Literature, language, and the human: a theoretical enquiry, with special reference to the work of F.R. Leavis

by

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Abstract

This thesis proposes a theory of literature's human relevance in *literary* terms, developing hints in the critical practice of twentieth century literary critic F.R. Leavis. It examines how literary texts can be humanly relevant in a manner that depends on their literary merit, and does so in three stages, interrogating: the way literary texts operate; the role literary language plays in thinking; and the interaction of literature and morality. The thesis has two, related, aims: to reconceptualise literature's relation to human living, and to offer a recharacterisation of Leavis's literary criticism, with the investigation of aspects of Leavis's practice forming part of the more fundamental enquiry regarding the nature of literature's human significance. In the first stage, the thesis argues that Leavis's critical practice in his works of the 1930s (his first major decade of critical output) provides fruitful ways for conceptualising the interaction between form and meaning in literature, with important consequences for present-day understandings of how literature functions and how it matters. It focuses on an untheorised (by him or others) achievement in Leavis's criticism, the introduction of the term 'attitude' into literary analysis and judgement, and argues that the term enables a different mode of attention to the question of how literature relates to the human world. The second stage first interrogates the role that language in general plays in understanding, constructing a hypothesis from arguments by philosophers R.G. Collingwood and Charles Taylor, and then turns to literary language, arguing that it enables a mode of relating to experience not otherwise possible, and forms a process of thinking, for reader and writer alike. The final stage focuses on arguments in aesthetics against literature's cognitive value, and in moral philosophy for its empathic and moral value. Building on earlier arguments about the operation of literary language and language's relation to thought, the thesis claims that literary language is humanly meaningful in a way that is both cognitively and morally significant. Throughout, the thesis argues for the inescapable link between well-written literature and the morally resonant, such that good literature forms what Taylor calls 'moral sources'. The crucial query is *how* literature functions, which will help us better to answer *why* it is humanly important. This thesis engages with literary criticism, philosophical aesthetics and moral philosophy, as well as offering close readings of literature itself.

Acknowledgements

The acknowledgements page has been removed for the online version of this thesis.

Contents

Textual Note

I use the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, and offer notes in footnotes. Following an initial full citation, the notes provide short titles. Complete citations may be found in the Bibliography, which is of works cited, not works consulted.

The following texts by F.R. Leavis have been abbreviated, and the abbreviation alone is given, without stipulation of Leavis as author. All citations without an author refer to work by Leavis.

New Bearings in English Poetry (1932)	*NB*
For Continuity (1933)	*FC*
Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry (1936)	*R*
'Literary Criticism and Philosophy; A Reply' (1937)	LCP
Education and the University (1943)	*EU*
The Great Tradition (1948)	*GT*
The Common Pursuit (1952)	*CP*
'Anna Karenina' and Other Essays (1967)	*AK*
English Literature in Our Time and at the University: The Clark Lectures 1967 (1969)	*ELTU*
Nor Shall My Sword: Discourses on Pluralism, Compassion and Social Hope (1972)	*NSMS*
The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought (1975)	*LP*
Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays (1986)	*VC*

The titles of commonly cited secondary sources have been shortened or abbreviated (e.g., John Casey's *The Language of Criticism* becomes 'Casey, *Language*'; Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* is 'Taylor, *Sources*'; Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* becomes 'Nussbaum, *LK*').

To keep footnotes brief, texts with subtitles have their subtitles included in the Bibliography, but not the footnote citations. Websites, where relevant (e.g. for literary reviews in newspapers), are given in the Bibliography.

Where a reference says 'All […]', 'all' refers to all preceding quotations following the last citation.

London Review of Books has been abbreviated to *LRB*.

University Press has been abbreviated to UP.

All emphases are original unless otherwise stated.

Copyright:
Edward Thomas's 'It rains' is out of copyright. I am most grateful to Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, for permitting me to quote his 'Emmaus' in full.

Introduction

This thesis is a theoretical enquiry into literature's 'human centrality': its human importance and relevance, something I argue manifests itself in a cognitive and moral significance.[1] I depart from the idea of literature as exploring *moral values*, and indeed use the term 'moral' in a sense as capacious as Matthew Arnold's, for whom 'whatever bears upon the question "how to live" comes under it'.[2] What is literature's relevance to human living? The question has been in the background of scholarship in disciplines other than literature, including moral philosophy, and is also at the heart of aesthetics. There has, I think, been a disproportionate focus on *why* literature is important, which has led to a neglect of the more technical, and more interesting, question of *how* it manages that importance. This thesis constructs a theory of literature's human centrality in *literary* terms, conceptualising how literary texts can be humanly relevant in a manner that depends on their literary merit. My argument takes place on three fronts. The three disciplines that have most discussed the question of literature's relevance to human living have done so in radically different ways:

(1) The general focus of literary criticism is on texts themselves, with the question most often in the background, if germane; moreover, there is a strong tendency in literary theory to resist the 'usefulness' question as distastefully Platonic in character and antithetical to literature's 'play' or 'freeplay'.[3] Wayne Booth's 'ethics of fiction' is a notable pull in the opposite direction; Booth argued for the relocation of ethical questions to the centre of literary study.[4]

(2) Thinkers in moral philosophy have over the last several decades especially examined philosophical questions with the aid of literature, to the extent that there was a symposium on the

[1] F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 111.
[2] Robert Henry Super, ed., *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold. Vol. 8* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 45.
[3] Irene Rima Makaryk, ed., *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 146–49. The Derridean notion of 'jeu libre' (free play or freeplay) is from Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1979), 247–64. See also Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009); Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1992).
[4] Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

subject in All Souls College, Oxford, in 1982, well before the publication of Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* in 1989 and Martha Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* in 1990.[5] The approach of moral philosophers in general is to use literature illustratively, in a way not dissimilar to the thought-experiment, considering literature as showing something that ought to be taken into account. Taylor and Nussbaum offer more nuanced readings of literature, but nevertheless consider literature as *showing* rather than *generating*.

(3) Aesthetics, in its turn, examines the question of literature's relevance in terms of cognitive and moral value, and has focused on the philosophical question of whether these values relate to literary value (the question of a text's value as literature).

My work has been informed by all three of these approaches (five, if one counts the three countervailing tendencies in literary criticism with regard to the question of literature's 'human centrality': not directly relevant; play; ethicism). The project engages with moral philosophers and philosophers of aesthetics as well as literary critics because this is a question relevant to moral and aesthetic philosophy as well as to literary criticism, and indeed because one of my claims is that moral philosophy and aesthetics are asking questions that should be asked more frequently in literature.

In this thesis, I have taken a distinct approach. I have focused on erecting my own theory of how literature is humanly relevant, facing the problems brought up by moral philosophy and aesthetics at distinct appropriate points along the way, but especially in Chapter III, my final chapter, where I offer my own argument for literature as cognitively and morally significant (rather than 'valuable'). Interaction with literary critics and theorists takes place throughout, and I am keen to retain the notion of literature as playful and of intrinsic value without lessening its profound human relevance. The thesis thus constructs literature's cognitive and moral significance as impossible to extract from its merit as literature, by which I mean how well-written it is. That is something for which there can be no prescription, apart from the following: 'well-written' means

[5] Peregrine Horden, ed., *The Novelist as Philosopher* (Oxford: All Souls College, 1982); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1989); Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990).

using language in such a manner that the particular deployment of language is fundamental to what is communicated. If some words are more or less as good as others, or if the language feels almost incidental, language is not occupying this role, and the work, while it may not lack competence, will not count as well-written in my scheme. At the end of the thesis, I offer four possible features of the well-written that draw out its inextricable relationship with moral significance: all are related to the effect of the language and what language makes room for, rather than any concrete stylistic observations. The achievement of literature is its use of words in new and unforeseen ways; being stylistically specific would be self-defeating. W.B. Yeats referred to 'the right word which is also the surprising word', emphasising innovation that is also felt to be 'right'.[6] By 'literary merit', I refer to the success or the power of the language: how good it is at making the world of the work felt.

My argument takes place in three stages, one in each chapter. The first stage, through close reading of a literary critic, F.R. Leavis, establishes how, in good literature, the following relate: form and content; thinking and feeling; technique, sensibility and intelligence; and, through those, literature and living. (I address Leavis's role in the thesis below.) The first chapter uses these various pairings to ascertain the role of 'attitude', arguing that it is both a key, though untheorised, term in Leavis's criticism, and one of crucial relevance in determining literature's importance to human living. The second stage provides a philosophical perspective on language in everyday and literary use, with close readings. The final stage examines arguments in aesthetics and moral philosophy that explore literature's cognitive and moral significance in separation from literary merit, and are sceptical about the relation of literary value to values that are cognitive and/or moral. I argue that cognitive and moral significance that is *literary* in nature (as opposed to learning, say, about the Methodists by reading *Adam Bede*) emerges from nowhere else but a work's literary merit, and that it is this literary cognitive and moral significance that is literature's focal and worthy achievement.

My claim has much in common with ethical criticism while also being distinct from it, and I

[6] Cited in John Bayley, *Pushkin* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971), 90.

have chosen to speak of 'moral' and not 'ethical' significance. Ethical criticism, in Gilbert Plumer's terms, is 'an approach to literary studies that holds that reading certain carefully selected novels can make us ethically better people'.[7] This thesis presents an 'approach' to literature that I argue holds for *all* well-written works of poetry and prose. It is not a focus on the relation between ethics and narrative, or an 'ethical moment in the act of reading', as per J. Hillis Miller's ethics of reading.[8] I do not discuss drama, which, as a performed art, functions differently; references to 'literature' throughout should be taken to refer to both prose and poetry.[9] My claim is not that people who read are 'ethically better' than those who do not, nor that reading makes one 'ethically better'. I argue that the appropriate *literary* engagement with literature (i.e., an interest in the text that is literary in nature, rather than that of the language-learner or social historian, for instance) is one that recognises its capacity to enable meanings that would not otherwise exist. These meanings are significant in moral terms, as they have bearings upon one's habitual modes of relating to experience, and in cognitive terms, as these new meanings are possible only because of a particular usage of language, which, as I argue in Chapter II, has the most intimate of relationships with thought. The consequences for readers are not what constitute (nor, therefore, what undermine) the moral significance of literature *in a literary sense*—and it is a literary theory, one that derives from the quality of literary language, of literature's moral and cognitive significance that I am interested in establishing. I argue that the specificity of good literary language enables for the reader an experience of a particular mode of relating to living that would otherwise not be available.

The claim that literature has a strong moral relevance to humans is one I figure as positive: any learning of other modes of relating to experience through language is a gain, both in the vocabulary one has to use to think through one's own automatic habits of perception and of conception, and in one's own mode of relating to experience. This need by no means translate into ethical or moral improvement, although I do think that if one is significantly affected by a poem or story, chooses to learn from the piece, and actively works on relating to experience in a more thoughtful and

[7] Gilbert Plumer, 'Cognition and Literary Ethical Criticism', *OSSA Conference Archive*, 18 May 2011, 1.
[8] J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), 1–11. esp. 8-9.
[9] Chapter III examines Peter Lamarque's interpretation of *Macbeth*; I treat the play as a literary text and not as performance.

contemplative manner, with a deep desire to be better, then poems, short stories and novels can effect a moral shift. That, however, is not my interest here, which is rather in establishing a technical theory for *how* literature can be cognitively and morally significant *as literature*: how its cognitive and moral 'value' (a term I think hinders more than helps in this context) is enabled only because of its profound literary 'value'. My aim is to erect a claim for literature's cognitive and moral significance that does not depend on reader response, but which is plausible for what literature is as literature, and which will make sense to literary scholars, philosophers and readers alike.

Leavis's criticism is used insofar as it helps with that project—and my case, in this thesis, is that it helps significantly. This thesis, not being interested in reconstructing Leavis's thought, is free to take the hints implicit in aspects of his critical practice and use them strategically to advance the construction of this theory. But Leavis's thought is not only a strategy. It has been the fertile soil for much of this argument, if only because of a sense while reading Leavis that he never quite provides fully the rich and fruitful conception of literature's importance at which much of his writing hints. The rest of the introduction will deal with some questions that may be raised by the term 'moral' and with Leavis's role in the thesis.

A note on 'moral'

This thesis, with the help of Leavis, erects a conception of literature that recognises its pivotal capacity to be morally significant without reducing it to that capacity, making it the aim or end of literary works; rather, the capacity depends on literature being conceived of as valuable because it *is* itself. Importantly, the moral significance depends on that intrinsic value—it cannot exist without it—and is therefore itself a fundamental, integral aspect of what literature is as literature. This also means that the notion of 'literature' at play here is an evaluative one: only texts of literary merit—only texts that are well-written—have moral significance, and it is only texts that are well-written that I refer to by speaking of 'literature'.

The term 'moral' is used in a particular way in this thesis, in the way that I believe best fits the relationship between it and literature, and indeed the idea of that relationship suggested in the practice of Leavis's criticism. 'Morality' in his vocabulary refers, not to a set of rules for conduct,

but to how best to live. In that sense he demonstrates an affinity with Arnold, for whom, as I mentioned, the term moral entails precisely that question. P.J.M. Robertson refers to Leavis's 'morality' as a large term, 'opening life'.[10] Leavis's reference to 'deep moral seriousness, a weight—a human centrality—of theme' indicates the way in which he wields the word: what is moral is profound, weighty and serious, all things he sums up as humanly central. 'Morality' neither prescribes nor relies upon specific rules for conduct. The expansive and interrelational notions of 'literature' and 'morality' that Leavis envisages is created early on by his description of Pope's

> sense of form [as] a sense of a traditional morality of his craft, enjoining an artistic and intellectual discipline. If we call it a literary sense, "literary" must be allowed to convey no suggestion of "superficial"; it was inseparable from a profound moral sense in the ordinary meaning of "morality".[11]

The sentence, from *Revaluation* (1936), is suggestive. It indicates the way in which form can be a manifestation of morality. The choice of article (*a* not *the* traditional morality) indicates that there are other moralities (and other traditions). This concept of morality is one of craft, not of the realm of moral decision or action. There is a collation of form and morality, and of the artistic and intellectual, all four of which come under the term *literary*. *Literary* is used as a wide term with extensive and serious implications. Not only is it not superficial—a reference only to form or to something disconnected from life—but it does not designate something isolated. It belongs with the moral. Leavis specifies that the use of the term *moral*, here, is 'in the ordinary meaning', indicating that his usage of the term is not usually so. The 'inseparable[ness]' of the literary sense and the moral sense, here at least, is evident.

Why use the word 'moral' at all? The central claim of this thesis is that literature has a meaningful relationship to human living. The issue of how to live meaningfully and well has been called a question both ethical and moral. At other times it appears to be covered by the liberal humanist approach, especially in recent texts by John Gibson and Bernard Harrison.[12] The thesis has benefitted from engagement with theorists advocating the 'ethical turn' in criticism and

[10] P.J.M. Robertson, *The Leavises on Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), 41.
[11] All *R*, 111.
[12] John Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007); Bernard Harrison, *What Is Fiction For?* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2014).

aesthetics, but is distinct from that movement, particularly given its emphasis on aesthetic versus ethical 'merits' and 'flaws'; that approach is antithetical to the one I advocate here.[13] 'Ethical' also tends to point more towards the question of the 'virtues' than I think is useful for speaking about literature; while, as I said, I do think literature can affect its readers, these effects are unlikely to translate into talk of virtue. Wayne Booth, who provides qualifications of his meaning of 'virtue', nevertheless offers a model in which 'virtue' is important, and focuses on characters and readers rather than on the form of literary language.[14] I am arguing for a less explicitly ethical and character-based approach, and do not emphasise the responsibilities of the reader as Booth did. Charles Altieri has stated that 'Ethical criticism occurs in at least three activities—in individuals evaluating motives and actions in texts, in readers imagining or actually entering moral conversations about their assessments, and in critics using texts to enter the discourses about morality carried out by professional philosophers'. Like Altieri, I think these activities 'involve substantial risks of subordinating what might be distinctive within literary experience to those frameworks and mental economies that are attuned to modes of judgment shaped by other nontextual and (usually) less directly imaginary worldly demands'.[15] I also think these activities, though certainly of interest, are themselves misguided as points in which the realms of literature and morality can meet.

Yet the gains in awareness of modes of perceiving and conceptualising that literature enables do justify talk of literature's moral significance. Amanda Anderson has pointed out that literary criticism tends to direct suspicion towards the term 'moral', and the wariness of the term seeps into critical approach as well as into a sort of bashfulness in talking about why literature is meaningful.[16] That bashfulness can result in generalities of the sort exemplified in Jeanette Winterson's comment that 'art shows us how to end the war, the war between heart and head'; it can also exacerbate, or illustrate, what Alasdair MacIntyre calls 'emotivism': 'the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions

[13] See Noël Carroll, 'Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research', *Ethics* 110, no. 2 (January 2000): 350–87.
[14] Booth, *Company*, 8–12.
[15] Charles Altieri, 'Lyrical Ethics and Literary Experience.', *Style* 32, no. 2 (1998): 273.
[16] Anderson made her comments in the first of her University of Oxford's 2015 Clarendon Lecture series on 'Pysche and Ethos': 'Psychology Contra Morality', 10 November 2015.

of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character'.[17] MacIntyre claims that 'emotivism has become embodied in our culture', and I would suggest that it is also traceable in responses to literature (as characterised by Winterson's comment).[18] But David Parker is right to stress that evaluative discourse need not 'find itself shackled to an historical, universalist or essentialist conception of human nature': as he says, there is 'no inherent incompatibility between the notion that our ethical understanding is culturally constituted and the conviction that our ethical language is meaningful'.[19] I hope to make a claim for the kind of moral evaluation in literature that is appropriate to a *literary* conception of literature's moral significance: one that in no way obscures the power of literary form.

There is currently in literary criticism and aesthetics an inadequate recognition of the way in which literary form creates moral meaning; how it does so is what this thesis aims to show. Like Arnold, Leavis and Nussbaum, I use 'moral' in what Samuel Goldberg called 'its large sense', which is whatever is relevant to the question of how to live, one that Goldberg, echoing Arnold, argues one is 'perpetually occupied' in answering.[20] Goldberg, a former student of Leavis who became an important figure in late twentieth-century Australian literary criticism, writes of literature as 'a special kind of moral thinking', 'in that it continually re-opens questions'.[21] Literature does have a 'special', distinct kind of moral significance, which derives from its capacity to create *sui generis* thought, but the emphasis on questions can undermine attention to the way literature provides new kinds of information and even evokes entirely new modes of answering. It also does much more than offer the ambiguity that Javier Cercas, for instance, prizes, in his exposition of 'the blind spot'.[22] Literature's ability to inhabit complexity means that it can step outside the linguistic frameworks of social, moral and political norms, and offer new modes of responding, as well as dwell in ambiguity in the way Cercas celebrates.

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[17] Winterson in Jon Raymond, ed., *The World Split Open* (Portland, OR: Tin House Books, 2014), 186; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 11.
[18] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 21.
[19] David Parker, *Ethics, Theory and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 197.
[20] S.L. Goldberg, *Agents and Lives* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 11. See Super, *Complete Prose of Matthew Arnold*, 45.
[21] Goldberg, *Agents*, xv.
[22] See Javier Cercas, *El Punto Ciego/The Blind Spot* (Barcelona: Literatura Random House, 2016).

Moralism does not mean dogmatism, and ambiguity does not mean a free play of the mind in abstraction from moral resonance and depth. Literary debate too often relies on the ethical/formalist or moral/aesthetic dichotomy, as captured well by Patricia Waugh, who summarises that formalism 'insists that the preservation of literary values rests on the containment of literature as an autonomous and non-cognitive discourse, made safe from the encroachments of political or moral or commercial interests and defended through a formalist criticism with its own rigorous methodologies'. Moralism, meanwhile, 'acknowledges that literary texts have ethical and cognitive values and effects in the world, and that they must therefore be defended through containment within a minority culture serviced by an appropriately trained clerisy'.[23] I do not use the term *moral* in the hope that literature's moral significance will 'end up being subverted into some new rule of life—into ends, or ideals, or criteria of conduct and of moral judgment'.[24] I take the deepening of one's sense of 'the way things have significance' for them, as Charles Taylor puts it, and of 'the way a person is alive' as itself a morally significant, and immensely valuable, gain.[25] Some ways of living are better than others, and this is where good writing comes in; only good writing is spacious enough to recognise the profounder levels of human living, even if, and perhaps especially when, a character is not living that way. I strongly disagree with Nussbaum's claim that novels 'can be a paradigm of moral activity'.[26] The moral significance novels and poems can offer is skewed if thought of as becoming a criterion in that kind of way, and especially a criterion of behaviour or activity, neither of which are within the realm of literature's moral significance as I am defining it. That is one reason that throughout I have emphasised *modes of relating* to experience, and not simply experience, which, as I argue in Chapter I, importantly involves the concept of 'attitude'.

There is also the fact that 'moral' is the word Leavis uses—a fact that has probably had as damaging an effect on the connotations of 'moral' in literary criticism as it has on Leavis's own reputation. Yet his usage of the term, as I have suggested, is quite different from the 'ordinary meaning' of 'morality', and in my examination of the way that form and content relate in literary

[23] Patricia Waugh, ed., *Literary Theory and Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 78.
[24] Goldberg, *Agents*, 87.
[25] Taylor, *Sources*, 34; Goldberg, *Agents*, 85.
[26] Nussbaum, *LK*, 148.

language and language more generally, I also suggest that literature's moral significance is located in the quality of its form: in its literary merit. The sense of literature I advance, then, is as something that, if written well, cannot but be relevant to morality, to 'human centrality'. In Leavis's work, which also, at its best, advocates that position, the persuasiveness for the view emerges from the treatment and handling of other areas of literary controversy. That is, this idea of the literary and the moral derives from, and gains meaning through, Leavis's position with regard to various other literary dichotomies, that of form and content in particular. But it is not the case that a oneness of form and content equates to a corresponding oneness for the literary and the moral. There is a third aspect, which shapes and informs the essential mode of Leavis's attention to literature. This aspect is attitude. The focus on attitude enables one to bypass the traditional division of a phrase or line into form and content: 'attitude' cannot be said clearly to derive from one or the other, and evidently relates to both. As Nussbaum has written, 'Style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters'.[27] My contention is that that 'sense of what matters' is integral to the creation of meaning. Attention to the attitude of a text is an attention to something created by form and content together, and literature's relationship to morality, I'll argue, is primarily mediated through the attitude that form and content generate.

Why Leavis?

The erection of my theory of literature's human relevance is advanced, in my first chapter, through close examination of Leavis's criticism in his early texts, those of his first major decade of output, the 1930s. Of major English-speaking literary critics and theorists across the twentieth century, when literature became established as a university discipline, he is the most vocal and most explicit about asking the question of 'What for? —what ultimately for? What do men live by?', and desiring that literature be an active part of one's thinking in response.[28] The questions form a kind of refrain in Leavis's work. His criticism has rightly been considered to be at times rigidly doctrinaire; George

[27] Ibid., 3.
[28] F.R. Leavis, *Nor Shall My Sword* (Chatto and Windus, 1972), 56.

Steiner called it 'totalitarian'.[29] Yet his critical practice (as opposed to his assertions about critical practice) points towards literature's vital relevance in ways that remain informative for current inter- and intra-disciplinary debates. The question of the relation to life that a work conveys is always in the background in Leavis's criticism, and sometimes bursts into the open. Referring to the 'concern, intense and profound, for what, talking loosely, as we *have* to talk (for no precision is possible), we speak of as the "meaning of life"', he states:

> Such a concern, felt as the question 'What for—what ultimately for?' is implicitly asked in all the greatest art, from which we get, not what we are likely to call an 'answer', but the communication of a felt significance; something that confirms our sense of life as more than a mere linear succession of days, a matter of time as measured by the clock— 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow….'[30]

Leavis's is a desire to have the 'what for' question at the heart of literary enquiry, and it emerges as his focal interest in his earliest criticism, not through such explicit question-asking but through an untheorised attention to 'attitude'. My first chapter recharacterises Leavis's work to provide an account of the place and role of 'attitude' in literary analysis (prose and poetry), and argues that the concept is necessary to recognising literature's human relevance. Chapter I thus establishes what I see as an unspoken, unacknowledged framework in his early criticism that can inform present-day conceptualisations of the contribution literature makes to human living. Leavis's work is an important and guiding element in the argument throughout, and forms a notable part of Chapters II and III as well.

More than most other critics of the twentieth century, Leavis has been caricatured in various ways. Booth points out that he 'frequently allows himself to play the hanging judge'.[31] The evidence for the caricatures is in his work, but that work is intriguing because of how little justice snippets of quotation do to his thought. His work in practice proposes a concept of critical methodology that remains untheorised, and which is at its fullest in his work of the 1930s. My first chapter argues that the early criticism provides the foundation not only for his future work, but also for a more

[29] George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (Faber & Faber, 2010), 349. See Gabriel Gersh, 'The Moral Imperatives of F.R. Leavis', *The Antioch Review* 28, no. 4 (1968): 520–28.
[30] F.R. Leavis, *'Anna Karenina' and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 46.
[31] Booth, *Company*, 50.

general theory of how literature works and how to articulate its importance to human living. Barry Cullen rightly highlights the 'difficulty of identifying the philosophical coordinates in Leavis's thinking'.[32] For Cullen this is an integral part of Leavis's method. When René Wellek asked Leavis to be more explicit about the method of his criticism in 1937, Leavis's response was to claim that literature's relation to ideas could not be found in the kind of scheme that Wellek proposed.[33] What remains compelling in the debate today is the desire detectable in Leavis's response to preserve for literature its distinct cognitive and moral capacity: literature, he says is 'thought of an essential kind' because it is a 'discipline *sui generis*'.[34] The method of the critic must not obliterate that *sui generis* mode of thinking, lest it obliterate the thought in the process. Cullen uses the term to describe Leavis's approach to criticism, which itself has a '*sui generis* mode of enquiry and procedure' and a 'methodology which was recognisably a *literary* method and not a philosophical one'.[35] His criticism has 'a *literary* method' because, for him, only that kind of method recognises and can elucidate what literature does.[36] By this he did not mean that theory was inappropriate—indeed, he spoke of hoping he had 'advanced theory, even if I haven't done the theorizing'.[37] In establishing explicitly for the first time the kind of critical logic at play in his early writings, I am interested in the *procédé*, as he came to call it, of the criticism: not in the (in)justice of his critical judgements (especially regarding Shelley and Milton, notable early victims of Leavis's approach).[38]

I am interested in establishing the foundations of Leavis's conception of literature, then, for

[32] Barry Cullen, '"I Thought I Had Provided Something better"—F.R. Leavis, Literary Criticism and Anti-Philosophy', in *The British Critical Tradition*, ed. Gary Day (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1993), 191.
[33] René Wellek, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy', *Scrutiny*, March 1937, 375–83; F.R. Leavis, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy: A Reply', *Scrutiny*, June 1937, 59–70; René Wellek, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy', *Scrutiny*, September 1937, 195–96.
[34] F.R. Leavis, *English Literature in Our Time and the University: The Clark Lectures 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), 20–21. Leavis may not have enjoyed the term 'cognitive', but he certainly believed in what it signifies. In 1956 he wrote 'Literary Studies: a Reply', demanding 'Would [W. W Robson] say that these works are *not*, in their various ways, characterized by interesting "content", or that they don't demand, if one is to take what is *given*, a sustained and difficult effort of thought, entailing a delicately exacting discipline for relevance? What does Mr Robson means by his "cognitive" if it doesn't apply here at least as much to the texts he himself favours?' F.R. Leavis, *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, ed. G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 210–11.
[35] Cullen, '"I Thought I Had Provided Something Better"', 195.
[36] See a criticism of this in David Pole, 'Leavis and Literary Criticism', *Philosophy* 51, no. 195 (1976): 21–34; and a response in Peter Byrne, 'Leavis, Literary Criticism and Philosophy', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19, no. 3 (1 January 1979): 263–73.
[37] 'LCP', 64.
[38] F.R. Leavis, *The Living Principle* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 166.

two reasons. One, a happy by-product, is that Leavis's work has been and remains misinterpreted, thanks in part to his lack of explicitness in flagging his method and direction, and in part to his excessive explicitness elsewhere, say, in vindicating D.H. Lawrence or flogging T.S. Eliot; those emphases have not helped readers to encounter his work with a willing openness to learn from an excellent close-reader and interpreter, and above all a critic with a sharp, impeccable sense of literature's 'felt significance'. Gabriel Gersh, in a review of *'Anna Karenina' and Other Essays* (1967) spoke of how Leavis's neither 'small nor casual virtues […] are often offset by his narrow-mindedness, misrepresentation, rancor, and dogmatism the more pernicious for masquerading as flexibility'.[39] The other, related, reason, which is the primary and principle motive in writing this thesis, is that Leavis's critical practice can help in the present-day debate about why literature is humanly important and how it relates to human living. My interpretation of his work in Chapter I returns us, I hope, to a focus on *how* literature creates its significance, rather than why it is significant, and can therefore aid in the establishing of a literary model of literature's human centrality. I use 'literary' not only to invoke the discipline (that is, to state that the method and means of inquiry are literary ones), but also as it is used in aesthetics to speak of 'literary cognitivism': to indicate that the model of human centrality here established is internally constituted by literature, and derives from literature alone, rather than from, for instance, reader's responses or empirical results.[40] These, too, provide fruitful modes of engaging with the question of how literature matters, but they are not my concern in this thesis.

Leavis and 'Life'?

The thesis's subject is the relation of literature to human living. Cullen's essay highlights that a notable critical contention with Leavis's criticism has been its evident metaphysical aspect, its

[39] Gersh, 'The Moral Imperatives of F.R. Leavis', 522. Incredibly, John Gross uses almost identical terms: 'unfortunately there has been a long price to pay for his virtues in terms of narrowness, spitefulness, dogmatism all the more pernicious for masquerading as flexibility'. John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 274.

[40] See, for instance, John Gibson, 'Literature and Knowledge' in Richard Eldridge, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

relation to values that do not appear to be literary.[41] The 'ultimate value criterion', as Wellek puts it, is 'Life'.[42] The term in Leavis's usage has received numerous critiques, from Catherine Belsey's pointed reference to 'Leavis's most recurrent if slightly elusive positive value', to John Schad's 'organicist master-word' and Robert Boyers's 'vacuous life affirmation', from John Bayley's reference to the 'moralistic mystique of "life"', to Eliseo Vivas's 'extended exhortations' and David Lodge's considered 'they are not really literary concepts, but ethical concepts'.[43] Other theorists, notably including Schad, have suggested a desire to restore the word to criticism. John Gibson's *Fiction and the Weave of Life* is a manifesto for the relation between literature and life. It argues for 'a theory of literary humanism', which 'reveals the connection between literature and life to be a proper feature of literary content'. That text, which warns against the 'desperate category of the ineffable', dispenses with Leavis—and the New Critics—in a footnote for the 'notoriously vague notion of life as an indefinable and basic presence in literary texts'.[44] Harrison and Nussbaum are other present-day thinkers who want literature to be relevant to life, as is Joshua Landy.[45] Indeed, most collaborations of literature and philosophy desire connection between life and literature in some form or another.

Bayley writes, referring to Leavis's at times acerbic tone, that 'the life of a novel, as opposed to the liveliness of its characters, would be a more acceptable criterion if life had not acquired in this context such a combative sense and such a censorious flavour'.[46] He also offers a footnote that suggests approval when Leavis's tone is less off-putting.[47] The term's relevance is evident in the desire in present-day theorists to bring the word 'life' back to the centre of literary-critical practice.

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[41] Cullen refers to a perspective in criticism of Leavis that 'focuses upon the problem of characterising the nature of the "metaphysic" that is inherent in the expression and formulation of Leavis' critical judgements' (191).
[42] Carroll Camden, ed., *Literary Views* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 112.
[43] Catherine Belsey, 'Re-Reading the Great Tradition', in *Re-Reading English*, ed. Peter Widdowson (London: Methuen & Co, 1982), 121–35; Michael Payne and John Schad, eds., *Life.After.Theory* (London: Continnuum, 2003); Robert Boyers, *F.R. Leavis* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 102; John Bayley, *The Characters of Love* (New York: Basic Books, 1960), 38; Eliseo Vivas, 'Mr. Leavis on D.H. Lawrence', *The Sewanee Review* 65, no. 1 (1957): 9; David Lodge, *The Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 67.
[44] Gibson, *Weave*, 18; 50; 14.
[45] Joshua Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions* (New York: Oxford UP, 2014).
[46] Bayley, *The Characters of Love*, 38.
[47] 'Another of the senses which criticism gives to the word "life" is agreeably illustrated by Dr Leavis's treatment of Professor Elton's comment that "George Eliot, while exhaustively describing life, is apt to miss the spirit of life itself". "For anyone whose critical education has begun", says Leavis, "this should be breath-taking in its absurdity".' Ibid.

It is indicative that Leavis did not, unless for a specific purpose, use 'life' with a capital 'L' or with quotation marks, which, as Michael Polanyi has said in a different context, signifies that a term is used in 'a *sceptical* or *oblique* fashion'.[48] It was not a critical term for him; it was a fundamental part of literature. John Casey rightly points out that Leavis's '"key" terms are so thickly interrelated that it is at any rate misleading to talk about his "premises"—as though "life", "maturity", etc. existed in isolation and *a priori,* to be accepted or rejected entirely in their own right'.[49] A. Alvarez similarly speaks of the 'interlocking system' of Leavisian critical values, which for him are given their meaning through the works of which they are used or with which they are identified.[50] Both critics resist the temptation to create a blueprint of Leavisian criteria, recognising that the terms have meaning only in application. Roger Poole writes that '"Life" for Leavis has become the concept without which we cannot think responsibly at all. It is a reality we have unremittingly to keep our conscious attention on. The literary critic has a new philosophical duty towards this reality'.[51] My argument is that 'life'—in Leavis's criticism and beyond—is not usefully thought of as a 'concept' or criterion. Yet Poole's reference to it as a 'reality' of which one has a duty to keep aware fits entirely with Leavis's criticism, and with the approach I advance here. Leavis seemed afraid that by losing the ability to focus on how literature related to life, one was losing a sense of living. In *Nor Shall My Sword* he remarked that '[t]here is a dawning unselfrecognized conviction that we can get on, and get on better, without much life'.[52] His project was to show literature's profound relevance to living, and to argue that one's understanding of what living well is could be developed and elaborated by good literature. The fact that he combined the desire to ask questions of how literature's 'felt significance' can inform living with the closest of attention to the workings of literature's language is the reason for his privileged position in this thesis.

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[48] Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 250.
[49] John Casey, *The Language of Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1966), 156.
[50] 'Dr. Leavis' critical terms seem to renew their strength and gain a fresh, precise definition from being used of Lawrence's work. These terms are not merely critical tools, more or less useful according to your personal taste. They have been used throughout all his work to distinguish a specific tradition of literature, a specific mode of English consciousness and moral awareness. The terms and the works of art have been built up into a great interlocking system of values'. A. Alvarez, 'Lawrence, Leavis, and Eliot', *The Kenyon Review* 18, no. 3 (1956): 484–85.
[51] Roger Poole, 'The Affirmation Is of Life: The Later Criticism of F.R. Leavis', *Higher Education Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (1 December 1974): 89.
[52] *NSMS*, 33.

A claim in the background of my argument is that life and literature are always relevant to one another, the experiences of one feeding into and creating dialogue with the experiences of the other. Yet the term 'life' loses its significance if used as a pre-existing criterion—and this is where Leavis's criticism is misleading, for he does at times use 'life' as a criterion of judgement rather than the phenomenon of living, to which literature can always have something to say.[53] The term also loses its meaning if used too generally, as in Julian Barnes's prefatory comments to an essay collection: 'Novels tell us the most truth about life: what it is, how we live it, what it might be for, how we enjoy and value it, and how we lose it'.[54] This difficulty in its usage is one reason for my strong focus on *how* literature operates. I do not think that the stimulating question of how literature and life engage one another can be appropriately considered, let alone answered, without a firm sense of how literary language functions.

A significant number of commentators on Leavis's work believe they understand the relation of literature to life he advocates. As Parker has pointed out with reference to a Leavisian-spirited movement more generally, it 'involves a turn to literature and the arts as sites of the culture's deepest moral questioning'.[55] This emphasis, thanks to Leavis's own stress upon it, has gained a level of attention disproportionate to its value. Leavis at times made statements that presented literature as salvific; such statements do not do justice to the role literature is able to play in human living. Presentations of Leavis's view that largely paraphrase it, in a tradition exemplified by G. Singh, William Walsh and Ronald Hayman (good paraphrases though they are), are unfortunately corroborated by more independent depictions that nevertheless take some of Leavis's most stringent assertions as characterising the overall practice of his corpus.[56] Thus Gary Day's study, which significantly departs from Leavisian thought by comparing it with poststructuralism, nevertheless describes Leavis's notion of 'life' as 'a transcendent force'.[57] Like Michael Bell's statement that

[53] See especially F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (Chatto & Windus, 1955); F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, *Dickens: The Novelist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970).
[54] Julian Barnes, *Through the Window* (London: Vintage, 2012).
[55] Jane Adamson, Richard Freadman, and David Parker, eds., *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory*, Literature, Culture, Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 15.
[56] G. Singh, *F.R. Leavis: A Literary Biography* (London: Duckworth, 1995); William Walsh, *F.R. Leavis* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980); Ronald Hayman, *Leavis* (London: Heinemann, 1976).
[57] Gary Day, *Re-Reading Leavis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 142.

Leavis's 'sense of responsibility and reverence towards an ultimate value was directed […] at the value of life itself', this is accurate, and indeed at times called for from Leavis, while also skewing the way Leavis's criticism works in practice.[58]

As John Gross has pointed out, Leavis was perhaps too vehement in his convictions for much else other than agreement or disagreement, at least for those who knew him.[59] But there is another way in which the vehemence has been obstructive; it has gotten in the way of seeing what Leavis's criticism suggests as well as what it states. Sometimes the two blend together, and at other times it is what Leavis does not say that offers the more fruitful path. What I call Leavis's theory of literature's relation to human living is not a mystical invocation of a life force, then, but a claim for its human centrality: its concrete and tangible meaning to humans. As manifested in his best criticism, his meaning of 'life' is the phenomenon of being alive, and by 'life', he means what has come in the twenty-first century to be called 'really living': things to do with love, death, loss, grief, human relationship, striving, failure, human connection.[60] Gao Xingjian offers a useful synonym of sorts in *Soul Mountain*, distinguishing between 'real life' and 'life's manifestations'. Life's manifestations are all the things that take up time and energy, but are rarely correspondent to the deeper wells of human desires: administration, arrangements, daily concerns, even the 'bustling literary world' Xingjian's narrator finds to be full of falsehood—things that are daily real, but that 'distort […] reality'. The 'starkly real', on the other hand, is the focus of meaning in most people's lives, the things that they find most significant. Less time may be spent on 'real life' than on 'life's manifestations', but 'real life' is what centrally matters and is felt to contribute to one's personhood in some way.[61]

Leavis's 'life' has something of the energy suggested in his comment that 'We did not need Nietzsche to tell us to live dangerously; there is no other way of living', but it is really a question of maintaining the essence of 'real life' in 'life's manifestations': keeping the quality of what life

[58] Michael Bell, *F.R. Leavis* (London: Routledge, 1988), 18.
[59] See Gross, *RFML*, 283.
[60] The 'Really Living' movement has grown into a commodity in the twenty-first century, specialising in motivational videos and self-help books.
[61] Gao Xingjian, *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (London: Flamingo, 2001), 11–12.

is *for* throbbing through its humdrum quotidian practices.[62] Literature's relationship to the way one lives, I believe, is in its relevance to the practice of living: daily, not only at rarer, sharper, heightened moments. That aspect has been repeatedly emphasised, by, for instance, Nussbaum, who says: 'we have never lived enough. Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial'; 'much of life goes by without that heightened awareness, and is thus, in a certain sense, not fully or thoroughly lived'; 'So literature is an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life'.[63] Nussbaum sets up an opposition between literature and living, in which literature makes up for what life does not offer. While literature does have the capacity to influence reader experience, I do not think it does so according to the kind of model at play here. Nussbaum's notion of literature as elevated experience that adds to life distracts attention from the more habitual changes in attitude that literary language might enable.

Viktor Shklovsky spoke of literature's power to make the stone stony, but even that notion of things being defamiliarized or *enstranged*, as one sees the old and familiar with fresh, appreciative eyes, is too lofty for the kind of human meaning I invoke here.[64] How is literature connected to living without floating into the exultant others of vitalism, formalism or aestheticism? I use Leavis to construct a theory of literature's human significance that is literarily (as well as literally) viable: something that comes from its qualities as literature, nowhere else. In the first chapter I pay close attention to how words relate to experience in Leavis's early work, which takes place through exploration of three related dichotomies: intelligence and sensibility; form and content; thinking and feeling. In establishing the role these play in Leavis's work, I am outlining a theory of literature's human significance that uses Leavis 'tactically', as he might put it: perceiving hints and

[62] *ELTU*, 15.
[63] Nussbaum, *LK*, 47–48.
[64] Lee T. Lemon, Marion J. Reis, and Gary Saul Morson, eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt, *Russian Formalism* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973). On *enstrangement* see Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1993). Sher deliberately misspells *estrangement* in his translation to effect the making-strange suggested by the Russian term *ostranenie* (usually translated as defamiliarisation).

suggestions in his criticism that are not developed explicitly, and using them for my own purpose, which is to erect a theory of *how* as well as *why* literature matters.[65]

Beyond Leavis?

In examining literature's relation to human living, I am not asserting that a particular work or author stands for or against life—a characterisation Leavis's work sometimes compels. I am advocating a scrutiny of the kind of reality the words of a text engender, itself related to the kind of attitude they create. What is the mode of a text's relation to life; what idea of life does it generate; how does the reality it presents persuade us of its reality, or fail to do so; how does it deepen or fail to deepen our ideas of our emotions, concepts, and experiences; how does it communicate its thought? James Wood is perhaps the most vocal of present-day critics desiring that literature be understood to have a relation to life, a desire given persuasive voice in his turn-of-the-century diagnosis of 'hysterical realism'.[66] Peter Lamarque's insistence on the 'uselessness' of art exhibits the opposite perspective: a fear that arguing for literature's applicability to life obscures its value in itself.[67] Wellek had similar fears about Leavis's work, which he compares with Benedetto Croce's: it 'very quickly leaves the verbal surface to which he is committed to respond, in order to discuss the leading sentiment, the attitude, the morality, and the philosophy of his author'.[68] There are moments in Leavis's criticism where that accusation is justified, although his use of author's names can also more generously be viewed as Booth's 'implied author'.[69] Where his work fruitfully points, however, is to the way in which the 'verbal surface' *is* 'the leading sentiment, the attitude, the morality'. The investigation of attitude is not separate from the examination of the words, as a key remark in Leavis's essay on Jonathan Swift ('arrangement of words on the page and their effects,

[65] 'I don't derive from philosophers: I merely *use* them tactically'. Letter to David Holbrook, 16/12/74. Cited in Ian MacKillop, *F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (London: Allen Lane, 1995), 391–92.
[66] 'Hysterical Realism' in James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self* (New York: Picador, 2005), 167–83.
[67] Peter Lamarque, 'The Uselessness of Art', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 3 (2010): 205–14.
[68] René Wellek, 'Review of F.R. Leavis: Judgment and the Discipline of Thought by Robert Boyers; The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis by R.P. Bilan; The Moment of "Scrutiny" by Francis Mulhern', *The Modern Language Review* 76, no. 1 (1 January 1981): 179.
[69] Booth, *Company*, 128; 168-198. See also Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961). esp. 67-86; 211-221.

the emotions, attitudes and ideas that they organize') should remind us.[70]

Where Leavis's judgement falls short, that should not in itself undermine the idea that words and attitude both merit analysis, precisely because of the inextricability of their relation. The thesis argues that literature's relevance to life emerges from a triumph of literary technique, nowhere else. Its moral value belongs to its value as literature, which is to say, in the quality of its language. I argue for literature as an extraordinary means of deepening our conceptions of human experience, recognising that this requires one single property in the question of what makes good literature: that it be well-written. It ought to use language in such a way as to create, whether what it creates is a new mode of seeing or feeling or thinking, or a fresh understanding and fresh contemplation of experience. John Gardner writes that the 'true experimental novel, like Biely's *Petersburg*, or Beckett's *Malone Dies*, is one which achieves the form it does because it cannot otherwise say what is to be said'.[71] My argument is that *all* literature 'cannot [be] otherwise', if it is to merit the term 'well-written'.

The relations between language and human understanding (understanding of human experience, including self-awareness, understanding of human motives and actions and the infinity of possible relations between these) that I explore in Chapter II endow literature with an important function, one that it cannot help but fulfil, whether or not we recognise it. That function depends on good writing. The objective for literature is that it be well-written: only by fulfilling its literary obligation can it enable the deeper kinds of understanding I am talking about. Here is novelist Marilynne Robinson:

> When I wrote *Housekeeping* […], I made a world remote enough to allow me to choose and control the language out of which the story was to be made. It was a shift forced on me by the intractability of the language of contemporary experience—which must not be confused with contemporary experience itself. […] The language of present experience is so charged with judgment and allusion and intonation that it cannot be put to any new use or forced along any unaccustomed path. The story it wants to tell I do not want to tell.[72]

Robinson appears several times in this thesis not only because she exemplifies an instance of

[70] F.R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), 76.
[71] John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 169.
[72] Marilynne Robinson, 'Writers and the Nostalgic Fallacy', *The New York Times*, 13 October 1985.

excellent writing, but also because she aligns herself explicitly in her interviews, articles and non-fictive books with what I see her language doing in her fiction. That is, she writes about the importance of language in human thinking in a manner very like that I am advancing, and instantiates language's generative capacities in her practice. The same goes for Rowan Williams.

My emphasis on good writing has a Wildean ring. But I am not occupying a position of aestheticism. My claim is that literature is essentially to do with morality, conceived as human centrality. My argument is that it is in language that 'open[s] the way' to a new mode of thinking, which requires both an expertise in technique and profundity in vision, that we find literature's moral significance.[73] Robert Eaglestone, an ethical critic, makes a salient point with reference to the final sentence of note 6.421 in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. That sentence is bracketed, giving it the impression of being a marked thought, something to be developed in the future but as yet unfully formed: '(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)'[74] Eaglestone's application of this to his analysis of 'ethical literature'—'we already think of the two as being divided (ethics *and* literature)'—is something I would like to be borne in mind throughout my consideration of the way in which literature relates to human living.[75] Leavis's criticism begins with the premise that life 'includes literature', not that the two belong to different spheres.[76] I will be concentrating on how literary uses of language might affect modes of thinking, and even complicate modes of knowing: on how literary language can internally influence one's mode of living.

Early on, Leavis states that language is that 'upon which fine living depends'; for him, language is a 'metaphor that is metonymy also' for culture.[77] That has been the emphasis in remarks upon the role of language in Leavis's literary thought. Bell, for instance, writes of Leavis's language as 'the historical embodiment of its community's assumptions and aspirations at levels which are so subliminal much of the time that language is their only index'.[78] John McLaren compares Leavis

[73] Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes* (Oxford: Lion Books, 2004), 70–71.
[74] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 2001), 86.
[75] Robert Eaglestone, 'One and the Same? Ethics, Aesthetics, and Truth', *Poetics Today* 25, no. 4 (1 December 2004): 596.
[76] F.R. Leavis, 'Revaluations (XI): Arnold as Critic', *Scrutiny*, December 1938, 325.
[77] F.R. Leavis, *For Continuity* (Cambridge: The Minority Press, 1933), 15.
[78] Bell, *F.R. Leavis*, 9.

with Lucien Goldmann on the sociology of literature.[79] Hayman writes of Leavis's 'conviction that literature, properly studied, could protect language against the depredations of mechanization and commercialism'.[80] Leavis does make these claims, but they tend to exemplify his criticism at its worst, its most exclamatory and least perceptive. For critics repeatedly to draw out this emphasis disregards the more interesting, less salvific, role that both literature and language play in the practice of Leavis's thought—which, being less explicitly stated and rarely insisted upon, is harder to trace and more difficult, though also more beneficial, to analyse. I do not think that culture depends on literary language in the way that Leavis at times suggests and has largely been portrayed as advocating. (Though I do think—another subject—that literary language over time causes shifts in cultural modes of thinking: hardly a controversial claim, given the impact Shakespeare had had on how English-language speakers think and the language they use.) In this thesis, I will argue that literary language can inflect and even change the way humans think and know, and so, perhaps, the way they live.

Throughout the thesis I use the term 'form'. In doing so I refer to the usage of words, to J.M. Cameron's 'these words in this order' or Wittgenstein's 'these words in these positions', with all that that implies for style, structure, punctuation and syntax: that is, by form, I mean almost everything that might come under form and/or style (except form as genre, which is too large-scale).[81] Form is an 'elastic term', and I use it to focus attention on the way words are used, which includes the choice of words themselves.[82] I do not use 'form' in abstraction from 'meaning' or 'content', then, but to refer to a use of words that is specific, 'singular', in Attridge's phrase, and to emphasise both that words are deliberately formed and that they form something deliberate.[83]

Throughout I use 'cognition' and its variants as a term that, as Terence Cave puts it, embraces

[79] John McLaren, *Culture, Literature and the Humanities* (University of Melbourne, 1981), 306–7.
[80] Hayman, *Leavis*, 38.
[81] J.M. Cameron, *The Night Battle* (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1962), 137; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 152e.
[82] Michael D. Hurley and Michael O'Neill, *Poetic Form: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 2.
[83] Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 112. The 'notion of singularity is entirely bound up with the notion of form'.

'mental functioning and mental processes as a whole. These processes include abstract and rational thought, imagination, emotion, and somatic reflexes and responses'.[84] Nussbaum, too, has made a strong case for the intelligence of the emotions, which develops in her later work into the claim that emotions *are* cognitive processes.[85]

Finally, where I speak of 'literary', I refer to the fact of something being literature, not to 'some essential quality that marks out a piece of writing as literature'.[86]

[84] Terence Cave, *Thinking With Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), 14.
[85] Nussbaum, *LK*, 40–43; Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).
[86] Jeremy Tambling, *What Is Literary Language?* (Philadelphia: Open UP, 1988), 8.

Chapter I—The 'relation to […] words': the role of 'attitude'

'that total sense of things—of human experience and the problems implicit in it—upon which analysis operates, and which conditions the analytic process' Leavis, introduction to *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*[1]

Leavis's early essays, articles and books consistently exhibit a refusal to consider anything to do with literature as for its own sake, whether that be technical innovation or exploration of emotion. In these works, of his first major decade of critical output, the 1930s, he also approaches literature as conveying 'attitude'; even when he does not use the term explicitly, the attention to attitude is implicit in his focus on *ways* and *modes* rather than on content specifically. 'Attitude' is by no means a key organising term in his criticism, but it is implicit in his mode of enquiry, and, as I will show, his usage of the word (or variants thereupon) comes with a certain force. This chapter offers a recharacterisation of Leavis's thinking in terms of the concept of attitude—a concept that, I argue, is fundamental not only to Leavis's claims about literature's function and possibilities throughout his career, but to present-day comprehension of literature's relevance to human living, a theory which this thesis overall develops. 'Attitude' assists in interrogating the way in which form and content relate to one another and together generate meaning; the term suggests how literary language is always perspectival, and always creates a particular sense of whatever it is that is created. Further, 'attitude' clarifies that literature presents not experience, but a mode of relating to experience; it is that, I will suggest, that one analyses in analysing the words on the page. The notion of attitude is crucial both to understanding what Leavis's criticism is doing, throughout his career, and to considering how it is that literature, as literature, relates to human living. His writings during this decade focus predominantly on literary criticism and poetry rather than creative prose, but his terminology and approach is similar in discussions of both literature and non-literature, and it is the critical method that I am interested in establishing. I treat his elucidation of the role of attitude in

[1] Leavis in J.S. Mill, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge, with an Introduction by F.R. Leavis* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), 14.

non-literary texts, as in poetry, as of equal importance for literary prose.

Disputing the idea that there are distinct phases in Leavis's critical work, I believe that the 1930s writings set out the framework for the future development of his criticism. Anne Samson, for instance, finds that Leavis's early and late work is concerned with culture and his middle period with literary criticism.[2] Gross finds that 'Leavis on literature is a great deal more illuminating than Leavis on society'.[3] Both readings undermine the conception of literature that Leavis's criticism advances from beginning to end, one in which literature is profoundly to do with culture and society. Terminology that is used later requires understanding of these early writings in order fully to be understood; the same goes for the method and direction of Leavis's later arguments. Bernard Harrison writes that Leavis's sense of the significance of literature's role in the human world is 'advanced' 'in two late works', *The Living Principle* (1975), and *Thoughts, Words and Creativity* (1976).[4] To see that concern only in those works loses much of the richness of Leavis's remarks therein; they are at their most persuasive where they interact with and build upon the claims Leavis had made since the beginning of his career. Leavis's articulation of his perspective is at its most thorough in his early writings, in part because at its newest. I read the 1930s texts as providing not only the basis for but also the fullest sense of Leavis's conception of literature, both in terms of the way it operates and its human relevance.

Leavis's 1930s texts together aim constantly at undermining the prevalent twinned notions that literature is either for its own sake or a vehicle of morality. A.C. Bradley and I.A. Richards had explicitly tackled the idea of literature for literature's sake, Bradley in his Oxford lectures as Professor of Poetry (1906-1910), and Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924). Bradley wanted to vindicate poetry as providing an experience that 'is an end in itself, is worth having on its own account, has intrinsic value', while not collapsing into what he felt was the formalist fallacy of 'Art for Art'.[5] Notably Bradley speaks of the 'experience' as having intrinsic worth, rather than poetry itself—an emphasis on the reader that he has in common with Richards, but not with Leavis.

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[2] Anne Samson, *F.R. Leavis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 8.
[3] Gross, *RFML*, 272.
[4] Harrison, *WIFF?*, 103.
[5] A.C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1926), 4–5.

Richards queries aspects of Bradley's view, but agrees essentially that 'separation of poetic experience from its place in life and its ulterior worths, involves a definite lop-sidedness, narrowness and incompleteness in those who preach it sincerely'. 'The world of poetry has in no sense any different reality from the rest of the world and it has no special laws and no other-worldly peculiarities'.[6] Both Bradley and Richards approach the question in a philosophical sense, considering poetry's relationship to the world and the nature of its value (which is, for both, intrinsic). Leavis's approach is different, primarily because his battling against the notion of literature for literature's sake most consistently and effectively takes place in an implicit manner. When he makes the argument overtly, he does so with much the same approach as Bradley and Richards, speaking of literature in general terms. But he also undermines the idea of literature as for its own sake in almost every aspect of his criticism, down to his understanding of how literature works. In so doing he widens the issue from one about the aesthetic-social status of literature to an ontology of literature—a theory of what it is, which includes its relationship to life. This is perhaps the key distinction with Richards, whose keen interest in literature as a social and psychological phenomenon is not also one about what literature *is*. *Practical Criticism* (1929) is substantively concerned with the way poetry can be used 'as a means of ordering our minds', which, however vehement Leavis at times sounds about literature's human value, is a different emphasis.[7] Richards's interest, as *Foundations of Aesthetics* (1922), *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), and *Science and Poetry* (1926) indicate, was as much in the mind of the reader as in literary texts. *Principles of Literary Criticism* also demonstrates that concern, with chapters on 'a psychological theory of value', 'emotion and the cœnesthesia' and memory, not to mention the mode of interest and process of inquiry in the more ostensibly literary chapters.

I will argue throughout this chapter that Leavis's 1930s writings provide a view of the relationship of form and content that is useful for deliberating the nature of that relationship today. For many literary critics, the crucial interrelatedness of form and content is axiomatic. Yet there are surprising divergences regarding what that interrelatedness might mean, divergences captured in

[6] I.A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 59–60.
[7] I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1930), 349.

Raymond Williams's amorphous description of form as both 'an essential shaping principle' and 'a visible or outward shape, with a strong sense of the physical body'.[8] Is form external, or essential? Incidental, or internal? The ostensible dominant consensus today regarding form's relationship to content is that it is when form and content feel inseparable that one knows one is reading excellent literature, and that such inseparability is at its maximum in poetry. This was firmly stated by Bradley in his lecture on 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake', in which he explored style as 'expressive of the poetic meaning of the whole', but only in 'fine poetry'. 'Pure' poems are 'creations, not manufactures'.[9] Bradley's lecture is concerned with vindicating form as integral to poetic meaning, just as present-day scholars are defending form's role in the creation of poetic meaning; in sympathy with Bradley's aims, they do so without wanting to isolate it from content.[10] But scholars mean quite different things by the interplay of content and form. Katherine Thomson-Jones conceives of 'three prevailing accounts' of the relationship between form and content: the 'container' account, in which form holds content; the 'functional' account, in which the form is the function or purpose of a work; and the 'semantic' account, 'which describes content as the meaning of a work, or what it is about, and form as the mode of presentation or expression—the way meaning is made manifest'. Thomson-Jones believes that the 'thesis of inseparability invokes the semantic account'.[11] But 'the semantic account' is a notion of inseparability that entails a separation. It fails to see how meaning is not simply expressed or manifested through form, but, with content, created by it.

