RECENT WORK

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LITERATURE

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In his 1985 paper, 'Philosophy and/as/of literature',[1] A.C. Danto offers a typology of ways in which philosophy and literature can be related. One purpose of Danto's paper is critically to address the presumption that a consequence of Deconstruction is to subvert any distinction between the two. In the present review article, we take up some of the repercussions of this Deconstructionist 'subversion'. However, more traditional assumptions about the relationship between literature and philosophy have also been renewed and elaborated in the period since Danto wrote, and these include the wide range of recent work—some of which bears the hallmarks of the debate provoked by Derrida and co.—which has explored the relationship of literature and philosophy by way of ethics.

If ethics is construed as that form of reflective understanding which leads to good or right action then literature can be understood as so many exemplary narratives which rehearse ethical dilemmas in all their particularity and difficulty. Literature in this sense becomes itself a form of ethical (philosophical) reasoning. It shows us how things turn out wrong or right and indicates why they turned out that way. This ancient and persistent thought about the morally educative power of literature has been powerfully exemplified in the work of Martha Nussbaum.

Nussbaum's work contains a wide and varied reference to imaginative literature from Greek tragedy to the work of Henry James and Samuel Beckett. Her most sustained reflection on the relation between literature and philosophy is in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, published in

1. In J. Rajchman and C. West (eds.), *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (Columbia University Press, 1985). (The best collection from the period on issues of and around the philosophy of literature is, in our view, Reed Dasenbrock's *Redrawing the Lines: Analytic Philosophy, Reconstruction and Literary Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989).)

1990.[2] Nussbaum's interest in literature is at one with her interest in practical reasoning in so far as she sees both as crucially engaged by a classical question in ethics: how should we live? It is a part of Nussbaum's project that we should be able to distinguish this question from two more recent questions that have informed ethical thinking: the Kantian concern with the nature of moral duty, and the Utilitarian concern with calculating consequences along a scale of maximal or minimal utility.[3] The importance that Nussbaum gives to literature as a form of moral reasoning depends upon her distinctive reconstruction of Aristotelian rationality. Her reading of Aristotle promotes a revision of the standard assumptions about rationality. So according to Nussbaum it is possible to be reasonable in an Aristotelian sense while acknowledging incommensurability (valuable things are valuable in different ways; there is no single criterion or property which makes something valuable). Similarly, practical reason can acknowledge both the priority of particular judgements without appeals to universal rules or principles and can embrace the importance of emotion and imagination to rational choice. Good literature, in Nussbaum's view, engages with these priorities in distinctive ways. Reading literature becomes a vital component in the education of ethically rational beings. It can help train us in that 'discernment of perception', that ability to see ethical situations in all their singularity and complexity which is an essential skill in developing *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Nussbaum is drawn to works such as James's *The Ambassadors* or Dickens's *Hard Times* which tell stories about the limitations of Kantian or Utilitarian canons of reason as they are brought to bear on the judgement of particular lives. Characters who embody these canons of judgement are shown to be wrong or limited because of their inability to see the distinctive and even unique features of the situations they judge and because of their denial of emotion and imagination in their response to others. These forms of showing are distinctively literary. They can arise in a character's sudden discovery of the limitation of a particular ethical code (for Nussbaum what literature contributes to our ethical education is not just the fact of such discoveries, but of their 'timing' also; the way they can come as shocks or compelling intuitions); or in the recognition that there are certain dilemmas where no wrong or right answer is available.[4] This, in turn,

2. Oxford University Press. See also Wayne Booth's 'Why Ethical Criticism Fell on Hard Times', *Ethics*, 98 (1988), pp. 278–293, for the pre-history of contemporary moral-philosophical employments of literature. And see also Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
3. Thus Nussbaum's work, as much as or perhaps more than Bernard Williams's and Alasdair MacIntyre's, has affinities with 'Virtue Ethics', the 'third way' in Moral Philosophy which, in inheriting from Aristotle and Wittgenstein, has in recent years placed a significant question-mark against the still-widespread presumption that Deontology ('Kantianism') and Utilitarianism are the only significant possible 'moral theories'.
4. This is again (see n. 3, above) connected with the distinctive (non-Utilitarian, post-Kantian) nature of 'Virtue Ethics'. For a review of the current state of play on the question of the 'action-guidingness' or otherwise of the Virtue approach, with especial reference to deep moral dilemmas, see Read's 'Critical Notice' of Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1999), forthcoming in *Philosophical Investigations*.

is an indication of literature's ability to engage with incommensurability, to show the limits not just of Kantian or Utilitarian reason, but of that sensitive and discriminating form of 'perceptive equilibrium' that Nussbaum herself recommends. Literature's power, that is, can come from its capacity to go beyond 'ethical consciousness' as such.[5]

Nussbaum's 'use' of literature has affinities with the work of earlier critics such as F.R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling. Like the former she values literature for its capacity to expose the violence and limitation of modern forms of reason; like the latter she discovers in literature something like a Nietzschian moment, a capacity to go beyond formulaic versions of good and evil. The connection between literature and practical reason has enabled her to argue forcibly for the public importance of literary study.[6] She has criticised what she sees as the tendency of a literary theory shaped by ('Nietzschian') deconstruction to become esoteric, remote from a central ethical dimension of literature, remote from real value.

