be a different activity. The artist's duty is to art, to truth telling in his own medium, the writer's duty is to produce the best literary work of which he is capable, and he must find out how this can be done[17]

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15. ibid, 132
16. Poe, E. A. "The Poetic Principle", 1027
17. Murdoch, Iris. Existentialists and Mystics: Writings On Philosophy and Literature (New York, Allen Lane, 1998), 33

On the one hand, she argues that persuasion is not the business of the literary artist; on the other, she claims that "truth telling in his own medium" is.

And, perhaps most paradoxically of all, Cleanth Brooks quotes T. S Eliot as disliking Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn," because the line "truth is beauty and beauty truth" is "a serious blemish on a beautiful poem, and the reason must be either that I fail to understand it or it is a statement which is untrue."[18] Here we almost have a version of the Liar's Paradox where a statement asserts its own falsehood; Eliot dislikes the Ode because he disagrees with it. But what Keats' poem suggests is that we only like those poems we agree with (a plausible interpretation of "truth is beauty"). So Eliot does agree with the poem after all. But then he has no reason to dislike it . . .

I choose these passages because they are all from writers who wrote fiction and/or poetry as well as criticism. The fact that so many literary artists, who also wrote as critics, thinking theoretically about the act of creating literature, could hold such seemingly conflicting views about the matter suggests how little clarity exists. What is the difference between short fiction and poetry, such that, according to Poe, truth is relevant to one, but not the other? What does Murdoch mean by "truth-telling in his own medium," and how does it differ from just telling the truth? This lack of clarity is what makes the question difficult to pose, much less answer.

In order to have some hope of even beginning the argument, I will restrict my attention to the form that the question has taken in the 20th century, in the analytic tradition. Most recently, the dispute takes place in the context of the "linguistic turn" characteristic of English language philosophy at the first half of the previous century.

The are two major trends in 20th century philosophy of language that bear upon the No Truth Theory. The first of these is logical positivism, with its emphasis on logical precision and empirical verification, the second is Speech Act Theory, with its realization that

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18. Brooks, Cleanth, "Keats Sylvan Historian" in *The Well Wrought Urn* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1970), 152.

there is more to language than assertion and denial. Each of these trends, while not directly involving literature, had their effect on the literary criticism of the time. It is therefore worth saying a bit about each.

1.6 The Philosophical Background: Logical Positivism

In Frege's "On Sense And Reference", a work that would greatly influence the logical positivists, we find what can be considered the modern foundation of the No Truth Theory. In a discussion of vacuous names, that is names that don't refer to anything, Frege lightly touches upon the literary use of language:

> But why do we wish that every proper name have not only a sense, but a nominatum? Why is the proposition not enough? We answer: because what matters to us is the truth-value. This, however, is not always the case. In listening to an epic, for example, we are fascinated by the euphony of the language and also by the sense of the sentences, and by the images and emotions evoked. In turning to the question of truth, we disregard the artistic appreciation and pursue scientific considerations. [19]

Here we seem to have a succinct statement of the No Truth Theory: The literary and the scientific are mutually exclusive. To pursue the one is to ignore the other. A proposition when applied to the world has a truth-value, but when it concerns things that do not exist, it has no truth-value. Sometimes this will be because of a mistake: we refer to the "present king of France" (the standard example of a non-referring definite description,) not knowing that such a person doesn't exist. Or else it will be a matter of deception: I claim that "a man in a blue hat" stole the money, when I am merely trying to cover up my own crime. Analytic philosophers following Frege have been most concerned with this aspect of a propositions failure to refer (and

19. Frege, Gottlieb. "On Sense And Nominatum" in *Philosophy of Language*, ed A.P. Martinich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 150

failure to have a truth-value), where it is considered to be a defect. So Bertrand Russell in "On Denoting" argues that such statements can be assigned a truth value, and are in fact false, whereas P.F. Strawson in "On Referring" argues that such statements fail to have a truth value at all. The case of literary fiction was not generally taken into account. Frege's brief comment here, with his claim that a non-referring name in a literary context has some non-cognitive value, seems to be the kernel from which the current No Truth Theory grew. We have a proposition that is strictly speaking neither true nor false, so it is not a scientific or philosophical proposition. At the same time, it is not a mistake and it is not a lie. Therefore, it must have some other value, some other content. This is its "emotive" content, and this is what the literary critic is primarily interested in.

As I say, analytic philosophy had little more to say about literary fiction, even as it went on to develop various theories of vacuous names. In particular, Logical positivism, which was at its most popular in the 1920's and 1930's, tended to divided statements into two groups: those that were scientifically or mathematically verifiable, and those that were nonsense, with there being some disagreement over whether or not some kinds of nonsense were valuable. It was left to I.A. Richards, a literary critic who studied at Cambridge during the 1920's, and who was trained in philosophy, to apply these linguistic insights to literature in any detail. Accepting the basic distinction of Logical positivism between scientific discourse and *everything else*, Richards attempted to show how a correct appreciation of literature did not in fact require any notion of truth. His "Principles Of Literary Criticism" offers an early defense of the position. He writes:

> A statement may be used for the sake of the *reference*, true or false, which it causes. this is the *scientific* use of language. But it may also be used for the sake of the effects in emotion and attitude produced by the reference it occasions. This is the *emotive* use of language. . . Many arrangements of words evoke attitudes without any reference being required *en route*. They operate like musical phrases. But usually references are involved as *conditions* for, or *stages in*, the ensuing development of attitudes, yet it is

> still the attitude, not the references which are important. It matters not in such cases whether the references are true or false.[20]

Whereas a scientific or historical account of events requires an objective, unemotional confrontation with reality, literature invites us to immerse ourselves in certain thoughts and feelings without regard to what reality is like. Richards claims that these two uses of language can be kept distinct if we look carefully at how the word "true" is used:

> A reference is true [in the scientific sense] when the things to which it refers are actually together in the way in which it refers to them. Otherwise it is false. This sense is very little involved in any of the arts. For the avoidance of confusion it would be well if the word 'true' could be reserved for this use.[21]

Unfortunately, confusion is not avoided, since the word 'true' has different senses, one of which is often used in literary contexts:

> The 'Truth' of *Robinson Crusoe* is the acceptability of the things we are told, their acceptability in the interests of the effects of the narrative, not their correspondence with any actual facts involving Alexander Selkirk or another. . . it is in this sense that 'Truth' is equivalent to 'internal necessity' or rightness. That is 'true' or 'internally necessary' which completes or accords with the rest of the experience, which cooperates to arouse our ordered response, whether the response of Beauty or another.[22]

We react emotionally to the plight of King Lear, for instance, and our knowledge that there is not, and never was, such a man does not, and *should* not, affect this emotional reaction. Lear's decision to retire and hand his kingdom over to his three daughters may not make sense from a psychological point of view; it seems unmotivated and irrational, and we might well inquire as to his sanity, if he were a real person. But this "irrationality" is no defect to the drama, because the point is not to describe the way people behave, but to display a series of increasingly tragic

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20. Richards, I.A., *Principles of Literary Criticism, (*New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc, 1925), 267
21. ibid, 268-269
22. ibid. 269

events. Lear's decision suits this purpose, and so makes sense within the context of the play, the only context which matters to the literary critic. "Such things don't happen," we might say, thinking of the way people usually behave, but this is irrelevant, since these things happen all the time *in tragedy*; that's what makes them tragic, and that is why tragedies affect us the way they do.

The ambiguity in the word 'truth' also affects other related words, most problematically 'belief'. There are two kinds of belief, says Richards, and we need to keep them apart:

> The sense in which we believe a scientific proposition is not the sense in which we believe emotional utterances, whether they are political 'we shall not sheathe the sword', or critical 'the progress of poetry is immortal', or poetic. Both senses of belief are complicated and difficult to define. Yet we commonly appear to assume that they are the same or that they only differ in the kind and degree of evidence available. Scientific belief we may perhaps define as readiness to act as though the reference symbolized by the proposition which is believed were true. Readiness to act in *all* circumstances and in *all* connections into which it can enter. . . the other element usually included in a definition of belief, namely a feeling or emotion of acceptance, the 'This is sooth, accept it!' feeling, is often absent in scientific belief and is not essential. [23]

The basic idea here is an old one. Socrates devoted his life to pointing out that very often what a believer *feels* to be true does not stand up under scrutiny; the feeling of certainty was unjustified. What's wanted is not a feeling of confidence, but some objective way of justifying our confidence. For Richards, this objective justification was provided by the scientific method, and nothing else. And justification may well exist without a feeling of certainty. Many a scientifically justified belief may be unsettling or even counterintuitive, but if there is experimental evidence for it, then the question is settled, or at least settled until further evidence unsettles it. Our 'acceptance' as a subjective matter is not required, and may even interfere with scientific investigation.

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23. ibid. 277

When we read a work of literature, says Richards, we may be inclined to describe ourselves as believing certain things. At a minimum, we believe certain things about a character named "King Lear". But of course, what makes sense in a play does not need to make sense outside of the play. Our acceptance of the "facts" concerning Lear and his daughters is provisional:

> That these beliefs as to "how any person of a certain character would speak or act, probably or necessarily", upon which so much drama seems to depend, are not scientific, but are held only for the sake of their dramatic effect, is shown clearly by the ease with which we abandon them if the advantage lies the other way. The medical impossibility of Desdemona's last speech is perhaps as good an example as any.[24]

Our involvement with fictional characters and events only lasts for as long as we are reading the fiction (or if it doesn't, if we go through our everyday life mourning for Lear, we are acting pathologically rather than critically.) But, Richards notes, there is another sort of experience that literature affords us, that we are also inclined to describe as "belief":

> Very often the whole state of mind in which we are left by a poem, or by music, or, more rarely perhaps, by other forms of art, is of a kind which it is natural to call belief. When all provisional acceptances have lapsed, when the single references and their responses are forgotten, we may still have an attitude and an emotion which to introspection has all the characters of a belief. This belief, which is a consequence and not a cause of the experience, is the chief source of the confusion upon which Revelation Doctrines depend.[25]

We very often go away from having read a great work of literature, such as *King Lear*, with the rather robust feeling that we have *learned* something, and something important, about the world. Something, we are inclined to say, has been *revealed* to us. The proponent of the "Revelation

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24. ibid. 278
25. ibid. 279

Doctrine" agues that it is this revelation that is the primary value of literature. But, Richards argues, there is nothing that is revealed:

> If we ask what in such cases it is which is believed, we are likely to receive, and to offer, answers both varied and vague. For strong belief feelings, as is well known and as is shown by certain doses of alcohol or hashish, and preeminently nitrous oxide, will readily attach themselves to almost any reference, distorting it to suit their purposes. . . Thus when, through reading *Adonis*, for example, we are left with a strong emotional attitude which feels like belief, it is only too easy to think that we are believing in immortality or survival, or in something else capable of statement, and fatally easy also to attribute the value of the poem to the alleged effect, or conversely to regret that it should depend upon such scientifically doubtful conclusions. Scientific beliefs, as opposed to these emotive beliefs, are beliefs '*that* so and so'. They can be stated with greater or less precision, as the case may be, but always in some form.[26]

The reason that these "revelations" are not testable is because they have no propositional content. They are "objectless beliefs", consisting entirely of a subjective emotional state, which if left unattended will attach itself to whatever subject matter it encounters. They are not capable of experimental verification and so they are not scientific beliefs.

The upshot of this analysis of belief is that when we are evaluating a poem, we should *look at the poem itself*, and not at any alleged relationships between the poem and the world. New discoveries in the world might make us reject a scientific theory, but will never force us to dislike any given poem, and certainly this does in fact seem to be the case: we no longer accept Ptolemy's theory of planetary motion, but we still do admire Homer's epics. If truth were necessary for literary value, we would expect literary works to be discarded at the same rate as scientific theories. But they are not. The value of a poem lies in how its various parts fit together into an acceptable whole, not in how they refer to or describe the world. Under the name "The New Criticism", this way of approaching literature would influence a generation of literary critics. Notable examples include Cleanth Brooks, who in his essay "Keats' Sylvan

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26. ibid. 279

Historian" directly tackles the poet's claim that "Truth is beauty, beauty truth", arguing that the poet does not in fact assert that proposition, but offers it up for the contemplation of the reader, and William K. Wimsatt who, along with philosopher Monroe Beardsley, wrote a pair of essays ("The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy"), which attempt to further separate the aesthetic value of a poem from it's contextual or historical relations.

So the No Truth Theory has one foot firmly planted in logical positivism. It holds that the assertoric, truth-telling function of language needs to be strictly set apart from the other functions of language, and that talk of “poetic” truth, or “literary” truth only serves to muddy the waters, and does not do either science or literature any favors.

1.7 The Philosophical Background: Speech Act Theory

Isenberg credits Richards with the modern revival of interest in the No Truth Theory, and Richards obviously brings to the question some much needed precision and clarity. All the various contemporary defenses of the theory make use of these insights. At the same time, Richards is heavily invested in the philosophy of his time, logical positivism, which does not now enjoy the same popularity that it once did. This might be a problem for the No truth Theory, except that its current defenders also take insights from the other important development in the philosophy of language in the 20th century: speech act theory. This insight is summarized nicely by one of its major proponents, J.L. Austin in the following passage from his "How To Do Things With Words":

> It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a ‘statement’ was to ‘describe’ some state of affairs, or to ‘state some fact’, which it must do either truly or falsely . . .. But now in recent years, many things which would once have been accepted without question as ‘statements’ by both philosophers and grammarians have been

> scrutinized with new care. . . It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or intended only in part, to record or impart straightforward information about the facts. . . [27]

The tendency Austin criticizes does indeed have a long history. In his dialogue "De Magistro", written in the fourth century, St. Augustine claims that the sole purpose of language is to assert, or teach:

> Augustine: What do you think we purpose to do when we speak?
> Adeodatus: As far as occurs to me at this moment, we intend either to teach or to learn
> Aug: One of these is clear to me, and I agree with you: obviously when we speak we do wish to teach. But as to learning- how does that enter into it?
> Ad: Well how do you think, but by asking questions?
> Aug: Even in that case, as I understand it, we intend to do nothing other than to teach. For I ask you, do you put questions for any other reason than to teach the one you interrogate, what it is you wish to know?
> Ad: You are right[28]

So from very early on, assertion was assumed to be the sole function of language, and grammatical forms other than the declarative sentence were interpreted as being equivalent to some declarative. The question "What time is it?" was taken to be equivalent to the statement "I want to know what time it is.", and likewise the imperative "Close the door" would be taken as equivalent to "I want you to close the door," a declarative. When we speak we are teaching, that is informing our listeners, and our utterances are all either true or false.

Speech act theory begins with the realization that a question is *not* equivalent to a statement. I may tell you, for example, that I wish I knew how many stars there are in the universe, thereby letting you know that I am curious about the subject. But I am not *asking you* how many there are, as of course I assume you don't know either. So *telling you what I wish to know* is not the same as *asking you* a question. Likewise, I may say something like "I hope it

27. Austin, J.L., *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975), 1
28. Augustine, “De Magistro” in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 69

doesn't rain today", thus letting someone know what I hope occurs, *without* commanding them to do anything, since I don't expect anyone to be able to prevent it from raining. When we speak, according to speech act theory, we are very often not merely asserting something, we are *doing* something.

Austin originally divided sentences in to *constatives*, which say something, and *performatives*, which do something, and the difference between them consisted of the fact that while constatives are either true or false, performatives are neither: "That's not true" is a nonsensical reply to the command "Close the door." Performatives, such as commands, may indeed fail, but this will not be a matter of their being false. If I say "Close the door" when the door is already closed, I have failed to give a command. Likewise if I issue the command to an empty room. Such performative failures are called by Austin *infelicities*, and they are the result of some failure of the performative to fit its circumstances. This distinction collapses, though, since a sentence like "The present king of France is bald", which is obviously a constative, intended to assert something, suffers from what can only be described as an infelicity. Its problem is not that it lies or says something untrue, but that it has not asserted anything at all. Given that there is no present king of France, we can only say that the speaker of such a sentence has attempted, but failed, to make an assertion, just as a command issued to an empty room fails. The sentence lacks truth value. So asserting is simply one of the actions that a sentence might perform. *Saying* is merely a kind of *doing.*

So Austin rejects the Constative/performative distinction, and returns to the question "what are we doing when we speak?":

> . . . we begin by distinguishing a whole group of sense of 'doing something' which are all included together when we say, what is obvious, that to say something is in the full normal sense to do something - which includes the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a

> certain "meaning" in the favorite philosophical sense of that word, i.e. with a certain sense and with a certain reference.[29]

If someone speaks, for example if Bill says "I am cold", and we are asked "What did Bill just do?", an appropriate response might be "He made some sounds", or "He uttered a sentence", or "He said that he was cold." Bill did do all of these things. Austin gives names to each of these ways of characterizing the action:

> The phonetic act is merely the act of uttering certain noises. The phatic act is the uttering of certain vocables or words, i.e. noises of a certain type, belonging to and as belonging to a certain vocabulary, conforming to and as conforming to a certain grammar. The rhetic act is the performance of an act of using those vocables with a certain more or less definite sense and reference.[30]

One way of distinguishing between these acts (the phonetic, the phatic and the rhetic) is to think in terms of what would count as a substitution for each. Bill's phonetic act, for example, could just as well have been performed by a parrot or a tape recorder; as long as the same sounds are reproduced, it would be the same phonetic act (we could say, for example that the parrot did the "same thing" that Bill did). On the other hand, two English speakers, with two very different accents, an American speaker and a Scottish speaker, for example, might both say the word "girl", but pronounce it very differently, the Scottish pronunciation being something like "gair-ul". In this case, although arguably two different phonetic acts were performed (that is two different sounds were made) we can truly say that both speakers "said the same thing", namely the English word "girl". Finally, if Bill says "I am here", while I, speaking of Bill, say "He is there", we have both "said the same thing", although we have performed two different phatic acts to do so. These three acts, the phonetic the phatic and the rhetic, together constitute what Austin

29. Austin, J.L. *How To Do Things With Words*, 94
30. ibid. 95

calls the *locutionary act,* and performing a locutionary act is, he claims, what we usually mean by "saying something".

We rarely, if ever, say something just to say something. There is usually some purpose to our speaking (and Augustine's question "what do you think we purpose to do when we speak?" is exactly the right question to ask, since understanding an utterance usually involves understanding the intentions of the speaker). That there is more to speaking than locution may be shown by the following example.

Suppose it is cold out, and Smith and Jones are seated in a room together, and the window is open. Smith, who is shivering and also further from the window, says to Jones:

> The window is open

We can say, that Smith has performed a locutionary act; he has said something. Now suppose Jones, looks at the window, sees it is open, and says to Smith:

> Yes, it is

and then goes back to whatever he was doing. We might say that Jones, while *understanding* Smith's utterance, *missed the point* of that utterance. Smith was not merely reporting on the current state of affairs, he was telling Jones to close the window. The *point* of an utterance, in this sense, is what Austin calls the *illocutionary force* of an utterance:

> To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary* act, as I propose to call it. To determine what illocutionary act is so performed we must determine in what way we are using the locution [31]

31. ibid 98

The meaning of the locution, we might say, can be determined using a dictionary; it involves the conventional meanings of the words used. Knowing how a given locution is being used cannot be determined in this way. Understanding what someone says is never just a matter of grasping the locutionary meaning of an utterance. It involves understanding what the purpose behind the utterance was. This idea was elaborated on by H.P. Grice.

Grice argued that conversation is made possible by the participants adherence to certain conventions and maxims. He writes in his seminal essay "Logic and Conversation":

> Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of unconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose, or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. The purpose may be fixed from the start (e.g. by an initial proposal of a question for discussion), or it may evolve during the exchange; it may be definite, or it may be so indefinite as to leave very considerable latitude to the participants (as in casual conversation). But at each stage, SOME possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (ceteris paribus) to observe, namely: make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE.[32]

Following the cooperative principle involves following certain maxims, which Grice divides into four categories. There are what he calls maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner. The maxims of Quality have to do with the truth of the asserted statements, and include "try to make your contribution one that is true," as well as "Do not say what you believe to be false," and "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence." The maxims of Quantity have to do with the amount of information: "Make your contribution as informative as required," and "Do not make your contribution more informative than required." There is a single maxim of

32. Grice , H.P., "Logic and Conversation" in *Philosophy of Language* ed. Martinich, A.P. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 165

Relation: “Be relevant.” And finally, there are the maxims of manner which have to do not with *what* is said but *how* it is said, and include the “super-maxim” “Be perspicacious,” which involves at least the following:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression,
2. Avoid ambiguity,
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity),
4. Be orderly.[33]

And he says, there may be others.

All of this is required for even the simplest conversation, where the point is simply to exchange information. If I ask you what time it is, it would violate the Cooperation Principle if you told me how to build a clock; specifically, it would violate the maxim of Quantity. We have seen these maxims in operation. When Smith says “The window is open” to Jones as a way of issuing the command “Close the window,” it was the maxim of Relation that made this possible; the truth of Smith's statements was obvious, but its relevance could only be explained by assuming that Smith wanted to draw Jones' attention to the window, and that he had a reason for wanting to draw Jones' attention to the window, and so on. Jones assumed that Smith was not just spouting truths, but was engaging in a “talk exchange” and so he cast about to find the relevance of Smith's utterance. Linguistic activity of all kinds is a cooperative effort that requires the collusion of all involved.

An illocutionary act may be either direct or indirect. Smith's attempt to get Jones to close the window was indirect; he asserted a fact, hoping Jones would get the point. If he had said "Close the window", he would have performed a direct illocutionary act (and "I order you to close the window" would have been more direct still). And of course, the command could have been couched in phrases other than a declarative sentence: "Could you close the window?" is

33. Ibid. 166

grammatically a question but word serve as a command or at least a request, and "Isn't it cold in here?" while even less direct, might also do.

The No Truth Theory can also draw support from speech act theory, with its insistence that telling the truth is not the sole, or even the most important, function of language. Plato claimed that because literature did not tell the truth that it should be banished from the ideal society; this claim, seen in the light of speech act theory, is as ridiculous as saying that science, because it does not issue commands, is therefore worthless. Language has many functions, and literature may well represent one of these functions. In addition, speech act theory gives us a useful apparatus for understanding how a work of literature can "tell the truth." Literature is a very complex use of language, and speech act theory provides, to my mind, a way of grasping this complexity.

(I should be clear here: most of the modern defenders of the No Truth Theory explicitly reject the idea that literature is an illocutionary act, and some even reject the idea that speech act theory has anything useful to say about literature. I disagree, but certainly, at a minimum, speech act theory applies to literature, if at all, in complicated ways, of which I will say more about later. My only point here is that it is worth noting that the No Truth Theory does not solely or crucially rely on logical positivism, but makes it arguments against the current background of the philosophy of language.)

1.8 The Current Debate

This, then, is the version of the No truth Theory (hereafter, NTT) that I will argue against. It finds its most forceful philosophical defense in Arnold Isenberg (especially his two essays "The Problem of Belief" and "The Esthetic Function of Language"), and Monroe Beardsley, who

defends some aspects of the NTT in his book *Aesthetics: Towards the possibility of a philosophy of criticism*. Less well known, but covering much of the same ground is Sydney Zink, whose essay "Poetry and Truth" precedes Isenberg's "The Problem Of Belief" by a decade. Finally, Peter LaMarque and Stein Haugom Olsen's book "Truth Fiction and Literature" is perhaps the most recent defense of the NTT, and defends many of the basic ideas associated with the theory. These works represent, for the most part, the current philosophical defense of the NTT.

1.9 Against The No Truth Theory

The No Truth Theory is by no means universally accepted, at least among philosophers; literary critics are perhaps still influenced by it, at least in as far as deconstruction and structuralism are indebted to Richards and the New Criticism. The philosophical response, though, is less systematic, and tends to proceed by counterexample. M.W. Rowe, for example in his essay "LaMarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth" cites a number of examples of critics who use truth as a standard of literary value, authors who corrected factual errors in their works when these were pointed out to them, and works with uncorrected factual errors that suffer to some degree for those errors. He concludes:

> Conveying the truth has always been viewed as one of the central values of literature, and while LaMarque and Olsen have made me seriously question this, they do not ultimately say anything which makes me think it false.[34]

Christopher New's book "Philosophy of Literature" which gives an overview of the various philosophical issues related to literature, devotes a chapter to the problem of truth, claiming that

34. Rowe, M.W. "LaMarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth" Phil Quarterly vol. 47 no 188 (July 1997) 341

the success of certain kinds of novels, such as historical romances requires at least some of their propositions to be true:

> If. . . in the case of an historical novel, the historical figures places and events are so generally distorted that they bear little relationship to the actual ones, then, inevitably, the works status as an historical novel is affected.[35]

In David Novitzs' generally favorable review of LaMarque and Olsen's book he says the following in response to the claim that "it is the content of the claim, not its truth, that conveys interest" upon it:

> But this seems much too strong Even if the content is all that should be of interest to the informed reader, this is a short and more or less inevitable step away from demonstrating an interest in the truth of such propositions. For one perfectly ordinary (and perhaps) inevitable way of displaying one's interest in the content of a general proposition is to wonder whether it describes things as they really are.[36]

And we have seen how Martha Nussbaum considers the philosophical content of certain novels to be a crucial component of those novels, and so speculation about the truths of that content to be an indispensable part of our criticism of them. In the introductory essay of "Love's Knowledge" she writes:

> How should one write, what words should one select, what forms and structures and organization, if one is pursuing understanding? (Which is to say, if one is, in that sense, a philosopher?) Sometimes this is taken to be a trivial and uninteresting question. I shall claim that it is not. Style itself makes claims, expresses its own sense of what matters. Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content- an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth.[37]

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35. New, Christopher, *Philosophy Of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 116
36. Novitz, David, "Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective," Philosophy and Literature vol19 no 2 (Oct 1995) 350-359
37. Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge,* 3

Finally, there is Noel Carroll, who, as we have seen, argues that many literary works should be construed, and are intended to be construed, as thought experiments:

> Some artworks and literary fictions are intended to make argumentative points, and where a convincing interpretation of the text renders that interpretation plausible, there should be no reason, in principle, to treat the artist's thought experiments-with respect to conceptual knowledge- differently than the philosopher's [38]

It can hardly be said, therefore, that the No Truth Theory stands unopposed. It does, however, have a standard answer for these sorts of objections, namely that a work of literature may indeed contain true statements, and even express the views of the author, but that to interest oneself in the truth of the literary work is simply to not be interested in it as literature. There are many reasons to like a piece of language, but only one of these ways will be specifically literary. If we agree with Carroll and Nussbaum that some works of literature can be read as works of philosophy, then this only means that we have identified one way of using the work, but we are not using it as a work of art, but as a work of philosophy. No list of counterexamples, no case of a person, even a critic, rejecting a work on the grounds of falsehood, will weaken this basic point: the defender of the No Truth Theory can simply say these examples simply fall short of a genuine critical response. It is worth mentioning, perhaps that the "critical practice" assumed by the No Truth Theory does not describe the ordinary response to literature, the response of the "man in the street"; this in fact is what Rowe is trying to demonstrate, that LaMarque and Olsen simply have not explained the way most people respond to literature. But this will tend not to impress the defender of the No Truth Theory, since they are trying to be prescriptive. They want to argue that literature should be read a certain way, and this way will not be the ordinary way.

What is needed, and what I shall attempt to provide, is a more direct attack on the No

38. Carroll, Noel, "The Wheel of Virtue" The Journal of Art and Art Criticism, vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter, 2002), 9

Truth Theory, a demonstration that the critical practice defined by the No Truth Theory is not merely unpopular, or unduly narrow, but actually untenable.

Though rather brief, R.K. Elliott's essay, "Poetry and Truth" contains what I think is the best response to the No Truth Theory, isolating the basic error that its defenders make. He writes:

> Perhaps the most obvious objection to the 'no truth' theory is that it cannot accommodate an activity which critics unhesitatingly accept as poetic, that of stating neatly, economically and elegantly what is the case.[39]

This is the crucial point: following Frege, as we have seen, the No Truth Theory treats the proposition as the object of our critical attention. It is the "emotive content" of the proposition that is responsible for our aesthetic response. This may be true, but there is something else to which we ascribe aesthetic properties, as Elliott rightly points out: the speech act itself. When we say that a given description is elegant, or vivid, or neat, we are not talking about the proposition in isolation, we are talking about how that proposition is being used. It is being used to describe the world, and it does so elegantly. The same proposition, uttered in another context, might be awkward or vague or otherwise unbeautiful. This is the point I will elaborate on.

1.10 My Theory and An Outline of Chapters

With these preliminaries out of the way, I am now prepared to state my own theory concerning truth and literature: Truth can be relevant to literary value because the object of our critical attention is an illocutionary act. As R.K. Elliott says, one of the things that poetry does is "neatly, economically and elegantly" state the truth. In such cases, it is the assertion (the

39. Elliott, R.K., "Poetry And Truth", Analysis, vol. 27 no. 3 (January 1967) 80

illocutionary act) to which the aesthetic terms (“neatly,” “economically,”“elegantly”) apply, not the bare proposition (the locution). The NTT, if I am correct, claims that it is the proposition, and not the illocutionary act that is the bearer of aesthetic value, and this is why it claims that truth plays no role in our critical judgements. My disagreement with the NTT comes down to a difference of opinion concerning what, metaphysically speaking, a “work of literature” is. The NTT claims that it is a proposition (or set of propositions), whereas I claim that it is a speech act. We have two different theories concerning the literary object.

In chapter two, I will give a more detailed exposition of the NTT. I will identify its metaphysical assumptions concerning literature, and examine the particular ways these assumptions lead to the conclusion that truth is irrelevant..

In chapter three, I will examine some serious objections to the NTT’s theory of literature, and show that there is good reason for rejecting it. I will then elaborate on my own “speech act theory” of the literary object.

In chapter four I will show how my construal of the literary object creates a literary role for truth. I will show how my theory of the literary object both answers the various arguments used by the NTT, and explains the various intuitions shared by those philosophers who have rejected the NTT. In addition, I will apply my theory to a number of particular examples, showing how various short stories and novels do in fact assert truths, and that this is of literary and critical interest: we fail to do justice to these works if we overlook the ways in which they make use of truth and assertion. In chapter five, I will make some general remarks concerning truth and assertion, and attempt to dispel any remaining misgivings concerning the literary role of truth.

