

Article

Literature and Philosophy: Intersection and Boundaries

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Abstract: This paper is inspired by the manuscript of Philip Kitcher's forthcoming book *Deaths in Venice: The Cases of Gustav von Aschenbach*, in which he offers a brilliant, philosophically inspired reading of Thomas Mann's novel, as well as his views on the relationship between literature and philosophy. One of Kitcher's claims, which is my starting point, is that philosophy can be done not only by philosophers but also within some art forms, such as literature and music. Within the literary text, Kitcher claims, philosophy lies in the showing and the text can influence the way readers think and perceive the world. Due to this claim, I see Kitcher as pertaining to the group of literary cognitivists. He offers some powerful arguments in support of the cognitive value of literature, although his approach is substantially different from the arguments usually put forward in defence of literary cognitivism. In this paper, my aim is twofold: firstly, I want to analyse the relationship between philosophy and literature with the aim of showing that despite some overlap between the two disciplines, we have to keep them separate. Secondly, I want to explore what ramifications this has for literary cognitivism.

Key words: humanism; literature; literary cognitivism; philosophy

1. Introduction

In *Joyce's Kaleidoscope: An Invitation to Finnegans Wake* Philip Kitcher showed just how profound a philosophical reading of a literary work can be. In his forthcoming book on 'philosophy in

literature', *Deaths in Venice: The Cases of Gustav von Aschenbach*¹, Kitcher goes even further in elaborating on the connections between philosophy and literature. Throughout the book he advances what he calls the broader conception of philosophy, "suggesting affinities among works of art, music, and literature and philosophical themes, even juxtaposing quite diverse art forms to ideas from different philosophers". Part of his project is to show that art can be just as powerful a medium for the expression of philosophical ideas as philosophy itself, primarily due to the complexity and importance of the questions it asks and the way it elaborates on them. Interesting and thought provoking as this claim is in itself, I will not deal with it here, though I remain sceptical over its plausibility. Here I want to focus on what Kitcher has to say about literature and (i) its relation to philosophy and (ii) the way it influences readers cognitively. In respect to (i), Kitcher takes 'the supposed barrier between literature and philosophy to be highly permeable' and 'often breached'. He relies here on Hermann Broch, to whom he attributes the aim 'to break down the barrier' between philosophy and literature. In respect to (ii), in accounting for literature's impact on the way people think, Kitcher offers us a powerful answer to the sceptic's concerns about the cognitive dimension of literature.

Throughout this paper, I will be mostly concerned with the relationship between philosophy and literature. I will claim that we can interpret this 'breaking down the barriers' thesis in two ways: intersection thesis (IT), according to which there is indeed an area of overlap or intersection between literature and philosophy, and merging thesis (MT), according to which literature and philosophy can be merged, with the barriers between the two erased. My conclusion will be that the intersection thesis is justified; philosophy and literature indeed intersect and they do that in two relevant areas: in thematic concepts they operate with and in the impact they have on the readers (which is the aspect Kitcher insists upon). However, as I hope to show in part 3.4, IT is in itself not strong enough to justify the MT, only to provide arguments in favour of literary cognitivism. In the next chapter I will give an outline of Kitcher's view and then proceed to IT and MT. Given that this discussion is set against a more general framework of literary cognitivism, in the concluding chapter I will see how my conclusions regarding the relationship between the two fare with respect to it.

2. Kitcher on *Death in Venice*: humanism and literary cognitivism in Kitcher's book

Let's begin with doing philosophy through literature. As Kitcher sees it, there are "three grades of philosophical involvement that literary, or musical, work may manifest".³ The first one (the shallowest) is "that of simply using some philosophical reference to enrich a literary text", as Dickens did in *Hard Times*, where he alluded to utilitarianism and political economy. In the second grade, "substantive ideas from philosophy are taken over and applied to the literary account" of some phenomena, done in the way that Dante organized his *Inferno* on Aristotelian principles. Finally, in the third grade, fictional work is used for the exploration of philosophical questions, but in a way that the author not only works with the proposals of others, but actually "develops answers of his/her own". It

¹ Kitcher P. (2013), *Deaths in Venice: The Cases of Gustav von Aschenbach*, Columbia University Press. In this paper I rely on the manuscript of the book.

³ For the 'three grades involvement' account see the first chapter.

is here that Kitcher makes one more important distinction, between two ways philosophy can be done within literary works: it can be done by saying and by showing. Philosophy done by saying is conducted in novels where authors take up some ‘philosophical conundrum’ and then elaborate on those abstract issues, although “these excursions do not seem to be organically integrated with the development of a plot or character, but simply to serve as opportunities for the author’s expression of views about abstract issues”. He dismisses this as “fiction that argues” which is for that reason “typically dead”⁴. His prime concern is then the following:

“I want to focus on a different category of philosophical fiction, one that comprises works in which philosophical explorations are organically integrated with the narrative, with the evocation and development of character, and with the literary style. Works of this sort may take over questions descending from canonical philosophical texts – and the author may even adopt the formulations offered by those texts - but the answers proposed, elaborated and even defanged are the author’s own. Or the author may be concerned with issues he/she takes to be unfocused, or even unposed, in any existing genre” (Kitcher, ms. p. 18).

Kitcher here relies on Hermann Broch who claims that literature should concern itself with those human problems which are either banished from the sciences because they are intractable or with those problems that sciences are not yet ready to grasp. Kitcher himself wants to focus on “... the recurring questions that seem to resist efforts to find convincing answers, and are thereby vulnerable to dismissal by those impatient with philosophy’s apparent ability to keep talking forever”(ms.p.18). The whole purpose of this project is to “break down the barrier between philosophy – serious philosophy – and literature”, something that was (as Kitcher sees it) done by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Voltaire, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Coleridge, Proust, Kafka and Camus, and to the highest extent, by Sophocles, Shakespeare, Joyce and in music by Schubert, Mahler and Wagner (ms. p. 18). By claiming that “philosophical explorations are organically integrated with the narrative, with the evocation and development of character, and with the literary style” and that fiction that does not do this is dead, Kitcher subscribes to the strongest form of literary cognitivism, in that not only is literature cognitively valuable (the so called epistemic thesis), but also this cognitive dimension enhances its aesthetic value (aesthetic thesis).

It is along these same lines that Kitcher formulates his response to what is usually called ‘the sceptic position’ (or anti-cognitivist position). The first question that a sceptic raises is the following: can

⁴ Kitcher’s argument here is based on his reading of Robert Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* and what he sees as the problem is the fact that ‘philosophical’ aspects of work are cut off from the story: these ‘discursive passages’ are “easily transformable into pages from a standard work of philosophy...” (ms. p. 17). Kitcher might be asked to further explain why this kind of fiction is ‘dead’. One possibility is that this sort of fiction lacks the power to trigger psychological processes he sees as crucial to bring about the change in perspective (on which more below). This is problematic however, because he should then explain why ‘standard work of philosophy’ has that power. Another answer, I think more promising, is a desire to avoid didacticism and instrumentalism in literature. But the fact remains, there are works of fiction which might be seen as saying, but which nevertheless are not dead.

philosophy be done through literature if literary fiction does not argue? The problem is that serious philosophy should argue (and use arguments and conclusions), but these argumentative devices are not found in literature. This line of reasoning was developed by Stein Haugom Olsen and Jerome Stolnitz⁵.