The work of the American critic, J. Hillis Miller provides a very different account from Nussbaum's both of the relations between literature and philosophy and of the place of ethics in linking the two. Whereas Nussbaum regards 'Deconstruction' as diminishing our understanding of literature's importance to ethics, Hillis Miller regards it as central. One of the polemical purposes of his book, *The Ethics of Reading*,[7] is to address what he regards as a wide-spread misunderstanding of deconstruction in the United States. For Hillis Miller, deconstruction is "nothing more or less than good reading as such" (p. 10). He sets out to show how good reading is necessarily ethical reading.

Central to Hillis Miller's argument, then, is that the act of reading is itself ethical. Our reading of a literary work, sentence by sentence and page by page has to be ethical if we are to read it properly *as literature*. And to see how this might be so calls for an understanding of Kant's philosophical ethics. Hillis Miller extends the already analogical concept of respect in Kant's *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals* to include the relations between a reader and a text such that "our respect for a text is like our respect for a person, that is, it is respect not for the text in itself but respect for a law which the text exemplifies".[8] This ethical moment works through a whole chain of literary

5. For a parallel account of literature and ethics starting from the side of literary criticism rather than that of philosophy, see Wayne C. Booth, *The company we keep: An ethics of fiction* (University of California Press, 1988).
6. See her *Poetic Justice* (Beacon Press, 1997). (See also her 'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Literature and the moral imagination' in A. Cascardi (ed.) *Literature and the Question of Philosophy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).)
7. Columbia, 1987. The 'sequel' to that book, *Versions of 'Pygmalion'* (Harvard University Press, 1990), is notable among other things for Miller's surprising claim to be authentically inheriting Henry James's mantle, a claim which Nussbaum would presumably dispute. A useful book for the purposes of furthering the comparison of Nussbaum and Miller, treating as it does both of them in some detail and endeavouring to carry the debate forward from there, is Robert Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997).
8. *The Ethics of Reading* (ibid.), p. 18.

relations: between texts and what they are 'ultimately' about, between authors and their works, between narrators and characters in a novel, between the characters themselves, and between the reader and all these things.

But if analogy plays a constructive role in Hillis Miller's argument, opening up the possibility of a new ethic of reading, it is also gives rise to a deconstructive or aporetic moment. Like de Man and Derrida, Hillis Miller attends closely to the role of figurative language and narration in the construction of Kant's argument. Kant's bid to clarify the nature of respect or his exemplification of what it would mean to act ethically produce contradictions and double-binds. At the heart of Hillis Miller's analysis is a questioning of the nature and authority of philosophical concepts (a questioning bearing some close resemblances to Rorty's account in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*[9] and thereafter; though it should be noted that Rorty's position on the specific question of the ethics of criticism is far closer to Nussbaum's than to Miller's—Rorty believes in the edificatory power of literature).[10] Respect, for example, is 'defined' by Kant through a complex weave of analogy and disanalogy. Respect both is and is not a feeling! The rhetorical movement of Kant's text defeats expectations of conceptual lucidity. At a crucial moment conceptual argument is 'carried on' by figurative language.

What is true for respect is true for the cornerstone of Kant's moral edifice: the idea of the Moral Law itself. This is ultimately inscrutable, and can only ever be known indirectly in exemplifications which are at once like it, but not like it. Again philosophy turns towards literature without quite being identical to it. In the case of Kant's account of the categorical imperative, Hillis Miller draws out the way in which ethical argument becomes dependent upon narrative as its 'subversive accomplice'. The Kantian test of ethical action—that the rule according to which we act should be universalisable—and its exemplification in Kant's account of the man who makes a deceitful promise, are, according to Hillis Miller, unthinkable without narrative. For from being a dispensable adjunct to conceptual thought, narrative becomes its vital 'supplement'.