Chapter 2: The No Truth Theory

2.1 The current form of the argument

As I have said, it is probably a mistake to talk about *the* No Truth Theory. Over the course of several thousand years, various writers, poets and philosophers have defended and attacked different versions of it, each version having a slightly different view of what truth is, or what literature is, or even of what it means for truth to be relevant to literature. So as a matter of necessity, I will restrict my attention to the problem as it was posed by modern philosophers and critics in the analytic tradition. Arnold Isenberg, Monroe Beardsley, Sydney Zink, Peter LaMarque and Stein Haugom Olsen are the most vigorous defenders of the NTT, with J.O. Urmson and R.A. Sharpe providing important insights. These philosophers share common goals and interests with respect to literature, and there are certain threads that run through their writing on this topic. In particular, I will be focussing here on Zink, Isenberg and Beardsley for the simple reason that their arguments are very similar, and in a crucial way: none of them speak in terms of speech act theory in general, and none of them explicitly define literature as a locutionary act. This presents obvious difficulties for me, as I am claiming that the flaw in the NTT is that it does exactly this, it defines literature as locution. What I will do, then, is show that the various linguistic properties that these three do consider to be genuinely literary fit the standard definition of the locutionary act. It is the sounds of the words, their arrangement and their meaning that counts as literary for them, and these are nothing more than the phonetic, the phatic and the rhetic.

I will begin by discussing four arguments that are common to these philosophers, arguments that show up in one form or another in their various defenses of the NTT. These

arguments represent the prima facie defense of the position. They are mostly non-technical, and build on what strike me as perfectly plausible and widely shared intuitions concerning literature. I will then present some objections to these arguments that will show that the prima facie case for the NTT has not been so solidly made. I will then dig a little deeper into the metaphysical assumptions of these defenders of the NTT, and show that they share a common theory as to the nature of the literary object; in fact, the four arguments for the NTT only work given this underlying theory. It is this theory to which I ultimately object.

2.2 The "Survival" Argument

In his essay "Fiction", J.O. Urmson says the following:

> If a story is told, and it is asked whether it is true there are three possible answers: "It is true", "It is false" and "It is fiction", and the third answer is a way of saying that the question does not arise. I assert nothing when I make up a story as fiction, so a fortiori, I do not assert something that is true or false, even by coincidence.[40]

The basic point is something with which I agree: fictional literature is a different *use* of language than is ordinary assertion or denial. When we tell stories, the usual expectations and presuppositions are, for the most part, suspended. However, there is more to be said than this. Urmson himself writes later in the same essay:

> Every story must be narrated against a background of presupposition, since not everything relevant can be stated, and these presuppositions will normally be truths. Thus, if the story begins with the words "Tom was a middle-aged man from Columbus, Ohio," we may assume that he is visible to other men, needs food and drink, speaks English, and so on, unless we are explicitly warned to the contrary. Without some such presuppositions as these the story will be unintelligible. Even in the most fanciful fairy stories and science fiction we, in general, presuppose things to be as they really are

40. Urmson, J.O., "Fiction" American Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Apr., 1976), 153

> except where it is clearly shown or stated to be otherwise. Thus the presupposed is in general the truth, although in certain genres the truth is partially replaced or supplemented by conventional falsehood; in Wodehouse's novels, for example, it is presupposed that all rich young aristocrats are moronic unless we are explicitly warned of an exception.[41]

So while a story might not involve the *assertion* of propositions, it does involve the *presupposition* of propositions. In many cases these presuppositions are true, and in all cases they are necessary to the enjoyment of the story. Here we might have a simple argument against the NTT: the story needs these truths in order to work, in order to succeed with a particular audience, and so these truths are relevant to that success. But in fact, the NTT argues quite convincingly in the opposite direction. Since we do, in fact, appreciate certain works (the work of Homer, for example) without sharing their presuppositions, this only shows how *belief* in the presuppositions is aesthetically unnecessary. We may need to know that Homer believed in the gods, but we do not have to believe in them ourselves. Indeed, it is perhaps unimportant whether even Homer believed; it is enough to know that his intended audience believed. In any event, Homer’s poetry has survived a radical change in the beliefs of its readers and appreciators, and so the truth of the poetic statements is not at issue. We might call this the “survival argument”, and it is made by R. A. Sharpe, who, talking about a particular poem by South African poet Roy Campbell), writes that if the NTT were wrong:

> . . .I would need to know, first of all, whether there were some South African novelists as bloodless as Roy Campbell suggests. I no more make such enquiries than I would in the case of the Pope couplet. The poem outlives detailed knowledge of its target just as *Gulliver's Travels* and *Animal Farm* have.[42]

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41. ibid. 156
42. Sharpe, R.A., “The Art of the Possible” Philosophy, Vol. 54, No. 208 (Apr., 1979), 229

Since we do not seek out such knowledge, and yet may enjoy the poetry, the knowledge has nothing to do with the enjoyment. In "The Problem Of Belief" Isenberg analyses what is perhaps a subtler version of the claim that belief is necessary for proper appreciation of a given work:

> Oswald Alving, the hero of *Ghosts,* goes mad at the end. How do we know this? Because he asks for the sun. "Give me the sun, mother. I want the sun. The sun. The sun." It is only because we know that he cannot have the sun that we take him for one who has lost his mind-and this is knowledge about the real world.[43]

We would completely misunderstand Oswald's remark, and thus miss a crucial aspect of the play, if we did not share the author's belief that the sun is beyond human grasp; we realize that Oswald is insane, because he has expressed a clearly insane desire. But of course this desire is only clearly insane to someone who has certain beliefs. And examples easily multiply: we could not identify a fantasy as a fantasy, if we did not have some notion of reality. Alternatively, we might read as wild fantasy what was intended as sober history, if we do not share the beliefs of the author. We could not find some turn of events tragic, if we did not share some values and beliefs with the characters. Our appreciation of certain literary effects depends crucially upon our actual beliefs about the real world. Isenberg's admits that it may be the case that such considerations are important to a proper critical response:

> Among the terms which we apply to objects in painting and incidents of the drama are some which denote frequency, incidence, distribution, causal determination, deviation from or conformity to a rule. . .some events in fiction are "accidental" others are "inevitable", still others "miraculous" or "magical". When such statistical and causal characters are presented as actual qualities of the aesthetic object, we must note them, as we note red and green, large and small, or proud and humble.[44]

But, Isenberg contends, this does not mean that truth, or belief, play any ineliminable role:

43. Isenberg, Arnold, "The Problem Of Belief", 398
44. ibid. 341

> But conceding as much merit as we can to this group of critical concepts: they still do not entail the relevance of belief or disbelief. Experience provides us with most of our beliefs. It also makes things familiar or leaves them unfamiliar; and it lends them their meanings and secondary associations. That does not mean that when we evoke and utilize past experience we are utilizing beliefs. Cross eyes, which many of us thought comical when we were young, carry the suggestion that the bearer is trying to look two ways at once. Nobody believes this. Nobody acts *as if* he believed it. It is quite enough that we should possess the "connotation". Before we adopt a strong principle of explanation like belief, we should see what can be done with a weak one like association.[45]

So, for example, it used to be believed by the Vikings that ravens possessed special wisdom. Since they were carrion eaters, they spent a lot of time around the near-dead, and so were privy to a lot of last words and dying wishes. And because they could talk, they could share this knowledge with the living. Ravens were therefore associated with both death and the knowledge of what lies beyond death. It is this association that presumably animated Poe's "The Raven," although it is unlikely that Poe believed what the Vikings believed. The antiquated belief explains *how* the association came about, but it is the association that is aesthetically important, not whether the belief is still current. Indeed the association outlives the belief, and this is what allows the work to succeed. Even where a work of literature expresses a belief, or is the product of a belief, it is not the belief itself that we are interested in, but merely the network of associations and connotations that make the imagery work.

Thus, according to Isenberg, it is a plain fact that great works of literature have often survived a radical change of belief in the audience, and yet these works are still considered to be great works. The reason for this can only be that it is not belief or truth that is important to our critical response. If we find something surprising, or rare, or thrilling, or commonplace in a work of literature, it is not because we are comparing these things to our beliefs, but because the

45. ibid. 341

work has set up a web of expectation that we appreciate or fail to appreciate, and this appreciation will only involve belief, knowledge and truth incidentally, if at all.

So this is the "Survival Argument," and it must be admitted that it is quite strong: works of literature do seem to be able to survive radical changes of belief, and those works that do not, that seem dated and incomprehensible to subsequent audiences are, for that very reason, of secondary importance. What survives is the proposition, the meanings of the words and the various connotations and emotional connections associated with those meanings. If these meanings are lost, we might argue, then the literary work is lost as well. What is left is only marks and sounds. If we admit that such works of literature have in fact survived, we must also admit, it seems, that what survived was was the propositional content and not any cognitive attitude taken towards those contents.

2.3 The "Reception Condition" Argument

The survival argument is based, as I say, on a simple observation: we often do continue to enjoy a work of literature, even after we have discarded the beliefs that originally animated it. And Isenberg explains how this is possible, when he says that it is not the belief itself that is important, but the system of expectation that the belief might have helped set up. This leads us to another argument for the NTT: truth may in some cases be a necessary condition for the proper reception of a work of literature, but this does not mean that it is an aesthetically relevant property of that work. This argument is a bit more subtle than the survival argument.

In "Truth, Fiction and Literature" Lamarque and Olsen admit that truth plays *some* role in our reading of literature:

> *Of course* readers can pick up information about people, places and events from works of fiction; of *course* readers can learn practical skills, historical facts, points of etiquette, insights into Regency England, etc., from literary works; of *course* writers of literary fiction often offer generalizations about human nature, historical events, political ideologies, and so forth, in their work; of *course* what readers take to be true (in the world) will affect how they respond to literary works, including how they understand the works; *of course* readers often need to have background knowledge of a cultural, psychological, or historical kind, even moral or philosophical preconceptions, to understand some literary works.[46]

This, it seems to me, concedes rather a lot. Nonetheless, they conclude that none of this makes truth or belief *aesthetically* relevant. Surely, we will need to know certain things, we will need to have the correct beliefs, if we are to understand a work of literature; but *understanding* a work of literature and *appreciating* it are two different things. Isenberg makes the same point:

> We hear it said sometimes that we cannot enjoy the Greek plays as the Greeks did, because we do not have the same beliefs. But those beliefs posited an environment; and that environment may have been needed to give the right shades of sense to passages in the play. How, in other words do we know that we *understand* the plays as the Greeks did? Before we say that believing is relevant to value, we should be sure we know what is being valued and what is being believed.[47]

Sharpe, speaking of poetic irony, also says very much the same thing:

> . . .(R. K.) Elliott remarks that some verse require our understanding that certain propositions are false in order that its poetic irony might have the appropriate effect. This is not so. To appreciate the irony of a line requires merely the understanding that the poet thinks it false; this may depend in turn on a knowledge of the commonplaces of the time (which may or may not be true) and a sympathetic reading of context and tone.[48]

So it is not, according to these thinkers, that we don't appreciate those works whose presuppositions we don't share. Rather, it is that we do not properly understand those works to

46. Lamarque, Peter and Olsen, Stein H. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 56
47. Isenberg, Arnold. "The Problem Of Belief" 453
48. Sharpe, R.A. "The Art of the Possible" 230

begin with, so that our appreciation is more or less flawed. Knowledge and belief contribute to our understanding of a work, but once we understand it, we leave belief behind in our appreciation of it.

Take for example the story of "Goldilocks And The Three Bears." We are told that the bears sit down for a breakfast of porridge, but it is too hot, so they go for a walk to let it cool. If you do not know what porridge is, then this scene will not be entirely clear to you, you will not know what it is that the bears are waiting to eat. In fact, hearing this story for the first time as a child, I needed the word defined, and I was told that it is very much like oatmeal, which I knew about. *This*, though, can't be what is meant by those who claim that knowledge is aesthetically relevant; if *this* is the "background of presupposition" that it is necessary to know in order to appreciate a story, then it is entirely trivial. We may as well argue that we must have a knowledge of some language or other before we can appreciate a literary work; this is true, but hardly worth arguing for.

Obviously, says the defender of the NTT, we can't appreciate a work without understanding it, but the understanding and the appreciation are two separate things two separate moments in our response to a work of literature. We need certain beliefs in order to grasp the appropriate proposition, but it is that proposition, and not the beliefs, that is the object of our aesthetic attention.

An analogy might make this point clearer. Consider the case of painting. Suppose that I have never seen the Mona Lisa up close in a decent light, or even a reasonable reproduction. I have only seen it from across a darkened room while drunk. It is clear that I have not "really" seen the Mona Lisa and that my critical judgment of it is worthless. Were I to pronounce on the value of the painting ("It's awful!"), my opinion could be safely discarded. I simply did not get "a good look" at the painting. But we would not therefore conclude that the lighting, my

distance from the painting and my state of sobriety are all aesthetic properties of the painting. They don't effect the value of the painting, only the quality of my perception of the painting.

Likewise, we might argue, an audience who does not know what ice is would not get the metaphor “Sally is a block of ice,” but this is not the metaphor's fault. The audience's ignorance is not a property of the metaphor. If the audience doesn't get the metaphor, it's only because they didn't “get a good look” at it.

A painting will have standard viewing conditions, conditions under which it is meant to be viewed, a work of literature will have standard reading conditions, conditions under which the work is meant to be understood. But this, according to the NTT, does not mean that such conditions are aesthetically relevant. The failure of these conditions is a failure of the audience, not of the work.

In general, we can say that any particular artwork will have a set of “reception conditions” which the audience will need to meet if they want to “get a good look” at the work. But these reception conditions are not properly speaking a part of the artwork, and are not, therefore, aesthetically relevant. For literature, truth and belief may well be among the reception conditions, but this does not make them properties of the work. The work is that object that we are acquainted with when the reception conditions have been met.

2.4 The “Intrinsic Property” Argument

The reception conditions of a work of art must be met in order to have a proper viewing of that work, but this does not mean that they are *part* of the work. They are external to the work of art, and in the case of a painting, this is obviously so: the lighting and placement of a painting are important, but no critic would include them in a review of that painting. This brings us to the

third argument for the NTT, the “Intrinsic property argument.” The reason that the reception conditions are not aesthetically relevant is that they are not intrinsic properties of the work, but extrinsic, relational properties that the work bears to its environment. The aesthetically relevant properties, says the NTT, are only those which are intrinsic to the work.

Isenberg uses the example of Keats' *Hyperion*, in which a titan makes a speech that "asserts a constant and unending progress from lower to higher in nature." [49] We may appreciate the poem, even though, as Isenberg goes on to say, "Herbert Spencer may have believed something of the sort. We do not believe anything of the sort." [50] He continues:

> I should think that all of you in this room had read these lines from Hyperion many times before, and that few of you had ever asked yourselves whether you agreed with them- and this not from any slackness of attention but from the very fullness and fineness of your preoccupation with its meaning. You were making a different use of the proposition, which became for you simply an “aesthetic object”. To be preoccupied with the aesthetic object implies no disregard of the content of the poem- only a disregard for one function of that content, namely its relationship to observable fact.[51]

If we are interested in the truth of the proposition, then, according to Isenberg, our attention goes beyond the proposition itself. It is not the poem we are interested in, but the poem's relation to reality. This relation might be interesting, but it has nothing to do with the poem, seen as poetry. To be interested in the truth of the propositions contained by a poem is to overlook the fact that you are reading a poem. Zink makes very much the same point:

> The distinction is one which cannot be seriously denied; it is a *fact* that that the languages of poetry and science are different. I think that, actually, the advocates of poetic truth accept the distinction, but that devotion to their subject inspires them to find in it everything whatsoever that connotes the desirable, the noble, the excellent . . . If the advocates had examined this distinction, they would have seen that poetic values can stand quite well without truth[52]

49. Isenberg, Arnold, “The Problem Of Belief” 341
50. ibid. 344
51. ibid. 344
52. Zink, Sydney. “Poetry and Truth” The Philosophical Review, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Mar., 1945), 136

This is the difference between literature and science: in science we are interested exclusively in the truth of the propositions, their relation to the world. We do not hold on to discredited theories or statements because we think they are beautiful. In science, truth is the only value. With literature, the situation is exactly reversed, we do not care how the line of poetry or the work of fiction relates to reality, we are interested in exactly those properties which are directly available to us in the work of literature itself. We do not defer our enjoyment of a poem until such time as we have verified the truth of the statements it contains. Everything relevant to our appreciation of it is immediately present to us once we have understood the poem. As Isenberg puts it:

> Belief *adds* nothing to what is proposed. It only affirms the proposition. But a proposition first affirmed and then denied remains the same aesthetic object. [53]

And again:

> The understanding can encompass anything that has been found to be true, as well as much that has not. It is nothing against a proposition, considered as an idea, that it should describe the world as it is; but then it is the world described that matters to us, and not the fact that it is the real world that is being described. If the real world is interesting, it is still no better than many imagined worlds. [54]

We can grasp a proposition without either affirming it, or denying it, or taking any particular attitude towards it. Indeed, we *must* grasp the proposition *before* we can adopt a particular attitude. If belief is what's important, then we do not stop at grasping the attitude, we go on to verify that it corresponds to reality. But if aesthetic enjoyment is our goal, the proposition by itself is enough. We enjoy it for its own sake, and not for its relation to the world or any other thing. It is the intrinsic properties, not the relational ones that are of aesthetic interest.

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53. Isenberg, "The Problem Of Belief", 339
54. ibid. 339

Once more, an analogy with painting might be helpful here. Take, once again, the *Mona Lisa.* It is a portrait of Lisa del Giocondo, the wife of a wealthy Florentine silk merchant. As a portrait, it presumably bears some resemblance to its subject, and let's assume that the resemblance is quite strong. Any Florentine of the time who was acquainted with the subject would have instantly recognized her in the portrait. Be this as it may, *this* can't be the reason for the great reputation of the painting. The painting has been lauded by millions of people throughout history, very few of whom have been in the position to judge its resemblance to Signora del Giocondo. The admirers of the painting are looking at the painting, not at the painting *and* its subject. It is exactly those properties that are immediately present that are relevant to the critical response.

So the NTT quite sensibly claims that if you are interested in a work of art, such as a poem or a painting, it is *the work itself* that should hold your interest. If you are attending to the relationship between the work and the world, then your interest in the work is less than purely aesthetic.

2.5 The "Essential Property" Argument

We are to restrict our critical attention to the intrinsic properties of the object, not the relational properties it may have. Truth is a relationship of some kind between thing and world, and so is not aesthetically relevant. The truth value of a statement might change, and this would not effect the aesthetic value of that statement. This leads us to another argument that the NTT uses: truth is not an *essential* property of a work of literature, and it is only the essential properties that are aesthetically relevant. We should restrict our aesthetic attention to that subset

of intrinsic properties which are the essential properties. Lamarque and Olsen make the point here:

> . . .the important question involving literature and truth is not whether any connection at all can be found between the two, but whether there is anything integral to works of imaginative literature which makes the expression, embodiment, revelation etc. of truths indispensable to their value, aesthetic or otherwise. [55]

If we take "indispensable" to mean "necessary" (as I think it does), then this amounts to the claim that truth is not necessary for beauty. Of course, a given literary statement *could* be true, but it's truth is a matter of accident, and our aesthetic judgments should not take the accidental into account. We can call this the "essential property" argument.

It is crucial to this argument that no definition of literature includes the concept of truth. Every work of literature must use language, since the definition of literature is something like "the artistic use of language". Nothing that is not linguistic can be literature, so "being a linguistic entity" is a necessary condition for something's being literature, but being true is not. There are works of literature which are not true, and which do not strive for truth. Indeed, there are many works of art in general which are not attempt to assert any truths, so literature's status as an art form cannot depend upon its use of truth. Sydney Zink puts it quite strongly:

> If we cannot explain wherein truth characterizes music, architecture, and every other art, we must conclude that truth is something which art possesses incidentally, and not as part of its central aesthetic purpose. [56]

A scientific theory that has been confirmed may well be beautifully stated, but it is not its beauty that makes it a good scientific theory, it is the fact that it has been confirmed. It "possesses its beauty incidentally," we might say, and would continue to be good science, even if aesthetic tastes changed. In the same way a work of literature may well state known facts, and we may

55. Lamarque, Peter and Olsen, Stein H. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* 56
56. Zink, "Poetry and Truth" 142

even appreciate that it does so. But the stating of facts are not part of its *aesthetic* purpose, it has nothing to do with it being *literature*.

Our aesthetic judgments should be based only on those features that are essential to the work of literature, those features of the work that make it a literary object. Truth is not one of these.

2.6 Preliminary objections

These four arguments are all obviously related. They approach the same question from different angles. The survival argument, for example, takes a well observed phenomenon, the fact that many works of literature simply do survive a radical change in belief, and concludes that belief is therefore not a necessary part of the work. The reception condition argument explains away those cases where belief does seem to be relevant, and the intrinsic property argument and the essential property argument in turn explain how we are to distinguish between properties which genuinely belong to the art work and those which do not. The upshot of these arguments seems to be that only those properties which are "internal" or intrinsic to the object are aesthetically relevant, and since truth is not intrinsic to the proposition, in as far as the same proposition may be true or false depending on context, then truth is irrelevant.

One way to to argue against them, therefore, and to show that truth is perhaps aesthetically relevant, is to show that non-intrinsic properties are, or can be, aesthetically relevant. An example of this strategy is found in William Freedman's article "Aesthetic Relevance." He argues against a particular form of the NTT found in Harold Osbourne's essay, also called "Aesthetic Relevance". Osbourne says:

> Neither linguistic nor visual art, even when it is representational is appraised aesthetically, i.e. *as* art, by reference to the amount, completeness, accuracy or specificity of the semantic information it conveys[57]

This is a version of the essential properties argument: if we are judging a work *as* art, we should only consider those properties which make it art. Even representational art, which would be a clear candidate for truth or at least accuracy, does not represent *essentially* . Deciding if a representation were accurate would take us beyond art criticism, and into science, according to this view. Freedman's response to this is quite sensible:

> Metal, for example, is no part of the definition of automobiles, nor wood of tables. Neither is a necessary, surely not a sufficient condition for the definition of the object. Automobiles may be made of fiberglass, tables of chromium or wrought iron, and of course numerous other vehicles are made of metal, other articles of furniture of wood. Yet clearly the durability and rust resistance of an automobile body, the beauty and stain resistance of a table's wood are relevant to an evaluation of those objects. [58]

Just because a given property is not essential to an artwork does not mean that it doesn't make some contribution to the success of that work.

Likewise, Freedman takes exception to the survival argument, in an article called "The Relevance Of The Truth Standard." Against the claim that the greatness of Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare is not due to the psychological accuracy of the characters they portray, Freedman writes:

> Indeed, their greatness is not *due* to the truth or validity of their portrayals or ideas; but to admit that much is not to admit the utter irrelevance of these attributes any more than the admission that the greatness of Shakespeare's sonnets is not due to their handling of alliteration and consonance entails the irrelevance of these features to the quality of the sonnets. The eight-foot circus giant is undeniably a giant by our standards, and should he lose his feet in an accident, he will undoubtedly remain one. But this in no way

57. Osbourne, Harold, "Aesthetic Relevance" The British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 17, number 4, (Autumn 1977) 291

58. Freedman, William, "Aesthetic Relevance" The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980) 80

> demonstrates that the amputation of one's feet, even a giant's, has no effect on his height.[59]

This strikes me as perfectly sensible too: our judgment of a piece of literature is a complicated thing, involving an assessment of many different properties in many combinations. Some features of a work might fail, and others succeed. No one feature is perhaps necessary for literary success, but any feature might play a role, however minor. To identify the intrinsic properties as the exclusively relevant ones is perhaps misguided. The historical and morally elucidating elements of *The Iliad* might be dispensable in the sense that the modern audience doesn't accept them, but they may well have enhanced the enjoyment of the original audience, who presumably did.

2.7 Redefining the "aesthetic object"

There is, however, another way to approach these arguments. One can agree that it is only the intrinsic properties of an artwork that are relevant, but point out that which properties are intrinsic will depend upon what kind of object we are talking about. Take for example what I have called "reception conditions," those factors that affect our viewing of a work of art, but which are not intrinsic properties. The question of whether or not the reception conditions of a work of art are external to the artwork or internal is a difficult one. In the case of a painting, we might easily conclude that the viewing conditions (the lighting, the placement on the wall, the surrounding paintings, etc.) are all external to the object itself. But other forms of art might make the question much less clear-cut.

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59. Freedman, William. "The Relevance of the Truth-Standard" The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Summer, 1981), 436

Architecture is a particularly difficult example. A building is designed to fit into its surroundings; a building that can be plunked down anywhere is probably not a very aesthetically rewarding building, whereas a building such as Falling Water requires a very particular setting: Falling Water in the middle of a desert is not Falling Water. It seems much more natural to claim that the environment of a work of architecture is internal to the object, not merely a constraint upon the appreciation of the object. It is actually part of it. They cannot be taken away without marring the artwork. In addition, with architecture, although it is certainly intended to appeal to sight, there don't seem to be the same kind of "ideal viewing conditions" as there is with painting. A work of architecture is intended to be seen under a number of different conditions, with different levels of light, different perspectives, from different distances, etc. Presumably the architect took all of this into account when creating the work, so it strikes me as less plausible to simply dismiss these factors as being "external" to the work.

Or, perhaps more pointedly, consider a musical composition, as distinct from any particular performance of it. Assume, in fact, that a great composition has never had an adequate performance made of it. Do we want to say, as in the case of the painting seen in bad light, that we simply didn't get a "good look" at the composition? Is a performance of a piece of music merely a means of access to the composition? Suppose a performance of a given composition were played too softly to be easily heard. We could say, on the one hand, that we did not hear the composition, and so cannot judge it critically. On the other hand , we may say of the performance that it was a bad performance of the composition, and this strikes me as a an aesthetic judgment. The performance, we are saying, was aesthetically lacking. But we have a problem then: on the one hand the volume of any given performance is external (and so aesthetically irrelevant, according to our hypothesis) to the composition, it is merely one of its reception conditions. On the other hand, it is internal (and therefore aesthetically relevant) to the *performance*, which is itself a legitimate object of aesthetic attention. The question of whether

or not a given property is internal or eternal to the work of art depends crucially upon what the work of art is taken to be.

And there is a similar problem in deciding which of the intrinsic properties are essential. A painting might represent its object, but, as has been said, does not do so *essentially*. A painting need not represent in order to be a painting, and when we evaluate a representational painting, we do not check it for accuracy or faithfulness to its subject. So, in the case of painting, we seem to be able to identify an inessential property and keep it out of our critical judgment.

However, other art forms do not submit to such treatment as easily, and architecture is once again a good example here.. An architect builds a structure that is intended to please the eye, but at the same time have some other function as well, usually to be inhabited. If we were to dispense with this function, if we were to create, as we might say, a work of "abstract architecture", what would we have? It seems to me we would no longer have a work of architecture, but rather a work of sculpture. A sculptor creates structures that are intended to be enjoyed aesthetically. An architect is a sculptor who has, for whatever reasons, subjected his work to additional constraints, but these additional constraints are not aesthetic. Architects, sure enough, tend to build much larger statues than those who describe themselves as "sculptors", but there is otherwise no aesthetically important distinction. If we say that "inhabitability" is inessential to architecture in the same way that representation is inessential to painting, then we are left in the odd position of being unable to distinguish between architecture and sculpture. If we look at a given structure as a "sculpture," then inhabitability is inessential. If we look at the same structure as a "house," then inhabitability is essential.

The NTT insists that we only take the intrinsic or essential properties into account when we make our aesthetic judgments. Doing so will lead to the conclusion that truth is irrelevant, but only if we have a particular theory as to what a work of literature is. I object to the NTT on exactly this point: they have a mistaken view of what, metaphysically speaking, we are

beholding when we read a work of literature. In short, I agree that it is the intrinsic properties that are the only aesthetic ones, but I think truth is in fact intrinsic to many pieces of language.

2.8 The Metaphysical Problem

What kind of object is a work of art? If we think of things like paintings and sculpture, the standard, archetypal examples of art, we may be tempted to conclude that a work of art is a physical object. Certainly the *Mona Lisa* and the Statue of Liberty are both located in space an time, the defining characteristic of a physical object. If we think of music and literature, on the other hand, then we would be less inclined to say that artworks are physical objects. It is hard to say where *The Magic Flute* is located, and to say "*War and Peace* is holding up the short leg of my table" is to make a bald category error. But even in the case of painting, the situation is not so clear. Suppose for example that I have seen the *Mona Lisa*, and you haven't. But suppose further that I have only seen it from the back, not the side with the paint, whereas you have seen a faithful reproduction of it. If the *Mona Lisa* is a physical object, then it is true to say that I have seen it and you haven't. But it seems also true to say in this case that you know what it looks like and I don't. What this suggests is that the *Mona Lisa* is not a physical object but a visual aspect of that object. Not all viewings of the object count as viewings of the painting.

What then is a work of art? Is there a single kind of thing which includes all artworks? Richard Wollheim, in his book "Art and Its Objects" provides a useful survey of the various attempts to answer these questions. As far as I can tell, the NTT adheres to what Wollheim calls the "Presentational" theory of art. First I will say what this theory is, and then I will show that the NTT does indeed hold to it.

Wollheim begins by examining the theory that artworks are physical objects, but discards this for reasons similar to what I have mentioned above: we can locate a particular volume of a novel, but have not thereby "located" the novel. The particular volume is a physical object, the novel itself is not. Wollheim then moves on to two other theories that are intended to be improvements over the "physical object" theory:

> According to one kind of theory the work of art is nonphysical in that it is something mental or even ethereal: its location is in the mind or some other spiritual field, at any rate in a region uninhabited by physical bodies: hence we do not have direct sensible access to it, though presumably we are able to infer it or intuit it or imaginatively re-create it from the object in the world that is its trace or embodiment. According to the other kind of theory, the work of art differs from physical objects, not in the sense that it is imperceptible, but because it has only sensible properties: it has no properties (for instance dispositional or historical) that are not open to direct or immediate observation. Whether on this account we are to regard works of art as public or private depends upon what view we take of sensory fields, which is now their location. [60]

This second theory is the one embraced by the NTT: Art, and therefore literature, is a purely perceptual object, what George Berkeley would have called a "sensible thing," an object that is immediately and wholly available to the senses. We can call such a theory "presentationalist," since it defines art as being immediately present to contemplation.