By formulating a sceptical position along these lines, Kitcher resonates two arguments that are often put forward by sceptics. The first one is the so-called ‘no argument’ argument, according to which a reader cannot trust what he reads in a work because literary works do not provide arguments in support of the claims they put forward. The second one is a ‘no evidence argument’ which is based on the claim that works do not offer evidence for the claims they advance. The point of these arguments is to call into question the epistemic foundation of literary works and to render them unreliable as a source of cognitive values.

As a response to this, Kitcher offers the following reply. Firstly, he offers an alternative way to how literature influences readers. The way of learning that sceptics presuppose rests on the assumptions that (i) “psychological movement that occurs in someone who is thinking through a philosophical issue can be exhaustively characterized in terms of changes in belief (or knowledge)” and (ii) “the changes in belief are sparked by the straightforward presentation of new propositions, ideally stated in precise declarative sentences and accompanied by the explicit presentation of cogent reasons” (ms.p.19). As an alternative to this, Kitcher claims that “on many philosophical issues, people appear to change their minds because they appreciate new possibilities, or because they imagine vividly the consequences of holding a particular view, or because they come to recognize that something they were inclined to believe just doesn’t fit” (ms.p.19). What is important in this is the recruitment of imagination and emotion. Finally, Kitcher claims, we should recognize a broader view of how philosophizing takes place, “... including experiments in imagination and emotional reactions to them and in which the texts and sounds that generate philosophical changes of mind can be far more various than the luminous rows of precise declarative sentences beloved of the popular model” (ms.p.20). All in all, Kitcher aims to show, “... a work of literature (or music) might expand our conceptual repertoire, leading us to approach our experiences with new categories and to react to experience in different ways: perspectives inspired by our imaginative identification with a character or with the significance of a particular emotional response ...“(ms. p. 20).

At this point, sceptic can claim that even if people actually form beliefs in this way, those beliefs are not rationally grounded, but are the result of seduction and should therefore not be accepted as philosophical. In a sense, they do not meet the highest standards of reason, they are not justified and therefore fall short of knowledge. When faced with this argument, most literary cognitivists try to show that there is a sense in which literary works can provide justification (for example, because they belong to the genre of realism (Carroll), or because they are true to life, in the sense that they reflect human practices (Gibson, Farrell, Pocci, Elridge⁶, or because they are part of the reflective equilibrium⁷). Kitcher however chooses a different route, relying on his pragmatist background. He tries to show that the perspective from which we usually look at the world is no less ‘seductive’ than

⁵ See Olsen 1978 and Stolnitz 1992.

⁶ See Gibson (2007) and Gibson, Huemer and Pocci eds, (2007).

⁷ Carroll 1998, Baccarini 2010.

the one prompted by literature. Namely, as he says, "...it is not that we achieved our concepts and categories through some insight into their special worthiness – there was no Cartesian moment at which they were rigorously assessed and found to pass muster"(ms.p.20). The concepts through which we perceive the world and make sense of our experience are acquired from our culture and as we go along, we change them and adjust them so that they make a more-or-less coherent whole. In that sense, literature is just one more tool available to us, but a tool that can have particularly powerful influence on us. What literature does for us, Kitcher claims, is achieved by the way it triggers psychological processes "... in which people are brought to see or hear or think or feel in novel ways, so that questions that had been viewed as unanswerable admit of solution" (ms.p.146).

What happens in these psychological processes is the creation of what Kitcher calls synthetic complex, which can become "stable parts of our thinking and feeling" and can then "revise our conceptions and judgments", two of which are the most important: endorsements and rejections, "judgments in which a subject concludes that some state of affairs is tolerable or to be resisted, or in which she takes a scenario as a serious possibility for herself, a goal to be worthy of pursuit, a course of action she has hitherto viewed as necessary to be trivial and dispensable" (ms.p.147).

There are two main ways in which synthetic complex operates: either by leading "people to enquire into matters they had previously taken for granted, playing a role in *discovery*, but having no force as *justification*" (ms.p.149) or by invoking a change in perspective, triggering the audience to look differently at something.

By making synthetic complex part of a reader's internal conceptual repertoire, Kitcher provides a justification for his claim that engagements with literature can indeed have a lasting impact on the readers (as opposed to the sceptic's claim that this influence can at best be episodic) and that conclusions readers reach can be trustworthy and can have serious standing.

We can conclude two things from discussion so far: in some cases, dealing with (philosophical) literary fiction can help us gain new concepts which we then apply to the world and this is done by triggering our imagination and our emotions. But one more thing that follows from the 'philosophy as showing' conception, expressed in this last quote, is that sometimes literary fiction simply describes situations (i.e. possibilities) that we are invited to reflect on and by doing so we can come up with new conclusions and expand our knowledge in that way. In the literature on the cognitive value of literature, this view is known as indirect humanism⁸. So all in all, Kitcher quite firmly accepts all of the cognitivist agenda.

At this point I want to turn to a slightly wider context to see where Kitcher's place on a larger scale of literary cognitivism is⁹. I also want to see whether the fact that the boundaries between literature and

⁸ Notice however that the term 'humanism' here does not primarily mean any connection with the question Kitcher identifies as the basic, the question of value and how to live, but refers to the whole humanistic conception of literature that emphasizes its 'mimetic' aspect, namely the fact that literature deals with what is of interest to us as human beings). See Gibson 2007.

⁹ An account of literary cognitivism which also recognises strong arguments for the similarities that exist between literature and philosophy was defended by Peter Swirski (see his 2007). Swirski argued that "... the capacity of literary fictions for generating nonfictional knowledge owes to their capacity for doing what philosophy and science do – generating thought experiments" (p.4). I will not deal with this proposal here because it would require an extensive analysis of the notion of

philosophy are highly permeable allows us to accept Broch's thesis – namely, the breaking down of the barrier between philosophy and literature. I will develop this thesis along two lines, IT and MT thesis. If there are reasons to suppose that philosophy and literature should be held closer together, it means there is a space of the overlap, or the intersection of the two. I will try to see what that intersection might be and proceed to consider – and eventually reject - some arguments that purport to show not only that this intersection does in fact exist, but also that it is strong enough to ground the stronger interpretation of the breaking down the barrier claim, the merging thesis, according to which literature and philosophy come so close together that they should not be seen as distinct and should not be kept apart.