There is a confusion here about terms, perhaps in part perpetuated by Bradley's distinction between subject-matter and content, summarised as: 'The subject matter is that part of the real world that the work refers to, while the content is the way in which the subject matter appears in that particular work. The subject matter is truly separable from the work, consisting in matters that lie

[8] Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Flamingo, 1983), 138.
[9] Bradley, *Lectures*, 21–24.
[10] See especially Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge UP, 2006); Simon Jarvis, 'Prosody as Cognition', *Critical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1998): 3–15; Angela Leighton, 'Poetry's Knowing', in *The Philosophy of Poetry*, ed. John Gibson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 162–82; Angela Leighton, *On Form* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).
[11] Katherine Thomson-Jones, 'Inseparable Insight: Reconciling Cognitivism and Formalism in Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 4 (September 2005): 377.

quite outside it. But the content is a part of the work and cannot be separated from it'.[12] The distinction is not helpful, partly because it leads to claims such as this: 'content is '*the-subject-as realised-in-the-poem*' and form '*the-mode-of-realisation-of-the-subject-in-the-poem*'.[13] This is Peter Lamarque's amendment of Bradley's supposed inseparability thesis, but, like Thomson-Jones's, it sets up a separation. I take content to mean, drily, that which could be paraphrased, while maintaining that it would be different were it paraphrased; the fact that it would be different reveals how content (in language at least) is inextricably related to form.

Form and content are neither identical nor indistinguishable; the terms do have a purpose in analysis. But the purpose is limited; like Hurley and O'Neill, I hold that 'poems when read fully as poems require attention to the fact that "form" and "content" provide the context for understanding each other, so that the poem's meaning emerges from their mutual transformation'.[14] For poetry, however, read *literature*. The mode of seeing goes with the seen, so that even analytic purposes must take into account that what is seen is seen in a distinctive way. Form and content are inextricably related, because, as Bradley says, when 'you try to examine one, you find it is also the other', and more fundamentally because they both create meaning, and once created, meaning cannot be even *distinguished* from either.[15]

That is because of attitude. The way something is written generates a certain attitude towards whatever is expressed, which inevitably shapes the meaning created. Form is not Lamarque's 'mode of realisation' alone, because the mode of realisation, through attitude, *is* itself the meaning. Iain McGilchrist comes closer to expressing form's role ('style') in the creation of meaning than I think either Bradley or Lamarque manages. He writes that it 'is quite impossible to consider [style] without [content], because so much of the content is actually in the style, and equally the style depends on the content. "Style" is a treacherous term, because it appears to refer to that aspect of an author's work which is the subject of stylistic analysis. What I mean by style is absolutely

[12] Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, *Aesthetics and Education* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 131–32.
[13] Peter Lamarque, 'The Elusiveness of Poetic Meaning', *Ratio* 22, no. 4 (2009): 407.
[14] Hurley and O'Neill, *Poetic Form*, 2.
[15] Bradley, *Lectures*, 15.

everything which is not contained in the abstractable meaning'.[16] Yet even the idea of 'abstractable meaning' assumes that there is, somewhere, a meaning formed differently. Form does not always occupy a deeply significant role in creating meaning, but, nevertheless, it always participates in what meaning is, even if that participation is nugatory. McGilchrist rightly states that 'form' and 'content' have 'only contingent existence'.[17] The terms only mean something with reference to what they are not. Rafe McGregor's definition—'a relation of *inseparability*, such that once form (or content) is separated from the work (the form-content unity), it is no longer identical with the form (or content) in that work'—is perfectly accurate. But his summation misses the emphasis on meaning that is really at issue in arguing for a relation of inseparability between form and content: how *could* the form or content be 'separated'?[18]

McGregor calls 'form-content inseparability' 'poetic thickness', arguing that 'the experience of a poem qua poem is an experience of poetic thickness, i.e. an experience in which poetic form and poetic content are inseparable'. For him 'poetic thickness' is 'a demand which is satisfied by a work rather than a property of a text'; it is 'the inseparability of poetic form and poetic content in the experience of a work of poetry'. The emphasis on 'demand' and 'experience' show how for McGregor form-content inseparability is an *approach* to reading, not a feature of literary language. Like Lamarque he speaks of reading 'Lucretius's work qua philosophy *or* qua poetry'.[19] For both, it is only if read as a poem that form-content indivisibility comes into play. Lamarque negates inseparability as a feature of the work at all: 'Reading a poem *as poetry* demands the assumption of form-content unity. The indivisibility of form and content is not something that is *discovered* in works—more in this, less in that, not in this one at all—it is something that the practice of reading poetry *imposes* on a work'.[20] For McGregor, as for Lamarque, form-content inseparability is essentially a point about the reader and 'appreciation'.[21] Yet the emphasis on readerly approach obscures the way in which there is *always* an interplay between form and content, one that does not

[16] Iain McGilchrist, *Against Criticism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1982), 34.
[17] Ibid., 39.
[18] Rafe McGregor, 'Poetic Thickness', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 54, no. 1 (1 January 2014): 50.
[19] Ibid., 49; 56; 61.
[20] Lamarque, 'Elusiveness', 411.
[21] Rafe McGregor, 'Literary Thickness', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28 September 2015, 343–60.

only depend on the qualitative success of a poem, or the way in which it is read.

That goes for prose along with poetry (and indeed, I will argue, it also goes for language in general). The consensus-of-sorts regarding form-content inseparability does not refer to prose, but to poetry. It remains a poetic value (for the reader and not the text, if you take Lamarque and McGregor's view) rather than a literary one. Angela Leighton's book on form is about poetry; Simon Jarvis's arguments for the philosophic claims of form depend on prosody. O'Neill and Hurley state that 'poetic form is the essence of poetry'; it deserves 'to be accorded centre-stage in any discussion of poetry'.[22] Yet form is quite as important to the creation of meaning in literary prose: not line-breaks, but certainly rhythm, allusiveness, associative echoes, momentum, syntax, not to mention mode of narrative. Novels and short stories are particularly efficacious at lulling one through form into the mind of another. Camus's *La Chute* and Mohsin Hamid's modern variant, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, are both first-person narratives that are also monologues: the speaker talks with an interlocutor whose responses are not given in the text. Both depend on the creation of a voice, whose potency is generated by the shape of the prose: sentence-length, punctuation and key moments of suggested silence are pivotal in both.[23] Yet the importance of form in prose is far from restricted to first-person texts: there is always a textual voice generated—and never simply amplified—by qualities of form.

Harrison writes that the *qualia* of experience (the *what is it like* to be conscious) is something that can be related to form but not to conceptual content: qualia 'possesses structure but no content'.[24] That separation is unnecessary: the *what is it like* of experience has a content precisely by having so distinct a shape of form. Yet the comment nicely suggests the importance form, as manifested in momentum, rhythm, syntax, etc., might have in creating an experience of knowing what it is like to have a particular kind of consciousness. Harrison's argument is about colour theory in philosophy, and I am exploiting it for literary ends in suggesting that it helps to focus on the primary and fundamental role that form plays in generating senses of experience. Virginia Woolf,

[22] Hurley and O'Neill, *Poetic Form*, 1.
[23] Albert Camus, *La Chute* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956); Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007).
[24] Bernard Harrison, *Form and Content* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), 6.

D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce are major figures in twentieth-century literature for the very reason that their usage of form to explore consciousness enables several distinct senses of 'what it is like' to be an experiencing human that literary language had never before conveyed. Content alone (if such a thing could be said to exist) would never have managed it. Thus while Susan Wolfson rightly calls attention to the need to vindicate New Critical 'commitment to close reading and […] care for poetic form' (while jettisoning the insistence on 'unity' and literary autonomy), that commitment and care are as relevant and as necessary for prose—perhaps more so, given how little recognition the form of prose often receives.[25]

The consensus on form and content, then, is less robust than one might have assumed. Philosophers of aesthetics and literary theorists are using the words differently within as well as between disciplines. Certainly the importance of both form and content was acknowledged by Leavis's most influential contemporaries, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Richards. Leavis diverges from all three in the application and direction of his form-content interest. The first decade of his writings exemplifies a working-through of these differences; there are explicit disagreements (Pound), tentative questionings (Eliot) and an increasing awareness of underlying diversions of perspective (Richards). I will provide an instance of the disagreement with Pound, which comes first, in *How to Teach Reading* (1932; republished in 1943 in *Education and the University*), and is especially indicative. It exhibits a fear of unnecessary divisions that might undermine literary experience: something that occupies Leavis throughout this decade in almost all of his writing, which constantly strains against the view that anything in literature is 'for its own sake'. Pound's attention to form as divorced from content, Leavis argues, is at the expense of understanding the way words function, resulting in a curtailment of possibilities for meaning as well as of meaning itself. That is, his contention is not with an attention to form *per se*, but with an attention to form that attempts to isolate form from other aspects of a word that inform its meaning—an attention to form for its own sake. Leavis's fear is that such attention distracts from what words actually do. His criticism of Pound's division of poetic language into three main aspects (*melopoeia*, *phanopoeia*

[25] Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges* (Stanford UP, 1997), 2.

and *logopoeia*) is that it is little able to illuminate, indeed has little 'to do with', poetry. Perversely, attention to these aspects distracts from what the words are able to suggest and create: a division into these three elements neither explains nor elucidates the poetic experience.

Leavis's criticism also extends in another direction. Aside from presenting a distraction from the experience induced in and engendered by words, the three aspects pose hindrances even in their Poundian function as isolated and isolating categories. Leavis claims that it is misleading to suggest, as Pound does, that these three aspects exist separately for analysis. Not only might attention to the music of a word avert attention from how the word functions, but the impression that one has of a word's music is not available apart from other aspects of the word's semantic halo—its definitions, associations, connotations, images, aural properties that are not specifically musical, etc. Meaning and imagery together 'determine the "musical property"', says Leavis, and 'the "musical property" by itself is an abstraction so remote from the concrete experience of poetry as to be useless'. The objection to Pound's division, then, is that the interest in form actively impedes interest in content, thereby also undermining attention to poetry as 'concrete experience'—something that includes form and content but does not halt with them. Thus, when Pound writes 'I am not talking about the books that have poured something into the public consciousness, but of books that show *how* the pouring is done or display the implements, newly discovered, by which one can pour', Leavis's response is that 'There is a great deal more need to assert that the pouring can *not* be studied apart from the thing poured'.[26] He is clear that attention to *how* is essential: with it, though, must go a recognition that the *how* does not belong apart from, and is not available for contemplation without, the *what*. Even for the purpose of analysis, while the two can be spoken of separately, finding one, as Bradley pointed out, always involves finding the other. An attention to form is a reverse of the Johnsonian attention to the moral, but both commit the same offence, in performing an artificial separation.

Leavis's criticism goes further than insisting that the two, content and form, be treated indivisibly; it insists that the attitude generated in the form-content, enabled by 'particular

[26] All F.R. Leavis, *Education and the University* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), 113–14.

arrangements of words', also be attended.[27] He envisions an absolute equation between form and content that has far-reaching implications—it extends into the general language itself. This is because of attitude, which emerges from non-literary as well as literary language. In 1933 *Culture and Environment*, a text co-authored by Leavis and Denys Thompson but apparently already drafted prior to Thompson's involvement, was published.[28] The text provides various possible quotations as stimulus to thought for students. Here is an example:

> 'In journalism—this greatest game of all—the pinning of words to paper so that the masses shall be uplifted, instructed, entertained, the one cardinal point that the player has to bear in mind is that the unpardonable sin is dullness'.
> What effects of this policy do you observe in the style of this? What effects do you think it would tend to have on the quality of living?[29]

That the *style* might have an effect suggests the sort of approach Leavis applies to words: one predominantly concerned with attitude. His questions ask how the attitude that the quoted advice presents is manifested in the advice itself; and, what this sort of advice does to one's life, not so much in terms of the practical consequences of heeding it, as of the implications of thinking in such a manner. What might it mean to consider things in this sort of way? Another exercise provides a list of terms, including 'clean-cut executive type', 'good mixer' and 'representative man' and asks: 'Why do we wince at the mentality that uses this idiom?'[30] Again, it is not the style that is protested against—not, at least, style for its own sake: it is the attitude that the style reveals, which causes one to wince. The practice of Leavis's criticism consistently refocuses attention on attitude, outside literature as well as within it. Richards had described 'attitudes' as 'imaginal and incipient activities or tendencies to action', a definition with which Leavis's usage has very little in common.[31] His is an aspect of the work, not the reader, it emerges from the way language is used, and it is constitutive of meaning.

This chapter goes further, then, than arguing that form and content are importantly related in

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[27] Ibid., 25.
[28] 'Thompson has said that his part in *Culture and Environment* was to advise on school conditions and possibilities; that the book was essentially Leavis's in conception and method. Leavis, whose energy at this time must have been prodigious, has said that it was written in a week'. Hayman, *Leavis*, 22.
[29] F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933), 141.
[30] Ibid., 121.
[31] Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, 86.

literature. That idea determines the interrelationship to be a sign of literary quality, rather than a property of language. But form and content are always both involved in the creation of meaning, something that attention to attitude helps to make clear. A comment about 'feeling the warmth of the day flowing through me like joy' conveys a different sense of meaning to 'Boy, it's warm today and it makes me joyful', even though content, in the strictly propositional and paraphraseable sense, is similar: the day's warmth creates a good feeling in the speaker. Form is more important to the creation of meaning in literary language, but it is no less linked with content in non-literary language, and it is always generative of attitude.

For Leavis, attitude is a way of conceptualising the mode of connection between words and experience. Each section of this first chapter on Leavis's early work addresses that connection, exploring how language exemplifies, through the indivisible creation of form and content, attitude. Much of the argument applies to non-literary language, as Leavis targets the writing of critics as well as of creative writers. The four section divisions are for the sake of clarity and ought to be viewed with the understanding that each feeds into and informs the others. The trajectory that emerges most urgently in Leavis's early work is the necessity to subvert consideration of literature and any aspect of it as for its own sake: the overwhelming stance generated by these texts is *against* for its own sake-ness. The difficulty is in expressing this, given that no words exist for form-content or technique-as-spirit (/spirit-as-technique). Leavis speaks of notions like these as truths easily lost 'in the process of critical analysis': 'Criticism involves analysis and abstraction, but the critic must see that his analysis is subtle enough, that his abstractions are the right ones, and that he does not, forgetting what they are, give them a status to which they have no right'.[32] His early work struggles vigorously against the apparent double-bind of articulating how literature is relevant to life in a literary way that gains its significance precisely by being literary: how it is for the sake of something else precisely by being for its own sake. The subversion of that double-bind takes place through his focus on attitude. His sense of the relevance of literature to life—and of words to experience—which is at the heart of his thinking for the rest of his career, can be understood and meaningful

[32] *EU*, 113.

only within the context of these texts; to read *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955) or *The Living Principle* without an understanding of the foundational work done by the early texts means one reads at a level of superficiality unhelpful when Leavis's famed 'necessary words' such as 'life' or 'significance' are being used.[33]

i. Words and Experience in Intelligence and Sensibility

The first page of *For Continuity* (1933) asserts that its essays 'all illustrate, develop and enforce, in ways more and less obvious, the same preoccupation and the same argument—the preoccupation and the argument of *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*; and, moreover, misunderstanding possible, it seems, when they were separate will be less easy in the book'.[34] The sentence is not by-the-by: it proffers a warning to be heeded and directs an approach to reading. At first sight the essays seem concerned with issues differing somewhat from *Mass Civilisation*: the task and function of literary criticism; 'the literary mind'; contemporary poetry; 'the word' and technique; *Scrutiny*'s partiality; D.H. Lawrence.[35] How is it that these seemingly specialist aspects of literature relate to a topic as steeped in sociological concern as 'mass civilisation and minority culture'? Attention to the essays makes it clear that for Leavis sociological concerns are intimately related to conceptions of what literature is, and particularly to how it functions—another reason why Samson's division of these concerns is inadequate. Inability to perceive the importance of the relation, Leavis points out, probably with relish for the paradox, is itself symptomatic of the loss society suffers—the poverty of its thought—when literature is considered tangential or specialist.

For Leavis, it is the fact that the topics are literary that enables them to explore contemporary life at a deeper level than would otherwise ensue. That they are literature means they entail such exploration. *Mass Civilisation* itself is deeply concerned with the literary. To pick out some of the

[33] *NSMS*, 11.
[34] *FC*, 1.
[35] These quotations are of chapter-titles.

most significant preoccupations: 'problems of definition'; the concern and function of critic and artist; theory; culture (which is 'language, the changing idiom, upon which fine living depends'); what is represented by and malign about the existence of newspapers such as *The Daily Mail*; the methodology of critical expression; the 'gulf between poetry and life' that 'over-literary persons sometimes suppose' (in Richards's words, which Leavis quotes approvingly); taste in poetry; the danger of the highbrow-lowbrow distinction and what it represents, encourages, and enforces; literature that appeals 'at a number of levels of response'; the task and targets of language.[36] These ought to make it clear that the connection at stake between literature and the sociological, for Leavis as for my overall argument, is not about literature's 'highbrow'—and unproven—capacity to refine minds in any simplistic, or indeed salvific, sense. The connection is more technical and more precise: Leavis's early work consistently concerns itself with showing that literature's most ostensibly technical and specialist aspects are deeply connected to the sociological. In a chapter on John dos Passos, Leavis writes of 'a peculiar technical problem', which is to make the significance of the 'multitudinous impersonality of the ant-heap' felt through a focus on the life of the individual.[37] These 'technical' aspects are not *technical*—with its connotations of the supplementary; the merely aesthetic; adornment; experimentation for experiment's sake—at all.

An early essay in *For Continuity* specifies that 'what I have spoken of as the literary tradition was more than literary'.[38] Leavis made the point again and again throughout his career: 'The more seriously one is concerned for literary criticism the less possible does one find it to be concerned for that alone'; a 'real literary interest is an interest in man, society and civilization, and its boundaries cannot be drawn; the adjective is not a circumscribing one'.[39] 'I don't believe in any "literary values", and you won't find me talking about them; the judgments the literary critic is concerned with are judgments about life'.[40] For Leavis, it is a fact about literature that is at once both literary and more than literary; further, it is only by being literary that literature is able to have

[36] *FC*, 13; 15; 30; 38. See Richards, *Practical Criticism*, 1930, 319.
[37] *FC*, 103.
[38] Ibid., 49.
[39] Ibid., 160; *CP*, 200.
[40] *NSMS*, 97.

supra-literary relevance. This is a deliberate and selective direction of literary study: an insistence on asking the large questions of meaning and significance precisely *through* close attention to literary technique. An essay unpublished in Leavis's lifetime, 'Standards in Criticism', asks: 'How, as we come to appreciate [the work] and to realize its significance, does it affect our sense of the things that have determining significance for us? How does it affect our total sense of relative value, our sense of direction, our sense of life?'[41] These extra-literary questions are questions only invoked because of what literature itself enables. How does a text being literary allow it to speak to 'our total sense of relative value' in ways that would not be provoked without it? That, I believe, is a driving question of Leavis's throughout his career.

'The Literary Mind' (1932) is the article in which the reference to 'more than literary' surfaces—suggesting that its title be read with a certain eye. The essay discusses Max Eastman's *The Literary Mind*, and, unsurprisingly, given that reference, takes issue with the adjective. The article does crucial work regarding the uses of the terms 'intelligence' and 'sensibility', which qualifies the meaning of these terms throughout their usage in the rest of Leavis's career. The manner of Leavis's critical procedure—the way in which he manages to complicate Eastman's idea of the 'literary mind' through reorienting accepted ideas of 'intelligence' and 'sensibility'—merits close attention.

> what, as exhibited in *The Literary Mind*, is wrong with Mr. Eastman's *intelligence*? —That he is deficient in taste and sensibility is plain. My present point is that these deficiencies are associated with others of a kind that he could, perhaps, be brought to recognise. By a little analysis it should be possible to bring home to him that he is deficient on the side of intelligence. He maintains an air of incisiveness and intellectual rigour, but his writing is both loose (to use his own key term) and blunt. Not only does he use such key words as 'experience', 'interpretation', and 'meaning' with an uncritical looseness, but, apart from (or rather accentuated in) localisable confusions and fallacies there is a pervasive debility, a lack of tension, outline and edge, in his thinking. The point might be made by saying that he has none of that sensitiveness of intelligence without which all apparent vigour of thought is illusory. And when such a phrase as 'sensitiveness of intelligence' suggests itself it begins to appear that the relation between 'intelligence' and 'sensibility' is not the simple distinction that is readily assumed.[42]

The first sentence refers to an effect that the text is likely to have had on its readers, that Eastman has intelligence. It is just this impression that Leavis, by reconceptualising 'intelligence', intends his article to dispel. Leavis has already posited and offered evidence for Eastman's 'plain'

[41] *VC*, 246.
[42] *FC*, 49–50. All further quotations from this essay are from 50 unless otherwise stated.

deficiencies of taste and sensibility; one of their manifestations was the uncritical use of that adjective, *literary*. Now he undermines the claim for Eastman's intelligence by suggesting that it is a façade. The success of this attempt depends on the association between intelligence and sensibility of which he must persuade his readers. That Eastman 'could, perhaps, be brought to recognise' the association applies also, perhaps primarily, to Leavis's own readers, who are to be similarly manoeuvred during the process of this paragraph; it is an aside intended to make readers want to 'recognise' the association all the faster.

Yet that the link between the two is deeper than mere association is a point to which Leavis's argument must attain, not with which it can begin. The mode of operation here is careful. Leavis's first claim is tentative: the deficiencies of intelligence 'are *associated* with others' (my emphasis). What these others are is not yet detailed; but there are hints. Leavis first returns again to the claim he wishes to prove: 'he is deficient on the side of intelligence'. 'Side' is surprising, given that the aim is rather to broaden intelligence's base than to segment it. For the present moment, 'sensibility' is being brought towards 'intelligence', something Leavis will shortly show is insufficient for conceiving of the mutually inflecting nature of their relationship. The intelligence exhibited is but appearance, the 'air' of rigour is a sham. To assert this Leavis begins to solidify the association he is claiming: behind the air of incisiveness is a loose use of terms. These are terms (experience, interpretation, etc.) it is hardly easy to use *un*loosely, though that is in part Leavis's point: the appropriately critical usage of these terms will be one that informs their meaning in context and application, in the 'concrete'. In his Clark lectures of 1967, Leavis would state:

> I know, of course, that 'sensibility' is a tricky word, one difficult to define for our purposes. But it is not for that any less an essential word. It can't, I think, be so fixed by definition as not to shift in force as we use it—as we find ourselves having to use it. But that is a peculiarity of important words—words we find we can't do without—in the field of our distinctive discipline of intelligence […] What the critic has to do is to cultivate a vigilant responsibility, so that the shifts confuse or mislead neither the reader nor himself. And 'sensibility' is a word to which the student ought to give a great deal of thoughtful attention; new perceptions and realizations are likely to result. There can hardly be a better text for bringing that home to him and starting fruitful discussion than this central, this pre-eminently focal, criticism of Eliot's.[43]

The words that are the most necessary are the ones it is easiest to use loosely. This is a charge that

[43] *ELTU*, 85.

Leavis's 'life' has never escaped, although it is now more from his reputation as a life-mongerer than from firsthand experience of his writing that some of these judgements derive. Lamarque and Olsen, for instance, write that '[t]hose critics, like F.R. Leavis, who give prominence to moral truth as a literary end will postulate a "great tradition" which elevates George Eliot and Henry James over Laurence Sterne and Thomas Hardy'—which suggests that Leavis's project in *The Great Tradition* (1948) is to emphasise 'moral truth': a phrase that Leavis uses once in that text, and then with reference to Leslie Stephen's view of *Silas Marner*.[44] As far as I have been able to tell, that is the only usage throughout his career. In this case at least, he is more precise with words than his interlocutors.

Leavis's decision to highlight 'experience' and 'interpretation' as terms that can be used rigorously is indicative for another reason. They aid in the objective of asserting a link between intelligence and sensibility, being words that belong neither to one nor the other. Eastman's 'loose' use of terms is indirectly related, through '[n]ot only', to 'a pervasive debility […] in his thinking'. This will enable Leavis to make a crucial point, to which I return—that improper use of words signals inadequate thought. '[P]ervasive' has not yet been shown to be merited; it flags the way the argument will turn. For now, Leavis slips it in between the less drastic, more general claims of 'uncritical looseness' and 'lack of tension, outline and edge'. He points out that this lack is 'accentuated in' 'localisable confusions and fallacies'. *Local* suggests that it is small weaknesses that prove the flaws of large ideas. It also prefaces the importance Leavis is shortly to claim for 'concrete particulars'.[45] The decisive claim of the paragraph follows: 'he has none of that sensitiveness of intelligence'. Leavis describes this phrase as 'suggest[ing] itself' as if that it has done so was inevitable. The impression is not only that no other phrase is appropriate; the deliberately passive framing of the sentence suggests that these terms, arriving spontaneously, are not related to Leavis's own driving of his argument.

The subtleties of this paragraph's persuasive tactics are legitimate. The paragraph aims to

[44] Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, 'The Philosophy of Literature: Pleasure Restored', in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 209; F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Penguin, 1966), 59.
[45] *FC*, 51.

convince readers of the intimate relation between sensibility and intelligence, and it begins by telling us so: 'these deficiencies are associated with others'. Qualities which are usually associated with either one or the other are run together, so that the conventional distinction between sensibility and intelligence feels arbitrary and unseeing. By the time one reaches 'lack of tension', certainly, it is difficult to categorise such a lack as to do with either in clear distinction from the other. '[V]igour' is also made to work remarkably. The word has not yet appeared, although Leavis's mode of introducing it suggests that it has, as if it has been 'vigour' under discussion all along. The word recalls the 'rigour' of two sentences previously.[46] It does so in sense as well as in correspondence of sound, for the rigour was 'air', and the vigour is 'appearance'. Like the semblance of rigour in Eastman's thought, its vigour too is 'illusory'. Without rigour, thought might lack precision or theoretical grounding; without vigour, it is without energy and usefulness. Vigour also has connotations of roots in and direction from a living, good source, so that, without vigour, there are hints of a wrongness in origin and so in application. The word-association allows Leavis to deepen his claim for Eastman's lack of 'sensitiveness of intelligence'.

Leavis's charge of Eastman enables him to establish a position that he applies as much to discussion of living in contemporary society as to criticism of literature: intelligence and sensibility do not exist in isolation from one another. The article assumes a position that Leavis's future work will take for granted. The argument, which has so far proceeded subtly, therefore needs to become explicit: 'Mr Eastman's defect of sensibility is a defect of intelligence'. The phrasing of the sentence is ambiguous. That 'a defect of sensibility is a defect of intelligence' might mean either equivalence (one equals the other) or indication (a defect of sensibility suggests a corresponding defect of intelligence). To decide which is meant, one must swap the terms. If a defect of intelligence is also a defect of sensibility, then the terms are equivalent in status. The previous paragraph had described the deficiency of sensibility 'as plain'. Leavis's concern in that paragraph had been in part to turn this deficiency from 'plain' into *significant*, even, to use a term of which he became fond, 'a

[46] See Simon Barker, 'Rigour or Vigour: Metaphor, Argument, and Internet', *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 31, no. 4 (1998): 248–65.

portent'.[47] Leavis wants to secure and to evoke sensibility's importance. To accomplish this, he quickly amasses other accusations: Eastman 'lacks fineness of perception'; '[w]hat we diagnose in expression, as inadequacy in the use of words, goes back to an inadequacy behind the words'. The shift, from the 'side' of intelligence referred to earlier, to a broader conception which inherently involves sensibility, takes place here. What was Eastman's improper ability to word experience has collapsed into inability properly to experience at all. He has not 'experienced, perceived and realised', and this does not have consequences only for his intelligence as had been first claimed: it is evidence of the insufficiency of intelligence alone—or, better put, of the falsity of the idea that intellect equals intelligence.[48]

Leavis is now able to repeat his point with a different formulation ('No easy distinction between intelligence and sensibility') that avoids the suggested hierarchy between the terms. Instead of one feeding into the other, they have become mutually dependent. Persuaded readers might now assent that intelligence in divorce from sensibility is indeed not intelligence. A few pages later Leavis is confident enough in the persuasiveness of his argument to make it conclusive. He 'reverse[s] my earlier stress' to assert that 'the defect of intelligence is a default on the part of sensibility'. The two have become equivalent to the extent of being mutually constitutive. The 'failure to keep closely enough in touch with responses to particular arrangements of words' is a result of that failure of the oneness of intelligence and sensibility.[49] The term 'responses' is important, prefiguring the role 'attitude' plays in Leavisian analysis here as well as in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) and *Revaluation* (1936). An appropriate response will be informed by intelligence and sensibility together. Further, keeping closely in touch with responses requires introspection and self-examination, neither of which fits perfectly with either intelligence or sensibility. Intelligence and sensibility are both qualities in people, then, but also essential aspects of an approach to reading and writing—criticism as well as literature.

A point made in *How to Teach Reading*—published the same year as 'The Literary Mind' and

[47] *NSMS*, 42.
[48] *FC*, 51.
[49] All Ibid., 56.

New Bearings—in which intelligent sensibility is associated with textual approach, is helpful here. 'It is hardly possible to insist too much on the training of sensibility as prior and irremissible. Literary study unassociated with it becomes, infallibly, "academic" and barren—a matter of profitless memorizing, of practice in graceful or scholarly irrelevance'.[50] Those without appropriately trained sensibility are at risk of falling into the Eastman trap, in which ingenious analysis replaces understanding of a text. Ingenuity is similarly made a target, as we saw, in Leavis's denunciation of Pound for being an 'amateur of abstractions'.[51] To train sensibility becomes to cultivate a mode of attitude that is able both to perceive in language, as well as to exemplify in critical practice, the way in which intelligence and sensibility interweave. Inability to do both will lead to an arbitrary division of these realms in an artwork during the process of criticism, one that would essentially undermine the literary experience. Thus an interest in poetry, to merit the term 'critical', must have, or have acquired, the 'habit of sensibility' that is able to understand the proper relation between the two.[52] This is not only because such understanding is the appropriate way to experience poetry, but also because an incorrect attitude will falsify what the poem itself offers. The link between a division of intelligence and sensibility is considered from another perspective in the (similarly erroneous) division between thinking and feeling, which I discuss in the next section.

As 'responses' suggests, Leavis stresses that the perspective one holds towards something is as decisive as the rigour one applies to the perception. This comes to be important in the analysis of attitude that his criticism advocates. One might say that the rigour must be vigorous, just as the vigour must be rigorous. To be too intellectual is 'to err by not being intelligent enough'; 'any serious attempt to apply intelligence to poetry has to face prejudice against the "intellectual" approach'. To conduct Eastman's task (writing about the 'literary' mind) requires 'fine sensibility', 'discriminating awareness', 'an ability to discern and fix differences of quality and degree'. Without these one is 'without his essential data'. Leavis is advancing the notion that an approach to literary analysis seeps into an approach to thought about living. The way one interacts with a literary work,

[50] *EU*, 121.
[51] Ibid., 114.
[52] F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 56.

whether as reader, critic, or author, will decide what one gets out of it. Of the kind of thinking likely to interest those 'who are preoccupied with the problems of living', Leavis says, 'criticism of it concerns its fidelity to concrete particulars and the quality of these. No easy distinction between intelligence and sensibility comes to hand here'.[53] Such comments, which appear almost by-the-by, signal that Leavis's conception of literature already includes its relevance to living; his argument for the impossibility of dividing intelligence from sensibility applies to life as it does to criticising a poem. Remarks about literature and remarks about life flow together.

The important mutual bond between intelligence and sensibility finds its significance in what their relation signifies about the relationship of words to experience. An intelligent sensibility/sensible intelligence is one that perceives the role of words ('concrete particulars') precisely *in* confronting 'the problems of living'. Leavis's point about Eastman is that, lacking intelligent sensibility—which Leavis himself discerns through Eastman's usage of words—he cannot understand or make use of a function of words that Leavis deems their very point, whether in literature or out of it: to relate to living. It is for the very reason that they relate to living as intimately and inescapably as they do that Leavis is able to make such judgements solely through the act of scrutinising another person's words. That is especially evident in the affirmation following his account of Eastman's want of 'fineness of perception', which, as Leavis has now made clear, is intelligence and sensibility together. 'What we diagnose in expression, as inadequacy in the use of words, goes back to an inadequacy behind the words, an inadequacy of experience; a failure of something that should have pressed upon them and controlled them to sharp significance'.[54] This is a striking statement, and I will spend the rest of this section considering its ramifications.

In one sense, it is clear that failure to express effectively does not represent failure to experience. Even if one allows that *experience* does not have any element of passivity (in verb or noun form), such that it relates to active consideration of events and deliberating, interpreting or discerning their effect upon one, it does not follow that such conception of experience must be effectively expressed. That it must, however, is not Leavis's position. Denis Donoghue has a useful

[53] All *FC*, 52.
[54] Ibid., 50–51.

formula for experience so construed: 'The test of an experience is that it indeed alters the structure of our feeling: if it doesn't, it hasn't been an experience, merely a circumstance'.[55] Leavis's 'experience' has much in common with that idea, meaning one's relationship to an event, rather than experience *as* event. But Donoghue doesn't mention words; and it would be inaccurate, I think, to interpret Leavis as meaning that without words one has no conception of experience. He is talking about what is at stake when words are involved. That move entails an extra step on from Donoghue, for whom 'experience' is already a relation to an event. For Leavis, *words are a mode of relating to one's experience*: of evaluating one's response to a particular event or happening. For him, once words are used to relate to experience, then where they fall short becomes indicative of a deeper inability regarding one's own relation to experience. To fail to interpret and assimilate one's experience will also prevent experience from having 'sharp significance': from being meaningful or constitutive. Failure to realise one's experience—that is, to make one's experience real by understanding it through a precise and particular usage of words, and perceiving what was and was not important about it, what its effect upon one was—becomes a failure of self-knowledge. What is at stake is not so much one's understanding of experience, as understanding of one's relation to that experience, with a focus on attitude. Such understanding is bound up with using language, such that language is a *way into*, as much as a *way of*, relating to experience.

The role of attitude is fundamental here, as the references to 'fineness of perception' and 'training' sensibility suggest. There is more than one way of relating to experience, and using words is a method of altering the way in which one both conceives of and perceives one's experience. Both conception and perception are 'attitudinal', to borrow a term of Charles Taylor's.[56] One's idea of one's experience, that is, involves an attitude towards it, even before one is contemplating different ways of relating to it. The process of thinking about an occurrence, which in Donoghue's terminology makes of it an experience, is an active manifestation of one's attitude, which is formed by perspective as much as it also directs it. But attitude is more strongly and more deliberately

[55] Denis Donoghue, 'Radio Talk', in Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks, eds., *The State of the Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 547.
[56] See Taylor, *Sources*., esp. 15.

involved when words are used. There are two important points to be made here. The first is that any usage of words conveys an attitude, inadvertently or deliberately. The attitude conveyed inadvertently by Eastman in his word usage is what Leavis analyses in his discernment of intellect rather than intelligence. The second is that using words can assist in, perhaps even enable, discovering a different attitude. Thus one's mode of perceiving and attitude to experience can best be discerned and examined through using language: through the formulation of feelings and thoughts in words.

Attitude is fundamental to a conception of literature that urges the importance of its language to life. The consequences of ignoring attitude are well brought out in John Casey's *The Language of Criticism*, perhaps the best and most sustained analysis of Leavis's critical technique in terms of the vocabulary he uses. Casey considers Leavis to be attempting to combine expressionist and mimetic theories of language in his criticism of literary works. This is done, Casey claims, in order both to retain emphasis upon 'the emotional importance of literature' and to provide 'objective criteria for judging the quality of emotion a poem presents'.[57] His interpretation of Leavis's critical method does not pick up on the role of attitude, either in determining the emotion or experience a work presents, or in its significance for form and content. Here is a line from *New Bearings* quoted by Casey: 'the only technique that matters is that which compels words to express an intensely personal way of feeling'.[58] This Casey glosses as 'the orthodox language of expressionism'.[59] But something more complex and fascinating is occurring in that sentence: the idea that technique is all at once the practice, manifestation, and what Leavis terms 'realization', the making-real, of an attitude to feeling. The remark goes further than asserting a deep and mutual relationship between content and form. It is not just that the feeling expressed by words depends on their style, but that technique is related to an individual's *way of* feeling. Technique relates to attitude, in a complex, circuitous manner: at once formative of and formed by. Indeed, at one point Leavis writes that it 'is difficult to distinguish between attitude and technique'.[60] Technique is borne of attitude as well as

[57] Casey, *Language*, 153–54.
[58] *NB*, 24.
[59] Casey, *Language*, 157.
[60] *NB*, 62.

expressive of it ('issues out of and expresses', as Leavis puts it).[61] It involves an awareness of what one is feeling. An exclamation of 'I'm so happy!' is expressivist, but it does not involve technique discerning a particular mode of relating to experience.

Casey does not quote the sentence that follows: 'To invent techniques that shall be adequate to the ways of feeling, or modes of experience, of adult, sensitive moderns is difficult in the extreme'.[62] The deliberate repetition of ('way of'/'ways of) and the echo, with 'modes of', ought to flag that Leavis is not talking about expressing feeling, but about carefully using technique to evoke and firmly locate a mode of feeling, a relation to one's feeling, something that entails strict attention to one's habits and tendencies. For technique to have to be 'adequate' to feeling and experience implies that those feelings and experiences are of a particular kind: one appropriate to sensitive, modern, mature people. Both technique and way of feeling (or mode of experience) must be of a particular fashion, presumably one nearing the 'finely aware and richly responsible' of Henry James's vision.[63] *Ways of* and *modes of* emphasises that technique has to convey something more than expression, more even than experience: it must generate an attitude towards experience. The upshot is to evince the formative role played by attitude in determining what those feelings and experiences *are*, along with how they come to be construed, and its essential relationship with 'technique'. I use the adjective literally: Leavis is suggesting that attitude and technique are essentially linked. Just as attitude will inform technique, technique plays the most decisive of roles in determining attitude.

Casey summarises Leavis's view thus: 'The way the poet uses language is the central criterion of how he feels, and the condition of his having certain feelings is his capacity to use language in a certain way'.[64] This seemingly accurate statement does not allow for some of the subtleties I am claiming for Leavis's position. Earlier in *New Bearings*, Leavis had asserted that the poet's 'capacity for experiencing and his power of communication are indistinguishable; not merely because we should not know of the one without the other, but because his power of making words

[61] Ibid., 132.
[62] Ibid., 24.
[63] Henry James, *The Art of the Novel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 62.
[64] Casey, *Language*, 164.

express what he feels is indistinguishable from his awareness of what he feels'.[65] Leavis is claiming that the definition of a poet is one who uses words to discern a particular relation to experience. He suggests (and this is confirmed by his later emphasis on sincerity) that the latter part of Casey's statement could be reversed: the use of language in a certain manner could be said to depend on having certain feelings.[66] In other words, the language and feelings are not related consequentially, but belong together. Casey's term 'condition' is misleading for that reason. Using language in a certain way will not straightforwardly equate to or result in certain feelings, as 'condition' implies; rather, the 'way of' using words involves, as well as evolves from, the 'way of' feeling. 'Criterion', too, fails to imply the multi-directional, mutually constituting mode of relation that organises Leavis's idea of the nature of the relationship between words, and mode of feeling or thinking. The words and the awareness of that particular feeling in that particular way belong together. One might take the statement to mean that a poet is a poet because s/he uses words as a process of discernment. But the fact that a similar equation of words and experience was used with relation to Eastman, a critic, also suggests that using words is always for Leavis an act of precision in relating to one's experience. Different words will always generate a different sense of one's *way of* awareness, because attitude is always conveyed, however inadvertently or inexpertly. The poet or writer allots to words the role that Leavis believes they ought always to have: one that determines and evokes an attitude of feeling.

Indeed, Leavis's description of a poet stems from the emphasis on discernment: 'He is a poet because his interest in his experience is not separable from his interest in words; because, that is, of his habit of seeking by the evocative use of words to sharpen his awareness of his ways of feeling, so making these communicable'.[67] These early formulations in *New Bearings* warrant reading alert to their similarity with the contemporaneous 'The Literary Mind'; note again 'ways of'. Casey's interpretation—'There just are many feelings which are intrinsically verbal and cannot be translated into any other form, or into any other form of words'—misses the way in which using words itself

[65] *NB*, 16.
[66] F.R. Leavis, 'Reality and Sincerity', *Scrutiny*, December 1952, 90–97.
[67] *NB*, 17.

produces an attitude towards feeling.[68] Leavis is not claiming an intrinsically verbal nature for any feelings: he is claiming that words help one to discern one's relationship to those feelings, and that in all cases the use of words itself entails an attitude towards feeling (rather than that a particular feeling is indivisible from the use of words). That is why one's awareness of feeling does not—cannot—*require* a specific form of words, because the awareness is not specified or pre-determined. It arrives together with the words, the form of the words commanding the attitude of the feeling, and the attitude of the feeling determining the form of the words. Antony Easthope, who also quotes the *New Bearings* sentence, offers a simplistic summary, saying that it 'assumes':

> (a) that poetry originates as the poet's experience;
> (b) that poetry expresses or reflects 'the actual quality of experience';
> (c) that the function of a reader is to re-create or re-live this experience which is communicated to him or her.
>
> Each of these assumptions needs to be challenged.[69]

Easthope uses the remark as 'a definition of poetry', which is misleading, as it is about the relationship between words and experience for a writer. The claim that poetry 'originates' as the poet's experience fails to observe the deliberate distance from experience that Leavis invokes. He speaks of 'interest in experience', not of experience directly. When Leavis writes, following the sentence already quoted, that 'poetry can communicate the actual quality of experience with a subtlety and precision unapproachable by any other means', Easthope, apparently deliberately, ignores the word 'communicate' (along with 'can', which shows that this is a capacity of some poetry, rather than a feature of all poetry) and substitutes 'expresses or reflects': quite a different claim. 'Communicate' includes generating, suggesting, evoking; reflecting entails an entirely different kind of relationship to reality, one in which literature is explicitly conceived as secondary and imitative. Nor does 'expresses', where it means what Casey uses it to mean, expression of feeling without attitude, meet what 'communicate' calls for. The final charge I see no evidence for in the *New Bearings* passage, which does not mention the reader at all. That a reader enter into the mode of experience generated by a text is part of what Leavis calls 'realization', but that idea does

[68] Casey, *Language*, 164.
[69] Antony Easthope, 'Poetry and the Politics of Reading', in *Re-Reading English*, 138–39.

not involve recreation; it involves collaboration (referred to elsewhere as a 'collaborative-creative process').[70] Easthope's idea of Leavis, like Catherine Belsey's, is suggestive more of a caricature than of a critic whose ideas merit serious confrontation and deliberation. Belsey's chapter in the same book quotes Leavis from Francis Mulhern's study, indicating that her interpretation does not derive from first reading of the criticism at all.[71]

Like Casey's far more sensitive commentary, Easthope's demonstrates the pitfalls of not exploring attitude, especially in these important early passages, which suggest language as a process of grappling with one's interest in and relation to experience, not with experience *per se*. Thus the inability to perceive the relation between intelligence and sensibility, and the failure to communicate it in one's language, is as much a failure of discernment in relation to experience as of effectively using words. The Eastman passage is an analysis of the attitude communicated by words, as well as an exposition of the relation of intelligence and sensibility. Leavis is arguing for relating the two in one's perspective and one's mode of attention as well as in words, and also suggesting that only the latter fully enables the former. Further, the passages on intelligence and sensibility themselves function as a process to bring the reader to a certain viewpoint: words are shown to be active, in making an argument as much as in discerning experience. The passage does crucial work not only for the definitions of the terms, but for the relation of words to experience, and for the concept of attitude, which becomes more established in *New Bearings* and *Revaluation*. Simple expressionism is not what is happening in Leavis's idea of literature as conveyed by his criticism, which focuses rather on attitude towards experience or emotion. These attitudes are held in words; crucially, they are found by being held in what Wittgenstein referred to as 'these words in these positions'. Using words, that is, is not only an expression of communication to others or to oneself: it is an internal discernment and realisation of one's habits of feeling and thought, enabling one to become more aware of a specific mode of experience.

[70] *NSMS*, 62.
[71] Belsey, 'Re-Reading the Great Tradition', 121–35; Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* (London: NLB, 1979).

ii. Words and Experience in Thinking and Feeling

Leavis offered a very particular view of intelligence and sensibility in 1932. *Revaluation* furthers the argument of their mutuality, applying it to thinking and feeling, this time not in the prose of a critic, but in poetry. Both examinations, of intelligence and sensibility, and of thinking and feeling, observe their interaction in a writer and also advocate a particular sense of their interaction as a textual approach. Leavis's interest in defining these interactions is predominantly in the way they influence the use of language to relate to experience, both in and out of literature. In *Revaluation*, thought and feeling—the text's great uniting theme—are shown to depend on one another, such that the appearance of one without the other marks an improper attention to experience. Given that poetry was thought to be the expression of feeling, Leavis's focus is primarily where feeling is shown in separation from thought, especially in the poetry of Shelley.

The entire work aims at persuading readers that poetry that suggests that feelings and thoughts need not relate, or that considers one in isolation from the other, is deficient. Leavis's target is the still-prevailing currents of thought about poetry's function and role at the time of his writing. In 1917 Poet Laureate Robert Bridges described poetry as the representation of 'spontaneous conjunctions of concepts, as they affect the imagination', implying that poetic composition had little to do with deliberateness or discrimination.[72] One of Leavis's footnotes in *New Bearings* quotes from *Art and the Unconscious*, published in 1925: '[t]he poet must, I think, be regarded as striving after the simplicity of a childish utterance […] He must deliver himself—and the poetic task is the same in every age—from the burden of the intellect of his day'.[73] *New Bearings* is deeply concerned by notions such as this, which Leavis summarises as: poetry 'must be the direct expression of simple emotions […] Wit, play of intellect, stress of cerebral muscle had no place: they could only hinder

[72] Robert Bridges, *'The Necessity of Poetry'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), 18. 'Now Poetry, when it is performing its essential function, and thereby provoking censure from Newton, and nausea in Darwin, uses our conceptions in their natural condition. It neither trims them nor rationalises them. Its art is to represent these spontaneous conjunctions of concepts, as they affect the imagination'.
[73] John Thorburn, *Art and The Unconscious* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd, 1925), 70.

the reader's being "moved"—the correct poetical response'.[74] It isn't so much the idea of 'being "moved"' that is queried here as that 'stress of cerebral muscle' is incompatible with emotional feeling.[75] The notion of an opposition between thinking and feeling is one Leavis rejects, as much in the phenomenon of everyday writing as in poetry. He dislikes the division because it obscures the way the two interrelate, but also, I think, because of the rankings of modes of experience that were in place at the time, and that arguably persist today. Leavis is forever trying to justify literature as something to do with thought as well as feeling in order to show it to be rigorous. The implicit ranking of levels of experience conveys a distinction between thought as rational and feeling as irrational, something that Leavis also protests against because it prevents the human from realising experience fully—and thus from fully realising his/her humanness, which involves 'the whole being'.[76] That, presumably, is one reason for Leavis's often antagonistic responses to critics, like Max Eastman, who do not perceive the relation appropriately. Given that the ranking of experience applies usually in everyday thinking and assumptions (Leavis, like many others, associates it with Cartesian dualism), literature is particularly important for being able to bring together, and make felt, these facets of human experience that tend to be conceived as divided.

That is not to say that poetry cannot evoke the contrasts and conflicts between emotional and intellectual experience. It does, however, assert that the contrasts are not so much between emotion and intellect, as between one powerful emotion-guided thought, and another; or between one deeply thought-through emotion, and another. Leavis is intent on persuading his readers that intellectual response forms an important part of poetry and that emotional experience, in and out of the poem, need not be dissociated from such movements of the intellect. Underlying his criticism is the idea that poetry might in fact enable one better to evaluate and monitor emotional experience, and to discern between unthinking emotions and automatic responses, and those that are more meaningful. This is one reason that positioning poetry as the rightful place for expression of 'simple emotions' is pernicious; in fact, it is poetry (and prose) that is able properly to realise—and so to allow us in

[74] All *NB*, 14.
[75] Leavis uses 'emotion' and 'feeling' interchangeably; for simplicity with quotations I do the same here.
[76] *ELTU*, 127.

turn to realise—the 'potentialities of human experience'.[77] There are echoes here of Eliot's assertion that poetry 'is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality', though the idea of 'escape' is not one with which Leavis's criticism overall is comfortable, even as early as the 1930s, when he was still on better terms with Eliot's work.[78] For Leavis, emotion ought to be weighted and considered. He values the ability of poetry to command thinking-and-feeling in their complex unity, and, as Eliot suggests, to go beyond simplistic expression. That going-beyond, again, is where Casey is mistaken in stating that Leavis's criticism represents 'a logical culmination of romantic expressionism', as if all that mattered were the sincerity with which art is made. 'A poem is to embody an individual response to the world; what is important is the emotion with which the poet invests what is before him'. As we shall see with the case of Shelley, emotionally 'embody[ing] an individual response to the world' is far from enough to make good poetry in Leavis's eyes. Leavis is interested in 'the quality of an emotion', as Casey says, but the suggestion that the individuality of the response is what matters misses the crucial fact that for Leavis language is to be used as an approach to experience, a means to deliberation and what he called 'placing', an assimilation of experience that affords it a position in one's self-understanding.[79]

That capacity of language is part of what it means to be a writer. The (good) poet is 'unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be. He knows what he feels and knows what he is interested in'.[80] These things are not best thought of as either causes or results of one becoming a poet. They are qualities enabled by the process of one's writing. The idea of *knowledge of one's feeling* conveys the depths of the interplay of thought and emotion at play, as does the knowledge of the direction of one's interest. These are manifestations of self-knowledge, a knowing that brings to bear both intelligence and emotion on one's feelings and thoughts. To know what one feels is to have thought deeply about feeling, to the extent that a feeling becomes something that is thoughtful. *Knowing one's interest* is another way of knowing a feeling

[77] *NB*, 16.
[78] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1950), 10–11.
[79] Casey, *Language*, 184.
[80] *NB*, 16–17.

about something, knowing why one is interested in it and why it appeals to one in such a way. Again, there is the suggestion that writing enables one to be more oneself, in the kind of self-discernment it entails. The 'artist's knowledge is a kind of self-knowledge', as Rowan Williams puts it.[81]

The discussion of Shelley's poetry in *Revaluation* begins by pointing out that 'there is certainly a sense in which [it] is peculiarly emotional, and when we try to define this sense we find ourselves invoking an absence of something'.[82] This absence is not thought qua intellect, but thought qua consideration and pondering. Importantly, it is an absence of treatment, of handling, not of a missing presence in terms of content alone; Leavis detects lack of thought in the *way* language is used. He objects to Shelley's words for revelling in emotionality, for being present for no purpose other than to amass emotion, such that they work against the discerning function of language. Leavis sees Shelley as using words purely for expression, invoking them for their own sake, a usage that is harmful, presumably, because it neglects that discerning function, and so has consequences for the writer's own ability to respond to experience, as well as encouraging the reader into thoughtlessness.

We have already been told in the introduction that Shelley 'represents pre-eminently the divorce between thought and feeling, intelligence and sensibility'.[83] Leavis spends hardly any time on the latter pairing, as if expecting that his earlier work would have been read, and the terms' definition remembered. The Shelley discussion expands the introduction's judgement, beginning by showing how the poetry generates the sense of such a divorce. Shelley's 'poetry induces—depends for its success on inducing—a kind of attention that doesn't bring critical intelligence into play: the imagery feels right, the associations work appropriately if (as it takes conscious resistance not to do) one accepts the immediate feeling and doesn't slow down to think'.[84] The poetry, that is, is not obviously incompetent; it can even seem successful. But its success derives from a perpetuation of its own system: one has to receive it without thought, in the very way that Leavis

[81] Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity* (Harrisburg, PA: Continuum, 2006), 25.
[82] *R*, 194.
[83] Ibid., 15.
[84] Ibid., 194–95.

deems it to operate unthinkingly. For a poem to command the 'kind of attention' that impedes intelligence is for it to manifest a division between thought and feeling that also implicates its reader. To enjoy the poetry one must keep from working the 'critical intelligence'. Shelley is described as falling prey, too: he 'surrender[s] to a kind of hypnotic rote of favourite images, associations and words'.[85] 'Hypnotic' connects to a charge made earlier that Shelley's poetry is frequently 'habit': it has 'little to do with thinking'. There is effort involved—Shelley's 'creative labour' is spent 'getting the verse to feel right'—but it feels so 'only mechanically and externally', for 'there is nothing grasped in the poetry—no realized presence to persuade or move us by what it is'.[86] Such comments evoke Leavis's idea of 'technique' as something far more than mechanical or external.

Leavis's indictment of Shelley concerns his being more interested in moving the reader—in sentimentality—than in grasping a moving experience. The complaint, that is, is about how language is used; he feels it is not being used thoughtfully, but only to create effects. Emotion appears for its own sake of emotion. In a subversion of a famous phrase in Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Leavis suggests how 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' might be misused.[87] *To a Skylark* is described as 'a mere tumbled out spate ("spontaneous overflow") of poeticalities, the place of each one of which Shelley could have filled with another without the least difficulty and without making any essential difference'.[88] Leavis is not accusing Shelley simply of being unaccomplished, but—a graver imputation—of not having a purpose for the words he wields.

Two things are going on at once in that charge. One is that attending to the emotion consumes the poet's attention, so that the poem does no more than express or induce an emotion that remains a construction. The other is that Leavis is making more concrete the mode of relation between word and thought that pertains for him throughout his career. Words are important neither for what they represent nor for their own sake. They are important for what they uniquely lead to, for what could

[85] Ibid., 201.
[86] All Ibid., 195–97.
[87] William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*, ed. Martin Scofield (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 8.
[88] *R*, 202.

not have been thought or felt or recognised were it not for 'these words in these positions'. Shelley's poetry betrays an inability to use words in order to generate a mode of relating to experience. The attitude generated by Shelley's words is what Leavis analyses, concluding that the emotion is presented for no other reason than to indulge in emotionality. Shelley 'offers the emotion in itself, unattached, in the void', says Leavis: '"In itself" "for itself"—it is an easy shift to the pejorative implications of "for its own sake"'.[89] The reference makes Leavis's position regarding the role of words explicit. They must be used for something. Just as emotion offered for itself is thoughtless emotion, which cannot communicate to the reader without lulling them too into thoughtlessness, words offered for themselves are words that lead nowhere; any light they may shine reveals nothing but their own presence.

The diagnosis that emotion is being indulged in comes from the verse, nowhere else: the verse betrays a mode of using language, a habit with a particular view of language's purpose. Leavis is evaluating thoughts and feelings, but, as he began his Shelley essay by reminding us, 'it is strictly the "poetry" one is criticizing'.[90] Such a move can only be made because of attitude. Words create an attitude, which is part of the meaning of the poem, and the diagnosis of the attitude can only legitimately take place through scrutiny of the words. Leavis says the Shelleyan reading experience is rendered predictable by 'the elusive imagery, the high-pitched emotions, the tone and movement, the ardours, ecstasies and despairs', which 'are too much the same all through'.[91] These are all aesthetic features. But notably they are also aesthetic diagnoses: the imagery is 'elusive', emotions 'high-pitched', the emotional movement 'too much the same'. In a surprisingly concrete instance of Wittgenstein's tantalising and elusive description of 'ethics and aesthetics [as] one and the same', Leavis's criticism manages the remarkable feat of making claims about Shelley's approach to emotion (a claim of moral significance) *through* attending to features of form. It is attitude that bridges form and morality, and attitude that enables the bridging to be legitimate.