If the NTT is correct about the nature of literature, then of course truth is not an intrinsic property of the literary work, since the truth value of a proposition cannot be known simply by grasping the proposition. Truth is a property like the "historical or dispositional" which is not directly observable. I will argue that the NTT is incorrect, and that a work of literature is, or can be, a speech act, which is something that is not wholly present to the senses, but rather the product of some sort inferential or implicative process. First I will have to show that the NTT does indeed employ a presentationalist theory of literature.

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60. Wollheim, Richard, *Art and Its Objects (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 124

2.9 Art and Perception

We may like a work of art for many reasons, but not all of these reasons will be properly "aesthetic". J.O. Urmson makes this point, in an essay entitled "What Makes A Situation Aesthetic?":

> A play may give me moral satisfaction because I think it is likely to have improving effects on the audience; economic satisfaction, because it is playing to full houses and I am financing it; personal satisfaction because I wrote it and it is highly praised by the critics; intellectual satisfaction because it solves a number of highly technical problems of the theater very cleverly. But the question will still be open whether I found the play aesthetically satisfying.[61]

If the reason that I like a certain book is because it is just the right thickness to hold up the short leg of a table, then my appreciation of the book is not an aesthetic appreciation. The (physical) thickness of a book is not aesthetically relevant (except perhaps where it is related to the content of the book. War And Peace is a thick book, and its thickness is a function of its epic scale; this is of course aesthetically relevant. But an edition of War And Peace with extremely small printing, in a slim volume would still be a great novel. "Thickness" is aesthetically irrelevant). Isenberg echoes Urmson, admitting, in "The Problem Of Belief" that there may be any number of reasons for liking a piece of literature:

> If a man should take exception to something that a poet says and at the same time expresses a dislike for the poetry, or if he should give his disagreement as a ground for his dislike, I do not know how we can separate his "cognitive" from his "aesthetic" reaction. In critical theory, we are not competent experimentalists. And I do not know that we are in a position to moralize. Does it make sense to ask whether beliefs, considered as psychological states, should influence tastes? They do: and that may well be an end of the matter![62]

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61. Urmson, J.O., "What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, suppl. vol. 31, 75

62. Isenberg, "The Problem of Belief" 343

But while in practice, the various positive (or negative) responses we have to a work of art may be hopelessly tangled up, in principle we can distinguish an "aesthetic response" from some other sort of response:

> Factors in human response which, as states of mind, are imponderable and mutually inextricable, become distinguishable in terms of their several commitments. In other words: even though we should be unable to say how far the liking of a poem depended upon agreement with the poem, we could quite intelligibly ask whether the criticism of a poem coincided with the verification of its statements, and so in the end, whether beauty depends upon truth. [63]

It may simply be the case that people will explain their love of their favorite novel or poem in terms of their agreement with its moral. And it may be that one's personal experiences and associations will taint or influence one's responses to literature. Be that as it may, the critic can still identify a "pure" aesthetic response, and such a response will not involve these personal or psychological elements, of which belief is one. Of all the possible reasons one can give for liking a poem, only some will be legitimately "aesthetic." I am broadly sympathetic to this claim. Some responses a reader might have to a poem might be too subjective and idiosyncratic to count as properly 'critical.' We must limit our response in some way. But I am less persuaded that we must discard as much as the NTT asks us to.

Monroe Beardsley elaborates on this point, offering a strategy for isolating the appropriate aesthetic response. In "The Aesthetic Point of View" Beardsley mentions Sir Henry Wotton's three conditions for good architecture: Commodity, Firmness and Delight (where commodity is the usefulness of a building, and delight is its aesthetic appeal). If we examine a number of buildings according to these criteria, he says:

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63. ibid. 343

> . . .we would find that the characteristics vary independently over a wide range; that some extremely solid old bank-buildings have Firmness (they are knocked down at great cost) without much Commodity or Delight, that some highly delightful buildings are functionally hopeless, that some convenient bridges collapse. [64]

There is no point then, in merely saying of a building that it is a 'good' building. We need to say 'good for what' or better, 'good from which point of view', the aesthetic, the engineering, or the practical. And here we seem to have an argument for the NTT: when we look at a piece of language from the aesthetic point of view, we do not care what other points of view may be adopted towards it. The reason we don't care, while reading The Iliad, whether Achilles really existed, is that we are reading it as poetry, rather than as history. In many cases we do care whether a piece of language makes an assertion, and whether that assertion is true. But not when we are treating that piece of language as literature. And more pointedly, we may even admit that a given work of literature may contain truths, it may be historically or scientifically accurate. But this is of no aesthetic relevance. A building that is Firm may indeed be Commodious. But the two qualities are in principle distinguishable, and the same is true for literature. If we care, or even notice that a work of literature contains truths, we have stopped, for the moment, looking at it as literature. What it means to enjoy a work of literature is to ignore these properties. This is the basic idea behind the NTT.

There is some circularity here, since it might not seem too helpful to say that an object's aesthetically relevant properties are those that are relevant from the "aesthetic point of view", given that if we don't know what an aesthetic property is, then we are unlikely to know what the aesthetic point of view is. But I think Beardsley's approach does give us a way of talking about artworks in terms of the uses to which we put the object in question. So when we look at a building from the point of view of Firmness, we have certain expectations: we want it to be sturdy, hard to knock down; we are using it as mere shelter. When we look at it from the point of

64. Beardsley, Monroe, *The Aesthetic Point of View* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1982), 230

view of Commodity, we expect it to be comfortable to live in; we are using it as a home. When we look at it from the point of view of Delight (that is, the aesthetic point of view) what do we expect from it, what are we using it for? One popular answer here is "We are using it as an object of perception for its own sake; we take pleasure in perceiving the object." This is the conclusion Urmson reaches:

> If we examine, then, some very simple cases of aesthetic evaluation it seems to me that the grounds given are frequently the way the object appraised looks (shape and color), the way it sounds, smells, tastes or feels. I may value a rosebush because it is hardy, prolific, disease resistant and the like, but if I value the rose aesthetically the most obvious relevant grounds will be the way it looks, both in color and shape, and the way it smells; the same grounds may be a basis for aesthetic dislike.[65]

The philosopher Frank Sibley, in a very influential paper entitled "Aesthetic And Non-aesthetic" says very much the same thing:

> It is of importance to note first that, broadly speaking, aesthetics deals with a kind of perception. People have to see the grace or unity of a work, hear the plaintiveness or the frenzy in the music, notice the gaudiness of a color scheme, feel the power of a novel, its mood or uncertainty of tone.[66]

So there is a widely shared view of art that locates aesthetic value in the perceptual properties of an object. A work of art, on this view, is an object that gratifies our senses, that is enjoyable to merely perceive. Right away, I think we can see the problem that literature presents for this way of defining art. While it is not at all controversial to claim that aesthetics is primarily concerned with perception, it is not clear that we can identify the sensory channel involved with appreciating literature. With a painting we see the "grace or unity." with music we hear the "plaintiveness or the frenzy," and with a novel, according to Sibley, we. . . *feel* the "power" of

65. Urmson, J.O. "What makes a Situation Aesthetic" 234
66. Sibley, Frank, "Aesthetic and Non-aesthetic" The Philosophical Review, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Apr., 1965), 137

it? This can't be the tactile feel; we don't feel the power of the novel the way we feel the roughness of its pages, or the heft of the volume. He must mean the emotional "feel." We feel the novel the way we feel sadness or joy. But certainly, this kind of feeling is also in play with painting or music. Sibley has not told us which sense it is that literature exploits. This strikes me as a serious problem for any perceptual theory of literature. Monroe Beardsley, in an essay responding to Sibley, attempts to meet this objection:

> I take it that 'feel' is used here for the apprehension of a phenomenologically objective quality of an intentional object- the world of the novel as presented through the text. [67]

What we are attending to, in Beardsley's view, is a "fictional world", and a fictional world has phenomenologically objective properties that are directly available to our contemplation. The fictional world is directly and wholly available to our contemplation, in the same way that the pigmented surface of a painting is directly and wholly available to our sight, and so literature is no less purely perceptual than is painting. This is the claim made by various defenders of the NTT, as I will now show.

2.10 Zink and "Contemplative Knowledge"

In "Poetry and Truth" Sidney Zink explains why truth cannot be an object of contemplation, laying out what is another statement of the basic form of the NTT:

> Truth is not something to be contemplated, nor even something to be "enforced," in the sense of persuaded. Truth is rather to be discovered or verified. And because it is not the business of poetry to discover or verify, poems *as* poems, are neither true nor false. [68]

67. Beardsley, Monroe, "What Is an Aesthetic Quality?" Theoria: A Swedish Journal of Philosophy, vol. 39, 1973. 55

68. Zink, "Poetry and Truth" 345

We once again have the claim that poetry is a different use of language than is science. But what exactly is "contemplation" such that truth cannot be its object? Zink goes on:

> Contemplation is a kind of knowledge, but it is a kind in which truth has no place. Because truth belongs to the relation between knowing and its object, the determination of truth requires an awareness and investigation of this relation. Contemplation is the primitive form of knowing in which apprehension is fully absorbed in an immediate presentation. Here there is no conscious separation of object from the knowing of it: contemplation is an activity which is not known as an activity, and possesses a content that is known, not as a content of knowledge, but only as a specific immediate nature. Awareness between the knowing and its object can therefore arise only when knowledge has become other than a pure activity absorbed in the given. To seek truth is to look for certain things in the given and to try in some way to make inferences beyond it. It is to require more of the object than the intrinsic, qualitative nature which the mind apprehends; it is to make the demand that this given content relate in certain ways with other immediate contents.[69]

So there are two kinds of knowledge, knowledge that involves truth and knowledge that involves only the apprehension of an immediate presentation. This strikes me as uncontroversial: it is merely the distinction between "knowledge by description" and "knowledge by acquaintance" advanced by Bertrand Russell[70]. The distinction is made clear if we think about how we can know colors. We can only know what the color red is by experiencing it, by being acquainted with it. No description can tell us what red is like, if we haven't seen it. And since knowledge by acquaintance is not propositional, that is can't be stated, it is neither true nor false.

So, when we view a painting or hear song, we become acquainted with a particular sensory object. But what we perceive is neither true nor false. Of course, when we read a novel or hear a poem, there is more than the sensory object. There is also the meaning of the sentences, which is the content of a proposition. This is the problem the NTT must overcome, as Zink is well aware:

69. ibid. 346.
70. Russell, Bertrand, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Las Angeles: IndoEuropean Publishing, 2010), 34

> Yet we come back to the fact that poetry seems to be a contemplating of propositions. "Contemplation" is an accurate description of the attitude of appreciation, and the poem is composed of linguistic statements. How are we to solve this paradox of contemplating what is not a concrete object, and of treating a proposition other than as true or false? By, I think, a reexamination of the contemplative and scientific modes of knowing.[71]

The paradox is resolved, he claims, by looking at the different roles that symbols play in assertion as opposed to contemplation:

> Their differences may be put in two ways: the remoteness of science from its object, contrasting with the immediacy of the object in contemplation; and the necessity of mediating symbols to science, their dispensability in contemplation. These amount to the same thing, because it is the symbols which intervene between science and its object, and which carry the knowing activity away from the immediately given.[72]

So contemplative knowledge does not require symbols, as is obviously the case when we contemplate some particular object,say, an apple. We perceive the apple, and enjoy it or not, directly. But, while not necessary, contemplation may make use of symbols, though in a very different way than truth does:

> Poetry, more specifically metaphor, discloses that it is possible to apply symbols to an object, not principally to compare it with other objects (to assert a proposition claiming truth and to be proved by comparison with these objects), but as a predication or qualification of a particular object. One may say a thing is red, or relate a given object to others, so as to reveal what is particular to it rather that what is common to its class. Metaphor does this explicitly. The intent in metaphor is not to establish a certain relation between the given object and other objects, not to formulate a true proposition about the object, but to penetrate more and more deeply into its qualitative nature- to enrich contemplation.[73]

Science makes connections between particular objects. When we say "This is an apple" in a scientific (that is, a truth seeking) context, we are implicitly comparing this object to other

71. Zink, Sydney, "Poetry and Truth", 322
72. ibid. 323
73. ibid. 325

objects, classifying them together. Our assertion is true or false depending upon whether or not the classification is appropriate. But, Zink argues, in a literary description, we are not led away from the experience of the particular object, but rather deeper into it.

Without criticizing his arguments, it is clear from this that Zink is indeed a presentationalist. Literary propositions are an object of contemplation, and we enjoy them without looking at their relationship to anything outside of the total sensual experience which is the literary work.

2.11 Isenberg and "Non-Referential Meaning"

Like Zink, Isenberg, in his essay "The Esthetic Function of Language", sees literature as presenting a paradox to the presentationalist position, a paradox that he states as follows:

1) If the "esthetic object" is purely sensuous, language cannot be an esthetic object because language is not purely sensuous

2) And the esthetic *is* purely sensuous; for a non-sensuous object cannot be directly perceived and enjoyed; and what is not directly perceived and enjoyed is not esthetic.

3) But language is, or can be, an esthetic object.[74]

We could, he says, resolve the paradox if we reject statement three, and admit that language cannot be an aesthetic object. This, however, would leave us with a problem: how do we evaluate literature, for even if it isn't art, it is still not science. We now have a new thing, "literary value", that stands in need of explication. Alternatively we could reject statement two, and claim that the esthetic object is not purely sensual, but that it consist of symbols that

74. Isenberg, Arnold. "The esthetic Function of Language" The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Jan. 6, 1949), 5

represent something. Isenberg rejects this claim because he finds the various suggestions concerning what, exactly is being symbolized to be untenable:

> If the esthetic object is a special kind of symbol or sign, what kind of symbol or sign is it? What is its referent and how shall we tell whether the reference to this referent is correct or incorrect? The answer, so far as we can understand it, always comes down to some such formula as that the esthetic object is the kind of sign which does not signify anything or the kind of symbol which symbolizes itself- a long way round to immediate experience.[75]

Instead he prefers another option:

> As a third alternative you can show that language can be intelligible without indicating or referring to anything; and if you can show this, you can again deny that the esthetic object is purely or exclusively sensuous without denying that it is directly perceived and enjoyed. . . Our question then has to do with the existence of non-referential meaning. [76]

A piece of language can be understood, he claims, without pointing to anything outside itself, without relating to any fact in the world. He uses a particular example to illustrate his point:

> Suppose we read this sentence in a novel: "on the first of March, 1820, a man stood for three hours at the portal of the Cathedral of Notre Dame." This sentence is more than ink or wind. It conveys ideas. It introduces us to a "world" full of "people" and "events." Yet it does not inform us (or misinform us) about anything in the actual world outside of the novel. The same sentence could, however, be treated as an assertion and be tested for its historical accuracy. Hence the property, informativeness or non-informativeness, is not inherent in the sentence: it depends on the attitude of the reader. The ability of language to divest itself of its reference to reality without losing its intelligibility is thus a specialized function which can be assumed and discarded. [77]

Truth and accuracy are separable from meaning, which can be grasped and directly enjoyed. The ideas conveyed by language can become, if we take the correct attitude towards them, objects of aesthetic contemplation.

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75. ibid. 6
76. ibid. 6
77. ibid. 6

But what of the very strong temptation to treat literary statements as if they did indeed express some truth that could be agreed or disagreed with? Certainly, there are philosophical novels, and novelists are often quoted as if their words do apply to real life situations. Isenberg meets this objection head-on, dealing with what is a hard case for the NTT, the aphorism:

> Let us now consider a simple empirical statement. I choose Nietzsche's remark about the relatives of a suicide: "The relatives of a suicide take it in ill part that the deceased was not more considerate of their feelings and their reputations." Some of the normal reactions to a sentence like this would be the following: you can accept it; accept it "in part"; doubt it; reject it; or hold it before your mind as a hypothesis for further examination. In every case except perhaps the last, it is clear that the *understanding* of the sentence must be distinct from the act in question. . .
>
> The case in which we "entertain" the sentence as a mere "supposition" would seem to be different; and it is this frame of mind that we are apt to identify with the understanding of the sentence, as opposed to the various degrees and kinds of assertion. Yet it is in the nature of a supposition, after all, that it is something *to be* tested. It expresses a verificatory set,a group of implicit exploratory responses which look ahead to an eventual result.
>
> Considered as a supposition, Nietzsche's sentence would certainly be clearer if it were modified to indicate whether we are to look *only* for resentment in the relatives of a suicide or for a mixed attitude of resentment and grief. . . just as, considered as an assertion, it would have a better chance of proving true if it were modified by the word "frequently" or "sometimes." But any of these changes would spoil the quality of the sentence as a piece of writing. That quality is poignancy, ironical, and shocking. It can be exhibited, though not duplicated by a paraphrase.
>
> This element would be weakened and reduced by exactly those changes which would increase the theoretical value of Nietzsche's sentence. On the other hand it would exist in that sentence if there were not a single case for which the sentence held good.[78]

So an aphorism, he claims, possesses a value apart from whatever truth it may have. It may be poignant, ironic or shocking, and we can judge this solely by grasping the content of the proposition, we do not need to carry out any process of verification. Aphorisms, metaphors, all

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78. ibid. 17

of the various pieces of wisdom that we seem to gather from literature have nothing whatsoever to do with truth. The proof of this is as follows:

> But as an objection to the point that there exists a distinct dimension of esthetic meaning and an imaginative insight which corresponds to it, the argument is exposed to a crushing retort. This is simply that the greatest contribution to knowledge is in principle supersedable, whereas these passages are not to be superseded; they have a final and permanent value.[79]

I would take exception to this; Nietzsche, after all was a philosopher, and his aphorisms were presumably intended to have the force of asserted truth (depending of course upon Nietzsche's theory of truth.) To "aestheticize" this statement, to 'enjoy it for it's own sake' while allowing your opinions or attitudes to remain untouched seems to miss the point. An aphorism, whatever else it might be, does seem to be a statement. I will come back to this point later. For now it is enough to note that Isenberg, too is claiming that the object of literary attention is the bare proposition, removed from any context, and that a proposition can be grasped wholly and immediately.

2.12 Beardsley and the sensuous whole

We have seen Monroe Beardsley's claim that what we "feel" when we feel the power of a novel is the "phenomenologically objective quality of an intentional object." In his book *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, he expands on this notion of a phenomenologically objective quality:

> Let us use the general term "*phenomenal field"* to refer to all that one is aware of, or conscious of at a given time. Thus my phenomenal field at this moment consists of

79. ibid. 19

> various colors and shapes (the visual field), the sounds of typewriter and nearby birds and cars (the auditory field), my thoughts, memories, feelings, expectancies, and so on. Some of the parts, or ingredients, in my phenomenal field are phenomenally objective; some of them are phenomenally subjective.[80]

The phenomenal field includes more than simply sensory objects, it extends to all items of consciousness. Presumably if if I am entertaining a proposition, then it is part of my phenomenal field. Looked at this way, propositions are of a kind with "sensible things." But, it would seem, these things are all subjective, as they exist only in the mind of the perceiver. My thoughts are, after all, *my* thoughts. Beardsley skirts the metaphysical issue here: he distinguishes between the phenomenally objective and the phenomenally subjective without making any deeper metaphysical claim; without, for instance choosing between idealism and materialism:

> Suppose you are contemplating a single object- something you have just acquired, say, a new LP phonograph record, in its slipcase. As you hold it in your hand, and turn it around, you get various sensations- the case is smooth, firm, square, brightly colored. You are also aware of a pleasurable feeling of expectation- pretty soon you will be able to play the record and hear how it sounds; perhaps you are trying to recollect what you have heard of the composer or the performers; perhaps you are wondering whether to invite someone else to hear it.
>
> The object appears as something persisting "out there," self contained, independent of your will, capable of owning its own qualities. and the colors and shapes appear as belonging to it. . .
>
> Your feeling of pleasurable expectation, how ever does not appear as a characteristic of any object "over there" in your visual field, but as something going on in your *self*.[81]

So when Beardsley says that when we "feel the power of the novel," he is claiming that the propositions of which we are conscious have a certain power. It is not clear that this is an objective property of the novel, rather than an effect it has on us, but perhaps if we are willing to

80. Beardsley, Monroe. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (New York:* Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 125

81. ibid. 127

call a painting “sad”, and mean something objective by it, then we can call a novel “powerful” in the same way.

Beardsley admits, just as Zink and Isenberg do, that literature presents a particularly hard problem for this view:

> This distinction becomes most puzzling when we apply it to works of literature. For here it might seem as if the boundary between the work and its effect collapses, because no distinction can be made between what is phenomenally objective and what is phenomenally subjective in the literary experience. After all, what is it to *read* a poem or a novel? The marks on paper, or the sounds, are phenomenally objective, but our attention is not, or not entirely, on them, but on the meanings they invoke in us. How can we separate object from response when the experience is *all* response, and no object?[82]

This strikes me as a major point against the NTT. Truth is rejected as relevant because it is “external” to the proposition, but, of course, meaning is “external” to the sign. You don’t “see” the meaning just by seeing the sign, it is arrived at by a process of interpretation, which takes us beyond those signs that are present to our senses. Beardsley meets this objection as follows:

> The defining mark of phenomenal objectivity is not immediate presentation to us, but experienced independence of the self. And there is more than one mode of awareness of phenomenal objects. I “see” the apple; I “think of” my childhood home or the Fiji Islands; I “imagine” Shangri-La. When I see a picture of someone I know, I think of that person; when I see a picture of someone-say Perseus- whom nobody ever knew, because he never existed, I think of that person too.[83]

And while there are important differences between “seeing” and “imagining”, he says:

> The main point is that thinking of something is one mode of awareness of it, and even if that which is thought of is nonexistent, it is something that can be dwelt upon, contemplated, as if it were or could be before you- though it is not at all necessary that

82. ibid. 128
83. ibid. 128

> you should have mental images of it- and hence it impinges upon your phenomenal field as an object.[84]

The contents of my thoughts are items in my phenomenal field, and as such, can be objects of contemplation. Beardsley concedes that a proposition is not immediately present to us, but his conclusion is the same as Zink and Isenberg: through contemplation, we are acquainted with a proposition, in the same way that through perception we are acquainted with a "sensible thing". In each case, the object of our acquaintance is exhausted by our acquaintance with it. In a crucial way, contemplation is just like perception, and so linguistic objects like propositions can be aesthetic objects in the same way paintings are.

2.13 Conclusion

I am arguing that the NTT relies crucially on this presentationalist theory of literature, that is, to the idea that a work of literature is wholly and immediately available to contemplation. It is quite clear that at least these three defenders of the NTT, Isenberg, Beardsley and Zink, are committed to the idea of literature being presentational. This is not an accident, I think. Certainly Zink, in "Poetry and Truth" develops his theory of literature precisely to show how truth is not a literary value. And while Isenberg seems to have independent motives for arguing the presentationalist position in "The Esthetic Function of Language," in "The Problem of Belief" he explicitly addresses the issue of truth in literature, and his rejection of truth makes use of his presentationalist account.

In each of these three philosophers, we find the same point being argued: the object of attention when we read a work of literature is a proposition or set of propositions. We meditate

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84. ibid. 129

upon the meanings of the words, but we do not go beyond those meanings. We do not compare them to reality to see if there is a correspondence of any kind, any more than when we view a painting we compare it to reality as part of our aesthetic evaluation of it. And the comparison to paintings is, I think, crucial. Zink, Isenberg and Beardsley all take painting as the archetypal art form, and their arguments all strive to show how literature is the same kind of thing as painting. This, I think, is an error, one that causes the NTT to ignore the specifically linguistic nature of literature.

Most importantly, I think I have shown that the NTT does in fact exclude illocutionary properties from the set of aesthetically relevant properties. Literature is language taken out of its normal context and enjoyed for its own sake. The usual illocutionary force associated with those particular words is ignored when we look at them from the 'literary point of view.' So whether the words would normally be interpreted as an assertion or a question or a command, will be irrelevant to our assessment of them as a work of literature. According to the NTT, it is only the locutionary properties, phonetic, phatic and rhetic that will play any role in our critical judgments of literary works. This is a mistake, as I will show in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Literature and illocution

3.1 Against presentationalism

I have shown that the NTT is committed to a "presentationalist" view of literature: it holds that the work of literature is wholly and immediately present to the reader in the same way that a painting or a piece of music is wholly and immediately present to a viewer. And this is why truth is held to be aesthetically irrelevant, since the truth of a proposition is *not* wholly and immediately present to the contemplator of a given proposition, but can only be determined through some process of verification. Such a process is external to the proposition, and tends to distract from the contemplation of it. When evaluating a piece of language as a work of literature, we restrict our attention to those properties which are internal to it. This will include the way the words sound, or perhaps look on the page, and what the words mean. In short, it is the *locutionary* properties alone that are relevant, the phonic, the phatic and the rhetic properties. The literary artist, on this theory, performs a locutionary act which we enjoy for its own sake, without worrying about what sort of illocutionary force it might have. If we construe the piece of language as an assertion, or a command, or a warning, then we have stopped seeing it as a work of literature. This is the theory of literature defended by those who subscribe to the NTT.

In this chapter I will argue against this conception of literature in two ways. First I will argue negatively: I will show that this presentationalist account of literature is untenable. I will show that they have on the one hand failed to exclude truth from the set of literary properties, while on the other they are unable prevent the exclusion of properties (such as meaning) that they would like to include. And I will show that the locutionary object, be it a set of propositions, a fictional object or a fictional world, is not a proper object of aesthetic attention. Secondly I will

argue more positively, presenting reasons why the illocutionary act is a better candidate for the title of "literary object" and responding to the objections of Lamarque and Olsen who argue that literature is not a matter of illocution.

3.2 Two arguments against the NTT

There are two simple but rather cutting responses to the NTT as I have portrayed it so far. First, it is not clear that truth can be excluded from the set of aesthetically relevant properties on the grounds that the NTT has argued. Isenberg, Zink and Beardsley all consider truth to be external to the proposition. Truth is a "matter of verification". Knowing the truth of a proposition involves checking it against "the facts" or "the world", and this takes us beyond the proposition. But of course this is only the case with so-called "empirical truths", those truths which make a statement about the world. An analytic proposition, on the other hand, is true or false whatever the world happens to be like. "All bachelors are unmarried" is true even if there are no bachelors. In short, the truth of an analytic proposition is internal to the proposition. It is known as soon as the proposition is understood. I don't suggest that we must therefore conclude that all and only analytic propositions have literary value, only that the NTT is wrong if it thinks that truth is always an "external" property. They will need some other reason for excluding truth.

Second there is the unavoidable fact that the NTT's account of literature provides us with a clear example of what should be impossible, namely, a single object being seen from both the "aesthetic point of view" and a functional point of view at the same time. We are told that what it means to see a piece of language as literature is precisely to ignore its normal function. Literature is a different use of language than is science, and we must choose which use we are interested in. The literary critic looks at the proposition and admires the properties it has; the

scientists looks through the proposition, to the fact it describes. And we cannot do both. But, using the very same logic, we could argue as follows:

Language is nothing but sound (or marks on paper) used to convey meaning. Any sound (or mark) might be so used, since what makes a particular sound (or mark) meaningful is just the way it is used. There is no "natural" language in the sense of a set of sounds which have their meanings otherwise than by convention. Now, it is obvious that some sounds are beautiful. And we can make this judgment independently of whatever other value the sounds might have. Indeed, if we are to take the NTT seriously, we *must* make this judgment independently of whatever other value the sounds might have. In particular, we may (indeed must) evaluate the sounds as beautiful or not, without regard to their meanings, since the sounds would sound the same, regardless of what they meant. You are either using sound as an art object, looking at it from the aesthetic point of view, or as a bearer of meaning, looking at it from the "semantic point of view" we might say. We cannot do both. And there are in fact cases where this line can be drawn quite sharply. Take Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky, whose first stanza is:

> 'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe
> All mimsy were the borogoves
> and the mome raths outgrabe[85]

This is of course meaningless. Carroll made up most of these words. And yet, taken as they are, they reward critical analysis. There is rhyme and alliteration and meter, all the various phonetic properties for which we value poetry. This poem is quite beautiful, and that can be said without knowing what, if anything, it means. And if you run off to a dictionary to find out what these words mean, you are disturbing the aesthetic experience. The sounds themselves have a value that is distinct from their being bearers of meaning.

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85. Carroll, Lewis, *The Annotated Alice* ed. Martin Gardner. (New York: W.W. Norton &Compnay, 1999), 148

Or consider the Book of Kells, an illuminated manuscript that is considered a work of art. It is appreciated as a masterpiece of calligraphy, and its aesthetic merits can be determined without knowing what it says. It is in fact just an edition of the New Testament, but if it is the content of the work that interests you, you are better off finding a modern translation of the Bible. The Book of Kells is beautiful not because of its semantic content, but because of its visual qualities. We must decide how we are to use these inscriptions, as words with meanings, or as a work of art. Seeing it as a work of art precludes seeing it as a bearer of meaning. Or so the logic of the NTT would seem to lead us.

These are of course absurd conclusions. We do not have to limit our appreciation of a piece of language to its perceptual properties, the way the words sound to the ear or look on the page, we may also look through the words, as it were, to their propositional content. Our aesthetic interest in the way the words sounds does not prevent us from also taking an interest in what they mean. But if we admit this, it is not at all clear that the same can't be said of the proposition: we might be interested in its content, and at the same time interested in whether it makes a true assertion or not. We are not forced to ignore its propositional use anymore than we are forced to ignore the semantic properties of the words.

Literature is language put to artistic use, and there are therefore many different properties that might be held to be aesthetically relevant. The phonetic, semantic, even etymological details of a piece of language might need to be considered by the critic. The line between those linguistic properties which are aesthetically relevant and those which are not seems to me to be somewhat capriciously drawn by the NTT. There is no good reason to stop at the locutionary properties, and disregard the illocutionary properties when evaluating a piece of language as literature.

3.3 Evaluating the Proposition Aesthetically

These two objections (that NTT has overlooked analytic truth, and that it allows language to have a dual function, as aesthetic object and bearer of meaning) suggest that the NTT, by settling upon the proposition as the work of literature, has left some basic problems unsolved. We may agree that a locutionary act can be an literary object, but that doesn't force us to conclude that an illocutionary act *can't* be of literary interest. But something stronger can be said. I will argue that there is good reason for thinking that a proposition simply *cannot* be the object of aesthetic attention.