3. Cognitivism and humanism in literature and literary aesthetics

The idea that philosophy – or, more precisely, questions and concerns recognised as philosophically important – can be done through some other media (rather than philosophy itself) is by no means brought up solely in the connection to literature. A very interesting discussion is currently ongoing regarding the (use of) film as a philosophical medium and the capacities that film has to present, develop and explore philosophical questions.¹⁰ But what is distinctive about this question when it comes to literature and philosophy is the extent to which some authors seem willing to erase the differences between the two and claim that philosophy and literature merge together. Some prominent philosophers who come to mind are Stanley Cavell and Martha Nussbaum. Stanley Cavell offered a reading of Shakespeare's tragedies that supports his claim that "Scepticism, in particular about other minds, is a kind of tragedy, and tragedy is obedient to a sceptical structure", merging in that respect literature and philosophy¹¹. Martha Nussbaum has gone the furthest in insisting that "conventional distinction between philosophy and literature (...) will have to be modified or abolished" and she has been very critical of what she saw as philosophical disregard of important humanistic questions¹², as well as of the style that philosophers used which, as she saw it, was to a large extent in contradiction to the claims they were putting forward¹³ (incidentally, the claim that literary style is particularly suitable for presenting deep, important and complex ethical concerns is part of her overall argument in support of the merging thesis). Nussbaum and Kitcher advance similar arguments for merging literature and

thought experiment which goes beyond the aim of this paper, but a reader interested in this topic could certainly benefit from Swirski's book.

¹⁰ See for example Falzon 2002 and Davies 2008.

¹¹ Quoted in Lamarque 1996, ch. 9

¹² Nussbaum writes: „For I was finding in the Greek tragic poets a recognition of the ethical importance of contingency, a deep sense of the problem of conflicting obligations, and a recognition of the ethical significance of the passions, that I found more rarely, if at all, in the thought of the admitted philosophers, whether ancient or modern.” (Nussbaum 1990, p. 14).

¹³ Here's Nussbaum: „An article, for example, argues that the emotions are essential and central in our efforts to gain understanding on any important ethical matter; and yet it is written in a style that expresses only intellectual activity and strongly suggests that only this activity matters for the reader in his or her attempt to understand”. (Nussbaum 1990, p.21)

philosophy. Nussbaum however, as well as Hilary Putnam, is primarily focused on moral philosophy (and philosophy of emotions) and her arguments are primarily put forward with a reference to moral philosophy¹⁴. The claim is that "... literature is valuable because it educates the reader's moral awareness by presenting situations of moral conflict and choice in all their complexity and with all their emotional implications..."¹⁵ For this reason, literary works should be part of moral philosophy, which cannot do without them.

At this point I will turn to the wider context within which philosophy and literature are sometimes brought in connection, in order to evaluate the reasons for the breaking down the barrier thesis. But first, a brief note on the concept of philosophy. Namely, for Nussbaum and Putnam, the MT includes only moral philosophy. Kitcher, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the question of how to live, and the philosophical doctrines he sees underlying this question are those developed by Plato, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. So what exactly is meant by philosophy in this context? Rather than providing a definition of philosophy here, I will rely on the analysis of literary works which are focused on certain philosophical questions which go far beyond moral philosophy or the 'how to live' question, and include concerns pertaining to epistemology, ontology, bioethics and the philosophy of science. This will at least provide a framework within which to think about the relation between literature and philosophy.

3.1 Philosophy and literature: intersection

It is plausible to claim that the link between philosophy and literature is apparent to anyone who has ever taken the trouble to read at least some of the great works of the literary canons. On the other hand, their love-hate relationship is well-known to everyone remotely interested in either¹⁶ but I do not want to go in that direction here. I am more interested in developing the idea behind philosophical involvement with literature in order to see the reasons philosophers have for wanting to merge the two. My concern in this part will be the humanistic conception of literature, which, I claim, can be understood along two related aspects, thematic and mimetic. After elaborating on that, I will turn to the intersection of philosophy and literature.

There are numerous ways to account for humanism in literature¹⁷. For my present concern however, it is important to note that it insists on the claim that literature is in some sense concerned with what it

¹⁴ See Nussbaum 1990 and Putnam 1976.

¹⁵ Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 387.

¹⁶ Martin Warner in his article "Philosophy and Literature: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" gives a nice overview of this. In Saul ed. (2002) a nice overview is given of the connection, intersection and hostility between philosophy and literature in Germany, in the period of 1700-1990. Various authors present how at times philosophy and literature came so close together as to be seen as joint in their research of the world as well as in the methods used, and at other times as dealing with completely different topics, with one claiming superiority over the other.

¹⁷ Andy Mousley has recently offered a humanistic reading of Shakespeare, and in his introduction he offers a brief account of various forms humanism in literary criticism has taken. He says: "At the heart of literary humanism is the question: 'how to live'" (p.8) which, given its ethical aspect, is firstly connected to asking which way of living might be a more or less authentic expression of what it is to be human and secondly, asks for some concept of human nature. Mousley also makes an effort to show that the question 'how to live' "assumes an intimate connection between 'literature' and 'life'. I think that

means to be human. John Gibson has characterized it “as the thought – or hope – that literature presents the reader with an intimate and intellectually significant engagement with social and cultural reality” and because of that, “literature is the textual form to which we turn when we want to read the story of our shared form of life: our moral and emotional, social and sexual – and so on for whatever aspects of life we think literature brings to view – ways of being human” (Gibson 2007, p.2). We saw with Kitcher that this takes the form of a question of how to live and what it is that makes life valuable. However, there are other important questions and considerations that we hope literature will expose to us, and these are explained by two of its aspects: the mimetic and the thematic. The mimetic aspect, roughly, stands for the intuition that literature deals with humanly interesting questions, those questions which matter to us as human beings¹⁸. The second one has to do with what is called the thematic level, as opposed to the subject level. While at the subject level we are concerned with what goes on in the story in terms of the characters and events, at the thematic level we are more concerned with humanly important themes of a more-or-less universal nature. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen provided quite a substantial elaboration of this, showing in what sense themes are intimately connected to literature. To give but one example, in analysing Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, they argue:

“This brief and simplified description of the theme of Euripides’ *Hippolytus* is built up by help of a number of general concepts through which the different features of the play are apprehended and related to each other: freedom, determinism, responsibility, weakness of will, continence/incontinence, sympathy, guilt, human suffering, divine order, purity, pollution, forgiveness, charity, reconciliation. These thematic concepts (...) are constitutive of the theme as identified through the analysis; they provide the core of what the play is about...” (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 401-2).

One reason for claiming that literature and philosophy intersect (and can be merged together) is the fact that many of these themes, such as the freedom of will and determinism, are also found in philosophy¹⁹. Generally speaking, the development of these humanly important themes is by no means restricted to literature, but is found in some other practices, such as philosophy and religion. However, the way literary works elaborate on these thematic concepts, particularly when they are recognised as philosophical, is sometimes characterised as philosophizing (or doing philosophy) through literature.

insisting on this ‘intimate connection’ is important for the overall cognitivist project. (See Mousley 2007). An even stronger grounding for the cognitivist project is provided for by evolutionary literary studies which extend this humanistic component. Peter Swirski writes: “In what follows I want to consider the evolutionary economies of behavior as a criterion for judging the veracity of literary characters and their actions –and, more generally, for judging the truth of literary representations. My central assumption is that our evolutionarily adaptive dispositions to love, fight, cheat, create, cooperate, see resources, quest for power – in short, all that we do in the course of living and propagating – is the central source of our interest in literature as an adaptive modelling laboratory” (Swirski 2010, p. 262).