The analysis is steeped in language, and it is language that reveals an attitude that in turn raises

[89] Ibid., 201.
[90] Ibid., 192.
[91] Ibid., 198.

other questions—such, indeed, as that of legitimacy. The term is rare in Leavis's vocabulary. 'Legitimate' is used once in *Revaluation*, and appeared once in *New Bearings*, at a moment, interestingly, when Leavis remarks that the question of the legitimacy of 'Mr Eliot's methods in "The Waste Land"' is an unnecessary distraction. Instead, the 'question worth asking is, do they work?'.[92] Here is the use in *Revaluation*:

> reading with an unsolicited closeness, one may stop at the second line and ask whether the effect got with 'lies dead' is legitimate. Certainly, the emotional purpose of the poem is served, but the emotional purpose that went on being served in that way would be suspect. Leaving the question in suspense, perhaps, one passes [to the next line]

The attitude of the poem is what enables the question of legitimacy in this case to be invoked. The words are not making their reality felt: they feel for their own sake. Leavis describes the closeness as 'unsolicited' because the emotion presented in the poem is of a lulling kind, moving one, he claims, to a kind of mindlessness. His criticism here enters a temporal reconstruction of the poem, taking the reader through reactions closely and in linear fashion: again, attending to words primarily and through those to attitude. A tentative critical querying soon begins to harden. By the end of his criticism of the first stanza Leavis is more certain: '[o]nly in the vaguest and slackest state of mind—of imagination and thought—could one so describe […]'; 'the complete nullity of the clinching […] seems hardly worth stopping to note'; [t]hose who take pleasure in recognizing and accepting [these currency values] are not at the same time exacting about sense'. As the criticism proceeds so does the accusation, so that the reader, rereading the poem that Leavis has quoted in full, will also, in company with the critical analysis, perceive deficiencies with gathering clarity. The focus does not leave the language of the poetry, even while Leavis is able also to say that 'the emotional clichés take on a grosser unction', or to say that 'the required abeyance of thought (and imagination) becomes more remarkable'. 'Sufficient recognition of the sense depends neither on thinking, nor on realization of the metaphors, but on response to the sentimental commonplaces: it is only when intelligence and imagination insist on intruding that difficulties arise'. The evaluation is of language, which is not playing the role it should be; indeed, it is that one reflexively responds to

[92] *NB*, 121.

'sentimental commonplaces' that alerts Leavis to an effect of illegitimacy, and allows him to make judgements of moral significance.

The repeated emphasis of 'intelligence and imagination' occurs three times in just over one page at this point, insisting, *pace* Shelley, that the mind is 'imagination and thought' together.[93] The repetition suggests Leavis's wariness of misinterpretation, and also the strength of his concern to keep from being dichotomised and divided what for ease's sake are referred to as separate aspects of the mind.[94] For Leavis both intelligence and imagination are affronted by certain Shelley poems, something that has a further effect on the relation to words they express. A poem demanding an absence of imagination and intelligence compels frivolity, both towards its subject-matter and towards words, and therefore towards poetry itself. A further frivolity is implicit in these: one towards living. This has been hinted earlier in the Shelley essay (indeed, on the second page):

> Here, clearly, in these particularities of imagery and sense, peculiarities analysable locally in the mode of expression, we have the manifestation of essential characteristics—the Shelleyan characteristics as envisaged by the criticism that works on a philosophical plane and makes judgments of a moral order. In the growth of those "tangled boughs" out of the leaves, exemplifying as it does a general tendency of the images to forget the status of the metaphor or simile that introduced them and to assume an autonomy and a right to propagate, so that we lose in confused generations and perspectives the perception or thought that was the ostensible *raison d'être* of imagery, we have a recognized essential trait of Shelley's: his weak grasp upon the actual.[95]

The passage is remarkable for suggesting that Shelley's inability to 'grasp' the real world in poetic images does not just betray but in some important manner *is* an inability to grasp the 'actual', the real world itself. Like Leavis's charge of Eastman, there is the suggestion that if Shelley cannot use words to relate to the world, that is as much to do with a failure of interest in the world as it is a failure to use words accurately. It is a mistake to dismiss such comments as a conflation of author with work, as Belsey does, without also trying to see what Leavis is doing.[96] He is building upon the earlier work of *New Bearings* and *For Continuity*, and their suggestion that inadequacy of words (for a poet or writer in general) connects in some way to an inadequacy of experience. Shelley's inability to grasp the actual is connected to his readiness to slide into the world of his emotions. The

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[93] All *R*, 204–5.
[94] A useful exploration of these intersections can be found in Jane Heal, *Mind, Reason and Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).
[95] *R*, 193–94.
[96] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), 12–14.

world of the emotions is part of 'the actual', such that the poetry reveals a sort of self-indulging shelter from the realities of both the outside world *and* the inner life, neither of which is the poem interested in confronting or attempting properly to know. Shelley does not use words to discern a mode of response to living, or an emotional experience, but rather to poeticise—to use words for the sake of creating poetic effects.

Keats and Wordsworth have an entirely different relationship to words. The Keats commentary develops the assessment of the relationship between words and experience. His revisions to *Hyperion* show 'the interest of the Letters realized—become active—in technique': words rendering an interest stronger and more thorough.[97] Leavis is keen to qualify the way in which Keats can be called an 'Aesthete', noting that he is 'the one Aesthete of genius'; his relation to words entails 'vitality', a 'strong […] grasping at fullness of life'. *Ode to a Nightingale* 'is better in a way involving a relation to life that the prescription "art for art's sake" (whatever it may mean) would not tend to encourage'. The phrase 'relation to life' is a synonym for attitude, notably pointing towards what the poem generates as significant as well as the feelings and thoughts it incites. Leavis also uses the same terminology as that used of Shelley, showing how the chapters in *Revaluation* interact, contributing towards an overall argument about words and experience through the relation of thinking and feeling. Keats has the 'critical intelligence' Shelley missed, one 'intimately related to the sureness of touch and grasp' of the Odes, and a 'strong grasp upon actualities—upon things outside himself, that firm sense of the solid world'.[98]

Similarly, Wordsworth's 'characteristic' is 'to grasp surely (which, in the nature of the case, must be delicately and subtly) what he offers'. The offering, whether 'the world as perceived' or 'inner experience', is discerned through language. His poetry, 'recollected in tranquillity', is the antithesis of what Leavis perceives in Shelley, not so much because Wordsworth is more measured as because his poetry reveals a different conception of words.[99] For Leavis, 'the process covered by [Wordsworth's] phrase' ('recollected in tranquillity') is 'one of emotional discipline, critical

[97] *R*, 254.
[98] All Ibid., 234–44.
[99] Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 21.

exploration of experience, pondered valuation and maturing reflection'.[100] The description highlights that 'recollected' ought not to suggest a record of a past event, but the *nature* of the depiction: 'collectedness'. Emotional discipline is not to do with the potency of the emotion so much as its quality (as Leavis would stress in an essay of that title).[101] That the reflection is *maturing* and not mature suggests the active force and active role of language: reflection arrives through and takes place during the process of composition. He 'present[s] an object (wherever this may belong) and the emotion seems to derive from what is presented'. Leavis emphasises the legitimacy of the emotion, which has a genuine origin in the poem, as well as the fact that the emotion belongs to the way of seeing the poem's 'object', and insofar as that is the case, belongs to the object itself. The emotional attitude, that is, is part of the 'what' that is presented—because it is not so much presented as created, a vision generated through words that are attitudinal. In Shelley, emotion feels exterior to whatever experience is offered in the poem, whereas in Wordsworth, that which is presented in the poem is 'present […] in the experience'. Shelley's emotion is separate to experience, imposed upon it; it is 'exterior'. In Wordsworth emotion is 'generated'.

The verb is important. Emotion that is merely represented is emotion that cannot be felt as real. In Wordsworth's poetry, however: 'outer' and 'inner' fluctuate 'unobtrusively'; there is 'no emotional comment—nothing "emotional" in phrasing, movement or tone; the facts seem to be presented barely, and the emotional force to be generated by them in the reader's mind when he has taken them in—generated by the two juxtaposed stanzas'. The term 'generated' stresses that the emotional experience is created *through* the poem. Leavis claims the verb for both poem and reader, emphasising reading that is active but fundamentally attentive, responsive to something 'generated by' the form of the poem. Notably he writes of Shelley as exemplifying 'the wrong approach to emotion, the approach from the wrong side or end': an approach incompatible with *generating* something.[102] Shelley's determination to show emotion and make it felt prevents it from being created by the poem.

[100] *R*, 198–99.
[101] F.R. Leavis, '"Thought" and Emotional Quality', *Scrutiny*, March 1945, 53–71.
[102] All *R*, 200–202.

For Leavis there is something almost insulting about the sort of metaphysics of the human Shelley constructs in his writing. That is evident in his irritation with the passages of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* that refer to the spontaneity of creative 'inspiration'. Leavis comments that Shelley 'hand[s] poetry over to a sensibility that has no more dealings with intelligence than it can help', in which the poetic faculty vibrates responsively but 'active intelligence' is 'switched off'. What Shelley calls the 'active powers of the mind' 'are insufficient in themselves for creation'.[103] For Leavis, Shelley's idea of both poet and reader involves pejorative assumptions. The presumption that the idea of experience presented in the poem will be accepted by the reader is itself a slight. Leavis sees the Shelleyan poet as one who abdicates the responsibility of creation, and accepts inspiration alone, without the rewriting and reconceptualising that comes with the 'organization' found in better poets (Wordsworth is again the example). While Shelley's 'poetical habits' and 'fondled vocabulary' depend on the 'kind of inspiration that works only when critical intelligence is switched off', organisation involves an understanding of oneself—and, indeed, a view of words that desires their end in relating to experience.[104] Shelley's 'inspiration' allows him to indulge a tendency to use words for their own sake, such that in Leavis's terms he is effectively fleeing reality.

Earlier in *Revaluation,* in the Pope chapter, Leavis had prepared the way for the Shelley argument, offering a verse from Henry King in which 'personal feeling is so indubitably strong', 'the immediate feeling and emotion' makes nevertheless 'an implicit reference, even here […] to a considered scale of values—a kind of critical "placing", as it were'.[105] In contrast is the Sporus character in Pope's *Epistle IV*, which 'is frankly an indulgence in personal feeling'. Throughout *Revaluation* Leavis condemns indulgence in emotion, just as in *For Continuity* and *How to Teach Reading* he condemns indulgence in intellect. In the same way that 'The Literary Mind' establishes an argument about intelligence and sensibility, *Revaluation* sets up the conception of thinking and feeling that persists for the next 40 years of Leavis's literary judgements. Both texts have behind

[103] Ibid., 197.
[104] Ibid., 201.
[105] Ibid., 74.

them a sense of the role of words, one that depends upon them operating as entities whose meaning derives from form and content together, and involves attitude. That role is to relate to experience, through careful usage of words. The analysis of Pope introduces the term 'organization' that resurfaces with Wordsworth in order to show Shelley's deficiency: 'His technique, concerned as it is with arranging words and "regulating" movements, is the instrument of a fine organization, and it brings to bear pressures and potencies that can turn intense personal feelings into something else'.[106] Organisation is also to do with impersonality, something Leavis conceptualises differently from Eliot, for whom it is the separation of the 'man who suffers and the mind which creates'.[107] Leavis would later write, with reference to Eliot's idea of 'impersonality', that 'we don't find ourselves impelled to think of the pressure of the artistic process as something apart from the pressure of the living—the lived life and the lived experience—out of which the work has issued'.[108] For Leavis, 'impersonality' is the making relevant and informative to others something intensely personal (just as *New Bearings* emphasised the 'personal way of feeling').

Shelley lacks the ability to relate to personal experience so that it is able to have meaning beyond indulgence in emotionalism. Leavis's charge develops from the inability to grasp the actual and the suggested flight from reality to an inability to impersonalise through full knowing of the self, such that Shelley makes himself 'his own hero'. Leavis perceives Shelley as 'characteristically, addressing himself'; his 'characteristic pathos is self-regarding, directed upon an idealized self'. Such a direction is not a self-interest or self-involvement, but rather the reverse. The weak grasp of the actual extends into, even of its nature includes, a weak grasp of the self. Leavis's charge is that Shelley does not know himself: his self-awareness is occluded by excessive self-consciousness. Thus the 'abeyance of thought' in the poetry 'takes on a more sinister aspect': Shelley's ability to 'accept the grosser, the truly corrupt, gratifications' of some of his work exemplifies his little understanding either of himself or the world. What is worse is that his desire for such understanding is also little, a charge Leavis makes plausible through his attention to the attitude to words he detects

[106] *NB*, 82.
[107] Eliot, *SE*, 8.
[108] *AK*, 181.

in Shelley. In its chase for effect the poetry gives up thought; its aesthetic shrugging of responsibility is also a human shrugging. Shelley's 'antipathy […] to any play of the critical mind, the uncongeniality of intelligence to inspiration' goes 'not merely with a capacity for momentary self-deceptions and insincerities, but with a radical lack of self-knowledge'.[109] That lack condemns Shelley to practise two aspects of the same fault: 'spontaneity of emotion and poetical abeyance of thought', with 'poetical' mocking the archetypal notion of poetry's role that Leavis is attempting to reject.[110]

Although selective quotation can suggest otherwise at times, Leavis's argument is derived from and focuses on nothing other than the words of Shelley's poetry. His dominant criticism is that Shelley's words evoke only their straining to evoke; they are there for their own sake. Leavis condemns this as Shelley's 'Shakespeareanising': his attempt not to generate something of his own but to sound like Shakespeare. 'Shelley's drama and tragedy do not grow out of any realized theme'. The word 'realized' in that sentence has three aspects, including the mind of the artist, the words on the page and the mind of the reader. Leavis's claim is that the theme or concept being explored is realised neither in Shelley's mind nor in the words on the page; being so, nor can it be felt to be real by an attentive reader. '[T]here is nothing grasped at the core of the piece'.[111] The meaning of these charges is that Shelley does not allow words to be more than tools for poeticising, to lead to anything beyond themselves. Leavis calls Shelley's pathos 'corrupt' because it is hollow, a pathos hankered after without recognised cause or motive, such that it cannot become more than a word. When Shelley's work is good, on the other hand, he 'sees what is in front of him too clearly, and with too pure a pity and indignation, to have any regard for his emotions as such; the emotional value of what is presented asserts itself, or rather, does not need asserting'.[112] It is not emotion at issue, but emotionalism. Shelley's 'wordy emotional generality […] does not grasp anything, but merely makes large gestures towards the kind of effect deemed appropriate. We are told emphatically what the emotion is that we are to feel; emphasis and insistence serving instead of

[109] All *R*, 206–7.
[110] Ibid., 213.
[111] Ibid., 209.
[112] Ibid., 215.

realization and advertising its default'.[113] The comment is as much to do with modes of interpreting literature as it is with Shelley's emotionalism. Leavis desires words to generate, not to show or tell. Nor is the distinction Leavis is making merely between insisting on something and suggesting it. Leavis describes Shelley as making 'gestures towards', gestures that are deemed inadequate because they fail to grasp. Leavis would repeat the formula later: 'what we have to look for are the signs of something grasped and held, something presented in an ordering of words, and not merely thought of or gestured towards'.[114] He is trying to trouble notions of how to use language, what to use it for, and how to speak of what it does.

Shelley's renderings have 'vague, generalizing externality', while Shakespeare presents words which 'spring from a vividly realized particular situation; from the imagined experience of a given mind in a given critical moment that is felt from the inside—that is lived—with sharp concrete particularity'. Shakespeare uses words to develop a new way to new ideas. The difference is one of the conception of words' role and functioning, and, because for Leavis words are a mode of discerning relation to experience, the difference is also one of attitude towards experience. Note how words and experience are elided in the claim that Shelley's words lack 'sentience, warmth and motion, the essentials of being alive'.[115] The elision is justified by the concept of 'attitude'. In *New Bearings* Leavis writes that the 'poet's command both of his experience and of his technique (if we can distinguish) is perfect'.[116] Words and experience belong together in this conception, which is one reason that 'attitude' does not belong to an author or a character in a text, but to the work itself, even to a paragraph or sentence in it. Leavis's claim in *The Great Tradition* that the chosen authors have 'a vital capacity for experience' depends on the work done in these early texts regarding the relation of language to experience.[117] Vernon Young says of that assertion that it must be true only 'in a very qualified sense', which is right—but the qualifying has already been done in these earlier works, and is continued in *The Great Tradition*.[118] The statement belongs to Leavis's overarching

[113] Ibid., 212.
[114] *EU*, 78.
[115] All *R*, 211.
[116] *NB*, 61.
[117] *GT*, 17.
[118] Vernon Young, 'Tradition and Mr. Leavis' Talent', *The Hudson Review* 2, no. 4 (1950): 625.

vision of how language works and what it is for: working on intelligence, sensibility, thinking, and feeling, and using these faculties at their maximum in examining experience. *Revaluation* builds on *New Bearings* and *For Continuity* to solidify a sense of attitude as essential for thinking about how literature operates and relates to living. Attitude is much more fundamental than a message, theme or 'moral' expressed by a work, in part because it is generated, not 'expressed', but also because it is something created by language that extends far beyond it.

iii. Words and Experience through 'Technique' and 'Realization'

Many times I have mentioned 'technique'. The term is profoundly important for Leavis's conception of the interpenetration of form and content, and for understanding how language can be used with regard to experience. In the Augustan section of *Revaluation* Leavis offers a bracketed aside. He is remarking that Pope's 'correctness' (the inverted commas are his) cannot be discussed in 'prosodic' terms. Presumably with reference to 'prosodic', this follows: '(one cannot say "technical"—technique in any serious sense does not exist for discussion at that level)'.[119] Technique, as *For Continuity* suggested, cannot be thinned to 'technical' alone; nor will an appropriately serious treatment isolate 'technique' from other aspects of the poem. A few pages later that impression is bolstered by a second aside: 'that [Horace Gregory] supposes Pope's technique ('craftsmanship' being plainly depreciatory) to be something superficial, some new skill of arranging a verbal surface, is confirmed by [...]'.[120] Leavis is stressing that technique is not 'superficial' or secondary, that it is not something done to a finished poem in order to make it better. *Craftsmanship* is unsuitable because it suggests the shaping or refining of something from outside, the fashioning of something of which the substance is already completed. The first of the OED's definitions for technique is 'way of doing something', a broad definition, but one appropriate for

[119] *R*, 75.
[120] Ibid., 81.

Leavis's use of the term.[121] It is part of Leavis's sense of how language works that the 'way of doing' is what creates the 'done' (rather than merely altering it, as if it already existed).

Peter Lamarque's comments on Pope, in turn, demonstrate how a failure to appreciate technique as internal to the workings of a poem overlooks the way in which poetry operates. Lamarque distinguishes between reading Pope's *An Essay on Man* 'as poetry', which is reading 'for the surface poetic form', and reading 'for the ideas and arguments in their own right'. This presumes, as Simon Jarvis points out, that the form can be ignored and the content remain the same. Jarvis writes that 'To read the poem as poetry is to read it. The idea that there is a special way of reading poems which reads them as poetry, but which does not need to read or pay attention to the words and sentences of which they are actually made up, is nugatory'.[122] Lamarque's argument is that because *An Essay on Man* is so full of ideas, it can be read for its abstract thought alone; but he does not consider that 'the surface poetic form' might be what enables 'the ideas and arguments', and that, as far as the poem is concerned, they do not exist 'in their own right' at all. Lamarque says that, like Lucrece's *De Rerum Natura*, Pope's is a poem in which 'poetic devices seem more incidental than essential', 'provid[ing] an easy proof that poetry can be a vehicle for philosophical thought'.[123] '[P]oetic devices' plays into the idea that there is a market of such goods on offer, from which one picks that which will best fit (in direct contrast to *New Bearings*' objective of undermining 'the familiar idea of the intrinsically poetical').[124] Lamarque's project, to show that 'abstract thought' is not inimical to poetry, disregards the possibility that poetic form might internally relate to the so-called abstract content. Even in cases where Lamarque argues that form is important, its importance is for effect; he speaks of it as external to the 'philosophical themes': 'The poem uses the full potentialities of poetry to *illustrate* the point rather than arguing for it head-on in a direct philosophical treatment either in prose or in Lucretian-style verse'.[125] '*[I]llustrate*'

[121] Oxford English Dictionary, '"technique, N.".', *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford UP, December 2016), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/198458?redirectedFrom=technique.
[122] Alexis Papazoglou, *The Pursuit of Philosophy* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2012), 74.
[123] Peter Lamarque, 'Poetry and Abstract Thought', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (1 September 2009): 37–38.
[124] *NB*, 70.
[125] Lamarque, 'Abstract Thought', 43–44.

suggests an addition, the exemplifying of a point that has already been made and is already known.

Jarvis has pointed out that the view that a poem could be read for its 'surface poetic form' or for its ideas 'relies on a notion of "form" that only became widely current in aesthetic theory from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the notion that "form" is opposed to "content"; it presumes that the strictly poetic resides in this "form"'.[126] This is right, but Lamarque's reading is not wrong only on historical grounds. It is blind to the way in which poetry, like prose, creates meaning—a more serious charge for a philosopher than historical inaccuracy. Lamarque's pursuit of 'abstract thought' does not allow that form inflects, and does not just reflect, generates and does not just '*illustrate*', meaning. In Yvor Winters's words: 'The poet is not writing in language which was first conceptual and then emotionalised, nor in prose which has been metered; he is writing in poetical language'.[127] 'Poetical language' goes entirely against the 'vehicle' idea that Lamarque advances.

For Leavis, the very concept of technique is something to do with thought; it is defined as a mode of grappling with ideas, not playing with surfaces. The concern of *New Bearings* with technique is explicit. Casey quoted part of a relevant sentence: 'the only technique that matters is that which compels words to express an intensely personal way of feeling, so that the reader responds, not in a general way that he knows beforehand to be "poetical", but in a precise, particular way […]'. Technique must communicate; it must make felt. Rather than merely express a feeling, it must generate it. For technique to be 'adequate to the ways of feeling, or modes of experience, of adult, sensitive moderns' ('difficult in the extreme'), requires a particular conception of language as integral to the working-through of one's relationship to experience, such that 'technique' is what enables such adequacy. 'Technique' must enable a sense of relationship to experience not previously existing. Leavis's comments on 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' are indicative:

> as striking as this subtlety and flexibility of tone, this complexity of attitude, is the nature […] of the imagery. […] We have here, in short, poetry that expresses freely a modern sensibility, the ways of feeling, the modes of experience, of one fully alive in his own age. Already the technical achievement is such as to be rich in promise of development and application.[128]

[126] Jarvis in Papazoglou, *Pursuit*, 73.
[127] Yvor Winters, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 83.
[128] *NB*, 60–61.

The 'technical achievement' is what testifies to the writer's capacity to explore a relation to experience: through tone and attitude, not through abstractable content. Indeed, the tone and attitude are what give the poem its subtlety, flexibility and complexity. They shape meaning in the most fundamental of ways. Leavis had written in the opening chapter of *New Bearings* that the 'evidence [that one is 'fully alive in our time'] will be in the very texture of his poetry'.[129] Being fully alive in one's time means knowing what one feels and the direction of one's interest: coming to know through writing the modes of perception through which one tends to conceive of experience, and being willing to examine and probe them further. The repetition of 'fully alive' in the Prufrock commentary echoes those introductory comments. The Prufrock passage also repeats the same formula from the start of *New Bearings* about the 'ways of feeling and modes of experience of adult, sensitive moderns', in its emphasis of 'the ways of feelings, the modes of experience'. For technique to be expressionist would suggest that it indicate feelings or experience directly, not generate the particular modes of experiencing these, which realigns the focal interest with attitude. There is an interesting distinction here to be drawn with Leavis's contemporary John Middleton Murry, who writes that, once 'the vivid emotions of youth ha[ve] been refined into a complex but self-consistent attitude to life, and his emotional bias confirmed into a mode of experience, [the author] chooses a plot'.[130] Despite the mention of 'attitude' and 'mode of experience', this idea has little to do with language as a means to grasping a mode of experience. It suggests instead a habit of experiencing that exists independently of writing and of literature, and then reveals itself in an appropriate plot. The fact that the form of language is not centrally important in Murry's account of the relation between idea and expression is highlighted by his assertion that '[w]here the originating experience is predominantly emotional […] it is largely a matter of accident or fashion whether poetry or prose is used for the expression'. Murry's 'expression' is reminiscent of Casey's: something external, for which language is the 'vehicle' rather than the method.[131]

[129] Ibid., 24.
[130] John Middleton Murry, *The Problem of Style* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1922), 30.
[131] Ibid., 53; 43.

Leavis's discussion of technique is informed by Eliot's reference to expression as 'altered only by a man of genius'.[132] More crucially for Leavis, perhaps, Eliot had written: 'We observe that we cannot define even the technique of verse; we cannot say at what point "technique" begins or where it ends; and if we add to it a "technique of feeling," that glib phrase will carry us but little farther'.[133] Leavis agreed. *New Bearings* states that '[f]or the poet "technique" was the problem of sincerity'. Technique is a mode of expressing newly, not for the sake of doing so, but because only new modes of expression can generate new senses of relating to experience. This is a radical demand of language. Leavis provides a footnote to the 'sincerity' comment, of Eliot on Blake: 'this honesty never exists without great technical accomplishment'. Like Eliot, Leavis sees the accurate expressing of attitude as to do with self-scrutinising.

Yet Leavis's understanding of technique is importantly different from Eliot's. For Eliot technique is a fundamentally important use of tools for a process of working out, which might or might not resolve itself successfully. For Leavis, rather than being tools used to try to work something out, technique is what *enables* the process of working-out. Of Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* Leavis writes '[Eliot] had to achieve a paradoxical precision-in-vagueness; to persuade the elusive intuition to define itself […] The warning against crude interpretation, against trying to elicit anything in the form of a prose statement, is there in the unexpected absences of punctuation; and in the repetitive effects, which suggest a kind of delicate tentativeness. The poetry itself is an effort at resolving diverse impulsions, recognitions and needs'.[134] That final 'itself' cements the suggestions of the achievement that Leavis sees in the poem, which have been already tendered by 'achieve', 'paradoxical precision-in-vagueness', persuade', 'define itself', 'delicate tentativeness'. The 'effort at resolving' takes place *through* the act of poetic composition, as one grapples with technique. Thus the way of expressing ('form'), the expression ('content'), the stance of the expression ('attitude'), all interpenetrate with this term, *technique*.

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[132] 'Sensibility alters from generation to generation in everybody, whether we will or no, but expression is only altered by a man of genius'. From Eliot's introduction to a 1930 edition of Samuel Johnson's 'London' and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'. Online: T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. Jason Harding and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2015), https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/1690380.
[133] T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen & Co, 1934), ix.
[134] All *NB*, 90.

Gerard Manley Hopkins's fame for technical accomplishment makes Leavis's handling of him in *New Bearings* especially intriguing, given Leavis's desire not to isolate from mode of feeling any 'technical' aspect, nor to separate 'the technique and the matter'.[135] The second sentence of the Hopkins chapter, which asserts Hopkins's vocation, makes clear that Leavis's interest in Hopkins's technique is in the way it enables a new understanding of the function and operation of poetry. Hopkins 'was one of the most remarkable technical inventors who ever wrote, and he was a major poet'. Leavis takes a wry approach to the discussion of why Hopkins's work was left unpublished until almost thirty years after his death, with extensive quotation from Hopkins's biographer (G.F. Lahey SJ), Sturge Moore (who rewrote 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo'), and especially from former Poet Laureate Robert Bridges, Hopkins's friend and editor of his poems. Leavis's conception of the way technique creates meaning is intimated in his reference to 'what Dr Bridges calls "blemishes"' in Hopkins's work. He comments 'it is difficult to understand how the attitude implicit in this description of them can go with an interest in his work'.[136] To dislike the technical aspect of Hopkins's poetry is already to misunderstand it, for the technical is not an *aspect* of his work at all. Removal of the 'blemishes' fundamentally alters both the poetry and the experience of it. In the Epilogue to *New Bearings*, Leavis discusses Donne, 'one of the greatest masters of technique who ever lived'. Those to whom technique is incidental will 'apologize a great deal' for Donne, 'judge him a very faulty craftsman whose verse is harsh and rugged [and] praise him for incidental poetic beauties achieved at great expense'.[137] They will also have gravely misunderstood poetry (and, the implication goes, literature in general), in misunderstanding how technique, relating to more than the technical, generates ideas.

Leavis's concept of technique finds perhaps its clearest expression here: 'Hopkins's genius was as much a matter of rare character, intelligence and sincerity as of technical skill: indeed in his great poetry the distinction disappears; the technical triumph is a triumph of spirit'.[138] That final clause is a profoundly important one for Leavis's understanding of how word and experience relate. 'These

[135] Ibid., 59.
[136] All Ibid., 119–20.
[137] Ibid., 147.
[138] Ibid., 135.

words in this order' (Cameron) have been chosen only because of the 'spirit' whose interest in particular questions recognises that they can only be asked and pursued in a particular way. The 'triumph of spirit' is in using words this way, for this purpose, just as using words this way, for this purpose, is a triumph of spirit. There is no 'technique' for technique, as Eliot said; it emerges from tussles with experience through language, which, to be authentic, use language as integral to the task of tussling. Technique does not mean complexity or experimentation for their own sakes; it has much more to do with a successful expression of attitude. But *expression* is insufficient; so is *manifestation*. Neither quite fulfils the role of technique in Leavis's understanding of it. *Successful enabling of attitude* would be more appropriate, indicating that the attitude comes with the words and neither exists as it is before them, nor is a static product of them. As a 'triumph of spirit', technique is also generative, a creation of that attitude for other readers, such that the act of reading is able to constitute for them an experience of whatever the poetry or prose evokes.

The remarks on William Empson that come later in *New Bearings* are relevant here. Empson is

> often difficult, and sometimes […] unjustifiably so; but his verse always has a rich and strongly characteristic life, for he is as intensely interested in his technique as in his ideas.
>
> Indeed the criticism of him would be that in his work the heat of creation is as yet too exclusively a matter of interest in technique and ideas; and that, however intense this interest may be, something more is needed before his intelligence and his technical skill can be fully employed […]

The mention of both technique and ideas is striking. If neither is lacking, both 'form' and 'content' are ostensibly in place. There is 'intelligence' and 'technical skill' but an insufficiency of 'something more' which will enable the deployment of these to be at its maximal power. Leavis writes that at his best Empson 'can be more subtle and complex in tone and attitude'; he 'is very original: not only his ideas but his attitude towards them and his treatment of them are modern'.[139] The attitude towards ideas is made felt through a use of words that finds the ideas precisely in the act of using these words. What Empson is missing is a use of technique for the very purpose of making ideas felt, creating something new because the ideas come with a particular attitude, making

[139] All Ibid., 147–48.

them subtly different.

What Empson is missing, Hopkins has. ‘Hopkins is really difficult and the difficulty is essential’. His innovations are not just playing with words and rules; they change understanding and present alternative modes of perceiving. Communication is central to his work: ‘[t]he final, adequate reading will not be a matter of arduous struggle (though a sense of tension and resistance is usually an essential part of the effect), but it will have been made possible by previous intellectual effort, the conditions of various subtle and complex organizations’.[140] ‘[S]ubtle and complex’ foreshadows the qualities that Empson has only at his best. The emphasis on being understood is notable; Hopkins’s aim is to make felt as well as to make known. The conception of technique Leavis advances is one that enables an entirely new mode of relating to experience through language; in that sense, it has an important human element. Thus Hopkins’s innovations are important because of the new possibilities they present for experience as well as for language. As with the evaluation of Shelley, the list of Hopkins’s achievements in innovation are aesthetic appraisals with profound human consequences: ‘to increase the expectancy involved in rhythm and changes its direction, to control movement, to give words new associations and bring diverse ideas and emotions together, to intensify the sense of inevitability—in short, to get new, precise and complex responses out of words’.[141] The mention of ‘responses’ again emphasises attitude, and the adjectives stress that words used this way have a profound purpose. Hopkins’s poetry is praised because it presents an understanding of language as functioning in a manner to do with experience. The ‘peculiarities of his technique appeal for sanction to the spirit of the language: his innovations accentuate and develop bents it exhibits in living use’. The comment is praise for a conception of language that recognises the connection between extending the known possibilities of language and extending the known possibilities of relating to experience.

It is the Hopkins-and-Shakespeare conception of, and mode of using, language, that enables the full extension of its relationship with understanding experience. For Leavis, the way in which a writer uses language is ‘the primary order of consideration; “consciousness of the universe” is an

[140] Ibid., 123.
[141] Ibid., 130.

unprofitable abstraction apart from it'.[142] He is developing an argument for language as a mode of deepening one's engagement with the world, meaning that innovations in technique are also innovations in how the world is or can be seen or understood or encountered. These innovations are what enable the 'realization' of words into felt realities. 'Realization' is a key Leavisian term, and although he stated that it 'is not offered as a technical term, an instrument of precision', it also has a particular meaning that needs to be drawn out.[143]

> Words in poetry invite us, not to 'think about' and judge but to 'feel into' or 'become'—to realize a complex experience that is given in the words. They demand, not merely a fuller-bodied response, but a completer responsiveness […] The critic's aim is, first, to realize as sensitively and completely as possible this or that which claims his attention; and a certain valuing is implicit in the realizing.[144]

Much of Leavis's exploration is focused on the role of language for the writer, with hints at the implications for the reader. 'Realization' establishes that the discerning function of literary language applies as much to the reader. It means *bringing to life*, though it is also more complex than that might suggest. 'Realization' involves a profound attentive encounter between text and reader, in which the reader's attention to the words, and openness to the experience they convey, is what allows the text to enable experience. Realisation of the words is an entering into experience, deriving from a mingling of thought and feeling together. Leavis's emphasis on the language of interiority is notable. The first sentence is suggesting neither that thinking has a lesser place in poetry, nor that poetic response is emotion-bound: the prepositions qualify meaning in an important way. '[A]bout' denotes something exterior, while 'into' evokes an approach that is inward. 'Feel into' and 'become' are employed as synonyms, demonstrating where the semantic stress is to lie: the approach envisioned is one that comes to occupy from within. These assertions arrive in the context of a debate between Leavis and Wellek about *Revaluation*, which, as I've argued, is a text in which the appropriate relationship between thinking and feeling is figured as one of consistent interaction and response: where feeling, in other words, is also intelligent. That thinking and feeling have a complex interaction gains renewed assertion in the distinction between 'a fuller-bodied

[142] All Ibid., 125.
[143] *EU*, 78.
[144] *CP*, 213.

response' and 'a completer responsiveness'. Leavis is calling for a different kind of stance from which response emerges: a responsiveness including intelligence, emotion, imagination and openness. Only that which 'claims' attention will be able to prompt such realisation, meaning that fundamentally it is down to the words whether or not the experience is available to the reader.

Most significant in this passage is the assertion that evaluation is already at play in the process of 'realizing' the words, and indeed, has begun even before then to take place, in the almost spontaneous assessment of the words as to whether attention *can* be claimed. For valuing to take place during the realising means that that which is being valued is both words and experience: the experience as given in the words, formed according to the words. I emphasise *the words* to stress their role in determining *and* directing meaning. The stable object that is there, the literary artefact whose words do not change, is not realised—not made real—until read. But the encounter with words that reading involves is not akin to vaulting from a springboard; it does not lead the way to meaning, so much as induce one to enter it. Clive Scott writes of metrics in poetry as something learnt 'not [to…] govern the way we read, but rather as something which *releases* us into scansion, into reading the rhythm which is partly the text's and partly our own'.[145] The metaphor of the interior, which Scott, with his repetition of 'into', also uses, reinforces the idea of meaning as something belonging to the words. One becomes a better reader in order to realise meaning more fully; but, however good a reader is, the meaning has to be something that the words can yield. If interpretation is to be tenable, let alone persuasive, it requires the support of the 'constant, unchanging' words, which other people can read and whose meaning they too can recognise.[146] Rhythm is 'partly our own' because we have become good readers, readers who can be patterned by texts.[147] Reader experience, though different, is never whimsical; it is always rooted in the words given. It is personal, but not subjective.[148] The involvement of evaluation even in the early moment

[145] Clive Scott, *The Poetics of French Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 2.
[146] E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967), 8.
[147] See Seymour Chatman, *A Theory of Meter* (Paris: Mouton de Gruyter, 1965), 223. The reader 'not only perceives the pattern but participates in one, as he actively or subliminally performs a kind of little dance with his organs of speech'.
[148] See Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*. 'It is the act of commitment in its full structure that saves personal knowledge from being merely subjective' (65); 'the conception of the *personal*, which is neither subjective nor objective' (300). See 299-324.

of entering the text and during initial realisation signals how much this also has to do with literary merit: only good writing enables 'realization'.

Like much of Leavis's critical method, 'realization' is both a nod to and a significant departure from I.A. Richards:

> There are two important senses in which we can 'understand' the feeling of a passage. We can either just ourselves *undergo* the same feeling or we can *think of* the feeling. Often in witnessing a play, for example, we think of the feelings of the characters, but undergo the feeling the whole action conveys. Obviously we can and do make mistakes in both forms of understanding. Much the same is true of the apprehension of tone, our appreciation of the speaker's attitude towards us. His attitude invites a complimentary attitude from us. So we can either simply adopt this attitude (thereby in one sense 'recognising' his attitude), or think of his attitude (perceive it, thereby 'recognising' it in quite another sense).[149]

Leavis's realisation neatly resists the either/or binary that Richards sets up. Realisation is a mode of entering into the words, so that it is both experiencing ('undergo') *and* thinking of a feeling. Nor do I believe Richards is quite right to say that what one undergoes is the feeling itself. The mode of relating to experience generated usually has more than only 'feeling' at play: one undergoes an experience of an attitude. Richard's mention of 'attitude' here is also quite distinct from Leavis's. As with his reference to 'attitude' in *Principles*, it belongs to a person, not a text, and is something that operates along the same binary Richards establishes for 'understanding': either one takes it oneself or one perceives it. Becoming aware of the attitude generated by a text, however, is only possible through an entering into the experience of that attitude: an inhabiting of it, through 'realization', a full responding to the words.

Earlier I mentioned the divergence between Eliot's view of technique and that of Leavis. Leavis's early work is generally taken as deeply indebted to Eliot. McLaren writes that *New Bearings* and *Revaluation* 'remain largely an elaboration of the approaches inaugurated by Eliot and I.A. Richards'.[150] For Wellek, Leavis's 'general agreement with Eliot both in implied standards and in taste is obvious'.[151] Less obvious are the subtleties and distinctions: but they are there. The early work shows Leavis taking some of Eliot's principles in his own direction, as though hearing what he wanted to hear, even if in doing so he might misapprehend Eliot's own meaning. *New*

[149] Richards, *Practical Criticism*, 1930, 331.
[150] McLaren, *Culture*, 252.
[151] René Wellek, "The Literary Criticism of Frank Raymond Leavis," 175-193, in Camden, *Literary Views*, 179.

Bearings demonstrates Leavis's debt to Eliot while also struggling to establish his own understanding of key terms, such as 'impersonality' and 'technique'. That debt should not preclude attention to the way in which the pair differ, and George Watson is right to state that 'for Leavis, the misunderstanding [of Eliot's early criticism] was fruitful'.[152] I turn now to the Pound section of *New Bearings*, beginning with its notable criticism of Eliot, where Leavis treads an uncertain line between criticising Pound's poetry and criticising Eliot's criticism of it. He does not himself appear clear which is his subject; as Hayman writes, Leavis 'seems less interested in coming to grips with Pound's text' than in grappling with the issues raised by Eliot.[153]

The Pound section opens with some comments by Eliot on poets: 'A man who devises new rhythms is a man who extends and refines our sensibility; and that is not merely a matter of "technique"'. I have already suggested that Leavis goes further than Eliot, for whom 'technique' changes expression and 'extends and refines'—that is, improves—sensibility. For Leavis, new modes of expression are also new modes of conception. Using words differently does not mean only writing in a new fashion or presenting things in a novel light. Thanks to the notion of attitude, it impacts *how* one is self-aware; it impacts how things are seen and understood. Changing the words changes what the sentence means. Thus Eliot is able to say, of Pound, that 'I am seldom interested in what he is saying, but only in the way he says it'. To say this, Leavis remarks, is 'drastically' to limit 'the interest' of the poetry.[154] The criticism Leavis has not yet made is that such a view of literature fails to see that ideas and form cannot be separated. He gets closer in saying that 'surely […] the interestingness of ways of saying depends a good deal upon the quality of what is said'.[155] Nevertheless, 'surely' and 'a good deal' do not chime with the kind of emphasis Leavis places elsewhere on the relationship between form and content, and his tentativeness may well be because it is Eliot he is criticising.

That Eliot is able to make the comment demonstrates the division he perceives between technique and idea, entailing a fundamentally different conception of how language relates to

[152] George Watson, *The Literary Critics* (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), 188.
[153] Hayman, *Leavis*, 29.
[154] All *NB*, 103.
[155] Ibid., 115.

experience: a poem can be technically interesting but lacking in other interest besides, and yet remain a good poem. For Leavis such a comment condemns the poem, in part because it shows that it uses language inadequately—to experiment and not to communicate, not to try to relate to experience. It suggests that the technical interest has become one for its own sake, just as emotion indulged in for its own sake also means language is used to hinder its function to relate to human experience. Form and content are always related, however language is used, but the 'relation to […] words' of the writer will decide whether theirs is a successful manifestation of technique used to generate new meanings.[156] The fact that Eliot can separate saying from said in Pound signals an important difference between Leavis and Eliot. Leavis became more explicit in the 1940s, criticising Eliot's 1947 British Academy lecture on Milton, and asserting that a word 'is certainly not the pure sound—no poet can make us take his verbal arrangements as pure sound, whatever his skill or his genius'; 'meaning must always enter largely and inseparably into the effect'.[157]

It is clear that, for Leavis, just as with his criticism of Pound's divisive approach, which 'has little to do with poetry', to survey meaning as if it were made of distinct properties undermines the experience of the poem, which is made up of all these aspects. He becomes more insistent on this as his career continues, but the most effective statements are found in his early work. The best literary criticism will bear upon experience, he claims, and so include attention to the nature of the relation of the aspects that make up literary experience, rather than focus on the aspects themselves. Leavis says of Pound that he offers an 'inadequate notion of technique' as well as exhibiting a 'failure to grasp [technique's] relation to sensibility'.[158] That is, Pound's theory of how literature operates is inadequate, as well as the practice of his judgements. *How to Teach Reading* emphasises that

> Everything must start from the training of sensibility, together with the equipping of the student against the snares of "technique". Everything must start from and be associated with the training of sensibility. It should, by continual insistence and varied exercise in analysis, be enforced that literature is made of words, and that everything worth saying in criticism of verse and prose can be related to judgments concerning particular arrangements of words on the page.[159]

[156] *R*, 52.
[157] F.R. Leavis, 'Mr Eliot and Milton', *The Sewanee Review* 57, no. 1 (1949): 7.
[158] *EU*, 114; 116.
[159] Ibid., 120.

Leavis's interest is both profoundly formal and profoundly moral, and it is by being so that it is also fundamentally to do with the use of language to relate to experience. In 1990 Asha Kanwar, writing in *The Literary Criterion*, a Mysore-based journal founded by Leavis's former pupil C.D. Narasimhaiah, could write of Leavis's work: 'But linguistic dexterity is not the sole criterion'.[160] The emphasis on form and language is an aspect of Leavis's criticism that was by then long lost to British theorists and thinkers. But Kanwar is right to emphasise both language *and* going beyond language. Changing the terms changes the texture of meaning, the attitude, and the mode of relating to experience generated. Leavis writes that the 'cultivation of analysis that is not also a cultivation of the power of responding fully, delicately and with discriminating accuracy to the subtle and precise use of words is worthless'. This emphasis on words is why Leavis criticises Pound for speaking of translating technique: 'the "technique" that can be translated is not the technique that the critic who described great literature as "language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree", and its function as "nutrition of impulse", should be mainly interested in'. Pound's definition of literature, and his characterisation of it as 'to do with maintaining the very cleanliness of the tools, the health of the very matter of thought itself', says Leavis, 'implies a great deal more that he appears not to perceive; it demands expansion and development'. Part of his protest with Pound's reference to 'the ways of "charging or energizing" language', I think, is that these terms are employed by Pound as verbs and not adjectives. For language to be charged or energised suggests language's passivity: something being done to something that already exists. Pound falls 'disastrously short […] in his account' because 'the ways of "charging or energizing" language' is not a *doing to* (technique in the 'limited' sense) but a *beginning with* (sensibility unseparated from technique), enabling the sought-after subtlety and complexity of attitude.[161]

Leavis sees Pound's poems as 'mainly opportunities, taken or made, for verse practice'. Only in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* do 'we feel a pressure of experience, an impulsion from deep within'.

[160] Asha Kanwar, 'F.R. Leavis and Scrutiny', *The Literary Criterion* XXV, no. 3 (1990): 31. See C.D. Narasimhaiah, *F.R. Leavis* (Rao and Raghavan, 1963).
[161] All *EU*, 116–18.

Here language is communicating, meaningfully and effectively; and this for Leavis is literature's speciality: it can provide new ways of using language which create new ways to relate to experience. He says of *Mauberley*: 'The verse is extraordinarily subtle, and its subtlety is the subtlety of the sensibility that it expresses. No one would think here of distinguishing the way of saying from the thing said'. (This last is more a comment for Eliot than for Pound.) *Mauberley* exemplifies the 'subtlety of tone, a complexity of attitude' that Leavis desired more of in Empson and admired in Hopkins: these terms seem to be the final tests that resolve achievements of technique, idea, emotion and intelligence into the achievement of great poetry. Leavis's terminology in analysing *Mauberley* emphasises the way in which form and content contribute to one another. 'The rhythms, in their apparent looseness and carelessness, are marvels of subtlety: "out of key with his time" [from the poem] is being said everywhere by strict rhythmic means'; 'The subtlety of movement is associated with subtlety of mood and attitude'; 'His technical skill is now a matter of bringing to precise definition a mature and complex sensibility'. Nor is experimentation for its own sake or without meaning: '[d]evices that might easily degenerate into tricks ('stunts') remain under perfect control'. Indeed *Mauberley* is admired because it represents 'a criterion of seriousness and purity of intention'.[162]

Such language should not be taken to indicate that Leavis is a moralist, or that his powerful moral interest is separate from a powerful interest in language. That is his posthumous reputation. Anthony Haynes could state plainly in the early 90s: 'That Leavis was a moralist is a commonplace'.[163] For Watson, Leavis 'offers an unusually pure example of critical moralism'.[164] Such interpretations signal the pejorative connotations with which 'moral' has come to be imbued throughout the twentieth century, arguably starting with Bloomsbury and catalysed by events across Europe in 1968. The general view was more positive beforehand. Arnold Kettle, writing in 1951, employs Leavis's term 'moral fable' and states: 'I hope that in using the term, as I believe I have, in a sense rather more narrow than his habitual use of it, I have not compromised a critic to whom

[162] *NB*, 104–10.
[163] Anthony Haynes, 'F.R. Leavis: Intuitionist?', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33, no. 2 (1993): 163.
[164] Watson, *The Literary Critics*, 197.

anyone who has done any serious thinking about the English novel must owe a particular debt'.[165]

The 'criterion of seriousness and purity of intention' is primarily concerned with language; it is through words that these morally resonant phrases become relevant: through words and attitude. The remark refers to Pound's attitude to language as manifested in *Mauberley*, an attitude that determines to use language so as to relate to experience. In contrast, the *Cantos* 'appear to be little more than a game'. Pound's experiments here are for their own sake, keeping the poem from communicating. The 'value [of Pound's allusions] remains private to the author'. This affects very straightforwardly the interest that the technical experiments can have. 'We may recognize what Mr Pound's counters stand for, but they remain counters; and his patterns are not very interesting, even as schematic design, since, in the nature of the game […] they lack definition and salience'.[166] Pound's innovations are 'technical' rather than of 'technique': they are interested in word play, not a play of words that might be used to create new meanings. In *How to Teach Reading*, Leavis writes that 'a lack of interest in the present means usually an incapacity for any real interest—the kind of interest that understands the meaning of "technique"—in literature at all'.[167] The criticism insists on using words as a means to deepen relation to experience.

Arnold, too, wrote of the 'superior character of truth and seriousness in the matter and substance of the best poetry, [which] is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner'.[168] Casey, remarking on that comment, writes

> The guarantee of the 'truth and seriousness' of a poem is its 'style and manner', but the excellence of its 'style and manner' is a matter of 'truth and seriousness' of its *content* ('substance and matter'). It is this sort of language which has earned Arnold a reputation for intellectual looseness. But far from being loose, this is one of the subtlest statements of the relation between form and content ever made by a critic. Arnold is avoiding, on the one hand, the aestheticism which is involved in trying to assess poetry purely in terms of its 'formal' qualities and, on the other, the moralism or didacticism which seeks to judge the moral or emotional or intellectual 'content' of a poem separately from its 'form'.[169]

Casey himself is somewhat unclear, using language such as 'guarantee', which underplays the integrated nature of the relationship between form and content for which Arnold is arguing. Yet the

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[165] Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1951), 8–9.
[166] All *NB*, 116–17.
[167] *EU*, 130.
[168] Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London: Macmillan, 1925), 22.
[169] Casey, *Language*, 180.

summary is pertinent, and it is striking that Casey found it necessary to make this clear almost a century after 'The Study of Poetry' was first published in 1880. Casey conflates the Arnold-Leavis position, and claims that for both a poem's 'capacity to embody serious motives or emotions will depend on its having a serious form; so will its capacity to say something serious about the world in a more literal sense'.[170] In the next chapter I will argue that 'embody' is not a useful term in discussing the relation between form and meaning, because it fails to capture the way that form generates a new, fresh sense of meaning, rather than embodying something previously in existence. Yet Casey is right about the fundamental connection of form with the capacity of a literary work to generate whatever it generates, for both Arnold and Leavis, although I think it functions differently in each of their understandings of literature. The apparent balance between aesthetic judgements and those of moral resonance is a distinctive achievement in Leavis's work, precisely because it is not a balance. The two realms are integrated because of the attitude conveyed in a particular use of language.

That is why for Leavis it is vital to discuss literature as *language*, and not, for instance, as Hamlet's personality or 'Wordsworth's philosophy'. It is also vital to discuss language as communicating, and not to explore language as though it were not doing so, which is what he sees Pound doing, making of language an abstract entity. Leavis's warning of the 'dangers attending those processes of abstraction which are inevitable in all criticism is one against the for-its-own-sake. We have to speak of "technique" as something distinct from "sensibility", but technique can be studied and judged only in terms of the sensibility it expresses'.[171] The claim implicit in the practice of Leavis's work is that technique is itself a means to developing one's sensibility. His attention to ways and modes, to responses, and his insistence on literature as connected to living demands that words be used in order to deepen one's relation to experience.

[170] Ibid., 193–94.
[171] All *EU*, 111–13.

iv. Literature and Living

The first three sections have examined Leavis's focus in his early work on establishing, not so much a critical vocabulary, as an appropriate understanding of the relation between words and experience, and what that relation calls for from author and reader. Various specifically literary characteristics have emerged, which have broader ramifications: one must not use poetry as an opportunity for the 'spontaneous overflow' of emotion if that means it will be without thought; to appraise poetry intellectually is to betray a misunderstanding of how it functions; successful poetry, and literature in general, involves the successful manifestation of intelligence and sensibility, and thinking and feeling, in 'technique', to which the critic must in turn respond; the inseparability of form and content means that they generate, rather than express; the adjective 'literary' should not be thought of as signalling a distinction from society. What emerges especially is that language entails a relation to experience and not experience itself, and always generates 'attitude'.

These things mean that literature and living, via words and experience, are brought together in a notable and strong way. The arguments about the relation of intelligence and sensibility, and thinking and feeling, are directed beyond literature: divisions of these aspects of experience detract from the human as a being whose faculties are integrated, who finds his/her-self best as a 'whole'—'blood, imagination, intellect, running together', as *New Bearings* quotes Yeats.[172] Above all it is attitude that ensures literature be dealt with as relevant to human living. 'Attitude' introduces a mode of engaging with literature that approaches words as an opportunity of 'becoming' or 'feeling into'—'realizing'—a relation to an experience, perhaps through an atmosphere or mood, which can itself be surveyed and assessed as a mode of response to living. Two related assessments are always at play in Leavis's criticism: the words can be assessed for their power in enabling 'realization', and the relation to experience can be assessed for its worth. Leavis is constantly assessing both words and experience: two assessments that can only be related, given that changing the words will change the experience offered.

[172] *NB*, 40.

The appraisal of attitude can be misleading, because such a focus, which is a constant questioning of the way of seeing life a work entails, can appear to be a distraction, even an illegitimate practice of examining texts. Belsey has been one of the most vociferous critics of the link between literature and life in Leavis's work, arguing that it entails a 'recurring slide from text to author'.[173] Booth's concept of the 'implied author' may, as I suggested, make Leavis's ostensible statements about authors more palatable, the examination of the attitude of text being an examination of what it would mean to live with that kind of attitude. But the 'implied author' move would be a palate-cleanser more than anything else; it would be a tacit recognition that Leavis's attention is on something that appears not to be the text. What 'technique' and 'attitude' establish, however, is that it *is* on the text. The comments on authors are comments on the attitude a text generates. Attitude connects author and work, and indeed work and reader, but it comes from nowhere but the language of a work itself. Belsey's critique—'Literary inadequacies are seen as a direct expression of [an author's] personal inadequacies'—notably depends on 'direct expression', and this is just the notion of literary language, as we saw with Shelley, against which Leavis's criticism struggles. Indeed, he criticises Murry for viewing Keats's poems as biographical evidence; failure to appreciate the poems for what they are is, for Leavis, a '[w]rongness in criticism', which 'cannot be, or go with, rightness about the poet's soul'.[174] One can only find the 'soul' by attending to the way the words function in the work.

Leavis's unfashionable talk of 'the poet's soul' should not put us off attention to the fact that literary texts—like language in general—are attitudinal, and inhabit and generate particular modes of responding to experience, regardless of whether they are those of the author. Leavis's typical approach is to: analyse the use of language; examine the attitude made felt by a particular mode of using words; interrogate the implications of the attitude; examine the attitude as a mode of response to life. This approach is detectable even in his anonymous 'protocol' response several years earlier to the unauthored poems that Richards would distribute in his lectures as an experiment in critical response, published in *Practical Criticism*. In a brief four-line commentary of Hopkins's 'Spring

[173] All Belsey, *Critical Practice*, 12–14.
[174] *R*, 226.

and Fall' he writes 'What looks like preciosity […] is really a means of compression […] Wistfulness without sentimentality: the pang of transience well conveyed'.[175] The 'means of compression' is both a comment on form and on attitude, the evaluation of one prompting an evaluation of the other. In his essay on Swift, Leavis highlights that analysis derives from the 'arrangement of words on the page and their effects, the emotions, attitudes and ideas that they organize'.[176] Analysis is always both rooted in words and able to range wherever the words suggest.

In *The Great Tradition*, Leavis writes of attitude in a way that indicates the relevance to life the term held for him. He summarises Lawrence and then amends his summary: 'attitude in art, as Lawrence points out, is indicative of an attitude in life—or towards life'.[177] The reference is to Lawrence's review of Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* of 1913, in which he distinguishes Mann from Shakespeare and Goethe, who are 'more human', 'who must give themselves to life as well as to art'. For Lawrence, Mann, like Flaubert, retreats from life into his art; he exhibits a 'craving for form [that] is the outcome, not of artistic conscience, but of a certain attitude to life'.[178] That is the only mention of 'attitude to life' in the piece, yet it evidently struck Leavis, whose approximate quotation suggests a substantial discussion on Lawrence's part. In Leavis's criticism the appraisal of attitude through (rather than 'in') art becomes an assertion that technique is a manifestation of the way a writer approaches life. This is especially notable in *New Bearings* and *Revaluation*: both texts are as much about particular approaches to living as poetry. Each enquires into its central issue—the implications of an escape or retreat from life into art in *New Bearings*; how thinking and feeling relate in *Revaluation*—not alongside, but in the process of, poetic criticism. The change Leavis makes to his borrowed Lawrentian phrase is revealing: his move from 'in' to 'towards' emphasises that the 'attitude' in question is a mode of perception as much as a habit of acting. The shift suggests that there is something conscious and deliberate about attitude. As such, it reinforces the idea that a literary work does more than merely convey attitude; it can also enable it (an attitude

[175] Richards, *Practical Criticism*, 1930, 83. For evidence attributing the protocol to Leavis, see I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, ed. John Constable (London: Routledge, 2001), xxx.
[176] *CP*, 76.
[177] *GT*, 16.
[178] Edward McDonald, ed., *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers* (New York: Penguin, 1978), 308–13.

to rather than *in* life). The work might assist one in modifying one's own attitudes. Any attitude created by art is an attitude 'towards' life that has consequences for the presentation of what life is like within the literary work. The work generates a particular sense of life, which can be contemplated as germane to one's own living.