For one thing, there is the unavoidable fact that the only access we have to the "fictional world" (that is, the set of propositions that make up the work of literature) is by a description. This might not be the case in those literary forms that have a visual component, such as film, drama or graphic novels, but in many cases, we are not shown the objects of our alleged aesthetic attention, rather they are described to us. But the aesthetic properties of an object are not available to us by description: you can tell me that a certain painting is blue, and balanced, and abstract, without having told me it is beautiful or not. Some version of the fact-value distinction applies here. As Sibley puts it:

> Merely to learn from others, on good authority, that the music is serene, the play moving, or the picture unbalanced is of little aesthetic value.[86]

So if Helen of Troy, for example, is described to us in perfect detail, we are still not acquainted with her beauty, anymore than a description of the Mona Lisa acquaints us with the beauty of that painting. This is what it means, I think, to say that beauty is a matter of perception: we must see it (or hear it) for ourselves

86. Sibley, Frank, "Aesthetic and Non-aesthetic" The Philosophical Review, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Apr., 1965), 140

When Homer tells us that Helen is beautiful, we must take that as a stipulation, it is not for us to disagree. If Homer were to tell us that some real person were beautiful, then, if we could see them for ourselves, we may very well disagree with his evaluation, and be justified in doing so. This suggests that in the case of fiction, truth is not an issue. There is no question of a fictional description being false, so truth and falsehood do not enter in to our judgment of the story. This conclusion seems unproblematic, and is in fact, the basic motivation behind the NTT: the proof that a "literary description" (that is a statement that appears in a work of literature) is not a true description is that, strictly speaking, a fictional description (unlike a genuine description) cannot be mistaken. But what we may also conclude is that we are not, in any legitimate sense "aesthetically judging" the fictional object. We are judging the language that gives us access to that object. Consider the difference between:

1) Helen had a face that launched a thousand ships

And:

2) Helen was very, very, very, very beautiful

Are we in contact with the same object in each case? Arguably, yes: there may be different tellings of the same story, there might be different descriptions of the same fictional object. It can be plausibly maintained that both 1) and 2) are both talking about the same Helen, the Helen from The Iliad. If we are contemplating the same object in each case, and that object is beautiful, then the two descriptions are equal in aesthetic value, no? No. Why not?

Because the beauty of the poem is not the beauty of the subject of the poem. There may be a beautiful description of something ugly, there might be an ugly description of something beautiful. 2) above, I think, qualifies as a case of the latter. Merely saying that something is

"very, very, very. . .beautiful" does not make beautiful poetry (and adding 'verys' simply results in a worse poem, not a better one), although, we have not misdescribed Helen in this case; we could not have misdescribed her, the question of accuracy does not arise. She simply is beautiful, very much so. Consider also the following passage from Beowulf:, where the poet describes Grendel's Mere, the lake where the monster lives:

> the hart in flight from pursuing hounds
> will turn to face them with firm-set horns
> and die in the wood rather than dive
> beneath its surface. That is no good place.[87]

This is effective poetry. We are told, not what the place looks like, but how a hart reacts to it. A hunted animal would rather be torn to shreds by hounds, than escape by diving into the water. Then in closing, a nice bit of understatement: "it's not a good place". This is beautiful poetry, but of course the Mere itself is not beautiful, it is a terrible place. We judge, not the object, fictional or otherwise, but the poetic "description" of the object (and I put scare quotes around 'description' because, again, it is not a real description since it cannot fail.)

The following example will perhaps make the point clearer: compare the statement "No man is an island" to its logical equivalent "No island is a man", or worse "All islands are non-men." It is the same proposition asserted in each case (and a Venn diagram will persuade the skeptical of this), and yet they obviously differ wildly in aesthetic value. If it were the proposition that we were primarily interested in, this would not be the case.

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87. *Beowulf* , trans. Heany, Seamus (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., February 2001), 95

3.4 Literary Content

The NTT looks at the relationship between the proposition and the world, and claims that this relationship is aesthetically irrelevant. But the phenomenon we are seeing here has to do with the relationship between certain words and certain contents. The words (as perceptual objects) and the content (of the abstract proposition) together form the "sensuous whole," but if what I have just said is true, the content makes a very small contribution to the value of the work of literature. It does not matter what is described, so much as *how* it is described. More precisely, it is not the content we are interested in, but how that content is expressed.

We could avoid this conclusion by arguing that statements 1) and 2) above (about Helen) simply do not have the same content, that content depends crucially upon the exact words used. And perhaps this could be defended. Many writers draw on the same material, and each adds his or her own creative ability to the story. So, we can't simply talk about "Dr. Faust", we must talk about "Goethe's Faust" and "Marlowe's Faust", two different entities, that are related in some way, perhaps by overlapping descriptions or historical influence, but who are nevertheless distinct. But if content relies so heavily upon the particular words used to express it, I think this rather speaks against the existence of the fictional object, or indeed the proposition, altogether, because it suggests that words have a clear principle of individuation, while fictional objects do not. I am inclined to think that we cannot do without the notion of "fictional objects" and "fictional worlds," since our natural way of talking references these things all the time, and common sense does seem to suggest that we can think about and refer to a character independently of any given work of literature. But this does not mean that the fictional world is an aesthetic object.

3.5 The Story and The World

Ruth Lorand forcefully and persuasively makes this point in her essay "Telling a Story Or Telling A World?". She takes exception to what she sees as a trend in the philosophy of literature that rejects the Aristotelian notion that a story should have a definite beginning, middle and end. She disputes what she calls the 'world metaphor' of fiction, for the simple reason that it implies that a work of fiction, a story, is always incomplete:

> The 'world' metaphor suggests that a story aims at reflecting or representing a world (be it real, possible, or fictional). It evokes the idea that stories are partial reports of their corresponding worlds and supply materials or schemes for reconstructing these worlds. However, any world, regardless of its logical status, consists of an infinite chain of facts, and these facts are interrelated according to different principles (metaphysical, logical, physical, psychological and so forth). Therefore no depiction or representation of any world can ever be complete. The completion of a given story requires of the active reader the impossible task of including the whole range of facts that belong to its related world.[88]

Isenberg talks explicitly of the "fictional world", noting that an "imagined world is often as interesting as the real one."[89] The NTT is heavily committed to an ontology of fictional objects. Isenberg, Beardsley and Zink all assume that the words we read or hear give us access to the characters and events of the novel, even though these things are not real.

But if no story can ever be complete, and the reader is left to fill in the (presumably infinite number of) missing facts herself, then how can anyone ever be said to write a story, or for that matter, read one? By focusing on the (most likely impossible) task of reconstructing a world, we are ignoring the literary value of the story that is in front of us.

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88. Lorand, Ruth, "Telling a Story Or Telling a World?" British Journal of Aesthetics, 41(4) (October 2001) 425

89. Isenberg, "The Problem Of Belief" 3

For Lorand, it is a mistake to speak, as recent theorists do, of ‘gaps’ in the work of literature. We assume that Sherlock Holmes had grandparents, since all men do, even though we are not explicitly told this by the author. According to the tendency that Lorand wishes to resist, this missing ‘fact’ about Holmes leaves a gap in the story, a gap that the reader fills in, using her interpretive skills. Lorand does not deny that such interpretation is possible; she only denies that such ‘facts’ are properly considered part of the story.

To tell a story, be it fictional (the story of 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf’) or real (the story of how my car broke down and it took me all day to get home) requires that facts be selected. If in telling you the story of my day, I include every true thing that happened that day, I will have wound up not telling you anything at all, even assuming I could finish such a task. So suppose I begin: “I woke up at 8:53 and 54 seconds, got up, walked the 23 ft. 6 inches from my bed to the kitchen, where I had three eggs, each weighing 3.36 ounces, for breakfast . . .” and continued on in this vein. It is not merely that this level of detail is unnecessary; it is actually a distraction from what it is I am telling you. Why mention that it was exactly 8:53 and 54 seconds that I awoke? Is this relevant? Merely by mentioning it, I have suggested that it is relevant, and that you should be on the lookout for some incident that it is relevant to. (Recall here Grice's maxims of relevance). And if I were to include the totality of facts that were in operation that day, I would have succeeded in telling you the story of nothing in particular. A story, a finite narrative that is told by one person to another, cannot contain every fact, and so leaving some facts out should not be construed as leaving ‘gaps’ in the narrative, gaps that need to be filled in. The storyteller is telling us what we need to know, and to understand the story is to realize this.

The case is exactly the same for a fictional story: In "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," we are told what we need to know to understand and appreciate the story. To shift our attention to the ‘world of the story’, and the infinity of facts it contains, is to miss the point of the story. There is a reason that these particular events were narrated, these particular characters described.

What is of interest when we read a story is the particular object in front of us, the story, the particular set of statements that has been selected by the author, not some fictional world. So far, this says nothing in particular about the role of truth, and, indeed, Lorand blames a theoretical preoccupation with truth for the prominence of the 'world' metaphor:

> The question concerning the 'true facts' (explicit and implicit) of a given story blurs the distinction between the story and the world that the reader may associate with the story. Thus, establishing the true (and relevant) facts of a story amounts to establishing the true facts of the corresponding world. As a result, the structure and meaning of the story per se is obliterated. Telling a story then becomes the never-ending project of telling a world.[90]

So it would seem that fretting over the 'presupposed facts' of a story is no part of, and even detracts from, our aesthetic enjoyment of the story. And this seems perfectly in line with the NTT in that it discourages an interest in truth. However, it is more complicated than this. Lorand rejects the 'world' metaphor of fiction, preferring what she calls the 'material product' metaphor. On this view a story is a material product, like a cake or a piece of furniture. The materials for its production are drawn from various sources, and the materials preserve some of their properties, while losing others, in the process of being turned into the end product. This is not a matter of logical deduction or logical coherence, but rather of narrative coherence: the products are selected and altered with an eye towards producing the best end product, a story. Given that it is the author's selection of facts that is important to the story, anything that conditions that selection is relevant to the success of the story. So a Science fiction writer will include certain accepted scientific facts in a story. The reason those facts are there is because they are true, or held to be true. The reader, then, cannot be completely indifferent to the truth of those statements; not knowing that they are scientifically valid will affect the reader's judgment of the story. As Lorand puts it:

90. Lorand, Ruth, "Telling a Story or Telling a World?", 426

> A philosophical idea that is expressed in a story need not be defended by the same arguments as in its original, philosophical context. Representations of historical facts, even if accurately depicted, may lose some of their historical significance and gain new meanings in the story. The knowledge of what is lost and what is gained is a posteriori; it is not achieved through deductive procedures.[91]

This is quite strong enough for me. I do not claim that truth is necessary, but I am inclined to think that a given author may choose to include real facts for a reason, and that the contribution of these facts to the value of the story cannot be dismissed on theoretical grounds. Once we reject the idea that it is only a propositional content that can be the object of critical attention, the relevance of truth becomes a possibility.

Attention paid to the "world" of the novel, is attention not paid to the novel itself. And we have seen this tendency before: Beardsley said that when we read a novel "The marks on paper, or the sounds, are phenomenally objective, but our attention is not, or not entirely, on these, but on the meanings they invoke in us."[92] It is a peculiar theory of literature, we might say, that does not focus its attention primarily on the language, but only does so as an afterthought.

Lorand wishes to redirect our attention to the story, and I am inclined to agree. In particular, I am inclined to look at the act of storytelling. This is, or should be the focus of our aesthetic attention. The difference between "Helen is very, very, very beautiful" and "Helen had a face that launched a thousand ships" is a difference in means of expression, but it is arguably the same thing being expressed in each case. So our attention should be focussed on the means of expression. Why, we must ask, did the author choose to express herself in this way, rather than in some other way. What purpose lies behind this particular arrangement of sentences, and was this purpose well served? Why was this story told in this way? But first, of course, we need

91. ibid. 427
92. Beardsley, *Aesthetics,* 45

to ask “what is a story?” We need to take a closer look at how speech act theory has been applied to this question.

3.6 Fiction and Narrative

An important controversy concerning fiction, and one that bears upon my thesis, is whether or not there is an illocutionary act of "fiction-making" or "storytelling". If, following Frege, we accept that Homer, in writing "The Odyssey" was not in fact asserting anything, true or false, about Odysseus (since there is no such person), then we may well ask ourselves what he was doing. Did his words carry some illocutionary force other than assertion? This suggestion was dismissed as soon as it was first raised, by John Searle in his essay "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse." Kendall Walton, who has written extensively on the nature of fiction, also rejected this idea (but for very different reasons), as did Peter Lamarque and Stein Olsen, adding their own reasons for rejecting the "illocutionary act" theory of literature. On the other side, Gregory Currie has defended the idea that there is an illocutionary act of "fiction-making". I will side with Currie, with some minor differences. Let's look at the arguments against this position, and Curries responses. First I will lay out what I take to be the NTT’s view of the literary work. Then I will examine the different ways in which speech act theory has been applied to the question.

The basic claim, that literature represents a different use of language than does science, is hardly controversial. But accepting that does not necessarily force one to accept a speech act account of literature. After all, Frege himself did not, suggesting merely that the non-referring "literary" proposition was itself the object of critical attention. It is the sense of the proposition

that attracts our literary interest. The NTT, I claim, follows him in this. Indeed, Lamarque and Olsen explicitly reject a speech act account of literature:

> Although we are rejecting the notion that telling stories, or making up fictions, involves performing an illocutionary act of any kind, on the traditional Austin/Searle model, we do admit, of course, that it involves 'doing something with words'. A storyteller has a special kind of meaning intention, using words (or, more generally, other media) to elicit or encourage a certain sort of response.[93]

Literature, on this view, represents a non-illocutionary use of language. And Kendall Walton has expressed skepticism that speech act theory has anything useful to tell us about literature:

> Speech act theory is remarkably unhelpful in explaining what fiction is. We have here something of a "Have theory, will travel" syndrome. There is a tendency for theorists, when faced with a new problem, to dust off an old theory, which they know and love, one devised with other questions in mind, shove it into the breach and pray that it will fit. In this case it does not fit, and the result is confusion, rather than illumination.[94]

I think Lamarque and Olsen are wrong (as is Walton), and their mistaken view of the literary object is what causes them to adopt the NTT. First, let's look at their treatment of fiction.

As everyone involved in this debate is quick to point out, fiction and literature are not the same thing. And yet all the typical examples of literary language involve fiction: novels, short stories, and plays are the usual suspects that are rounded up when theories of literature are being devised and tested. Rarely, if ever, are essays, sermons, memoirs or oral histories cited as examples of "literature". Which is perhaps significant: if an essay is literature, and an essay attempts, among other things, to inform, then we have a clear case of a work of literature having truth as one of its crucial elements. The NTT, it seems, can be refuted simply by broadening the extension of "literature". Tempting as this might seem, it will not do. Firstly, because most, if not all, of those who claim truth as a literary value, have the standard examples in mind (recall

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93. Lamarque, Peter and Olsen, Stein H. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature,* 34.
94. Walton, Kendall. "Fiction, Fiction Making and Styles of Fictionality" Philosophy and Literature, 7 (April 1983) 78.

Martha Nussbaum who claimed that certain *novels* are essentially works of philosophy.) Secondly, the defenders of the NTT freely admit that a work of literature may contain truths, but these truths are not what makes it literature. And this would apply to essays as well. Take for example George Orwell's essay "A Nice Cup Of Tea", in which he describes how to make, well, a nice cup of tea. This essay might be enjoyable to read even if you don't use it as a cookbook, and even if you do not know what tea is. The pleasure of reading the essay is not necessarily the pleasure of learning something. The essay might bear rereading, although the knowledge it contains is imparted in a single reading. Even essays then , when read as literature, do not rely crucially upon their factual content, the NTT would argue. So the fact that the NTT (and most other theories of literature) focus on fiction is not a weakness, or an attempt to avoid hard cases. It is simply that many works of literature are works of fiction. Any serious response to the NTT will have to address the nature of fiction.

3.7 The “Narrative Act”

The claim that literature is purely a matter of locution is defensible. Searle, after all, recognized a "propositional act", which was the bare expression of a proposition without putting it to any use. If I say, for example:

The sky is blue

by way of giving an example of an English sentence, then I have expressed a proposition, without performing any illocutionary act. So it's simply possible to utter a proposition without performing any illocution. And indeed, the word "suppose", which I have used many times,

marks such a "propositional act". "Supposing" is not an illocutionary project; an act of supposing is not accomplished by saying "I suppose that P." If I say "Suppose that P," I am making a request, a request that you suppose P. But your supposing is not a linguistic matter at all, it requires some imaginative effort. I may ask you to suppose that P for many different reasons. I could say something like “Suppose the democrats lose Congress next election”, in order to persuade you to vote a certain way by getting you to consider the consequences of certain events. But I could have asked you to suppose something to be the case, merely to direct your imagination along intrinsically pleasurable lines. In the same way, I could say "look at that sunset", either in order to get you to realize how late it is, or to get you enjoy the sight of the sunset for its own sake. Lamarque and Olsen claim that the literary artist invites us to suppose certain things are the case, but for no reason other than to gratify the imagination. And as I say, this is perfectly plausible. We certainly do use our imaginations in this way. But this does not prove that this is the *only* use of language that counts as literature.

"Narrative" is a slightly more complicated propositional act, but an act that still falls below illocution. Lamarque and Olsen cite one standard definition of narrative:

> What is narrative? Here is a straightforward working definition from Gerald Prince: 'narrative' is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other. . . The crucial element is the temporal one; events not merely states of affairs, must be represented and connected in narrative. . . . At least two events are required in a narrative and the connection between them must be temporal not logical, hence the exclusion of a presupposition or entailment relation.[95]

It must be emphasized that this is an internal criterion for a narrative. A given piece of language can be identified as a narrative by analyzing just its formal properties. No mention of truth or reference must be made. So producing a narrative is simply a slightly more complex propositional act, and does not necessarily involve any illocutionary intention.

95. Lamarque, Peter and Olsen, Stein H. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature, 55*

Against this view, it has been argued, primarily by Greg Currie, that “storytelling” is an illocutionary act. I largely agree with Currie, and it is worth looking at the arguments for and against his position.

3.8 Searle's "Determination Principle"

Searle rejects the notion of a special, illocutionary "act of fiction-making" because he believes that there is a connection between the illocutionary force of an utterance and the locutionary act that is performed. Take the following three utterances:

1) The door is closed
2) Is the door closed?
3) Close the door

The first is an assertion, the second a question, the third a command, and this distinction is marked at the grammatical, and therefore, the locutionary level. The reason we can understand the illocutionary intentions of the speaker is because we understand the conventional, literal meanings of these sentences. And we reasonably expect someone who utters one of these sentences to believe, and be in a position to know, that the door is closed, otherwise the utterance will not make sense. But in the case of fiction, this is exactly what happens: the expectation of truth is suspended, but the utterance is not considered to have failed. Here is Searle talking about a passage from Iris Murdoch's novel *The Red and the Green*:

> If, as I have claimed, the meaning of the sentence uttered by Miss Murdoch is determined by the linguistic rules that attach to the elements of the sentence, and if those rules determine that the literal utterance of the sentence is an assertion, and if, as I have been

> insisting, she is making a literal utterance of the sentence, then surely it must be an assertion; but it can't be an assertion because it does not comply with those rules that are specific to and constitutive of assertions.[96]

So, according to Searle, the illocutionary force of an utterance is determined by its locutionary meaning, making it impossible for a single locutionary type, a declarative sentence, say, to have one illocutionary force in one context, and some other illocutionary force in a different context. Currie dubs this the "determination principle", and claims that it is simply wrong. His first reason is perhaps not decisive. He points out what I have discussed before in chapter one, that very often a declarative sentence can be used to issue a command, or a question might be used to make a statement (the so-called "rhetorical question" for example):

> The same sentence may, given the right context, be used to make an assertion, ask a question, or give a command (e.g. "You are going to the concert.")[97]

This would tend to show that the link between locutionary meaning and illocutionary force is broken. However, this will not do. Recall the case of Smith and Jones (which I used in section 1.7) where Smith gets Jones to close the window by saying "The window is open." In that context, the sentence functioned as a command, even though it was grammatically a declarative. But it did not serve as a command directly, it only did so by way of asserting. Indeed, such a command would only succeed if the underlying assertion were true. The command was the indirect speech act, but it did not replace the direct speech act of assertion. So this response is, as I say, not decisive. But a stronger case, I think, can be made.

Imagine for example a simple language along the lines of Wittgenstein's "Slab!" language, where workers building a structure communicate by pointing at various pieces of stone, and saying "Slab!" or "Block!"; there is a practice of handing a fellow worker a block or

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96. Searle, John, “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse” in *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts (*Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985) 60

97. Currie, Gregory, "Works of Fiction and. Illocutionary Acts" Philosophy and Literature 10 (1986) 304

slab depending on which word is uttered. On Wittgenstein's hypothesis, the word "Slab!" in this case simply means "Give me a slab!", but there is no hidden propositional structure that makes it so: the meaning of the word is it's use. And this might be context sensitive: it might be the case that during the day "Slab!" means "Give me a slab!", whereas at the end of the day, when it is time to clean up and take inventory, the word "Slab!" would mean "There is a slab!" The very same locution, that is, the very same noise and gesture, would vary in illocution depending on context. Wittgenstein's "Slab" language is a deliberate simplification, perhaps oversimplification, but it does at least suggest that illocution is not determined by the locution. If anything, the determination goes the other way: humans make various sounds for various reasons, and those sounds that are all used the same way are said to “express the same proposition” or "have the same meaning."

There is, at any rate, a practical example of illocution depending entirely on the context of an utterance and not the locutionary act. Consider the difference between a threat and a warning. Suppose Smith were to point to a glass of liquid, and say to Jones (who sees Smith's gesture and its object):

> If you drink that, you will die

Has Smith threatened Jones, or warned him? We cannot tell simply by examining the sentence alone. If the glass Smith points to is Smith's beer, and he doesn't want Jones to drink it while he leaves the room for a moment, then the utterance has the intended force of a threat. If, on the other hand, the glass is full of poison, then the intended force was presumably that of a warning. It might be argued that the direct illocutionary force was that of asserting a conditional proposition, which would in turn indirectly result in either a threat or a warning depending on circumstances, but I'm not sure this is correct, for the simple reason that there does not seem to

be any standard way of distinguishing a threat from a warning. Many illocutionary acts have a characteristic or canonical form: "I order you to. . . "; "I hereby declare that. . . "; "I'm asking you. . ."; and so on. But it does not seem to me to be necessary for an illocution to have such a standard expression, and it seems to me that threats, in fact, do not have such a standard expression. It makes sense to say, for example "I warn you not to drink that!", but it does not make sense to say "I threaten you not to drink that!" And it is not merely stilted (as, for example "I request that you close the window" is) but actually improper. As far as I can tell there is no purely locutionary marker that would distinguish a threat from a warning. Even the phrase "I'm warning you. . ." can be used to issue a threat (it would be perfectly natural, for example, for Smith to say "I'm warning you, Jones, don't drink my beer!", and that statement would be rightly construed as a threat.) So it seems to me that there is this much reason to reject the determination principle. Therefore, Searle has not shown that a declarative sentence could not be used to perform some illocutionary act other than assertion.

The second argument Currie gives against the determination principle is much simpler, and to my mind decisive: Searle's own theory of fiction violates it. Searle argues that the fiction maker is not performing an illocutionary act, but rather pretending to perform one. There is a certain plausibility to this claim, although I am not sure that every fiction writer can be said to be pretending something. In any event, Currie points out that the very same sentence might be used to perform a genuine illocutionary act, or to only pretend to form that act, which means that the use a sentence is put to is not determined by its locutionary meaning. Searle, therefore, has not given us any good reason to think that a piece of literary language cannot have any illocutionary force.

3.9 Kendall Walton and "Natural" Fiction

In his essay "Fiction, Fiction-making and Styles of Fictionality", Kendall Walton seems to reject the determination principle as well. It is people who assert, and sentences can only be called "assertions" derivatively:

> We can speak of sentences as being "assertions". But the notion of assertion applies primarily to human actions. No doubt this is because it is the actions, not the sentences, which are of primary importance. Assertive sentences are important as means whereby people assert. Sentences are assertions in a merely derivative or parasitic sense. [98]

This strikes me as an outright rejection of Searle's principle: it is not that illocutionary force is dependent on locutionary meaning, but rather that locutionary acts are only said to be meaningful if they are habitually used to perform some illocutionary function. But while Walton might agree with Currie on this point, he too rejects the idea of a special "fictional" illocutionary act.

His reasoning is as follows: an illocutionary act requires a speaker (or writer). An illocution is the fulfillment of some intent. With no speaker, there would be no illocution. But fiction does not require a speaker (or writer). Therefore "fiction-making" is not an illocutionary project. Why does he believe that fiction, unlike assertion, does not require a speaker? Suppose, he says, we were to find a naturally occurring sentence, say we were to notice that the pattern of cracks on a rock spelled out the sentence "It is raining in Singapore". It is naturally occurring in that it appeared by chance: no one inscribed it, it has no author. In such a case, he says:

> This inscription would not serve anything like the functions which vehicles of people's assertions typically serve. It would not convince us that it is raining in Singapore, or that there is reason to believe that it is, or that someone thinks that it is, or wants us to think so. Ordinarily we are interested in vehicles of a person's assertions precisely because they are just that. [99]

98. Walton, Kendall, "Fiction, Fiction Making and Styles of Fictionality", 80
99. ibid 82

Compare this, he says, to the case of a story that was naturally occurring in the same way:

> The realization that the inscription was not made or used by a person to tell a story need not prevent us from reading and enjoying the story in much the way we would if it were told by someone. It may be entrancing, suspenseful, spellbinding; we may laugh and cry. Certainly some dimensions of our experiences of authored stories will be absent. But the differences are not ones which would make us deny that it functions and is understood as a full fledged story.[100]

The difference here seems to be that an assertion (or other illocutionary act) can only be understood as the expression of a speaker's intention. If there is no speaker, there is no intention, and therefore no illocution. Since we can enjoy the story without knowing who the author is, or even if it has an author, then fiction is not an illocutionary act. Fiction does not require a utterer in the way assertion does. And we needn't rely on the improbable occurrence of a story appearing naturally: it might be the case that Homer intended "The Iliad", for example, as a work of history. To his mind, he was simply keeping a record of what actually happened. Whatever his attitude towards, and intentions concerning his work, they do not affect our reading of the poem as fiction.

However, the difference between the naturally occurring "assertion" and the naturally occurring story is perhaps not as clear as it might seem. As Currie points out:

> . . . the most that Walton's argument could establish is that we may treat the shapes on the face of the rock as if they were fiction; we can respond to them as we would to a fictional work. But this is not enough to make something fiction. If it were, the Bible would undoubtedly be a work of fiction, since many people read and enjoy Bible stories as fiction. What makes the Bible not fiction is exactly the absence of the right kind of fictive illocutionary intention on the part of its authors. Just about anything can be read as fiction, but not everything is fiction.[101]

100. ibid. 83
101. Currie, Gregory. "Works of Fiction and. Illocutionary Acts" 306

We may treat the story as if it were fiction, but then we may treat the "assertion" as if it were a genuine assertion. If, for example, the cracks in the rock spelled out "Beware of tigers!", we may well be on our guard. And it might be the case that there were tigers about, in which case, purely by accident, it would be good advice. But this is consistent with our knowing that there is no utterer. We can evaluate the sentence as a warning even if we know that no one uttered it. Reading the words as if they were a story is similar, it seems to me, as reading the words as if they were a warning. And there is perhaps a further parallel. Suppose the warning in the rock was legitimate; there were tigers around, and luckily the words warned of this (and we know for a fact that it is mere luck). We would not, in this situation, look around for further warnings. Knowing there was no utterer, we would take advantage of the felicitous inscription, but not expect more. Similarly, suppose the story in the rock was thrilling and suspenseful, but was cut off before the denouement. We would not look around for the end of the story. In fact, we could not even really speculate about how the story ends, there simply isn't an answer to that question. So the lack of an utterer does affect both cases in the same way: it limits, in some way, the uses to which the inscription can be put.

But there is perhaps a stronger reason for thinking Walton is wrong in denying stories any illocutionary status. To read the words as a story, Walton seems to think that all we need is the words that are there, that "the story" is immediately and wholly present to us, and that it is only those properties internal to the expressed proposition that are relevant to our evaluation of the story. But this is not quite true:

> When we read a work of fiction, we construct the story not merely on the basis of what is said in the text, but by assuming a tacit background of facts into which the fiction is slotted. There are many things which are true in fiction which are not said in fiction. . . what determines what is true in fiction is a certain pattern of inferences that take place within the scope of the reader's make-believe. We make believe that the story is told to us as assertion by someone who shares the common beliefs of the society in which the work is written. we then use the text and the background of common belief to work out what this person believes. What it is reasonable to infer that he believes is exactly what

> is true in the fiction. Many of these beliefs will be directly inferable from the text. . . But if there is evidence that irony, metaphor or some other kind of non-literal device is being used, the inference will be more complicated, and will, and may depend upon our deployment of conversational rules, in the sense of Grice. In such cases we rely upon the idea of what a speaker might have meant by the words rather than simply what the words themselves mean.[102]

To even understand a given story might require some knowledge of the speaker's intentions. The very same words might be construed in many different ways given different authorial intentions. This does not count against Lorand's view that we should not seek to "fill in the gaps" of a story. Currie is not claiming that there are logical gaps that need filling, only an authorial intent to be deciphered.

R.A. Sharpe also argues forcefully that our enjoyment of a story often requires that it have an author. His brief but suggestive essay “The Tale And The Teller” addresses a puzzle raised by the following situation: you are reading a novel, a thriller or a mystery, and are quite engrossed, but when you reach the end, you discover that the last few pages are missing. They have been ripped out of the book. You are disappointed; now you will never know how the story ends. The puzzle Sharpe raises is the following: why be disappointed? The story is just made up, why not make-up your own ending? It is one thing to not know how World War II ended; this is a historical fact, and so you can be mistaken about it. But the story is fiction. Simply make up an ending that you find appropriate. Sharpe suggests, and I am inclined to agree, that we would not be satisfied by this. The question is: why not?

It is interesting to look at this problem in the light of Lorand’s theory, and the theories to which she was responding. This is an example of a genuine ‘gap’ in the story. The missing pages were not left out by design, and so their effect on the story is unintended and detrimental. An author might leave a story unfinished for dramatic purposes, and do so successfully, but this is not an instance of that. So reconstructing the story in this case is legitimate, as I think even

102. ibid. 307

Lorand would agree; a complete object has been disfigured, and we want to know what it was like originally. Furthermore, reconstructing the story is presumably more than just working out the logical consequences of the surviving statements. This is not a job for a logician. But whom is it a job for?