¹⁸ Here is how Olsen and Lamarque describe it: „The concept of literature has always been recognized as having what, for the sake of tradition and convenience, may be called a *mimetic* aspect. The interest which literature has for human beings, it has because it possesses a humanly interesting content, because what literature presents or says concerns readers as human beings.” (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 265).

¹⁹ Lamarque and Olsen give the example of Hume’s elaboration of this theme (p. 403-4).

So the first area of intersection between philosophy and literature, and the first reason for claiming the two can be merged together, is the fact that they both are concerned with ‘humanly important themes’, that is, they share (some of the same) thematic concepts. Let’s see how these are developed in literature.

3.2. Thematic concepts in literature

A good place to start is to take a look at the Greek tragedies, which remain a bottomless source of philosophically important questions, as we saw with Lamarque and Olsen. Martha Nussbaum offered particularly powerful arguments in support of this claim. In her book *The Fragility of Goodness* Nussbaum analyses various aspects of some of the Greek tragedies, with the aim of showing not only why they should matter to ethics and moral theory, but more importantly why they are even better equipped to help us deal with the nuances and complexities of challenging moral problems. Shakespeare’s tragedies are also recognised by many to be heavily saturated with philosophical concerns. We already saw Stanley Cavell’s claim about the similarity of sceptical arguments and Shakespeare’s tragedies, with particular emphasis on the problem of other minds. Similar arguments are presented by Collin McGinn who has also offered a philosophical reading of Shakespeare, inspired by his desire to show “that an avowedly philosophical approach to Shakespeare can reveal new dimensions to his work, and that his work can contribute to philosophy itself” (p.1). McGinn analyses Shakespeare’s works showing the influence that the philosophy of Montaigne had on the famous bard, claiming that there are three major philosophical themes explored in his writings: scepticism and knowledge, the problem of self and identity and the problem of causality²⁰.

Ontological and epistemological concerns are at the heart of many great literary works. G. Crane introduces the notion of philosophical romances to refer to the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, identifying in them some of the well-known philosophical problems, such as the mind-body problem, realism vs. antirealism and empiricism vs. rationalism²¹.

²⁰ To give but one example, McGinn claims that in Shakespeare, the ancient scepticism, revived by Montaigne, is developed along three lines: the dream scepticism, that is, the problem of knowing the difference between dreaming and being awake, the problem of the external world and the problem of other minds. McGinn claims: “In my view, *Othello* is predicated on the philosophical problem of other minds, with all its ramifications – moral, personal, and metaphysical. It is thus a deeply philosophical play.” (McGinn, 2006, p. 67). McGinn has done a brilliant job in showing how close Shakespeare comes to doing philosophy and his interpretations of plays provide a very powerful argument to the merging thesis.

²¹ Here is how Crane analyzes the thematic level of Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*: „Disconcertingly, the fluidities of Pym’s mental states seem to be mirrored by an external world that is continually changing, casting doubt on the distinctions between subjective and objective realities. In addition, the flux of both mental states and external circumstances raises questions about the existence of permanent or absolute truths. In an apparently shifting and metamorphic world, what can be said to represent an ‘immovable truth? What aspects of self can I point to and say „that is the stable essence defining my identity?“ In *Pym*, Poe repeatedly tests whether our empirical categories and metaphysical distinctions can withstand his fantastic thought experiments in which opposites are brought together, and people and things seem to morph into their opposite“ (p. 76). Crane goes on and draws the analogy with Descartes’ quest for certainty carried out via his method of doubt. It is an imperative here to mention Poe’s most philosophical work, *Eureka*. Swirski (2000) sees it as “Without doubt, it is also one of the most ambitious and far-reaching projects ever attempted in philosophy” (p. 27). *Eureka* is saturated with epistemological concerns which are still important and often discussed. As Swirski rightly claims, “In *Eureka* Poe sets out

It's worth pointing out that philosophy can be found in genres such as science fiction. Noel Carroll has offered an extensive analysis of the 'philosophy of terror' that is underlying this genre and grounded many of its aspects in the epistemological concerns having to do with knowledge, justification and proving. Here is Carroll:

"The point of the horror genre (...) is to exhibit, disclose, and manifest that which is, putatively in principle, unknown and unknowable. (...) That is, horror stories are predominantly concerned with knowledge as a theme. (...) The majority of horror stories are, to a significant extent, representations of processes of discovery, as well as often occasions for hypothesis formation on the part of the audience, and, as such, these stories engage us in the drama of proof" (Carroll 1990, pp.126-8).

One familiar plot structure of this genre is that of the overreacher, or a mad scientist, someone who reaches out to find forbidden knowledge and put it to use so that human welfare can be attained. Carroll analyses several of these stories (including the well known *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) and shows how deeply saturated with bioethical issues these are.²²

Notice that all of these examples classify as philosophical fiction, in Kitcher's sense of the term. All of them can also be said to explore certain aspects of reality or various concepts and attitudes. Do they however show that the barriers between philosophy and literature should be broken down? One thing that the examples show is that concepts usually taken as philosophical can be invoked in the process of interpreting the story. In this respect, these stories allow, perhaps even invite, philosophical interpretation. But that doesn't necessarily have to be so. Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story *Young Goodman Brown* can be read and interpreted as the epistemological exploration of the problem of other minds and first person/third person asymmetry. The events that Goodman Brown experiences in the woods open the question of trust in oneself and others, trust in one's community and marriage and the value of ties we create with others. From an epistemological point of view, it also tackles the problem of perception and introspection. But on a more general level, the story is set against the Salem witch trials and it can invite the sociological exploration of the Puritan society, mob behaviour and occultism, or just be read as Hawthorne's attempt to come to terms with his heritage. This shows that even when there is a sense in which we can see philosophy and literature intersecting, in that they deal

to legitimize other fields of enquiry alongside the natural-scientific sources of knowledge and to provide an epistemological framework within which all fields (scientific, philosophic, and poetic) can conduct their programs" (p.31).

²² Worries can be raised regarding the claim that science fiction should be on this list, given its questionable status as literature. I do not want to raise this question here, I just want to point to the fact that some works pertaining to science fiction are deeply saturated with philosophical concerns (and these works are usually recognised as classics). Given that one usual theme that is being developed in these stories is the creation of the new being that is in some sense enhanced, made possible by the development of science and scientific technologies, we can recognise many of the bioethical concerns dominant in modern discussions, as well as issues having to do with the justifiability of science and scientific progress. In this sense, we can say that science fiction predates some of the most important and influential questions invoked by modern philosophers. In this sense, Broch's claim seems justified; i.e. this genre of literature concerns itself with those human problems that science is not ready to grasp yet.

with important human concerns and offer solutions to them, there is still plenty of space left for non-philosophical aspects to be discussed. As I will claim later on, the fact that the two intersect does not turn one into another.