Where an author has written multiple works, another stage is involved in Leavis's criticism: he considers whether the implications of the attitude are traceable elsewhere in an author's writings. In *New Bearings*, Leavis's exploration of 'escape' takes place in part through a comparison of de la Mare and Yeats across chapters. As with the idea of Shelleyan emotivism, which is given currency through the comparative discussions of Wordsworth and Keats, his literary analysis traces poetic traditions, offering a kind of map in which figures stand in relation to one another as well as to life, while also achieving the balance between words and experience, through attitude, that is a remarkable characteristic of Leavis's criticism. Attending to the words and to the attitude generated by them is a way of examining literature as itself a mode of apprehending reality, demanding what kind of way of living, and what kind of attitude towards life, these particular words entail. The examination is not of two attitudes, a literary one and a life one. The attitude created by the text is not viewed *as if it were* an attitude in life, which would entail examining the text *as if it were* relevant to life. Rather, the assessment is of one single attitude; it is an excavation of the attitude given in literature *because of* literature's relevance to living.

Leavis's emphasis on 'life' has been construed as an interest in 'affirmation', notably by R.P. Bilan, who has a chapter on 'The Novel as an Affirmation of Life', as well as in a recent article considering Leavis's relationship with tragedy.[179] Leavis's interest is in affirming life, rather than 'life' as an affirmation: a fine distinction, but an important one. The latter concentrates on life as a positive. But the former prioritises life rather than affirmation. By affirming life, I mean that Leavis advocates use of the term 'living' in a profound and serious way, a way that is interested in what Edward Greenwood calls 'ultimate questions', such as love, death, meaning, and significance.[180]

[179] R.P. Bilan, *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis* (Cambridge UP, 1979), 125–36; Paul Dean, 'Leavis on Tragedy', *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (2016): 189–205.
[180] Edward Greenwood, 'Leavis, Tolstoy, Lawrence, and "Ultimate Questions"', *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (2016): 157–170.

At times Leavis refers to these questions as 'religious', speaking of Lawrence's 'religious sense' or saying that Pope's 'mode of contemplation was religious in its seriousness'.[181] 'Sense' and 'mode of contemplation' again assert that the interest in affirming living is attitudinal, not a property of content—nor interested in affirmation for its own sake. The interest is in the attitude 'towards' life, a mode of relating to living that is interested in and open to Xingjian's 'real life', and refuses to be preoccupied with the distraction of 'life's manifestations', with which a life could easily be filled. Being distracted by 'manifestations' is necessary, but being preoccupied with the distractions signals a fading of interest in 'real life': it is 'real life' that Leavis wants to affirm. Literature—for Leavis as for my position in this thesis—is a way of deepening one's engagement with real life, not in that it offers heightened life (often it does not), but in bringing modes of relating to life and different attitudes to life to the fore: in helping one to hold onto 'real life' even when occupied by the more materially pressing, less metaphysically vital, 'life's manifestations'. Leavis's advocacy is of a relationship between literary language and living, rather than of life *per se*, something that comments such as Wellek's on the 'linguistic interest in Leavis [being] strictly subordinate to his interest in what he would call life' entirely miss.[182] The interest in life is in how language can be used to relate to it; in other words, the interest is in how language can deepen, intensify, or otherwise enhance relationship to life and way of living. In that sense only, the 'affirmation is of life', as Poole titled his article on Leavis.

Leavis's desire that language be used to confront experience, to affirm living, and not to escape from it, is well demonstrated in *New Bearings*, where his chief objection to Victorian poetry is that it 'admits implicitly that the actual world is alien, recalcitrant and unpoetical, and that no protest is worth making except the protest of withdrawal'. Poetry that conceives of its role as a mode of retreat from the world is likely to poeticise experience rather than to explore it—to use words for reasons far from relating to experience. Leavis's attention to Arnold, for instance, is in the way he tries to evoke what he called 'this strange disease of modern life'; life is not there, Leavis says, '[e]xcept as the explicit occasion of his thin, sweet, meditative melancholy'. That Arnold's interest is more

[181] *FC*, 158; *R*, 83.
[182] Wellek in Camden, *Literary Views*, 188.

in his lamentation at the current state of the world than at the state of the world itself means that Leavis reads his poetry as escaping from life, using words as a 'manner of evasion', a 'quest' for 'sanctuary'. Despite Arnold's 'will and intelligence' as well as his 'technical abilities' (notably not 'technique'), he 'slips away from "this uncongenial place, this human life" to moonlight transformations', ending with 'wistful, melodious sentiment'.[183] The evasion Leavis perceives in Arnold is the use of words as a manifestation of the desire to escape the necessity of engaging with life. The inability to see something worth living for in 'this human life' is willed through the way words are used, heightening the felt sense of art as a mode of retreat instead of *reconnaissance*. The inadequacy is an aesthetic one, which, as we now know, generates an attitude towards life with strong human implications and resonances.

There is another way in which Leavis's affirmation of life does not require that the life affirmed be *affirmative*. He admires Hardy's poetry, for instance, for 'really evok[ing] the emptiness of utter loss, exhibiting that purity of recognition which is Hardy's strength'. He admires Hardy's honesty, and the use of technique to generate a response to living that has been thought-through and scrutinised. 'Hardy's greatness lies in the integrity with which he accepted the conclusion […] that nature is indifferent to human values, in the completeness of his recognition, and in the purity and adequacy of his response'.[184] An evocation of that same indifference in de la Mare's poetry, on the other hand, is not honest, because it derives from an utterly different mode of using words. Leavis's chief complaint of de la Mare's poetry, as with Shelley, is of words that are evidently used in order to create a particular effect, such that the poem's point *is* the effect. Thus the 'open function' of a starlit night in *The Ghost* offends because its desire 'to suggest the desolate, pygmy helplessness of man' is so transparent as to be a mark of failure. The evocation for which the image aims fails, because of the transparency with which that aim is assumed, to the extent that it remains a poetic straining for effect rather than a realised felt impact. What presents itself instead is de la Mare's 'equivocal sweet poignancy': an attitude adopted, not emergent, and therefore not convincing.[185]

[183] All *NB*, 18–20.
[184] Ibid., 46–47.
[185] Ibid., 45.

De la Mare's assertion of nature's indifference to man, unlike Hardy's, is insufficiently realised in 'technique' to be commanding and persuasive. If anything, Leavis wants the poem to provide more reasons for assenting to its *un*affirmative perspective, as part of the experience of the poem.

The problem with de la Mare's work, then, is that it does not use words to relate to living, meaning that it represents a kind of escape from life. That is a poetic failure more than anything else: it is a use of language to urge a mood not merited by the poem. Here is de la Mare: 'The skill of words to sweeten despair/ Of finding consolation where/ Life has but one dark end'. The verse, says Leavis, claims to be a daring acknowledgement of a fact of the world, but exemplifies instead a fascination with its own power. The 'apparent recognition is not the frankness it pretends to be but an insidious enhancement of the spell, which is the more potent to soothe and lull when it seems to be doing the opposite', such that the poetry 'cultivates subtler (and more dangerous) illusions than it professes'. 'Dangerous' highlights that for Leavis it is a genuinely pernicious possibility that poetry, while lulling one into the undefended readiness of agreement, might also cultivate a perception that has no justification or foundation within the poem. The poem offers an easy lamentation of the hostile world, Leavis argues; for him, opting for that trope without Hardy-like courageous honesty uses words to mislead. The poem comforts and instils desire to be comforted without also making it convincing that such comfort should be necessary. The form and content try to convey a meaning that has not been merited, one dependent on effects of verse and abdication of thought. Leavis, using terms from de la Mare's poem, calls this a 'sweet cheat'.[186]

Such a mode of analysis, again, has Eliot in the background. His 1921 comparison of poems by William Morris and Marvell concludes that 'The effect of Morris's charming poem depends upon the mistiness of the feeling and the vagueness of its object; the effect of Marvell's upon its bright, hard precision'. These are evaluative as well as descriptive criteria: 'The day-dreamy feeling of Morris is essentially a slight thing; Marvell takes a slight affair, the feeling of a girl for her pet, and gives it a connection with that inexhaustible and terrible nebula of emotion which surrounds all our exact and practical passions and mingles with them'.[187] In *Revaluation*, the echoes of Eliot's

[186] All Ibid., 42–44.
[187] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (Harvest Books, 1975), 167.

language are evident. Eliot: 'A curious result of the comparison of Morris's poem with Marvell's is that the former, though it appears to be more serious, is found to be the slighter; and Marvell's *Nymph and the Fawn*, appearing more slight, is the more serious'. Leavis: 'What Marvell is doing is implicitly "placed"; not in the least solemn, he is much more serious'.[188] Only an ability to face feeling and emotion, to feel both fully in writing, is writing that is 'bright, hard [and] precis[e]'—a use of words with utter purpose.

The fact that Leavis's argument with de la Mare's poetry is not that the world might be indifferent to the humans inhabiting it, but with 'the spell', the 'working of this surreptitious magic', underscores the way that Leavis's conception of literature works. He is able to make such observations only because of the concept of attitude (along with its relationship to form and content, thinking and feeling, intelligence and sensibility), which emerges from the way language is used. Without the notion of attitude, the capacity of literary criticism to comment on the way in which literature might affect one's idea of living and understanding of life is curtailed. The word 'dangerous' can be relevant to criticism only in a context in which attitude operates; the only way for such a judgement to be legitimate is for it to be grounded in the words of the text, and interested in them as a mode of experiencing life. The insistence is on words and experience together. What do these words mean for one's mode of relating to experience? The way in which the judgement emerges from words also outlines the commitment Leavis's criticism advocates towards reading a work as complete in itself: not in a New Critical sense of unity, but rather as something operating on its own terms, something in which, in George Saintsbury's words, 'the poetry makes the rules, not the rules the poetry'.[189] Or, as Murray Krieger put it, 'the poem, in the very act of becoming successfully poetic—that is, in constituting itself poetry—implicitly constitutes its own poetic'.[190]

At its best and most meaningful, Leavis's criticism assesses neither idea nor expression. Where it is felt to do one or the other often indicates a weak point in his criticism. The notion of attitude is key because it helps to get us closer to what it is to analyse literary works for their ideas and

[188] *R*, 44.
[189] George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 307.
[190] Cited in Frank Lentricchia and Andrew Dubois, *Close Reading: The Reader* (London: Duke UP, 2003), 88.

expression together. Assessment of attitude has to begin, not with whether it says something with which one disagrees, nor with how it matches up with the world beyond poetry, but with whether or not it is an attitude merited in or by the work. The key difference between de la Mare and Hardy appears to be that Hardy 'felt deeply and consistently, he knew what he felt, and, in his best poems, communicated it perfectly', a statement that recalls *New Bearing*'s opening formula of knowing what one feels and what one is interested in. The ability to create through one's words is what concerns Leavis's best criticism, rather than how affirming of life as a positive a work is.

A.D. Nuttall's perceptive comments about 'life' in Leavis focus on the connection with Lawrence; he allies the term with a Nietzschean-Lawrentian strand of strength.[191] Yet life for Leavis—certainly outside of his Lawrentian criticism—is not so much about feeling *I am alive and powerful*, as sensing and feeling the response to life generated in a text. It is escape that he dislikes, and the notion of escape is an escape from the responsibility of language to enable relation to experience: not escape from strength or vitality. As Leavis writes of Hardy, prefacing *Revaluation*'s discussion of Shelley, '[h]e was betrayed into no heroic postures'.[192] Neither heroism nor postures would be acceptable. Hardy's poignancy is successful because it is made felt, made real by words that convince because they do more than *express* poignancy. A.E. Housman's idea that 'to transfuse emotion—not to transmit thought but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer—is the peculiar function of poetry' is relevant here, not in its division of emotion and thought, but in the verbs Housman used.[193] *Transfused* emotion is generated, created, made felt. *Transmitted* emotion would be emotion of the Shelleyan and de la Mare-esque strain. *Mauberley*'s strength, like Hardy's, is far from Lawrentian heroism; it is a 'pressure [that] seems to derive […] from a recognition of bankruptcy, of a devoted life summed up in futility'. The attitude that conveys that recognition is achieved through formal precision: 'its technical perfection means a complete detachment and control'.[194]

The emphasis on making life *felt*, rather on making *life!* felt, is paralleled by James Wood's

[191] A.D. Nuttall, *A Common Sky* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), 268–69.
[192] *NB*, 46–47.
[193] A.E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1933), 12.
[194] All *NB*, 195.

commentary on the present-day novel. Like Leavis, Wood is concerned with both life and the generative power of literature. He coined the term 'hysterical realism' in 2000 to demarcate a trend in contemporary fiction, showing a Leavisian interest in mode of using words and what they are used for. '[T]oday's "big, ambitious novel"' is 'a perpetual motion machine', where 'stories and sub-stories sprout on every page, flaunting their glamorous congestion. Vitality is story-telling, as far as these books are concerned'.[195] Wood targets liveliness that does not create felt life. His approach echoes Leavis's, for whom 'vitality' in general is a positive term, but who judges Browning's 'physical vitality' and robustness as keeping him from depth: a resonance with Wood's perpetual motion.[196] Wood's emphases on flaunting and glamour parallel Leavis's on 'gusto' in Shelley.[197] Wood is concerned that all the bravado and noise—all the attention to the machinery—prevents attention to 'the human'. 'Bright lights are taken as evidence of habitation'. Leavis speaks of 'the characteristic corrugation of [Browning's] surface', which 'is merely superficial, and not the expression of a complex sensibility'.

Leavis's metaphor of words dead or alive is one Wood also uses, with a similar sense that meaning is 'insisted' (recall Shelley, whose 'emphasis and insistence serv[e] instead of realization'), instead of generated from within: 'the characters in these novels are not really alive [and] their connectedness can only be insisted on'. Wood is explicit that hysterical realism is 'a cover up' of something missing, and that the 'lack is the human'. 'One's objections are made not at the level of verisimilitude but at the level of morality: the style of writing is not to be faulted because it lacks morality—the usual charge—but because it seems evasive of reality, while borrowing from realism itself'. Wood uses 'reality' much as I am using 'moral' in this thesis: to mean a human centrality, 'the common seriousness of concern—with essential human issue', as Leavis puts it.[198] The concern with evasion was Leavis's with Shelley, de la Mare and Arnold. Part of the moral absence is an attitude, or, as Wood puts it, a 'mode of narration', that 'is almost incompatible with

[195] All James Wood, 'Human, All Too Inhuman', *New Republic*, 24 July 2000.
[196] All Browning references: *NB*, 21.
[197] 'The energy might be called gusto; he is enjoying the emotion as he works it up, and our sense of its strength is inseparable from a sense of the enjoyment'. *R*, 222.
[198] *GT*, 19.

tragedy or anguish'. Again, there are echoes of Browning's 'being aware of disharmonies because for him there were none'. Wood quotes from Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, in which a religious character is presented entirely from without; it is, Wood says, 'all shiny externality, all caricature'. '[W]e are not led toward the consciousness of a truly devoted religionist'. He sees Smith as interested in energetic prose, not in making felt the human realities in the story. Wood writes that it is 'now customary to read 700-page novels, to spend hours and hours within a fictional world, without experiencing anything really affecting, sublime, or beautiful'. His desire for these qualities illustrates a conception of literature in which deepening one's sense of human experience is the very point. As with Leavis, it would be a misinterpretation to deem that issue straightforwardly one of content. Wood's chief complaint is about tone: something attitudinal.

In *New Bearings*, Leavis speaks of 'words that lie there arranged on the page' as 'dead'; they 'have no roots: the writer can never have been more than superficially interested in them'.[199] What does it mean for the words to be empty, and what would it mean for them to be felt to have something beneath them? Words are not merely referential, though they evidently apply to the world, as Nuttall argued in his advocacy of 'Transparent' criticism against formalism.[200] Yet 'transparent' criticism, as Anne Barton stressed in a perceptive review, risks neglecting the words altogether.[201] Words *relate* to things, a term perhaps more illuminating than *refer*, partly because the latter elides so easily with the 'merely referential' thesis, but principally because the former indicates that a mode of relation is also at stake between word and thing. Words are not clothing, cases, or symbols; nor are they able to have their maximum significance if used for a reason that ends with them. What Leavis stresses, and what Wood seems to desire, is that they accomplish something. In the perceptible freshness of their formula, the words enable a felt mode of experiencing, whether through thought, emotion, atmosphere or mood. Words that are 'alive' are generative, which is why attention to the thought, emotion, etc., always means an attention to the words and the attitude they generate.

[199] *NB*, 12.
[200] A.D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis* (London: Methuen, 1983), 80–88.
[201] Anne Barton, 'Transparent Criticism', *LRB*, 21 June 1984.

Thinking about words as *relating* also ensures that the fact that attention must never stray from the way words are used in a text is not misconstrued as looking at words for their own sake (the more extreme formalist view Nuttall's book targeted). In a 1947 article on 'The Literary Discipline', Leavis pointed out that the 'preoccupation with words in their subtlest organizations is a preoccupation with the nature of thought and expression, and the training seems to me to have the most essential bearings on any kind of thinking that uses language'.[202] Attention to words means attention to modes of thinking and to how the words connect with what they evoke: an attention that remains enveloped by the words themselves. Articulating precisely the nature of the relationship between words and experience is extremely difficult. In his Clark lectures Leavis would raise a doubt about Eliot's objective correlative. It has 'a valid use', he says, in being used 'to insist that poetry isn't talking poetically about and about, but presenting'. But he finds the term an obstacle to effective thinking in the way that it is used to differentiate between 'external facts' and 'the emotion'. Such a use 'eliminates from all relation to "significance" the essential poetic function or efficacy of the Shakespearean dramatic poetry'.[203] Part of the objection to the objective correlative, I think, is that it suggests that an idea is *embodied* in a symbol, phrase, image or scene. Leavis does not make this claim, but the distinction between external facts and emotion stems from a concern about the way 'the essential poetic function' is thought to relate to what it communicates. His real concern is with an approach that overlooks either words or what they 'present' (or so much as hints at a division between the two). Attitude, which is securely located in the words, while also involving serious consequences for one's relationship to experience, enables a focus on both at the same time, and I think this is the overarching achievement, as well as founding premise, of Leavis's criticism.

When Leavis remarks upon Milton's 'habit of exploiting language as a kind of musical medium outside himself, as it were', he is voicing a frustration with a different approach to language, a different relationship with words: one that uses them for poetic ends alone. Milton's words have no 'substance', and thus do not function fully as words: 'There is no pressure in his verse of any complex and varying current of feeling and sensation; the words have little substance or muscular

[202] *VC*, 174.
[203] *ELTU*, 151–52.

quality'.[204] The complaint is in part that the words do not 'relate' enough. They remain 'words', without leading to something that could have been created only by them. Milton's words are 'occupied with valuing themselves rather than with doing anything': words that are present for their own sake. Milton uses 'only a small part of the resources of the English language'.[205] With Eliot and Hopkins, on the contrary, 'the whole body of the words seems to be used'.[206] That goes for non-literary language too: Eliot's criticism, in contrast to that of many other critics, 'really does something with his words'.[207]

Revaluation, the last of the 1930s works, employs the term 'attitude' 19 times, most often in connection with the formal elements of the poem under discussion. Leavis writes of 'the attitude towards the verse, the handling of the medium' in discussing Keats.[208] Referring disapprovingly to Milton, he says 'the medium calls pervasively for a kind of attention, compels an attitude towards itself, that is incompatible with sharp, concrete realization'.[209] And in describing Shelley's 'distasteful' lines, he remarks that 'there is strong feeling, and the feeling is false. It is false because it is forced [… Shelley] is enjoying the emotion as he works it up […] This attitude towards, and elaboration of, emotion is what we see manifested in the elaboration of imagery noted above'.[210] Notably, the first two of these instances involve not the attitude created by the verse, but the attitude of the writer to the words. Writing of Milton, Leavis mentions 'the poet's relation to his words'. Given the last comment about Eliot's criticism, I'd like this to be thought of as the *writer's* relation to words. Leavis's phrase focuses on the fact that the manner of words' usage determines what they do; how the user relates to the words determines what impact and effect they have. The fascinating thing about 'dead' words is that individually they are the same words as those most alive. The surface is no different: what is different, and utterly so, is the attitude both behind and created by the words: the mode of handling them, and whether or not they are generative. Thus when Leavis

[204] All *NB*, 64.
[205] All *R*, 58.
[206] *NB*, 64.
[207] *FC*, 62.
[208] *R*, 249.
[209] Ibid., 53.
[210] Ibid., 222.

says that Milton 'seems here to be focusing rather upon words than upon perceptions, sensations or things', the objection is that words are used at the expense of anything else. Being nothing other than themselves, they accomplish nothing. Leavis quotes a passage from book IV of *Paradise Lost* and lists some of the descriptive terms, such as '"Orient Pearl", "sands of Gold"', which 'convey no doubt a vague sense of opulence, but this is not what we mean by "sensuous richness"'. Rather,

> in this Grand Style, the medium calls pervasively for a kind of attention, compels an attitude towards itself, that is incompatible with sharp, concrete realization; just as it would seem to be, in the mind of the poet, incompatible with an interest in sensuous particularity. He exhibits a feeling *for* words rather than a capacity for feeling *through* words; we are often, in reading him, moved to comment that he is "external" or that he "works from the outside". […] If the Eighteenth Century thought that poetry was something that could be applied from the outside, it found the precedent as well as the apparatus in Milton.

Contrast this with the achievement of *Comus*:

> The texture of actual sounds, the run of vowels and consonants, with the variety of action and effort, rich in subtle analogical suggestion, demanded in pronouncing them, plays an essential part, though this is not to be analysed in abstraction from the meaning. The total effect is as if words as words withdrew themselves from the focus of our attention and we were directly aware of a tissue of feelings and perceptions.[211]

The Milton commentary states that one's 'most vivid emotional and sensuous experience is inevitably bound up with the language [one] actually speaks'.[212] Hayman glosses this as 'Milton's poetic idiom is remote from his everyday speech', but Leavis is making the more interesting point that experience and language are intimately related.[213] Milton does not use language as it could be used, to enable, and thereby deepen, relationship to experience. The fullest use of language will be enabling most fully: enabling a vision that is metaphysically full, referring to the whole being, calling for intellectual, emotional and physiological response. Most importantly, for words to enable means whatever they lead to was not previously thought out. Such a pre-formed vision, however full, would be flat—merely depicting, not generative, not enabling new modes of thinking.

The sense of the author's relation to words communicated by his/her poetry or prose has something in common with Dylan Thomas's distinction between writing 'out of words' and writing 'in the direction of them'. Those who do the latter see, hear and imagine things 'and then g[o]

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[211] All Ibid., 52–54.
[212] *NB*, 64.
[213] Hayman, *Leavis*, 26.

towards words as the most suitable words through which to express those experiences'. But those who write out of words are their 'medium first', 'express[ing] out of [their] medium' what they see, hear, think and imagine.[214] For Leavis, writers have a responsibility to write 'out of words'. It is 'the writings of the greatest master who ever used [language]' that suggest what words can do.[215] Shakespeare exemplifies a 'marvellous power of using words to compel on the reader or listener a precise complex response, to evoke the combination of emotions and associations appropriate to the context'.[216] Were 'the poet's relation to his words' different, the ability of the words to compel and to evoke would be compromised, which would make impossible the result.[217] The idea of the relation to words, as manifested in the words given, is that only such a use of words enables the appropriate verbs: realise, generate, evoke, compel, suggest, enable, communicate. Other uses of words will suggest other verbs. 'Express' is a term that can be used in either sense (as we'll see further in Chapter II with Collingwood's 'expression'): a good reason to be careful in using it.

Discussing Eliot's poetry in *New Bearings* Leavis uses the phrase 'the mode of its contemplation of life'.[218] This is a synonym of sorts for 'attitude'. The formula of the remark is such as to suggest that every poem, or, rather, every work of art, inescapably contemplates life. Leavis's idea of literature is precisely this, that it is inescapably to do with life. Even where it seeks to escape from life or fails to confront it, it still has something to do with life. Literature and life, through attitude, are always already linked. It does little justice to the emphasis in Leavis's criticism on literature's relevance to living to conceive of 'life' as a literary property, even where Leavis might fall into making such a claim. The *LRB* offers some indicative samples of common views of Leavis's 'life'. Karl Miller refers to 'that criterion of sympathy later known to F.R. Leavis as "life"'; Patrick Parrinder writes 'From sources as varied as Wordsworth and Nietzsche Leavis constructed an ideal of sane and vital experience, of intensity of "life", which he then located in and behind the most "exploratory-creative" instances of poetic language. "Life" was not a common but an

[214] Letter 2/5/1934. Cited in John Goodby, *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013), 121.
[215] *NB*, 125.
[216] *EU*, 123.
[217] *R*, 52.
[218] *NB*, 74.

uncommon standard […]'.[219] Yet Martin Amis's wry comment in 1980, two years after Leavis's death, which was probably representative of how contemporary novelists felt, hints at something more akin to the mode of engagement between literature and living that Leavis's best work suggests: 'Leavis had the notion that life was something he had to keep sticking up for—almost as if the rest of us had no time for the stuff'.[220] Amis's very point is that everyone cares about life. If that is true, then Leavis's criticism is of significant value in suggesting how literature, which many people think of as an 'escape' from life, is in fact deeply connected to living. His work is trying, not to make 'life' a literary quality, but, through attitude, to reposition literary words, and at times language more generally, as of the utmost relevance to the way in which one lives.

It is difficult to mention 'life' in literary criticism without falling into Leavis's own errors and appearing dictatorial about what does or does not make for life. David Lodge connects the emphasis on life with unattractive moralising, writing of the dual 'images' held of Leavis, one as the critic focusing on 'the words on the page', the other as the moral critic. '[I]s it not true', Lodge asks, 'that we think principally of his work on poetry in connection with the first image, and of his work on the novel in connection with the second?'[221] Unfortunately for Leavis, this is not an unusual characterisation of his work, although the perceived disconnection between ideas (or morals) and the language of literature is one his work strains against. Yet where Leavis's criticism falls short should not lead to a jettisoning of the notion of literature's value to human living altogether. The idea of 'attitude' usefully leads away from the more familiar content-driven ideas of 'life' (such as affirmation), to the felt realities offered moment to moment in excellent writing, where recognition of a moral reality or mode of relating to experience is generated through finely used words.

Throughout this chapter, I have been examining how best to conceptualise and articulate the relationship between words and experience. How literature relates to living cannot be understood without due comprehension of the way in which words are fundamentally attitudinal. Implicit in every text is an attitude to living, which can provide a way of thinking more deeply about one's

[219] Karl Miller, 'We've Done Awfully Well', *LRB*, 18 July 2013; Patrick Parrinder, 'Jolly Jack and the Preacher', *LRB*, 20 April 1989.
[220] Martin Amis, 'In Praise of Pritchett', *LRB*, 22 May 1980.
[221] Lodge, *Language*, 66.

own life-attitude. Careful attention to Leavis's claims throughout his career, but especially in the 1930s texts, indicates a conception of literature in which literary form is essential to creating meaning, and, through attitude, is a means of discerning relationship to experience. In his final book, Leavis writes that 'Only a major creative writer can give concrete specificity to such values and establish them; he does it *in* communicating them: the communicating, or the making communicable, is essential to the thought'.[222] How language, and so how literary language, relates to thought will form the subject of the next chapter.

[222] F.R. Leavis, *Thoughts, Words and Creativity* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), 29.

Chapter II—'How can I know what I think until I see what I say?'

'[P]oetry cannot afford to lose […] its joy in being a process of language as well as a representation of things in the world'.[1]
Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*

This chapter posits a theory of language that is necessary for the understanding advanced in this thesis of how literature might relate to the human world. The first chapter argued for the role that words play in relating to experience, through attitude. In this chapter I explore language as a process: one that is formative for self-awareness and understanding, so that expression *through* language becomes a way of knowing in the clearest manner possible what one thinks, feels and experiences in precise moments. But under consideration is not a method of knowing the fluctuations of human experience in their minutiae: rather, a process of 'placing' one's own emotional, intellectual and imaginative experience, such that an experience is able to become constitutive for the person. As throughout, I do not consider literary language as different in kind from language in general. Adjectives such as 'literary' or 'poetic' can be markers of distrust—as made pithily plain by Nietzsche's remark about how 'the wisest of us becomes a fool for rhythm'—or of triviality, which was Leavis's struggle with 'literary'.[2] I therefore begin by exploring a preliminary conception of the role played by non-literary language in thought, which enables a more nuanced, and less easily dismissed, understanding of literary language's own role.

'Placing' is a Leavisian term: for Leavis, literary expression is bound up with self-knowledge. For him the growth and development of human understanding is bound up with language; articulation enables a development that is guided and conscious, rather than something to which one is subject and about which one has little idea. The idea of experience that emerges from Leavis's writings is reminiscent of Donoghue's earlier-quoted: 'The test of an experience is that it indeed

[1] Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), 5.
[2] 'The wisest of us occasionally becomes a fool for rhythm, if only insofar as he *feels* a thought to be *truer* when it has metric form and presents itself with a divine hop, skip, and jump'. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 85–86.

alters the structure of our feeling: if it doesn't, it hasn't been an experience, merely a circumstance'. Leavis's criticism goes further, implying that the circumstance must also be worded in order to constitute the alteration of structure of feeling (and thought) that comprises experience. His work therefore makes explicit an element of decision in Donoghue's words: if language is attitudinal, as has been argued in Chapter I, and if it is decisive in determining modes of feeling or thinking, as this chapter argues, then the precise way in which structures are altered depends on the nuances of the words used. One chooses *how* to allow the structures of one's feeling and thought to be altered, because one chooses which words to use. Again, Donoghue is not referring to chance oscillations and momentary flux: an alteration in structure requires that the thing altered, the way of its alteration, and the reason for it, all be acknowledged—or, better put, 'placed'.

'Placing' is a key Leavis term from *Revaluation* onwards. In *New Bearings* it is only found in normal usage as a noun or verb signifying position. But in *Revaluation* it becomes terminology:

'There is in Herrick's verse nothing of the crisp movement, nothing of the alert bearing […] What Marvell is doing is implicitly "placed"; not in the least solemn, he is much more serious' (44);
'A certain crisp precision of statement, a poised urbanity of movement and tone, that relates this passage to the other two becomes very apparent in the last line. The effect is as of an implicit reference, even here in King where personal feeling is so indubitably strong, of the immediate feeling and emotion to a considered scale of values—a kind of critical "placing", as it were' (74);
'Through a medium of glassy serenity we see the emotional episode enacted, the medium, with its suggestion both of quiet intentness and of the contemplation of the placed and the familiar, assuring us implicitly of the weighed importance of what is presented' (188);
'the failure to place the various phases or levels of visionary drift with reference to any grasped reality is more significant because of the palpable effort' (216);
'The current placing of [Keats] seems, in essentials, likely to stand: what a critic may still propose to himself is a sharper explicitness; a recall that is, to strict literary criticism' (225);
'The indulgence is, I suggest (making the point in my own way), "placed"' (255)

By *Revaluation*, 'placing' has come to represent a kind of organisation: an act of comprehending feeling and assimilating it, coming to situate it in one's own understanding of one's experience. A failure to place exposes an inability to comprehend. Placing includes assessing and valuing; it is a measuring of something against other comparable experiences or feelings. The Keats quotation shows that Leavis used the term to refer to the evaluative rank of the literary-critical hierarchy as well as an internal discerning scale. For Leavis an act of 'placing' is an act of knowing evaluative comprehension; the closest synonym in his usage is 'grasped'. To use 'placing' as *Revaluation* does is Jamesian. In the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* James writes 'If I watch [my characters] long

enough I see them come together, I see them *placed*, I see them engaged in this or that act and in this or that difficulty'; a few pages later he asks, 'If the apparition was still all to be placed how came it to be vivid?—since we puzzle such quantities out, mostly, just by the business of placing them'.[3] For both James and Leavis 'placing' is a mental activity that has something instinctive about it: the making-vivid of character or experience itself entails placing. It is a cognitive achievement as much as an artistic one, the artistic manifestation also being a mode of cognitive realisation. Interestingly, it is the literary critic, Leavis, who emphasises 'placing' as a *written* activity; for James, the writer, it is visual. He does not refer to language in his discussion, employing instead metaphors of seeing, apparition, a presence. For both, though, the successful artistic rendering is the only way to 'place', and, circuitously, only that rendering will attest to whether or not something has been 'placed'. 'Placing' is an act of knowing, whether knowing character through strenuous imagining, for James, or, for Leavis, knowing one's relationship to life experience (as per his discussion of Wordsworth and Shelley's placing of experience).

'Placing' can only take place through a process of using words, and I will argue that literature enables a process of encounter with possible modes of relating to experience. Perception is an important factor, as the Donoghue quotation suggested; experience might be interpreted in numerous ways, and placed accordingly. To stress perception acknowledges that a different kind of experience could have been created from the same circumstance. Philip Brockbank cites Leavis referring to 'the creativity of perception' in a letter to E.H. Gombrich: a phrase that highlights perception's relationship to deliberation and decision.[4] There are, as we have seen, *modes of* and *ways of* perceiving. This is perception in the (William) Jamesian sense of a chosen direction of attention, something that one can train or encourage into one mode or another. James writes 'my experience is what I agree to attend to'.[5] His meaning approximates the common-sense proposition

[3] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Lionel Kelly and Keith Carabine (New York: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), 5; 8.
[4] Philip Brockbank, *The Creativity of Perception* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991). Leavis replied to Gombrich's comment that they had 'much in common' with: 'Yes—tradition, and the creativity of perception'. See Brockbank's preface, ix-xv. For other uses of the phrase in Leavis, see also his *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher*, ed. G. Singh (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), 4., and the references to 'the creativeness of perception' in *ELTU*: 52; 106; 178.
[5] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt et al (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP,

that what one experiences emerges from what one perceives, perception being the result of attention.

The comment also reveals something more complex, figuring the possibility that what constitutes experience for us is able to become experience only as a result of a certain kind of intention on our part. One has to perceive (itself the result of a choice as to mode of perception); then to interpret (again, to do with mode of perception, as one chooses how to allocate meaning within interpretation); then to construct into experience what one has perceived and interpreted. Construction, as an act of decision, itself accords significance. James refers to experience 'remoulding us every moment', so that 'our mental reaction on every given thing is really a resultant of our experience of the whole world up to that date'. Thus 'each of us literally *chooses*, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit'.[6] One's mode of perception is central to the way one conceives of experience, and central to whether or not it becomes constitutive of oneself or one's 'universe'. If putting something differently changes attitude towards it—as it does, given that attitude is created by specific words—then the act of articulation has the capacity to alter one's relation to an experience.

This may seem like a drastic claim, but much human activity operates implicitly on that basis. One alters one's relation to experience (including the meaning an experience has for one) through words (spoken, written or read) in conversation, introspection, therapy, interviews, articles, essays, and other activities besides. Hindsight and revaluation operate on the principle that conveying an experience or emotion or idea differently changes the relation to the experience. Cases of self-deception through words also exist, but they are red herrings in this theory (though complex and interesting ones), because they do not involve a proper usage of words: they do not involve 'placing'. My argument is not that using *any* words has an impact on one's mode of experience, but that the process of using language in order to think through relation to experience (and not as simple expression, in Casey's sense) permits an investigation of response that would not be possible without language, and is likely also to enable something new. This chapter argues, then, that there is a multi-directional current between perception, conception and the use of language, from which

1981), 380.
[6] Ibid., 228; 401.

the 'placing' of experience is inseparable; further, that the act of using language in that way itself enables a process of relating to experience. As throughout the thesis, Leavis's thought is exploited for its usefulness in assisting the construction of a theory of why and how literary language is humanly significant. The same goes for other thinkers considered in this chapter; thus, although R.G. Collingwood—whose idea of 'art as expression' is explored in section ii.—was contemporaneous with Leavis, and although Leavis writes of Collingwood admiringly, I am not interested in the influence of either upon the other. The ideas of both are useful in erecting a theory of how literary language might influence processes of relating to experience.

A note on 'process'. In cognitive psychology, as in information technology, the term is used with a teleological structure, as a movement towards a goal. J.C.D. Clark has pointed to the inappropriateness of the term as a metaphor, and John Gray suggests implicit links between progress and process.[7] In psychological scholarship, 'process' has the resonance of working-through on an upward trajectory (thanks especially to ideas like Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's regarding the five stages of grief).[8] Even research that explicitly rejects that model tends to use the phrase 'process of grief'.[9] Yet one of the attractive features of 'processing' is that it suggests something that changes and develops over time; it also implies *a mode of* and *means to*, which allows for the attitudinal aspects of meaning crucial to interpreting literature. As I use 'process' here, I hope it is clear that there is no final objective or goal in view. The process of processing, as it were, is ongoing, not least as new experience and new encounters—and indeed new literary texts creating worlds through new uses of language, with unknown voices and moods, and thus unknown modes of relating to experience—continually crop up.

Many philosophers argue that human self-understanding is to do with the language we use to convey ourselves to ourselves. Gadamer's emphasis on linguisticality, or Michael Polanyi's on human 'aware[ness] of language in all thinking', are two instances.[10] Charles Fernyhough's *The*

[7] J.C.D. Clark, 'Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a "Grand Narrative"', *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (March 2012): 161–94; John Gray, *Straw Dogs* (London: Granta Books, 2003).
[8] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[9] Ruth Davis Konigsberg, *The Truth About Grief* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).
[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 1960); Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 101.

Voices Within contributes a developmental psychologist's perspective, instancing numerous experiments on the phenomenon of 'inner talk', or talking to ourselves.[11] Wittgenstein (who, for Leavis, 'was a genius and very subtle') is perhaps the most famed and revolutionary of philosophers on language.[12] His most-quoted phrase is probably 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life'.[13] Taken thus as a phrase, it is persuasive, at least for many scholars or philosophers of literature. Arthur Danto, for instance, uses it as a supposition to think through the implications that a language without narrative predicates has for its people, such that the phrase functions as a prompt to hypothesis.[14] But the context of Wittgenstein's statement is a language-game request, asking that one imagine 'a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle', or 'a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering Yes and No'. The interest is more in the implications of language use than on the shifts nuances of language create in processes of thinking. This chapter, which explores literary language as enabling distinctive modes of cognitive (including emotional) processes, departs from an idea of language as a 'game'. The thesis of language as 'games' derives, Polanyi has pointed out, from nominalism, the notion that 'general terms are merely names designating certain collections of objects':

> The question how the same term can apply to a series of indeterminably variable particulars is avoided by admitting that terms have an 'open texture'. 'Open' terms, however, lack any definite meaning; they may mean anything, unless some intervention is admitted which is competent to control the range of their meaning. My own view admits this controlling principle by accrediting the speaker's sense of fitness for judging that *his words express the reality he seeks to express*. Without this, words having an open texture are totally meaningless, and any text written in such words is meaningless. Refusing to make this admission, the nominalist has either to refrain from enquiring how such words can be applied, except arbitrarily, to experience; or else to invoke a set of vague regulative principles—without asking on what authority these rules are to be accepted and how they can be applied, unless arbitrarily, in view of their own vagueness.[15]

Polanyi's critique of nominalism extends to a critique of treating words as if they were things. '[D]isagreements on the nature of things cannot be expressed as disagreement about the existing use of words'.[16] Controversial questions, says Polanyi, 'can be attended to only if we use language

[11] Charles Fernyhough, *The Voices Within* (London: Profile Books/Wellcome Collection, 2016).
[12] 28/08/1972 letter to Ian Robinson. Cited in MacKillop, *Leavis*, 394.
[13] Wittgenstein, *PI*, 11e.
[14] Arthur Danto, 'Narration and Knowledge', *Philosophy and Literature* 6, no. 1–2 (1982): 17–32.
[15] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 113.
[16] Ibid., 114.

as it exists, to direct our attention to its subject matter and not the other way around, selecting instances of relevant cases to direct attention to our use of language'. This chapter is interested in how literary language might open up for consideration that for which there would otherwise not be space, precisely because language and meaning have the most intimate of relationships.

Wittgenstein's tussling over 'understanding' is indicative. He writes:

> 531. We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.)
>
> In the one case, the thought in the sentence is what is common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions (Understanding a poem.)
>
> 532. Then has 'understanding' two different meanings here? —I would rather say that these kinds of use of 'understanding' make up its meaning, make up my *concept* of understanding.
>
> For I *want* to apply the word 'understanding' to all this.[17]

Wittgenstein's concept of understanding is shaped according to usage of the term, both in word and in practice, in terms of how it *works*. His interest here is in how to define 'understanding', given that it refers to two quite different things: understanding content, in paraphrase, and understanding the specific irreplaceable meaning of a particular usage of words. Wittgenstein concludes that the concept of understanding is made up of both. But the differences between these kinds of understanding is significant. Understanding a thought that happens to be given in words, but to which the words are incidental, is not just different to understanding 'something' to which the words are fundamental: something more than 'understanding' is happening in the latter. As he summarises the differences between the two, Wittgenstein speaks of 'the thought' in the sentence; then he refers to 'something' being 'expressed'. The former is aimed at a thought: it is purely conceptual. The latter is also conceptual, but is specific to certain particularities (to what Leavis would call the 'concrete'). This kind of 'understanding' is bound to a form; it belongs to words that unfold in time. My argument in this chapter is not only that literature enables the latter kind of 'understanding'—as Wittgenstein says—but, more importantly, that 'understanding' does not sufficiently capture what it does. It neglects the fact that under consideration is an experience of language (which is the only way 'something' is understood), necessitating an element of linguistic attentiveness, and not

[17] Wittgenstein, *PI*, 152e.

just understanding something specific. Over the next two chapters I will be arguing that in the 'something' case, what is at stake is a shift in mode of consciousness incited by the use of language as process, as one undergoes an experience of knowing by paying precise attention to 'these words in these positions'. Attending to them fully requires more than 'understanding'.

Charles Taylor, like Gadamer, Polanyi and Fernyhough, also emphasises language as bound up with 'form of life'. Taylor is an important figure in this chapter, not least because he desires that a richer discourse be part of the public sphere for the very reason that self-understanding is wrapped up with language. For Taylor, the relation is so integral that if the language of public discourse does not acknowledge the frameworks of meaning that make up one's identity, then it denies certain fundamental aspects of the self and of the things that construct meaning for one. Over the last four decades he has argued that theories of human consciousness and experience necessarily exceed naturalist or behaviourist articulations, and that a fuller discourse is needed. He emphasises that 'an epistemology which privileges disengagement and control isn't self-evidently right', and that the language of the public realm must acknowledge that, allowing for other epistemologies, if citizens are to feel that their differing modes of existence are recognised.[18]

An altered, more epistemologically open discourse need not be one that is literary. What Taylor has in mind is an everyday use of language that includes sincere reference to moral and experiential lives, one which, by referring to the full range of human goods and significances, enables a sense of human fullness. His argument has allegiance with the protest in *Culture and Environment* against the idea of the human subtly smuggled in via certain modes of expression. As I said, these are not expressions that are literary; Leavis and Thompson focused on journalism and advertising. The argument, for all three, is to do with modes of using language rather than specific genres. While Leavis finds that the most refined, subtle and innovative uses of language occur in literature (prose, drama and poetry), that conclusion emerges from his prior conception of language's place in culture and understanding. Taylor also esteems literary language as distinctive; he uses Shelley's phrase 'subtler language' to refer to the evocative use of language characteristic of literature and

[18] Taylor, *Sources*, 164.

scripture.[19] I emphasise in this chapter that the generative capacity of literary language and its intimate relation to thought are properties of language in general, although it is in literature that they are most often found. These are not literary qualities. Leavis's emphasis on language advocates profound thought about the nature of relation between language and thought as a basic preliminary to literary understanding. Remarkably also referring to 'a subtle language'—though not quoting Shelley—Leavis in his penultimate book claims the closest of relations between 'intelligent thought about the nature of thought' and 'intelligence about the nature of language', which 'involves an intimate acquaintance with a subtle language in its fullest use'.[20] Leavis is pointing towards language's capacity to enable thinking, which I develop in this chapter. The idea of language put forward here, I believe, is fundamental to a theory of literature's significance.

Although I argue for language as enabling something that would not be enabled without words, at no point do I claim that thought cannot exist without speech; neuroscience can prove, and has, the inaccuracy of that claim.[21] What I am interested in is what happens when words, particularly at use in literature, are involved. Thought evidently does not require language, as experiments working with people who have been deaf since birth have proven.[22] Fernyhough writes that we need to be much clearer on what we mean by both 'thinking' and 'language' (which might include any sophisticated sign system, including sign language), asserting that 'For many of the activities we call thinking, the use of self-directed language is a massive boost, but it is by no means essential'.[23] My point is not that language is necessary for thinking, but that it has a capacity to deepen reflection and, more fundamentally, to bring about shifts in relationship to experience or thought of such specificity that they otherwise might not take place.

This chapter also argues against the usefulness of the term most frequently applied, by him as well as others, to Leavis's idea of the way in which language operates in an artwork: *enactment*. More frequently 'embodiment' has become fashionable in theoretical discourse; but, like

[19] See 'Part V: Subtler Languages' in Ibid., 391–495.
[20] *LP*, 13.
[21] See Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2012), 106–10.
[22] See 'A Voice That Doesn't Speak', in Fernyhough, *The Voices Within*, 219–34.
[23] Ibid., 248.

enactment, it is a term, I think, which inhibits the understanding of language's mode of operation put forward here. Instead I advocate the term 'enabling'.

i. Expression as becoming self-aware

R.G. Collingwood and Leavis share affinities in their attention to—though not conclusions regarding—two domains. The first is the conception of one's emotions and their place in one's self-understanding. As detailed in Chapter I, Leavis is explicit in arguing on behalf of a conception of thinking and feeling that figures their interaction and inter-dependability appropriately. He is close to both Eliot's 'intelligence, of which an important function is the discernment of exactly what, and how much, we feel in any given situation', and Jacques Maritain's 'intelligence-permeated sense'.[24] Collingwood's emphasis on emotion has no such attention to requisite thought or directing intelligence: 'feeling appears to arise in us independently of all thinking, in a part of our nature which exists and functions below the level of thought and is unaffected by it'.[25] Imagination, 'the point at which the activity of thought makes contact with the merely psychic level of feeling', is a bridge between two fundamentally separate functions, one psychical, one intellectual.[26] For Collingwood, feeling has no cognitive aspect at all. 'Feeling proper' (as opposed to 'feelings', which can refer to imagination) is 'sensation and emotion', not thought. Indeed, thought is incompatible with the dominating nature of 'feeling proper', 'an experience in which what we now feel monopolizes the whole field of our view'. Collingwood matches this distinction with one between types of language, the latter distinction enlarging the segregation he posits between feeling and intellect. Like his characterisation of 'feeling proper', he posits a more basic and a more refined use of language. 'Original' language is an imaginative activity whose function is to express

[24] T.S. Eliot, '"Reflections on Contemporary Poetry"', *The Egoist (London: The New Freewoman Ltd)*, 1917; Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1978), 190.
[25] R.G. Collingwood, *Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1938), 163.
[26] Ibid., 171.

emotion; 'intellectual' language expresses thought and is a modification of original language.[27] None of this—neither the act of categorisation nor the categories themselves —accords with Leavis's viewpoint.

Yet the second area to which the pair attends, the role that language plays in thought, suggests how useful a comparison between them might be for constructing the theory of language necessary for my argument about literature's 'human centrality'—which is also Leavis's unwritten theory of language, the theory I think underlies his best literary analysis. For Collingwood, without worded expression, knowledge of one's feeling cannot take place at all. His expression is a mode of cognition: it allows a conscious grasp of experience. It is an activity, as David Davies puts it, and not the product of activity.[28]

To understand Collingwood's sense of the relation between language and understanding, it is necessary first to look at his theory of how ideas, or thoughts, relate to action. Collingwood makes a distinction between *event* and *action*. Events are events in history; actions are human actions, which have thought at their core. To understand an historical action, one must attempt to 're-enact' the thought that lay behind it. Such re-enactment is not an act of the imagination, but rather a deliberate and directed intellectual search for what makes action intelligible, which enables a reconstruction of the motive behind behaviour. Re-enacting an action can enable one to know a thought. Collingwood offers intriguing analogies to illustrate his theory of re-enactment, such as playing a note on a harp, pausing, and playing the note again; or writing an equation and later writing the equation again. Both instances involve expression, suggesting that a repetition of the same expressed action is what enables one to re-enact past thoughts, this time with critical reflection about the 'presuppositions' involved. Re-enactment is the re-enactment of a thought read in an expression of some kind—language, music, action during war. Collingwood calls 'all history' 'the history of thought'. It involves 'see[ing] what the person who made this (wrote this, used this, designed this, etc.) was thinking'.[29] Re-enactment is an operation that succeeds only through

[27] Ibid., 221–25.
[28] David Davies, 'Collingwood's "Performance" Theory of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 2 (1 April 2008): 162–74.
[29] Stephen Toulmin, ed., *R.G. Collingwood: An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 110.

expression, so that expression becomes a means to uncovering historical modes of thought and reasons for action.

Higher-order activity, deliberate reflection on absolute presuppositions, plays an important role in investigating thought, and forms a fundamental aspect of Collingwood's method for understanding action. Collingwood asserted that beneath thoughts are 'presuppositions', of which one is not usually aware. He distinguishes between 'absolute' and 'relative' presuppositions, the former being the unchallenged and usually unarticulated assumptions upon which thought and rational enquiry—first-order activities, including artistic and historical activities—proceed.[30] These activities are organised, methodological, competent ways of understanding the world, which, nevertheless, are conducted upon unquestioned, unrecognised presuppositions. Philosophy is what Collingwood calls 'thought of the second degree, thought about thought': a higher-order activity, which is aware of these presuppositions, and examines them.[31] Philosophy is thus an activity in self-awareness, enabling one to detect 'constellations of absolute presuppositions': predominant ways of thinking about the world that are in operation in our own time as well as previously.[32] For action to be understood fully requires an investigation into presuppositions, which in turn allows the re-enactment of thought. Both methods—investigating presuppositions and re-enactment—have notable links with Collingwood's account of art 'as expression', which places language at the very core of what it is to know oneself. All characterise expression as a necessary preliminary step in the process of understanding thought. Collingwood's theory of art holds that what is expressed in art is not known in its exactitude beforehand, thereby formulating expression as a cognitive activity, the pivot that enables one to know. As with re-enactment, Collingwood rejects the notion of art as simulation or representation of something preconceived. Instead, it is a kind of process.

For Collingwood, expression is a coming-to-consciousness of a mental state. As Graham Wallas, later more famously echoed by E.M. Forster, put it: 'How can I know what I think until I

[30] R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 29.
[31] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. W.J. van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 1. See also R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005). 'The theory of science and the theory of history are not parts of science and of history; if scientists and historians study these things, they study them not in their capacity as scientists or historians, but in their capacity as philosophers'.
[32] Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, 67.

see what I say?'[33] Both Wallas and Forster use the phrase in comic tone, Wallas quoting an imagined young girl and Forster an old woman. But the process covered by the phrase has been considered seriously in psychology and neuroscience, notably by Antonio Damasio, who quotes Forster to suggest the distinction between conscious feeling and emotion. Damasio argues that emotions are unconscious, preceding feeling, while feeling entails self-awareness, and is an important aspect of both 'core' and 'extended' consciousness.[34] Daniel Dennett also quotes Forster, referring to broader processes of cognition than those related to the emotions. Wallas speaks of 'thinking', after all, rather than feeling. For Dennett 'we often do discover what we think (and hence what we mean) by reflecting on what we find ourselves saying—and not correcting'.[35] Dennett's claim has been interpreted as suggesting that 'the way we express something can actually be part of what *creates* how something seems to us'; even further, it posits that 'expressing something may be part of what makes the expressed what it is'.[36] This idea parallels the Leavisian emphasis on the creativity of perception: the perspective involved in expression—the particular attitude made felt through words—comes to inflect the reality under discussion, to the extent that *under discussion* might be better phrased *created by the discussion*. The way of talking determines what is talked about.

Collingwood's claim has less of a stress on the manner of perception. Expression is more instinctive, preliminary to and separate from mode of interpretation. For him, expression is the only way in which one can know what one is feeling:

> When a man is said to express emotion, what is being said about him comes to this. At first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is: 'I feel…I don't know what I feel'. From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something which we call expressing himself. This is an activity which has something to do with the thing we call language: he expresses himself by speaking. It has also something to do with consciousness: the emotion expressed is an emotion of whose nature the person who feels it is no longer unconscious. It has also something to do with the way in which he feels the emotion. As unexpressed, he feels it in what we called a helpless and oppressed way; as expressed, he feels in a way from which this sense of oppression has vanished. His mind is somehow lightened and eased.

[33] Graham Wallas, *The Art of Thought* (Kent: Solis Press, 2014), 54. Wallas's book was published in 1926; a year later Forster paraphrased the question in his Clark lectures, published as E.M Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 2005).
[34] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000).
[35] Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London: Penguin, 1993), 245.
[36] Andrew Brook and Don Ross, *Daniel Dennett* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 54.

This lightness and ease, Collingwood is careful to point out, is not the effect of catharsis: the emotion has been not expunged, but identified. One has a 'sense of alleviation' because one now knows what one feels; the emotion is no less than it was.[37] In order to come to know one's emotional state, one must express the emotion intelligibly. The use of language as a prompt to knowledge is suggestive for the theory of the workings of language I am claiming for Leavis, not least as there is an indicative key difference between the two. For Leavis the becoming-self-aware entailed in an expression of emotion (or of thought, which Collingwood leaves aside) triggers assessment and evaluation; there is a movement towards discernment in the very act of articulation.

Thus while Collingwood's expression is a vocalising that makes one conscious, Leavis sees the act of putting an emotional or intellectual state into words, if they are the right words, as something that *of its nature* involves 'placing'. That qualification is key to formulating Leavis's understanding of the way that language, and therefore literary language, works, and key to understanding his critical assessments. The commentary on Henry King I quoted earlier refers to 'a considered scale of values—a kind of critical "placing", as it were', with the word 'values' signalling that the 'placing' occurs within some larger structure or pattern. Emotion that is worded successfully is emotion that has been placed, weighted, balanced. It is emotion that has been thought-through (as opposed merely to thought about); again, the two realms in their proper incarnation are shown to connect. Thought-through emotion need not be restricted or controlled. Even 'histrionic exaltation' can be contemplated if words are used effectively.[38] It is when the words are the wrong words, words that do not enable an emotion to be realised, that the emotion feels unreal, which suggests that it is emotion not truly felt or thought-through by the author. Such emotion is insufficiently interrogated, so as actually to hinder self-awareness. In such cases, expression, because improperly done, functions in the opposite way to Collingwood's expression: it might be an obstruction to knowing what one is feeling, and, more fundamentally, to feeling the emotion itself. That was Leavis's protest against Shelley: his words point to emotion that is not thought-through, and is neither realised in the poem nor realisable for the reader. They are words

[37] All Collingwood, *Principles*, 109–10.
[38] *R*, 74.

used in a manner that prevents awareness.

That the act of rightful articulation in itself involves 'placing' for Leavis is only partly because Leavis stresses the connection between thinking and feeling, such that the proper doing of one inherently entails the other. As I have argued, the ultimate concern of his criticism is mode of using language in relation to experience. 'Placing' necessitates a precise, non-evasive use of language; only such a use could point to genuine, scrutinising awareness. Collingwood has no such sense of the adequacy or inadequacy of modes of expression. Indeed, he is explicit that '[a]ny kind of selection, any decision to express this emotion and not that, is inartistic not in the sense that it damages the perfect sincerity which distinguishes good art from bad, but in the sense that it represents a further process of a non-artistic kind, carried out when the work of expression is already complete'.[39] For him, expression is an outpouring of emotion that enables the emotion to be felt fully and recognised—and it is an act of art. Refinement and organisation, on the other hand, are 'further process[es]', ones that are not integral to art at all. Collingwood's theory of 'art as expression' depicts expression and art as more or less synonymous, with 'expression' being used in Casey's sense. But what is crucial for Leavis is that the use of language—whether or not literary language—of itself involves an act of discrimination, meaning that organisation will already be part of rightful expression. But bad art is bad because expression fails to make concepts felt as real. It betrays *lack* of awareness, rather than enhancing it.