Sharpe first suggests that the reason that we would be unsatisfied with an ending that we make up is that we would most likely be unable to do justice to the style of the original. The author has his style, we have ours, and the two would most likely clash. This might be true in particular cases, but it could hardly account for every case. Even if by chance, we wrote in the same style as the author, we would be unsatisfied to finish the story ourselves.

He then suggests that, unless we are professional writers, we would not do as good a job as the author. But this too is also not quite right: a professional writer in the same situation might still want to know how the novel *really* ends, and not just how she makes it end.

Finally, Sharpe provides his own solution (although he says it is little more than a suggestion). It involves, once again, doing away with the notion of the 'world of the fiction'. We are not, he says, interested in a fictional world, nor in seeing a set of statements completed, but rather, "We want to be told stories, and to be told a story is not the same as telling one ourselves."[103] If the object of appreciation were a fictional world, a set of propositions devoid of any context, then it would presumably not matter how those propositions were communicated to us. Once the storyteller had given us the idea to contemplate, we could forget all about her. But this is not the case. What we want to know is how the author would finish this story.

Sharpe's solution strikes me as essentially correct. The skill of the storyteller is a separate thing than the story itself. Two people might relate the same events (and those events may even be real), and one will spin us a rip-roaring yarn, while the other one puts us to sleep. And this will not necessarily be because the second storyteller left anything out. The facts are all there, but the presentation is a bore.

103. Sharpe, R.A., "The Tale and the Teller" *British Journal Of Aesthetics,* 42 (2002) 415-418

Walton might be right to a degree: there may indeed be some way in which a story does not require an author to be enjoyed as a story. An author might not be a necessary condition for some thing's being a story. And indeed, Walton is attempting a definition of "fiction", so establishing the necessary and sufficient conditions is important. But all this means is that we will read stories with known authors in a different way than we read stories with unknown authors, and in particular, we will apply different standards of evaluation. As Walton says above "Certainly some dimensions of our experiences of authored stories will be absent" when we read the naturally occurring story; what he would need to do, and doesn't, is show that these absent dimensions are aesthetically irrelevant, and that therefore, their absence makes no difference whatsoever to our appreciation of the story.

3.10 Story telling as illocution

What we admire, what we ascribe aesthetic properties to, is not, or not just, the story, but the act of story telling. It is the telling of a story that is bold, or vivid, or compelling. The only access we have to the characters and events of the fictional world is such an act. But what has this to do with truth? When we say a story, or act of storytelling, is vivid, for example, we make no reference to the truth, since, as we have seen, there is no question of the storyteller getting “the facts” wrong. So why claim that truth is ever relevant?

First of all, there is the simple fact, that has been mentioned more than once, that we are interested in more than just the looks or sound of the words involved. When we read a novel, we treat the words as perceptual objects (we like a novel for its ‘beautiful language’) as well as a symbol, a bearer of meaning. We look at the words, and through the words. We make a double use of the marks and sounds, and, in doing so, we leave nothing behind. Our interest in the

words as symbols, pointing to something beyond themselves, does not imply a disregard for what they look like or sound like. In the same way, we can admire MacBeth both for the character he is, and for what he tells us about the corrupting power of ambition. The words Shakespeare uses lead us to MacBeth, the fictional object, MacBeth in turn, leads us back to the world, with perhaps a new and different understanding of it. Perhaps this new understanding is not easily put into words or summarized; perhaps there is even real controversy as to what it is, exactly, that we understand. But to relate the world of the fiction to the real world is not to treat it as something other than an aesthetic object, any more than admiring the words for their appearance is interrupted or displaced by interpreting them for their meanings.

The words can play this dual role, as perceptual object and as symbol, without detriment to their aesthetic value; the fact that the words point to something else does not make them aesthetically irrelevant. In fact, what we are very often interested in is how well the words convey whatever meaning they do. What is the difference, for example, between saying "the sky was gray" on the one hand, and "the sky was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel [104]" on the other? They both convey, arguably, the same propositional content (the sky is of a certain color), but one does it in a more "literary" manner. The words and the propositional content do not simply rest side by side, as part of a "sensuous whole", rather the words have their own perceptual properties, as well as serving to conjure up the object of our imagining. What goes for the words, it seems to me, goes for the work as a whole: we appreciate a story, *and* we appreciate the use to which the story is put. A story often has an illocutionary force, which is either well-served or poorly served by the particular telling of it. Very often works of literature are intended to persuade, or accuse, or implore the audience of something. We can sensibly ask, for example, "What does *MacBeth* mean?", that is, what is the play saying about the world. Doing so does not suggest that we have moved beyond an aesthetic appreciation of the work. Indeed, this is the usual and customary response to many works of literature: what is the author

104. Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. (New York, Ace Books, 1984), 1

trying to say. Of course we know what the author is saying about the fictional world; after all, they just said it. What we want to know, what we wonder about, and speculate about, and argue about, is what they are saying about the real world. Often, the answer to this question is “Nothing”, we are to simply enjoy the story. But, just as often, there is a further point to the work, and figuring out what this might be is a legitimate critical enterprise. In fact, I would argue that when we talk about the “meaning of the work” in this way, over and above the meaning of the words (which we presumably understand already), we are essentially talking about the illocutionary force of the work. The author has used certain words to describe certain (perhaps fictional) events. Why? Is the work a satire, or a morality play, or an encomium to some person or other? Is it supposed to make us cry, or laugh, or blush, or rethink certain deeply held convictions? All of these have traditionally been held to be legitimate purposes of a work of literature, and we can judge a given work on how well it serves its purpose. We may well badly misinterpret a work of literature if we are completely unaware of what illocutionary force it is intended to have.

3.11 Lamarque and Olsen: Felicity Conditions

Lamarque and Olsen argue that even if it is agreed that "storytelling" requires knowledge of the speaker's intentions, this alone is not enough to prove that it is an illocutionary act:

> . . . irony, metaphor, conversational implicature, joke-telling, literary allusion, and satire might be usefully illuminated by Gricean intentions, though without supposing that each case involves a distinct illocutionary act. So it is with fiction. And normally the specifications of illocutionary acts requires more than just Gricean intentions, including, for example, what Austin called "felicity condition". The presence of Gricean intentions is not sufficient to determine a fictive illocutionary act. [105]

105. Lamarque, Peter and Olsen, Stein H., *Truth, Fiction, and Literature,* 45

This is quite right: the hallmark of illocution is to be *doing something by saying something*. A locutionary act is performed, with some intent in mind. There is no doubt that a story is a locutionary act. It is has all the expected phonetic, phatic and rhetic qualities of a locutionary act. But there is equally no doubt that a story may be put to many different uses. Suppose I were to say to you:

> A train travels directly from Chicago to New York City at a speed of one hundred miles an hour. At the same time, another train leaves New York City traveling directly towards Chicago on a parallel track at a speed of 80 miles an hour. When will the trains pass one another?

And suppose your response was:

> That's impossible, there is no direct route from Chicago to New York City

It is safe to say that you have misconstrued my utterance. I was giving you a math problem, and you took it as a statement about actual train routes. You missed the point of my narrative, and this failure of uptake strikes me as a matter of missing the illocution. A story might be used to warn, or amuse, or threaten, or entertain, or illustrate or persuade, just as an assertion might. We often do things by telling stories, and this, it seems to me, is enough to show that storytelling is a matter of illocution.

3.12 Fiction and Style

I should point out that I am not arguing that a locutionary act, or a bare proposition, cannot have aesthetic properties at all (although in chapter two I suggested that there were

problems with ascribing aesthetic properties to them), I am only claiming that when such a proposition is used with some illocutionary force, it may gain (or indeed lose) some aesthetic properties. An illocutionary act can be judged from an aesthetic point of view. So we might enjoy a particular story, for example, because of its internal narrative properties: interesting events, complicated plot, vivid characters. But if we come to realize that this very same story is a work of satire, intended to criticize and perhaps ridicule some real world events, we may appreciate it all the more (or alternatively, we may like it less. We could say for example that it works as a story, but falls flat as satire). We may, in short, judge how well the author's intended illocutionary project was fulfilled. We may deem such an illocutionary act as clever, or elegant, or leaden or trite. An illocutionary act may be judged aesthetically just as any action may be judged aesthetically. This point is, oddly enough, supported by Kendall Walton in the very essay I have quoted from above. He begins by saying:

> . . . style attributions are peculiarly alien to objects which are not products of human action. What is the style of a tulip, or an alpine meadow, or a pristine lake in the high Sierras? . . . To think of an object as having a style is to think of it as a product of human action.[106]

And he then proceeds to show how fictions do not need to be seen as products of human action; they can be understood and enjoyed without reference to any human intention, illocutionary or otherwise. He concludes the essay with:

> Finally, our result suggests a striking contrast between (fictional) representation and expression. Expression and style are closely linked; it is not easy to imagine one without the other. The explanation may be that expression, like style, is to be understood in terms of human action. Fictionality, on the other hand, is a less human attribute of works of art.[107]

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106. Walton, Kendall. "Fiction, Fiction Making and Styles of Fictionality" 84
107. ibid. 85

This, as far as I can tell, concedes my point: A work of fiction (which may or may not have aesthetic properties on its own) will gain certain stylistic properties, when put to a particular use by an author. And certainly a work's style is an object of aesthetic and critical attention. That works of literature, including fiction and stories, do have styles hardly needs defense. The stories of Poe differ stylistically from those of John Updike. So stories must be the product of human intentions.

Once we have admitted this, that a story is a product of human intention, a piece of language that is created with a particular purpose and designed to be appreciated by an audience, an audience that must be suitably prepared to receive the story, then I'm not sure how we can deny the possibility that a story can have some illocutionary force, and that this illocutionary force is an essential part of the story. A critic who wonders what the storyteller was "really trying to say" has not been distracted by irrelevant material, but is responding to the story as intended. On the other hand, the critic who pays attention to the bare propositions that have been uttered may miss the point of the work.

Chapter 4: Literature and assertion

4.1 Language in use

I have shown that the NTT is rather heavily committed to a presentationalist view of literature, and that this is why they limit critical attention to the locution, since the locutionary properties of a piece of language are the the ones that are immediately present to the reader. Of course, I have also shown that it is not entirely clear that the semantic properties of a piece of language are immediately present in the same way that its phonetic properties are; the NTT, I argue, glosses over some crucial differences between literature and other art forms.

In any event, I have shown that the NTT has given no good reason for ignoring the illocutionary act. A bare proposition may have some aesthetic properties, but so may a proposition in use. And it is language in use that most captures our critical attention. Literary devices such as irony and metaphor are clever *uses* of language. In addition, we expect works of literature, such as novels and plays, to confront the world, to respond to and effect the course of events, not to retreat from them into aesthetic contemplation. As I have said before, the philosophical novel is hardly a rarity. In this chapter, then, I will look at some of the ways in which works of literature do assert truth, and I will examine the arguments of the NTT that claim that these assertions are not real assertions, only apparent ones.

4.2 Metaphor: Searle versus Davidson

Metaphor presents a particular problem for the NTT because, while it is unarguably a poetic device, it also seems, equally unarguably, to play some informative role: we describe things using metaphors. In addition, a metaphor seems to exist as a matter of speaker meaning not proposition meaning. That is, a metaphor results as a particular way of using a proposition. For example, the proposition "Richard is a lion," is only a metaphor depending on how it is used, who says it, to whom the speaker is referring, etc. There are some uses where this statement is not a metaphor (where Richard is an actual lion, for example.) If I am correct, and the NTT sees literature purely as a matter of locution, then this apparent illocutionary element of metaphor counts against it. But the issue is unclear. There are many different accounts of how metaphors work, and little agreement as to which one is correct. I will focus on two prominent accounts, that of John Searle and that of Donald Davidson. I don't suggest that these are the best, but they are among the best known, and they both invoke speech act theory in their accounts, which makes them relevant to my argument. In addition, they divide the terrain neatly in half, each representing one side of a major dispute. Searle claims that metaphors assert propositions, while Davidson denies this. Thus their disagreement will shed light on my own thesis.

Searle explains metaphor entirely in terms of indirect assertion; when using a metaphor we say one thing, while meaning another:

> The problem of explaining how metaphors work is a special case of the general problem of explaining how speaker meaning and sentence or word meaning come apart. It is a special case, that is, of the problem of how it is possible to say one thing and mean something else., where one succeeds in communicating what one means, even though

> both the speaker and the hearer know that the meanings of the words uttered by the speaker do not exactly and literally express what the speaker meant. [108]

We have seen the indirect speech act before, where the question “Is it hot in here?” is used to issue the command “Open the window.” Metaphor differs crucially from this case in that in order for the command to be properly issued, the question must itself be successful, whereas in a metaphor, the literal assertion needn't be true, and is often false. It is often the failure of the literal assertion that makes the metaphor possible; we understand that “Sally is a block of ice” (to use Searle's example) is a metaphor, because we know that she isn't, she's a person. Of course, not all metaphors work in this way. The overt statement may be perfectly true, as in the case of “No man is an island,” which is literally true as well as metaphorically true. Be this as it may, Searle's larger point is that a metaphor involves the assertion of one proposition in order to assert indirectly another.

The standard objection to Searle's view is that, on the one hand, it is often not the case that there is a single clear proposition which a metaphor intends to assert, while on the other, if there is a clear proposition to be asserted, why did the speaker not simply assert it, rather than opting for a metaphorical expression? In short, the paraphrasing of a metaphor is either impossible or irrelevant.

These are the two problems that I have mentioned above, the problems of paraphrase and banality. The “heresy of paraphrase” (as it has been called) is the claim that to paraphrase a piece of literary language is to destroy it. If someone asks, for example, what Romeo meant when he said “Juliet is the sun,” then we might try to express the content of that assertion in different

108. Searle, John R., "Metaphor" in *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts (*Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985)*,* 78

words. Romeo meant, we might say, that Juliet is the center of his universe, that she is luminous and warm, that other women pale before her the way stars are drowned out by the sun's light in the daytime, and so on. But of course, we will never find the perfect paraphrase. Whatever we say will leave something out, or perhaps add something irrelevant. In fact, the best way, perhaps the *only* way of expressing what Romeo intended to express, is to say exactly what he did: "Juliet is the sun." Literary language means exactly what it says, and no paraphrase will succeed in communicating that meaning as well as the original.

The problem of banality is related, but perhaps even stronger. Here the claim is that even if an adequate paraphrase were found, it would prove to be trivial and uninteresting. Even if a complete list of all the qualities implied by "Juliet is the sun" were compiled, it would consist of quite ordinary sentiments: Juliet is beautiful, Juliet is nice, Juliet is important to me, and so on. What is being said is quite banal. It is *how* it is said that makes it worth hearing, that makes it *poetry*.

4.3 Davidson on metaphor

Donald Davidson addresses these points in his essay "What Metaphors Mean", in which he claims that there is no "hidden" meaning in a metaphor, there is just the proposition (often false) that is literally expressed:

> This paper is concerned with what metaphors mean, and its thesis is that metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation mean, and nothing more. [109]

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109. Davidson, Donald, "What Metaphors Mean" in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A.P. Martinich (Oxford University Press 1990) 233

So the reason that a metaphor can't be paraphrased, is because there is no propositional content to paraphrase. But, he goes on to say:

> This is not, of course, to deny that a metaphor has a point, and that this point can be brought out by using further words.[110]

So, while it is perfectly appropriate to "explain" a metaphor by giving something like a paraphrase of it "metaphorical content," it is a mistake to see this paraphrase as somehow being the content, or the meaning, of the metaphorical proposition. Davidson makes use of speech act theory to support his claim:

> I depend on the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do. I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use. It is something brought off by the imaginative employment of words and sentences and depends entirely on the ordinary meanings of those words, and hence on the ordinary meanings of the sentences they comprise.[111]

So a metaphor is *doing* something, not merely conveying some cognitive content. But what exactly does a metaphor do? He elaborates:

> In the past, those who have denied that metaphor has a cognitive content in addition to the literal have often been out to show that metaphor is confusing, merely emotive, unsuited to serious, scientific or philosophical discourse. My views should not be associated with this tradition. Metaphor is a legitimate device, not only in literature, but in science, philosophy and the law: it is effective in praise and abuse, prayer and promotion, description and prescription.[112]

And, more directly:

> A metaphor makes us attend to some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things.[113]

110. ibid, 233
111. ibid, 234
112. ibid. 234
113. ibid. 235

But metaphor accomplishes all this without the usual mechanisms of assertive discourse. There is simply no propositional content beyond the surface that a metaphor expresses, indirectly or otherwise. In fact, metaphor is best compared to various non-linguistic phenomena:

> A metaphor does its work through other intermediaries- to suppose that it can be effective only by conveying a coded message is like thinking that a joke or a dream makes some statement which a clever interpreter can restate in plain prose. Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact- but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact.[114]

And further:

> If someone draws his finger along the coastline on a map, or mentions the beauty and deftness of a line in a Picasso etching, how many things are drawn to your attention? You might list a great many, but you could not finish since the idea of finishing would have no clear application. How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph?. None, an infinity or one great unstatable fact? Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture.[115]

So asking for the "meaning" of a metaphor is wrongheaded. We can talk about its vividness, its power, its aptness, its insight, but none of this will involve an uncovering of its propositional content. Metaphor is language put to a radically different use than assertion. A metaphor, according to Davidson, *shows us* something, without *telling us* anything.

4.4 Metaphor and illocution

I need to say two things at this point. First, I find Davidson's theory of metaphor quite plausible, since it explains both why paraphrasing a metaphor is impossible (because there is no

114. ibid. 235
115. ibid. 236

special content to paraphrase), and also why attempts at paraphrase are unavoidable (since there is a "point" to a metaphor, which might need some kind of explanation). Secondly, if Davidson's account of metaphor is true, it is bad news for any theory, such as mine, that claims that truth is aesthetically relevant. Davidson shows how one central literary device, metaphor, can be explained without reference to truth, even though on the surface it seems to involve the making of assertions. Such an account of literature in general would put an end to any "truth theories" of literature such as mine. Let me quickly address this point before moving on to the notions of theme and thesis.

I think it can be said that, while Davidson's theory of metaphor certainly counts against my own thesis, it is not obvious that it lends support to the NTT. After all, for Davidson, metaphor is a matter of *use*. A proposition by itself, outside of any context, cannot be a metaphor. Metaphor is relative to a speaker and a context, whereas the NTT, if I am correct, locates all of the aesthetically relevant properties of a work of literature at the propositional level *not* at the level of use. In addition, Davidson clearly states that there are non-literary uses of metaphor; they have a role to play in science, philosophy and law, he says. A metaphor might contribute to our knowledge, even if it doesn't simply express any truth. This would tend to count against any strongly non-cognitivist view of literature, of which the NTT is one. Furthermore, the "point" of a metaphor will usually take us beyond the stated proposition; a metaphor shows us something about its object. "Sally is a block of ice" presumably shows us something *about Sally*. But the fact that this metaphor shows us something about Sally is *not* an "internal property" of the metaphor. We only understand the point of a metaphor when we see its connection to something outside of it. The NTT, on the other hand, insists that we limit our

attention to those properties of a piece of language which are internal to it (which is why they reject illocutionary properties as relevant, such properties go beyond the proposition). So it is not clear that the NTT finds any support in Davidson either.

4.5 The theme/thesis distinction

Metaphor is one instance where the problem of paraphrase comes in to play. Though not all literary works use metaphor, and some may not use any figures of speech at all, we might apply the lessons we learned from metaphor to literature in general . We might say for example that , in the same way that the content of "Juliet is the sun" is something like "Juliet is beautiful," the "moral" of *MacBeth* is something like "crime doesn't pay" or "power corrupts." This does seem to be the "truth" that Shakespeare asserted by writing this play. But of course these morals are hardly worth uttering at all. We hardly need *MacBeth* to get us to agree that power corrupts. History demonstrates that claim over and over. We can happily admit that this is in fact the moral of the story, while at the same time wondering whether there was more to the story than simply the communication of some trivial platitude.

This, of course, is the problem that the NTT is most interested in confronting. If the reader is primarily interested in whatever truths a work of literature can be construed as communicating , they are ignoring the specifically *literary* character of the work. If we were to not "waste our time" reading *MacBeth*, or to read it only once, because we "know what it's about," then we will have robbed ourselves of a profound literary experience. But of course,

serious readers don't do this, even those who defend the notion of literary truth. We go back to *MacBeth* again and again, even though presumably its lesson is imparted on the first reading. The truth, therefore, can't be the point of reading the play. If we reduce a work of literature to a “moral” we impoverish it, just as when we paraphrase a metaphor, we destroy its particularly *metaphorical* value.

This is stronger than the claim that truth is not an essential property of literature. The NTT has argued that some works of literature may indeed contain or express truths, but this is mere accident. No work of literature *needs* to contain truths in order to be literature. This is quite true, but I don't see that it has any bearing on the question of whether truth is aesthetically relevant. After all, no painting *needs* to contain any blue pigment, but for those paintings that do, it is perfectly fair to mention its blueness in any appraisal of it. Or, more decisively, a painting doesn't *need* to represent anything, but surely, it is worth mentioning in a critical response to a painting whether it is representational or not.

But the claim of the NTT is stronger. The argument is that truth is irrelevant because we *never* need to refer to truth to explain our liking of a given work. Compare the “truth” of a novel with the “representativeness” of a portrait. The “representational” aspect of a painting can be known and appreciated without comparing the painting to its object, a comparison we are usually in no position to make anyway. “Representation” is not simply a matter of visual faithfulness to an object, it is broader than that. The *Mona Lisa* represents, not merely an individual woman, but Womanhood itself, perhaps, or something else; exactly what is represented will be the subject of critical dispute. But this dispute will not be settled simply by

pointing out some feature of the model that the painting accurately depicts. It will be settled by deeper examination of the painting itself.

In the same way, even when a work of literature does assert or purport to assert some true statement, our appreciation of the work will not be reducible to the confirmation of that statement. Rather, it will be a matter of engaging more deeply in the ideas and concepts the work has utilized. Deciding what a work of literature represents is not a matter of evaluating its statements for accuracy. And so a work of literature may be about war, or love or justice, but its being about these things will not be a matter of asserting anything. We must distinguish between what a work is about, and to what, if anything, it asserts. We must, in other words, distinguish between a work's theme and its thesis. Beardsley defines the terms thusly, in the context of analyzing Wallace Stevens' poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird":

> Now if we ask what this poem is "about," there may be an easy answer and a hard answer. Or there may be an easy answer that is not the one we are after, and for the real question no answer at all. The poem is about blackbirds, snow, shadows, icicles, rhythms: these things are in its world, because they are referred to by its words; they are, in one sense, the subject of the poem. But that is not what puzzles us about the poem. We want to know whether there is some general idea that connects all these diverse references to blackbirds, some concept under which we can relate them: what is the *theme* of the poem? And we want to know whether there is some general statement that the poem may be said to afford, or to contain, some observation or reflection about life or art or man or reality: what is the doctrine, or ideological content, or *thesis* of the poem?[116]

So there are several ways of specifying what the poem is "about," from the painfully obvious to the more abstract and vague. Interpreting a work of literature consists of identifying the theme and thesis of that work, if it has any. But how are we to identify the theme, as distinct from the thesis or the subject, of the work? Beardsley elaborates:

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116. Beardsley, Monroe, *Aesthetics,* 402

> A theme is something named by an abstract noun or phrase: the futility of war, the mutability of joy; heroism, inhumanity. . . we refer to the subject by a concrete noun or nominative construction: a war, a love affair, the Aztecs, the taming of the shrew. The subject of *Oedipus Rex* includes Oedipus, Jocasta, Thebes- the *objects* in the play. Or the subject is the investigation of the cause of a plague- the *action* of the play. But the themes are pride, divine power, fate, irremediable evil, the driving spirit of man.
>
> A theme, then, is something that can be thought about, or dwelt upon, but it is not something that can be called true or false. What I shall mean by the perhaps awkward term "thesis," however, is precisely something about, or in, the work that *can* be called true or false, if anything can. . . We speak of the philosophical, religious, ethical and social ideas in Milton, Shaw, and Sartre.[117]

The thesis of a work, if it has one, is a proposition that is stated either explicitly or implicitly. I have used Aesop's fables a a standard example of stories that have an explicit thesis. A work that has a thesis presumably intends to persuade its reader that its thesis is true. But the reader need not be persuaded in order to be said to enjoy the work. Even in a simple fable, we may disagree with the intended moral, and yet appreciate the story. We may side with Aesop's grasshopper against his ants, preferring a life of an itinerant musician to a life of joyless, if prudent, toil, and we may even point to the story as illustrating the reason for our choice. The story may prove to us something very different than the author intended, but this in no way detracts form the story. (Indeed we may insist that a great work of art be variously interpretable in just this way, and be disappointed by a work that has a simple, unambiguous moral.) What is important, however, is the story's *theme*; what engages our attention is that the story is about the conflict between two different ways of life.

What makes this an important distinction for the NTT is the suggestion that whenever we think it is the truth of a work's thesis we are interested in, it can be shown that what we are in fact interested in is its theme. If we ever explain our liking for a novel in terms of belief, it can presumably be shown that the thesis the novel expresses is either not one we believe (and there

117. ibid 404

may well be real disagreement over what the thesis in question actually is), or else shown to be rather pedestrian and banal. If Tolstoy had done nothing but proven that “War is bad,” he would hardly be hailed as a genius. His genius lies in his ability to conjure up for the reader the experience of war and those subjected to it.

In addition, the theme/thesis distinction explains why we might continue to like a work of literature even after we have stopped agreeing with it. Our beliefs may have changed, but our engagement with the themes the work brings forth persists. We may evolve from pacifist to war-monger, for example, thus coming to disagree with the thesis of *War and Peace*, but as long as we have any interest in war, the novel will engage us. So a theme is internal to the work, and can be grasped all at once, not being in need of confirmation or falsification, unlike a thesis, which refers to the real world.

This distinction between a work's “theme” and its “thesis” does seem to give the NTT what it wants. Literature can be “about” the world without stating a truth or even referring to the world. A work of literature displays various concepts and ideas for us, in varying degrees of vividness and clarity, but it does not compel our belief or assent to any of these ideas. And so truth is irrelevant to the success of a novel *as a novel*. As with metaphor, the work of literature can be construed as *showing* us something without *telling us* anything. The question of truth simply does not arise.

4.6 Aboutness

Lamarque and Olsen argue similarly in *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, in which they seek to to describe how a work of literature can be "about" the world without asserting any facts. Speaking of what they call the "propositional theory" of literature, they write:

> This Propositional Theory of Literary Truth has recently been represented by theorists who have reacted against the post-modernist claims about the lack of meaning in literature. These critics have spent considerable intellectual energy arguing (successfully) against the basic assumptions of the post-modernist position. Unfortunately, they have had little new to contribute to the formulation of the Propositional Theory, and they have tended to ignore some useful distinctions, such as Beardsley's distinction between *theme* and *thesis*, the distinction between asserted and unasserted propositions, between trivial and non-trivial truths, between the claim that an interpretive statement is true of a literary work and the claim that an interpretive statement is true also of the world. [118]

Lamarque and Olsen are sympathetic to any attack on post-modernism, which they believe would rob literature of any human interest at all, reducing the literary work to a self-referential system of signs, but they do not think that in order for literature to have human interest, it must state truths, however indirectly. The Propositional Theory they state thusly:

> The theory presents two claims. First, a literary work implies propositions which can be construed as general propositions about the world. Second, these propositions are to be construed as involved in true or false clams about the world. In the terminology of *theme* and *thesis* the theory would be that a literary work develops not only a theme but also a thesis and that part of the appreciation of a literary work as a work of art is an assessment of the truth value of this thesis. [119]

There are perhaps non-trivial problems with explaining just how, exactly, a work of literature is supposed to "imply" propositions of a general kind about the world, but Lamarque and Olsen are willing to grant that some useful sense of "implies" is available, and in fact critics often talk

118. Lamarque, Peter and Olsen, Stein Haugom, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, 322
119. ibid. 325

about what the work "shows us about the world." It is the second part of the theory that they take exception to, the claim that assessing the truths of these implied statements is somehow a necessary part of the critical response to the work:

> . . . thematic statements, explicit as well as implicit, can be assigned significance and thus be understood without being construed as asserted. To understand the proposition 'the best human hopes and aspirations are always thwarted by forces beyond human control', which can be abstracted through interpretation from the Lydgate story in *Middlemarch*, one does not have to construe it as an assertion, either of the author or the work. There is consequently nothing in the way that a reader assigns significance to thematic statements, implicit or explicit, which in itself could be a reason for accepting the Propositional Theory. The question of truth is separate from the question of intelligibility. [120]

This is the point made by Isenberg in "The Problem of Belief," namely, that in order to take any attitude towards a proposition, we must first understand it, and so that understanding is distinct from our belief. And Lamarque and Olsen agree with Isenberg that what makes a statement true is not what makes it of interest to the reader:

> . . . what makes the Propositional Theory attractive is not that it attempts to establish that literary works state truths about human life, but that they state *interesting* rather than *trivial* truths, Judgements about interest are made with regard to content and are independent of judgements concerning truth. What gives the Lydgate story in *Middlemarch* depth is not so much that it implies a true proposition, but that it can be interpreted as about humanly interesting concerns- for example the nature and consequences of noble human desires. [121]

So a great work of literature is *about* the world, but "aboutness" is a broader category than truth or reference, and does not involve these two in any essential way. Lamarque and Olsen list the ways in which a work can be *about* something:

> There are three kinds of cases where we might speak of what a work is about: (1) being about some real object (person, place, or event), as when we say that *Bleak House* is

120. ibid. 329
121. ibid. 330

> about London or *Henry VI* is about the War of the Roses; (2) being about some fictional object (person, place or event), as when we say that *Smiley's People* is about Smiley's people and *The Case of the Speckled Band* is about. . . well the case of the speckled band; and (3) being about some theme or conception, as when we say that *Othello* is about jealousy or *Right Ho, Jeeves* is about being a wealthy and feckless bachelor playing waggish tricks on his friends.[122]

So a work of literature, even a work of literary fiction, may be about real things. Even so, truth will not play an important role in this kind of "aboutness." After all, as Lamarque and Olsen point out, true description is not necessary to ensure that a fiction is about a real object. They point to the example of the Emperor of Lilliput in *Gulliver's Travels*, who is intended as a satire on George I. Swift is referring to George I with his description of the Emperor, but he does not describe him accurately, or indeed at all. The work is *about* George I (at least that part of the work is) without truth coming into play at all. And truth is not sufficient, since if a fictional character happened to describe accurately a real person, that by itself would not make the story *about* that person; the author would have needed to have the intention of referring to the real person for it to be legitimately said that the story was *about* them. As Lamarque and Olsen go on to say, being *about* a real object and being *about* a fictional object (as well as being *about* a theme) are much the same in this context:

> . . . when we adopt the Fregean attitude to fiction, when we engage in imaginative involvement and make-believe, our attention is directed in each case to something more like what Aristotle calls kinds (or universals) than to particulars. What helps to blur the three applications of 'about' is the aspectival nature of fictional content. . . according to this notion, just as fictional objects and events owe their identity to the multiple aspects, descriptive and evaluative, through which they are presented, so too real objects make their appearance in works of fiction, not through a fully extensional presentation, but only under some set of aspects or another.[123]

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122. ibid. 123
123. ibid. 123

Even when a real person or event is referred to in a fiction, truth is not an issue. The author may choose to describe or misdescribe the real person any way they want, for whatever literary purpose they have in mind. The author is not bound by the facts of the matter concerning the real person. When used in such a way, as fodder for a work of fiction, a real person becomes something like a representative or stand-in for whatever qualities or themes the author wants to express. Attila the Hun might be used in a story as a symbol of war, or something, and the actual facts of Atilla's life will not affect this use; archaeological evidence that Attila was in fact a peace loving farmer would not spoil the story. So while stories do include real objects and events, it only includes them under some aspect and not in the fullness of truth. The truth does not govern what is appropriate in the story.