3.3. Literature and philosophy: indirect humanism

Another reason for claiming there is an intersection between literature and philosophy can be construed around the fact that literature and philosophy can both influence readers into accepting new perspectives, developing or deepening their concepts, cultivating their emotions and generally influencing their cognitive and emotional apparatus. So even if there are some underlying, even fundamental differences between the two, they stay united in their effects, in what they do, and therefore the barriers between them can be erased.

Many literary cognitivists insist on this aspect of literature, and both Kitcher and Nussbaum place a great deal of emphasis on it. Kitcher's whole enterprise not only in analysing Mann's work but Joyce's as well is to show how engaging with these works can bring about a radical change in how a reader views his life, values that should be central to it and the perspectives from which it should be evaluated²³. Even more than that, his claim that literature can play a significant role in a reader's endorsement or rejection of a particular stand can amount to the claim that literature can be taken as having some weight and significance in a reader's decision on which stand to adopt. Finally even the claim that sometimes synthetic complexes developed as a consequence of reading can be seen as playing a role in discovery has to be given a positive epistemic mark in that it can trigger a process that will eventually (i.e. after the reader engages in discovery) result in the growth of knowledge. So, all in all, the cognitive impact of literature on readers is significant and should not be ignored or denied. In light of that, why keep literature on the opposite side to philosophy?

In this part I have presented two reasons for the breaking down the barrier thesis: the fact that (i) philosophy and literature share the common interest in exploring things that matter for us as human beings and (ii) that engaging with these texts can have a similar influence on readers in terms of how they influence their conceptual repertoire. The fact remains that there is the intersection area between the two disciplines: they meet at the thematic concepts and have similar cognitive impact on the readers. The question now remains whether that is enough to ground the stronger, merging thesis.

3. 4. Literature and philosophy: boundaries

We have seen in the previous chapter that there are reasons to claim that philosophy and literature are rather close. Given the kind of questions they both raise (that is, the themes and thematic concepts they operate with), they both come rather close in exploring the nature of the world and our experience. The

²³ In commenting Joyce's prose, Kitcher says: "I read *Ulysses* as offering a vivid account of the worth of the ordinary, and *Finnegans Wake* as a deep interrogation of the theme. Through the swirling dream of Joyce's last work, readers are brought, again and again, to rejoice in the everyday, to laugh at its comic mistakes and misunderstandings, and, finally, to recognize the possibility that even flawed relationships may center lives of real value. (Kitcher, ms. p. 26). In analyzing *Ulysses*, Kitcher says: "What makes *Ulysses* one of the greatest novels in the English language (...) is that the reconstructed thoughts of Bloom, of Stephen, and of Molly are *worth* following, showing us what it is to struggle, to aspire, to fail, to fall, to betray and be betrayed, to befriend, to forgive, showing us some of what human life is, how it is limited and confused, how it can be triumphant and worthwhile" (Kitcher 2007, p. 49).

strongest connection between the two, which establishes the ‘intersection’, is the overlapping of themes that are being developed in literary works and philosophy. However, this is where we should also search for the barrier. In what follows, I will present three arguments that should make us question the possibility of breaking down the barrier between philosophy and literature. All of these will for the most part acknowledge the ‘overlapping of themes’ (i.e. the intersection thesis) but will show why that is not enough to claim that the two come sufficiently close for the barriers to be broken down, that is, why the merging thesis is not to be accepted.

4. The overlapping of thematic concepts is not sufficient

The strongest argument against the merging thesis comes from Stein Haugom Olsen and Peter Lamarque and the institutional theory of literature they advocate. What should be recognised is that literature and philosophy both pertain to different contexts – or, in Lamarque and Olsen’s terms, different social practices – and within these practices different conventions (of creation and reception) are operative. These conventions ultimately determine what kind of a work we are dealing with, regardless of the content of that work. So, no matter how ‘deeply philosophical’ a given text is, or how valuable a contribution it makes to our cognitive (or moral) functioning, that in itself does not make it neither a literary nor philosophical work.²⁴

On a more general level, the idea here is that the author of a literary work and a philosopher have a different set of intentions that govern their writing. For one thing, their categorical intentions are radically different: an author aims to create a literary work and offer it for evaluation *as a work of art*, a philosopher writes a scientific work that is to be evaluated on scientific grounds²⁵. Obviously I rely here on the general idea behind the social institution of literature, but also brush upon more general concerns regarding the grand issue of author’s intentions. That in itself is a topic that goes beyond this paper. But several things should be noted. Ambiguous as it may be, the generally accepted notion of categorical intentions still stands for the right of the authors to decide what kind of work they are writing; whether it is philosophy or literature or something else. Categorical intentions also imply that

²⁴ This argument is based on the claim that there is a distinction between a text and a work, where text is roughly understood as a set of sentences connected by grammatical rules, and work as contextualized object whose identity is determined by the historical embeddedness (context of origin) and institutional embeddedness (according to which a work counts as literature within a cultural practice of intention, expectation and reception). See Lamarque 2010, ch.2.

²⁵ The plausibility of this claim will ultimately depend on one’s own view of literature and philosophy. John A. McCarthy, for example, who doesn’t see philosophy – as opposed to literature – as aiming to communicate to the audience, explains the difference between the two by claiming that while philosophy “... in its pure form focuses on the (closed) system and often remains distant from practical matters and inaccessible to a wider audience, literature embraces practical needs and seeks broader public” (McCarthy 2002, pp. 14-15). However, he still sees the two closely united in the Enlightenment as “*epistemic tool for exploring the self, the limits of knowledge, the vocation of mind, the inner workings of nature, for explaining the mind-body problematic and for establishing the appropriate relationship between individual freedom and social duty*” (McCarthy 2002, p. 21, emphasis mine).

writers (an author in the case of literature and a philosopher in the case of philosophy) will pursue different aims in their writing: in the case of literature, aims pursued are primarily aesthetic and artistic, in the case of philosophy, they are scientific. This of course doesn't mean that an author doesn't also intend to convey a certain political or religious message, or that a philosopher doesn't care for how literary (or non-literary) his style is; but choices of these kinds always remain secondary.²⁶ This will certainly have an impact on how the writer approaches the theme and uses it. Finally, categorical intentions determine the mere identity of a work (at least according to the contextualist ontology that is part of the social practice theory of literature presupposed here); so if an author sets out to write literary fiction, then no matter how philosophical (psychological/religious or whatever) his work can be, it still remains a literary work²⁷, with philosophical interpretation always being secondary and dependent upon its interpretation.

Ultimately, due to the categorical intentions, readers also approach the work differently. In the case of a literary work, a reader should adopt a literary stance, which is, at the most general level, connected to the conventionally determined expectations along the following lines: (i) expectation of creativity, (ii) expectation of the seriousness of the content, (iii) expectation that the work will reward careful readings and interpretations. It could be claimed that all of these expectations might also be operative in the case of philosophy. However, whereas in the case of philosophy a philosopher engages in the assertive speech act (which means that a reader should take at face value what he reads and believe it to be true and to be the belief of the philosopher), when it comes to literature, what is operative is the so-called fictive utterance. The idea here is that the author is not guided by the fidelity principle, that is, he does not have to say what he believes to be true²⁸. On the other hand, when it comes to literature, a reader should adopt the make-believe, rather than believe attitude.