Before returning to Collingwood, I want to explore further Leavis's sense of using words as a process of coming to awareness. In 1936, four years after *New Bearings* and the same year as *Revaluation*, Leavis published an article on Auden in *Scrutiny*, in which he argued that Auden is good with words but 'he has no organization. He hasn't, at any rate, the organization corresponding to his local vitality, to the distinction of his phrasing and imagery at their best'. By 'organization' Leavis is referring both to formal stylistic choices and to 'placing' (which takes place in part *through* formal stylistic choices). He had used the term in *Revaluation* to distinguish between Wordsworth and Shelley. Auden 'still makes far too much of his poetry out of private neuroses and memories—

[39] Collingwood, *Principles*, 115.

still uses these in an essentially immature way'.[40] The issue is not the use of personal experience, but that its use is in immature fashion, without being 'placed'. The distinction is delicate, for Leavis's conception of the use of language involves discernment, as I have said, which means that using words is a way of better knowing oneself. That means the 'private' is profoundly involved. But the treatment of it is what counts. He finds Dorothea and Maggie Tulliver too close to George Eliot, such that Dorothea is the weakest point in *Middlemarch*. In the discussion of *Aaron's Rod*, Leavis finds that Lawrence's intelligence 'fail[s] to transcend the special conditions of experience'. He reads Lawrence as inserting an episode from his own life, about which 'there is no inevitability' with regard to 'Aaron's history'. The 'whole episode, in fact, is irritatingly unsatisfying because not completely significant'. The manner of handling the episode renders it gratuitous. 'The unsatisfactoriness of the episode, then, is significant as illustrating a tendency; an inherent tendency of the special circumstances of Lawrence's life to affect his perception of the problems in ways he is not sufficiently aware of'.[41] '[S]ufficiently' is a charge equivalent to that of Auden's alleged immaturity. In both cases the inability to organise is also an inability to know feelings fully, in the very way that *New Bearings* had stipulated was part of what it is to be a poet. 'Organization', for Leavis, is part of the successful construction of language that makes art; it entails the discernment implicit in the process of selecting and commanding words.

The closest Collingwood gets to this is the focus on 'lucidity' in his idea that 'the characteristic mark of expression proper is lucidity or intelligibility; a person who expresses something thereby becomes conscious of what it is that he is expressing, and enables others to become conscious of it in himself and in them'.[42] Yet the reference to discernment remains minimal. For Leavis, organisation and 'placing' signal that language is being used as a process, with words used a means to exploration and discernment, where they might generate something quite new and unforeseen. As any act of expression entails selection and choice, some kind of attitude towards the emotion or thought is inherent in the very act of articulation, whether desired or not. But being aware of this

[40] F.R. Leavis, *A Selection from Scrutiny*, vol. 1&2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968), 110.
[41] All *DHLN*, 55–57.
[42] Collingwood, *Principles*, 122.

means using words with care, so as to discern a relation to experience or feeling. The link with Collingwood helps us to see that for Leavis using language is a process not so much of putting 'experience into words' (as D.W. Harding, a frequent *Scrutiny* contributor, titled one of his books), as a process of evaluating, and more crucially forming, a relationship to experience that would not exist without these words.

To this, the sense of the pivotal point that language creates is crucial. Like Leavis, Collingwood rejects the idea of a prior content that form then moulds:

> The means-and-end, or technique, terminology too is inapplicable. Until a man has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. He is trying to find out what these emotions are. There is certainly here a directed process: an effort, that is, directed upon a certain end; but the end is not something foreseen and preconceived, to which appropriate means can be thought out in the light of our knowledge of its special character. Expression is an activity of which there can be no technique.[43]

To express is to 'becom[e] conscious' of an emotion, so that the distinction between plan and execution cannot be applied: one finds the expression in expressing it. The 'good painter […] paints things because until he has painted them he doesn't know what they are like'.[44] That a concept—or experience, or mood—can be generated through language is precisely why 'there can be no technique'. Once language is involved, there is no former idea underlying the expression that technique then treats. Language as communication does not work that way, because the user of language only gets to the idea *through* language. When one changes one's words to fit meaning more precisely, this only emphasises how inseparable word and meaning are, once language is involved.

If the technique is predetermined, there is no discovery of emotion or thought, which means that there is no illumination, realisation, or even clarifying, through articulation. The preconceived end subordinates or overwhelms the adventuring range of the means. Then words become what Collingwood calls 'mere craft', which is an equivalent to Leavis's 'poeticalities'.[45] Collingwood reiterates: 'There is no question of "externalizing" an inward experience which is complete in itself

[43] Ibid., 111.
[44] Ibid., 304.
[45] Ibid., 43.

and by itself'; although one visualises something before painting, the 'experience develops itself and defines itself in your mind as you paint'.[46] Just as with language, the idea shifts when expression is involved. '[L]anguage or art', says Collingwood, is an 'imaginative experience', an 'imaginative activity'.[47] Leavis calls art the 'exploratory-creative use of words upon experience'.[48] In this instance, the adjectives ought to be taken to direct the sense; 'words upon experience' is not a useful formula for what Leavis is trying to get at regarding the relationship between experience and language. Preconceived experience, like preconceived technique is incompatible with the idea of artistic words as 'exploratory-creative'.

Jenefer Robinson has an apposite reference to Collingwood. She emphasises that saying something like *I am very sad* is not 'expression' in Collingwood's sense, but the describing or labelling of one's emotion; it is 'categorizing my emotion using the vocabulary of folk psychology'.[49] She is making the case for Collingwood's expression as having an element of genuine discernment at play, in a model closer to Leavis's. A predetermined idea of ends—the assumption that 'I am sad' captures one's feeling—would not involve this discernment and not constitute 'expression'. In such a case language would be a *hindrance* to discernment and to thought, preventing the process of coming-to-awareness, because it is used improperly, unthinkingly and unfeelingly. For language to deepen relation to experience, not obstruct it, depends upon it being used as a process, one conceived of as to do with experience. Clichéd or hackneyed uses of language inhibit self-knowing. Bertrand Russell referred to 'a purely prudential use of language', in which the speaker uses language as s/he has heard others use it, imitating conventional practice.[50] To express properly what one feels would involve using language newly.

Marilynne Robinson, who has a strong interest in the relation of language to experience, writes,

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[46] Ibid., 303–4.
[47] Ibid., 225. See also 274, where Collingwood elides language and art altogether, referring to the directed imaginative process that is using language 'or' making art: 'The psycho-physical activity on which the given emotion was a charge is converted into a controlled activity of the organism, dominated by the consciousness which controls it, and this activity is language or art'. One page earlier he has asserted, given that art is imaginative and expressive, that 'art must be language'.
[48] *CP*, 109.
[49] Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 238.
[50] Cited in Richards, *Practical Criticism*, 1930, 324.

in an essay on Shakespeare, that 'No great statement about reality […] can be static, like simple information'.[51] The expression of something significant requires an active, dynamic, compelling, use of language, otherwise significance will not be generated. (This is reminiscent of, though opposite in spirit to, Nietzsche's observation that one '*feels* a thought to be *truer* when it has metric form and presents itself with a divine hop, skip, and jump'.) Robinson seeks what Rowan Williams calls language that 'open[s] the way to life'.[52] For her, the great statement about reality 'implies a profound relationship that unfolds continuously and compels, among other things, extraordinary self-awareness'.[53] What drives and requires 'extraordinary self-awareness', that is, is fresh language: language that operates differently to the language of convention, proposition, and 'simple information'. 'Static' language cannot be language that 'unfolds continuously', working through intimation, evocation and atmosphere as much as through semantics. Notably the unfolding—something that itself suggests 'process'—is not gestural, flimsy, or insubstantial: it compels.

Compelling through suggestion is important for Robinson. She writes that 'Shakespeare gives grace a scale and aesthetic power, and a structural importance, that reach toward a greater sufficiency of expression—not a definition or a demonstration of grace or even an objective correlative for it, but the intimation of a great reality of another order, which pervades human experience, even manifests itself in human actions and relations, yet is always purely itself'.[54] The Wittgensteinian idea that authors show, rather than say, has become axiomatic, but Robinson seeks something different, neither definition, demonstration, nor the objective correlative, but rather 'intimation[s]' that accumulate into meaning. Such meaning has the advantage of not being final or closed; it is something 'that presents itself, reveals itself, always partially and circumstantially, accessible to only tentative apprehension, which means that it is always newly meaningful'.[55] Language used in such a way can evoke what the language of simple information (including 'I am very sad') cannot. In interview, Robinson has asserted that 'extraordinary efforts have to be made

[51] Marilynne Robinson, *The Givenness of Things* (HarperCollins, 2015), 45.
[52] Williams, *Silence*, 70.
[53] Robinson, *Givenness*, 45.
[54] Ibid., 34.
[55] Ibid., 241.

to articulate feelings that are very deep and also very general'.[56] Her words capture the tricky space inhabited by language about emotions: it presents a knowledge that is personal and intimate, but also something experienced, personally and intimately, by many others. Its generality poses a risk: the very risk of 'I am sad' or 'I love her', emotions that most people feel at some point. How to use words to explore one's feelings, if generalities are the default? In order for one's own relation to the reality of these experiences to be known, different usages of language are needed.

The discerning capacity of language does not apply only to the person putting 'experience into words', just as Donoghue's suggestion that circumstance becomes experience only by 'alter[ing] the structure of our feeling' applies as much as to reader as writer. It is possible to relate to one's own experience differently after encountering a different mode of using language, one that suggests different ways of thinking. Collingwood's theory of re-enactment suggests that one can participate in the thought of a composer by listening to his or her music. The cognitive gain of the reader is of a different sort, though one not unrelated. The act of reading is one of experiencing: one inhabits a voice, atmosphere, or mood, all of which generate attitude, and undergoes an altogether unknown way of responding to life, one not necessarily, indeed not usually, aligned with a character. The attitude of a given text plays the strongest role in evoking a relation to experience, in part by way of emphasising various aspects of experience over others. David Szalay's *All That Man Is*, a novel of nine tales, has a sparse narrative of often incomplete sentences and the briefest of paragraphs. The tales are, as James Wood says, 'not without plot, but they don't have much in the way of conventional fictional shaping'; nor do the characters have 'much history at all'.[57] But the book 'subtly changes the way you look at the contemporary world', in the words of the judges who awarded it the Gordon Burn Prize 2016: not through the different male characters at the heart of each section, but through the attitude created by the language.[58] The springboard giving access to what one inhabits is the text, the creation of the author, but the text does not lead back to the thoughts of the author so much as lead the reader into a space in which the thoughts of the author are present,

[56] Thomas Schaub and Marilynne Robinson, 'An Interview with Marilynne Robinson', *Contemporary Literature* 35, no. 2 (1994): 237.
[57] James Wood, 'Nine Tales of Crises in All That Man Is', *The New Yorker*, 10 October 2016.
[58] Katherine Cowdrey, 'David Szalay Wins Gordon Burn Prize 2016', *The Bookseller*, 7 October 2016.

'realizable' for the reader.

This inhabiting, importantly, is temporally mediated: it unfolds in time, just as Robinson remarked, forming what Hurley calls an 'experience of knowing'.[59] A stimulating suggestion in that phrase is that the constitutive, active nature of language is such that, whether encountering language as reader or wielding language as writer, one is impressed—etched, marked—in the process, however temporarily, if it is meaningful language. The difference between the author and reader is that the author chooses how to use language, and thus creates an experience in art (or fails to). The reader, in encountering literature, chooses to participate in an experience. Leavis states that 'Any great creative writer who has not had his due is a power for life wasted', a phrase that is ambiguous regarding whether the life empowered is that of the reader or writer.[60] It is the writer who ought to have 'his due', so that 'power for life' feels of broader application than the reader alone. If the author is a power for life, is s/he wasted if not recognised? That, as much as a regrettable loss for the hypothetical reader, is Leavis's implication. The two cannot quite be separated; the reader's recognition of the writer and the writer's ability to continue his work are to some extent mutually reinforcing. Leavis follows that observation with: 'But the insight, the wisdom, the revived and re-educated feeling for health, that Lawrence brings are what, as our civilization goes, we desperately need'. Lawrence 'brings' these qualities; they do not exist in society itself. Leavis does not say 'offers' or 'provides', as though the insight and wisdom were things one could choose not to accept; nor does he say 'indicates' or 'intimates', as if they are gestured towards in Lawrence's writings. They are there, solidly, and only recognition of their existence is needed in order to make of Lawrence's work a 'power for life': something that bypasses author and reader, or rather, encompassing them, goes beyond them, reaching 'civilisation'. All three entities, Leavis suggests, are worked upon by literature.

That is only plausible with an idea of language not solely as attitudinal and generative, but also as forming a process, becoming a potential pivot in one's self-awareness. Worded experience has

[59] Michael D. Hurley, 'How Philosophers Trivialize Art: Bleak House, Oedipus Rex, "Leda and the Swan"', *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no. 1 (2009): 107.
[60] *DHLN*, 14.

the potential to enable a process of discerning, for author and reader alike. Reading literature entails 'realization', a term that straddles the divide between reader and writer, because it applies to the *words*. Being read, they are 'realized', made into something real for the reader; but being written, they also realise something, a bringing into being, enabling something new for the writer. Many authors speak of not knowing what their characters will say, or not knowing the direction in which a poem is heading, sometimes speaking of the novel 'writ[ing] itself'.[61] Even writers who lay greater stress on their agency acknowledge the way the use of words takes on agency of its own. Graham Wallas quotes two poets on what he calls the 'use of foreconscious processes for conscious ends': for instance, writing a poem in order to discover what you will write in it. John Drinkwater refers to his 'undiscovered mind' and James Stephens writes: 'I would think until I found,/ Something I can never find,/ Something lying on the ground/ In the bottom of my mind'.[62] Both thoughts are formulated in verse, which itself suggests the elusiveness of the found thing, and the precision in the process of its finding. Wallas also offers four lines from Shakespeare as illustration, though he does not pay attention to their context. The lines are Theseus's in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> And as imagination bodies forth
> The form of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and shapes and gives to aery nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

They open Act V, and are Theseus's response to Hippolyta's comment about the strangeness of what the lovers have reported. 'More strange than true', Theseus agrees, and goes on to speak of the 'seething brains' of lovers and madmen, who have 'Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend/ More than cool reason ever comprehends'. The poet does like work, Theseus suggests, with his eye glancing 'from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven', and making of 'nothing' local, tangible, realities.[63] Indeed all Wallas's examples suggest a something coming from nothing ('undiscovered', 'never', 'nothing'). For Leavis and Collingwood what was in place was never nothing. Words are

[61] Umberto Eco, *On Literature* (London: Random House, 2012), 327. 'The novel ends because it heads directly towards its conclusion on its own. This is what I would like my Model Reader to notice. That the novel writes itself, since this is how it happened, and how it always happens, really'.
[62] Wallas, *The Art of Thought*, 51.
[63] William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Herschel Baker et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 276.

not prior to feeling or thought. It is if there is 'nothing' beneath the words that words cannot prompt realisation. The comparison with Collingwood draws out the discerning function of language in Leavis's conception, the way that it can enable a process of coming to know what one feels or thinks for writer and reader alike. For both, words play the pivotal role. I.A. Richards described the 'amazing capacity of [the poet] for ordering speech [as] only a part of a more amazing capacity for ordering his experience'.[64] For Collingwood, but especially for Leavis, experience is only ordered—rather, discerned—*through* a usage of words. It is the usage of words that realises the experience *thus* (as Samuel Johnson might say). The capacity for ordering experience is located in the capacity for ordering words, not the other way around.

ii. The 'constructive powers of language': language as constitutive

The previous section examined expression as a coming-to-awareness and an act of discernment. Charles Taylor builds on such ideas in his argument for language's 'human expressive-constitutive power'.[65] He links the self's meaning-allocating activity—how the kind of mental universe one inhabits is chosen and constituted—with use of language: 'What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me [… and] these things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation which I have come to accept as a valid articulation of these issues'.[66] Taylor sees language as having the capacity—and the duty—not only to express what he calls hypergoods, the values by which we define our lives, but also to foreground these goods, such that they are able to have profound life-significance. For him this is a responsibility of language, something that it ought to be doing if it is to enable full human living. Taylor is forthright about this duty of language because, he argues, without language that invokes the deepest human values, these values are not

[64] I.A. Richards, *Poetries and Sciences* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1972), 44.
[65] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Harvard UP, 1995), 111.
[66] Taylor, *Sources*, 35.

meaningfully accessible to us: not able to be placed at the core of our lives. Language's 'constructive powers' impose an obligation.[67] Like Collingwood, Taylor sees language as enabling one to know. Like Bernard Harrison, to whom I turn shortly, he also goes much further: language is meaning-making, concept-building and at the very root of the 'human world'.[68]

Taylor's argument is that language creates one's sense of self: it is what enables identity (in terms of selfhood rather than political identity, though the latter is also important). This emphasis on the role articulation plays in understanding goes far beyond an acknowledgement of the fact that humans require language for communication. Taylor highlights 'the fundamental dependence of our thought on language'.[69] His point is not the hypothesis of linguistic relativity (also, mistakenly, known as the 'Sapir-Whorf' hypothesis) that conceptual categories depend on language, but that without language and the process of articulation, thought can remain unthinking: imprecise, undirected, unconsciously held.[70] The very 'function of language is to aid the construction of thought'.[71] For Taylor, thought's relationship to articulation fundamentally includes meaning-making; his argument is that human interpretations of reality require articulated frameworks in order to become modes of interpretation conducted consistently and with awareness. This shift from interpretation to modes of interpretation is not Taylor's vocabulary, but it helps to conceptualise his sense of language's role. Meaning comes to require 'powers of expression':

> the invocation of meaning also comes from our awareness of how much the search involves articulation. We find the sense of life through articulating it. And moderns have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression. Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing. Finding a sense to life depends on framing meaningful expressions which are adequate. There is thus something particularly appropriate to our condition in the polysemy of the word 'meaning': lives can have or lack it when they have or lack a point; while it also applies to language and other forms of expression. More and more, we moderns attain meaning in the first sense, when we do, through creating it in the second sense.[72]

In other words, sense-making requires not only a perception of the existence (or possibility) of meaning, but also a configuration, through language, of that meaning, which is what enables a full

[67] Ibid., 198.
[68] Harrison, *WIFF?*
[69] Taylor, *Sources*, 38.
[70] Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2007).
[71] Taylor, *Sources*, 197.
[72] Ibid., 18.

realisation of it. Taylor goes further, claiming that identity is inseparable from these articulations of meaning, what he calls 'a language of interpretation', which is also an interpretation of the self. He argues that there is no 'language of interpretation' without self-interpretation; humans are 'self-interpreting animals', as he has put it elsewhere.[73] All acts of interpretation are conducted by an agent who is already self-interpreting: 'To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer'.[74]

The Lockean view that personal identity (in Taylor's words) 'is the identity of the self, and the self is understood as an object to be known', is inadequate for Taylor because it elides personal identity with self-consciousness, suggesting that the self is something objectively to be considered. Taylor designates the disengaged subject of Locke's vision 'the neutral self', arguing that the idea of a self whose 'only constitutive property is self-awareness' is a phantom, because perception is always already bound up with 'constitutive concerns and hence [with] identity'.[75] In the terms I have been using, one is always relating to experience in some way or another, and there is no unmediated access to experience, no 'neutral' mode of encountering events. In that sense, what literature offers, however much one might want to call it plot neutrally conceived, or a neutral description of a character, is something always steeped in a mode of relating to experience and always generative of an attitude.

For Taylor, the claim that self-awareness might be neutral obscures the role that 'constitutive concerns' play in our interpretations, of ourselves, of others, and of the world. Again, it is language that enables these concerns to be *recognised* and maintained as 'constitutive'. They might be only implicitly constitutive until they are recognised through the process of articulation that enables them to be explicitly so. Only then can one understand how they constitute oneself and where they fit in:

> [T]here seem to be very strong reasons in favour of articulacy wherever a constitutive good serves as a moral source. Moral sources empower. To come closer to them, to have a clearer view of them, to come to grasp what they involve, is for those who recognise them to be moved to love or respect them, and through this love/respect to be better enabled to live up to them. And articulation can bring them closer. That is why words can empower;

[73] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge UP, 1985), 45.
[74] Taylor, *Sources*, 34.
[75] Ibid., 49.

why words can at times have tremendous moral force.[76]

He focuses on articulation as a mode of clarifying what one thinks or feels (like Collingwood), or what means most to one, and, more importantly, as a mode of getting 'closer' to the things, including the 'moral sources', that animate one's living. Here a clearer sense of the things that most matter itself depends upon language. The idea that articulation brings these things 'closer' suggests not only that formative things or concepts need to be *worded* in order to be identified, clarified, and interrogated, but that they may also require articulation in order even to be found. That is also to say the acts of identifying, clarifying and interrogating these things, which require language, are themselves processes in enabling these moral sources to be discovered.

It is notable that Taylor is talking specifically about 'humanly central' concepts, and concerns: moral sources and hypergoods. The crucial issue of 'what objects the soul attends to and feeds on', the things that motivate us and that provide calm or a feeling of deep peace, of being 'at home', in Rowan Williams's words, is easily the property of cliché.[77] There is not vocabulary readily available in our everyday language that enables contemplation of what such soul-food might be—as amply illustrated by the fact that 'soul-food' does it no justice. Understanding what feeds one's soul is an act of self-knowledge, an act bound up with using words. Like Collingwood and Leavis, Taylor is convinced of the importance of language's role in *self*-exploration, and not just exploration in general. It is because the things of deepest meaning for the soul are of such importance to human selfhood that articulation is necessary. Being self-aware in Taylor's terminology is a directed act of bringing into awareness one's unuttered, implicit suppositions, which become recognised, and powerful—genuinely constitutive—through articulation. The 'end of self-exploration', in this conception, 'is not disengaged control but engagement, coming to terms with what we really are'.[78] The ever-ongoing process of coming-to-know ourselves has, in order to be in any measure successful, also to be an examination of those 'objects', an exploration of what is most significant to us. Only knowing these and knowing ourselves helps us to live better: more openly, more fully.

[76] Ibid., 96.
[77] Ibid., 124; Rowan Williams, *Christ on Trial* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 83–91.
[78] Taylor, *Sources*, 344.

If literature, as Chapter I argued, is always offering a mode of relating to experience, if it is enabling an encounter with a fresh mode of engaging with the world, then it is also always providing new information in this task of self-exploration, some of which will be more provocative, more fruitful, than others. The strength and persuasiveness of the mode of relating to experience will depend on the power of the language: on how good a particular text is at making its mode of reality felt. Good writing is that in which the words enable a meaning that could otherwise not be found.

For Taylor, the objects the soul feeds on can be phenomena in which one is already invested, or in which one decides to invest; in both circumstances, the objects remain receptive to contemplation. The role played by knowing through language what they are, he emphasises, is deeply important: as with Collingwood's 'presuppositions', linguistic attentiveness to what the things are that mean most to us, and to how they are constitutive, leads to a different kind of understanding of what kind of person one is and a different sense of responsibility in the agency that one has in determining that. Our 'conceptions of moral sources are bound up with the kind of narrative structures in which we make sense of our lives'.[79] Not only, then, is language what enables a knowledge of these moral sources in all their fine particularity; the kind of language one uses is shaped by one's moral sources and sense of self as much as it also shapes these things.

Understanding one's 'soul-food' is as much to do with the *kind* of language used as with articulation. Certain 'humanly central' aspects of life can only be got at in language that resists the one-dimensional communicative simplicity of propositional disengaged statements. There is no form or structure that such language might take: nor even certain structural or technical elements that one might expect it to include, because in order for language genuinely to be generative, 'technique' in Leavis's sense is necessary: it is the only thing that can enable 'the whole body of the words […] to be used'. There has been a lot of attention to metaphor in literature, but as Terence Cave rightly points out, metaphor has become a 'token of value' in discussion of literary technique, assumed automatically to denote artistic insight.[80] Metaphors belong to everyday language, and research has shown that metaphors create emotional response most readily when they are common,

[79] Ibid., 351.
[80] Cave, *Thinking With Literature*, 85.

even clichéd, metaphors. Further, it is likely that the more complex uses of metaphor—those more characteristic of literature, which aim to avoid cliché—in fact inhibit comprehension and emotional response, acting initially as a barrier to understanding.[81] Propositional language is likely to make just as much use of metaphor as literature, in other words, and to more immediate effect. Language that enables recognition of the humanly central aspects of life is not necessarily figurative, nor even literary; the point, rather, is the mode of envisioning life it grapples with or suggests, and whether that enables access to a deeper level of relation to experience.

Taylor is profoundly interested in the question of the depth of life enabled by language. He is concerned with how we make sense of our lives, to ourselves, but also to one another, particularly in the political language of the public sphere, in which language can confer or withhold social and public recognition of the things that mean most to one. Just as Leavis thought that one must reclaim from the economists the use of the phrase 'standard of living', Taylor's purpose in arguing for a 'subtler' concept of publicly pertinent language is so that it include the full range of human experience and recognise the full range of human goods.[82] This is one reason for his stress on constitutive concerns and the things that mean most to us. He wishes for these things to be known, not just in internal discernment, personal conversation or in literary art or religious sermons, but in the language of public discourse. '[A]rticulation is a necessary condition of adhesion; without it, these goods are not even options'; they exist and persevere 'through *some* articulation'. In a claim reminiscent of Arnold's idea of criticism as a means of confronting the 'best that is known and thought', Taylor declares that the existence of universal rights of mankind exist only 'because they have been promulgated'.[83] Public language must acknowledge the full range of human goods, or

[81] Francesca M.M. Citron and Adele E. Goldberg, 'Metaphorical Sentences Are More Emotionally Engaging Than Their Literal Counterparts', *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 26, no. 11 (2014): 2585–95.
[82] To offer four examples: In 'What's Wrong with Criticism?' (1930), Leavis discusses the 'pervasive influence' 'a literary tradition' might have on 'feeling, thought and standards of living', further remarking 'it is time we challenged the current use of this phrase'. In 'The Literary Mind' (1932) he returns to the same theme, this time more explicitly: 'But sociology and economics, if they are to be sciences, can give no adequate answer to the questions that are waived by that phrase, "the standard of living", as the economists use it'. *FC*, 72; 63. In *EU*, he speaks of literary tradition 'as a pervasive influence upon feeling, though and standards of living (it's time we challenged the economist's use of this phrase)' (119). See too *ELTU* 177: 'neither a "rising standard of living", nor equality, nor both together, will do when accepted as defining the sufficient preoccupations and aims of thought and effort'.
[83] All Taylor, *Sources*, 91. See Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1865), 17.

they will not exist as publicly pertinent.

The argument foreshadows one made by Robinson in her 2008 Terry lectures on 'the exclusion of the felt life of the mind' from contemporary public modes of speaking.[84] Robinson voices fears that a 'systematically reductionist conceptual vocabulary', that of positivism, has overwhelmed public discourse, resulting in a 'truncated model of human being'.[85] Leavis argued similarly that '[o]ur problems cannot be solved without reference to the ends of life, without decisions as to what kind of life is desirable, and it is an elementary fallacy to suppose that such decisions can be left to Science'.[86] Leavis's target is dated, but the point of his argument—a larger question about life 'ends' needs to be asked in order for human goods to be discerned—remains timely and relevant. Taylor disputes the claim to objectivity implicit in what Thomas Nagel called 'a view from nowhere', arguing that it contributes to a more general disregarding of the experience of what it is like to be an agent.[87] Making sense of our lives means ensuring that the 'terms we select [make] sense across the whole range of both explanatory and life uses. The terms indispensable for the latter are part of the story that makes best sense of us, unless and until we can replace them with more clairvoyant substitutes'.[88] Taylor's argument interestingly fits in with recent research in cognitive science, which suggests that memory and language 'share a common neural mechanism', so that the way we represent our past selves in the present is likely also to be more bound up with language than has previously been recognised.[89]

These arguments are suggestive for literature. If it remains at a surface level of experience, never engaging with the more difficult and intricate aspects of the reality of consciousness, the kind of relation to experience it provides itself remains superficial. *Middlemarch* has struck numerous readers over centuries because of the subtle complexities of motives, desires, ambitions, fears, and self-deceptions, at play in the experience of the narrative. George Eliot does this in a way that

[84] Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011), 35.
[85] Ibid., xiii; xiv.
[86] *FC*, 63.
[87] Taylor, *Sources*, 130. See Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989).
[88] Taylor, *Sources*, 57–58.
[89] Natalie V. Covington and Melissa C. Duff, 'Expanding the Language Network: Direct Contributions from the Hippocampus', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 12 (1 December 2016): 869–70.

'produces absorption', in Michaela Bronstein's scheme of reading, but it is also the absorption that enables such subtleties to have their power in terms of content.[90] The text prompts a way of thinking about the reality of one's own mind, and the minds of others, in ways that one may not previously have considered. What Simon Blackburn says about Leavis's 'Reality and Sincerity' applies also to *Middlemarch*: 'Apart from anything else, such as an increased alertness to dramatic posturing or emotional debauchery, we have surely learned something about sincerity, the tightrope it walks upon, and the amount of work it takes to achieve it and maintain it […] It is in short an increase in moral understanding'.[91]

Although Taylor's argument is about terminology, it also applies—like Robinson's remark about the failure of static language to refer to 'great statements about reality'—to the form language takes. Taylor describes Montaigne as seeking 'not to find an intellectual order by which things in general can be surveyed, but rather to find the modes of expression which will allow the particular not to be overlooked'. The idea that 'modes of expression' can enable engagement with reality in a different way is precisely what this thesis is arguing. While Taylor glosses the phrase as Montaigne desiring 'a deeper engagement in our particularity', it is not so much literature's ability to speak of something 'particular' as its capacity to enable a differing mode of relating to reality, whether for writer or reader, that offers a fruitful way of conceptualising literature's relevance to the human world—something connected with, but far more than, particularity.[92] In *The Language Animal* Taylor writes excellently that metaphor

> can yield insights, make features of the situation come to light. This potential is trivialized in the talk of 'aspects of things we did not notice before' which we are prompted to 'notice', and especially when what we are prompted to is mostly not a recognition of 'truth or fact'. The idea seems to be that 'aspects of things' are lying around, ready to be noticed, and metaphors trigger this noticing. There seems no recognition that they can create a perspective in which things show up that wouldn't otherwise.

This goes for the full array of linguistic features other than metaphor, including more evidently formal aspects such as rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, repetition, echo, incomplete clauses, lengthy or

[90] Michaela Bronstein, 'How Not to Re-Read Novels: The Critical Value of First Reading', *Journal of Modern Literature* 39, no. 3 (21 September 2016): 78.
[91] Simon Blackburn, 'Some Remarks about Value as a Work of Literature', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 1 (1 January 2010): 86.
[92] Taylor, *Sources*, 182.

fragmented sentences, syntactical play, etc. These things can 'create a perspective in which things show up', as Taylor says; they can also generate impressions of modes of being that likewise would otherwise not exist. *The Language Animal* is about how 'possessing language enables us to relate to things in new ways, for example as loci of features, and to have new emotions, goals, relationships, as well as being responsive to issues of strong value. We might say: language transforms our world, using this last word in a clearly Heidegger-derived sense'.[93] Taylor argues that narratives, thanks to their embedded contextual meanings, create a richness in linguistic meaning that enables the enrichment of concepts. For him such narratives include much that is not literary: stories we tell ourselves, metaphorical phrases, identity categories and other shifts in language that prompt 'diachronic gestalts'.[94] Although he is adamant that novels have a role to play in such prompting, he treats them as 'nonassertoric presentations', which 'don't describe what they disclose'.[95] He draws the Wittgensteinian opposition between showing and telling, which I will confront in section iv. Novels are not just 'portrayals', offering stories of lives that 'only mak[e] sense against a deeper background'.[96] They are more active than that notably 'static' description suggests. Before suggesting how, I would like to turn to Bernard Harrison, who also claims that language is constitutive, and whose argument is explicitly to do with literature.

The constitutive role for language that Harrison perceives is fundamentally to do with the human practices that have developed over centuries of thought and refinement. For him, meaning 'is determined internally to language as a function of the roles assigned to linguistic expressions in the conduct of practices'. These practices have 'particular linguistic expressions that acquire meaning as the expression of the roles specified for them in [the practice's] conduct'.[97] Language has a meaning-making role because it is part of the meaning-making practices that determine the nature of one's engagement with the world. Unlike Taylor's, Harrison's argument is expressly aligned with literature. In line with his project of restoring 'literary humanism' (the subtitle of his

[93] Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2016), 37.
[94] Ibid., 307.
[95] Ibid., 169.
[96] Ibid., 237; 303.
[97] Harrison, *WIFF?*, xviii.

most recent book), he states that literature's value is its contribution to language, which is really contribution to 'practices'. The 'Practice-Based Model' Harrison advocates presents language as inclusive of 'the vast fabric of socially devised and maintained practices that enables a human language to function as a vehicle of truth […] taken together with the roles conventionally assigned to component expressions of the language within those practices'. This sociological account of language has relevance for literature, as Harrison shows. Yet it does not provide a *literary* account of literature's value, nor of what fiction is 'for' (as per Harrison's title). 'The writer's interest', he claims, 'is in the living origins of meaning in the conventions, practices, social arrangements, and associated beliefs that define and give shape to otherwise inchoate human passions and potentialities in the process of continuously creating and maintaining one or another form of human life'.[98] Writers are interested in the world of human existence, but their works are not in general aimed at interrogating conventional practice; more importantly, nor do they do so in practice—whereas literature cannot but provide a mode of relating to experience, regardless of whether or not authors think that is what they are doing. Nor is there space in Harrison's account for literature's difference to non-fiction pieces that themselves desire the interrogation of conventions and practices.

Harrison sees literature as a corrective, something that shows us where we have gone wrong. Literature offers readers 'reasons for doubting the adequacy of some of the humanly devised conceptual schemes employed in formulating the possibilities of understanding that we, at times mistakenly, regard as exclusive and exhaustive'.[99] That is not a capacity of literature much brought out by literary experience. Research suggests that readers read above all for the experience of going into another world, which is notably distinct from desiring the opportunity to assess this one through the depicted imaginary universe.[100] Around 80% of Americans are thought to 'read at least occasionally' for pleasure', with such reading described as enabling one 'to experience other worlds'.[101]

Even if prompting the reader to question 'conceptual schemes' is a by-product rather than an

[98] Ibid., 67; 71.
[99] Ibid., xvii.
[100] 'Research Evidence on Reading for Pleasure' (Department for Education, May 2012).
[101] 'The Rise of E-Reading' (Pew Research Center, 2012); 'Research Evidence on Reading for Pleasure', 8.

aim, Harrison's argument does not apply only to literature. Such scepticism might be prompted by an essay or film or graphic comic. Harrison does focus on words, but in such a way as to dwell on literature as 'showing', never as generating. He treats literature as depiction rather than experience:

> Literary fiction, I propose, works by deploying words against a background of imagined circumstances in such a way as to allow us to focus on the roots in social practice, with all of its inherent ambiguities and stresses, of the meanings through which we are accustomed to represent our world and ourselves.

Harrison rightly says that this proposal 'suggests a mechanism' to help understand how literature fulfils what humanists have long claimed for it, the ability to 'disclos[e] aspects of the human condition', 'considered not solely as determined by nature, but as something made'.[102] But his emphasis on literature as offering for sceptical consideration the meaning-making practices of mankind assents to the scheme of a firm barrier between the 'real' and the imagined world of the fictional, without accounting for the way in which the 'real' might be more subtly inflected by one's modes of relating to it, which are in part constituted by literature. Words *deployed against* an imaginary world asserts that the world and words are separate; their capacity for interaction is restricted to one of evaluation, with literature's aim (or, indeed, incidental result) construed as to revert attention to our world, to the 'roots in social practice'. But the relationship between these realms is porous; literature constantly interacts with the question of what it is to be alive through 'open[ing] up' (in Rowan Williams's words) new modes of seeing, experiencing, judging, thinking. The best literary language inflects how one thinks during the very process of reading; the minute workings of literary language are 'strateg[ies] for manipulating readers'.[103] Harrison's words are self-contained, effecting the world through a connection that a reader creates, rather than generating through careful linguistic construction a mode of relating to experience, one that is also available to a reader. The contrast he sets up between literature and the world, despite the attempt to connect them through language, nevertheless upholds a distinction between 'word and world'.[104]

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[102] Harrison, *WIFF?*, 2.
[103] Bronstein, 'How Not to Re-Read Novels', 78.
[104] Patricia Hanna and Bernard Harrison, *Word and World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

Much of Harrison's argument is concerned with vindicating the '"creative," or "constitutive"' elements of language.[105] Yet, given that for him the constitutive element of language is mediated through the impact it has on the everyday practices that shape societies, language's constitutive faculty is itself construed as instrumental. That is, Harrison does not attend to the roles of content and form in creating concepts so particular that they would not have existed quite as they are without the literary work. His theory of literature as indirectly creative of the world construes literature as operative in a manner antithetic to the functioning of good writing, merely offering something, however extraordinary or subtle, for the reader to consider. Literature's participatory nature, which is not so much that the reader creates the fiction by reading it, as that the work prompts from the reader a particular kind of engagement that enables him/her to experience what the work provides, precludes that emphasis. Literature can indeed be surveyed for its offerings, but it does not operate this way during the experience of reading, as Bronstein shows well: it operates 'not as a static object of analysis, but as a rhetorical tool, managing and controlling a reader's expectations and mental processes'.[106] I am arguing, further, that it is itself a process. Nor is its impact (both cognitive and moral) best accounted for in the survey model.

While Harrison has the worthy Wittgensteinian project of showing that reality is not separate to human practices and language, the argument does not account persuasively for how literature itself works, and thus also for how it relates to reality. He describes Dickens's business as 'solely with words but not "merely" with words', an argument with which I am sympathetic. But his attention to words is in their relation to 'practice'. He accounts for literature's distinct human contribution by talking of literature as neither 'inform[ing]' nor 'decorat[ing]', but reflecting, in the sense of 'promot[ing] reflection'. Literature 'makes us *see*'.[107] The inadequate attention given to the operation of literature, and the experience it enables, means that Harrison's sense of the way literature works is not one that is experientially grounded. The word itself 'see' suggests such neglect, as if literature presents something for the reader's viewing. It is telling that he uses

[105] Harrison, *WIFF?*, 128.
[106] Bronstein, 'How Not to Re-Read Novels', 78. Bronstein's article rightly refers to the way an 'experience of abrupt stylistic and tonal changes […] can have the force of a plot twist' (83).
[107] Harrison, *WIFF?*, 73; 86-87.

'vehicle', again implying the staticity of literary language, the carriage of something else: a usage very far from the emphasis on *process* I am advocating.[108]

'The power of literature is the power to cause us to reflect upon our common practices as those express or betray themselves in our common use of words'; creative literature 'bring[s] the operations and functioning of the human world, both on the social and individual level, before the bar of critical consciousness'.[109] That emphasis leads Harrison to claim that the value to the world of *King Lear* is that it influences our concepts, such as daughterliness.[110] But one's overall impression following *Lear* is not that 'daughterliness' involves a broader gamut of action and response than previously considered. The experience of watching or reading *Lear*, as Harrison would no doubt agree, has a very different value. While he might decide that that value is quite distinct from its value to the world, I would claim that it is the 'literary' value that ensures the play's relevance to the human world. An essay on daughterliness might change my mind about what it means to be a daughter. But *Lear*'s value to 'the human world' emerges from nowhere but its literary value. It influences one's thinking because its language enables a mode of relating to experience that does not exist without the play, and is at its fullest when the play is being read or watched: during the process of encounter with the words of the play. The mode of relating to experience is located in and belongs to *King Lear*. We require a theory of literature's significance to human living that takes that into account.

iii. Language in Literature

The argument so far has taken us far from any notion of words clothing concept in non-literary language, or from sound as echo to sense in literary terms. I turn in this section to literary language, examining some of Leavis's numerous key references to language and building on the concept of

[108] Ibid., 94.
[109] Ibid., 504; 93.
[110] Ibid., 112–16.

language's discerning and constitutive capacities explored with reference to Collingwood and Taylor. I have been suggesting that language has the capacity to form a process, whether of coming to awareness or a more profound discernment, and indeed to play a constitutive role. For Taylor, certain concepts or aspects of concepts are not fully accessible without language. While this section interrogates the relationship between literary language and thought in the light of these aspects of everyday language, it forms the first of three sections arguing that literary language entails a process of experience: for the reader, a temporally mediated encounter with a mode of relating to experience that is precise because it is attitudinal; for the writer, a movement in thought altogether, as the process of using words to communicate a thought itself incites a shift in the precision of the thought, words both leading to the thought that prompted them and enabling something new. Literary language means language in literature; as I said, I do not view it as different in kind from language in general.

Wordsworth's third *Essay Upon Epitaphs* claims that words ought to be an 'incarnation of the thought', a formula that is not far, though not quite there, to the position I am claiming both for Leavis and as necessary to a compelling theory of literature's significance to human modes of relating to experience.[111] Referring to Hopkins in *New Bearings* Leavis writes that 'His words seem to have substance […] Their potencies are correspondingly greater for subtle and delicate communication'.[112] That words might have 'substance' echoes the Coleridgean notion of 'destroy[ing] the old antithesis of *Words* and *Things*', 'elevating, as it were, words into Things, and living Things too'.[113] The way that Leavis writes of words suggests a conception of words as dealing with the world by creating senses of reality; he treats them neither as aesthetic symbols, nor as signs corresponding to something whose existence in its exactitude is already known. Nuttall rightly argues that language is not 'prior to meaning', though nor is meaning prior to language.[114] Leavis's criticism holds the position that words used well are able to bypass that distinction: they have an

[111] W.J.B. Owen, ed., *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, Vol II* (Clarendon Press, 1974). Online at http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198719755.book.1/actrade-9780198719755-book-1
[112] *NB*, 138.
[113] Earl Leslie Griggs, ed., *Collected Letters of S.T. Coleridge*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 625–26.
[114] Nuttall, *A New Mimesis*, 8.

integral relationship with one's sense of meaning. His work emphasises a sense of language as connected to reality, and as constitutive of it in the sense that language enables one to 'feel into' it more thoroughly, with more awareness both of reality and of one's mode of relating to it.

Where language is not used so as to engage with reality, it fails to be language used to its full capacity. Leavis's disappointment in 1933 with Joyce's *Work in Progress* (which became *Finnegans Wake*) is because of the absence of any 'commanding theme, animated by some impulsion from the inner life capable of maintaining a high pressure'. The linguistic experimentation is unsuccessful because it has no 'deeply serious purpose', but serves 'in general an inveterate solemn ingenuity, and it is often the very willing pimp to a poor wit'.[115] Verbal dexterity and experimentation must go with an ability to communicate, whereas *Work* is a 'dead end'. This complaint ought not to be interpreted as anti-Joyce prejudice: what Leavis laments in *Work* is that it does not extend, or even reach, the potential of *Ulysses*, which Leavis had wanted to teach at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1926, resulting in a visit from the police. In *Work* there is no 'organic principle determining, informing, and controlling into a vital whole, the elaborate analogical structure, the extraordinary variety of technical devices, the attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness, for which *Ulysses* is remarkable'.[116] The claim is that *Work* has avoided relevance to the world altogether. For Leavis, linguistic experimentation ought always to make felt the mode of its exploration of reality. He approves of the language of Eliot's poetry because with it 'goes a new freedom of access to experience, and a closeness to its actual texture'.[117] The phrasing implies that without this language, such a mode of access to experience would not exist at all. Language is productive, not of *things*, in the Coleridgean formula, but of modes of relating to them. In *The Living Principle* Leavis would describe language as 'more than a "means of expression": it embodies values, constatations, distinctions, promptings, recognitions of potentiality'.[118] All of these are notably not *things*. They are much closer to attitude. For Leavis, language suggests a sense of attitude and position as much as it does meaning in any more limited sense: it will imply a mode

[115] *FC*, 211–13.
[116] *GT*, 36.
[117] F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, *Lectures in America* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 36.
[118] *LP*, 49.

of thinking, rather than thought. Part of the very value of the language of great literature, indeed, is that it compels a refined understanding of the relation between word and thought (a more appropriate term than 'thing' for our purposes; I use it as Wittgenstein's 'something').

If the best literature can enable one to see that language can kindle new ways of thinking and of seeing, it also has the capacity to provoke new concepts, in the sense of developing one's awareness of modes of experience and of different modes of perception, different kinds of relations to experience. Following a reference to 'the ready-minted concepts of the common currency', Leavis speaks of the 'exploratory-creative use of words upon experience', which 'involv[es] the creation of concepts in a free play for which the lines and configurations of the conventionally charted have no finality'.[119] This point about the creation of concepts comes from Harding, whom Leavis often quotes on 'the creation of concepts'.[120] The idea is that language used newly opens to the imaginative realm spaces not previously possible: spaces that affect how one perceives and interprets the world.

Harding's reference is more specific than Leavis's selective quotation: he writes of 'a linguistic achievement, in this case an achievement in the creation of concepts'. That the creation is 'a linguistic achievement' is important. For the achievement to be linguistic suggests the significance of the role of words in creating. They *make-felt*, so that what is presented is also evoked, enabling an experience of the created meaning not otherwise possible. 'Linguistic achievement' highlights that the concept is not separable from the words. The way of the writing has both semantic and conceptual implications, as Wittgenstein's tussle with 'understanding' suggested, the meaning of a word changing along with one's sense of the concept that it creates. The effects are on thought and language in the closest of ways.

Leavis, too, emphasises the closeness of this relationship. Commenting on 'Four Quartets', he writes: 'To have gone seriously into the poetry is to have had a quickening insight into the nature of thought and language; a discipline of intelligence and sensibility calculated to promote, if any

[119] *CP*, 109. For another usage of 'exploratory-creative', see *VC*, 127.
[120] D.W. Harding, 'T. S. Eliot, 1925-1935', *Scrutiny*, September 1936, 174. See F.R. Leavis, 'Eliot's Later Poetry', *Scrutiny*, June 1942, 60–71; 'Reflections on the Above', *Scrutiny*, June 1943, 261–67; 'Approaches to T.S. Eliot', *Scrutiny*, December 1947, 56–67; 'The Novels as Dramatic Poem (VII)', *Scrutiny*, June 1952, 273–86.

could, real vitality and precision of thought; an education intellectual, emotional and moral'.[121] There is a lot happening in that sentence. 'Gone seriously into' recalls the language of interiority whose importance was emphasised during the discussion of realisation, implying the experiential aspect vital to any meaningful engagement with literature. The 'discipline' of intelligence and sensibility plays off the work done in the earlier texts, which emphasised the importance of both for the reader as well as the writer. Leavis's mention of both 'vitality' and 'precision' echoes 'vigour' and 'rigour', the point being that thought must evoke a sense of liveliness and meticulousness alike, and call for both of these in response. The terms mirror 'intelligence and sensibility'. The final clause emphasises again the 'whole being' with which Eliot's poetry is interacting. Leavis's point is that the poem itself tells one something about how thought and language relate to one another, neither preceding the other, but the thought finding itself in *this* usage of language.

The nature of thought and language is that the two are closely bound: that language can deepen thought by introducing new ideas and concepts, but perhaps more fundamentally, by making-felt new ways of thinking. As Joyce has Stephen say of Shakespeare in *Ulysses*: 'He found in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible'.[122] There is something of such construction of new modes of reality through language in that comment. 'Creating concepts' has everything to do with using language in an exploratory-creative way, involving no preconceived ends of how language will say what it has to say. Malcolm Bradbury states that 'It is the interaction between what is prefigured and the obligations of achieving it that creates a novel'. But he also acknowledges that 'the prefigured novel is not the same as the novel achieved'.[123] Ideas existing before the novel is written evolve as language is used, particularly in the best uses of language, in which language is a mode of examining and excavating those ideas and enabling their development in previously unforeseen, even unimagined, ways.

In the piece in which the reference to 'exploratory-creative' appears ('Johnson and Augustanism', 1946) Leavis quotes with approval Harding's description of Isaac Rosenberg's use

[121] *EU*, 104.
[122] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2009), 204.
[123] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Towards a Poetics of Fiction: 1) An Approach through Structure', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 1, no. 1 (1967): 51.

of language: 'Instead of the emerging idea being racked slightly so as to fit a more familiar approximation of itself, and words found for *that*, Rosenberg let it manipulate words almost from the beginning, often without the controls of logic and intelligibility'.[124] Leavis echoed the point again two decades later, contending that the notion that 'you get your ideas clear, then, with the aid of judgment, you find *les mots justes* for them' was a restrictive perception of how to use language, one 'so positive' that it 'amount[s] to a blank denial of creativity'.[125] The argument finds a parallel in his disparaging of the term 'medium'. He had used 'medium' approvingly in *Revaluation*: 'Through a medium of glassy serenity we see the emotional episode enacted, the medium, with its suggestion both of quiet intentness and of the contemplation of the placed and the familiar, assuring us implicitly of the weighed importance of what is presented'.[126] Yet as used here it is also clear that 'the medium' is neither external, nor incidental, to 'what is presented'. A turning-point regarding his approval of the term comes in the 1944 essay on 'Tragedy and the "Medium"', after which Leavis's use of the term is largely pejorative. In that article Leavis criticises George Santayana for asserting that 'previously definite' ideas find their appropriate 'medium'. 'What Mr Santayana calls "Shakespeare's medium" creates what it conveys; "previously definite" ideas put into a "clear and transparent" medium wouldn't have been definite enough for Shakespeare's purpose'.[127] The ideas (here the link with Collingwood is strong) find their defining—they become what they are—in expression. Blake affirms the same thing: 'Ideas cannot be Given but in their Minutely Appropriate Words'.[128] Like 'vehicle', which Leavis criticises in *The Great Tradition*, 'medium' is a term that leads one away from the conception of a unity of form and content I am advancing.

It is important to understand this idea of word's relation to thought precisely. When he protests against Milton's grand style, Leavis is objecting to words that get in the way of the thought they are there to create. Shakespeare's words, on the other hand, 'matter because they lead down to what

[124] D.W. Harding, *Experience into Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), 99. See *CP*, 206.
[125] *ELTU*, 99.
[126] *R*, 188.
[127] *CP*, 124.
[128] David Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 576.

they came from'.[129] That is a point of extraordinary subtlety, and it is not as convoluted as it sounds. For words to lead to what they came from is what most writers crave; it is too easy to write something that does not succeed in conveying what was meant or whose expression is only ineffective. Shakespeare's prowess, moreover, is in using words that manage to exceed a perfect fit to concept or idea. For words to lead to what they came from is not a process of matching word to thing; that would misrepresent the relationship of language and concept. What Shakespeare's words do is create his ideas, for himself as for his readers, rendering his concepts in their precision as real and as precise for the readers or audience as they are for him. Their reality is not just accessed through, but found in, the words used. The words that 'matter' are words used with such artistry that they generate recognition of a reality otherwise impossible to realise. It is only in expression in words that the thought can be located in its precision even by the creator of the thought-and-words. Writing of Eliot's *Four Quartets* in *The Living Principle*, Leavis refers to 'a thisness achieved by the poet, in which achievement the achieving of definition for himself and the making communicable are one'. The thought does not quite exist until these particular words, which are able also to convey the thought to others, arrive.

In that same essay, Leavis speaks of 'the need to strengthen the human grasp of a significance to be apprehended in life that will inform and guide creativity'.[130] 'Grasp' suggests again the role of language in that strengthening, but it also points to what the grasp is *for*: as well as being a point about language, this is also about what the words 'lead down to'. The implication is that the question of what life is for, the question of 'significance', is part of what literature ought to be grappling with. In the Eastman essay, Leavis wrote of the virtues of good prose as 'a matter of the negative presence of the concrete and particular; it is not merely absence, but exclusion, an exclusion felt as a pressure. Exclusion implies a firm and subtle grasp; to exclude, the writer must have experienced, perceived and realised'.[131] Words are what enable one to strengthen a grasp of significance or meaning, to hold a specific sense of reality in mind. Like Taylor, Leavis focuses on words as a way

[129] *FC*, 208.
[130] *LP*, 56; 68.
[131] *FC*, 51.

of discovering and securing the significance of experience. Both suggest that the strength of the connection between language and thought or experience is in part to do with mode of perception, 'the way things have significance for me', in Taylor's terms: the apprehension of a significance otherwise elusive.

What literature might enable one to apprehend, then, is not something that fits into fact or proposition. Jerome Stolnitz, emphasising literature's 'cognitive triviality', asserts that a 'likely candidat[e]' for what one learns from reading *Pride and Prejudice* is that 'stubborn pride and ignorant prejudice keep attractive people apart'.[132] Such a generalisation would indeed be cognitively trivial, as he says, but that is not the novel's 'cognitive yield', to use Lamarque's phrase.[133] Stolnitz seeks a propositional value that can be applied to all situations and circumstances. Literature's cognitive significance is of a different kind, one that depends upon 'these words in these positions', and cannot be dissociated from them. The 'realized presence' of a text need not be—is very unlikely to be—anything *graspable* in the usual sense of the word.[134] It is something more elusive, specific to words particularly used and likely to disappear—certain to be modified—should the words be altered: a voice or mood that communicates an impression of reality, whose significance is felt. Following his reference to the human 'grasp' of significance Leavis writes 'The English language in the full sense is alive, or becomes for the creative writer alive, with hints, apprehensions, and intuitions'.[135] None of these is graspable in any tangible manner: only words can manage to create them. Despite their ineffability, they are the attitudinal aspects that decide meaning; without them, no impression of reality can be generated. Leavis insists on the meaning-bearing function of such aspects of understanding and communication, vividly different from the propositional though they are: 'Modern English in that sense [where it has been 'purge[d]' of the 'unmodern and strange'] represents drastic impoverishment; the assumptions implicit in it eliminate from thought, and from the valuations and tested judgments that play so essential a part in thought,

[132] Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Cognitive Triviality of Art', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 32, no. 3 (1 July 1992): 193.
[133] Peter Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2014), 160.
[134] *R*, 197.
[135] *LP*, 68.

very important elements of human experience […]'.[136] Neglect of the role language plays in creating meaning means seeking to find accepted meanings that are already conceivable, already familiar, to one's mode of thinking (and indeed one's mode of using language). The idea that meaning must fit into a proposition means two important aspects of language are neglected: the attitude it generates and the way it functions as process. That, in turn, means there are areas of human significance—Taylor's soul-food—that are 'purge[d]' from everyday language and less available for experience. The loss to speech is a loss to perception and conception.

Rowan Williams has argued, more explicitly than Leavis, that language can 'open up' realms of imagining not otherwise available.[137] For Williams, this is a duty of all language, literature especially. He writes of the dangers of 'dehumanizing mockery or glib consolations' in language, the adjectives characterising the way language has a genuine and impactful effect on reality. 'Dehumanizing' functions as adjective and verb together, for dehumanising mockery dehumanises. Glib consolations fail to console. The way language is used prompts the realest of effects. Williams associates a change in language with a change in personhood altogether. '[W]hat if conversion meant not just taking on a new vocabulary and new ideas but a new style of talking?' Note that a change in content-properties only (vocabulary and ideas) would not be sufficient; the true mark of a change is one of a property of form ('style'). Only that kind of change would betray the change in attitude that marks a genuine shift, a genuine movement. The attitudinal change itself constitutes the real transformation in perception of meaning, and so in mode of conception.