The connections made between literature and philosophy in the service of ethics are very different in Nussbaum's and Hillis Miller's work. For Nussbaum, literature plays a positive role in ethical thought because it alerts us to the varieties of the good, while, at the same time, providing an engaged reader with an education in what it means to be a finely attuned ethical individual. Both Hillis Miller and Nussbaum assert the centrality of literary form to its ethical force, but each has a different conception of what literary form is. For Nussbaum literary form shows us things that philosophy cannot. For Hillis Miller literature is haunted by what it cannot show. Literature, like philosophy,

9. Princeton University Press, 1979.
10. See especially his *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), and also his 'The inspirational value of great works of literature' (*Raritan*, 16 (1996), pp. 8–17), and his *Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, 1998). (A complication which we have no space to explore here should be mentioned: Rorty believes that *some* literature (and *some* philosophy) is valuable only because of its purely 'private' (non-moral) pleasures. Thus, unlike Nussbaum, he does not think the moral realm extends thoroughgoingly into 'private life'.)

engages with a force which can never be directly represented, yet this force acts upon us as an ethical imperative. Figurative language and narrative give displaced representations of this absolute. They tempt us to identify what may be the effects of linguistic force as transcendental phenomena.

It could be argued that Hillis Miller tends to turn literature itself into a form of Theory. Somewhat similarly, Nussbaum might be said to treat literature as if its language were transparent, and the content of that language important only as a reflective mode of moral philosophy. Thus, in spite of the subtlety of Hillis Miller's rhetorical analysis, and Nussbaum's detailed and concrete interest in individual literary works, it could be argued that both overlook certain features of *literary language and form* which have been investigated in some detail by recent—explicitly Wittgensteinian—philosophers of literature.

Philosophers apparently influenced by Wittgenstein—and these include not only Richard Rorty but Nussbaum herself—have found a key role for literature *in* philosophy, especially via the rediscovery of the importance of novels for the moral imagination, and thus for moral edification and growth, and have thereby been a central figures in the renewal of 'Ethical Criticism'.[11] In this respect—and this can be seen also in the work of Cora Diamond—[12] the impact of Wittgenstein has been if anything to contribute to an ethical 'justification' of literature. But most of those who have taken Wittgenstein to be of increasing importance for our understanding of literature—again including Diamond—have placed considerable weight on formal or aesthetic aspects of language.

In several cases, however, this has tended to pull in a direction at least orthogonal to and on occasions directly contrary to the 'ethical' turn in philosophy of literature which so far in this review article we have been concentrating upon. For such Wittgensteinians have, if you like (and somewhat like Hillis Miller), focused our attention on the medium, not the message.

What follows are three of the most powerful examples of recent work on philosophy of literature carried out explicitly in the wake of Wittgenstein.

Cora Diamond led the production of a revolutionary new interpretation of Wittgenstein,[13] as holding from the *Tractatus* onwards a 'resolute' conception

11. The most efficient general critique of this movement in philosophy is Richard Posner's 'Against Ethical Criticism' (Part I in *Philosophy and Literature*, 21 (1997), pp. 1–27; Part II in *Philosophy and Literature*, 22 (1998), pp. 394–412). Part of Posner's argument is simply that the examples (e.g., from James and Wharton) which Nussbaum *et al.* prefer—for their purposes of non-systematic ethical edification—are almost invariably not the greatest works of literature of the authors concerned.
12. For Diamond's sympathetic relation to Nussbaum, see Diamond's 'Missing the Adventure: Reply to Martha Nussbaum', in her *The Realistic Spirit*, (MIT Press, 1991). This paper proceeds by means of a searing attack on the failure of standard English-speaking philosophy to catch the literariness and the ineluctably metaphorical character of certain paradigmatic philosophic examples (e.g. The Laws in the 'Crito').
13. See especially her *The Realistic Spirit* (ibid.), which contains her foundational work on both interpreting Wittgenstein and the philosophy of literature; and Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein* (Routledge, 2000), which features two essays by Diamond, besides essays by the associated 'school' of Cavell, Conant, McDowell and co.

of philosophy as an activity in which we engage with temptations to mire ourselves in nonsense. Diamond and her associates think that philosophy does not issue in controversial theses or theories of any sort, but has no 'positive content' at all. Philosophy is, for Diamond, a *therapeutic* activity, in which one works on one's own (and others') desire to say things that nevertheless do not satisfy one—to say things that one cannot succeed in attaching any clear meaning to—at least, any clear meaning which is the meaning one wants.