4.7 Recapitulation

What I have showed in the last few sections is that the problems of paraphrase and banality do seem to suggest that the NTT is correct. The literary critic who worries about extracting a statement from a work of literature, and, worse, worries about the truth of that statement is simply barking up the wrong tree. Whatever conclusion they reach, they will have ignored the specifically literary qualities of the piece of language in question. Their energy is better spent engaging with the work itself.

In addition, the NTT seems to explain away those cases where we do seem to be interested in the truth: in such cases we are interested in the themes raised by the work of

literature, not (or not especially) in the thesis of the work. And where we are interested in the thesis, it is not because it expresses some truth about the world, but because it helps us engage more deeply with the theme.

In short, the problems of paraphrase and banality are not in fact problems for the NTT, and this is a point in favor of that theory. If I hope to show that the NTT is wrong, I will have to show that these problems do not prove that truth is aesthetically irrelevant. Let us start by saying something about each in turn, again, mostly negative. I will argue that difficulty in paraphrasing does not imply a disregard for the assertion a work of literature might be making, and then try to show that limiting our attention to a work's theme does not solve the problem of banality. Finally I will take a closer look at the relation between the truth of a statement and the "interestingness' of that statement, and I will argue that they are not as far apart as the NTT claims.

4.8 In defense of paraphrase

There may be cases in which no simple paraphrase is possible of a given work of literature. Indeed, it may be the case that *most* works of literature resist paraphrase. This cannot be taken, it seems to me, as proof of the inadequacy or irrelevance of paraphrase. It may well be that the mark of a great work of literature, or of an interesting use of language, is that it strives to be hard to pin down in exactly this way. The literary works that most impress us are the ones that cultivate a fruitful ambiguity. That is, the fact that no single, simple paraphrase will do does not mean that the attempt to paraphrase the work distracts us from the work, or take us away

from the work, but rather is a way of becoming more deeply involved and interested in the work. The paraphraser's work may never be done, but this does not mean it is pointless. To tease out whatever meanings and assertions a work seems to be making is perfectly good critical practice. An example will illustrate the point.

In chapter two, I cited Isenberg's use of one of Nietzche's aphorisms, namely "The relatives of a suicide take it in ill part that the deceased was not more considerate of their feelings and their reputations." Isenberg claimed that this aphorism was self-contained and complete by itself, and was not best understood as a statement about the world. To "check it against the facts" would be an improper response to this aphorism, says Isenberg; whatever power it has does not depend upon its being *true*. And indeed, perhaps this aphorism is particularly resistant to paraphrase and verification. But of course, Nietzsche was a philosopher. He was presumably trying to persuade us of something with this aphorism. So either the aphorism does have some assertoric force, or else the distinction between literature and philosophy becomes blurred. After all, Isenberg has shown us that the philosophical use of a statement has nothing to do with truth. If one of the purposes of the NTT is to emphasize the autonomy of literature and to distinguish it sharply from science and philosophy, then Isenberg's example will simply not do. But there is a deeper point to be made here. Paraphrasing the aphorism, Isenberg says, destroys its power, even if it results in a statement that is closer to being true. But I'm not sure this is the case. A different example might make this clear.

In the course of Plato's *Euthyphro* , in which Socrates and Euthyphro discuss the nature of piety, Socrates utters the following:

> I mean to say that the holy has been acknowledged by us to be loved of God because it is holy, not to be holy because it is loved. [124]

This has the force of an aphorism, I think. It stands by itself, even though it was said in the context of a longer discussion (presumably the aphorism Isenberg quotes appeared in the context of a larger work). It is a perplexing assertion, calling into doubt widely held opinions about our moral obligations, opinions that survived the change from belief in the Greek gods to the arrival Christianity. Indeed, any moral or legal theory that holds right action to consist of obedience to a legitimate authority will be stopped short by this aphorism. And it presents the same challenge to a reader who doesn't believe in any god or care much about piety. And of course there is no question of "verifying" the truth, since we have no way of finding out what the gods might like or dislike. We might agree, then, with Isenberg that the power and effectiveness of this statement is not a matter of its truth.

But of course this would be a terrible mistake. The purpose of this dialogue, or any of Plato's dialogues, is precisely to get us closer to the truth. If we disagree with this statement, then we must explain our disagreement, just as Euthyphro must. We can't simply "aestheticize" the statement and "contemplate it for its own sake." All the various literary elements of the dialogue- the plot, the drama, the vividly drawn character of Euthyphro- all have has their primary purpose the education of the reader. Plato makes certain assertions that the reader will either agree or disagree with, and he also shows us certain things about how an argument works, or fails to work, given the personalities of the participants. To simply say "what a lovely drama" and be untouched by the philosophy is to miss the point of the exercise.

124. Plato, *Euthyphro* trans. Paul Shorey, in *Plato: Collected Dialogues* , eds. Hamilton, Edith and Huntington, Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 10a

There is the assertion, and there is the context which Plato brings to life so vividly. The discussion of piety is not merely an academic exercise, as Socrates has been accused of impiety and is on trial for his life, while Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father for murder, believing that to be the pious thing to do. The argument then, is not a mere recitation of facts and evidence, but a rather emotional, if subtly so, discussion. If Euthyphro is wrong about what piety is, then he is about to commit a serious error, prosecuting his own father. And so he prefers not to think too hard about what Socrates says. Plato wants us to realize this, that "knowing the truth" is not simply a matter of being persuaded by evidence, but the willingness to accept conclusions that might be unpleasant. This of course, is why a writer might choose to couch an assertion in "literary" language.

4.9 Theme, thesis and banality

Even if our paraphrastic efforts are successful, even if we manage to extract a satisfactory statement from a work of literature, the result will often be less than edifying. As Noel Carroll puts it, the problem of banality is that the knowledge that literature is said to give:

> . . . hardly counts for much, amounting to little more than truisms, such as that patricide is evil. . . Compared to the natural and social sciences and to history, art and literature do not produce new knowledge; they do not make discoveries. They recycle truisms that reader s already know.[125]

125. Carroll, Noel, “The Wheel of Virtue” 4

More needs to be said here, obviously, but it must be noted that banality is not a problem that is limited to a work's thesis. The NTT would be quite wrong to say that banality can be avoided by limiting our attention to the theme rather than the thesis. Themes may be banal as well.

Thus, if I am asked what the theme of *Macbeth* is, I can honestly reply “murder.” Or perhaps “ambition.” Or even “the corrupting influence of power.” Any of these will do as possible themes of the play, but I can hardly be credited with fine critical judgement for seeing them. The theme of *War and Peace* is war, and also peace. The theme of *The Iliad* is war, as is the theme of the movie *Star Wars*. It is not at all obvious that teasing out the theme of a work is any more important than deciphering its thesis, in terms of critical appreciation. And the theme confronts us with many of the same problems as does the thesis. There may be many candidates for “the” theme of a work. Is *The Iliad* about war, period? Or about heroism in war, or the capriciousness of war, or the futility of war, or all of these, plus others I failed to mention? Knowing what the work is about cannot be reduced to knowledge of its theme any more than knowledge of its thesis, or else no one would ever have to read past the title of *War and Peace.* If banality is a problem, it is one that affects a work's theme as well as its thesis.

Isenberg made the claim that simply being true does not make a proposition interesting. What makes a work of literature interesting, then, is not that it says something true, but that it treats of some important theme. But some themes will be interesting, some will not. Some ways of describing a theme will do justice to a work, some will not. Merely having a theme does not guarantee a successful work. But if we must decide which themes are interesting, which ones are worth our attention, I see no reason why we may not do this with truths. Some truths will be

interesting, others not, and we may perhaps judge a work on how well it persuades us that what it asserts is worth asserting.

4.10 Truth and interest

The NTT argues that truth is not sufficient for literary value. Much of what is true is not worth mentioning. Isenberg argues as follows:

> We do not consider the fact that we believe something a good enough reason for saying it. If we did, we should be uttering stupid truths all day long. A belief, to deserve utterance, must be to the point or purpose; or it must have some quality of interest and originality. There are distinctive cognitive values in ideas over and above their truth; and these are what warrant their publication.[126]

So the truth of a statement is one thing, its relevance quite another, its originality another still, and there may be more cognitive values besides. And, argues Isenberg, the fact that there are truths that are not worth uttering, for any reason in any context, even as part of a fictional story, shows that truth is not the cognitive value that the literary artist should be interested in. It is not obvious to me that this is the case however. While the truth of a statement and the "interestingness" of that statement are two different things, they are not unrelated. We can make up any fantastic world we want, filled with wondrous creatures and impossible events, and such a world might be quite interesting. But if we describe some astounding chain of events, and then further show how these events are either true or possible (that is they *could be true,*) then we have perhaps added some degree of interest.

126. Isenberg, Arnold, "The Problem of Belief" 400

We can say something stronger, I think. It is often the purpose of a work of literature to show the reader that whatever topic the work treats *is of interest to the reader*. Sometimes this purpose is explicitly stated, as in the case of Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman*, where we are told of Willy Loman that:

> He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. [127]

Perhaps we were not inclined to pay attention to such a person, but Miller strives to persuade us that we ought to. More often, this purpose will remain implicit, but it is fair to say I think, that one thing an author must do is persuade the reader that whatever she is talking about is *worth* talking about. And if she fails to persuade us of this, her work will suffer in our eyes.

4.11 Truth and constraint

The NTT argues that paraphrasing a work of literature in an attempt to state the "real meaning" of the work only emphasizes that it is not an assertion that we are interested in with respect to literature. The paraphrase will be just as *true* as the original, but it will not be as *beautiful*. What we want is the particular work of literature with all of its subtle details of sound and connotation and mood, none of which is captured in a paraphrase of the works "moral." From this, the NTT concludes that truth is therefore irrelevant. This, I would like to argue against. Simply because truth is not sufficient for literary value does not mean it is irrelevant.

127. Miller, Arthur, *Death of a Salesman*, (New York: Penguin, 1976), 140

One way of making this case is to look at it in terms of literary constraint. Poetry is perhaps the best example to use here, since poetry is language that is under heavy constraint. A poem has a theme, and perhaps a thesis, but also usually a rhyme scheme and a metrical structure, and is often much shorter than a work of prose. All of these constraints are aesthetically relevant. What we enjoy about a poem is how it meets all of these stringent requirements, and yet seems to be effortless. A poem must meet all of these requirements at once, and no single one carries the day. Suppose a poet is composing a poem and is stuck on a line. Suppose, to use a concrete example, that Joyce Kilmer had gotten stuck while writing "Trees" and had only gotten as far as:

> I think that I shall never see/ a poem lovely as . . .

before becoming stumped. He has chosen the structure of the poem (rhymed couplets) and the theme (the beauty of nature with which the works of man cannot compare), and he needs a word that fits these requirements. It must be one syllable, be the name of some naturally occurring object and it must rhyme with "see." "A flower" will not work, though flowers are quite lovely; they are "on theme", but would throw off the rhyme and meter. "A ski" will also not work. It rhymes, but does not fit thematically. He finally settles on "a tree" (although he could just as well have settled on "a bee" I suppose) and the line is complete. The final word had to meet two different criteria, one thematic, one phonetic. Neither by itself was sufficient. May we conclude from this that rhyme is aesthetically irrelevant? After all, mere rhyme does not make a great poem, it must be a rhyme that involves an appropriate theme. Or shall we argue that theme itself is irrelevant, since merely having a "great" theme does not make a great work of literature, there

must be some “poetic” value too, rhyme, meter, or other mellifluous phonetic properties. This is of course ridiculous, but this is how the NTT argues with regard to truth. The fact that not just *any* truth will do, but that we insist on an *interesting* truth, does not mean that the interestingness is more important than the truth. I would argue that there is reason to think that they cannot be so easily separated.

4.12 Quality and manner

Defenders of the NTT often talk as if an interest in the truth of a statement precludes an interest in any other quality a statement might have. Recall if you will Poe, whom I quoted in the first chapter (1.5) as declaring that the requirements of truth conflict with the requirements of poetry. Truth requires terseness and simpleness of expression, and would be endangered by the rhetorical flourishes of poetry. A statement would most likely have to sacrifice some of its truth in order to succeed as poetry, whereas a poem that strived to be true would most likely have to avoid the more outrageous, and attractive, forms of poetic expression. If we are interested in truth for its own sake, then we do not care, says the NTT, whether that truth is interesting. But this is simply not true.

Recall here the work of H.P. Grice, whom I mentioned in chapter one. He claimed that any exchange of information, any conversation no matter how simple, involves cooperation between the participants. This "cooperation principle," as he stated it, consisted of various maxims, requiring us to be informative, but not too informative, and to be relevant and clear in

our speech exchanges. We might apply these insights to literature in several ways. A. P. Martinich, for example, explains literary fiction as being discourse that involves the suspension of the maxim of Quality: nobody involved in the writing or reading of fiction assumes that what is being said is true.[128] This strikes me as a plausible account of how fictive discourse differ from "serious" discourse. But for the purpose at hand, I think it is worth looking at the maxims of Relation and Manner, since they have to do with the interestingness of a statement and the style in which that statement is expressed.

The first lesson to be drawn here is that *even when truth-telling is the point of a verbal exchange, truth by itself is not sufficient to warrant the assertion of some statement.* The NTT trades rather heavily on the claim that merely because a statement is true, that does not make it worth uttering. This is taken to prove that truth is insufficient for literary interest. But even when stating the truth is explicitly the point of an utterance, not just any truth will do. It must be relevant and well expressed. Science is not just an infinite pile of confirmed facts, but an organized set of data, organized, presumably, in such a way that the relations of different truths can be better seen and more clearly understood. Even the most single minded seeker of truth cannot be completely indifferent to relation and manner. Thus, *even for a scientist* the fact that a statement is true is not reason enough to say it. It must be of interest, it must address the matter at hand or answer a question that has been asked for some reason. Nothing the NTT has said proves that because truth is insufficient for literary value it is therefore irrelevant to that value.

The second lesson to be drawn here is that the relationship between quality and manner is rather complex, and the two don't merely interfere with one another as Poe suggests. Consider once again Romeo's utterance that "Juliet is the sun." How are we to understand it, how are we

128. Martinich, A.P., "A Theory Of Fiction" *Philosophy and Literature* 25.1 (2001) 96-112

to decode this problematic piece of language? We could take inspiration from Martinich and say that this assertion was made with the understanding that the standard conversational maxims be suspended, but in this case it is not the maxims of quality but rather those of manner. The metaphorist, the poet, the literary artist in general does not strive to be perspicacious, but uses and overuses the language for literary effect. The poet shall NOT avoid obscurity of expression, the poet will court ambiguity, the poet will use many words to say a little, and the poet will not be especially orderly, at least not according to the standards of freshman composition. Everyone expects this of poets, and it is exactly their abuse of these maxims for which they are valued. And so we understand Romeo in this way; he could have said something simple, like “I love Juliet” or “Juliet is beautiful,” but he instead chose a striking and perplexing way of expressing this. This striking way of speaking may be an abbreviation of a long list of qualities that he wants to attribute to Juliet, but more importantly the colorfulness of the language itself carries a message: it expresses his passion and enthusiasm for the topic. We are in no real doubt about what he intends to assert. The manner of the assertion while being more elaborate than strictly necessary, and so a seeming violation of the cooperation principle, does not obscure or defeat the purpose of the intended assertion.

On the other hand, we could say, invoking Davidson, the following: there was no content to Romeo's assertion, other than what was explicitly stated: Juliet is the sun. And there was no rhetorical flourish in its statement, this was simply the clearest, most concise way of stating what Romeo wanted to communicate. No other words would have done, no paraphrase is really possible.

The second of these options seems to be in line with the NTT, as it discourages us from looking behind the utterance to the “real” assertion. But it seems to me that the first option, which treats the utterance as an assertion- and so understands the oddness of the phrasing to be a matter of style- leaves us more open to the power of the metaphor.

In short, if it is the *speech act* that is the object of our critical attention, if we are interested in *how* a particular assertion is made, then we are interested both in the content of the assertion *and* in the manner of its assertion. “Sally is emotionally unresponsive” is not an adequate paraphrase of “Sally is a block of ice,” but this is not because they don't have more or less the same meaning, or that one is true and the other not, but because they differ in the manner in which that meaning is conveyed. But that manner, the *style* in which the statement was made can only be judged with respect to the actual statement being made. If Sally literally is a block of ice, then there is no metaphor, no literature, juts a simple assertion.

4.13 Literature and paradox

Grice's maxim of Manner warns us against ambiguity. A successful talk exchange usually requires that speakers make their meaning clear. Literary language, on the contrary, is often vague or ambiguous, being open to many different interpretations. This would seem to be proof that the simple exchange of information can't be what literary language is interested in. But once again, I don't think it is as simple as this. Very often literary language strives for a fruitful ambiguity, that is, an ambiguity which is essential to the statement being made.

Again, here is how the NTT argues: it is simply the case that we admire and appreciate works of literature that we also “disagree” with, that is, whose moral or worldview we do not accept. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, for example describes a hero who is not by our standards heroic. He is cruel and arrogant and oppresses the people over which he rules. He performs great deeds, but they are done merely to satisfy his own ego and relieve his own boredom. In short, there can legitimately be said to be a factual dispute between us and the intended audience of the epic over what qualify as genuinely heroic characteristics. And yet this does not prevent a modern audience from admiring the epic. The NTT concludes agreement must not be necessary for the appreciation of the story.

Of course, there is the basic problem of whether “agreement” in this sense is genuine cognitive agreement, that is agreement with a fact. It might be said, rather, that it is not a difference in belief that is at issue here, but a difference in values. Different qualities were valued in the time of Gilgamesh, but this has nothing to do with the facts or belief in the facts. Leaving this point aside for the moment, I would like to look at the claim that if we enjoy a story that we don't believe, that is, a story whose moral we do not share, then this shows belief is irrelevant to enjoyment. It seems to me that this claim can be disproved if we can find a suitable counterexample, that is, if we can find a case where we disagree with an assertion that is made by a piece of language, still value that piece of language, and yet are still interested in the truth, that is, our primary interest in the given piece of language is its relation to the truth. The counterexample I have in mind is paradox.

A paradox consists of one or more premises, each acceptable on the face of it, that lead, by a standard and valid rule of inference, to a conclusion which is unacceptable. The problem

then is to decide what is to be done. Shall we reject one of the premises, perhaps by showing that it was not acceptable after all? Do we reject the rule of inference, perhaps even using the paradox in front of us to show how it is invalid, that it leads from truth to falsehood? Or do we, against our initial judgement, accept the unappealing conclusion? Different paradoxes will require different treatment, and different people will come up with different solutions to the same paradox. Zeno shows that if we assume that space is infinitely divisible, as common sense suggests, then we must accept that motion is impossible. I am disinclined to accept that conclusion, but at the same time the premise strikes me as reasonable.

And so, I can safely say, on the one hand, that I do not “agree” with Zeno's conclusion. And yet, I find this and other paradoxes, rather compelling and worth thinking about. But this does not mean that I have thereby put Zeno's paradox to a different use, that my interest is somehow “disinterested” or “poetic.” I am interested in the truth of the paradox, even though I disagree with the conclusion Zeno has reached. Something like this can be said, I think, in the case of literature.

If we look at the work of the Marquis De Sade, I think it can be said that his novels have the force of paradoxes. He presents a worldview which is quite commonsensical in many ways, one that most people today would accept as reasonable, based as it is in enlightenment ideas of liberty and autonomy and secularism. He goes on to show how these enlightenment ideals can justify the most horrific behaviors: rape and murder and cannibalism and worse. Nothing that De Sade describes is incompatible with modern notions of individual liberty. If we accept that individual liberty and freedom are good things, then we seem forced to conclude that the criminal behavior that De Sade describes is acceptable. But of course we don't, or at least most

of us don't. Does this mean we reject enlightenment values, that we long for the world view of the Middle Ages, where the church decided what was right and wrong and where the king enforced the law? Not at all (although I assume there are readers of De Sade who conclude exactly that). And so where are we? It seems to me what we have here is something like a paradox. From reasonable premises we have been led to unacceptable conclusions, and we are at a loss as to what to do. Does this mean that we are not interested in the truth here? I think not.

It is worth pointing out that De Sade presents particular difficulties here. On the one hand, if we simply conclude that, because these questions have no answers, this proves that there is no "moral truth," well, that is part of what De Sade is arguing through his work, and we agree with him after all. If, on the other hand, we follow the advice of the NTT, and refuse to look at the novel as philosophy, but rather as an aesthetic object and look at the various descriptions of horrible cruelty from the "aesthetic point of view," well this too, is part of De Sade's point. He wants to show that there is nothing particularly bad about violence and cruelty, it is something we can get used to and even learn to enjoy, and so live more vital and exciting lives.

The NTT claims that reading a work of literature *as literature* involves ignoring how those propositions impinge upon our beliefs, and to look for a satisfaction that does not involve belief or truth. Yet, it seems possible that there are works of literature that are valued primarily for the way in which they push back against our beliefs. Much the same way paradoxes do, so called "philosophical novels" confront and test our closely held premises; they force us to work out the consequences and ramifications of our own beliefs and values. And simply because we disagree with a given novel while still appreciating it does not mean that it's value to us has

nothing to do with truth or belief. On the contrary, the reexamination of the truth may be the central point of it.

Literature trades in ideas, much in the same way as philosophy or even science does. And while the treatment an idea receives in a novel is different than the treatment it receives in a laboratory, it is not clear, and the NTT has not proven, that this difference consists of the fact that in one case the truth of the idea is at issue while in the other it is not. Obviously a novelist does not *prove* anything in the course of writing a novel, but this does not mean that the author, as well as the audience are indifferent to the truths of the statements used. In the next chapter I will examine particular cases where a work of literature involves statements whose truth is crucial to that work.

Chapter 5: Examples and applications

5.1 Loose ends

I have shown both that the NTT, in as far as it is committed to a presentationalist account of literature, is untenable, and that literature works can perform illocutionary acts, assertion being one such kind of act. There are still a few loose ends, and in this chapter I will try to tie them up. First, I will return to the four arguments that I described in chapter two, the arguments that as I said make up the prima facie case for the NTT: the survival argument, the reception conditions argument, the intrinsic property argument and the essential property argument. I will take each of these in turn, and show how, given an illocutionary construal of literature, they do not in fact show that truth is aesthetically irrelevant. Then I will go through some examples of literary works that, in my estimation make crucial and aesthetic use of the truth.

5.2 What, Exactly, "Survives"?

The survival argument, as we recall, is based on an undeniable fact, namely, that works of literature often do seem to survive a radical change in belief. Our view of the universe is very

different than Homer's, and yet we continue to enjoy his poems. Enjoyment survives belief, therefore belief is irrelevant. We have seen William Freedman's response to this, that a change in one aspect of a work of art might not completely ruin it, and yet still affect our evaluation to some degree. This is essentially correct, but now I am prepared to elaborate on this point, and show that construing a novel as an illocutionary act calls the survival argument into question. A few examples will make this point clear.

Consider first, the poem "The Tygre" by William Blake, whose first stanza contains a famously imperfect rhyme:

> Tygre, tygre burning bright
> in the forests of the night
> what immortal hand or eye
> dare frame thy fearful symmetry[129]

"Eye" does not rhyme with "symmetry" (and I find that when I read the poem aloud, I have a strong desire to pronounce "symmetry" so as to rhyme with "eye".) It is what is known as a "sight rhyme", where words are spelled similarly, but pronounced very differently. This lack of rhyme, however is no hindrance to the poem's greatness: it is widely read and admired, as well as being widely anthologized and taught in English courses. It is a "great" poem by many widely shared standards.

However there is some evidence that in the dialect Blake spoke, "eye" was pronounced "ee", and did in fact rhyme with symmetry: "What immortal hand or ee/dare frame thy fearful symmetry". It is very often the case that a sight rhyme is the remnant of a true rhyme that underwent a shift in pronunciation. So the lines originally did rhyme, but English pronunciation

129. Blake, William, "The Tyger" in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake.* ed. David Erdman (Anchor Books. 1988) 24

has drifted since the poem was written, and the rhyme was lost. But obviously the poem has other literary features worth examining, and most of the rhymes remain intact. The loss of a single rhyme does not ruin the poem. We might say, in fact, that the poem has outlived detailed knowledge of its original pronunciation. We may therefore conclude, following the logic of the NTT, that rhyme is no more relevant to the appreciation of this poem than detailed knowledge of tigers is. This strikes me as obviously wrong, but it does seem to be the unavoidable conclusion of the survival argument: if the value of a poem survives change of some feature, then that feature is aesthetically irrelevant.

Consider also the case of the Venus De Milo, with her famously missing arms. And not just the arms: roman statuary was often painted and decorated with bright colors and garments. Over the course of the centuries, the pigments, the clothes and finally the arms were lost. If we admit that the Venus is still a great work of art today, it can only be because these elements are aesthetically irrelevant. Again, something seems to be amiss with our reasoning.

In each of these cases we could say, along with Freedman, that while something valuable was lost, something else, equally valuable, was retained. So the Venus de Milo lost some color and form, but what remained was worth looking at. I think the same could be said for literature. It is is obviously too simple to talk of an artwork's "surviving" a change in some property or other. An artwork is a complicated thing, and many factors may contribute to its success. Change, or lose, a few of these factors, and an artwork may well "survive" in the sense that it is still worth looking at, but there will be some cost.

Take "Animal Farm," the example used by Sharpe. He claims it "survives detailed knowledge of its target." One can appreciate the novel without knowing the political situation it is understood to be describing. I argue that it may well be said to survive, but *not as a satire*. We may appreciate it as a story, or as a cautionary tale about totalitarianism, or as a fable, but we would simply not be in a position to judge it as a satire. We would not even understand it as a

satire unless we knew the circumstances of its origin. Its illocutionary force would be lost on us, but something may well remain. This strikes me as a more radical change than a loss of rhyme, or even the loss of the *Venus'* arms. It would be as if the statue continued to erode, losing all human form and became just a lump of stone, but a lump of stone that were still aesthetically pleasing, perhaps as an abstract sculpture. Would we still say that the work of art "survived" the radical change of shape? I think not, rather we would say that the original was destroyed, but by chance, what was left was also a work of art. In the same way, Orwell's novel would simply *not* have survived the change of context, but luckily the words that remained had some aesthetically valuable properties on their own. Something important would be lost, even if , by chance, something valuable remained.

Although perhaps it should not surprise us that a story written (at least in part) to ridicule Stalinist Russia should serve, in the absence of "detailed knowledge of its target", as a satire of tyranny in general. Orwell used a story about a dictatorial pig to make a statement about a dictatorial human. Though he presumably had a specific human in mind, any dictator should feel the sting of the satire. But just because it has this more general interpretation, does not mean the specific interpretation is irrelevant. Any serious critical appreciation of the work could hardly fail to mention the appropriate historical details. The question is not whether a given artwork survives, but rather *what does it survive as*?

So while the illocutionary force of a work of literature may not survive a change in historical circumstance, this does not prove that it is not aesthetically relevant, and simply because the propositional content usually *is* what survives of a literary work (thanks to translators and such), does not mean that it is the "true" work of art. Illocutionary force may be particularly fragile, easily being lost on an unintended and unanticipated audience, but this does not render it aesthetically neutral.

This point relates to a broader question in aesthetics. There are two ways of using the word "beautiful." The NTT assumes that we judge artworks as simply "Beautiful," while I am arguing that we in fact judge an artwork as "A beautiful X", where 'X' represents the kind of artwork it is. It is not enough, I think, to say that "Animal Farm" is "good," period, rather we ought to say things like "It is a good story" or "It is a good satire" or "it is a good fable". This point can be generalized to all artworks, I think. So, for example, suppose there were a house that we described as 'delightful'; that is, it succeeded according to the aesthetic point of view. According to Beardsley, we would not care whether the house were convenient to live in when we judge it in this way. In fact, the house may well be a model, too small to live in and this would not affect its 'delight' at all. But suppose we were to wear the model house as a hat, would it still be delightful? I can only assume that it would make an ugly hat. It's delightfulness, its beauty, was only in regard to it being a house, not a hat. We don't simply say that an object is beautiful, we say it is beautiful as an example of a kind.

"Animal Farm" may be interesting as a story, but it may have a very different kind of interest when seen as a satire, and this interest need not be any less aesthetic. Likewise, a description that is bold or vivid (aesthetic attributes both) will only be bold or vivid in as far as it is a description. It would be neither bold nor vivid if it failed as a description.

This general point is made rather vividly by James Thurber in his story "The Mac Beth Murder Mystery" . The narrator lends his copy of Mac Beth to a woman who has only ever read mystery stories. She takes it reluctantly, and only because she has nothing else to read. The narrator asks her later if she liked it:

> "No, I did not," she said, decisively. "In the first place, I don't think for a moment that Macbeth did it." I looked at her blankly. "Did what?" I asked. "I don't think for a moment that he killed the King," she said. "I don't think the Macbeth woman was mixed up in it, either. You suspect them the most, of course, but those are the ones that are never guilty--or shouldn't be, anyway." "I'm 'afraid," I began, "that I--" "But don't you see?" said the American lady. "It would spoil everything if you could figure out right away who did it.