Williams argues that one must always try to be 'looking or listening here for speech that will affirm and open the way to life, for speech that can be playful and not just useful, for words that disturb and change us not because they threaten but because they "fit" a reality we are just beginning to discern'.[138] He suggests that the connection between language and reality is so close that if language is altered, the kind of reality one is 'just beginning to discern' may be lost. The idea is that part of the process of discerning a new reality takes place through attention to language and usage

[136] Ibid., 67.
[137] Williams, *Grace*, 26.
[138] Williams, *Silence*, 70–71.

of 'open[ing]' modes of speech—that a new relationship to reality might be enabled through a new usage of language. For Williams, this 'new style' of language is found most commonly in scripture and creative literature, particularly poetry. In his Clark lectures on aesthetics, forty years after Leavis's, he quotes Maritain's assertion that 'Poetry is ontology', glossing the French philosopher as saying that poetry 'has to do with our knowledge of being itself'.[139] Art 'is inescapably a claim about reality'; it 'set[s] out to change the world', by 'chang[ing] it into itself'.[140] That enigmatic-sounding statement is suggesting that art generates a sense of what the world is like that continues to influence how one thinks about the world and about experience even when the art is no longer present. In literary art, this is achieved through language that enables 'the world' to confront a possibly entirely unknown world-view. Art does not aim

> at the stimulating of particular felt response: it speaks to intelligence, inviting intelligence to recognize its truth. It demands—in an extended but still exact sense—contemplation, the intellect being shaped by the impress of truth in such a way that the impress of truth on the artistic mind or imagination is continued through the work (but *only* through the work, not through an idea that can be abstracted from the work or through the artist's gloss on their own production). And in all these ways, the work not only challenges appearances; it challenges pre-existing assumptions about knowledge itself. It makes claims about being but also about how being is adequately known.[141]

Williams's notable care in emphasising the essential role of the work itself in prompting contemplation and enabling cognitive experience highlights the fact that abstractions of the work's meaning, like paraphrases of its content, end by forfeiting meaning, because they overlook form, which is where meaning in its specificity is found.[142] Such abstractions disregard attitude, and therefore subtler meanings. Williams quotes Stephen Spender's well-known account of T.S. Eliot's response to being asked about the meaning of a line in *Ash Wednesday*—Eliot repeated the line. Williams writes 'The signification of the words is neither conceptual nor representational; it is the positing of a world in which these words "catch" and establish certain relations or resonances'. The words themselves create the attitudinal and atmospheric context that can recognise their importance. Again following Maritain, Williams writes that 'ordinary realism' in art 'fail[s] radically in the

[139] See also Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), 91.
[140] All Williams, *Grace*, 16–17.
[141] Ibid., 22.
[142] On contemplation and knowledge, see Emily Holman, 'Contemplation as a Mode of Knowing: Leavis and Literary Analysis', *Poetica* 85, 53-74, Spring 2016.

artistic task, which is to open up knowledge otherwise unavailable'. (The reference to 'realism' is not the literary genre; by 'ordinary realism', Williams is referring to the representation or reproduction of things, 'in a way that takes for granted where [the world's] boundary lines are drawn by our ordinary conceptual mapping'.) The idea that it is not just art's role, but its essence, to 'open up' beyond the 'boundary lines' suggests that art has the most intimate of relations with the way we perceive and conceive of the world. Art, if it is art, should be touching one's modes of thinking and of feeling, as well as prompting unimagined, uninhabited attitudes towards experience.

Speaking explicitly of poetry (at times he talks of 'art' in general), Williams describes its ability 'to bring out relations and dimensions that ordinary rational naming and analysing fail to represent'.[143] Literary language can make suggestions that in ordinary reality, the reality we live daily as ordinary, may not be perceived. The breaking of ordinary habits is something that literary language can accomplish, as Shklovsky recognised. But Williams is going further than Shklovsky: language can change reality. It can make the stone *stonier*, perhaps—felt more fully than it would usually be, in ways that have a permanent effect on one's way of seeing stones thereafter. Maritain writes that 'things are not only what they are'; they 'give more than they have'.[144] The idea is that a different kind of vision must be enabled in order to allow such giving to take place and to bear fruit. Williams describes Geoffrey Hill's *Tenebrae* as presenting the 'ontology […] of a universe that is inextricably both material and significative, where things matter intensely, but matter in ways that breach boundaries and carry significance beyond what they tangibly are'.[145] Carrying significance beyond something's tangibility is the speciality of literary language, through the attitude it generates and the process of experience it creates. The deepening of reality created by the artist's vision, the mode of seeking s/he prompts in the reader, is what enables things to 'give more than they have'. Such a vision appeals to a full humanness—not to intellect or emotion alone. Williams writes of art as 'a deliberate attempt to display the reality that the intelligence as a whole encounters'.[146] In his own Clark lectures, Leavis describes 'True intelligence' as 'the agent of the

[143] All Williams, *Grace*, 26–31.
[144] Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 127.
[145] Williams, *Grace*, 75.
[146] Ibid., 33.

whole being' and speaks admiringly of 'a wrestling with experience that engages the whole being', including the physical.[147] In his late works, Leavis became ever more urgent about the necessity of a language that recognises, and so contributes to, human fullness; literary language is that which can enable the 'achieving of an organic wholeness'.[148]

iv. Enactment, Embodiment and Enabling

Before moving on to look at other ways in which literature might 'give more' than it has, I want to argue against two common verbs we use to describe what literary language does, Leavis's term 'enactment', and the more prevalent 'embodiment'. Neither of these have space for the aspect of 'process' in literary language this chapter advances. Instead I advocate the term 'enable', which I have used several times in my argument.

Williams is explicit about the importance of form in creating meaning: 'Art shows that form is utterly bound to matter, yet also that this or that matter does not exhaust the possibilities of form'.[149] A poet 'is exhibiting the human as such, not in what is written but in the act of writing like this'.[150] These formulations strain to position the artwork as something particular and generative of something itself particular, suggestive, 'significative' through its specificity. Williams quotes Flannery O'Connor as saying 'The truth creates its own form. Form is necessity in the work of art', a statement that foregrounds Leavis's *thisness* of a work: this, and nothing else.

Williams uses the term 'embodiment' to describe how an artwork relates to a concept. In his Gifford lectures, he defends the word, claiming that it invokes the bodily dimension of experience

[147] *ELTU*, 154; 127.
[148] '[The artist] needs all the resources of the language his growing command of his theme can make spontaneous—can recruit towards the achieving of an organic wholeness: his theme itself is (being inescapably a prompting) an effort to develop, in realizing and presenting it, living continuity. The less he has to ignore or play down in achieving his "heuristic conquest" out of representative human experience, the better'. Leavis goes on to quote a passage from Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the same passage with which he begins the essay, which refers to 'the living intuitive faculty'. *LP*, 68; see also 14-15.
[149] Williams, *Grace*, 61.
[150] Ibid., 75–76.

and of language, which Saussurean language of the arbitrary character of signifiers neglects. Williams is right that language is 'an *embodied* phenomenon, rooted in physical negotiations and transactions, both internal and external'.[151] The word is less useful for capturing what literary language does and how it operates. The kinaesthetic aspect of language justifies language of an embodied experience in reading literature, but not of literature itself embodying a particular idea. Ellen Spolsky has written articles on kinesis and advocated a theory of embodiment for literature; neither article suggests using the term to articulate what literature *does*.[152] For literature to embody meaning, thought or an idea suggests that an idea is well expressed and conveyed in these words. It suggests that an idea is captured in words, that the idea has found the right form. It obscures the role form might have in creating the idea, such that something new is generated through particularities of form. For something to be *embodied in* form is quite different. 'Embodiment' closes, a perfect fit of word to thing, rather than presenting the possibility that ideas and concepts might be opened through expression. The term does not break radically enough with the idea of form as external, even though it speaks of form as body and not just decoration. An idea 'embodied' is still an idea whose body is conceptually, if not physically, separate.

In *Mystery and Manners*, O'Connor defends embodiment as fundamental to an accurate understanding of literature. But she does so through making it identical to an understanding of form and content similar to that I am advocating, and indeed different from the connotations of 'embodied':

> When you can state the theme of a story, when you can separate it from the story itself, then you can be sure the story is not a very good one. The meaning of a story has to be embodied in it, has to be made concrete in it. A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate. When anybody asks what a story is about, the only proper thing is to tell him read the story. The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning, and the purpose of making statements about the meaning of a story is only to help you to experience that meaning more fully.[153]

Like Eliot, O'Connor would send an inquirer to the text itself. She, too, insists that form creates

[151] Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014), 19.
[152] Ellen Spolsky, 'Elaborated Knowledge: Reading Kinesis in Pictures', *Poetics Today* 17, no. 2 (1996): 157–80; Ellen Spolsky, 'Toward a Theory of Embodiment for Literature', *Poetics Today* 24, no. 1 (2003): 127–37.
[153] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), 96.

meaning—that these words in this order express something that could not otherwise be expressed. Her stress on the *thisness* of the literary text has much in common with Leavis's; and where he would speak of meaning being enacted, she uses the language of embodiment. By this, both mean a being 'made concrete'; indeed, both use the opposition between abstraction and the concrete in order to make their point. Terry Eagleton targets these sorts of terms, referring to them as 'the incarnational fallacy':

> On this view, form and content in poetry are entirely at one because the poem's language somehow 'incarnates' its meaning. Whereas everyday language simply points to things, poetic language actually embodies them. There is a theology lurking behind this poetics: just as the Word of God is the Father made flesh, so a poem does not simply talk about things, but in some mysterious way 'becomes' them. […] Words can never attain the status of the Word. Language can intimate truth by drawing attention to its own limits, and thus to what transcends them; or it can yield a negative insight into truth by cancelling itself out; but in a fallen world it cannot capture it in the flesh.[154]

Parts of this are convincing, but by the end Eagleton's lively prose defeats his point. His own language neither draws attention to its limits nor cancels itself out: it makes a claim, in a particular rhetorical tone, and its persuasiveness in part depends on the rhetoric. His simple opposition between language that points and language that 'becomes' is not a justified dichotomy; the spectrum of possible ways in which language can function holds more than either of these extremes. When Eagleton shortly afterwards insists that 'words which "become" what they signify cease to be words at all', rhetoric threatens to take over the argument altogether.[155] Words that function in the way Eagleton seeks to critique—that is, generating meaning through atmosphere and evocation, so that meaning is felt, not represented, shown, stated or demonstrated—do not stop being words; rather, they 'lead down to what they came from'. They direct the reader to the meaning they generate. They neither deflect attention from, nor demand it for, themselves.

Although Eagleton's critique is misplaced, I think 'embodiment' remains an unhelpful term, because of the separation that it perpetuates between form and content, concepts which are already too easily discussed in isolation from one another. It is important that the emphasis lie elsewhere. A word that suggests the relationship between form and content as one in which neither exists as it

[154] Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 59.
[155] Ibid., 60.

is without the other is required. Leavis used the term 'enactment' frequently, but that is more problematic than embodiment. When Leavis uses it, his aim is clear: he wants to capture how 'the verse acts the meaning—not merely says but does—'.[156] His reference to the physicality of language nevertheless fails to capture how literary language operates: it does not present a movement or an idea and then 'enact' it. Again, this suggests a prior 'meaning' of which language then presents its own imitation. Leavis's favoured example is Donne's 'about must, and about must goe', which Iain McGilchrist also quotes in exploring the physicality of language.[157] Such 'action in the verse', Leavis claims, 'together with the attendant effects of movement and intonation in the whole passage, would be quite impossible in the Grand Style: the tyrannical stylization forbids'.[158] But though 'enactment' captures action, it does not appropriately designate the relation of form and content. Howard Felperin has written that Leavis's 'enactive poetics' 'takes the form of a series of practical value-judgements, whereby a poetry of sensuous concreteness […] carries the day against [abstraction]'. Through enactment 'the best poetry recovers for language an emotional and moral integrity with the "real" and "human" world'.[159] This emphasis is rather too exalting; language is not lacking in 'emotional and moral integrity' without enactment. The gap Felperin posits between the world and poetry is also not one I trace in Leavis's criticism, which strains constantly against a convention that conceives them separately, because he conceives of literature as already part of what constitutes experience in living. His notion of literary language is not different in kind from everyday language—only in quality. What he means by enactment is that the words make felt, and it is this making-felt that enriches the possibilities of language, from mere demonstration or illustration, to creation.

Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, using Leavis, speaks of literature as an 'enactment of the ethical'.[160] She takes a Wittgensteinian perspective, emphasising 'the difference between *saying* and *showing*', and claiming that, '[a]s paradoxical as it may seem, literature does not *say* what it wants to transmit;

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[156] *R*, 54.
[157] Ibid., 58. See McGilchrist, *Master*, 180.
[158] *R*, 55.
[159] Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 180–81.
[160] Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, 'Wittgenstein and Leavis: Literature and the Enactment of the Ethical', *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (2016): 240–64.

it creates contexts and situations that allow the important things to *show* themselves'.[161] In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein remarks that philosophy 'will signify what cannot be said, by clearly presenting what can be said' (4.115) and that 'What can be shown, *cannot* be said' (4.1212).[162] The comments are linked with his later claim that 'Propositions can express nothing that is higher' (6.42), as suggested in his letter to Bertrand Russell. 'The main point is the theory of what can be expressed […] by propositions—i.e. by language (and, what comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown; which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy'.[163] Yet while what Wittgenstein was getting at is clear, the term 'showing' is too evident, too obvious, for literature. What is required is suggestion, evocation, the creation of an impression: all aspects of meaning that are not sufficiently emphasised in either embodiment or enactment.

Part of the difficulty with theorising literature's relationship to the ethical is that it suggests more than it says or shows ('gives more than it has'); it enables a particular mode of thinking about an idea or an experience, rather than offering something than can definitively be said to have been *shown*. This is a crucial point for conceptualising how words in literature relate to what they point to or speak of: they create, rather than demonstrate. When Matthew Kieran writes of the idea that there is 'an inherent link between what is represented artistically and moral understanding', *represented* undermines the very idea of inherence.[164] Part of the weakness of the term *enactment* is that it indicates too simplistic a relationship between word and thought, as if it were merely an illustrative one, however compelling or persuasive the illustration might be. Moyal-Sharrock offers the example of Anna Karenina feeling contempt for her husband's ears:

> At Petersburg, as soon as the train stopped and she got out, the first person that attracted her attention was her husband. 'Oh, mercy! why do his ears look like that?' she thought, looking at his frigid and imposing figure, and especially the ears that struck her at the moment as propping up the brim of his round hat. Catching sight of her, he came to meet her, his lips falling into their habitual sarcastic smile, and his big, tired eyes looking straight at her. An unpleasant sensation gripped at her heart when she met his obstinate and weary glance, as though she had

[161] Ibid., 241; 249.
[162] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 30–31.
[163] Cited in G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1959), 161.
[164] Matthew Kieran, 'Art, Imagination, and the Cultivation of Morals', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 4 (1996): 337. See Kieran's introduction in Matthew Kieran, ed., *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

expected to see him different. She was especially struck by the feeling of dissatisfaction with herself that she experienced on meeting him. That feeling was an intimate, familiar feeling, like a consciousness of hypocrisy, which she experienced in her relations with her husband. But hitherto she had not taken note of the feeling, now she was clearly and painfully aware of it.

Of this Moyal-Sharrock writes that the

observation of her husband's ears *is* Anna's nascent realization of her feelings; and no mere statement of this realization could effectively replace this enactment (or, as we may also call it, particularly aptly in this case, *embodiment*). For though the narrator later in the passage begins to flesh out the meaning of the enactment, he merely gives explicitness to a significance that, as Leavis says, 'we have already taken'.[165]

Focusing on 'enactment' leads Moyal-Sharrock to miss the significance of the passage, for the notion that the unanticipated attention to Karenin's ears forms an illustration or embodiment—what Eliot would call the objective correlative—of unpleasant feeling towards her husband is incorrect. The attention to the ears is something that Anna is aware of; it is even given in the direct speech of her thought. It is a conscious identification that she makes, and, further, she is conscious of the reason for it. She often feels hypocritical when she sees him, but this time she is 'clearly and painfully aware' of her hypocrisy and of the reason behind her contempt of his physical appearance. The observation of his ears is another manifestation of that complex nexus of feeling toward him, just as she notes that his smile is sarcastic and his eyes are tired. These physical observations are not simply symptoms of her feeling, hints from Tolstoy for the reader that her feeling has changed, a way of showing us something without stating it. They are part of Anna's feeling that she herself confronts, just as she must also confront her 'hypocrisy'. Nor do the physical observations serve to show us something otherwise unstated. Tolstoy is explicit, doing the very telling that Moyal-Sharrock and Wittgenstein suggest is not literature's strength. But the passage would be very different, and significantly less effective, without the final lines that for Moyal-Sharrock 'merely giv[e] explicitness'. They are important because they generate Anna's own sense of what is happening. She is not struck by her response to Karenin's ears so much as 'the feeling of dissatisfaction with herself' that she feels when they meet, which is in part, but only in part, related to that scorn of his appearance: she has just seen Vronsky. Those lines are more effective in

[165] All Moyal-Sharrock, 'Wittgenstein and Leavis', 251–52.

conveying the new complexity of Anna's mindset, her struggle with her own impulse of feelings towards her husband and her guilt, than the scorn of his ears, which is merely one facet of those feelings. Her awareness of her hypocrisy is a crucial pivot, marking an early point in her ongoing fight with herself, the very fight that forms so much of *Anna Karenina*'s power.

'Enactment', like 'embodiment', misdirects interpretation of how literary language operates, suggesting that there are showings for what would otherwise be stated, as if one is another version of the other, and as if illustration of an idea were sufficient to make it persuasive. Rather, literature works through generating an experience that is attitudinal and tonal; it creates a mood, through working on feeling and thought together (and not one and then the other, as 'enactment' might suggest), so that it creates something that would not otherwise be there. If literature 'allows [the ethical] to emerge through the artistic fabric', it can only do so if it does not have an intact prior conception of what that 'ethical' is, such that the words genuinely create.[166] The semantic possibilities of neither enactment nor embodiment allow for that, and therefore obscure something essential and fundamental about how literary language works. That is also why Goldberg's claim that art 'provides a form in which moral issues can be thought about more adequately because they can be thought about not only in general terms, but also concretely, in the given particulars', goes nowhere near far enough.[167] Art is not only a depiction of a situation that shows 'moral issues' being thought about in very specific and complex ways. My reluctance to use enactment or embodiment is that they lead to these ways of talking—for Goldberg, too, following his old teacher Leavis, speaks of a text 'characterizing the distinctive manner of the life in a way that *enacts* something of that manner'.[168]

Peter Barry takes issue with 'enactment' for another reason. His 1980 essay on 'The Enactment Fallacy' argues against the idea that 'elements of the sound patterning (especially alliteration and assonance, rhyme and rhythm) are directly related to meaning'.[169] In the essay Barry also protests the terms 'embodying' and 'miming', deeming that they, like 'enacting', posit sound as contributing

[166] Ibid., 253.
[167] Goldberg, *Agents*, 173.
[168] Ibid., 105.
[169] Peter Barry, 'The Enactment Fallacy', *Essays in Criticism* XXX, no. 2 (1980): 95.

to meaning; Barry's case is that such a thesis is gratuitous, proof of ingenious interpretation rather than anything else. His argument might have come from Samuel Johnson, who takes mischievous delight in satirising critical ingenuity to great effect with the character of Dick Minim. Minim laments that the following 'wonderful lines upon honour and a bubble have hitherto passed without notice':

> Honour is like the glassy bubble,
> Which costs philosophers such trouble;
> Where, one part crack'd, the whole does fly,
> And wits are crack'd to find out why.
>
> In these verses, says Minim, we have two striking accommodations of the sound to the sense. It is impossible to utter the first two lines emphatically without an act like that which they describe; bubble and trouble causing a momentary inflation of the cheeks by the retention of the breath, which is afterwards forcibly emitted, as in the practice of blowing bubbles. But the greatest excellence is in the third line, which is crack'd in the middle to express a crack, and then shivers into monosyllables. Yet has this diamond lain neglected with common stones, and among the innumerable admirers of Hudibras the observation of this superlative passage has been reserved for the sagacity of Minim.[170]

Barry's assertion that sound and meaning are not causally linked nevertheless misconstrues the way in which the pair are related. The sound of a word inflects its meaning, not because it has *a priori* a property which contributes to that meaning, but because the way that the word sounds is part of our understanding of what it means. Sound is already involved in the interpretation of meaning, just as meaning is involved in the interpretation of sound. Though *snug* and *slug* rhyme, for instance, their quite similar sounds have different effects and create different impressions because they do not have the same associations. They trigger different responses because what one knows, the set of expectations brought to each word, cannot be separated from the words themselves. If *snug* sounds, looks, and feels, cosy, that is because of our knowledge that *snug* has much more to do with warm comfort than a wet invertebrate. Sound is part of meaning precisely because it cannot be separated from meaning. It does not cause meaning, but it does remain relevant to meaning because the two affect and so inflect one another. As Nuttall put it, 'The plangency of the line arises from the ordinary lexical meanings of the words and acquires further meaning from the manner of their

[170] Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson.*, ed. Arthur Murphy and Francis Pearson Walesby, vol. IV, Oxford English Classics (Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825), 329.

arrangement'.[171]

Barry targets Leavis, one of enactment's 'most subtle and cogent users', arguing that words are not actions.[172] The target is somewhat misaligned. Leavis does not think that words commit an action, in the way of J.L. Austin's illocutionary acts. Barry's version of what Leavis sees in Keats' 'And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep/ Steady thy laden head across a brook' is inaccurate. Barry asks 'How can a *pause* enact a *movement*?'[173] Yet, as John Leonard has pointed out, Leavis's claim is not that the pause enacts movement, but that the step across the line-division taken by the reader enacts 'analogically', as Leavis puts it, the movement of the gleaner.[174] This is quite clear in what Leavis says, even as quoted by Barry: 'In the step from the rime-word "keep", across (so to speak) the pause enforced by the line-division, to "Steady" the balancing movement of the gleaner is enacted'.[175] Here is Leavis commenting on the passage in his 1949 essay on Eliot and Milton: 'As we pass across the line-division from "keep" to "steady" we are made to enact, analogically, the upright steadying carriage of the gleaner as she steps from one step to the next'.[176] It is not the line-division, but the reader, prompted by the combined effect of line-break, the meanings of 'keep' and 'steady', and the uncertainty of sense that the line-break is felt to heighten, who enacts: the poem works semantically and syntactically, as well as visually, to create an effect. Barry claims the pause is only 'to the eye', an argument that verges on eradicating one thing that makes poetry poetry and not prose: line-breaks. He also calls the line 'vigorously run-on'. My view is that uncertainty hovers about the line-break, as either the 'p' sound is prolonged until it becomes the 'st' of 'steady'; or, a pause between the two breaks the sound clearly. There is a felt slow balance of sense over 'keep/ Steady', which can hardly be described as 'run-on'. Attention not to sound alone, but to sound and sense combined, directs meaning. Still, however one reads the line, it is worth noting that Barry himself makes an 'enacting' argument, in attributing the quality of vigour to enjambment.

Leavis's view is not as crude as sound enacting sense. He writes of Edward Thomas's poems

[171] Nuttall, *A New Mimesis*, 41.
[172] Barry, 'The Enactment Fallacy', 102.
[173] Ibid., 103.
[174] John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 229.
[175] *R*, 245–46.
[176] *CP*, 17.

that they 'seem to happen' (whereas Edmund Blunden's 'are frankly "composed"').[177] For Leavis, 'enacting' seems to refer to a felt unfolding of experience, the words generating a spontaneous sense of whatever they relate to, something not done through sound, rhythm, or semantic definition alone, but by the effect of each as they combine to create meaning. Words prompt a process. Barry's version of enactment perpetuates an artificial separation: 'Indeed, if rhythm could even suggest such things, let alone enact them, poets would hardly need to use the mere meanings of words, and all poems would tend to become sound poems or tone poems'.[178] What would it mean for a poet to use the 'mere meaning' of a word? What would be a 'sound poem'? As we know, Leavis opposed Pound's division of poetic meaning into three parts in 1932. Meaning, not being apart from sound or image or context or a term's semantic halo or any number of appropriate associations, cannot be isolated. For Pope to have said that 'sound must seem an echo to the sense' was misleading, not only because it subordinates sound, but also because it divides the two from one another.[179] Pope gives sound a mimetic, and not a constitutive, role. Barry's division falls into the same trap.

'Enactment' has come to suggest something secondary or subsidiary—an enactment *of* an already established sense—to the extent that the term is not especially useful in contemporary criticism. The term 'enable' has a more active quality. Its noun form ('enabling') is also a present participle and thus remains rooted in the *doingness* of a verb. It also suggests the formative contribution of formal properties in creating sense. Words 'enable' a sense of something that otherwise might not have existed: they generate, they create, rather than embodying an established concept or enacting an already existing sense. *Enabling* foregrounds the crucially generative aspect of the way words work. It focuses on the way words 'give more than they have', while also emphasising the effect in the mind of an author or reader, for whom a different mode of relating to experience might be 'enabled' by a particular mode of using words. Only 'enabling' has space for words 'lead[ing] down to what they came from'. It also allows that literature unfolds in time, enabling a process of thinking for reader and writer, with language occupying its full functionality.

[177] *NB*, 55.
[178] Barry, 'The Enactment Fallacy', 98.
[179] 'An Essay on Criticism', 17-39, Alexander Pope, *The Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 29.

In *New Bearings*, Leavis, quoting from *Ash-Wednesday*, writes: '"word", "Word", "world", "whirled", suggests both the agonized effort to seize the unseizable, and the elusive equivocations of the thing grasped'.[180] There is an ingenuity in Leavis's criticism here, responding to the ingenuity in Eliot's poetry; he celebrates Eliot for so well grasping, through his evocation, the way in which something can be ungraspable. Eliot's repetition and echoing create a sense of ongoing attempt and near success as well as inability to capture. The effect derives from the context, the definitions of the words, and the way in which they call to and correspond with one another. They create a process of thinking, available to the reader, felt by the writer. This is not enactment in Barry's sense, and to accuse Leavis of a theory of enactment of the simple kind Barry targets is to misread his work. Leavis is seeking to evoke something intensely physical, certainly as physical as that which proponents of 'embodiment' are keen to capture. He describes Hopkins's 'words and phrases [as] actions as well as sounds, ideas and images, and [they] must, as I have said, be read with the body as well as with the eye: that is the force of his concern to be read aloud'. Hopkins's technical innovations enable 'the association of inner, spiritual, emotional stress with physical reverberations, nervous and muscular tensions'. Thus the changes to *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo* that Sturge Moore had proposed discard 'not merely a certain amount of music, but with the emotional crescendo and diminuendo, the plangent rise and fall, all the action and substance of the verse'. As I said, the term 'substance' denotes a central property of literary language: word as prompting reality in some way, not as symbol. Changing 'music' alters meaning not because the music means the meaning (Barry's mistake) but because it is part of the generation of meaning. '[M]elody, harmony, counterpoint' are 'capable of use for expressing complexities of feeling, the movement of consciousness, difficult and urgent states of mind'.[181]

Hopkins, for Leavis, is the best innovator of the language after Shakespeare. What Leavis refers to as a Shakespearean use of English is an ability to create with words something until then unknown, an ability *to enable*. That ability is not captured by the idea that words show rather than tell, or embody or enact a property, concept or atmosphere. They enable something new—

[180] *NB*, 97.
[181] All Ibid., 128–31.

something that is also very hard to evoke in rewriting.

> We are not merely told that evening "strains", we feel evening straining, to become night, enveloping everything, in the movement, the progression of alliteration, assonance and rhyme. This progression is associated with, and hardly distinguishable from, the development of meaning in the sequence of adjectives: evening is first sweetly solemn, serene, etherealizing and harmonizing, then becomes less tranquillizing and more awful, and finally ends in the blackness of night.[182]

That 'we feel evening straining' emphasises the experiential and temporal aspect of literary language. The experience of reading is of a developing, a moving. Bronstein has highlighted the 'naïve sequentiality' of first-time reading, an adjective not quite apt, but which captures nevertheless what she also terms the 'breathless experience' of reading a piece for the first time.[183] That experience, however, applies to most engaged readings, whether first or not: experience unfolds, as if spontaneously. The relationship between spontaneous experience and the poem or work is better captured by 'enabling' than 'embodying' or 'enacting'. The words enable an experience in part, in this case, through their functioning kinaesthetically, a function that Leavis is careful to note derives from use of adjectives as much as of alliteration or assonance. As ever, he emphasises that meaning is not merely informed by or reflected in, but created through, form: 'the heavy stress that [Hopkins's] rhythm enables him to put upon "our" brings home the poignant realization'.[184] What Terence Cave has called a 'richly linguistic corporality' is at work in such uses of language.[185] More so, though, the words exceed classification solely as kinesic triggers.[186] They are able to communicate more than something that works on one level alone—intellect or emotion or physical response or imagination. Thus the 'potencies' of Hopkins's words, which are born of the way he uses them—to say which is to refer not only to technique but to the approach to the function of words realised in his technique—'are correspondingly greater for subtle and delicate communication'.[187]

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[182] Ibid., 136.
[183] Bronstein, 'How Not to Re-Read Novels', 78; 84.
[184] *NB*, 137.
[185] Terence Cave, 'The Style of Gestures', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 29 March 2013.
[186] 'The adjective "kinetic" refers to aspects of movements that may be objectively measured—for example, according to the laws of physics […] In contrast, "kinesis" pertains to interpersonal gestures and expressive movements. Most importantly, it implies the possibility of intersubjectivity'. Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2012), 9.
[187] *NB*, 138.

A ‘Shakespearean’ use of language, one in which language enables, and does not just enact, embody, represent, or symbolise, is one that can generate a particularity nothing else could and make it felt in the process of reading the words. During his discussion of Hopkins, Leavis says that the pattern ‘issues out of and expresses emotional intensities’.[188] The point is that both of these terms are necessary. ‘Expression’ alone suggests that the thought, idea or sensation exists already and needs just a voice; but ‘issues out of’ is a reminder of the constitutive role of language. When Barry, parodying the tenets of ‘liberal humanism’, says, ‘Hence, ideas as such are worthless in literature until given the concrete embodiment of “enactment”’, he falls prey to a common misunderstanding of literature’s functioning.[189] The parody misses the mark. Great literature does not shadow ideas. His separation of idea from expression misinterprets what ‘enact’ and ‘embody’ are supposed to get at: the way that literary language enables its ideas, incites them into being, the words leading down to what they came from.

v. ‘Style is a thinking out into language’

Maritain’s idea that things ‘give more than they have’ captures well the capacity of literary language to enable. It indicates literature’s suggestive quality, its capacity to make meaning beyond the definitions of words, and to work through such elusive things as allusion, echo, and tone—all of which generate the attitude I am arguing is profoundly important in the creation of meaning. Literature’s suggestive quality also makes itself felt in more concrete features of form: syntax or sentence-length, for instance. Before further examining literary language as a process of precise thinking, let’s consider an example of the role these structural features might play.

Suggestion is powerful in literary creations of meaning, in part because generic conventions mean that suggestion is accepted as a mode of constituting meaning in a way that it is less likely to be outside of literature. John Gibson divides ‘linguistic meaning’ from ‘critical meaning’, arguing

[188] Ibid., 132.
[189] Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

that the latter is not something that emerges from what 'the text actually says'. Gibson aims to highlight the distinction between propositional 'meaning' and meaning that comes from something other than the definition of the words. But the laudable intention distracts attention from the fact that 'critical meaning', the meaning that is not obviously semantic or definitional, nevertheless derives from what the text says, which includes how it is said. The idea that the proposition differs from the other aspects of the text only widens the gap between form and content. It vindicates the propositional alone as a mode of enquiry. But there is no neutral 'what is said' that is then interpreted differently according to other considerations. What is said is already said in a particular way, with a particular attitude. Gibson's idea that the semantic properties of the words do not add up to what it is that the text comes to mean for us is evidently right, and yet his conclusion—'and so consideration of [the text's] language will hardly seem apt for helping us to understand what prompts critical interpretation'—will not aid in textual and interpretative analysis.[190] The text's language is all that the critic has to go on, and what creates what the text comes to mean for us is its language.

Take the description in *Sons and Lovers* of Morel's reaction to his wife's death:

> The miner sat still for a moment, then began his dinner. It was as if nothing had happened. He ate his turnips in silence. Afterwards he washed and went upstairs to dress. The door of her room was shut.
> 'Have you seen her?' Annie asked of him when he came down.
> 'No,' he said.
> In a little while he went out.[191]

The propositional meaning of these sentences, in accumulation or not, is not what creates the significance of the passage. As Heidegger put it, 'The point is not to listen to a series of propositions, but rather to follow the movement of showing'.[192] 'The door of her room was shut', for instance, tells both that Mrs Morel's door is shut, and that her husband noted it was: that he went to her door or looked to notice that it was closed. It might be that the size of the house means he cannot but note it, but this would not account for its presence in the narrative, not to mention the prominence

[190] Gibson, *Weave*, 123–36.
[191] D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, ed. Howard J. Booth and Keith Carabine (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), 347.
[192] Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, ed. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 2.

of its position at the end of the paragraph. Morel notices the closed door, a fact that renders his ostensible purpose in going upstairs 'to dress' more complicated. It is a half-truth. The reason attributed to his movement might be an assumption made by his adult daughter, the watching Annie, or it might be the mental identification Morel himself makes with the action: a mental note—this is why I go upstairs, and for no other reason—that enables him to make the movement, when in fact what he is thinking of when climbing the stairs is the possibility of seeing his dead wife. These possibilities affect the other statements, whose origin, and therefore tone, is ambiguous. The narrative voice is unclear. Morel's eating his supper may be a pose, whether for himself or for his grown-up children. The 'as if nothing had happened' might refer to the impression Morel wished to give, to his mental state according to the narrator, or to silent assumptions made by his observers.

These possibilities derive from particularities that are not propositional, as Gibson notes. But they still derive from language, and from concretely specific features, sentence-length and use of pronouns. Only close attention to the language will allow them to emerge. The 'language must speak for itself', in Wittgenstein's words.[193] The short, brief, sentences suggest a terseness and abruptness in Morel's own bearing. It is worth pointing out that this is not a quality belonging to all short, brief, sentences (that would be the enactment/incarnational fallacy): it emerges because the short sentences structure words in which abruptness features. The content and the form make meaning together. The unclear narrative voice also plays its part. The description of Morel as 'the miner' distances the reader from the meanderings of his mind, presenting instead an image of a man, who is quite separate from the voice of the narrative, sitting and eating supper. Such distance renders the more startling the move to what seems to be a narrative of his mental observation: seeing the closed door. Likewise, the unidentified 'her', telling us where Morel's mind is concentrated, reinforces identification with the miner. So too does the 'of him' in the narrating of Annie's question. To ask 'of' someone suggests a request that is personal, that comes from a need and applies a pressure on the person being asked. To ask 'of' is to ask a favour; and we tend not to think of ourselves asking *of* others, but rather of others asking things *of* ourselves. Is this Morel's voice

[193] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 40.

and his attitude to Annie's act of speaking? As for Annie's question itself, it seems to be an asking in order to reach out, whether for herself or for him; she asks so as to speak, to make contact. Morel, after all, had eaten 'in silence'. His response is short and tantalisingly undescribed. The understated report of his answer ('he said') reinforces the sense of the mood in the house already created: quiet, tense, incommunicative. The reference to his exit leaves an enormous amount unsaid and unknown, particularly as one imagines a silent, bereft Annie left alone. The spare, muted narrative is what enables such dimensions of meaning, as the passage creates an impression of the characters through the structure of the sentences and paragraphs.

This is just one instance of the significance of formal features like word-order and paragraph breaks. Elements of form such as rhythm, syntax, punctuation, sentence-length, and momentum, as well as paragraphing, play a vital role not only in the construction of meaning, but in literature as a process of thinking. In his Clark lectures, Leavis is particularly struck by the generative power of such formal elements in *Four Quartets.* He writes of Eliot's

> power of giving concrete definition to (that is, of seizing and evoking in words and rhythms) feelings and apprehensions—the focal core with the elusive aura—that have seemed to him peculiarly significant elements in his most private experience. But what goes with this power in the fully mature Eliot is the power of searching and sustained thought; thought that is not a matter of reflecting poetically (to use Eliot's own dismissing phrase), but thought that requires for its definition and conduct means and procedures that are essentially poetic.

Four Quartets 'is a feat of disciplined thinking', 'bringing to expression in language what language doesn't readily lend itself to'; 'Eliot is saying something that couldn't have been said in a way that would satisfy a logician'. Of 'Ash-Wednesday' Leavis says that 'The propositional form of what are offered us as propositions is essential to the poetry, to the "constructive" organization, but, as the absence of punctuation implicitly avows, the "consequence" with which they follow one another, the relation in which they stand, is not logical'. The 'critical' vs 'linguistic' meanings together generate a process of thinking. Form plays more than a significant role; it prompts a process of experiencing meaning in its entirety: Leavis speaks of 'what words and syntactical conventions do to dictate thought and disguise or transmute basic intention, perception and apprehension'. One way in which these aspects of meaning interrelate is through attitude, which Leavis also mentions: the 'kind of full waking attention the poem calls for is apparent in the part that shifts of tone play

in the definition of attitude—that is, in the meaning'.[194] That is a notably strong claim for 'attitude', and its full significance cannot be understood without the work done by the 1930s texts, which have made the elision of attitude with meaning plausible and convincing, more than a merely rhetorical flourish.

Leavis's detection of meaning in 'shifts in tone' sounds almost aestheticist. It is certainly not that of a 'dogmatic maverick'—but it is not separate from the moral either.[195] Tonal shifts are important for the space they open up in meaning, and the vision they enable. R.P. Blackmur said that Hart Crane 'habitually re-created his words from within, developing meaning from within; and that habit is the constant and indubitable sign of talent. The meanings themselves are the idioms and have a twist and life of their own. It is only by ourselves mediating and *using* these idioms—it is only by emulating—that we can master them and accede to their life'.[196] One must '*us[e]*' the language in order to locate the meaning, language itself forming not only the mode of access but the centre of meaning. Wittgenstein's 'understanding' is not adequate as a response, because there is an aspect of process, which, if lost, compromises meaning altogether. Only in entering or re-entering the experience of the words is the meaning made again fully real, 'giv[ing] more than it has'. Blackmur writes that the 'art of poetry [and prose] is amply distinguished from the manufacture of verse by the animating presence in the poetry of a fresh idiom; language so twisted and posed in a form that it not only expresses the matter in hand but adds to the stock of available reality'.[197] Language has the capacity to enlarge the reality available, because it enlarges the known modes and methods of responding to or conceiving of experience. That is a profound moral gain, and a complex one, because of how intimately it is bound up with the precise wording that generates it. Any exploration of how literature 'gives more than it has' must attend to it as an experience of language, and a process of precise thinking.

A book on Blackmur's famous line names Leavis as an example of 'the conservative mind' for

[194] *ELTU*, 115; 118-122.
[195] Booth, *Company*, 50.
[196] R.P. Blackmur, *Form and Value in Modern Poetry* (New York: Doubleday, 1952), 278.
[197] Ibid., 349.

whom literature had 'a special role […] as the superlative means of ordering unruly experience'.[198] Leavis sees literature as organising and 'placing' one's own response to experience, but not ordering experience itself. Indeed, in *The Great Tradition*, he parodies the idea that art makes life 'neat'.[199] Bloom's comment suggests literature as a mode of reigning in life rather than of creating new possible ways of relating to it. Geoffrey Hill, a firm advocate of language's generative capacities, quotes R.L. Nettleship, whom Collingwood acknowledged as an intellectual presence in his years at Oxford: 'the consciousness which we express when we have found the "right word" is not the same as our consciousness before we found it; so that it is not strictly correct to call the word the expression of what we meant before we found it'.[200] Hill links this with a formula of T.H. Green (Collingwood describes Nettleship as of 'Green's school'; both were Balliol men): 'in the very act of naming, i.e. of *knowing* them, we transmute them'.[201] These quotations indicate the inadequacy of the common metaphor of 'pinning down' a thought in words: the thought does not exist outside of the words. But they also suggest the cognitive impact that *wording* incites. For Nettleship a shift in consciousness takes place; for Green, 'knowing' something is bound up with 'naming'.

Yet literature is also, as I have been emphasising, a process. Literary language means in part that the things that are discerned, or the new realities that are opened, depend for their existence on the particular words *and* the particular form in which they are given. Poems, says Rowan Williams, 'change the landscape of language so that space appears'.[202] The experience of literary language is an entering into a mode of thinking that belongs to a particular usage of language. In Newman's words:

> Thought and speech are inseparable from each other. Matter and expression are parts of one: style is a thinking out into language. This is what I have been laying down, and this is literature; not *things*, not the verbal symbols of things; not on the other hand mere *words*; but thoughts expressed in language.[203]

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[198] James D. Bloom, *The Stock of Available Reality* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1984), 28.
[199] *GT*, 15.
[200] Toulmin, *R.G. Collingwood*, 15–19. Nettleship's words are quoted in Geoffrey Hill, 'Perplexed Persistence', *Poetry Nation*, no. 4 (1975).
[201] Hill, 'Perplexed Persistence'. As Hill points out, this is not representative of Green's thought in general; I quote because the formula is useful for our purposes, not to suggest that this can be offered as representing Green's general view.
[202] Gavin D'Costa et al., *Making Nothing Happen* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), xi.
[203] John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. I.T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 232.

Newman's point is almost lost in that final clause, which risks a return to the notion of finding as fitting a word as possible for a particular thought, while also demonstrating how very difficult it is to articulate precisely the nature of the relation of form and content. 'In', though scarcely avoidable, is not a helpful term, reinforcing the notion of an interior thought clothed in exterior wrap. Thoughts expressed 'through' or 'with' language is a more relevant formula. But what Newman is getting at is evident; he even employs the Theseus passage Wallas also chose to emphasise the generative capacity of language. We do not have thoughts for which we then find words. As T.R. Wright put it, 'The straightforward assertion of the identity of thought and speech is, in fact, qualified by [Newman's] recognition that writing involves a complex negotiation between signifier and signified, linguistic codes and inner feelings'.[204] But Newman is not just saying that words and thought have a connection. He suggests that a unique kind of thinking takes place in the process of using literary language ('this is literature'). There is some merit in emphasising *thinking* rather than *thought*, for the thinking entailed is grounded in, and enabled by, an experience: that of a pattern of words unfolding meaning in time. I have emphasised that language generates a way of engaging with the world that also determines an attitude towards it, and that such a mode of engagement does not quite exist in its exactitude until worded. That means, further, that literary language can constitute an experiential process: for Newman, that process is one of thinking. Thinking develops in the process of being formed in words: the mode of thinking comes through the use of language.

One's own 'stock' of reality is widened in experiencing 'thinking out'. Edward Thomas's 'It rains' offers a precise experience of 'thinking out' a particular kind of relating to love. It suggests what Harding might have meant by a 'linguistic achievement in the creation of concepts', by having something to do with love, but more significantly, by creating a distinct sense of responding to it. Just as Nettleship and Green intimate, concepts are altered—or, better put, created newly, both responding to and departing from already-known ideas—in the use of well-written language. Both Thomas's speaker and, say, Othello, pine for a lost love, but the kind of relationship to love created by Shakespeare's play and Thomas's poem are drastically different:

[204] T.R. Wright, 'Newman on Literature: "Thinking Out into Language"', *Literature and Theology* 5, no. 2 (1991): 189.

It rains, and nothing stirs within the fence
Anywhere through the orchard's untrodden, dense
Forest of parsley. The great diamonds
Of rain on the grassblades there is none to break,
Or the fallen petals further down to shake.

And I am nearly as happy as possible
To search the wilderness in vain though well,
To think of two walking, kissing there,
Drenched, yet forgetting the kisses of the rain:
Sad, too, to think that never, never again,

Unless alone, so happy shall I walk
In the rain. When I turn away, on its fine stalk
Twilight has fined to naught, the parsley flower
Figures, suspended still and ghostly white,
The past hovering as it revisits the light.[205]

The poem does not just enrich or complicate a prior existing concept of love, as if it were adding new information to one's idea of what love is. Although 'love' is a word relevant to the poem, Thomas is also creating something distinct and new, in part by inviting one to inhabit not just a scene, but a thought, a 'thinking out', as Newman has it, one unfolding as the poem does. 'It rains' generates a precise process of experience that requires these words in order to be generated. The poem begins 'It rains', as if rain were the continuing state of things, and invokes absence several times in the first stanza with references to 'nothing', 'Anywhere', 'none'. The rhymed 'break' and 'shake' suggest a small human violence, as well as emotional suffering. From the beginning the emotional tones of the poem are established in order to direct one's continued reading of the poem. The second stanza introduces a speaker with a kind of swelling, the 'And' suggesting a continued thought, even though it is the first intimation that the poem is in the first-person. 'And' intensifies the sense of an ongoing state of things introduced by the poem's first two words. One feels that the speaker is in the orchard whenever 'it rains', feeling 'nearly as happy as possible': a happiness, one realises, filled with sorrow, happy only in memory, and sharply painful because of loss. The speaker searches 'in vain though well', knowing it is fruitless, but without desire to resist. This vain searching, 'alone', is his happiness. The sense of absence deepens as the narrator remembers past happiness in the increasingly faded light. In the final lines, the turning away suggests a turn from memory as well as a physical movement, and the thinning parsley stalk as the day darkens

[205] R. George Thomas, ed., *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), 105.

contributes to an atmosphere of a ghostly, finely lined hovering past, a possible reality suspended and pale, neither life itself nor able to be released from the mind of the speaker, whom, we know, will continue to return to the orchard to remember his past and the loss of love. It is the attitude that generates the meaning that love, happiness, and sorrow have in the poem. Its tonal, attitudinal aspects are as important as the paraphraseable understanding of what is going on and even as the speaker one is meeting. Indeed, they are more so, because even without comprehension of the 'bare action of plot', and even were the speaker's role not quite understood, the atmosphere would still allow one entry into the 'thinking' of the poem, in a way that access to plot or speaker alone could not.[206] The poem is 'thinking out', invoking known concepts such as love, grief, loss, happiness, poignant sorrow, and desire for the past, and simultaneously rendering them subtly different, creating something quite new. The 'thinking out' is found only by 'these words in these positions', but our response to them is not mere 'understanding'. One undergoes a process of a distinct relating to experience, one of powerful relevance to one's idea of love outside the poem, but nevertheless able to be found just as it is only be re-entering the experience of 'It rains'.

Terence Cave's fascinating *Thinking* With *Literature*—his italicised, capitalised 'With' underscoring the role literature plays—explores the interplay of language and thought, arguing that literature is a 'virtuoso demonstration' of that interaction.[207] He points out that language 'is intrinsically instrumental, not ontologically prior', phrasing that stresses that once language is involved a change takes place.[208] Throughout, this chapter has argued that language has the most intimate of relationships with thought. Thought does not depend on language, but language can incite changes, not so much in thought directly as in ways of thinking. It does not necessarily introduce new concepts, but it can alter one's nexus of associations for a concept and so widen or make more delicate one's idea of what, say, love or faith, or grief, or pity, are, something that in its turn does subtly change one's concepts and the way they interact with each other.

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[206] Norman Page, *Thomas Hardy Annual No. 2.* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 141. Page refers to two modes of reading Hardy: one 'locates dramatic interest in the events themselves—the bare action of plot—with narrative presence almost nonexistent'; the other finds 'the principal interest […] in the "impact" or "emotional core"', such that 'plot or action is subordinated […] to the affective element'.
[207] Cave, *Thinking With Literature,* 105.
[208] Ibid., 54.

Any new insight is able, at least temporarily, to change how one thinks about the world; when the insight is worded, those words become important in enabling the insight to percolate and take ground. In that way, the insight is bound up with the words. In psychology, a therapeutic technique called 'countering' involves countering negative thoughts with positive phrases or mantras, which prompt positive feelings in the speaker and listener. In literature, the power of the language is bound up with the power of the narrative, which might—but might not—involve a plot and characters; it will certainly involve voice, which is part of the attitude always created by language. Words also take on an added significance in literature because they operate at so many levels. While particular phrasing outside literature might become important to a particular grasp on meaning, or a particular relation to experience, in literature the phrasing is so precise and so importantly generative of attitude that, rather than being the heuristic to hold onto a certain mode of relating to experience, it is itself the mode of relating to experience. Punctuation, line breaks, paragraphs, whether a character is named or given a pronoun: every detail, however apparently prosaic, also becomes important, as we saw in the sparse prose of Morel's numb, masculine mourning, or the quiet accepted loss of Thomas's poem.

'Literary works make you think differently', says Cave. 'Cognitively the only difference [between real and fictional worlds] is that fictional worlds open themselves up for exploration to a degree that is not possible in the real world'. Literature creates 'unlimited possibilities for imaginative leaps into the blue—or into the minds of others'.[209] It is the first part of that phrase ought to have the emphasis; literature's special capacity is not its characterisation, something in which film, for instance, is also expert. Literature creates these 'unlimited possibilities for imaginative leaps' not so much through expert characterisation of characters, as through expert manipulation of words, leading to an expert invocation of a particular mood and tone, both things that provide a reader's sense of a character more strongly than their qualities or attributes.

Before returning to Cave, let's look at an example, Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*. It is a novel written as a letter from an elderly pastor to his young son, and one might want to claim that its moral

[209] Ibid., 5; 128; 27.

significance is in the character of the pastor one encounters. But *Gilead*'s richness is not the person of Ames so much as the attitude of the prose. As I said above, the novel *is* itself the relation to experience. Its statements belong fully to a particular attitude, creating a mood that critics have called 'out of time' and 'written in a gone time'.[210] Critics comment on the attitudinal elements of mood and atmosphere more than they do on the 'content', because attitude is where the content is. Robinson's prose is 'clean and plain and beautiful'.[211] Rowan Williams begins a review of Robinson's work by remarking 'One of the most important marks of a serious novelist is the capacity to create a diversity of consistent voices, voices we can hear as having an integrity of their own. Bad novelists ventriloquise, good novelists allow the speakers they create to be other than their creator'.[212] The emphasis on voice, similarly attitudinal, forms a parallel to Robinson's own priority; 'felt experience' is her telos in writing.[213] As with 'It rains', one experiences an attitude to living, which is as strong in descriptions of, for instance, the weather—see below—as of characters' mental states.

Plot is minimal in *Gilead*, which is composed of reflection and observation, through Ames's ongoing attempt to understand his past, his parents, the early death of his wife and the sudden hope that his new family life has provided. Robinson has said that plot 'is not a word I use', adding that some 'people think it's not a concept I *have*'.[214] Neither plot nor character is as important as the attitude of the prose, mediated through a distinct voice. The way Ames relates to experience is mediated through his way of seeing the world:

> This morning a splendid dawn passed over our house on its way to Kansas. This morning Kansas rolled out of its sleep into a sunlight grandly announced, proclaimed throughout heaven—one more of the very finite number of days that this old prairie has been called Kansas, or Iowa. But it has all been one day, that first day. Light is constant, we just turn over in it. So every day is in fact the selfsame evening and morning. My grandfather's grave turned into the light, and the dew on his weedy little mortality patch was glorious.[215]

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[210] Respectively James Wood, '"Gilead": Acts of Devotion', *The New York Times*, 28 November 2004; Ali Smith, 'The Damaged Heart of America', *The Guardian*, 16 April 2005.
[211] Joan Acocella, 'A Note of the Miraculous', *The New York Review of Books*, 9 June 2005.
[212] Rowan Williams, 'Living the Good Life: Rowan Williams on Marilynne Robinson', *The New Statesman*, 16 October 2014.
[213] Robinson, *Absence of Mind*, 114; Marilynne Robinson, *When I Was a Child I Read Books* (London: Virago, 2007), 8.
[214] Bob Thompson, 'At Home with Marilynne Robinson', *The Washington Post*, 20 October 2008.
[215] Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (London: Virago, 2005), 239.

The language locates a reader behind Ames's eyes, enabling one to see and think as he does. The reference to the first day draws attention to Ames's mind as a pastor, echoing Genesis and Eden, especially with the mention of light. But the language is not exultant or heightened. The splendid dawn is balanced by the weedy mortality patch. Ames's desire to look at the world and love it is made felt, as well as the distinct energy of his tone, which lends a mythologising, even ironising, tone to the prose: Kansas 'rolled'; the sun is 'grandly announced'. Ames is aware of his desire to love the world, and gently mocks it in a way that does nothing to depreciate that love, fully relishing it. The language reveals something about the world in being so precise an evocation of Ames's view of it: light is indeed constant, with the earth 'just turn[ing] over in it'. Robinson's prose suggests how a use of language is intensely attached to the reality of the world, and especially to the attitude encountering it. Ames's rhythmic words habituate one to his way of seeing and experiencing, making his moments of tension and difficulty more powerful because one feels how strongly the pastor desires goodness and hope, while often struggling with what he finds, in himself as in others.

His language generates a distinctive way of encountering the world, which itself forms an encounter for the reader. One is steeped in his mode of relating to his experience, and habituated during the course of reading to the attitude of his voice and way of thinking. The novel powerfully conveys the *qualia* of that attitude, the *what is it like* to live with this sort of world of language in one's mind. More than the character of Ames himself or any aspects of plot, that is the novel's generative power: the attitude it enables through an experience of language. As one critic puts it, 'Robinson gives access to a form of life as different from what we know as her language is different from her contemporaries, both Christian and non-Christian'.[216] The form of life, as Wittgenstein said, is indeed here bound up with the language.

Goldberg speaks of 'the moral qualities of a particular life' (i.e., of a character), which 'require of us an uncommon openness and subtlety of thought and a scrupulous, even imaginative, precision of language, in order to notice such qualities in the first place and to capture them in a way that

[216] M. Vander Weele, 'Marilynne Robinson's Gilead and the Difficult Gift of Human Exchange', *Christianity & Literature* 59, no. 2 (1 March 2010): 217.

enables others to notice them too'.[217] His stress on character is not necessary; the 'particular life'—a facet of 'attitude'—is of a *text*. But his emphasis on the scrupulous imaginative precision of language and its connections with 'the moral qualities of a particular life' is exactly right. I do not think moral 'qualities', or 'values', are the best terms for articulating this moral resonance; both focus attention on properties of content, the tangible 'moral qualities' of a character, for instance, rather than the rich moral resonance of a text. *Gilead*'s moral resonance is its unique attitude, just as the 'particular life' of Ali Smith's *There But For The*—a novel with no central character, and often no character at all—emerges from its attitude and atmosphere. Smith's novel is about small, unseen, nevertheless significant, connections between things and people, and indeed words. The prose differs strongly in different sections, often with lengthy paragraphs, other times with incomplete sentences, sometimes with a particular narrative voice or perspective, and sometimes free of character altogether. The experience of reading is often unrooted while conveying a deep sense of the significance of things, down to the minutiae of words, and 'the way things connect'. Smith's speciality is to draw out the significance in the ordinary, even banal, her work generating a sense of a depth to experience where none was thought to exist. The ostensibly plain description of a 'girl' whose 'face went sad' when someone says 'it's nice to be loved' creates a distinct sense of human interaction and response, something perceived without pathos or interiority.[218] It gives a particularly muted quality to the attitude of the prose, rendering the more powerful the girl's experience: what she is thinking is obvious, and it is clear that she is in pain. The sense is of a huge, complex, world, pained and disorientated, with trivial connections nevertheless made important merely by the fact that they are observed in language that offers them significance.

Both novels generate attitudes through their distinct uses of language, rather than through plot or character. It is this emphasis on attitude, rather than 'the minds of others', that I think is missing in Cave's account. Literature, says Cave, is

> characteristically an embodied language in its rich exploitation of its intrinsically situated ecology and in its preference for kinesic palpability and figurative elaboration; similarly, at the broader level of plot, fictional 'characters' are by definition embodiments, living their fictional lives in situated environments (storyworlds) that

[217] Goldberg, *Agents*, 89.
[218] Ali Smith, *There But For The* (London: Penguin, 2011), 196; 246.

> may be represented in concrete detail. It follows that mental processes as they appear in literature—the beliefs and imaginings of characters, the social, ethical, or political conceptions that are enunciated or implied within a given work, whether they are attributed to fictional character, narrator, or author—are always entangled with modes of embodiment.[219]

Many novels do not have 'situated environments'. *Soul Mountain* is without clear characters: there is a 'You', a 'She', an 'I'; at times the boundaries between the characters is in doubt and the sex unknown. Yet the novel has a powerful sense of atmosphere that determines the mode of relation to experience it creates through attitude. Reading a novel or a poem immerses one in a mindset, not that of an embodied character, but that of the attitude generated by the language. Literary thinking is sustained and immersive in nature: that, perhaps, is one distinct difference between literary and non-literary language, and why suggestion and evocation are foundational aspects of literature, operate though they evidently do outside of it. The *Sons and Lovers* passage is thoroughly immersed in an atmosphere of tacitness; the taste of the unspoken is what characterises Morel's distinct grief. It is not so much the 'situated environments' of characters that creates a storyworld, but the attitude of the narrative itself, such that the language *is* the relation to experience, in just the way Wittgenstein's 'understanding' was insufficient to capture.