This conception of philosophy makes style absolutely central—for 'all' that philosophy is, on this 'resolute' reading of Wittgenstein, is the endeavour to tease out one's own and others' wishes to be confused. All that matters is the form of philosophising—it *has* no 'content'. This yields an obvious respect in which rhetorical and *literary* aspects of philosophical authorship become vital in Diamond's Wittgenstein (and in James Conant's like-minded Kierkegaard).[14]

The *Tractatus* 'stated' that the ethical was ineffable. But on the resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, this does not mean that there are ineffable ethical truths which unfortunately we are constitutively unable to state. Rather, it means that there is a virtually unavoidable tendency to want to render a most important dimension of our lives (how we live, how we are in ourselves and to others) in language—but strictly, there is no thing so to render.[15] An ethical 'dimension' or *aspect* is present in all our linguistic practices, in the same way that all of our language has a form—for Wittgenstein, there cannot be *any such thing* as the *stating* of either. (To state the form of language, one would have to be 'outside' language—which is only a tempting but ultimately empty fantasy). The best we can do is feel the force and importance to us of forms of words (such as 'Thou shalt not . . .') which "run up against the limits of language", and to try to consider critically and realistically the tendencies we have to want to find an ethics to state (or to put beyond all statement) these forms. And it is Diamond's view that this can be done best *by means of looking at literature*, at instances, for example, of deep, world-encompassing, 'ineffable' Evil in literature: such as in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark', or indeed in the Brothers Grimm tales of 'Rumpelstiltskin', and 'The Fisherman and his Wife'.[16]

14. See for instance Conant's 'Must we show what we cannot say?', in Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (eds.), *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Bucknell University Press, 1989), and his 'Putting two and two together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and the point of view for their work as authors', in Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (eds.), *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief* (Macmillan, 1995).
15. In a fuller presentation we would want at this point to discuss the Miller/De Man tendency to speak of 'the limits of language/reason' etc. in a way which on the Wittgensteinian conception can make no sense. That is to say: the Yale Critics and Derrida, while extraordinarily close to the Diamondian point that there cannot be anything intelligible to say about a fantasised 'outside' to such 'limits', nevertheless tend to leave one with the impression that this is a fact to be resisted or regretted, or that drastic consequences (e.g., we are 'trapped' in language) follow from our 'inability' to reach this 'outside'. On the view of (Diamond's) Wittgenstein, by contrast, no consequences whatever follow (except certain purely negative philosophical consequences)—because *all* that we are abandoning is a nothing, a fantasy.
16. See Diamond's 'Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of the *Tractatus*', in *The New Wittgenstein (op. cit.)*. (Some somewhat similar moves to Diamond's are made in Colin McGinn's *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* (Clarendon Press, 1997), especially in the chapters on 'The Evil Character', 'Beauty of Soul' and 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'.)

Louis Sass has written two major books[17] and a wealth of papers in the late 80s and the 90s, which to an unprecedented extent[18] develop a serious Wittgensteinian philosophy of psychopathology. The greatest single novelty of that philosophy of psychopathology is that it proceeds by means of a detailed and quasi-literary examination of 'deranged language': especially, autobiographies of schizophrenics and others, and great and obscure works of literary Modernism. Sass's argument, in a nutshell, is that the nature of the most intriguing and impenetrable psychopathologies can be understood by means of analogy to the character of Modernist writing (and of Modernist 'characters', with their (often) excessive or self-destructive introspectiveness). In producing his philosophical readings in turn of Modernist texts (such as those of Dostoievsky, Kafka, Artaud and Musil) in which the characters or narrators are 'symptomatic' of serious cultural and (perhaps relatedly) mental maladies, Sass draws explicitly on Heidegger, Foucault and (above all) Wittgenstein. He thinks that these philosophers enable us to diagnostically understand what is going on in such texts—and in the texts of those philosophers (such as Kant, Fichte and Derrida) who Sass believes embody, preview and reflect, in a 'purified' form, the absurd hyper-reflexive and alienated logic—in short, the derangement—of both schizophrenia and (more 'lucidly') of literary Modernism.

To take a specific example: Sass finds a common structure to the quasi-solipsistic thinking of both Daniel Schreber (a famous paranoid schizophrenic who has been written about by everyone from Freud to Bateson and Lacan) and of the protagonist in Kafka's extraordinary story, 'Description of a struggle'. The 'structure' of schizophrenic language, Sass believes, is thus clarified by putting Kafka's story behind or beside Schreber's autobiography, and can be fully interpreted when one understands solipsism through Wittgenstein's diagnosis of the latter.

Probably the most serious strictly philosophical difficulties for Sass's project are those raised by Diamond's work: if Wittgenstein has a resolute conception of nonsense and of philosophical writing, and it follows that would-be philosophical 'positions' such as solipsism are in fact completely unstable, are in fact nothing, are just invitations to nonsense, then it appears also to follow that any attempt to extract a nugget of something understandable from—to expand our conceptual knowledge *via*[19]—the relevant Modernist texts, let