What impact does this have regarding the previously identified thematic concepts? Here is how Lamarque and Olsen explain it:

²⁶ This line of argumentation is advanced further by examples such as Sartre, who is considered as philosopher but also acknowledged for his literary works. On the other hand, there are examples such as Theodore Dreiser or Fyodor Dostoevsky, who were both authors of literary masterpieces but are also known for their journalistic/editorial work. The problem of social classes and the clash between the rich and the poor, as well as the reasons behind these social conditions, is a crucial aspect which runs deep throughout all of Dreiser's works creating a background against which the actions and interactions of his characters take place. It was also a question of deep importance for him personally, something he was struggling with for the most of his life. Yet the way he treats it in his novels and in his journal articles is radically different and invites different kinds of reading. Linda Ivanits (2008) discusses the way Dostoevsky treats questions of religion, the differences between Russian people and Westerners and the role of moral and ethics in the conduct of people in his fictional works such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* and non-fictional (or semi-fictional) works, such as *The Diary of a Writer*. The same is the case with John Milton and the political and religious issues he discusses in *Paradise Lost* which are in a way a continuation of the polemical questions regarding the English political system and the revolutionary England he raises in his essays (see D. Loewenstein 2007).

²⁸ To put it in another way; regardless of various interpretations that the work invites due to the semantic intentions that may be operative within the work. See Davies S. 2006.

²⁸ For a detailed account of the fictive utterance theory see Lamarque and Olsen 1994, Lamarque 2010, Davies 2007, Davies 2010.

“The thematic concepts are, by themselves, vacuous. They cannot be separated from the way they are ‘anatomized’ in literature and other cultural discourses. And in literary appreciation it is the ‘specificity’ and ‘subtlety’ and ‘boldness’ of the artistic vision, the vision which is apprehended through thematic interpretation, which is the focus of interest. The focus is on the description of the work leading up to the application of the thematic concepts. As the conclusion of a thematic analysis which constitutes the appreciation of the play, one may formulate the thematic statements which have given direction to the interpretation in order to summarize that interpretation. (...) Without being related to a literary work through a specific analysis of that work, thematic concepts and thematic statements are empty.” (Lamarque and Olsen 1994 p. 403)

The fact remains that the same thematic concept can be employed in philosophy (as well as other disciplines), but then it will be used in accordance with the conventions operative within that particular domain. Here are Olsen and Lamarque again: “In philosophical discourse (...) thematic concepts and thematic statements are interwoven in the argument and become meaningful through definition and explanation, through the consequences that are identified and the conclusions that are drawn in the course of the argument” (p.404).

So the point is, the mere fact that philosophy and literature overlap in themes they explore is not enough to break down the barriers between the two, given that these themes are in themselves empty. It is only after they are submerged into the discourse (literary or philosophical) that they gain significance, literary/artistic/aesthetic *or* philosophical. In a sense, it is not the choice of the theme but treatment and development of the theme, as well as the aims pursued, that matter.

A good example of this can be found once more in the works of Dostoevsky. All of his major literary masterpieces (*The Idiot*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*) invoke philosophical interpretations and can be read as exploring certain philosophical concepts. In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky sets out to explore ideas connected to utilitarianism, socialism and the right to commit a murder; in *The Idiot* he is concerned with questions about the nature of God and the operation of the divine in the world. However, at the same time, all of these works can also be seen as explorations into the psychology of the characters and the depths of the psychological realm of people. According to that reading, the focus in *Crime and Punishment* will shift from focusing on the moral dilemma surrounding a murder and the resulting feeling of guilt and the need to repent for one’s sins, to the relationship between Raskolnikov and his mother. Certain Freudian concepts can be recognised in the way Dostoevsky portrays the father-son conflict in *The Brothers Karamazov*. But interpretations do not stop at the level of philosophy and psychology; various social aspects will also play their part in the interpretation. Again, in *Crime and Punishment*, the social background of poverty, crime and alcoholism is a factor that cannot be neglected in accounting not only for the actions of Raskolnikov, but of other characters – Marmeladov, who is usually seen as the voice of Dostoevsky, in particular – as well. This social picture of life in “the back streets of St. Petersburg in the mid 1860s – the poverty and human misery surrounding Raskolnikov – provide a good deal of the fuel generating his rationale for the murder” gives way to “moneyed milieu of post-Reform Russia with its schemes for amassing capital” that makes the background of *The Idiot*²⁹. One cannot neglect these aspects and focus solely

²⁹ Ivanits 2008.

on philosophical themes and concepts. This argument can be made even stronger if we take into consideration that in Dostoevsky's, these 'philosophical' concepts are being developed against the background of Russian legends and spiritual songs and folklore imagery on the one hand, and on the other, Dostoevsky's own views, doubts and queries regarding the existence of God and his benevolence, atheism, socialism and human nature. This 'layeredness' of ambiguity and richness of meaning are characteristic in literature; in fact, the more the work has to offer, the better it is. That is not necessarily so in philosophy, where the aim is usually to present clear, well supported and precise arguments devoid of ambiguity³⁰.

What about the fact that literature and philosophy can both have a similar cognitive impact? Important as this may be, notice that it is not a strong enough reason to disregard the differences between them. First of all, literature and philosophy are not the sole practices that can influence readers cognitively (and emotionally, given that the two, at least when it comes to literature, often come jointly). For example, journalism can also present readers with a story that can have powerful impact on them, causing them to reconsider their accepted perspectives and adjust their judgments accordingly. There are many works pertaining to music, paintings or film which are heavily influenced by philosophical concepts and can have impacts such as those described by Kitcher, yet no arguments are being made that would set out to equate the two. As before, the fact that some literary works come close to doing philosophy doesn't mean they don't pose their own, distinctively artistic and literary identity and nature, and can only secondarily be seen as philosophical.

Another important thing to note is that, regardless of the fact that literature and philosophy can have similar cognitive impact on the reader, literature is (together with other arts) still highly praised for the particular and distinctive way in which it engages readers. Philosophy rarely makes us cry and literature rarely makes us design arguments (which of course doesn't mean they are not there to be found, as shown by McGinn). The two disciplines have quite different ways in which they work upon the readers: literary works engage our emotions (particularly empathy), imagination and intellect simultaneously, while philosophy is to a lesser degree concerned with inviting readers to imaginatively and emotionally engage with the work.