Cave writes of 'cognitively enriched fiction', which 'offers a mode of intelligence at once kinesic and reflective—not available to other kinds of discourse'.[220] That literature can at once straddle the kinesic and reflective is what leads Cave, paraphrasing Mark Turner, but in a remarkable echo of Leavis, to say that 'the literary mind just is the human mind'.[221] But, for Cave, cognitive value is not necessarily to do with value more broadly conceived: with anything 'considered as embodying "good literature"'. He distances himself from a possible connection of literary value with cognitive. Yet it is little coincidence that Cave's examples are Conrad, Eliot, Shakespeare, Yeats, and that he mocks *Fifty Shades of Gray*. It is the position of this thesis that literature has to be well-written in order to be cognitively valuable, primarily because form has to be as important as content to the construction of meaning in order for literature's cognitive value

[219] Cave, *Thinking With Literature*, 142–43.
[220] Ibid., 132.
[221] Ibid., 31.

also to be a value that is literary. Further, language that is 'cognitively enriched' alone will be little more than an exercise in cognitive expansion, which, while it might be cognitively valuable, will not constitute 'literary cognitivism', a cognitive value that derives specifically from the fact that a work is of literature. Cave's argument suggests that language that is not kinesically suggestive or rich in embodiment is not cognitively valuable, which dramatically reduces the potential for many passages in literary texts to be deemed cognitively significant. Nor does he consider that in order for language to be kinesically suggestive, for example, excellent writing might be necessary. This apparent separation between kind of writing (e.g., kinesic or reflective) and style of writing in terms of literary quality may be what leads Cave to say that it is 'hard to deny that literary experience can be a vehicle for ethical reflection', 'vehicle' affirming the accepted convention that literature's ethical relevance is as 'examples of re-formulable ideas' or thought-experiment.[222] I shall turn to how to conceptualise and formulate literature's cognitive and moral significance in the next chapter.

[222] Ibid., 146; Simon Haines, 'Deepening the Self: The Language of Ethics and the Language of Literature', in *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy, and Theory*, 24.

Chapter III—Literary Cognitivism and Moral Significance

'If you're going to get criticism right, you've got to know what the work of art *is*'.[1]

'"[U]nderstanding" means not merely a grasp of intricacies, but a perceptive wisdom about ends'.[2]

Any claim for how literature operates is fundamentally linked with a conception of how literature matters and what it '*does*', how it can be 'formative'.[3] The idea of literature's operation erected in the previous two chapters compels a particular understanding of what literature is and of how it relates to human living, in terms both cognitive and moral. Many arguments about literature's cognitive nullity hinge on its ontological status, which itself derives from how it operates: they stress literature's non-relationship to reality given its status as fiction, taking the fiction-real world antithesis as a starting-point. This, I think, is a mistaken way to approach the question of literature's real-world relevance. As with Eaglestone's 'we already think of the two as being divided', it assumes a separation that demands a lot of philosophical manoeuvring in order to be bypassed, whereas if one thinks of Xingjian's 'real life', which means living fully, rather than the real world, with 'real' meaning not-fictional, the two feel less absolutely opposed. The label 'fiction', which is linked with much that is not literature, is a genre category; it does not indicate how literature functions, and should not be taken as a mode of defining its relevance. Literary language is rarely seen as generative of a complex attitude to experience, for instance, nor as a means of enabling that attitude to be inhabited by others, both of which I have argued are indeed literature's speciality. That literature might be generative, a 'process of language', in Heaney's words, significantly challenges the received notion of what it means for it to be fictive.

It is time to look at the implications of my understanding of how literature functions for what literature is and the space it occupies in the human world. I have argued that literature handles relations to feelings, thoughts, moods, atmospheres, etc., rather than feelings, etc. directly, because

[1] Colin Lyas, Art and Intentionality (2 of 6), interview by Vittorio Pelosi, 20 May 2009.
[2] *EU*, 23.
[3] See J. Landy, 'Formative Fictions: Imaginative Literature and the Training of the Capacities', *Poetics Today* 33, no. 2 (1 June 2012): 183; see Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions*.

language is attitudinal. I have argued that literature generates these things, rather than shows or manifests them, and, relatedly, that it enables them, for reader and writer, to be felt. I have argued that 'form' and 'content' are available separately for analysis but that the two exist together, and together create meaning, which is always attitudinal, conveying a particular attitude to life. I have argued that language has the closest of relations with thought, and that using language enables a process of discernment with regard to one's relation to experience. I have argued that in literary language this capacity is strengthened by the fact that literature can make felt and enable meanings for a reader or writer that were not previously within one's framework of significance. I have argued that literary language enables an experience, and forms a process of thinking, in which the thought shifts in the act of articulation. I ended the last section arguing that literary language and thinking (Wittgenstein's 'something') are *inextricably* linked: while any relation between word and thought has the capacity to be important, literary language inhabits a distinct space because the thought or mode of thinking is *only* available through these particular words. All language has the capacity to open new reality, but in order for a relation to experience created by literary language to be regained, rereading is required. Literary language involves a sustained immersion in the voice, mindset, and perspective—all part of the attitude—of a text, which forms the foundation of the 'experience of knowing' one undergoes in reading well-written poetry and prose. I closed commenting that literature's ability to do this, which is to add to one's cognitive landscape, and, perhaps more fundamentally, to inflect or suggest new modes of cognitive processing, is indivisible, *pace* Cave, from its merit as literature; only work that is well-written can enable meaning in the way I have argued. I suggested that new modes of relating to experience enabled by literature are forms of cognitive enrichment, even when they do not employ the kinesic language that for Cave is characteristic of cognitive expansion. In this chapter I further the argument of process and experience to argue that what literature enables is a *process of knowing*. I examine arguments against literary cognitivism and in favour of 'moral values'. I propose an alternate account of literature's cognitive and moral significance, one deriving from the arguments of Chapters I and II.

In discussing what literature is, I am not concerned with the 'ontology of literature' in categorical terms of defining what does and does not count as literature, as per Olsen's 'Defining a

Literary Work' or Currie's *An Ontology of Art*, as well as Lamarque's more recent *Work and Object*.[4] Nor is my concern akin to that of Amie L. Thomasson, who describes the 'central question for the ontology of art' not as a definitional one, but instead as one that enquires: 'What sort of entities are works of art?'[5] I am interested in how differing conceptions of what literature is (entertainment, for instance, or an opportunity for experimentation, or 'an emollient of nerves', in Polanyi's warning words) are linked with particular understandings of its function.[6] I have advanced a specific understanding of literature's functioning that suggests that literature matters in ways that bear upon what Lear calls the 'mystery of things'—the profounder aspects of human living—rather than upon, say, literacy or the consolation of readers, fortunate by-products though each of these might be.[7] The idea of literature solely as entertainment renders it difficult to argue for one book as more meaningful than another, as demonstrated by Nick Hornby in trying to argue that people read what they enjoy:

> I don't mean we should all be reading chick-lit or thrillers (although if that's what you want to read, it's fine by me, because here's something else no one will ever tell you: if you don't read the classics, or the novel that won this year's Booker Prize, then nothing bad will happen to you; more importantly, nothing good will happen to you if you do); I simply mean that turning pages should not be like walking through thick mud.[8]

Hornby undermines his point, which is that reading literature ought to be enjoyable, by claiming that 'nothing good will happen to you' if one does read literature generally viewed as superior in quality to 'chick-lit or thrillers'. Hornby employs an unfortunately common division in which texts are ranked according to genre, when in fact literary quality derives from the use of language, which means that a thriller has as much potential claim to excellence as another kind of novel. But the point is that Hornby's desire to claim literature as nothing more than entertainment also renders the

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[4] Stein Haugom Olsen, 'Defining a Literary Work', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35, no. 2 (1976): 133–42; Gregory Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989); Peter Lamarque, *Work and Object* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012).

[5] Amie L. Thomasson, 'The Ontology of Art', in Peter Kivy, ed., *Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 78–93, 78. Thomasson has argued elsewhere that investigations into the ontology of art must take place through conceptual analysis that operates by way of seeking out ontological conceptions lying beneath practices and judgements. Again, her discussion is concerned with the ontology of art as a philosophical category: quite different from the interest here. See Amie L. Thomasson, 'The Ontology of Art and Knowledge in Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 3 (1 June 2005): 221–29.

[6] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 380.

[7] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997), 365.

[8] Nick Hornby, *The Complete Polysyllabic Spree* (London: Penguin, 2007), 6.

rest of his argument unpersuasive—in that case, what difference between literature and anything else, and why accept that reading is worthwhile, why bother to give it a go? Literature should certainly be enjoyable, but the level of enjoyment one derives from literature is tied up with literary quality as much as it is with other factors like reader literacy and history of literary exposure. The idea that literature ought to be enjoyable does not mean that it need not be good: quite the opposite. As Leighton says, it is '*as* play' that literature 'might have something to say. Such play is not a totally free play, but remains connected with ethical and political values. But neither is it normatively identical with those values, so that the one can be bedrocked in the other. Literature, perhaps, is the point the two meet, their hub and hold-off'.[9] The sense of how literature functions I have been developing points to a way of speaking of literature's value as connected to the enjoyment one has in reading it.

On the opposite side from Hornby, some authors make conversely grandiose claims for what literature can do, and these are similarly linked with a misconception of literature's functioning. In the case of these words of Jeanette Winterson, the claim seems abstracted from a sense of literature's working. She speaks of art 'tak[ing] us seriously. The time you spend with it is the time it spends with you, one-to-one, no interruptions. And out of that conversation comes a new sense of who you are'. Art 'is a completely different way of looking at the world'; it is 'about being charged at a different voltage'. As I mentioned in Chapter I, she claims that

> Art shows us how to end the war, the war between heart and head, the war between reason and emotion. An achieved work of art combines an extraordinary hardiness of form with an exquisite emotional sense. Its toughness lets it contain emotion without suppressing or damaging it. Feeling breathes through form.[10]

These claims, in being so vague, are hard to substantiate and therefore unlikely to persuade. Even in the last sentence, where Winterson appears to speak of form, she does not give a sense of how literature works, nor of what it might mean for a form to be tough, nor how form stands in opposition to its emotion, a genuine shell of content in just the way I have been arguing against. If a persuasive case is to be made for literature's value to the human world, it needs to make concrete claims about

[9] Leighton, *On Form*, 36.
[10] Winterson in Raymond, *The World Split Open*, 178; 181; 186.

how texts matter.

A popular claim over the last few decades has been that literature deepens one's capacity for empathy. Martha Nussbaum has been a vocal proponent of that view, but her view is abstracted from an argument about literature's functioning; she concentrates on character and events. '[L]iterary works typically invite readers to put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their experiences'; 'reading a novel like [*Hard Times*] makes us acknowledge the equal humanity of members of social classes other than our own, makes us acknowledge workers as deliberating subjects with complex loves and aspirations and a rich inner world'.[11] There is already a level of assumption in operation here about the social class of the 'us' reading. One might ask, what, then, does the book do for 'workers'? This version of the empathy argument makes literature illustrative, a handy means to a noble end. More recently, Neil Gaiman has claimed that, thanks to literature 'You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well'.[12] True as this might be, its generality does not help its purpose. Certain rhetorical settings—Gaiman was giving a speech—encourage such statements, but they do little to impress seriously how it is that literature matters.

These statements have implications for more than the public view of literature. Experiments into literature's effects, usually conducted by those not in literary disciplines, take little heed of how literature works when considering its effect. Recent experiments, for instance, use the Mind in the Eyes (ME) test to assess literature's impact on Theory of Mind (known as ToM: the ability to attribute mental states to others and to oneself). The ME test is a visual assessment; it does not allow for consideration of whether readers have gained in ToM in a manner specifically dependent on words. The way these experiments account for literary exposure is also problematic; they do so by offering participants a list of author names: the more names recognised, the more literate a person is, something that in no way accounts for the texts one has read, only for exposure to a cultural conversation and literacy more generally. An experiment finding that reading literary fiction

[11] Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1997), 5; 34.
[12] Neil Gaiman, *The View from the Cheap Seats* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 2016), 8.

improves ToM in 2013, with corroborative results in 2016, has recently had its results undermined by a new group: both groups use the Author Recognition and Mind in the Eyes tests.[13] The lack of attention to *how* literature works renders claims for its effects, whether by authors, psychologists, readers or philosophers, unconvincing, contributing to a larger cultural scepticism about whether literature matters at all.

Following the theory of language of the previous chapter, this chapter argues that literature has an intimate relation with reality that can be fully understood only if one focuses on its language, rather than its status as fiction or indeed anything else. The chapter is in two parts. The first, beginning with contemporary questions in the cognition debate, examines the link between assertions of literature's cognitive triviality and misconceptions about how literature functions. The second turns to moral significance. The chapter as a whole offers a framework for conceptualising and articulating literature's cognitive and moral significance, in such a way that it can return one to, or deepen one's sense of, Xingjian's 'real life', despite the call of 'life's manifestations'.

Part One: Literary Cognitivism

i. Lamarque and Olsen: theory and practice

Literary cognitivism is the idea that one gets knowledge from literature qua literature. Where the knowledge in question is justified true belief, I believe that literary cognitivism is incompatible with literature, namely because of the scheme I have so far outlined for how literature operates: it suggests and creates, and what it creates is *sui generis* and cannot be stated in any other way. Justified true belief assumes that the knowledge can be verified; James Harold writes of historical

[13] David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, 'Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind', *Science* 342, no. 6156 (18 October 2013): 377–80; David Kidd and Emanuele Castano, 'Different Stories: How Levels of Familiarity With Literary and Genre Fiction Relate to Mentalizing', *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 2016; Maria Eugenia Panero et al., 'Does Reading a Single Passage of Literary Fiction Really Improve Theory of Mind? An Attempt at Replication.', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 111, no. 5 (2016): e46–54.

fiction that 'Without consulting historical evidence, I cannot be sure what is invented and what is not'.[14] However, the cognitive value of a literary text need not conform to the model of justified true belief: it might be cognitive in Cave's terms, involving cognitive expansion more broadly, or it might be ethical-moral in character, something for which there could be no external proof. That is the kind of knowledge I consider in this chapter, a cognitive value that is moral—humanly central—in character. In line with convention in aesthetics, I take it for granted that such insight is a cognitive gain. Where I speak of literature's cognitive or moral significance, it is the capacity of literature to generate new humanly central insights that I have in mind. While many theorists might grant that literature can indeed provide some kind of insight, they do not think that this is a value of literature qua literature, claiming that one is no longer reading literature as literature once one locates the insight, or, that the insight is not an integral part of literature's *literary* (as opposed, say, to moral or political) value. This section opposes that view.

Lamarque and Olsen's 1994 book is perhaps the landmark text dealing with literature and cognitive value. *Truth, Fiction and Literature* offers a series of arguments against literature's ability to contribute to truth, which derive largely from its status as fiction. As the authors put it on the opening page, 'there is no significant place for truth as a critical term applied to works of literature'.[15] The central issue for the pair is quite plainly that literature is false: 'the root of the problem we are addressing is precisely how works of literature, so revered in a culture, can at the same time be mere *fictions*'.[16] The word 'mere' and the italics do a lot of work in that sentence. There is little reason why a literary work, a series of words written by a human to communicate with other humans, should *a priori* not relate to human reality, particularly if literature is conceived of as a use of language with implications for one's own uses of language, and as an intrinsically and instrumentally valuable tool for shaping ways of thinking and discerning one's own perceptual habits.[17] Lamarque and Olsen see 'fiction' as a genre that presents information that is false. They

[14] James Harold, 'Literary Cognitivism', in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*, ed. Noël Carroll and John Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 382.
[15] Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), 1.
[16] Ibid., 24.
[17] Like Rylance, I see no contradiction between intrinsic and instrumental value. See Rick Rylance, *Literature and the Public Good* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016).

do not address whether or how literary language might function as process, even as 'guide[s to] our thoughts'; nor does their idea of fiction acknowledge that literature might enable access to what Raymond Williams called 'practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity'.[18]

Cave has pointed out that the 'interaction of imagination and epistemic vigilance is absolutely central to one's view of what literature is and does, and where its value lies'.[19] He also stresses that '[c]ognitively the only difference [between real and fictional worlds] is that fictional worlds open themselves up for exploration to a degree that is not possible in the real world'.[20] Necessary as epistemic vigilance is, indeed when dealing with any usage of language, awareness that literature is imaginative ought not to overwhelm one's reading, nor to condition the interpretation. For Frederick Aldama, literature's 'most salient feature is that it is fictional. Fiction is the defining, indispensable component of literature'.[21] But not all literature is fiction, and not all fiction is fictive. Much literature straddles fiction and non-fiction; there is even the category of 'autobiografiction'.[22] The notion of the status of fiction can be disruptive if it prevents attention to the way a reality created in language touches one's own reality, just as it is disruptive if it obscures the way literature functions—particularly novels, the most frequent victims of the fiction 'paradox'.[23] Kendall Walton has tried to resolve the 'paradox' by arguing that in engaging with fiction one experiences a simulation of real emotions, rather than real emotions themselves. Noël Carroll has argued in contrast that emotions are 'cognitively impenetrable', feelings genuinely felt even when one knows that their cause is not real.[24] He claims that it is not the fiction that prompts emotions, but one's

[18] Keith Oatley, *Such Stuff as Dreams* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 30; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Marxist Introductions (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978), 132.
[19] Cave, *Thinking With Literature*, 73.
[20] Ibid., 128.
[21] Frederick Luis Aldama, *Why the Humanities Matter* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 237.
[22] See Max Saunders, *Self Impression* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010).
[23] The term was used by Colin Radford and Michael Weston, 'How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 49 (1975): 67–93. See also Colin Radford, 'Tears and Fiction', *Philosophy* 52, no. 200 (1977): 208–13.
[24] Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi, eds., *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 217–18. See also Kendall L. Walton, 'Fearing Fictions', *The Journal of Philosophy* 75, no. 1 (January 1978): 5; Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993); Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

thought about the fiction, two things that in my view are inextricably connected.[25]

It is not a coincidence that the texts most frequently adduced in debates in aesthetics about fiction's relation to reality are the Sherlock Holmes series and *Anna Karenina*: both works in which plot and character are major features.[26] The paradox makes more sense when the question is about Holmes's Baker Street house or why one cries at *Anna Karenina*. But the status of fiction takes on a less comprehensible role in considering texts like *There But For The* or *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, whose richness of meaning more evidently derives from intricacies not of plot but of narrative style. The debate about how 'fiction' can meaningfully relate to the world has much less pertinence when applied to works whose meaning has little to do with plot, and whose characters are composed of impressions and memories, rather than dialogue and action. Goldberg's idea of morality in literature is what it tells us about 'agents and lives', allowing readers to see the 'moral lives' of characters, as well as to view them more simplistically as 'moral agents'.[27] But, as I suggested, literature's mode of bearing upon morality is one that has little to do with characters as people, whether conceived of as agents or lives; the moral significance of a literary text is about the attitude created by the text, not that of a character, which is why a novel like *Soul Mountain*, in which character is mellifluous, is able to be as morally meaningful as one as character-driven as Nussbaum's favourite *The Golden Bowl*, or—a present-day example—*Imagine Me Gone*.[28] Texts with clearly delineated characters have no more moral relevance than those that are character- or plot-less: the issue of moral significance is about how well a work is written and what its language makes felt. The attitude of a text, the mode of relating to living it makes felt, need not be dependent on character and is the reason there can be great moral significance in a description of a scene or

[25] In *Deeper Than Reason*, Robinson writes that 'a critical interpretation of a work becomes *a reflection upon one's emotional experience of the work*' (124).

[26] The following all mention Holmes and Karenina in discussing the relation of fiction to the real. Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopes, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2013); Dabney Townsend, *The A to Z of Aesthetics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010); Jerrold Levinson, *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Eran Guter, *Aesthetics A-Z* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010); Stephen Davies et al., eds., *A Companion to Aesthetics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); David Davies, *Aesthetics and Literature* (London: Continuum, 2007). See also Radford and Weston, 'How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?'

[27] Goldberg, *Agents*, passim.

[28] Martha Nussbaum, 'Flawed Crystals: James's The Golden Bowl and Literature as Moral Philosophy', *New Literary History* 15, no. 1 (1983): 25; Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (Ware, England: Wordsworth Editions, 2000); Adam Haslett, *Imagine Me Gone* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016).

the evocation of an atmosphere.

Lamarque and Olsen's argument is about the nature of knowledge as well as fiction: what does it mean for 'truth' as a concept if one applies it to literary fiction, a category whose definition acknowledges its untruth? To claim that literature has cognitive value, they say, one would have to 'redefine the concepts of knowledge and truth-seeking, at least loosening the connection with supportive evidence and argument'. Or, one would have more radically to redefine

> the whole notion of cognitive value, severing any necessary connection with the concepts of knowledge and truth. Supporters of the first alternative would attempt to retain the direct link between literature and truth and would insist that literary works yielded insights complementary to, yet as equally valid […] as, the knowledge yielded by sciences of all descriptions. Supporters of the second alternative would be ready to abandon the notion that literature has a direct truth-seeking link with the world and instead settle for a different form of insight which lent itself to appraisal in terms other than those of knowledge and truth.[29]

The big question is what is meant by truth. Literature does not provide truth, where truth is thought of as characters who are 'true to life' or events 'true to history or actual sequences of events in the world'.[30] But Iris Murdoch's truth, 'something we recognise in good art when we are led to a juster, clearer, more detailed, more refined understanding', in which truth is the '*manifesting* of deep conceptual connections', is a kind of truth applicable here.[31] While literature does not provide justified true belief (where it does, doing so is incidental to what it is as literature), it does enable what I call a 'process of knowing', something created by itself and functioning on its own terms. Harding pointed out that 'fiction represents possibilities of human experience [and] we have to notice that it may be doing so through the medium of physical impossibilities'.[32] That would not lessen its claim to truth in Murdoch's sense.

Lamarque has stressed that what he and Olsen are saying 'is that neither the notion of truth or

[29] Lamarque and Olsen, *TFL*, 368.
[30] John Hospers, 'Literature and Human Nature', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 17, no. 1 (September 1958): 45–46.
[31] Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Vintage Classics (London: Vintage, 2003), 321. See also *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 2014), 86–87. 'And as when we use the nature of art as a clue, we may be able to learn more about the central area of morality if we examine what are essentially the same concepts more simply on display elsewhere. I mean such concepts as justice, accuracy, truthfulness, realism, humility, courage as the ability to sustain clear vision, love as attachment or even passion without sentiment or self'.
[32] D.W. Harding, 'Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 2, no. 2 (1962): 138.

the notion of knowledge are the key to understanding the value of literature'.[33] That key, I would argue, is nowhere else but the mode of its functioning. Truth can be a red herring in literary analysis, if one is seeking truth in the sense of something that is objectively verifiable. But that does not render the term *knowledge*, or, as I prefer, *knowing*, irrelevant to literature. Lamarque and Olsen contrast between external objective and internal subjective knowledge, arguing ultimately that literature gives us neither. They identify the argument that literature provides the latter with Dorothy Walsh, who claimed that 'anything that might assist us to an imaginative participation can properly be said to extend the range of our humanistic understanding'.[34] Walsh's imagination argument is now better known as the empathy one, of which there are multiple versions, most notably by Nussbaum and Cora Diamond, as well as a modification of Nussbaum's in favour of 'arguments' by Plumer.[35] Literary cognitivists such as Lisa Zunshine have argued for literature's capacity to exercise ToM.[36]

Yet the experiments regarding this ability, as I said, are methodologically troubling and far from conclusive. What evidence there is points towards a possible link between fiction in general (film, TV, literature) and empathy and/or ToM.[37] Such experiments, though of evident interest, have little to indicate about how literature relates to moral or cognitive change, as is proven by the result that people are also more empathic after viewing TV drama and playing video games. The fact that these experiments employ the same methodology, even though literature and television operate, and affect us, in distinct ways, shows that the way literature functions has been ignored with regard to its empathic value. The distinct mode of its operation with comparison to other fictions is underplayed, even lost, such that the argument becomes more about 'fiction' and the immersive

[33] Helen Bradley, 'The Pursuit of Fiction: An Interview with Peter Lamarque', *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 10, no. 2 (30 June 2013): 7.
[34] Dorothy Walsh, *Literature and Knowledge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1969), 104.
[35] See Gilbert Plumer, 'On Novels as Arguments', *Informal Logic* 35, no. 4 (11 December 2015): 488–507.
[36] See Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Ohio State UP, 2006); Lisa Zunshine, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).
[37] See J. Black and J.L. Barnes, 'Fiction and Social Cognition: The Effect of Viewing Awardwinning Television Dramas on Theory of Mind', *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* Vol 9, no. 4 (November 2015): 423–29. See also Keith Oatley, 'Fiction: Simulation of Social Worlds', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 8 (August 2016): 618–28; Patrick Colm Hogan, 'Literary Brains: Neuroscience, Criticism, and Theory', *Literature Compass* 11, no. 4 (1 April 2014): 293–304; Federico Langer, 'Art Theory for (Neuro)Scientists: Bridging the Gap', *Poetics Today* 37, no. 4 (December 2016): 497–516.

world it provides, along with its provision of new agency and/or the prospect of escape in taking on another persona.[38] But the only way to observe through experiment the cognitive or moral significance of literature as literature, rather than as one organism among a species of fiction, is to include analysis of the mode of its operation. Again, the idea of how literature operates and how its meaning is created will define the kind of value one attributes to it.

Such evidence itself proves that improvements in empathy are incidental to a work being literature, and Lamarque and Olsen rightly assert that what they call the Subjective Knowledge Theory—and indeed any argument for literary knowledge—must 'establish that literature *in virtue of being literature* promotes imaginative participation of the type that yields this kind of knowledge'.[39] For literature to achieve such participation incidentally has nothing to do with its being literature. In one form or another this remains the flaw in many arguments for literature's cognitive value. It is for this reason that Lamarque and Olsen agree with arguments about literature and knowledge by, for instance, Catherine Wilson, only to a certain extent: while literature 'might help to extend conceptual resources—thinking *of* things previously unthought in ways previously untried—there is not much beyond this that distinctively literary qualities of a work can add'.[40] Cave has shown how literature does indeed extend conceptual resources, but the claim for such extension as distinctly literary is undermined by the fact that he believes it independent from literary merit. His work, too, would not pass the Lamarque and Olsen test for literary cognitivism.

There is something flawed, however, about the Lamarque-Olsen model of considering the interplay between 'literary qualities' and what they refer to. Their model does not recognise that what is referred to would not exist as it is without these 'literary qualities'. That is one reason that 'refer' can be a misleading term in speaking of literature, whose capacity is crucially generative. I am not resolving 'matter into form', as Nuttall feared, but rather stating that the two cannot be

[38] See Daniel Bormann and Tobias Greitemeyer, 'Immersed in Virtual Worlds and Minds Effects of In-Game Storytelling on Immersion, Need Satisfaction, and Affective Theory of Mind', *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6, no. 6 (1 August 2015): 646–52.
[39] Lamarque and Olsen, *TFL*, 371.
[40] Ibid., 380. Wilson argues that reading literature brings about 'a modification of a person's concepts, which is in turn capable of altering his thought or conduct'. Catherine Wilson, 'Literature and Knowledge', *Philosophy* 58, no. 226 (1983): 495.

separated, and that the matter is attitudinal because of form, and can be evaluated and assessed only through the closest of attention to form.[41] Olsen argues elsewhere that literature is 'enjoyable' but not justifiable as 'valuable' because 'aesthetic, not moral'.[42] His reasoning operates on precisely the distinction that disregards what is characteristic and essential about literature: that the moral only has the meaning it does because of the aesthetic. The term 'aesthetic' becomes misleading in such contexts, particularly if it is thought to delineate or demarcate form from content. The term is useful in focusing attention on a particular property or aspect, but if it functions divisively—aesthetic, not cognitive; aesthetic, not moral—it leads to an understanding of art that is fallacious. Angela Carter's description of reading Baudelaire as 'like having my skull opened with a tin opener and all its contents transformed' points to a cognitive impact deriving absolutely from the *thisness* of Baudelaire's work.[43] When Lamarque and Olsen claim that there 'is no specific aesthetic contribution to the idea of conceptual enrichment which is not already present in any activity where new situations are brought to mind', they are considering literature as providing 'new situations' in one of many possible ways, including film, or a story told by one friend to another.[44] They do not consider that the 'specific aesthetic contribution' is not in providing access to a new situation (through an act of imaginative creation any fiction might accomplish), but in generating a felt experience of a new situation that otherwise would not exist. Connected as they are, the felt experience is the important and distinct contribution, rather than the new situation itself.

Take the example of Rowan Williams's poem 'Emmaus'. The poem is an apposite choice in this context because it is partly an *old* 'situation', in that it refers to an episode outside of the poem, something already known: it takes the scene of two disciples travelling on the road to Emmaus given in Luke's gospel (24:13-35). Christ has been crucified and the disciples have heard that he appeared to the women at his tomb, and do not know what to make of it. As they walk Christ joins them, and they speak of what has happened without recognising him. Only when they eat together and he breaks bread are their eyes opened, and they realise how their hearts burned within them as

[41] Nuttall, *A New Mimesis*, ix.
[42] Stein Haugom Olsen, *The Structure of Literary Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 221–23.
[43] Cited in Jenny Turner, 'A New Kind of Being', *LRB*, 3 November 2016.
[44] Lamarque and Olsen, *TFL*, 380.

they and Christ walked and talked. So much is what Luke tells us.

First the sun, then the shadow,
so that I screw my eyes to see
my friend's face, and its lines seem
different, and the voice shakes in the hot air.
Out of the rising white dust, feet
tread a shape, and, out of step,
another flat sound, stamped between voice
and ears, dancing in the gaps, and dodging
where words and feet do not fall.

When our eyes meet, I see bewilderment
(like mine); we cannot learn
the rhythm we are asked to walk,
and what we hear is not each other.
Between us is filled up, the silence
is filled up, lines of our hands
and faces pushed into shape
by the solid stranger, and the static
breaks up our waves like dropped stones.

So it is necessary to carry him with us,
cupped between hands and profiles,
so that the table is filled up, and as
the food is set and the first wine splashes,
a solid thumb and finger tear the thunderous
grey bread. Now it is cold, even indoors;
and the light falls sharply on our bones;
the rain breathes out hard, dust blackens,
and our released voices shine with water.[45]

Williams's poem is also not an *old* situation at all, in that it creates something quite new, something whose significance is strengthened for its connections with and echoes of Luke's narrative, but whose generative power is its own. Williams begins by plunging one into the scene, the terms 'First' and 'then' locating one in a temporal-spatial particularity that will shift as the poem progresses. The fleshly reality of the heat is communicated, but it also feels mysterious and shimmering, as even the face next to the speaker become difficult to outline; the face, like the voice, is somehow not what it should be; things have a different quality to them. The atmosphere of strange reality, of things the same but not quite, deepens in the next lines as 'out of step' comes 'another flat sound, stamped between voice/ and ears', and Christ joins the pair. Their sight of each other is already itself 'out of step', everything slightly off, and now someone walks with them whose sound intensifies the

[45] Rowan Williams, *Headwaters: Poems* (London: Perpetua Press, 2008), 21.

oddness, while also providing a new key, one unimaginable shortly before. 'Between us is filled up, the silence/ is filled up', and the lined reality of the disciples' figures is 'pushed into shape/by the solid stranger'. Christ is both a bringer of a new reality and the only way to make clearer the reality the disciples are already living. He 'fill[s] up' their understanding almost immediately. The final stanza, in which the meal and the recognition occur as 'a solid thumb and finger tear the thunderous/ grey bread', begins: 'So it is necessary to carry him with us'. The 'So' echoes the 'First', 'then', 'when', of the earlier lines, shifting the emotional tone in response to shifts in circumstance, time, and place. 'So' has as much significance for the poem's achieved meaning as any of the more conventionally poetic features, such as the simile of 'dropped stones', or the invocation of physical movement along with feeling whose significance for literature's cognitive capacity Cave argues. The poem's momentum is felt from the start; 'So' strengthens the effect, but also offers a tone of simplicity, suggesting that the disciples make a simple decision and act accordingly, without realising the significance of anything that is happening to them. Like the 'And' of 'And I am nearly as happy as possible' in 'It rains', the conjunction does much to convey the relation of the poems' narrators to what is happening. The conjunctions also contribute to the distinct emotional atmospheres of both poems. Where 'And' offers a kind of swelling that is initially surprising following the invocation of absence in Thomas's first stanza, and then understood as the speaker's profound sadness become more evident, 'So' positions the final stanza as the resolution, the understanding, even before its characters have had the revelation.

The poem, like all good literature, offers a felt experience of a situation, and the situation as such does not exist outside of the words in which it is given. In this way, both the felt sense and the new situation depend for their existence—their ability to make unspoken things felt in ways we find difficult to articulate, and often come deeply to cherish—on the unique vision that the poem provides, through an expert usage of words. Lamarque and Olsen's static model of literature does not allow for the procedural way in which 'Emmaus' functions, and the kind of experience of knowing that it enables. As well as their idea that literature is about things existing in the world, rather than modes of relating to experience and attitude, the difficulty is their idea of literature's functioning, which is not generative. Lamarque asserts that 'literary works explore the big human

themes in their own way, in the sense that they're not competing with philosophy'. This is true, and the desire to avoid that competition was one reason behind Leavis's continual rejection of the term *philosophy* with application to literature. Lamarque continues: 'Themes of life and love, despair, hope and duty, and so on; of course, the great works of literature explore, and I use that word advisedly, these themes in original, powerful, and engaging ways'.[46] Yet the word 'explore' pinpoints an overall defect in Lamarque's account in a way that emphasises how the view of how literature functions is tied up with ideas of what it can do and how it is valuable. Although literary works can be said to 'explore' issues, that is not their specifically literary achievement, which is rather to generate new aspects of these issues, and to enable engagement with and contemplation of experience—particularly, but not always, emotional experience—in different ways, ways that could not have been considered without the specific language of the literary work. They enable such engagement by functioning as process: functioning experientially. Natalie Phillips writes of absorption and 'slow reading' as 'styles of attention', claiming that 'it is not only the books we read, but thinking rigorously *about* them that is of value'.[47] But they are not only 'styles of attention'; only certain texts will prompt such 'absorption', and be amenable to 'slow reading'. Others might not reward rigorous thinking; to do so a text needs to be multi-layered. Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, which states and shows, leaving nothing to suggestion or pondering, would not reward rigorous thinking. Bronstein is right to focus attention on the way that absorption is a response to the way a text is written, rather than primarily a choice of the reader.

Lamarque's view has altered somewhat, as the publication of his most recent book, *The Opacity of Narrative*, suggests. That text seeks to show why and how form is important to content in literature, speaking of a text as offering '[t]hought-clusters' that are 'densely opaque'.[48] The book considers narrative as valuable because it presents in its 'own terms' 'thoughts' that might become a 'resource', although Lamarque does not go so far as to deem this contribution valuable in terms

[46] Bradley, 'The Pursuit of Fiction', 7–8.
[47] Natalie M. Phillips, 'Literary Neuroscience and History of Mind', in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Oxford UP, 2015), 57; 63.
[48] Lamarque, *Opacity*, 149.

of knowledge.[49] This may be because of his suspicion that claims for literature's cognitive value are really pandering to a Platonic demand for the arts to justify themselves: 'The main point I take issue with, and actually many philosophers have said this about literature, is that somehow a work of literature is only of value if it's good for you in some way—notably if you learn something. It goes back to Plato's demand that the arts justify themselves as useful in some way'.[50] But, as Philip Larkin, referring to Art for Art's Sake in 1946, asked: 'For what other sake can art possibly be undertaken?'[51] A desire for literature to count is no doubt behind the forceful rhetoric of some claims of its moral value. The more interesting claim for the cognitive value of literature, however, is not that 'usefulness' is additional to the literary achievement, but that it is part of it: that such value is fundamentally to do with literary value, and belongs to it—a claim that *Opacity*, standing firmly with the view that 'usefulness' compromises literary value, does not make. Later in the book Lamarque distinguishes between 'cognitive triviality' and 'expressive triviality', giving an example from *Macbeth*:

> —the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast.[52]

Of this Lamarque says 'Boiled down to its cognitive, truth-bearing, core, it says only that sleeps "nourishes" [sic] and eases our cares. But Shakespeare embodies this truth in quite remarkable metaphors, far from trivial'. Again, the term 'embodies' moves one away from attending to how the verse operates. Sleep straightens out the tangled skein of cares, it puts each day to death, bathing

[49] 'Rather than supposing that a fictional narrative presents a transparent glass through which a world—fictional or real—is revealed to us, somehow beyond or independent of its narrative vehicle, we should think of the narrative as absorbing us in its own finegrained details, its "world", its characters, incidents, setting and structure, seen in, not through, the glass. Attending to these aspects in their own terms triggers thoughts and images that can lodge in the mind more securely than mere items of knowledge, serving sometimes to "shape" the mind or change its inner landscape in more or less permanent ways […] This is how the great novels stay with us. They linger in the mind not as truths or moral precepts, but rather as fine-grained memory-like thoughts that could, but need not, be a resource useful in multiple ways in negotiations with our own world, even when we don't notice this happening'. Ibid., viii.
[50] Bradley, 'The Pursuit of Fiction', 9.
[51] Cited in James Booth, *Philip Larkin: Writer* (London: Harvester, 1992), 15.
[52] Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1368.

labour, and offering balm to pained minds. If sleep 'knits up', it also makes tidy and ordered what has been 'ravell'd'. The mention of death is ostensibly out of kilter with the emphasis on innocence and balm, but it also tells us of Macbeth's mind, and that it is still with the murdered king. He has delivered death to Duncan, not as relief from the day's trials, but as an irreversible change of condition. The gentle nourishing death of sleep has been overwhelmed by the massive, permanent death of murder. Neither balm nor bath are available now to Macbeth; nor the possible second chance suggested in 'great nature's second course'; there are no renewed opportunities for him now, nor nourishment.

Lamarque would not deny the power of the passage, but he sees the 'expressive' power as external to the 'core', to the real point of what is being said, which is that sleep 'eases our cares'. If Macbeth said precisely that, the play would not simply be less beautiful or less 'expressive'. The loss would also be a cognitive one, and not simply because the metaphors broaden one's imaginative vocabulary. Beneath Lamarque's view is the suggestion that language is the cloth of thought, and not part of a way of thinking to the extent that using language can also determine what one is thinking or feeling. Macbeth's language forms part of the experiential process of his way of thinking. His speech tells us, but also tells him, that sleeping easily will never again be available to him. It is the first intimation of the madness that will pursue both husband and wife. 'Macbeth doth murder sleep', as he has just said, his own as well as Duncan's. The speech generates for the audience a sense of how Macbeth is relating to experience, given not only his action, but also his response to it, which is now becoming plain to him as he realises that he cannot be peaceful with his crime. Both he and Lady Macbeth will try repeatedly to change their modes of relating to their experience—they will try to tell themselves that the act was right. Throughout the play Macbeth speaks to persuade himself. 'To be thus is nothing/ But to be safely thus'. That is the beginning of the speech in which he decides to kill Banquo (III.i, 47-71), in which he continues, 'There is none but he/ Whose being I do fear', telling himself something untrue so as to spur himself on. He insists that he cannot bear the thought that it might be 'For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind,/ For them

the gracious Duncan have I murther'd,/ Put rancors in the vessel of my peace/ Only for them'.[53] The words lead him to deepen the cracks and flaws in that vessel, as he resolves to have Banquo and Fleance killed. As he and Lady Macbeth will continue throughout, Macbeth uses words to tell himself what to do and to try to convince himself of how to think. His trouble is that he cannot persuade himself with his words: he uses them as a prompt to act, but is sufficiently able to see through them that he cannot effect a different way of thinking through using them for purposes other than self-deception. Part of the play's force is the absoluteness of Macbeth's deed, from which there is no turning: no chance of peace, not least when he uses words to distance himself from the reality of his thoughts, which, until acknowledged, will continue (as it does) to stifle him into madness.

These are issues of deep human centrality: deep moral significance. They are not easily discussible, nor easily resolved. They belong to the work that creates them and cannot be spoken of meaningfully without reference to the precise words of the text, which succeeds in creating a disconcerting sense of how a moral reality can shift, through things as seemingly insignificant, but in fact so life-shaping, as one's use of words to relate to experience. The first intimation of Macbeth's mode both of using language and of relating to his experience is given in the speech Lamarque quotes. It enables understanding of Macbeth's particular way of thinking about experience: that is its cognitive and moral significance, as one experiences Macbeth's mental state, not what it tells us about the good of sleep. Lamarque's distinction between 'cognitive' and 'expressive' trivialities is another way of dividing form and content. Indeed Lamarque states 'the literary contribution in this and similar cases rests in the *way* something is said. Saying something aptly or tellingly is an important literary skill […] Strictly speaking, though, if we contrast the *mode* of expression with *what* is expressed, then it might seem that the truth—bare propositional truth—again takes a step back'.[54] But we cannot contrast these things without losing the meaning of the passage altogether, as Lamarque illustrates. His distinction between the saying and the said obliterates the fact that what is said is not there without the saying. Even the adverbs 'aptly or

[53] Ibid., 1371.
[54] Lamarque, *Opacity*, 132.

tellingly' are indicative of the way that Lamarque conceives of literary language, presenting in an intelligent or perceptive way something already existing. But there is not a 'bare propositional truth' of these lines that is separable from the words themselves. Any summarising—as for instance mine above—does little justice to what is enabled by the words of the play. Paraphrase being inadequate is a fundamental part of what something is as literature, as Cleanth Brooks pointed out, and that ought to suggest that there is a notable cognitive significance in 'these words in this order' that cannot be scaled back to the question of what is being said beneath pleasing expression.[55]

Like Lamarque's adverbs, the verbs used to discuss literature play a critical role. Walsh's assertion that literature offers to its readers a piece of 'virtual experience, embodied, objectified, expressed, in the literary presentation', like Lamarque's 'explore', does not further the case for literary form as integral to its meaning.[56] Form is rendered incidental if it embodies, objectifies, or expresses—in the Lamarque/Casey sense—experience. That, too, is part of the problem with Haydar and Conolly's attempt to show that literature is indeed cognitively valuable: 'Note that cognitivism is not the thesis that literature's value resides in its *causing* us to acquire knowledge, but rather in its *displaying* such knowledge. A given work's displaying knowledge does not of course entail that it causes us to acquire it'.[57] These verbs prompt problems. If literature's relation to knowledge is one of display then the kind of knowledge under discussion is necessarily curtailed, restricted to something that could be *displayed*: knowledge that fits into a proposition, such that we can say 'this work *displays* (or *demonstrates* or *tells us*) *that* […]'.

That leaves little space for the cognitive value of evocation, perhaps through atmosphere, implicit suggestion, or an experience of accumulating impressions. For Virginia Woolf, rhythm is vital to the creation of meaning: 'Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words'. Woolf is indicating something of especial importance in literature, in prose as much as poetry, which is the role played by aspects like momentum, rhythm and pace.

[55] Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (London: Dobson Books, 1968), 157–75; Cameron, *The Night Battle*, 137.
[56] Walsh, *Literature and Knowledge*, 91.
[57] Bashshar Haydar and Oliver Conolly, 'Literature, Knowledge, and Value', *Philosophy and Literature* 31, no. 1 (24 April 2007): 111–24.

While Woolf exaggerates, perhaps in line with the Bloomsbury ethos of Art for Art and Significant Form, her point is that rhythm is at least as important as the words chosen, and can even be more so. This becomes clearer as she goes on: 'Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it'.[58] Words come to be found in the process of writing to the rhythm, the 'wave in the mind'; as with Leavis's 'technique', Woolf conceives of one writing to something beyond words themselves, which 'makes words to fit it'. There is little scope to pay attention to the cognitive significance of something like rhythm if one is looking for a knowledge that can be displayed, just as literature's cognitive impact must be minimal if what it does is 'explore' already-known 'themes'. Using certain terms curtails prematurely and illegitimately the subject under discussion.

ii. Knowledge and 'knowing'

Most debates about literature and cognitive significance in fact do assert the importance of some manner of 'acquisition'. David Novitz argues that some works yield 'empathic knowledge'; Jenefer Robinson sees literature as offering a 'sentimental education'.[59] Gregory Currie is particularly suspicious of the idea that we might learn from fiction.[60] He is sceptical about literature's relation to morality because there is no conclusive proof that it makes us better people. But even if one takes the display model alone, and uses a more suitable verb like *generate*, it would not be accurate to

[58] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. 3*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 246.
[59] David Novitz, *Knowledge, Fiction & Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 1987); Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason*.
[60] Gregory Currie, *Arts and Minds* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005). See also Gregory Currie, 'Does Great Literature Make Us Better?', *The New York Times*, 1 June 2013; Gregory Currie, 'Can Reading Fiction Literally Change Your Mind?', *The Conversation*, 20 July 2016; Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

speak of literature generating knowledge in Lamarque and Olsen's sense. Lamarque errs towards a view of knowledge that positions literature as incidental. 'You can learn lots of practical things from reading literature, you could learn about geography or etiquette, and of course you can learn about fictional characters'.[61] Not one of these has anything to do with *literature's* cognitive significance, for not one is to do with something literature alone could incite—as, indeed, is Lamarque's point. But he is looking in the wrong place. Such 'learning about' is a different kind of learning altogether from that enabled in literary texts; nor do 'learning how' or 'learning that', to adapt Ryle's distinction for two kinds of knowledge, point in the right direction.[62] Lamarque identifies other cognitive benefits in *Opacity* ('what it is like to be in a certain predicament, changing our outlook on life, educating our emotions'), yet argues that these 'cognitive payoffs' are 'not at the heart of literature' because he does not perceive a connection between these 'payoffs' and the experience of reading.[63]

Literature's cognitive significance is experientially grounded, its potency dependent on the power of the experience, which is to say that it is dependent on the quality of the writing. Lamarque and Olsen question 'the cognitive status of an *experience*': '[i]t is more plausible to suppose, not that the experience *is* the knowledge, but that knowledge arises as a *result* of the experience; the experience gives rise to the knowledge'.[64] But this returns us to straightforward acquisition. Hurley's suggestion that excellent literature might provide an 'experience of knowing' has the merit of acknowledging the way that literature operates: that the knowledge that it yields does not follow from experience, as a separable value, but is located in it. In the same way that form and content are distorted if removed from the work, and attitude lost altogether, the kind of 'knowing' enabled by literature is overlooked if one seeks something extractable. A fear of cognitivism, lest it undermine the idea that art 'has value for itself', paradoxically fails to perceive how literature's relation to knowledge is located within, and only possible because of, its inherent value.[65] The

[61] Bradley, 'The Pursuit of Fiction', 9.
[62] Gilbert Ryle, 'Knowing How and Knowing That', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 46 (1945): 1–16.
[63] Lamarque, *Opacity*, 137–39.
[64] Lamarque and Olsen, *TFL*, 373.
[65] Bradley, 'The Pursuit of Fiction', 11.

sought-after 'key to understanding the value of literature' is understanding the way its language functions and the way its meaning is constituted.

I would like to amend 'experience of knowing' to 'process of knowing'. That formulation usefully emphasises the aspect of literary language as a process, while also conveying that it is ongoing and experiential. 'Process' also signifies, more than 'experience', that the knowing remains relevant outside the experience of the work, although the work is where it is found most fully, and continues to contribute to a wider processing of life-experience. Harold fears that a strong claim for literature's cognitive significance, such as that outlined here, will 'elide the differences between the activities of reading literature (that is, reading a work *as* literature, even if it is also a work of history) and the activities of reading science or history'.[66] *Knowing* stresses that this is a knowing that takes place in time, the present participle emphasising that knowing is temporally mediated, unfolding with the experience of reading. It makes it clear that knowing is alert to the way it is generated through form and content together. In Beardsmore's words: 'though we may speak of a novel or a poem's bringing a man to see what is possible for him, we can no longer conceive of these possibilities existing independently of the way in which he was brought to recognize them'; for 'what it has to tell us is internally related to the work itself'.[67]

'Process of knowing' is distinct from the two knowledge options Lamarque and Olsen offered, external objective and internal subjective. Although it is experienced by a person, which would bring it closer to the latter, it is available to all readers, because the text that prompts it will not change. In Polanyi's terms, 'process of knowing' is 'personal'—neither objective nor subjective—and does not thereby lose its claim to being rational. Leavis's insistence that authentic judgement is based fundamentally on the 'arrangement of words on the page' does not prevent it from also being 'personal': 'An approach is personal or it is nothing: you cannot take over the appreciation of a poem, and unappreciated, the poem isn't "there"'. But nor is the 'personal' found through anything other than 'the words on the page': 'We can have the poem only by an inner kind of possession; it is "there" for analysis only in so far as we are responding appropriately to the words

[66] Harold, 'Literary Cognitivism', 383.
[67] R.W. Beardsmore, 'Learning from a Novel', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* 6 (March 1972): 31.

on the page. In pointing to them (and there is nothing else to point to) what we are doing is to bring into sharp focus, in turn, this, that and the other detail, juncture or relation in our total response'.[68] The poem, or work of prose, is a stable, unchanging entity, not an opportunity for freethinking.

Jacques Maritain's conception of knowledge through connaturality, which derives from Thomas Aquinas, and has elements in common with the conception of the relation of thinking and feeling that I outlined in the first chapter, is relevant here. *Connaturality* is a state in which knowledge is not just possessed or considered, but *inhabited*; it becomes something that changes the person, knowledge that animates change. Maritain specifically associates connaturality with art. Connaturality has the intellect in play 'together with affective inclinations and the dispositions of the will, and is guided and directed by them'; it is a knowledge that engages the whole person, deriving from an immersive sort of absorption prompted by an art-work.[69] The reconfiguration of mind-state necessary to connaturality entails many of the elements I have already outlined: thinking and feeling together; a 'placing' or ordering of experience; discernment of one's modes of interpretation and relating to experience. Maritain, in an echo of Leavis's term, refers to 'reality, emotionally grasped'.[70] 'Grasp' also suggests intuition and impulse along with firm, intelligent, grip: it is a felt response and in this context a directed one. Art's ability to bring these facets together means that it offers a particular way of grasping reality, in its fullness. Importantly, connatural knowledge is born of the artwork; it could have arisen only because of the artwork, and in that it sense belongs to it, something that does not, however, preclude it from having meaning outside the artwork. Rather, it acknowledges the necessity of the artwork to creating it, or enabling it, in the first place.

Maritain highlights that connaturality

> is not rational knowledge, knowledge through the conceptual, logical and discursive exercise of Reason. But it is really and genuinely knowledge, though obscure and perhaps incapable of giving account of itself, or of being translated into words.[71]

[68] *EU*, 68–70.
[69] Jacques Maritain, 'On Knowledge through Connaturality', *The Review of Metaphysics* 4, no. 4 (1951): 474.
[70] Ibid., 477.
[71] Ibid., 474.

The knowledge's insusceptibility to translation emphasises the importance of the work—for literature, the words—that have enabled it. Changing the words changes the knowledge. If connatural knowledge is not so much prompted by an artwork as brought into being through it, generated during the process of experiencing it, then connatural knowledge cannot be abstracted from the artwork, which is its vertebrae rather than simply its roots. The artwork is the only way the 'knowing' reaches its depth, and in reaching it, it never loses touch with the work itself. 'Knowing' is distinct because of the procedure of its coming-into-being, and of its continuing-to-be—the ongoing way that it depends on the work, only able to reach beyond it by depending on it so fully. This dependence is such that for Maritain it cannot be characterised as 'rational': it cannot be arrived at in any other way.

That the knowing is not rational in convention does not keep it from being so in character. Connatural knowledge has much in common with Newman's 'illative sense', which has a powerful emphasis on rationality. Newman defines the illative sense as a perfection of 'the personal action of the ratiocinative faculty', the perfect act of the reasoning mind in its 'power of judging and concluding'.[72] *Illative* derives from the Latin *illatus*, meaning *brought in* or *carried into*. For Newman the illative sense, deeply rational in character, is what enables assent when the sums of logic are not sufficient. Maritain's reference to the untranslatability of connatural knowledge reiterates the role of artistic form, and the prompting of the work itself, while acknowledging that other words will not capture the experience; one is faced with the 'sheer impossibility of distinguishing structure from meaning, or expression from that which precedes it and makes it possible', as Christopher Norris wrote of Merleau-Ponty.[73]

For both Maritain and Newman this kind of knowledge is of the utmost significance, something that has much in common with Leavis's underlying question in any encounter with literature: what is it *for*? Newman's illative sense has as its context the most profound of moral and spiritual decisions: assenting to faith. Maritain's connaturality is superior to knowledge because it requires

[72] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, ed. I.T Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 223; 227-228.
[73] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 52.

and enables the involvement of the whole person, in body and mind. It entails one being sufficiently moved by knowledge to act upon it: to use it to change one's life, and to be ready to change one's life, if that is necessary, so as to use it. What is prompted by the artwork, Maritain says, is no 'merely artistic morality': it has a profoundly moral relevance, the ability to shape a reality.[74] Literature is a mode through which one's most unthought-through habits of perception and assumptions can be drawn into the awareness, as one, for a limited amount of time, inhabits the attitudes of a text. Robinson states that 'there is no objective reality more powerful than experiential reality', which she also calls 'felt experience'.[75] For Charles Taylor, 'felt intuitions are essential to our acquiring or taking on ethical convictions'; Bernard Williams echoes the Leavisian-Maritainian emphasis on grasp when he writes that an observer can only fully understand a given concept when s/he can 'grasp imaginatively its evaluative point'.[76]

When Rowan Williams speaks of the way art invites recognition of 'its truth', it is evident that the 'truth' invoked is not correspondence to the world but an impression of truth enabled by a work that is able to have impact upon the world through the fresh perception it incites in its reader. Williams's specification, which I quoted earlier, that this enabling takes places '*only* through the work' stresses the specificity of the work itself. His recognition of the distinct role of the work is vital to understanding literature's cognitive significance. An account of the relationship between literature and knowledge can only be tenable if it hinges with a strict degree of exactitude ('*only* through', which might equally be 'only *through*') upon the text in question, necessitating, too, as I have detailed, a view of literary language that recognises that, thanks to the importance of form in creating meaning, it is generative and not representative. Writing again of the necessity of 'experienc[ing] the felt intuition' of concepts in order for them 'to be meanings for me', Taylor continues: 'And to remain meanings for me, I have to be able to renew this experience'.[77] Renewing the experience means returning to the work. The process of knowing enabled by a work remains

[74] Jacques Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist* (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), 93.
[75] Robinson in Thomas Gardner, *A Door Ajar* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 49; Robinson, *Child*, 8.
[76] Taylor, *Animal*, 304; Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1985), 142.
[77] Taylor, *Animal*, 183.

relevant outside of a work, but requires the work itself to be felt again most fully. The idea that having a poem or passage 'by heart' is important to one's 'daily sanity' reinforces the need to have access to the words in order to find again the feeling—because the words enable the process of knowing.[78]

With this account, we can see how the notion of a work being 'realized' itself becomes bound up with processes of knowing: of how knowledge comes to be. As Taylor puts it, 'This shape of experienced meaning doesn't precede the articulation, but comes about through and with it'.[79] Newman's, Williams's and Maritain's knowledge cannot be separated from what is known, nor from notions of what it is to know at all. Ellen Spolsky's idea of 'a cognitively responsible theory of interpretation'—'having many ways of knowing' and thus providing 'the species with a variety of ways of responding to a varied and changing world'—posits knowledge as something that has to be gained through essentially different means, if it is to be responsible—and, presumably, responsive, to the 'varied and changing world'.[80] Robert Duncan writes that 'Responsibility is to keep/ the ability to respond'.[81] One's understanding of how literature works is bound up with the nature of the knowledge one is prepared to receive from it: it is no coincidence that both Williams and Maritain emphasise the specificity of art, as Newman does the specificity of literary language in *The Idea of a University*. For all three, the understanding of art leads to the understanding of the kind of knowledge-relevance it has. The process of the knowledge, its actual mode of coming-into-being, is dependent on and derives from the text. To say this is also to intimate the impropriety of describing knowledge as *yielded from* a work. This is knowledge that could not be gained in any other manner, but it is also *of*, in the sense of continually *belonging to*, the text. The text is not just the grounds for it, or its prompt, in the way that a French class acts as a prompt for knowledge of the language. Literature is not one among many modes of accessing knowledge, because the kind of knowledge—the kind of knowing—that occurs in reading a poem or a novel is not available via any other means. Haydar and Conolly argue in favour of literature's ability to provide propositional

[78] Dana Gioia, 'Hearing from Poetry's Audience', *Poetry Review*, Spring 1992.
[79] Taylor, *Animal*, 188.
[80] Spolsky, 'Elaborated Knowledge', 174.
[81] Cited in Stephen Benson and Clare Connors, eds., *Creative Criticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014), 6.

knowledge and discount what they call the 'irreplaceability' thesis (the claims that literature offers knowledge that could not be gained elsewhere).[82] But the kind of knowledge generated in literature is unique as much for the process of its coming-into-being as for whatever it consists of, not least because the former makes the latter what it is. Michael Wood writes

> We have words, as Austin shows, that help us to meet these demands, but we also have, like Maisie, perceptions we cannot translate into words. And if those perceptions come to us from a novel, we may find we cannot happily translate them into words other than those we have already been given. We do translate them, but we can't do it happily. Recognising this fact, pausing over the untranslated perceptions, settling for coarseness when we have to, but remembering the subtlety we have just betrayed, is not moral relativism but a form of patience, a way of looking the world's complexity in the face.[83]

The suggestion is not just that particular words effectively capture—even perfectly capture—a perception, but that, in the case of literature, they incite and constitute it. Other words won't do because the perception, or 'knowing', is compromised in the shift. Following Anthony Quinton, Lamarque and Olsen observe a distinction between philosophy *in* literature ('refers to an essential relationship between philosophy and literature') and philosophy *through* literature ('names a contingent relationship').[84] Yet philosophy *through* literature more properly designates that the relationship is integral, that the engagement with philosophical (or moral and ethical) issues—Wood's 'subtlety'—is made possible only through literary form.[85] Literature's cognitive and moral values must similarly be values not 'in' literature—didacticism conveniently packaged, for instance—but 'through' it: values made possible only because of the way the work is written. For this reason, I prefer the terms 'cognitive/moral significance' to 'cognitive/moral value': a 'value' is too easily isolable from precisely that which has made it. I shall discuss this in more detail in Part Two.