17. *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the light of Modern Art, Literature and Thought* (Basic Books, 1992); *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Cornell University Press, 1994). (See also his paper in Richard Allen's forthcoming volume on Wittgenstein and the arts.)
18. Stanley Cavell is an important predecessor of Sass, in that Cavell (especially perhaps in his *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford University Press, 1979)) not only details the philosophical inter-involvement of scepticism and madness, but does so in significant part *by means of* readings of great literary works (especially in his readings of Shakespeare's tragedies (see *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), and also 'The avoidance of Love: A reading of King Lear' (in *Must we mean what we Say?* (Charles Scribner's, 1969)), and 'Macbeth Appalled' (Part I in *Raritan*, 12 (1992), pp. 1–15; Part II in *Raritan*, 12 (1993), pp. 1–15))). See below for more detail.
19. H. Olsen and P. Lamarque published their influential (humanist and anti-Literary-Theoretic) book, *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (Oxford University Press), in the same year as

alone from schizophrenic narratives themselves, is doomed to failure. It doesn't help us to understand Schreber, if what Kafka is doing in 'Description of a struggle' is luring us into 'experiencing' something which we cannot understand—i.e. if the concept via which we could apparently be led to understand Kafka's text (i.e. 'solipsism') is in turn nothing at all.

James Guetti discusses Stevens, Faulkner, Frost and Hemingway (among others) via Wittgenstein, Davidson, Merleau-Ponty and Freud, in his 1993 *Wittgenstein and the Grammar of Literary Experience*.[20] He insists on a distinction between 'idling' language and 'working', meaningful language;[21] he is especially interested in the powerful and peculiar effects that language has upon us when it is 'idling' like an engine or 'exposed' to view—as he thinks it typically is in literature. To put this in terms of Cavell's rough 'inside' vs. 'outside' language-games distinction: Guetti thinks that literature, especially but not only Modernist etc. literature, tends to be 'language' outside of language-games. (Thus Guetti would resist strongly supposedly Wittgensteinian approaches to literature which focus on the question of *which language-game* a given piece of writing is properly to be placed in.)

The question of the substitutability of one piece of language for another is carefully weighed by Guetti. What is lost in paraphrasing a poem? Sometimes nothing strictly semantic; but it is of course *precisely* the literary/aesthetic aspect of a poem that compels us. Guetti calls the results of the 'actions' of non-meaningful aspects of language (repetition, for instance) *grammatical* effects, because they occur by means of exposing or displaying features of language to view, contrariwise to what occurs in the use of bits of (meaningful) language to do things, in which grammar is 'presumed'. It is grammatical effects that usually get ignored in the philosophy of language, for example in the debate around Quine's "Indeterminacy of Translation" thesis.[22] If one or more translations are acceptable, '*salva veritate*', still the grammatical effects are usually lost.

Sass published his *Paradoxes of Delusion*—1994. Olsen and Lamarque argue a *general* case that literature *qua* literature is not a source of conceptual knowledge, and that literature's literary/aesthetic qualities are falsified by claims and readings to the contrary—a claim that, if true, would buttress the more specific Diamondian (and Guettian) suspicions of Sass's project given above. However, the Olsen/Lamarque view has been widely criticised even within Analytic Philosophy of Literature—for example, by Eileen John (in her 'Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56 (1998), pp. 331–348) and M.W. Rowe (in 'Lamarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth' (*Philosophical Quarterly*, 47 (1997), pp. 322–341)).

20. University of Georgia Press.
21. For Guetti, most language most of the time is 'transparent' in its working: for example, 'Pass the salt'. Thus he would be bemused by and extremely wary of the Levinasian doctrine that, in Robert Eaglestone's words, "Only when language is not action . . . is it truly language" (*op. cit.*, p. 122).
22. And it is arguably grammatical effects that some literary theorists (e.g. Hillis Miler) incoherently regret not being able to translate in a normal semantical fashion. (This part of our argument is an expansion of Read's 'Book Review' of Guetti, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35 (1995), pp. 412–3.)

Here may be a truly linguistic, post-Kantian explanation for why it can be so crucial to decide a question concerning a fine aesthetic difference, such as whether to regard something as beautiful or not. Such discussions do not merely come down to 'semantics', to the extensions and replaceability of words '*salva veritate*'. For 'beautiful' has a series of conceptual associations—at once personal *and* interpersonal—that are *important*. They help to make it possible to preserve the idea of aesthetics as something more than 'mere taste'. The search for the *meaning* of (for instance) Freudian associations is a grievous mistake—one should look at such associations rather as effects words have when they are experienced in particular ways or contexts. In Wittgenstein's terms, 'beautiful' has a particular "corona" around it which is ignored in the Quinian picture of language.