> Shakespeare was too smart for that. I've read that people never have figured out 'Hamlet,' so it isn't likely Shakespeare would have made 'Macbeth' as simple as it seems." I thought this over while I filled my pipe. "Who do you suspect?" I asked, suddenly. "Macduff," she said, promptly. "Good God!" I whispered, softly. [130]

The joke is, of course, that Mac Beth is a great work of literature, but not a very good mystery story, and was not intended to be read as a mystery. We must judge it by the appropriate standard if we are to judge it correctly.

In the case of *The Iliad*, we will simply never know if we are judging it by the standards that Homer intended. All we can do is judge it according to our own standards. But then we have to admit that the poem did not "survive" a radical change in belief. The poem we read is simply not the poem Homer wrote.

5.3 Reception Conditions

The "Reception Condition" argument, as we recall, claimed that while truth and belief might be necessary to the proper reception of a work of literature, they were not *part* of that work of literature But what counts as a "reception condition" and what counts as a "part of the work" depends upon what, metaphysically speaking, a work of art is. While truth and belief may be among the reception conditions of a *proposition*, they often will be a genuine part of an illocutionary act.

Before, I used the example of a painting to illustrate this point: if you have only ever seen the *Mona Lisa* in low light from a distance, then you did not get a "good look" at the painting, and are in no position to pronounce upon its value as a work of art. But this, as we have said, does not show that the lighting conditions are a *part* of the work, they are merely the

130. Thurber, James, "The Macbeth Murder Mystery" in *Thurber on Crime*. ed Robert Lopresti (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1991), 54

reception conditions of that work. And for painting, this seems to be simply the case. But if we change the example slightly, to music, it becomes much more difficult to distinguish between those qualities that are reception conditions and those that are genuine properties of the artwork itself.

Suppose you have only ever heard Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* played by an untalented violinist on a badly tuned instrument. Furthermore, the performance is hesitant, and halting, and so quiet you have to strain to hear it. If you said something like "Beethoven's *Ninth* is an awful piece of music!" you could be rightly corrected, since you have not really heard Beethoven's *Ninth*, just a bad performance of it. And this is exactly analogous with seeing the *Mona Lisa* under poor conditions. The hesitancy, the too low volume, the out of tune notes, none of these are features of the composition. But in this case something else can be said, namely that *the performance* of the composition was bad, and this is indeed an aesthetic appraisal *of the performance*. There are, in short, two different objects at hand here, the composition and the performance of that composition, and each is a kind of art work. Nicholas Wolterstorff makes the point in his *Worlds and Works of Art*, where he says:

> In several of the arts there is application for the distinction between a performance of something, and the thing that is performed. In music, for example, one can distinguish between a performance of *Verklaerte Nacht* and that which is thereby performed, namely Arnold Schoenberg's work *Verklaerte Nacht*[131]

That these are in fact two separate objects is shown by the fact that:

> a thing performed and a performance thereof will always diverge in certain of their properties. For example, *having been composed by Schoenberg* is a property of *Verklaerte Nacht* but not of any performance of *Verklaerte Nacht*. On the other hand *taking place at a certain time and place* is a property of every performance of *Verklaerte Nacht* but not of *Verklaerte Nacht* itself.[132]

131. Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *Works and Worlds of Art*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5
132. ibid 5

And, as I have just argued, one might have aesthetic properties that the other does not: there might be a sloppy, hesitant performance of a bold and elegant composition. If we look at a particular performance *as a performance* we will judge it one way, certain critical judgments will make sense. If on the other hand we look "through" the performance to the composition itself, other judgments will come into play.

I am not claiming that the work/performance distinction applies to literature (although of course it might, since drama is literature that is performed, and so there might be a bad production of a good play, and poems are often read aloud, which, again, can be done either badly or well,) I merely wish to point out that what counts as a "reception condition" and what counts as a genuine property of the artwork itself depends crucially upon how we have answered the question of what, exactly we are looking at. In the case of language, as we have seen in the preceding example of *Animal Farm*, there may also be two different objects we could be talking about, the story and the satire.

A given piece of language might be judged as a story, and this might mean that we judge it purely as a set of propositions, without regard to whatever illocutionary force they might have. But then we might judge the same piece of language as a satire, and here the illocutionary force will come into play. Those elements, such as truth and reference, which are external to the proposition will be internal to the speech act. If the facts of the matter were different, than the speech act would fail to discharge properly, and this would be an aesthetic failing. A simple example of this is Aesop's fable "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." We all know the plot: a shepherd boy gets bored and to amuse himself shouts out that a wolf is attacking the sheep. When the villagers come to defend the sheep, the boy has a good laugh. He repeats the trick several times until the villagers no longer pay attention to his cries, even when a wolf really does come and devour the flock. A simple tale with a simple moral: always tell the truth. And the fact that there

is this moral, this illocutionary intent to the tale is a constraint on the story. Aesop might have written a tale about a boy who lied, and in doing so angered the gods, who caused him to fall into the ocean and drown. This might make an interesting tale, but it would not work as a cautionary tale. In a given fictional world, there might be any number of reasons to tell the truth, the only constraint being the imagination of the author. But Aesop picked out a reason for being honest that *applies to the world in which we live*. People do come to distrust known liars, and that is very often bad for the liar. The fable is designed to persuade children of the value of honesty, and this is why the plot plays out the way it does, and not some other way. We can judge the fable as a story, or we can judge it as an instructive tale, and this will involve two different standards of evaluation. A proper evaluation of the fable will involve an assessment of whether or not its illocutionary project was accomplished. Aesop's fable is a neat, elegant defense of the virtue of honesty.

The NTT argues, I think, that if we do not grasp that Aesop was a moralist and that his fables were moral tales, then we will have simply misunderstood him, but that this knowledge is part of the reception conditions, not part of the story itself. I am claiming something stronger: it is not just that Aesop's fable *happens* to illustrate a moral point, it was specifically designed to do so. And our aesthetic judgment will take this into account. If the story were entertaining and engrossing, but failed to persuade as to its moral, this would be an aesthetic failing.

It is perhaps instructive to compare "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" with Edgar Allen Poe's story "Never Bet the Devil Your Head"[133] , which is a savage parody of the "morality tale" (and which I quoted in chapter one as demonstrating Poe's defense of the NTT.) Poe tells us the story of a young man by the name of Toby Damit who, among other bad habits, has taken to the making of bets over trivial things, and since he has very little money, his bets usually take the form of "I'll bet the devil my head that. . ." The narrator of the story is shocked by this behavior and attempts to get Damit to mend his ways. One day when they are out walking, the pass a

133. Poe, E.A. "Never Bet The Devil Your Head", in *The Complete Tales and Poems,* 365

covered bridge with a turnstile at the entrance and Damit says "I'll bet the devil my head that I can jump that turnstile." As soon as the bet is made, they are surprised by a small man, dressed entirely in black, who was apparently there the whole time unnoticed, and who accepts the bet. Damit makes the jump, and is decapitated by one of the iron support struts of the bridge's roof, which was hidden in the shadows. The strange man makes off with Damit's head, and we are left with the stern moral "Never bet the devil your head!" This is of course a terrible story if what we are looking for is moral instruction. The very moral of it, "Never bet the devil your head," is too narrow and specific to do anybody any good, and the targeted vice, the "backing of assertions with wagers" is hardly a vice at all. This is a terrible fable. But of course it is not as a fable that we are intended to judge it. The story is a comic one, full of dark humor and absurd situations. Poe is ridiculing the idea that every tale should have a moral, and lampooning a certain kind of moralist. I would argue however, that *this* is how the story must be understood. It is not irrelevant, or external to the purpose of the story, that Poe is responding to critics who accused his stories of being "immoral." The story works as a satire of a certain view of literature (the "didactic fallacy"), but we may well ask if the story hits its mark (which it does.) We do not just evaluate the story as a story, but as a satire. Judged as a story, it works: there is humor and suspense and sharply drawn characters. But what determines the shape of the story is the illocutionary project of responding to, and ridiculing, certain of his critics. The illocutionary act is the object of our evaluation.

5.4 Intrinsic properties

The intrinsic property argument, we will recall, goes as follows: a proposition may be put to many different uses in many different contexts, but it remains the same proposition with the same meaning. A proposition has its meaning intrinsically, that is, its content can be grasped

without reference to the particular context of its utterance, or the particular use to which it is put. The context, as has been said, is external to the proposition, and of course the truth of the proposition is part of its context, since a proposition by itself is neither true nor false, it only takes on a truth value when used o make an assertion. Since it is only intrinsic properties that are aesthetically relevant, then truth is excluded. This is what the NTT has claimed, and it is now clear what the proper response should be: if we are to judge an illocutionary act, then we must take the context of the utterance into account. Take as an example the following metaphor (which has been much discussed, by John Searle[134] and others):

Sally is a block of ice

On the one hand, the NTT seems to have a point, in that we can judge this metaphor as a good one or not without knowing who Sally is. To describe a person, any person, as a block of ice is an interesting use of language, and remains so even without specific knowledge of its subject. At the same time, there does seem to be something here that can be either agreed or disagreed with, which is the hallmark of an assertion. If we knew which Sally was being talked about, we might well say something like "I disagree, she is a warm, caring human being." It is the sign of a good metaphor that it does in fact gets us to see something about the subject, that it perhaps brings us around to a certain view of the subject. There are, in short, success conditions for a metaphor, and the speaker may fail to meet these conditions.

A speech act may fail for any number of reasons. If I were to issue a command, "Close the door," for example, and the door were already closed, the command would be defective. If I were to issue the command in English to someone who only spoke German, the speech act would likewise fail to discharge properly. In some instances the failure will be due to defects in the speaker, in others to defects in the hearer. If I knew that my audience did not know what ice was,

134. Searle, John. "Metaphor" in *Expression and Meaning*,

then my use of the metaphor "Sally is a block of ice" would be defective, and it would be my own fault. If I had a reasonable expectation that ice was a well known phenomenon, then the defect would be in the audience ("Who doesn't know what ice is!" I could reasonably say.) When the felicity conditions of an utterance are not met, it may well be from a lack of skill on the part of the utterer. Think of a joke. Is it possible to say that a joke is funny, even if nobody laughs at it? If nobody ever laughs at it? There might be many cases in which a funny joke doesn't get a laugh. The audience might not be in the mood for jokes, or not understand the subject matter of the joke. And there might be cases where an unfunny joke gets a laugh. An audience might be in a jovial mood, and ready to laugh at anything. So whether a joke works or not is sometimes beyond the control of the jokester. But it seems to me impossible that a joke that has never gotten a laugh could nevertheless still be considered funny based on its propositional content alone. Could I say, for example, that this statement:

> Sally is an elm tree

is a very funny joke, it's just a matter of finding the right audience? That someday there will be people who will howl with laughter when they hear this, and I will be hailed as a comic genius? There's something odd about such a claim, and the oddness has to do with the fact that a joke is a performance of a certain kind. The funny joke is the one that actually succeeds in getting a laugh. We appreciate the skill of the speaker who creates and uses language in such a way that we are forced to laugh. And I think that the same could be said of metaphor. It would be just as odd to say that "Sally is an elm tree" is a beautiful metaphor, full of insight and striking imagery, it's just that the human beings who will appreciate its genius have yet to be born. A metaphor, like a joke, can only be said to work, or not work, for a particular audience.

What all this means is that the context of a literary utterance is a part of that utterance, it is not an external feature. If ice were not cold, I would have to find another metaphor to describe

Sally. The facts of the matter may indeed be external to the proposition, but they are a part of the utterance of the proposition.

5.5 Essential properties

The NTT claims that when we read a work of literature we ignore the truth values of the propositions it contains. If we take an interest in those truth values, then we have, for the moment, stopped reading the work as literature. That we can appreciate a proposition without regard to its truth value shows, according to the NTT, that truth is not an essential feature of literature, and so does not enter in to a critical analysis of literary language.

However, if a literary work is seen as a speech act, then perhaps truth is relevant after all. A literary artist chooses her words carefully, and for many different reasons. Words are chosen for their sounds, their meanings, their connotations and so forth. It may be that a certain statement was used because the author believed it to be true, and if such is the case, then that is worth knowing about, from a critical perspective. If we want to pronounce upon the value of a work, we will have to know why the work is the way it is. To use again the example of *Animal Farm*, it can be said ,I think, that the events of the novel allude to events in the real world, and that this is not a accidental or trivial feature of the book. If real world events had been different, the plot of the novel would have been different as well, since the purpose of the novel was to comment upon the significant events of its day. That it alludes to these events is an essential feature of this novel. The story may be understood in isolation of historical fact, but the satirical nature of the work is only understood in relation to the known facts. In general I think it can be said that if the reason a particular piece of language was used by a poet or novelist is that the piece of language was true (or at least related to what is true), then truth is an essential property

of that work of literature, in as far as if the facts were different, the author would have chosen different words.

5.6 Internal statements and external statements

Before I turn to particular examples, I want to distinguish between two different ways in which a story, or work of literature, can be said to "make a statement." There are what can be called internal statements, where 'internal' means internal to the story, and these are statements that describe the "world of the fiction." Then there are what can be called "external" statements, or those statements that can be construed as applying to the real world, the world of the reader. In the case of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," the statement

> Once there was a young shepherd boy. . .

is an internal statement, since it describes the fictional character, whereas the moral of the story, "You should always tell the truth," is an external statement, as it is intended to apply to the reader. In general, the moral of a story is an external statement, while those statements that make up the anecdote of the work are internal statements. Not every story will have a moral, and not every moral will be explicitly stated, as they are in the case of Aesop's fables. More often we will be forced to figure out for ourselves what the moral of the story is, or if indeed it has one. It will also be the case that not all of the internal statements of a story are explicit. We as readers may need to draw certain inferences from what the author has said (and we should recall Ruth Lorand's caution that this is not a matter of filling in logical or factual "gaps" in the story, but rather a question of appreciating the style of the author, who has, for perhaps dramatic reasons,

left certain things unsaid.) So either kind of statement, internal or external, might be either implicit or explicit. And because there are two kinds of statements, there will be two ways in which truth might come into play.

"The Boy Who Cried Wolf" describes a world very much like our own. There are in the real world such things as sheep, there are people who guard them, there are wolves that try to eat them. The world of the story is similar in most ways to the actual world. This is something that authors often strive for. Historical romance and science fiction writers both attempt to create worlds that are based in the real world (or are perhaps plausible expansions of the real world.) When the internal statements of a work of literature are taken from the real world in this way, we may call the fiction "realistic." (I should be clear here: this is not an exhaustive definition of "realism," which is a term that is widely used by literary critics, and has many different meanings. In some contexts "realism" might refer to the style of a work rather than the content, and in other contexts it might refer to a particular school of novel-writing. I only claim that my use of the word "realism", that is, the faithfulness of the internal statements of a novel to the know facts of the real world, is minimally plausible as a candidate for the title of "realism".)

Of course, not every story is realistic, and Aesop provides us with an example of this too. "The Ant and the Grasshopper" tells the story of a grasshopper who wastes his summer days having fun, as opposed to the ant who spends his summer working hard to store food for the winter. When winter comes, the grasshopper must go begging for food to the ant, who scolds him for his laziness. This of course is not realistic in my sense: ants and grasshoppers do not talk to one another. The internal statements of the story do not match those of the real world. However, we may note that even in such a case, the external statement might be sound. The moral of "The Ant and the Grasshopper", is something like "prepare for bad times while times are good," and is perfectly sound advice. When a fiction takes as its purpose the assertion of some moral, we can call the fiction "didactic." I do not claim that every work of literature must

have a moral. To do so would be to commit what Poe has called “the didactic fallacy.” It is enough for my purposes to note that many fictions do have a moral, and we judge such fictions according to the success with which they promote their moral.

Keeping this distinction between internal and external statements, and between 'realistic' fiction and 'didactic' fiction, in mind, we can now look at some particular examples of literary works that, make crucial use of truth.

5.7 *Moby Dick* and *Dune*

In “The Problem of Belief”, Isenberg argues the following:

> Thousands of propositions that we believe to be true we also deem perfectly trivial. Truths about the human heart are no *truer*, and no more firmly believed, than truths about the human pancreas. And this suggests at once that when we have a “great truth about the heart,” that what makes it *great* and what makes it a great truth *about the heart* are not what makes it true.[135]

This distinction between “truths of the heart” and “truths of the pancreas” is a good one, and cleverly expressed. He means, I take it, that those who speak of “literary truth” have something rather more highfalutin in mind then a simple factual statement. In his example, a statement like “There are not less than three people in this room[136]” does not qualify as a *literary* truth. This suggests that truth in and of itself is not of literary value. I ultimately disagree, but it is worth seeing to what extent his point is defensible. A good example to test our intuitions here is Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, which is a bountiful source of “truths about the pancreas”,

135. Isenberg, Arnold. “The Problem Of Belief”, 399
136. ibid. 399

although of course it is not the pancreas that Melville labors to inform us about, but rather the whaling industry:

> In most American whale men the mastheads are manned almost simultaneously with the vessel's leaving her port; even though she may have fifteen thousand miles, and more, to sail ere reaching her proper cruising ground. and if, after a three, four, or five years' voyage she is drawing nigh home with anything empty in her -- say, an empty vial even -- then, her mastheads are kept manned to the last; and not till her skysail- poles sail in among the spires of the port, does she altogether relinquish the hope of capturing one whale more.
>
> Now, as the business of standing mastheads, ashore or afloat, is a very ancient and interesting one, let us in some measure expatiate here. [137]

And expatiate he does. This passage, taken from chapter XXXV, “The Masthead”, is typical of the work as a whole, crammed full of informative details about the day to day business of running a whaling ship in 18th century America. The culture of whaling, from the port town where the narrator begins his journey, to the day to day life on the whaling ship, from the various characters and pieces of equipment involved, to life on the sea, all of it is described in minute detail. And all of these facts presumably play into the dramatic and thematic elements of the novel. The details of the whaling life are, for the narrator, a jumping off point for various philosophical and moral speculations, and the white whale is fraught with symbolic importance. So the wealth of information provided by Melville has a literary role to play, it directs the reader's attention to what is to be considered important. It provides a structure to hang the story on. But of course, Isenberg would be quick to point out, the included facts don’t need to be *true* in order to do any of this. Indeed, few modern readers are in a position to fact check the novel, so as far as they are concerned (and I include myself here) this may as well be a work of wild fantasy. Melville may as well have made all of it up. Indeed, if we take the case of Frank Herbert’s science fiction epic *Dune*[138] , we have a case of exactly that: Herbert describes an alien

137. Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001), 192
138. Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. (New York: Penguin, 2003)

desert planet inhabited by large desert worms, and a small human culture that subsists by learning the ways of the desert and the worms. Herbert is famous for the amount of effort he put into fleshing out his alien world. He includes all sorts of details about the ecology of the planetary desert, the life cycles of the giant worms, the political and religious culture that has developed among the people who manage to survive among the worms. And all of it, of course, is pure fiction. He employs, arguably, the same level of description as Melville does, and uses all of these "facts" as a vehicle for philosophical and moral speculation, just as Melville does, but his "facts" are all invented. It makes no difference to the literary value of the work. And if we conclude (as I am inclined) that *Dune* is a less important work of literature than is *Moby Dick*, it won't be because Melville told the truth about whaling while Herbert simply made things up about sand worms, but because of a difference in their skill with language. So a fact may indeed be included by an author because it is interesting, but its interest is not reducible to its truth. Many false or made up things might nevertheless be interesting, and many true things might hardly be worth a second glance.

But if we look more carefully at *Moby Dick*, we are forced, I think to reach a different conclusion. Melville includes many facts about whales, but also many myths, and stories, and legends, including the biblical story of Jonah and the whale, as well as the Greek myth of Perseus, the sea monster that he killed being assumed by the narrator to be a whale. And this is very much the theme of the book, to examine the whale from every possible perspective, to show how the human ability to describe pales in the face of the leviathan. Humans have created myths and told stories about whales for thousands of years, and the latest means of encountering the beast, namely the scientific method, and the dingy, unromantic processes of the whaling industry are no closer to coming to grips with it. There is still something mysterious and implacable about whales, even as they are killed by the thousand and turned into oil.

So Melville is deliberately contrasting the mythical, the religious and the scientific viewpoints, exploring the limits of each, and showing how each perspective has its role to play in the human psyche. But of course, in order to do this, the facts he includes about whales and whaling must be genuine facts, checkable and confirmable. Given the theme he is exploring, the contrast between myth and science, made up facts simply will not do. We might not even care which facts about whaling and cetology he uses, but the ones he does use must be genuine. No novelist *has* to use real facts in their work, but Melvilles inclusion of them is crucial to the theme of his novel.

5.8 "The Gold Bug"

Edgar Allen Poe's story "The Gold Bug"[139] provides another example of how the inclusion of genuine facts in a story might be crucial to the success of that story. Poe had a many faceted interest in language, writing both poetry and short prose fiction, as well as a number of essays on various literary topics. In addition, he was an avid cryptographer, and in "The Gold bug" he demonstrates his method for cracking a simple code. While I have already quoted Poe (in section 1.4) as being a defender of the NTT, who insisted that "the oil and water of truth and poetry" could never be mixed, we will recall that he also said that there are "tales of ratiocination" which do crucially involve the truth. "The Gold bug" is one such tale.

In the story the narrator visits a friend of his, an intelligent and rather eccentric character by the name of Legrand. Legrand is excited to see the narrator, because he, Legrand, has just found a beetle that looks as if it's made of pure gold. Legrand has lent the beetle to another friend, and so draws a picture for the narrator on a piece of scrap paper he has found. The narrator says that the picture looks more like a skull than a beetle, which greatly upsets Legrand.

139. Poe, E.A., "The Gold Bug" in *The Complete Tales and Poems,* 125

The narrator leaves, as Legrand, his mood soured, is lost in staring at the bit of paper. The narrator thinks this is odd, but Legrand is, after all, eccentric. Weeks go by before the narrator hears from Legrand again, and when he does, Legrand is still acting strange. He insists that the narrator accompany him on a trip to the woods, where after some more bizarre behavior, they dig a hole near a tree and uncover a buried treasure. The narrator is flabbergasted, and wants an explanation. Legrand explains that by some extraordinary coincidence, the piece of paper on which he drew the beetle contained, on the other side and in invisible ink, a coded message. The paper had been set near the fire which brought out the invisible ink and the picture of the skull. After examining the message, Legrand made a few brilliant deductions about its content, and by applying his ingenious method of code breaking was able to decipher the message, which was written by Captain Kidd, and told the whereabouts of a treasure. The method that Legrand describes to crack the code (or I should say, the method that Poe has Legrand describe) is one that actually works. It is based on the frequency of different letters and letter combinations in written English. 'E' is the most frequent written letter, and so it can be recognized even when another symbol is substituted for it. What seemed like bizarre behavior leading to an inexplicable fortune was simply a scientific procedure at work.

This then is the plot, and I claim that it is crucial to the literary value of the story that the method described actually work. The pleasure that the story affords is that of watching a mystery be solved, and this pleasure relies upon the mystery and the solution being a genuine one. If Poe had made Legrand the inventor of a "code breaking machine", where you feed the coded message into one slot and, after a sufficient whirring of machinery, the decrypted message comes out another, it would be a very different kind of story. Perhaps the altered story would have pleasures of its own, but it would be very different from the one Poe wrote. The internal statements concerning the method of code-breaking are realistic and work in the real world (you could use them, for example, to crack the "cryptograms" found in many newspapers), and so as

Legrand enlightens the narrator as to his methods, the reader is enlightened as well. We are watching a real world mystery be solved, and while there is no treasure for the reader, there is the genuine thrill of seeing the incomprehensible made transparent. This thrill would have been lost if some unrealistic procedure for solving codes had been described.

In this case it is the truth of the internal statements that contribute to the success of the story. There is no "moral" to the story, as far as I can tell, although I suppose one could be teased out. Rather, I think the purpose of the story is its effect on the reader: in the same way that the purpose of a ghost story is to give the reader a "chill", or the purpose of a lyric poem is to evoke some emotional response in the reader, the point of this story is to give the reader an "Aha! moment," to give the reader the pleasure of seeing a problem solved. But what makes it a satisfying and enjoyable story, is the fact that it creates a suspenseful plot around a bit of information that applies to the real world. Change that, and the story fails to satisfy. In other words, the sentence "E is the most frequent letter in the English alphabet" is interesting *because it's true*.

5.9 G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*

The next example comes from G.K. Chesterton, a Catholic writer from the turn of the last century best known for his humorously polemical novels, as well as short detective stories which always involved some sort of "moral" in the Aesopian sense. In short, all of his fiction was proudly didactic, and he quite publicly disagreed with the so-called "Aesthetic movement" in Britain at the time which rallied around the slogan "art for art's sake." Chesterton argued that the attempt to strip literature of any philosophical position was itself a philosophical position. His *The Man Who Was Thursday,* written in 1908, is a darkly comic novel concerning an undercover policeman's attempt to stop an anarchist plot to assassinate a European king. It was inspired in

part by Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, as well as contemporary events, such as the assassination of William McKinley by anarchists in 1901.

Chesterton's novels were written, at least to a certain extent, as philosophical dialogues. And we have seen the standard argument used by the NTT here: the fact that there is some philosophical content may be an interesting, and we may indeed value his novels as polemic, but the question of whether they are of literary interest is a separate one. I will argue, however, that Chesterton's work presents a much more difficult case for the NTT.

Thursday follows Gabriel Syme, a poet and undercover police officer with a special branch of Scotland Yard, whose job is is to ferret out "philosophical" anarchists, that is anarchists who are not interested in merely breaking the law, but are rather motivated by a deep philosophical hatred of western civilization. He comes across Lucian Gregory, who is known as an eccentric character, spouting anarchist rhetoric at a local park. Syme and Gregory have an argument, and Syme dismisses Gregory as a blowhard and a crank, certainly not a real anarchist. Gregory is irked at this, and taking Syme to a heavily armed hideout, reveals that he is a genuine anarchist, and that his identity as a local eccentric is his cover. It is, he explains, the perfect disguise:

> When first I became one of the New Anarchists I tried all kinds of respectable disguises. I dressed up as a bishop. I read up all about bishops in our anarchist pamphlets, in 'Superstition the Vampire' and 'Priests of Prey.' I certainly understood from them that bishops are strange and terrible old men keeping a cruel secret from mankind. I was misinformed. When on my first appearing in episcopal gaiters in a drawing-room I cried out in a voice of thunder, 'Down! down! presumptuous human reason!' they found out in some way that I was not a bishop at all. I was nabbed at once. Then I made up as a millionaire; but I defended Capital with so much intelligence that a fool could see that I was quite poor. Then I tried being a major. Now I am a humanitarian myself, but I have, I hope, enough intellectual breadth to understand the position of those who, like Nietzsche, admire violence-- the proud, mad war of Nature and all that, you know. I threw myself into the major. I drew my sword and waved it constantly. I called out 'Blood!' abstractedly, like a man calling for wine. I often said, 'Let the weak perish; it is the Law.' Well, well, it seems majors don't do this. I was nabbed again.[140]

140. Chesterton, G.K. *The Man Who Was Thursday*, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003), 25

Desperate, Gregory sought the advice of the head of the anarchist council, a man by the name of Sunday:

> I said to him, 'What disguise will hide me from the world? What can I find more respectable than bishops and majors?' He looked at me with his large but indecipherable face. 'You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would ever look for a bomb?'I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion's voice. 'Why, then,dress up as an anarchist, you fool!' he roared so that the room shook. 'Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.' And he turned his broad back on me without another word. I took his advice, and have never regretted it. I preached blood and murder to those women day and night, and--by God!--they would let me wheel their perambulators.[141]

It is only at this point that Syme reveals that he is a police officer, and that he is using the same strategy: he is such a typical example of bourgeois smugness, that no one would ever suspect that he is a police officer who has actually devoted his life to defending bourgeois Victorian values. (This is of course partly a joke, but partly sound psychology: the best place to hide is often "in plain sight"). Gregory is surprised by this revelation, but has little time to react, since the rest of the anarchist cell is starting to arrive for their weekly meeting. Syme and Gregory quickly swear to keep each others secret. Syme will not tell the police about this cell, and Gregory will not tell the anarchists that Syme is an undercover agent. The meeting starts and Syme is passed off as a representative of Sunday, the head anarchist. The purpose of the meeting is to elect a new chapter president, who will take the title of "Thursday," each chapter head being named after a day of the week. Gregory is the nominee, and his election is all but accomplished, but he is to give a brief speech before the formality of a vote:

> "Before I put the matter to the vote," said the chairman,"I will call on Comrade Gregory to make a statement." Gregory rose amid a great rumble of applause. His face was deadly pale,so that by contrast his queer red hair looked almost scarlet. But he was smiling and altogether at ease. He had made up his mind, and he saw his best policy

141. ibid. 26

> quite plain in front of him like a white road. His best chance was to make a softened and ambiguous speech, such as would leave on the detective's mind the impression that the anarchist brotherhood was a very mild affair after all. He believed in his own literary power, his capacity for suggesting fine shades and picking perfect words. He thought that with care he could succeed, in spite of all the people around him, in conveying an impression of the institution, subtly and delicately false. Syme had once thought that anarchists, under all their bravado,were only playing the fool. Could he not now, in the hour of peril,make Syme think so again?[142]

So Gregory is in a tough position: he cannot reveal that he was careless enough to lead an agent of Scotland yard to the anarchist hideout, but he also cannot reveal too much of their plans to Syme. So he attempts to mislead Syme with his speech. He presents the anarchists as eccentric, and perhaps impassioned, reformers who are not in any way dangerous. The gathered anarchists are appalled by this, but are nevertheless prepared to go through with the vote as planned. At this point, Syme makes his move. He opposes the election of Gregory, and makes his own speech:

> "Comrades!" he cried, in a voice that made every man jump out of his boots, "have we come here for this? Do we live underground like rats in order to listen to talk like this? This is talk we might listen to while eating buns at a Sunday School treat. Do we line these walls with weapons and bar that door with death lest anyone should come and hear Comrade Gregory saying to us,'Be good, and you will be happy,' 'Honesty is the best policy,'and 'Virtue is its own reward'? There was not a word in Comrade Gregory's address to which a curate could not have listened with pleasure(hear, hear). But I am not a curate (loud cheers), and I did not listen to it with pleasure (renewed cheers). The man who is fitted to make a good curate is not fitted to make a resolute, forcible,and efficient Thursday (hear, hear). "Comrade Gregory has told us, in only too apologetic a tone,that we are not the enemies of society. But I say that we are the enemies of society, and so much the worse for society. We are the enemies of society, for society is the enemy of humanity,its oldest and its most pitiless enemy (hear, hear). Comrade Gregory has told us (apologetically again) that we are not murderers. There I agree. We are not murderers, we are executioners (cheers). . . I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us murderers; I go to earn it (loud and prolonged cheering). To the priest who says these men are the enemies of religion, to the judge who says these men are the enemies of law, to the fat parliamentarian who says these men are the enemies of order and public

142. ibid. 28

> decency, to all these I will reply, 'You are false kings, but you are true prophets. I am come to destroy you, and to fulfill your prophecies.'[143]

There is quite a bit going on here. First, this passage is crucial to the polemical nature of the book. I take it that Syme's description of anarchism is correct: they do not simply resent having to follow the law, they believe that the coercive power of the state is unjust, and an obstacle to human happiness. All human interaction should be voluntary and freely chosen, according to the anarchist, and church and state interfere with this noble goal. Chesterton goes on, throughout the rest of the book, to argue against anarchism, but this is a crucial first step, correctly describing the opponent. If he had had Syme say something like "When I have lead our movement to victory we will be able to loot the world at will. . ." he would have been setting up a straw man, and his polemic would have been thereby weakened. The philosophical argument of the book requires this scene, or something like it.