5. The overlapping of themes is not necessary

Even though many literary works are concerned with philosophical issues, that is by no means a universal rule, as the brief and superficial analysis of Dostoevsky's works shows. This argument is

³⁰ In order to make this point even stronger, we can invoke another writer who is often considered to be primarily preoccupied with philosophical themes, Herman Melville. For all its complexity, autobiographical resources and realism, *Moby Dick* (as well as other Melville's works like *Billy Bud* or *Clarel*) is deeply philosophical, exploring the problem of truth, certainty and doubt, desire to find and attribute meaning to the world and man's ultimate inability to find answers. For all of this, Melville is truly "philosophical sceptic" (Yannella 2004, p. 6) but his road to scepticism goes through complicated maze of mythology, religious connotations and mystical imagery (rather than through the dream argument or evil demon). The use of allegory and symbolism makes recognition of philosophical themes in Melville extremely difficult. So even if he touches "large questions which thinking human beings confront", we mustn't forget, as Yannalla reminds us, "What has all too often been lost by activist modern readers is that Melville was not an activist, nor was he a social, political, or behavioural scientist. He was a *literary artist* composing intellectually charged fiction and poetry about cultural issues..." (Yannalla, 2004, p. 12).

most often raised in discussion with those who claim that literature should be a part of moral philosophy, due to the special moral insight it delivers or its ability to help us sharpen our moral intuitions and judgments. As a response to this, Lamarque and Olsen claim that the thesis that literature is (or should be) a part of moral philosophy “would be uninteresting from the point of view of literary aesthetics since it makes no claims about any systematic relationship between literature and philosophy” (1994, pp. 389-390). A similar response can then be given regarding literature generally: given that only some literary works come close to the ‘philosophical’ questions (i.e. in Kitcher and Brohm’s terminology, those questions “disdainfully discarded by thinkers who pride themselves on their scientific rigor, and on new issues, as yet unformulated”), the reasons for equating philosophy and literature are not strong enough. On the other hand, Nussbaum and Kitcher can still claim that the lack of universality doesn’t necessarily mean that some literary works do not come close to being philosophy. However, that is not a good answer for two reasons: (i) whether or not a literary work is indeed ‘philosophical’ will ultimately depend upon the interpretation and it will be philosophical only in connection to that particular interpretation. Under some other interpretation, a work might be given a completely different meaning. (ii) It should be emphasised that literature shares concepts not only with philosophy, but with other disciplines as well. With the rise of psychoanalysis, many literary critics incorporated these methods into their analysis and criticism of literary works. Most literary criticism and interpretation was being done analogously to the way psychoanalysis was done³¹. A very popular and influential trend was to analyse literary works from the standpoint of psychology and psychoanalysis and to insist on the strong connections that hold between literary characters and humans. An argument can then be made to claim that we should bring together psychology and literature for the same reasons Nussbaum claims moral philosophy and literature should be brought together; it helps us understand human psychology better, it helps us understand ourselves and other people better. This would ultimately result in literature – that is, different sets of literary works – being equated with different disciplines, but surely this is not how we see literature.

6. Thematic concepts, functionality and paraphrase

Literary work is, by its very definition, dual: it is a particular, distinctive and unique linguistic expression that, due to the way it organises, develops and works with linguistic units, triggers a distinctive kind of pleasure, namely aesthetic pleasure. This also makes it the work of art. And because of this intimate relationship between the content (or subject matter) and the way that content is organised and given form, literary works cannot be paraphrased without the considerable loss of their artistic and aesthetic value. This was first highlighted by A.C. Bradley who called it the ‘identity claim’. Although the claim was developed with regard to poetry (when it comes to poetry, content and form are inseparable), it was soon considered to be applicable to most of the arts. This principle is also known as the ‘no paraphrase claim’ (the idea is that the content of a poem cannot be paraphrased, i.e. it cannot be expressed in any other way than through the form it is expressed in a given literary work). Obviously, the same principle doesn’t apply in philosophy and other sciences³². Notice that this

³¹ See Castle 2007 and *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism* for an account of how this was done.

³² Gordon Graham discusses this argument in reference to literary cognitivism, see his 1997.

doesn't mean we do not evaluate philosophers for their precision and clarity in presenting the arguments, but we can easily imagine the Chinese Room Argument or the Twin Earth Argument or any other philosophical argument stated in different words, just as we can paraphrase it and still get the same point. On the other hand, the rhetoric power of William Blake's poem *Tiger* is lost if we retell the poem.

What exactly is the power of this argument? First of all, it is usually raised not in reference to the question of whether literature and philosophy can be merged together, but in discussion of the value of the cognitive dimension of literature. However, I think the problems that the 'no paraphrase' claim opens up can make us doubt whether philosophy and literature can merge, due to their distinctive natures. Two important things have to be taken into consideration here. Firstly, the claim put forward by Kitcher, Putnam and Nussbaum was that philosophy and literature can be merged together because of the common questions they both raise (thematic concepts) and cognitive impact both of these disciplines have. The idea is that a reader will expand his knowledge or understanding of the theme by engaging with these works. This is also something that a cognitivist would claim. But what the 'no paraphrase' claim shows is that in literature, unlike in philosophy, the theme is inseparable from the way the subject matter is developed, which also implies that whatever cognitive gain there is, it cannot be separated from the literary work, that is, it has no value when considered in isolation from the work. However, given that the claim is that literary works can have an impact on how we organise and make sense of our experience, it seems that these works will only be valuable if we can actually apply things we learn from the work into the real world. But the 'no paraphrase' claim shows that this is not necessarily so. If thematic concepts are the carriers of the cognitive value that can ultimately advance knowledge and understanding, then it shouldn't matter how these are expressed. However, it seems that when it comes to art, we are not interested solely in what is being presented, but also in how it is being presented³³. A similar argument was put forward by Peter Lamarque in his discussion of the moral value of tragedy. According to the traditional (humanistic) view, tragedy offers either a moral lesson (or principle) that can be derived from the work, or a moral vision, both of which can enhance the reader's moral sensibility. But as Lamarque shows, either the moral lesson is too close to the work and cannot function as an independent generalizable moral principle, or the moral lesson is too detached, too loosely connected to the specifics of the work to be perceived as a part of the literary content the work expresses.³⁴

On the other hand, there are also some who claim that due to the inseparability of theme and subject, literary works are particularly powerful (even more so than philosophy) to influence reader's moral sensibility³⁵. For one thing, literature offers contextualized examples of moral problems and dilemmas, unlike philosophy, which in most cases deals with abstract ideas and principles. The way

³³ For this reason we do not condemn or lose interest in works that contain (factual) mistakes, regardless of whether they were intentional - as in the case of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who, despite conducting extensive researches regarding the historical setting, "routinely changed facts to suit his imaginative purpose" (Person, 2007) - or just represent the wrong scientific facts of the time the work was written.

³⁴ Lamarque 1996, ch. 8. Notice the similarities with Kitcher's account of philosophical fiction and fiction that argues.

³⁵ See for example Gibson 2009.

literature presents the complexities of situations makes it easier for a reader to distance himself and approach a particular problem in a manner that enables him to reach a more thought-through conclusion regarding the matter than if the same thing had happened in real life.