Thus Guetti applies Wittgenstein in a very practical way to the philosophy of literature and to the theory of literary criticism. Guetti's work stands in direct tension with most broadly contemporary literary theory. He thinks that Wittgenstein[23] puts one in a position to *see* the nature and play of 'literary language', of language on display, largely by contrast with 'language-in-use'. But he thinks that most literary theory is written as though the language it were about were functioning as language-in-use—Deconstructionists and 'old-fashioned' Ethical Critics both, albeit in broadly opposed ways, read literature as though it were (effable) philosophy; New Historicists read literature as though it were political history; Feminist Theorists and many others read literature as though it were politics or propaganda; and so on. So Guetti concludes that most 'literary theory' is, ironically, not only completely ill-equipped to substitute for philosophy of language, but unable even to tell us anything much about *literature*. . . .[24]

For Guetti, the extraction of the 'moral' from a literary work (*à la* Nussbaum *et al*) must involve treating it as language-in-use, signifying language . . . and thus falsifying it; falsifying its distinctive claims to literariness, we might say. Guetti would thus find Nussbaum's or Rorty's efforts—to find the main point of novels to be their moral-philosophical edificatory or conversation-

23. Also important for Guetti are Davidson (on metaphor), Merleau-Ponty, and Jakobson. (On the latter's importance to the philosophy of literature, and (implicitly) in relation to Guettian and Cavellian manners of distinguishing the literary from the ordinary, see Chapter 2 of M. Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago University Press, 1996).) The most interesting recent work on metaphor is, in our view, that of Guetti, and that of Lamarque and Olsen—see especially pp. 350–363 of their *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (fn. 19 above).

24. Guetti might here be related to Bernard Williams, whose seminal 1993 work of moral philosophy and cultural history, *Shame and Necessity* (California University Press) would deserve a serious treatment in a longer piece on our topic—because Williams's book is a philosophical examination of Greek literature—but one that treats it *as* literature, and does not try to force it to be philosophy. For example, Williams studies (in Ch. 2 of his book) the conceptions of agency displayed in *The Iliad* in a sensitive and unpatronising manner. (For a similar treatment from a socio-psychological standpoint, see Ch. 2 of I. Leudar's and P. Thomas's *Voices of reason, Voices of Insanity: Studies of Verbal Hallucinations* (Routledge, 2000).) Moreover, along the way Williams makes some deep remarks explicitly concerning the relation between philosophy and literature; for example, on pp. 12–15.

expanding purposes—hopelessly linguistically naive. (However, it is not clear if Guetti's arguments apply to a more nuanced version of 'literature as ethics' such as Diamond's, a version that *accepts* that literature is always banging up against the limits of language, and says the same of ethics.)

The authors we have considered in this review, those we believe to have undertaken the most substantial work in philosophy of literature over the last fifteen years, take up rather different stances from one another on the question of whether philosophy can be clearly distinguished from literature or not. At one extreme perhaps stands Guetti, with a severe insistence on maintaining a borderline between the two; but it might be asked of him, what positive character he would attribute to philosophical writing, including his own, in the light of the challenge presented by the new Wittgenstein interpretation of Diamond *et al.* For—like Alexander Nehamas[25]—Diamond, Conant and Cavell in their different ways all make the stylistic character of philosophical authorship (for example, that of Wittgenstein, of Kierkegaard, and of themselves, certainly in Cavell's case) a central issue in their work, and raise deep questions about whether it can mean anything to attribute any positive content to philosophical 'assertions'. But if philosophy is only an activity, one involving a continual engagement with the production of nonsense, some might ask how exactly it differs from literature. (And, it might be asked further: If important literature always involves 'the language of paradox' (Cleanth Brooks's phrase, which presumably both Diamond and Guetti would resonate with), isn't philosophy awfully close to it?)

At the other extreme from Guetti (and from those 'analytic' philosophers of literature who seem to see literature as quintessentially their suborned subject-matter), going far further than Cavell, Diamond and co. (who—though raising questions about the very idea of having a philosophical position, or about there being content to any tenable philosophising—would strongly resist the *absorption* of philosophy within literature), there still stands Derrida. The turn to ethics and politics in Deconstructionism—and the rising star of Levinas and the engagement between his work and Derrida's[26]—has modulated but in our opinion *not substantially altered* the fact that many 'post-Deconstructionists' still seem to see philosophy as (to use Rorty's term), a 'kind of writing',[27] philosophy as a genre of literature, or at most as something—as a concept—continually trying to win some independence from literature. But perhaps the exciting recent development of a real philosophical engagement, for the first

25. See his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), and his *The Art of Living* (California University Press, 1998).
26. See for instance Levinas's *Otherwise than Being; Or, Beyond Essence* (trans. A. Lingis, Nijhoff, 1981); and Simon Critchley's 'The Chiasmus: Levinas, Derrida, and the Ethical Demand for Deconstruction', *Textual Practice*, 3 (1989), pp. 91–106.
27. See especially his 'Philosophy as a kind of writing', in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minnesota University Press, 1982), and also his 'Deconstruction and Circumvention' (in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). Rorty's main 'face-to-face' engagement with Derrida is well documented in Chantal Mouffe's edited collection, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (Routledge, 1996).

time, between Derrida and the Wittgensteinians, will substantially change this situation. Derrida's Wittgensteinian critics have challenged him to explain if he really thinks[28] that we must understand all language, including nonsensical language, and literary language, as deferredly saying ("signifying") something. And Wittgensteinian philosophers such as Guetti, Martin Stone,[29] and Stephen Mulhall,[30] ask Derrida why Wittgenstein should be thought to be wrong in his proposal that everyday language is alright as it is. Once again, Continental-inspired language philosophy and literary theory is being asked—but perhaps more sensitively *and* tellingly than ever before—whether it can really assimilate ordinary language to literature (and/or vice versa) as much as it seems to want to.