But apart from this, the speech serves a dramatic purpose. Syme is in a tight spot, surrounded by enemies, his life in danger. Rather than lay low and try to quietly get away, he makes a bold move, and the reader is quite surprised that this model of bourgeois respectability could put on such a plausible show as an anarchist. It is unexpectedly brilliant. Furthermore, if his performance were not authentic "anarchist speak", the scene would not work dramatically. Compare Syme's speech to Gregory's feeble attempts to play at "respectability" ("Down, down, presumptuous reason!") The reader could hardly be impressed if Syme escaped from anarchists who were dimwitted enough to fall for it. The speech must be one that would impress actual anarchists, and not just fictional ones. It would be as if there were a story about a genius, and the proof of the character's genius was the ability to add two three digit numbers in her head. That would not be a very good story. (Now I might be wrong here. It might be the case that no real anarchist reading this book would be impressed by this speech. It seems authentic to me, but I'm

143. ibid. 28

not an anarchist. If this is the case, however, that anarchism is misrepresented, then I simply think the book suffers dramatically.)

So there are these two elements at work in *Thursday*: the didactic element, where the story strives to make some moral point about the real world, and the realistic element, where the world of the story includes genuine facts, and creates drama and suspense from them. (And I need to be clear: in many ways *Thursday* is simply not realistic. It is full of absurd situations and surreal imagery. There are abrupt changes of weather from chapter to chapter, and improbable turns of event in rapid sequence. But this element, the authenticity of the anarchist's motive, is a crucial bit of realism, in the sense I am using the word. It is something a real world anarchist might say.)

However, these two elements, the polemic and the dramatic, are not completely distinct. It is significant that the story concerns a detective who must heroically infiltrate a gang of anarchists by successfully posing as and thinking like an anarchist, while the polemic, to be effective, requires that Chesterton refute a genuine anarchism, and not some straw man version of it. In other words, Chesterton must think like an anarchist every bit as much as Syme has to, and there is the same dramatic achievement in each case. The real world rejection of anarchy is as heroic as the fictional defeat of it.

The NTT, and Chesterton's contemporaries of the "art for art's sake" movement, would argue that the "heroic presentation" of an idea is distinct from a logical defense of that idea, but here it seems that the two cannot be so easily disentangled. Syme's, and thereby Chesterton's, rejection of anarchism is accomplished in part through an act of imagination, a sympathetic inhabiting of the opposing viewpoint, a willingness to see how someone might be attracted to anarchy. And it would seem quite odd if one could simply "turn off" this imaginative effort without it having an effect, if one could inhabit a philosophical position and then abandon it with it leaving no mark. Put another way, if Chesterton gets you to consider a given philosophical

theory as admirable, then he has (I would say that he *must* have) given you at least that much reason to think that it is true. I don't see how the two could be in any serious way be pried apart. It may well be that to describe anarchism and to recommend anarchism are two different things, but any serious recommendation must be based on what anarchism actually is.

The dramatic elements of the novel and the polemic elements of the novel are intertwined to tightly to separate. He wanted to show that the defense of bourgeoise values against those of the anarchist was an intellectual enterprise as well as a heroic one. These two elements, the dramatic and philosophical combine to give the novel whatever value it has.

5.10 Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland*

The NTT claims that while we may learn new facts from a work of fiction (for example facts about whaling, cryptography, anarchism etc.) it is simply the case that in as far as, and for as long as, we are using the story as a source of truth, we are not using it as literature. Like the famous ambiguous drawing, we must decide if we are looking at a rabbit or a duck, and we can't see both at once.

Edwin A. Abbot's satirical novel *Flatland* presents what seems to be supporting evidence for this argument. Written in 1884, it is a science fiction novel that satirizes the social mores of Victorian England. Today mostly treated as a introduction to the concept of space-time and higher dimensions. Indeed, in many libraries it can be found on the same shelf as books about physics and relativity. The novelistic and satirical aspects have not survived to the same extent in the mind of the modern day audience. Truth be told, it is quite an effective introduction to the notion of higher dimensions. Abbott shows how we can describe, mathematically, spaces that

we cannot imagine. It is certainly not an abuse, then, of the novel that it is mostly used in this way. But the novelistic aspects are there, and they relate to the 'scientific' aspects in interesting ways.

The novel is told from the perspective of a citizen of Flatland, A. Square by name, who has various adventures that take him out of Flatland and into the worlds of other dimensions. The book begins with Mr. Square describing in some detail the inhabitants of Flatland and their culture. All the inhabitants are polygons, and there is a rigid caste system; the more sides, and the more regular your sides, the higher the class you belong to. The lowest class are the isosceles triangles, above them are the equilateral triangles, then the squares (to which the narrator belongs), and so on. The very lowest are the women, who are such acute isosceles triangles that they are essentially lines. This caste system leads to problems. Since all the inhabitants live on the same plane, and only see each other's edges, they appear to one another as lines. Thus they have developed a number of methods for determining the shape of a new acquaintance without being rude; you do not want to draw the ire of someone of a higher class than yourself.

Finally, Square gets around to telling us of his peculiar adventures. They begin with him having a dream of "Lineland," a world that consists entirely of a line, its inhabitants being line segments of varying lengths. He speaks to the king of Lineland, who calls himself "The Monarch of the World," and tells him that there are more than just two directions in which to move. The king is skeptical:

> King: Exhibit to me, if you please, this motion from left to right.
>
> I: Nay, that I cannot do, unless you could step out of your Line altogether.
>
> King: Out of my Line? Do you mean out of the world? Out of Space?

> I: Well, yes. Out of YOUR world. Out of YOUR Space. For your Space is not the true Space. True Space is a Plane; but your Space is only a Line.
>
> King: If you cannot indicate this motion from left to right by yourself moving in it, then I beg you to describe it to me in words.
>
> I: If you cannot tell your right side from your left, I fear that no words of mine can make my meaning clearer to you. But surely you cannot be ignorant of so simple a distinction.
>
> King: I do not in the least understand you.[144]

The line creatures can only move in two directions, North and South, and so cannot imagine moving left and right. Try as he might, Square cannot persuade the king that there is a space beyond Lineland. Finally the king loses his temper:

> You ask me to believe that there is another Line besides that which my senses indicate, and another motion besides that of which I am daily conscious.. . .Can anything be more irrational or audacious? Acknowledge your folly or depart from my dominions.[145]

Square is scornful of the king's ignorance, and they fight, whereupon Square wakes from his dream. This is his first encounter with other dimensions, and with a being who does not share his perspective. The second comes about when he is thinking about a geometry lesson he recently gave to his grandson:

> Taking nine Squares, each an inch every way, I had put them together so as to make one large Square, with a side of three inches, and I had hence proved to my little Grandson that--though it was impossible for us to SEE the inside of the Square--yet we might ascertain the number of square inches in a Square by simply squaring the number of inches in the side: "and thus," said I, "we know that three-to-the-second, or nine, represents the number of square inches in a Square whose side is three inches long."[146]

144. Abbott, Edwin, *Flatland* (New York: Dover Publication, 1952), 62
145. ibid 64
146. ibid 65

His grandson had replied:

> But you have been teaching me to raise numbers to the third power: I suppose three-to-the-third must mean something in Geometry; what does it mean? [147]

To which Square responds:

> "Nothing at all," replied I, "not at least in Geometry; for Geometry has only Two Dimensions." And then I began to shew the boy how a Point by moving through a length of three inches makes a Line of three inches, which may be represented by three; and how a Line of three inches, moving parallel to itself through a length of three inches, makes a Square of three inches every way, which may be represented by three-to-the-second. [148]

But his grandson presses the point:

> "Well, then, if a Point by moving three inches, makes a Line of three inches represented by three; and if a straight Line of three inches, moving parallel to itself, makes a Square of three inches every way, represented by three-to-the-second; it must be that a Square of three inches every way, moving somehow parallel to itself (but I don't see how) must make Something else (but I don't see what) of three inches every way--and this must be represented by three-to-the-third." [149]

To which Square gives his final response:

> "Go to bed," said I, a little ruffled by this interruption: "if you would talk less nonsense, you would remember more sense." [150]

Square, who was so contemptuous of the king of Lineland's inability to imagine a space beyond his experience, is now dismissive of the possibility that there might be a space beyond Flatland. He is quickly set straight:

> "The boy is a fool, I say; three-to-the-third can have no meaning in Geometry." At once there came a distinctly audible reply, "The boy is not a fool; and three-to-the-third has an obvious Geometrical meaning." [151]

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147. ibid. 66
148. ibid. 66
149. ibid. 66
150. ibid. 66
151. ibid. 67

The voice comes from a sphere who has come to Flatland to teach about the third dimension. His attempts to explain the third dimension are as useless as Square's attempt to explain the second dimension to the king of Lineland:

> Stranger. Pooh! what do you know of Space? Define Space.
>
> I. Space, my Lord, is height and breadth indefinitely prolonged.
>
> Stranger. Exactly: you see you do not even know what Space is. You think it is of Two Dimensions only; but I have come to announce to you a Third--height, breadth, and length.
>
> I. Your Lordship is pleased to be merry. We also speak of length and height, or breadth and thickness, thus denoting Two Dimensions by four names.
>
> Stranger. But I mean not only three names, but Three Dimensions.
>
> I. Would your Lordship indicate or explain to me in what direction is the Third Dimension, unknown to me?
>
> Stranger. I came from it. It is up above and down below.
>
> I. My Lord means seemingly that it is Northward and Southward.
>
> Stranger. I mean nothing of the kind. [152]

Finally, tiring of argument, the sphere simply lifts Square into the third dimension, proving once and for all that Space does not consist of Flatland alone. Square now believes in the existence of the third dimension, and is ready to go back to Flatland and preach the truth to the other polygons. But before he does, he has a request. He wants to see the fourth dimension:

> Sphere. But where is this land of Four Dimensions?
>
> I. I know not: but doubtless my Teacher knows.

152. ibid. 69

> Sphere. Not I. There is no such land. The very idea of it is utterly inconceivable.[153]

The pattern is clear: everyone has contempt for those who are more ignorant than themselves, but at the same time, no one can see their own ignorance, or even imagine that there might be things that are unknown to them. And this is the point of the story, to explain certain mathematical concepts, but also to show how easily we fall into intellectual pride, a pride which makes us unwilling to admit our ignorance. Each character happily shares his wisdom with those less enlightened, but if much less willing to be enlightened in turn. The same argument is even used over and over, where a higher dimension is described through analogy to a lower one, and yet those who use the argument don't like having it used on themselves. The novel is less an essay on abstract geometry, than a cutting indictment of human folly.

But of course, for this point to come through as clearly as it does, the geometrical reasoning must be sound. Abbott's descriptions of the various dimensions and how they interact must be plausible. In other words, if we want to retrieve the literary elements of the novel, the satire, the humor, we must admit that they are very closely related to its philosophical content. We sympathize with the various characters because their ignorance is our own, their inability to imagine a higher dimension is matched by the reader's inability. Reading the detailed description of how two-dimensional beings live and interact in a two-dimensional world, the three-dimensional reader is inclined to see his own world in a new way.

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153. ibid. 89

While it may be a mistake to read this novel merely as an introduction to higher order geometries, reading it "properly" does not involve ignoring this aspect of it. The mathematical aspect of the work is vital to its functioning as literature.

I have attempted, with these examples, to show how a significant "scientific" content was crucial to their success as works of literature. They each contain significant facts, facts that can be checked against the world, or verified independently of the novel, and that the inclusion of these facts is not dispensable. The plots of these works require these facts, and requires them to be facts, or else they would be lacking in some important way. The plots would be less exciting, the drama less dramatic, the surprises less surprising if the author had gotten his facts wrong. It is not simply that we *can* read these works for their factual content, but that if we ignore this factual content, our appreciation of the work suffers. The truth of the literary propositions is relevant to the aesthetic value of these works.

Conclusion

The question of the role that truth plays in literary value is not a narrow one. It impacts upon broader arguments in the philosophy of literature and criticism. In arguing as I have against the NTT, I have been implicitly arguing against a particular way of looking at literature and a particular way of looking at criticism. In conclusion, then, let me look at the two ways in which my difference of opinion with the NTT has rather radical consequences for aesthetic theory.

Firstly, the NTT assumes that there is a simple, unitary account of the arts. This was perhaps most obvious in Zink's claim (cited in 2.5) that for truth to be relevant for literature, we must be able to say how it is relevant for all the arts. But it was also implied by Isenberg, when he raised the possibility (cited in 2.11) that because literature is not wholly sensual, we should separate "literary" value from "aesthetic" value. His strategy was to attempt to prove that literature was wholly sensual after all, thus finding the unity he was looking for. My rejection of the NTT is based largely on the rejection of this point. There is a larger difference between literature and other art forms than the NTT is willing to admit. Literature is crucially different in that it makes use of truth, but this does not mean that it is not in fact an art form. The concept of "art" is a family resemblance concept, and not the clear cut concept that the NTT assumes. That the definition of art involves a family resemblance is perhaps not radical, but I'm inclined to think that the concept is much more heterogeneous than is widely believed. Look, for example, at how the notion of formalism arises with respect to various art forms.

The NTT discovers the aesthically relevant properties through a process of exclusion, of stripping away. Seeing something from the aesthetic point of view means ignoring some of it's properties and paying attention to others. If one goes too far in excluding properties from one's theory of literature, one will eventually arrive at formalism, a destination that at least some defenders of the NTT would like to avoid. Lamarque and Olsen, in particular, insist that literature does bear *some* relationship to the “real world” and is not merely a self-referential system of empty signs. But it is a mistake, they claim, to think that telling the truth is what protects literature from formalism. They wish to define a weaker relationship-- “aboutness”-- which will preserve the distinctly literary values from being reduced to science, while avoiding the excess of an empty formalism. If we insist, as the NTT does, that all of the aesthetically relevant properties of a work of literature (or indeed any work of art) are internal to it and do not refer to anything in the “real” world, then we are left with the question of why such works should interest us at all. The fact that human beings do in fact enjoy telling and hearing narratives about things that have happened, in the form of history, or news, or gossip, does not seem to me to stand in need of explanation. Of course people will enjoy sharing information about people and events that they know, or hope to know, or may have to deal with in some way. The well-informed person is better equipped to deal with his or her environment. But why should we be just as interested in hearing about people and events that don't exist? How can we be interested in the purely internal properties of a narrative independently of some practical use?

If formalism is an issue, then it is perhaps worth mentioning that literature is not as susceptible to formalistic interpretation as are other art forms. Abstract painting came as a shock, I suppose, but there has always been purely ornamental design. Music does not require

words, and some of the greatest music is so-called “absolute music.” Architecture has long been considered one of the fine arts in the West, but there has never been a requirement that a structure *mean* or *refer* to anything. Indeed, notions of meaning and reference are not obviously operative in many art forms. However, with literature, or language put to artistic use, questions of meaning and reference inevitably arise. As I have argued previously (in 3.2), if we discount the meaning of a literary work, then all we are left with a series of sounds or a string of marks on the page, not a *literary* work at all. The words of a poem or novel *must* refer to something outside themselves: the concepts or propositions which are the conventional meanings of those words.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine what a purely formal work of literature might be. In chapter two I have discussed the case of “Jabberwocky.” Before the character of Humpty Dumpty translates for Alice (and the reader) the first stanza is gibberish, mere sound, although musical and compelling sound. But the later stanzas require less translation: “Beware the Jabberwock, my son/ The jaws that bit, the claws that catch.” The Jabberwock is a monster of some sort and its eventual defeat is a heroic victory. This, any reader of the poem can discern, even without detailed knowledge of Carroll's made up vocabulary. Here the plot is not “formalistic” at all. A lone hero goes out and slays a fearsome monster-- a plot that for centuries has been dear to the hearts of those who tell and enjoy stories. Now compare this poem to Pollock's *Lavender Mist*. Pollock's painting isn't *about* anything at all. It is beautiful and kinetic and visually impressive. . . but there is absolutely no temptation to “interpret” it, to uncover its “meaning.” If we were to stare at the painting , unblinking, in the hopes of discerning some pattern in the spray of pigment, like cloud gazers looking for faces in the clouds, we may indeed see something, but whatever we see would hardly be considered “the meaning of the painting,” or even “a meaning

of the painting." It simply seems to be the case that, whereas a painter can easily achieve formalism and must strive for representation or "realism," the case is reversed for a literary artist. The mere use of language guarantees a minimum degree of meaning, while pure abstraction is harder to come by. And, as I have said, there is not even the temptation to interpret a work of abstract painting or absolute music, whereas this temptation seems to be always present with literature. We have appreciated a work of literature exactly when we can say *what it is about*.

Let's try to apply the notions of theme and thesis, then to painting. *Lavender Mist* has no thesis, obviously. Even if we discerned a pattern of paint splotches that spelled out a statement, that would not count as a thesis *of the painting*. Does it have a theme? Perhaps we can wring one out of it, but we must be careful to avoid banality. It is presumably about lavender, but that's hardly worth saying. Perhaps it's about the history of art; it says something about the nature of representation, it calls into question accepted standards of form and representation. This is a possibility, but certainly even someone without an appropriate knowledge of art history can appreciate the vibrant colors of Pollock's work. His paintings reward the gaze of the untutored eye, as does a sunset or some other natural phenomenon. A sunset has no theme, much less a thesis, but this does not stop it from being beautiful. Purely perceptual works of art, such as abstract painting and absolute music, do not require a theme, they do not need to be about anything. I do not find myself tempted to ferret out the theme of *Lavender Mist*. I simply enjoy it for its own sake. Formalism is not an issue one way or the other for works of art that are wholly sensual. Indeed, it doesn't seems as if formalism is even something to avoid in painting. But formalism is an issue for literature, to the point that I have trouble imagining what a purely formal work of literature might be. Literature, it seems, *always* involves a theme.

None of this by itself decides the issue for or against the NTT, but it does suggest that literature is very different from the standard examples of "fine art." Painting, music, dance, architecture, they all have this essential perceptual element. Their value is wholly contained in their appearance. Once an audience has seen a painting or viewed a dance or heard a piece of music, there is nothing else to know about the work. These art forms are what has been called "presentational." Literature, on the other hand, takes the reader, naturally and as a matter of course, beyond the sounds and the symbols that compose it. So this talk of the theme/thesis distinction, crucial to the NTT's discussion of literature, and intended to show how literature can be subsumed under a presentationalist account of art, only serves, to my mind, to emphasize that literature is very different from the other fine arts, and that its ability to *say something* is at the heart of this difference.

The second point of disagreement between the NTT and I is our differing view of the nature of criticism. The NTT is primarily prescriptive. It is not content to describe how people tend to respond to works of literature, it strives to tell them how they *should* respond, or at the very least, it attempts to isolate the *legitimate* responses from all the illegitimate responses the "man in the street" is likely to have. Literary value, as the NTT construes it, might exist in a piece of language unnoticed, even by the person who created it and by the audience for which it was intended. This is because "literary value" is not among the ordinary properties of a piece of language. You needs a particular theory of literature to see it. When all is said and done the NTT can still claim that, sure enough, from an anthropological point of view, questions of truth and ethics and the morally educative value of literature has played a role in the production, understanding and enjoyment of literature in various places and at various times. As matter of

historical fact the greek tragedies were performed as part of religious rites, Dante's *Comedy* did serve as an exposition of catholic theology, and the *Ramayama* is both an epic poem *and* a sacred text. This might all be readily agreed to by a defender of the NTT, but, they might say, this does not address the *aesthetic* issue. Whatever purposes were behind the original creation and enjoyment of these works, that has nothing to do with the critical evaluation of them. The modern critic has a different set of interests in them. What is at issue , then, is a dispute over what 'correct' critical practice is. I have addressed this from the philosophical side, arguing that the NTT has erred in ignoring the illocutionary act. Let me now address this from the perspective of the literary critic. What I will have to say will necessarily be sketchy, but I will attempt to explain away the final bit of plausibility that the NTT still, to my mind retains, and so show, I hope decisively, that it must ultimately be discarded.

On the one hand, as I have said, the NTT is motivated by the best of intentions, the desire to protect literature from "ruinous competition" with science. In as far as their arguments hold against the didactics, who insist that literature must have a moral, and the "puritans" who think that being pleasurable is not justification enough for literature, but that it must also be "educational," then the NTT has my sympathies. In addition, they are also impelled by a desire to do justice to the concept of truth, not allowing it to become some vague, woolly concept that is the stock in trade of mystics and postmodernists, but rather a relatively well-defined concept, one that has practical uses in science and technology. There is nothing mysterious about the truth, we have well tested methods for discovering and verifying it. While I am less sanguine about the scientistic conception of truth that appears to underlie the NTT, I am in general quite sympathetic

to the general position. Talk of "literary truth" often blurs the clear distinctions between literature and science, and the NTT brings much needed clarity.

On the other hand, as I have said, the NTT does not do justice to the linguistic nature of literature. Such theorists are perhaps too ready to lump literature in with other forms of art, neglecting the fact that literature is *language* put to artistic use, and language is a complicated phenomenon, which involves sound and meaning and truth and reference, as well as many other things. I see no obvious reason to draw the line that divides the literary from the non -literary in the place where the NTT draws it, between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act. I am inclined to think that the NTT has picked up some bad methodological habits from the logical positivists.

For the logical positivist, the 'meaning' of an utterance is simply the proposition that utterance expresses. Many utterances are ambiguous or vague, and so we must look beneath the surface of the utterance to discover what it 'really means.' Some utterances may turn out to express no proposition, and so have no meaning at all despite initial appearances. The point is that the 'real meaning' of an utterance is something that is discovered through a process of abstraction: ignore the emotional state of the speaker, the context of the utterance and so on, and the true meaning will reveal itself, a meaning that we can then assess for truth or falsehood. The NTT proceeds in a similar manner, but towards a different goal. It is not truth that is the end product, it is beauty, but the method is the same. If we ignore certain qualities of an utterance (the speaker's intentions, the beliefs of the intended audience, its relationship to the facts) then we will have uncovered the true 'literary object,' which we can then assess for beauty or ugliness. In both cases we must look 'beneath the surface,' behind the actual, particular utterance to find an

object worthy of attention. The truth of an utterance is something that is uncovered by the formal logician, whereas the literary value is something that is uncovered by the critic.

Speech act theory rejects this theory of meaning. Meaning is use for the speech act theorist, which is to say that the meaning of a given sound or gesture depends upon the context of its performance. The unit of meaning for the speech act theorist is the utterance *not* the proposition, the illocutionary act *not* the locutionary act. It is the illocutionary act that is the location of literary value as well, and we judge a work of literature at least in part by how well it fulfills the illocutionary project of the author.

If I am correct and the NTT sees the work of the critic as analogous to the work of the logician, in that the critic and the logician are both specialists who take an ordinary piece of language and extract a meaningful structure from it, then this helps explain why the NTT is as appealing as it is. After all, though we might reject the positivist's claim that any meaningful utterance must have an underlying logical form (and that, in fact, 'meaning' is defined as having just such a form) but still find formal logic useful for elucidating our meaning in certain cases. A formal logic can help us resolve ambiguity (if someone says, for example "Everyone owns a dog" we might inquire as to whether they meant that there is one dog that everyone owns, or else that everyone owns a different dog) and it might serve to show us the implications of our beliefs, implications that might not have occurred to us ("How can you believe in a benevolent God when there is such suffering in the world?"). In the same way, the critic performs an equally useful function, pointing out features and structures in a literary work that might have gone unnoticed by the casual observer.

Both the logician and the critic work at a certain level of abstraction. In fact, a logician, properly speaking, is more interested in *truth preservingness* than in truth. The logician will say something like “'All Ravens are black therefore all non-black things are non-ravens' is a valid argument.” while leaving the question of whether all ravens are in fact black to the ornithologist. The logician tells us how to get from true premises to true conclusions, and might have something general to say about when a given premise has been confirmed or falsified, but whether or not a given premise is true is beyond the scope of logic. In the same way, a critic strives to deal with a work of literature at a certain level of abstraction. She will look at plot, character, rhyme and meter, as well as at whatever theme and thesis is in the work. And she will discuss how these things relate to one another without rendering a verdict on the truth of the thesis. Indeed, it might be absolutely crucial for a critic to avoid talking about the truth of a thesis, or else fall into the didactic fallacy. If we judge a work solely by our agreement with its thesis, then we will miss whatever literary value might also be there. So it is not the critics job to say whether a given thesis is correct or not, but rather to show how the thesis is handled by the work. And I'm inclined to see a very strong analogy here. Learning to think logically involves learning to "suspend your disbelief" in a way. That is, in order to analyze the logical structure of an argument, you must learn ignore the truth of the conclusion to a certain extent. The fact that you agree with a given conclusion doesn't mean that the argument was any good, and it might be hard to reject an illogical argument whose conclusion you agree with. A good conclusion might have a bad supporting argument. In the same way, learning to be a good critic may invovle suspending your own beliefs. You might disgaree with the thesis of a work, but that will not be

enough to judge it a "bad" work. It is not the thesis by itself, by how well the thesis is expressed and treated by the work.

But of course in both cases, in logic and criticism, our ultimate interest is not purely abstract. We will eventually want to use logic to reach a true conclusion, just as we may well come to prefer those works whose themes we do in fact agree with. Our ordinary responses to literary works may depart from technical critical practice, but our ordinary responses are no less aesthetically legitimate. It is a critical flaw in the NTT, to my mind, that it seeks to make literary appreciation a matter for professionals. Rather than describing and explaining the ways in which people actually do respond to literature, it seeks to prescribe, to say how people *should* respond to literature. While I may agree that not every natural response to a work of literature counts as properly “aesthetic,” I would just as soon avoid the conclusion that 'literature' properly understood is a matter for academics. Focussing on the illocutionary act allows me to avoid this conclusion, since it means that adopting the “critical point of view” does not mean abandoning our ordinary understanding of how language works. The literary use of language builds upon but does not exclude the ordinary uses to which language is put.

In their desire to separate science and literature, the defenders of the NTT are too quick to dispense with truth as a factor in the evaluation of a piece of literature. Zink sums up their position when he says (as we recall from chapter two), that truth is not something to be contemplated for its own sake, but rather something to be discovered and verified. Once the scientist has done so-- discovered and verified a new truth-- then her job is finished. Any interest in the scientific statement beyond this is no longer scientific. Since it is no part of literary practice to discover or verify truths, therefore truth is irrelevant to literature. I think this is

wrong, however. When we have discovered a truth, and then verified it, we are not quite done. There might still be work to do. We might for example wish to explain or clarify that truth. We might want to illustrate it or disseminate it or popularize it. We might want to speculate as to its effects on our other beliefs, and on our values. We might wonder what other new truths this one might, in turn, entail. We might even wish to think about it for a while, in order to get used to it. In short, the "discovery and verification" is not all there is to our interest in truth. Certainly literature has taken it upon itself, for many centuries and across many cultures, to play this role. Historical events, political occurrences, scientific theories and revolutions, all have provided fodder for literary expression, and the culture, even the scientific culture, has been enriched by literature's ruminations. True enough, literature can work with falsehood as well as truth, but it does seem to be the way in which a culture comes to grips with what it knows, or thinks it knows.

Science fiction was called "speculative fiction" in its early days, but I think that much literature, and certainly much fiction, is speculative in some way. The free play of the imagination does not preclude an interest in the truth, and novelists have long been interested in working out the consequences of the current state of knowledge. It can't be said that all literary artists are primarily interested in advancing science, or that all literature is a supplement to the scientific method, but it seems quite safe to say that literature has-- as one of its constitutive elements-- an interest in speculating about the truth. The NTT, in short, goes too far in banning notions such as truth and belief from the vocabulary of the literary critic. Literary language is language that diverges, in large ways and small, from the usual maxims of manner. This does not mean that the quality, or truth, of a literary statement is of no importance; indeed, in some

cases we must be able to say what that statement is, and have some attitude towards its truth before we can even judge the style of a literary expression. If we do not know what the poet is saying, we will be unable to say whether she said it badly or well. Moreover, depending on the manner of expression, we may find ourselves re-evaluating a truth. What once was banal and cliché may seem once again fresh and new. What was obscure or uninteresting may seem suddenly relevant and worthy of attention. A skillful use of language may have these effects, and we judge “skillfulness” at least in part, by how well these goals are achieved. To say that literary language “shows but doesn't tell” is okay as far as it goes, but it perhaps does not go far enough. It leaves out the many complex ways that literary language has of “showing us” things, of bringing things and facts to our attention, and the many complex purposes that the literary artist might have for “showing us” anything. Given the wide variety of literary forms, and the long history that literary language has had across various cultures, it does not strike me as a good idea to decree that some linguistic phenomena (illocution in general, assertion in particular) are simply off limits to the literary critic, while others (locution, meaning, sound) are fair game. A given artwork may use, or not use, any feature of language at all; the question of which features are relevant in a given work and which are not must be decided case by case.

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