So, to go back to the question, what is the power of the ‘no paraphrase’ argument? First of all, I do not think it is a problem for literary cognitivism, but I will not develop this here. However, in terms of whether or not it can be seen as a treat to the merging thesis, the following dilemma applies. If ‘no paraphrase’ is the problem (in the sense posed by Lamarque’s dilemma), then the cognitive dimension of literature is of a quite different nature than that of philosophy, which means we can’t merge the two. On the other hand, if ‘no paraphrase’ enhances its cognitive value (particularly in terms of cognitive benefits insisted upon by indirect humanism) than literature delivers its cognitive benefits in a manner more powerful than philosophy, so again, no need for the merging. The two are just too different to be covered by the same umbrella.

This conclusion is supported by two further principles of literary criticism, namely the functionality principle and the teleology principle³⁶. The idea behind it is that every single detail in a literary work has its own function within the work and should contribute to the overall purpose of the work, namely to express artistic/aesthetic aims. In that sense, the use of thematic concepts in literary works is always subsumed under the more general aim of telling a story and presenting the content in specific way as envisioned by the author. However, within the philosophical discourse, thematic concepts and their elaboration are the main purpose. The philosophical aim is precisely to elaborate on those concepts. Here is how Lamarque and Olsen explain this:

„It is of the essence of philosophical discourse that it is about issues. These issues are defined through thematic concepts, and philosophical discourse is concerned with the nature of the reality to which the concepts apply. Thus these concepts help constitute philosophy as an intellectual activity. (...) Literature is attached to thematic concepts only indirectly. The theme of a literary work emerges from the subject it has, the way in which the subject is presented, the rhetorical features used in its presentation, and the structure which it is given. Sometimes thematic concepts suitable for formulating the theme of a work can be found in the text of the work itself, but mostly it is the reader who has to bring these concepts to the work. The connection between the thematic concepts and the literary work is established through the reader’s creation of a network of concepts enabling him both to tie together, imaginatively, the different elements and aspects he recognizes the work as having, and to establish what thematic concepts can be applied and how that might be done. It is this constructive labour which is literary appreciation. Literary appreciation is concerned with the application of a set of thematic concepts to a particular literary work. It is not concerned with any further reality to which these concepts might be applied in their other uses.” (Lamarque and Olsen 1994 pp. 408-9).

³⁶ I rely here on Lamarque 2010, ch. 5 and Olsen 1987. I am grateful to my reviewer for pointing out that this idea is also captured by Poe’s claim “In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design” and that certain genres, such as Nouveau roman and other experimental writing reject it.

So the idea here is that there are two completely distinct functions that thematic concepts are being subjected to. In a literary work they are always subjected to artistic aims and should be analysed from that standpoint. Notice however that it does not mean that at some further level a reader is not invited to reflect on them and this reflection will include the judgment of plausibility. A reader might come to accept or reject the ‘worldview’ advocated by the work, but a judgment of that kind is secondary to the aesthetic evaluation. So the point is, no matter how close literature and philosophy are, at all times different aims are being pursued and different evaluative conventions are operative. Therefore, we cannot merge the two and claim they are doing the same work³⁷.

7. Literary cognitivism, intersection and merging

In the previous part we saw that the claim about breaking down the barriers between philosophy and literature can only be understood along the lines of the intersection thesis, according to which philosophy and literature indeed overlap in some of the themes they develop. The thesis also recognises the fact that dealing with literature, as well as dealing with philosophy, influences one’s cognitive, imaginative and emotional economy. However, from a theoretical point of view, it adds to no more than to recognising that certain literary works are deeply philosophical, either in the sense that they rely on philosophical doctrines and perspectives, or develop them further. The question might be asked: do the reasons we have for abandoning the merging thesis diminish literature’s claim to cognitive value?

Let’s begin with the conventions operating in these practices. Does the fact that different aims are being pursued in the creation and reception of literature by a writer and the audience respectively show that literature should not be considered as cognitively valuable? In other words, does the attitude of (aesthetic) appreciation exclude the possibility of learning something from the work? I think not. Even if aesthetic aims have precedence over various possible cognitive benefits, that by itself still doesn’t exclude the possibility of readers actively engaging in critical thinking about the work and deriving some valuable insights from it. By focusing our attention on various aspects of reality, human relationships, phenomena and activities, literary works give us the possibility to think about something we might have missed or neglected. Literary works are also a powerful vehicle of bringing to our view the complexities of moral situations and dilemmas, as Nussbaum stresses. Readers who actively engage in the work that opens up such a perspective might profit cognitively. They might come to a better understanding of moral principles and demands. They might become more aware of what it means to be in a particular kind of situation, or they might just be triggered to reconsider their values,

³⁷ This point is emphasized in Stein Haugom Olsen. He compares literary work with what he calls ‘informative’ discourses (these include philosophy alongside sciences) and claims: “Literary discourse and informative discourse are two mutually exclusive classes. However, the thesis does not imply that one cannot at different points in time interpret the same piece of discourse as on one occasion literary and on other occasion informative. It is possible to change one’s point of view from an aesthetic one to one where the piece of discourse is seen as informative (and to change back again at will). What is impossible is to see the informative function as being a part of the literary function. It is a category mistake to let judgments about the truth of a piece of discourse interfere with one’s aesthetic understanding or evaluation of it” (Olsen, 1978, p. 58).

priorities, world views and choices, which ultimately might result not only in a heightened moral sensibility but also in a growth of knowledge. Kitcher is certainly right in claiming that literary works can assist in discovery, just as he presents wonderful arguments that show that the fact that literature doesn't argue doesn't diminish its cognitive value or the power it has to bring about the change in perspective.

Another reason for abandoning the merging thesis was the fact that literature shares concepts not only with philosophy but with psychology as well. This is I believe another strong reason to insist on the cognitive value of literature. Notice however that one does not exclude the other: great literary works can offer insights into psychology as well as into philosophy and various other disciplines. This, if anything, enriches, rather than diminishes its cognitive value and cognitive gains one can get out of it.

Finally, what about the functionality and teleology principles? Again, I do not think they compromise the cognitive dimension of a work. Even if aesthetic aims are being pursued, that does not prevent the cognitive potentialities of a work to shine through, provided the reader is willing to reflect on them. The overall teleological aim of a work might be to promote or challenge a certain perspective and in that case, the function of episodes within a work will be to fulfil a certain cognitive function (as Kitcher for example shows, playing a role in discovery if not in justification).

8. Conclusion

I have argued that much of what Kitcher has said can be accommodated within overall literary cognitivist theory, which emphasises the cognitive dimension of literary works and the contribution they make to the way we perceive and make sense of the world. In reference to that, Kitcher's pragmatist background can indeed offer strong munitions to cognitivists against the sceptic's claim. But the most important question was to see whether that was enough to conclude that philosophy and literature can be merged together. Plausible arguments were put forward in support of this claim. The idea that we can engage in philosophical discussion seems quite in accordance with the reading practice. It is also a common experience that some works are set against philosophical themes and that their underlying philosophical background is precisely what gives them their value and keeps the audience interested in them. But on the other hand, that is not enough to insist on the claim the two should be merged together. We still have to recognize their distinctiveness and approach them with an awareness of different conventions that determine how they should be read. That doesn't mean that we can't analyse a literary work and give it a philosophical meaning. But that will not turn it into philosophy.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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