Possibly the most crucial figure of all in the challenge of Wittgensteinian to Derridian-and-after literary-theoretical thought on 'the philosophy of literature', remains Stanley Cavell. The connections between literature and philosophy in the work of Cavell grow out of his critique of *Cartesian scepticism*. For Cavell this is the major event of philosophical modernity, a form of reasoning which is simultaneously a kind of madness. In his readings of Shakespeare, Beckett, the English Romantic poets, and the American transcendentalists,[31] Cavell renews our sense of the value of literature—by reading it as so many allegories of scepticism, and its overcoming. Cavell might be read here as offering a helping hand to Sass's detailed likening of madness to solipsism and scepticism; for Cavell finds scepticism to involve a real experience at least, in the literary contexts where it is to be found—an experience of unacknowledgement of others, and of disintegration of world. Cavell's subtle affirmations of the value of literature have led him meanwhile to question most probingly the long-running emphasis in Literary Theory on 'the politics of interpretation'.[32]

Cavell's profound and nuanced engagement with philosophical scepticism underlies the efforts of the likes of Stone and Mulhall to question the tenability of Derrida's philosophical aspirations, including his alleged subversion of the distinction between philosophy and literature. Cavell's thought leads one to wonder whether Deconstructionism is in the final analysis a dissatisfaction with the ordinary, manifested in a slightly formulaic effort to get one to doubt anything that cannot be proved to a certain arbitrary philosophical standard,

28. As appears, for instance, from p. 12 of *Limited Inc*. (Northwestern University Press, 1988).
29. In his 'Wittgenstein and Deconstruction', in *The New Wittgenstein (op. cit.)*.
30. For example, in his 'Wittgenstein and Deconstruction', *Ratio*, 13 (2000). This special issue, edited by Simon Glendinning and entitled 'Arguing with Derrida', presents a record of one of the recent conferences where English-speaking philosophers have debated directly with Derrida. (See also Mulhall's *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Clarendon Press, 1994).
31. See especially his *In Quest of the Ordinary* (University of Chicago Press, 1988). (See also his paper on Coleridge and Emerson in Rajchman and West (fn. 1 above) and fn. 18, above.)
32. See particularly his 'Politics as opposed to what?', in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.) *The Politics of Interpretation* (Chicago University Press, 1983); his 'Counter-philosophy and the pawn of voice' in *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Harvard University Press, 1994); and 'A conversation with Stanley Cavell on Philosophy and Literature' (with Michael Payne and Richard Fleming), in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (*op. cit.*).

and with the codicil that, as the standard cannot be reached, one must be satisfied with the reduction of everything to the 'level' of literature, of 'Writing'.

However, one important response to this critique of Derrida would be to argue that it applies more to 'Derridians' than to Derrida himself. The claim that Derrida 'reduces' philosophy to literature may well be a further example of what Derrida has previously identified as a persistent tendency to misread his thought. In a lengthy interview published in *Acts of Literature*,[33] Derrida has provided a detailed account of the points where philosophy and literature overlap and where they diverge. If he (and other Deconstructionist literary critics) sometimes treats them almost as if they were the same, this may be due to their both being encompassed within a broader category of 'rhetoric' or 'Writing', rather than to philosophy being assimilated to literature.

As much to the point here is the subtlety and insight of Derrida's own readings of literary texts. Derrida has shown a particular sensitivity to the ways in which language in literature can be original, unique to a specific text, at the same time as it has within it complex patterns of cultural and historical influence. There are many examples of this patient reading, including his essay on Joyce ('Ulysses gramophone'), his work on the French writer Francois Ponge ('Signsponge') and his meditation on Celan ('Shibboleth').[34]

If we were to hazard a guess as to what a 'Recent work in philosophy of literature' piece written in 2010 or 2015 would say, then, we would be surprised were a part of it not devoted to the clash or meeting between post-Levinasian Deconstruction and the philosophy of Wittgenstein, which could be epitomised in a prolonged and genuine engagement between the work of Derrida and that of Cavell. Cavell has thoroughly 'deconstructed' the failed engagement of Derrida with Austin's thought (while paying no compliments to Searle).[35] We, for our part, hope that a full and mutual 'confrontation' between Cavell's Wittgensteinianism and Derrida's Deconstructionism, unlike that between Searle and Derrida a generation before, really takes place.

There are some promising signs. Simon Critchley in his book *Very little . . . Almost Nothing*[36] has found a commonality in the work of Blanchot, Levinas and Cavell, drawing out the way in which each has a special conception of literature as an 'answer' to nihilism—not, it needs to be added, because literature recovers a meaning that philosophical scepticism or nihilism has destroyed, but because it can point us towards modes of ordinariness where these anxieties about meaning and its loss lose their force. Critchley is amongst a number of philosophical authors like Nussbaum,[37] Cavell and Guetti who

33. D. Attridge (ed.), *J. Derrida*, Routledge, 1992.
34. The Joyce essay and excerpts from the work on Ponge and Celan can be found in *J. Derrida*, *op. cit.*
35. See Cavell's *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Blackwell, 1995), and his *A Pitch of Philosophy* (*op. cit.*).
36. Routledge, 1997.
37. From Literary Studies, Wayne Booth should again be mentioned as an allied voice to Nussbaum's (see fns. 2 and 5, above).

have renewed our understanding of the ways in which literature can be valuable, often in the face of a powerful scepticism (about a value specific to literature) deriving from much recent literary theory and history.

But let us end with a remark on a different note, on a note of regret at what we have not really found space for in this review article—though perhaps we should have. Namely: the variegated recent efforts *by non-academic writers*, not professional philosophers, to do philosophy by other means—i.e. by means of literature—or experimentally to test the distinction between the two. Let us mention here just two examples, who are particularly relevant in that both of them, roughly, do philosophy *of literature* through the writing of (respectively) fiction, and poetry.

Our first example is J.M. Coetzee, whose powerful *The Lives of Animals*[38] presents a fictive scenario of a writer lecturing passionately on the subject of human cruelty to animals. The writer explicitly doubts whether her words will have any positive ethical effect. As Marjorie Garber's response to Coetzee in particular brings out, Coetzee is as much asking here about the value of philosophy, or of literature (i.e. of ethical criticism?), as he is asking about our disvaluation of animals.

The Lives of Animals offers, we might say, a 'weak' grammar of philosophy (including of literature) *via* literature. Coetzee's story is told in very plain prose. Superficially, it does not offer a uniquely or essentially literary language. It is 'only' in its narrativity, its indirectness and its reflexive ironies that it offers something not plainly philosophical. Our second and final example, while again raising questions about its own status, moreover plainly proceeds throughout in a satirical, experimental and 'non-linear' fashion—and might thus be said to offer a 'strong' grammar of philosophy *via* literature. Its 'strength' lies in its fairly deep non-availability to philosophical paraphrase. It is Ron Silliman's brand of L.A.N.G.U.A.G.E. poetry, especially as found in *The Age of Huts*.[39] Here we find for example a poem, 'Sunset Debris', composed entirely of questions—about 2000 of them. And a poem, 'The Chinese Notebook', whose echoing and deranging of the *Philosophical Investigations* is plain even on a fairly cursory inspection:

55. The presumption is: I can write like this and "get away with it".
58. What if there were no other writers? What would I write like?
59. Imagine meaning rounded, never specific.

38. Edited by Amy Gutmann, from Coetzee's 1997–8 Tanner Lectures at Princeton, published in 1999—with responses to Coetzee's story by Wendy Doniger, Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer and Barbara Smuts—by Princeton University Press. See also Diamond's remarks on Coetzee in her 'What time is it on the sun?', *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, 8 (2000), pp. 69–81; and Ian Hacking's 'Our fellow animals', *the New York Review of Books*, January 29, 2000.
39. Segue (Roof Books), 1986. Silliman's poetry is intelligently discussed in Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder (op. cit.)*. It is noteworthy that among other things it appears to question the distinction between the ordinary and the poetic (see, e.g., paras. 65–66 of 'The Chinese Notebook'. It may be recalled, incidentally, that it is in paras. 65–66 of *Philosophical Investigations* (Macmillan, 1958) that Wittgenstein introduces for the very first time his 'family-resemblance' picture of language.).

60. Is it language that creates categories? As if each apple were a proposed definition of a certain term.

At least part of the meeting of Wittgenstein and Derrida on the crucial terrain of the philosophy of literature, then, had best be ready to take an unprosaic form—one that truly recognises for instance the ineliminable contribution made to both their philosophies by their distinctive literary styles—and that can find some place for moments in 'The Chinese Notebook' such as the above, and the following (which, it will be observed, consists only of questions, without answers):

53. Is the possibility of publishing this work automatically a part of the writing? Does it alter decisions in the work? Could I have written that if it did not?