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[82] See Oliver Conolly and Bashshar Haydar, 'Narrative Art and Moral Knowledge', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 41, no. 2 (2001): 109–124.
[83] Michael Wood, *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), 35–36. See Michael Wood, 'What Henry Knew', *LRB*, 18 December 2003.
[84] Lamarque and Olsen, *TFL*, 391–92. See Quinton's Chichele Lecture in Horden, *The Novelist as Philosopher*.
[85] As distinct from Mikkonen's notion of 'philosophy through literature', which explores literary works explicitly deemed to be philosophical. See Jukka Mikkonen, *The Cognitive Value of Philosophical Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

Part Two: Moral Significance

i. *The Great Tradition*

I have argued that literature's cognitive value is in the process of knowing it enables, for both reader and writer, something which is created only because of a usage of language in which 'technique' creates ideas. This second part of the chapter concentrates specifically on the moral significance of that process of knowing, and I argue that if a text is morally significant then it always has the potential to enable a moral gain. I consider the nature of the relationship between morality and literature, if one wants to claim that a text *is* morally significant rather than merely than it *has* incidentally something useful to an ethical project: that is, if the moral significance is a literary value. I begin with Leavis's *The Great Tradition*.

This thesis is advocating reading as a 'power for life', as Leavis put it. Such reading is at the heart of literature's worth, precisely because it is inextricable from literary quality. Only the literary works whose worth as literature makes itself felt can touch us and have an impact. As we have seen, it is not easy to refer to literature's relationship to living without thinning it to life-value alone. At times Leavis is at risk of doing that, although often the interpretation that he is rests partly on a misreading, or neglect, of the way words and experience are shown to relate in the 1930s texts. The way Leavis summarises Arnold's view is more indicative of his own:

> we make (Arnold insists) our major judgments about poetry by bringing to bear the completest and profoundest sense of relative value that, aided by the work judged, we can focus from our total experience of life (which includes literature), and our judgment has intimate bearings on the most serious choices we have to make thereafter in our living.[86]

Leavis is able to make this argument plausibly because of the focus on attitude that his criticism divulges. Reading is a genuine encounter with new modes of thinking, a new language for relating to experience, and can enable a shift in one's own way of thinking about living. Well-written texts generate new modes of relating to experience and enable for readers a process of knowing through the encounter with what I have been calling the attitude of a text—its mindset, the whole world of

[86] 'Arnold as Critic', 325.

life it makes felt, and its approach to living. Attitude is always involved, and it is attitude that is the key to appreciating how well-written language provides new modes of relating to experience. The broadening or deepening, through attitude, of one's way of conceiving human relation to experience is a cognitive and moral gain of significance, with the potential to affect one's life, if one is willing to toy with the idea that it might. It is the sustained immersive process of meeting a new world of attitudinal language, in which the language is crucial to what is given, that creates literature's moral significance.

The Great Tradition is famously problematic for its presentation of four 'great' writers of English literature. Marshall Gregory speaks representatively when he jibes at 'the mental image of F.R. Leavis intoning on and on about "the great tradition"', as does Marilyn Butler, in claiming that Leavis 'reduced the essential canon to only four writers'.[87] Leavis does make a disclaimer on his opening page—'The view, I suppose, will be as confidently attributed to me that, except Jane Austen, George Eliot, James and Conrad, there are no novelists in English worth reading', and a strong case can be made for his judgements of novelists like Fielding as emerging not from a desire to whittle down the canon, but rather fully to illuminate what makes novelists 'great'.[88] Still, as Belsey points out, the disclaimer also functions rhetorically, and in itself does not do enough to persuade one otherwise.[89]

Yet the text is of significant interest, particularly with regard to literature's moral bearings. *The Great Tradition* repeatedly draws upon the mode of thinking erected in the 1930s texts, and is easily misunderstood without them. *Revaluation*'s definition of 'deep moral seriousness' as 'human centrality' is echoed in *The Great Tradition* in terms such as 'essential human issues' or 'the most serious and urgent kind of interest in life'.[90] As Casey puts it in his analysis of *The Great Tradition*, 'the question arises whether the word "moral" is being used with anything like the force it traditionally has'.[91] Just as in Leavis's earlier discussions of morality in *New Bearings* and

[87] Marshall Gregory, 'Ethical Criticism: What It Is and Why It Matters.', *Style* 32, no. 2 (1998): 195; Marilyn Butler, 'Moments', *LRB*, 2 September 1982.
[88] *GT*, 9.
[89] Belsey, 'Re-Reading the Great Tradition', 122.
[90] *GT*, 19; 35.
[91] Casey, *Language*, 181. Context clarifies that the question is not of 'the force': 'It is important to notice what

Revaluation, 'morality' is not anything extractable from the literary text. The term can only be used with justice when it is referring to something that is to do with form and technique, just as form and technique cannot but relate to morality and human living. Leavis is careful to use language that undermines the abstraction of form from morality or vice versa:

> when we examine the formal perfection of *Emma*, we find that it can be appreciated only in terms of the moral preoccupations that characterize the novelist's peculiar interest in life. Those who suppose it to be an 'aesthetic matter', a beauty of 'composition' that is combined, miraculously, with 'truth to life', can give no adequate reason for the view that *Emma* is a great novel, and no intelligent account of the perfection of its form.

The commentary aims to undermine formalist criticism and advocates of verisimilitude alike. The 'moral preoccupations' are attitudinal, an 'interest in life' that requires particular words not only to be expressed, but to be *found*, for novelist as well as reader. That is why the 'formal perfection' cannot be separated from the 'peculiar interest in life'. (Characteristically of the time, Leavis uses 'peculiar' to mean 'particular': another attitudinal term.) The particular interest in life can only be pursued, examined, and 'appreciated' through *this* form.

Leavis is clear that to talk about literature as if '"form" and "style" [were] ends to be sought for themselves' is as unjust to literature as if 'morality' were explored in its more traditional form, as a set of rules for how to live.[92] As in the 1930s texts, technique is what enables a particular attitude and sense of morality to emerge: Lawrence's 'innovations and experiments are dictated by the most serious and urgent kind of interest in life'—an echo of the commentary on Hopkins's innovations in *New Bearings*.[93] Conrad is 'one of those creative geniuses whose distinction is manifested in their being peculiarly alive in their time—peculiarly alive to it': another clear echo.[94] Leavis is also explicit, as Maritain was about connaturality, that 'moral' does not refer to anything that can be paraphrased: in reading James, we have 'a sense that our finest discrimination is being challenged, while at the same time we can't easily produce for discussion any issues that have moral

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Leavis does not say. He does not say that Jane Austen arrives at the right moral conclusions about life […] Nor does he suggest that the moral code which emerges in Jane Austen's novels is one which, if we admire her as a writer, we should in some sense be prepared to adopt, or at least to approve. Indeed the question arises whether the word "moral" is being used with anything like the force it traditionally has'.

[92] All *GT*, 17.

[93] Ibid., 35.

[94] Ibid., 32.

substance to correspond'.[95] Moral weight is to do with one's 'interest in [one's] art', which 'brought to an intense focus, [is] an unusually developed interest in life'. That statement is a strong echo of the 1930s assessment of the ways authors relate to words and use language—whether to relate more deeply to experience or to escape from it. The trifold summation of the great novelists as 'all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity', is a statement about how the novelists use language, rather than the awestruck grandiosity assumed in some interpretations.[96] Belsey points out that the property of greatness is seen as belonging to authors, not texts, but she is ignoring the earlier work that establishes Leavis's interest as one in attitude—attitude to words and attitude to relating to experience.[97] The point is not the authors but what the language generates as the attitudes of the texts. Taking Leavis's statements alone can make him sound presumptuous. But the critical method of *The Great Tradition* and its echoes of the early work is more interesting than her dismissal recognises.

Leavis opposes that triple formula of the hallmarks of the greats with 'Flaubert's disgust or disdain or boredom', showing that these are aesthetic and moral categories: attitudes to language and experience alike.[98] His is a point that converges around the role and function of language, rather than one directly to do with experience, which illuminates Roger Poole's elusive reference to Leavis's '*linguistic* judgement on a view of life'.[99] In the passage from *New Bearings*—'He is a poet because his interest in his experience is not separable from his interest in words; because, that is, of his habit of seeking by the evocative use of words to sharpen his awareness of his ways of feeling, so making these communicable'—the claim is far from being that authors behave differently, or are superior to others in the way they live. They are able to develop a 'finest discrimination' through a precise and particular use of language that suggests a fresh, delicate way of understanding or imagining life that would not exist without that language. The point is that these

[95] Ibid., 20.
[96] All Ibid., 17. For instance: 'He was forever expressing an inspiring vision of the great potentialities of human nature'. John Newton, 'Leavis: A Life Partly Told', *The Sewanee Review* 104, no. 2 (1996): xxix.
[97] Belsey, 'Re-Reading the Great Tradition', 121–22.
[98] *GT*, 17.
[99] Poole, 'The Affirmation Is of Life', 61.

are linguistic achievements that enable a broadening or deepening of conceptions of relating to experience, for writer as for reader. Again, there are echoes with William James, who called attention to the way that reality can be felt as '*simply relation to our emotional and active life*'.[100] The insight is revealing of Leavis's view of literature's cognitive and moral relevance, and useful for thinking about how literature might inflect one's reality, enabling one to discern an emotional/intellectual response to living, whether or not one's own. Such discernment is found in uses of language that extend ideas of how to relate to living.

The Great Tradition is replete with diagnoses of attitude made through analyses of style and its creation of moral meaning. Early in the text Leavis characterises Fielding's 'attitudes, and his concern with human nature, [as] simple'.[101] Such simplicity prevents Fielding from counting in the way Leavis has prescribed on his second page: 'count[ing] in the same way as the major poets, in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of that human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life'.[102] The idea is that Fielding fails to prompt engagement with the human centrality that for Leavis represents morality, 'something of great human significance'.[103] '[A]wareness of the possibilities of life' is awareness of modes of perception that have a more profound reach than that permitted by everyday uses of language and customary, even automatic, modes of thought. Again, the closeness of the interest in art and in life is evident in Leavis's phrasing: great texts will be importantly innovative in terms of technique *and* in terms of their relevance to life. Language has to be used newly in order to prompt new understanding of life's possibilities. One's literary technique is bound up with the life-interest: 'There can't be subtlety of organization without richer

[100] '*In the relative sense*, then, the sense in which we contrast reality with simple *un*reality, and in which one thing is said to have *more* reality than another, and to be more believed, *reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life*. This is the only sense in which the word ever has in the mouths of practical men. *In this sense, whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real*'. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. II (New York: Holt, 1891), 295.
[101] *GT*, 12. Note that the commentary opens with the claim that Fielding 'deserves the place of importance given him in the literary histories'—a phrase which he qualifies: 'but he hasn't the kind of classical distinction we are also invited to credit him with' (11).
[102] Ibid., 10. The sentence is formulated surprisingly badly, with a misplaced 'not only' and an incorrect semi-colon.
[103] Ibid., 26.

matter to organize, and subtler interests, than Fielding has to offer'.[104] The comment calls to the earlier use of 'organization', especially with regard to Wordsworth, and underlines the fact that 'technique' is made up of ideas and formal innovations together. Time after time, Leavis undermines the separation of the 'literary' or 'aesthetic'—also called 'form' in *The Great Tradition*—and morality, and, as in the 1930s texts, he does so to subvert the presentation of art and life as distinct isolated realms. Indeed, he states that his quotation of David Cecil is solely in order to further that project of subversion: Cecil is quoted 'because the inadequate ideas of form ("composition") and moral interest [the quotation] implies—ideas of the relation between "art" and "life" as it concerns the novelist—are very representative'. He explicitly identifies these ideas of form and morality with those of art and life, making it clear that his attempts to recalibrate one's sense of form and morality as things that cannot be identified independently of one another is part of a broader project to present art, or more specifically, literature, as something that has everything to do with life.

The time that Leavis takes to investigate the relation of art and life suggests that this is *The Great Tradition*'s driving force, just as escape was that of *New Bearings*, and thinking and feeling that of *Revaluation*. As in those texts, the interest in correcting a misconception (literature is escape from life; poetry is about feelings; aesthetics and morality are unrelated realms of enquiry) applies to perception in life as well as to the interpretation of art. Leavis writes that Austen's

> interest in 'composition' is not something to be put over against her interest in life; nor does she offer an 'aesthetic' value that is separable from moral significance. The principle of organization, and the principle of development, in her work is an intense moral interest of her own in life that is in the first place a preoccupation with certain problems that life compels on her as personal ones. She is intelligent and serious enough to be able to impersonalize her moral tensions as she strives, in her art, to become more fully conscious of them, and to learn what, in the interests of life, she ought to do with them.[105]

In her art—and through her art. Austen's art is her mode of 'becom[ing] more fully conscious' of her 'intense moral interest' in life: the use of words in a process of writing literature enables for her a new awareness and discernment, just as Collingwood and Taylor argue of language generally. The enormous, vital, difference is that for Taylor and Collingwood language is a tool, whereas for

[104] Ibid., 12.
[105] All Ibid., 15–16.

Leavis, it is the objective as well as the means, because of the moral insight it *is*, and enables for the reader. Just as in the commentary on *Emma*, having come up with these words in this order is a marked moral accomplishment. The achievement of language is an achievement because it is also a moral one. Here ethics and aesthetics are genuinely 'one and the same', because it is only in using language in order to explore living that possibilities in living are themselves expanded.

It is easy to misinterpret this, even when the critic is keener on Leavis than, say, Catherine Belsey. Bilan's summation that there 'can be no significant form apart from this kind of moral inquiry into life, and the organisation that results—the inclusive scheme—is that of the moral fable or moral pattern' both identifies and obscures something very important in Leavis's work.[106] His suggestion that form *is* moral inquiry into life is right, if he means that achievements in form are what enable such an inquiry to take place as it would not otherwise be able. But the idea that what emerges is 'the moral fable' (Leavis's own, not useful, term) misses the fact that the moral inquiry is conducted *through* form—meaning that the moral significance cannot be merely illustrative, as a fable is. One sees this too in Anwar's suggestion that the 'focus is thus on the experience of life communicated by literature'.[107] *By* has to be *through*, or one loses what it is that literary language—the form of the saying—is doing, which is already so fine a point that it is hard to hold onto. Casey writes of Leavis's references to morality: 'The moral significance of [Austen's] work, then, lies in its dealing seriously, or intensely, or maturely, with experience. The opposite of this would be triviality, or sentimentality, or self-deception'.[108] This is vaguely right, but also apt to mislead, because it obscures the relation of 'work' and 'experience', which is not one of the former *dealing with* the latter. Leavis's sense of how language operates is the important preliminary missing here, along with the role of attitude in his thought.

Leavis, quoting from L.H. Myers's *The Root and the Flower*, finds it necessary to offer a qualification of his approval: 'Myers hasn't the great novelist's technical interest in method and presentment; he slips very easily into using the novel as a *vehicle*. That is, we feel that he is not

[106] Bilan, *Leavis*, 124.
[107] Kanwar, 'F.R. Leavis and Scrutiny', 33.
[108] Casey, *Language*, 181.

primarily a novelist'. As with the earlier argument against *medium*, he is alert to usages of words that indicate poetry or prose is treated as means to expressing (however well) already-formed ideas. One who is 'a novelist' will have a different relation to words to that intimated by Myers's work. Leavis's concern is with how language and thought can be related in the profoundest of ways, the former enabling a precision and particularity for the latter otherwise impossible to 'realize'. As ever, it is the relation of form and ideas that occupies him. '[T]here is an elementary distinction to be made between the discussion of problems and ideas, and what we find in the great novelists'. As with vehicle, 'discussion' (like Lamarque's explore) misrepresents what literature does. The 'great novelists' are 'are all very much concerned with "form"; they are all very original technically'—but they are not *only* concerned with form. This is the point at which Leavis quotes Lawrence on attitude—'this attitude in art, as Lawrence points out, is indicative of an attitude in life—or towards life'—and it is a clear association of form with attitude to life.[109] Indeed, Leavis expressly says that 'the peculiar quality of [the great novelists] preoccupation with "form" may be brought out by' Lawrence's remark on Flaubert, which is about the attitude towards life created by his writing.

Just as 'organization' cannot be subtle without rich matter, there cannot be originality in form that has life-resonance without an interest in life: an interest in using language to discern something about life. The interest in life, that is, is a 'serious' one, as Casey put it; Leavis writes later in a footnote that 'out of triviality comes evil'. He parodies 'an admirer of George Moore', for whom 'the novelist's problem is to evolve an orderly composition which is also a convincing picture of life'. The separation of art and life that aestheticists perform also means that the interest in life is limited to that of 'a convincing picture': not a use of language to discover and make available new aspects of living. While Cecil and Moore present ideas in which art and life are rivals, for Leavis the two are profoundly mingled, interacting, effecting and influencing one another. He praises George Eliot for her 'radically reverent attitude towards life', something that he has discerned only from her writing: the evaluation is of form, then of *attitude*, not Eliot's character. When Leavis says she has 'a profound seriousness of the kind that is a first condition of any real intelligence', the

[109] All *GT*, 15–16.

statement can only be a reference to the attitude exemplified through her 'technique'.[110]

John Gross writes that 'the novelists in the Great Tradition have no monopoly of the common qualities, such as "a profoundly serious interest in life", which Leavis claims for them. I can see how one might feel that Hardy was a less profound novelist than George Eliot (not everyone would agree); but in what possible sense could he be said to take a less profoundly serious interest in life?'[111] What we can take Leavis to be meaning by such comments is that Hardy's work exemplifies a use of words less determinedly concerned with relating to life than that exemplified in Eliot's. The words do not generate a felt mode of response to life that takes both life and the language one uses in order to relate to it as issues of the utmost significance: crucially, inextricably, connected. The very point is that being a less profound novelist means a less profoundly serious interest in life.

Gross also criticises Leavis for quoting selectively Beatrice Webb's statement about turning to novelists and poets for descriptions of 'the complexity of human nature'—Leavis does not mention that the novelists Webb turned to were Balzac, Fielding, and Thackeray, none of whom are advanced as great in *The Great Tradition*. (He writes of Webb's *My Apprenticeship* in more detail in his introduction to *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*).[112] But the remark highlights something notable about Leavis's critical values. What matters to him most is why one reads, or, rather, what reading is for. He approves of Webb for reading for the reasons she does; that matters more than anything else. This is also why Leavis earlier offers a parenthetical remark disparaging critics who demand nothing from a novel but that it kill time.[113] The charge, as Gross points out, does not seem genuine; no critics are mentioned; like Belsey, Gross feels that such comments function as 'rhetorical tricks'.[114] But the point that Leavis is interested in making is that literature deserves to be spoken of as prompting more than enjoyment. His criticism does its best work when it demonstrates that the qualities that make literature enjoyable are the very reasons that it is valuable to human living. Gross might be wrong so readily to dismiss what Frank Kermode called the

[110] Ibid., 23; 16.
[111] Gross, *RFML*, 276.
[112] Mill, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge, with an Introduction by F.R. Leavis*.
[113] *GT*, 75; 31.
[114] Gross, *RFML*, 277.

Leavisian 'uncompromising seriousness'.[115] As McGilchrist has said, literature 'is not the tiresome series of word games which some critics would make it, undermined by its particularity in time and place, and offering no connexions with life'.[116] Leavis's fear that the novel be treated as a means of killing time is an amplified version of the same charge. Michael Bell has written that the 'critical impact of Leavis lies not in a complexity of ideas *about* literature so much as in the quality of attention *to* it'.[117] The statement reduces the ongoing relevance of Leavis's ideas to his generally recognised power as a close reader. The 'complexity of ideas about literature' are there in his idea of the nature of the relation between form and content, words and experience, and language and thought, his attention to attitude, and his related conviction that literature is morally valuable in its capacity to convey 'felt significance'. His interest in what literature is for, and his utter refusal to consider that question in terms of anything other than the 'words on the page', is a 'complexity of ideas about literature' of remarkable nuance. Leavis's criticism conveys the seeds for a theory of literary language as enabling an attitude towards experience that has the potential to modify one's own attitude, and one's own language-world—which is a profound contribution to literary scholarship, despite the fact that these are but seeds in his work.

ii. Nussbaum and 'ethical goodness'

Given what *The Great Tradition* demonstrates about the relation of form, morality and attitude, I would like to turn to present-day claims about the ethical value of literature, most notably by Martha Nussbaum, who has much in common with Wayne Booth's project of ethical criticism, but extends it in interesting ways, away from the idea of novels and characters as friends, and towards the question of how literature influences politics, law, and society.[118] Her characterisation of literature as valuable for its promotion of readerly goodness, attractive though it is, largely neglects both the

[115] Frank Kermode, 'Why Didn't He Commit Suicide?', *LRB*, 4 November 2004.
[116] McGilchrist, *Against Criticism*, 24.
[117] Bell, *F.R. Leavis*, 12.
[118] See Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2012).

procedural and attitudinal aspects of literature's functioning. In examining the flaws in her argument in this section, I hope to suggest further how misinterpretations of literature's relationship to morality are connected with an inadequate sense of how literature works. In the section following, I will suggest how one might hold onto some of Nussbaum's better claims while toppling her method, rendering them *literarily* convincing, as well as appealing.

The principal flaw in Nussbaum's account, from *Love's Knowledge* through *Poetic Justice* to the present, is that she considers literature for its storylines or complex characterisations, and bypasses the text as an experience of language, in which, to use Michael Wood's term, the 'subtlety' of what is given cannot be translated, nor our perception of that subtlety. She locates literature's usefulness, its relevance to the world, in something that has little to do with the literary value of literature: literature as valuable because it leads to empathy, which is the *real* value. She writes, for instance, of the value of *The Native Son* and *Maurice* as the compassion they incite for people who are black or are homosexual. Aside from the question of whether that is true—whether readers are indeed prompted to compassion—one has to ask, with Richard Posner (with whom she and Booth had a debate on 'ethical criticism' in 1998), as well as Lamarque and Olsen, how that relates to the literary value of the text.[119] It cannot be sufficient that *The Native Son* features a maligned black character; a film could incite the same compassion. But Nussbaum does not investigate how compassion might be related to literary language and what such language enables in subject-matter, either in her four pages on Wright's novel or her briefer look at Forster's *Maurice*.[120]

In fact, throughout her strong claims for the value of literature, and despite her vocal insistence on the role of 'aesthetic values' such as 'structure, viewpoint, metaphor, sentence rhythm and so on', and even her approval of James's view (in her words) that 'the aesthetic is ethical and political', the account Nussbaum provides is notably unliterary, one that depends on novels as illustrative, depictions of complex situations that prompt responses from readers.[121] Even in a piece titled 'Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature', there is little discussion of the distinctive functioning of

[119] Richard A. Posner, 'Against Ethical Criticism: Part Two', *Philosophy and Literature* 22, no. 2 (October 1998).
[120] Nussbaum, *PJ*, 93–99.
[121] Martha Nussbaum, 'Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism', *Philosophy and Literature* 22, no. 2 (October 1998): 344–46.

literary language, whether in general or in a particular text.[122] References to 'form' point to 'the very form of the novel as genre'.[123] That is problematic not so much because the genre of the novel is notoriously broad and undefined (Nussbaum concedes that what she says may apply only to certain carefully selected novels), as because she views 'the novel' as a sufficient mention of form. For her, that something takes place in 'the novel' is already an emphasis on style, such that mentions of the novel remain at the level of generalisations about the genre without considering how novels differ as particular and distinct manifestation of form, form generating meaning singularly in every text.

Her discussion of the kinds of questions literary texts raise offers topics (who is speaking; how involved are they in events; what does the narrative communicate about the narrator; does the narrative give pleasure; and so forth) that are all generic questions, applicable not just to any novel but to any narrative fiction, including film. She lists the questions I would deem crucial, from which any analysis of these others must arise, last, commenting, 'We also ask questions that are more often called stylistic', and offering three: 'What are the shape and rhythm of the sentences? What metaphors are used, and in what contexts? What vocabulary is selected?'[124] These queries must not be relegated to 'also'. Questions about literary form involve close attention (at least) to style, syntax, punctuation, tone, context, atmosphere, rhythm, lexicon, sentence-length, rhetorical technique, imagery, as well as the more general considerations of narrator and character; the way in which the former collaborate in creating the realities of the latter is the fascinating subject of literary enquiry. By concentrating on the latter alone, Nussbaum can only make great claims for literature that sound intuitively attractive to those who have been moved by the novels she discusses, but without shedding light on how they achieve their effects, and thus undermining the claim, which remains an insistence, on their importance.

Nussbaum's grand claims for literature can sound off-putting in a way that harms the overall project. As Louis Groarke put it, her 'often platitudinous arguments seem to seriously understate

[122] See Nussbaum, *LK*, 3–53.
[123] Ibid., 37.
[124] Ibid., 30–35.

the ethical role of literature'.[125] Nussbaum's 'ethical criticism' is the use of 'ethically good' literature as a 'guide' in ethical issues; she employs categories such as the 'ethical deficiencies' of a work.[126] With literature's relation to morality viewed thus, one might be inclined to say with Posner, a lawyer vehemently defending literature as separate from moral issues, that 'the moral content and consequences of a work of literature are irrelevant to its value as literature'.[127] The notion of literature being 'ethically good' or bad greatly simplifies the way that it relates to morality, discounting its 'ability to champion the unconventional, to explore the unfamiliar, and to tackle difficult subjects'—as the 2016 Man Booker judges put it in their announcement of the shortlist—as well as the fact that often it may not invoke what could be called moral content at all.[128] Novels that do not have much in the way of plotline would not fit with Nussbaum's insistence on the rich inner lives of characters. Even in novels by Nussbaum's exemplary author of 'ethically good' work, Henry James, it is not clear how such a label illuminates James's writing. Wood rightly asks of *The Wings of the Dove*: 'Has Densher arrived late at the right morality, or is he just trapped in some blurred and generalised sense of guilt?'[129] The novel offers no clear answers. Nussbaum might say that the novel is ethically good precisely because of the questions it raises, prompting one to think through issues not previously considered. If this is what is meant by 'ethically good', it is closer to the position I am advocating, although my view is that the stress on any literary work as ethically good or deficient leads inexorably towards content considered in abstraction from form, as Nussbaum's analyses prove, and remains a misleading characterisation of the relation of literature to morality. Besides that, an emphasis on ambiguity can pose a distraction. Literature must be doing more than asking complex questions, for these exist already; many ethical questions have no straightforward or simple answer. If a novel is 'ethically good' for providing complexity, then the question of what use the epithet offers remains.

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[125] Louis Groarke, 'Cognition and Literary Ethical Criticism', *OSSA Conference Archive*, 18 May 2011, 3.
[126] Nussbaum, 'Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism', 353; 356.
[127] Richard A. Posner, 'Against Ethical Criticism', *Philosophy and Literature* 21, no. 1 (1997): 1.
[128] 'As a group we were excited by the willingness of so many authors to take risks with language and form. The final six reflect the centrality of the novel in modern culture – in its ability to champion the unconventional, to explore the unfamiliar, and to tackle difficult subjects'. 'Man Booker Prize Announces 2016 Shortlist', *The Man Booker Prizes*, 13 September 2016.
[129] Wood, *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge*, 28.

Much of Nussbaum's response to Posner accuses him of being illiberal in stating that she is wrong to use literary texts as she does. Novels can indeed be used as illustrations. But she does not see how she compromises her own project—to enquire how literature contributes to moral philosophy, and to ask, with Bernard Williams and Hilary Putnam, how it might expand philosophy's 'limits' or the 'meaning' of knowledge, along with literature's possible contribution to issues of social justice, public morality, and present-day politics—by treating it as something that functions merely illustratively.[130] Literature's contribution to ethics cannot be satisfactorily accounted for in a vision of literature as primarily the source of 'responsible' content, without 'ethical deficiencies'. As Posner writes, that vision 'gives literature too solemn and even puritanical an air'.[131] 'In Nussbaum's account', writes Charles Altieri

> literature is primarily an instrument for teaching us discernment and for eliciting from us thoughtful pity. Literature remains subject to philosophy, which ultimately controls how values are characterized and assessed. And while literature proves useful in resisting the utilitarian and rationalist models of assessment that Nussbaum attacks, its relevance in this regard stems less from the passions it mediates than from the inadequacies of those philosophical stances. Therefore I think that in asking literary criticism to pursue clearly defined, public ethical ends, we risk losing sight of what are usually the most compelling and most persuasive experiential qualities the relevant texts produce. And we do so without gaining much more than ideological reinforcement for values that have their sponsoring energies and relevant conditions of judgment elsewhere.[132]

Altieri highlights that part of what is lost in the Nussbaumian account is literature's 'experiential qualities'; she treats it as 'an instrument'. But he is perilously close to suggesting that one jettison relevance to 'public ethical ends' altogether. The response of lovers of literature to an idea that literature 'must be studied because it's a vehicle for preserving and transmitting the experience of those distant from us in space, time or circumstances', as Bruce Robbins summarises Nussbaum's view (note 'vehicle'), is generally to claw literature back from those Landy calls 'the meaning-mongers'.[133]

That is primarily because many 'meaning-mongers' ignore, Nussbaum-style, how literature operates. Nussbaum sees novels as aids in a moral fight: 'in the war against moral obtuseness, the

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[130] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*; Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).
[131] Posner, 'Against Ethical Criticism', 21.
[132] Altieri, 'Lyrical Ethics and Literary Experience.', 86.
[133] Bruce Robbins, 'Dive In!', *LRB*, 2 November 2000; Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions*, 8.

artist is our fellow fighter, frequently our guide'.[134] Romanticised as this is as a formulation, what I am claiming is not so different. Where Nussbaum speaks of 'the artist', I would speak of the novel or poem, and Nussbaum and I evidently differ in *how* we think texts are important. As Bromwich says, 'Nussbaum thinks that good novels are about moral seriousness and she thinks that morality is a reflection on the "inner lives" of persons. It follows that a novel she admires had better be about the inner lives of its characters'.[135] Her texts would depend on the story of characters, mine on how well-written a work is: on the question of what its language enables. As I said earlier, a text need not have characters at all in order to be morally significant. Nor does the metaphor of 'war' and 'fellow fighter' fit my argument. But a subversion of 'moral obtuseness' is indeed what I am claiming for well-written works. While Posner desires that literature is not involved in Nussbaum's 'war' at all, I think Nussbaum is right to emphasise its relevance to moral questions, though entirely wrong in the way she does so.

Diamond offers a Nussbaum-inspired account, stating that writers of literature 'can put before us and develop our concept of a human being by giving us scenes of such recognition or denial of recognition, by showing us, reminding us, that *this* is what it is like to recognize another human being, and that *this* is what it is like to fail to accord such recognition, to refuse it'.[136] Elsewhere she uses de la Mare's poem 'Ducks' to tell us that 'Every Duck himself is, and himself alone […] The sense of life in the poem, the sense of the memory of *this* feathered creature, with *his* one life, is akin to the sense of mystery of individual human life felt by Wordsworth in the crowded streets of London: "The face of every one that passes me by is a mystery": *each is himself*, this man, this face, with his one life. There is *who he is*'.[137] For her, novels are 'texts engaged in the shaping of the language of particularity'.[138] I draw out the stress on particularity because it is a common emphasis in ethical criticism, and often does little justice to literary achievements, because it, too, concentrates on something deriving purely from content (and often banal content at that). Although

[134] Nussbaum, *LK*, 164.
[135] David Bromwich, 'Rat Poison', *LRB*, 17 October 1996.
[136] Cora Diamond, 'Losing Your Concepts', *Ethics* 98, no. 2 (January 1988): 264.
[137] Cora Diamond, 'Martha Nussbaum and the Need for Novels', *Philosophical Investigations* 16, no. 2 (April 1993): 146–47.
[138] Ibid., 153.

literature can make felt the particular importance of distinct beings, to dwell on that alone short-changes many texts, even those that evoke characters in profound ways.

Mrs Dalloway, for instance, creates the extraordinary sense of fluctuations of consciousness for various characters, through lengthy sentences and the 'rhythm' whose importance Woolf declared, which lulls the reader into an experience of a mode of thinking. Take this passage:

> Since she was so unhappy, for weeks and weeks now, Rezia had given meanings to things that happened, almost felt sometimes that she must stop people in the street, if they looked good, kind people, just to say to them 'I am unhappy'; and this old woman singing in the street 'if someone should see, what matter they?' made her suddenly quite sure that everything was going to be alright. They were going to Sir William Bradshaw; she thought his name sounded nice; he would cure Septimus at once. And then there was a brewer's cart, and the grey horses had upright bristles of straw in their tails; there were newspaper placards. It was a silly, silly dream, being unhappy.[139]

It evokes Rezia's particularity, but that is not the passage's significance, which is rather in the way the prose configures a state of being. The power of the passage is partly that, just as Rezia feels she is happy, the prose suggests otherwise, as she continues to attribute meaning where there is none, just as she does when 'so unhappy': reading meaning into things that do not appear to have it, and thereby enriching the 'things that happened'. One is lulled into the rhythms of Rezia's mental state by the length of the first sentence and the only vaguely connected clauses. The lack of pronoun in the fourth clause locates one securely in Rezia's mind, as does the semi-colon, which signals and ensures a kind of volta in the sentence as the attention shifts, with Rezia's, to the lines the old woman is singing. The associative moves of Rezia's mentality are figured: unhappiness equals finding meaning in things; finding meaning in things tells her that 'everything was going to be alright'. The fluctuations of her mood both hangs on external events and operates independently of them, so that one is not sure—just as Rezia is not—which is determining her feeling. William Bradshaw's name sounds nice, which seems a good sign: is that because of the woman's song, or because she already feels hopeful, or because she seeks a sign of hope wherever she can, and knows it? The answer is that that there is no clear answer, only the strong conveyance of Rezia's mood, which itself does not know its causes or effects, and of the swell of sudden, tentative, hope. Initially the hope is more anxious, but by the end of the passage it bursts open: Septimus will be cured 'at

[139] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. Morris Beja (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 63.

once'; being unhappy is a 'silly, silly dream'. The components of the scene that Rezia is walking through also give her joy, something that Woolf makes clear is an aspect of her mental state by offering no adjectives: the cart, the straw, the placards. Rezia's mood is such that just seeing them is enough for them to be of perfect, telling, significance, even though she does not know what they tell or what they signify: only that they are good, and that they are there. The strength of the passage is in the way in which it generates for the reader a sense of the contours and texture of a brief attitude for brief moments. It is a felt sense, such that one undergoes a process of knowing what it is to respond to living, however momentarily, this way: something akin to Walsh's 'knowing in the sense of realizing by living through', as long as 'realizing' has a Leavisian inflection.[140] Woolf creates Rezia's mode of relating to experience, and it is not that it is Rezia's that is significant, nor her particularity—she is a minor character, and this her largest scene—but the mode of relating itself.

I think, with Nussbaum, that literature is deeply relevant to morality—and public morality, not just private. But that importance is because of its language, not because of its content, nor because it is a vehicle for a message I already know is important, such as that mistreatment of an ethnic group has horrifying personal and social consequences. The possibility that a text stimulates the empathic imagination is a likely one, but literature must be doing something more if it is to be distinct from any other narrative art-form, and if one is to find *Mrs Dalloway* of as much value as *The Native Son*. As Susan Feagin says, having 'emotional and other affective responses to a work of fictional literature is a very important part of appreciating it, and a capacity of a work to provide such responses is part of what is valuable about it'.[141] Affective, like intellectual, response is vital not just to appreciating literature but to 'realizing' it: to inhabiting the experience given. But the emphasis on empathy or 'particularity', or on ethical goodness, can lead to a misapprehension of the nature of a text's moral significance with disheartening consequences for the way in which literature is seen and spoken about. Jenefer Robinson writes that 'To be told that *Anna Karenina* teaches us that betraying your husband can lead to misery is no substitute for reading the novel. One important reason why this is so is that it is only through an emotional experience of a novel that one

[140] Walsh, *Literature and Knowledge*, 101.
[141] Susan L. Feagin, *Reading with Feeling* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell UP, 1996), 1.

can genuinely learn from it'.[142] She is right about 'no substitute'—but wrong about what one learns from reading the novel. Where ethical criticism leads to a desire for literature to assert what one already thinks of as morally right—not 'betraying your husband'—it misses the real, and vitally different, moral significance of a text.

Both Diamond's and Nussbaum's visions of literature's moral value compromises the overall endeavour. As Plumer said, 'I think that if this is all there is to the morally persuasive force of novels, then that force is cheapened compared to what it otherwise might be'.[143] Lamarque, too, points out that in such cases the 'connection with literature can seem merely contingent'.[144] If that it generates empathy is to be a value of a literary text qua literary text, an account constructed on word-choice is fundamental. The empathy generated—and the same goes for the knowledge generated—must be specific to, depend on, and derive from, the words. As Robinson has put it:

> There is a great difference, in fiction and in life, between knowing someone and knowing *about* someone. When a writer knows *about* his character, he is writing for plot. When he *knows* his character, he is writing to explore, to feel reality on a set of nerves somehow not quite his own. Words like "sympathy", "empathy", and "compassion" are overworked and overcharged—there is no word for the experience of seeing an embrace at a subway stop or hearing an argument at the next table in a restaurant. Every such instant has its own emotional coloration, which memory retains or heightens, and so the most sidelong, unintended moment becomes a part of what we have seen of the world. Then, I suppose, these moments, as they have seemed to us, constellate themselves into something a little like a spirit, a little like a human presence in its mystery and distinctiveness.[145]

Lamarque and Olsen rightly protest against Nussbaum's use of literature, with Putnam's, in their arguments for literature's relevance to morality, not because their assertions are not correct—Putnam's claim that literature 'aid[s] us in the imaginative recreation of moral perplexities, in the widest sense' is obviously right for some novels and some people—but because they are incidental to the fact of these works being literary.[146] Neither Nussbaum nor Putnam argues for a moral value deriving from literary quality. Nussbaum has even said the novel is a form 'that implies […] that our task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do'.[147] Lamarque and Olsen

[142] Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason*, 156.
[143] Plumer, 'Cognition and Literary Ethical Criticism', 2.
[144] Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 248.
[145] Marilynne Robinson, 'Reclaiming a Sense of the Sacred', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 February 2012.
[146] Hilary Putnam, 'Literature, Science, and Reflection', *New Literary History* 7, no. 3 (1976): 7.
[147] Nussbaum, *LK*, 3.

summarise Nussbaum's perspective well: 'What literature supplies in moral reasoning is the working-out of a moral choice from a subjective point of view'.[148] They ultimately dismiss the Nussbaumian view because the 'question whether [the literary works'] moral value is part of, or integral to, their aesthetic value is simply not raised or considered'.[149] Thus, although they accept that 'some literary works make a contribution to moral reasoning', the problem is the claim—embraced in this thesis—that the 'features of these works which make them valuable contributions to moral reasoning are identical in part with those features that make them valuable literary works'.[150] The final section, building on the rest of the thesis, completes an account to answer that challenge.

iii. Moral significance

As the discussion of Nussbaum suggests, a prime difficulty in discussing the relationship of literature to morality is discussing it without being waylaid: lulled into making statements that suggest a text is a moral vehicle, or perhaps more insidiously, into speaking of it as offering, for instance, 'moral values' that are 'promoted in a work' (as one might read Robinson's claim about *Anna Karenina*).[151] It is difficult not to fall into such speech, because the moral significance of a literary text is evidently related to what Leavis called 'the human world', which is value-filled.[152] How to speak of literature's crucial relevance to the world of human values without expecting that it helps one to 'reconsider the list of things which you do not currently value, but which you think of as likely candidates for valuing'?[153] Such vocabulary, like Nussbaum's, renders a literary work

[148] Lamarque and Olsen, *TFL*, 387.
[149] Ibid., 391.
[150] Ibid., 394.
[151] Malcolm Pittock, 'Literature and Moral Seriousness: A Note', *The Cambridge Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1 September 2016): 199.
[152] *LP*, 58. Ian Robinson named his journal 'The Human World' in recognition of Leavis. See his evaluation of Leavis in *The English Prophets* (Norfolk: Edgeways, 2001)., and his *Culture and Environment*-inspired criticism of language in *The Survival of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973).
[153] Gregory Currie, 'The Moral Psychology of Fiction', *Australian Humanities Review*, April 1996. An earlier version is Gregory Currie, 'The Moral Psychology of Fiction', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 73, no. 2 (1

a vehicle, just as Leavis warned against. This section suggests the nature of literature's vital moral significance, arguing that that significance is fundamentally connected to, and only enabled by, the way literature operates.

Andrew Gibson criticises David Parker and Nussbaum for their view that 'ethics is only thinkable in terms of certain uniform characteristics or consistent features. This, precisely, is an ethics that cannot allow for radical difference, heterogeneity, the thought of the incommensurable'.[154] His concern is with conformity, and I agree that the moral significance of literature, being generated rather than illustrated, requires an account in which there is space for the 'radical' and new—something that 'moral values' minimises. But the wish to transcend conformity must not disregard literature's inescapable tie to morality—what Nussbaum calls the question of 'human life and how to live it'—a tie that is denied in Posner's account and generally in that of 'autonomists', as well as detectable in Gibson's statement.[155] In examining how literature is morally significant, I focus on the way such significance is inextricably interwoven with good writing. One of the merits of 'moral significance' is that it leads away from the idea of literature dealing with an established value or even creating its own particular set of values, or being 'ethically good', recognising nevertheless the powerful, integrative, kind of relationship literature has with morality: with the question of what Hopkins's friend Richard Dixon perceived in his poetry as 'the essence of things'.[156]

Carroll, a 'moderate moralist' describes the Art for Art (or radical autonomist) argument, championed by Lamarque, Hornby and Posner, as one in which talk 'about morality is [...] out of place, if not conceptually incoherent'.[157] Moralism 'is the view that 'sometimes a moral defect in an artwork can be an aesthetic flaw and that sometimes a moral virtue can be an aesthetic virtue'.[158]

June 1995): 250–59.

[154] Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel* (London: Routledge, 1999), 10.

[155] Nussbaum, *LK*, 15.

[156] C.C. Abbott, ed., *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1935), 33.

[157] Noël Carroll, 'Moderate Moralism', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, no. 3 (1 July 1996): 228. See also Noël Carroll, 'Moderate Moralism Versus Moderate Autonomism', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 38, no. 4 (1 April 1998): 419–24. Lopes argues 'radical autonomists' do not exist in *Beyond Art* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 88–91.

[158] Carroll, 'Art and Ethical Criticism', 377.

The very idea of 'moral virtue[s]' radically conditions the kind of moral relevance a text can have; a literary conception of literature's moral relevance would not seek 'moral virtue'. More significant than the terminology, perhaps, is the kind of distinction between 'moral' and 'aesthetic' that Carroll sets up, one sequentially affecting the other, but only 'sometimes'. My case is that the two *always* interweave, and that neither is first established and thereafter influences one's view of the other. The sequential, occasional relation Carroll envisions indicates that his idea of 'moral' is driven by content, neglecting both attitude and form, and suggesting a preliminary conception of the morally good without openness to what 'aesthetic' innovations might create. Leavis was perhaps right to highlight the demerits of 'aesthetic'—as he did throughout his career, warning against 'literary' in the 1930 texts, and notably using quotation marks around 'aesthetic' in *The Great Tradition*. It is a useful term, but less so when used as one half of a binary; as Eaglestone pointed out, using it assumes a clear separation from the ethical, which is forced away, separate and distinct.[159] Nor does Booth's more accommodating scheme—'aesthetic values are real', but 'aesthetic quality' and 'moral and ethical quality' overlap—allow for the symbiotic relationship between the realms that Leavis's criticism envisions, in which they are inescapably connected via attitude, each always raising concerns ostensibly to do with the other.[160]

Alessandro Giovannelli has advanced the 'ethical fittingness theory', which claims that 'there is an ethical evaluation of [representational artworks, including literature]—the one targeting a work's point of view or, as I say, ethical perspective—that, whenever legitimate qua ethical evaluation, systematically bears on the artistic evaluation of the work'.[161] Berys Gaut offers a similar option, ethicism, which 'holds that a work is aesthetically flawed in so far as it possesses an aesthetically relevant ethical flaw and aesthetically meritorious in so far as it possesses an aesthetically relevant ethical merit. The ethical flaws referred to are intrinsic ethical flaws, not the ethically bad effects that works may have on actual audiences. Intrinsic ethical flaws are ethical

[159] For instance, from a 1972 talk: 'I need to guard myself and my theme from the word 'aesthetic', which tends in this matter, as in so many others, to beg the important questions and trivialize the issues'. *VC*, 259.
[160] Wayne Booth, 'Why Banning Ethical Criticism Is a Serious Mistake', *Philosophy and Literature* 22, no. 2 (October 1998): 169; 171.
[161] Alessandro Giovannelli, 'Ethical Criticism in Perspective: A Defense of Radical Moralism', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 4 (1 November 2013): 336.

flaws in the attitudes that works manifest toward their subjects'.[162] My argument is that a work that is well-written bypasses those categories, form and idea arriving together; moral significance is decided by the way language is used, 'exploratory-creatively', to enable a distinct process of thinking during the very act of composition. In Gaut's terms, 'aesthetically meritorious' work has moral significance because the way it is written enables moral resonance. A text can be more or less morally significant, depending on how well it is written. Such moral significance is intrinsic, in that it is generated by the text, but it is also outwardly-engaged, relating in some way to what is meant by morally good in the world. That is, the moral significance is likely to be something such as increased thoughtfulness: an addition to understanding of different modes of relating to experience or of attitudes to living.

Gaut's intrinsic 'ethical merit[s]' and 'flaws', like Giovannelli's, depend on how a work treats its subject. Such treatment, which Gaut calls 'the attitudes that works manifest towards their subjects', is a factor in my scheme only insofar as it refers to the attitude generated by a work's language, not an attitude in terms of content (say, one of derision towards a character). That is, where language is felt to be imposed on what is written, whether or not regarding character, I would suggest that a text is 'aesthetically flawed' and its capacity to be morally significant limited. If a work shows contempt to a character in terms of content, but is well-written, the language remains of moral significance. D.H. Lawrence frequently shows contempt to his characters, in a way that does not affect the moral significance of his writing: his interest is predominantly in what language and its movements make felt, rather than in creating character. In *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, for instance, most of the characters are significant only as opposing forces to Yvette, and even Yvette matters only because of what she stands for. In a confrontation with Yvette, her father is described as speaking

> with a cold, mongrel sort of sneer, which showed what an utter unbeliever he was at the heart. The inferiority of a heart which has no core of warm belief in it, no pride in life. He had utterly no belief in her.
>
> Yvette went pale and very distant. Her pride, that frail, precious flame which everybody tried to quench,

[162] Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 229. See also Berys Gaut, 'The Ethical Criticism of Art', in *Aesthetics and Ethics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge UP, 1998), 182–203; Berys Gaut, 'Art and Knowledge', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford UP, 2003). See Conolly's defence of ethicism in Oliver Conolly, 'Ethicism and Moderate Moralism', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, no. 3 (1 July 2000): 302–16.

recoiled like a flame blown far away, on a cold wind, as if blown out, and her face, white now and still like a snowdrop, the white snow-flower of his conceit, seemed to have no life in it, only this pure, strange abstraction.[163]

As with the rest of her family, little attempt is made to write of them with love or generosity, but the language does not call for such an attempt to be made. Yvette, too, is a kind of means for the language; the point of the confrontation is to enable the juxtaposition of the 'cold, mongrel sneer', which bespeaks 'no pride in life', with the effect that it has on the other, recoiling, flame of pride, which is itself 'pale and very distant'. The language is felt to be finding its thought, and the exploration of pride is powerful in part because the characters are of little significance beside it.

If, however, derision or contempt are *formal*—a character not thought-through, not felt to be alive, when the intention of the work is evidently that the character be made real—then the work fails to be consistently well-written, and loses moral significance. Ian McEwan's *Solar*, in my terms, has only limited moral significance. The novel opens eleven affairs into Michael Beard's fifth marriage, itself shortly to end, and that loss seems to stifle his capacity to love at all. Later, thinking of the 'dark summer' of the marriage's end, Beard tells himself, contemptuously, that he 'pined like a dog'. He has closed himself, without acknowledgement, to understanding of, or desire for, genuine human intimacy. Returning from a business trip and on his way to his lover of the moment, Melissa, he knows that there is a certain protocol to which he must adhere upon first seeing her, and laments to himself that he cannot just eat the food she has prepared and then take her straight to bed, without talk or preamble. In his own mind, he is 'a monster of insincerity, cradling tenderly on his arm a woman he thought he might leave one day soon, listening to her with a sensitive expression […] when all he wanted was to make love to her without preliminaries, eat the meal she had cooked, drink a bottle of wine and then sleep—without blame, without guilt'.[164] This internal monologue contributes to the disquieting, sordid tone already established, which persists through the rest of the scene, not only indicating the ultimate indifference Beard feels for Melissa, but also prompting the reader into a squalid view of Beard, on which the remainder of the novel will play. Melissa tells

[163] D.H. Lawrence, *The Complete Short Novels*, ed. Keith Sagar and Melissa Partridge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 496.
[164] Ian McEwan, *Solar* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2010), 169–71.

him that she is pregnant, and asks him, during sex, to assure her of his love, at the very moment he is visualizing various women in a fantasy of endless auditioning so as to achieve orgasm. His act tells her he loves her, his words tell her he will help her. In his mind, meanwhile, circles a stubborn argument for abortion intermingled with pictures of other women and stifled frustration with the body beneath him.

Beard is a strange character, in terms not of his personality but of the novel's form. *Solar* is in the third-person and shadows Beard's mind throughout. He has a complex background and history, with which the novel begins, and an inner life that, though neither profound nor enviable, is present. He is evidently meant to be felt as real, but he is soon unable to be much more than a caricature of sordidness. An over-eater and mass-womaniser, he is a hardly-disguised symbol of a culture intent on consumption in a novel about climate-change. Beard is a character who ought to be more fascinating than he is. Despite the ongoing sating of his appetite for women, food, fame, admiration, Beard is continually hungry, literally and metaphorically. His psychology, and the apparent intensity of his desire for self-sabotage, have the capacity to intrigue. But the novel's language never renders Beard a full character (forgive the pun). McEwan cannot decide whether or not Beard, with the novel, is a farce. Despite glimpses of the past, with Beard remembering hope and the advent of love, these are left aside in order to pursue the allegorical, plot-driven side of the story: society's intent self-destruction and Beard as a representation of it. The language is interested in effect, and mocks Beard to manage it. The attitude created is one from without, one of contempt for the very 'life-world' (in Heidegger's sense) of the novel, which is never made felt.[165] The novel does not enable an experience of knowing what it would be to live this way, to have Beard's internal patter as one's own, because it remains at the level of character and plot, neither of which are generated, but seem to be imposed on the narrative. Beard evidently *is* more than caricature: he is intelligent, alert, full of self-pride, a character whose mental world is the landscape of the novel. His lack of interest in himself feels like an aesthetic slip, of moral consequences, a staying-with the surface Beard who is easier to depict. In other words, the decision not to make Beard's mind *felt* feels as if

[165] Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 149–87.

it comes from McEwan, not Beard, and that keeps Beard at the level of caricature, slightly obscene, mostly absurd, and it ultimately prevents the text from having a voice that speaks for itself. As one reviewer put it, '[t]his may be Beard's story, but it's McEwan's vehicle, constructed to let him pull all the showy turns of the major contemporary novelist and ambitious public intellectual: personalizing the political, politicizing the personal and poeticizing everything else'.[166]

The text is useful because it is an example of writing that is elegant and accomplished, which nevertheless fails to prompt 'realization'. McEwan's words are distinguished, but they do not fully attach to their reality: one is swept along with the words in reading, but the realities are never made felt. The words do not 'lead down to what they came from'; McEwan is writing 'in the direction' of words, to use Dylan Thomas's distinction, and not out of them. They are used to state and show, rather than suggest, so that language is denied its crucial capacity as a means to developing thought, as a 'thinking out into language'. The experience of knowing Beard's mind that one undergoes is not one ripe for the greater 'process of knowing' I suggested is possible with the best texts: an assimilation of the language-world—the world the language of a text opens, the attitudes it generates—of a literary work into one's own relation to living. Such assimilation is, I would argue, the intense, intricate, and intimate moral significance of a text like *Gilead* or *It Rains*, or, indeed, McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*, where the world presented is far richer: because the language, and what the language therefore enables, itself is richer. Colm Tóibín writes of the latter that its 'tone' is one of 'almost reverent care'.[167] *Solar* lacks a 'tone'—I would say more than 'tone': an attitude—that is of the novel and not of the author's stance towards the text, which prevents the language from speaking for itself. In Leavis's terms, *Solar*'s enjoyment of the grotesque aspects of Beard's life render them 'for their own sake', words used to make a mockery of Beard, not to make the world of his life real.

My position, then, is closer to Beryl Gaut's than the difference in our language permits—and therein lies a further problem. I agree with him that 'aesthetically meritorious' work is also ethically resonant. But the difficulty in terminology extends more deeply; even the idea of 'ethical

[166] Walter Kirn, 'Human Orbits', *The New York Times*, 16 April 2010.
[167] Colm Tóibín, 'Dissecting the Body', *LRB*, 26 April 2007.

assessment' suggests an evaluation of something quite disconnected from an interest in moral resonance constituted in part by the formal qualities of a text.[168] Gaut has said that 'the fact that moral values are important is going to help make the resulting aesthetic merits important too'.[169] 'Resulting' undermines an otherwise intricate declaration. The statement emphasises how difficult it is to speak of the relationship between the aesthetic and the moral—difficult, but not impossible. I think it accurate insofar as it suggests that part of the reason the aesthetic is important is that the morality the aesthetic creates is important. Living with as much capacity for discernment as one can is essential, and literature's language matters so much because of the fact that it relates to living. But aesthetic merits do not result from the moral: on the contrary, moral significance is only enabled by the formal qualities of language and the attitude that they create.

Terminology directs discussion. Leavis's work is especially relevant because of its refusal to use certain vocabulary in evaluating literature. His declarations against philosophy are a resistance to the philosophic method as much as a desire to keep literary criticism distinct as a discipline. Where contemporary aesthetics insists on beginning with aesthetics and ethics as divided, and troubles itself, as Gaut demonstrates, in arguing how the realms might be brought together, Leavis is more interested in the way that form and morality are notions with little meaningful independent definition during discussion of literature. His vocabulary has insisted on viewing form and morality integratively from the beginning: as he said of Pope in 1936, his work exemplifies a 'morality of his craft'. *The Great Tradition* is an important text primarily, in my view, for the remarkable way in which it shows how form cannot be examined without recognition of moral significance, and how moral significance does not exist at all without the form and attitude that create it. Leavis's refusal to use 'aesthetic', unphilosophical as it has marked him, is also an efficient way of avoiding a concern that he thought led away from the important questions: what Eliot's 'East Coker' calls the 'intolerable wrestle with words and meanings', and how, for Leavis, that connects to 'a feeling for value and significance in living'.[170]

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[168] Gaut, 'The Ethical Criticism of Art', 182.
[169] Chris Woerner, 'Creativity, Ethics and Education: An Interview with Berys Gaut', *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 10, no. 1 (28 February 2013): 9.
[170] *GT*, 178.

Leavis's use of that last phrase, indeed, is specifically to do with form: with the way in which *The Ambassadors* 'produces an effect of disproportionate "doing"—of a technique the subtleties and elaborations of which are not sufficiently controlled by a feeling for value and significance in living'. Leavis repeatedly returns to the issues of significance and meaning in life, desiring that they be permitted as valid modes of enquiry in determining literary value—in ways that recognise fully their connection with language and technique. In his terms, the power of *Solar* is also limited because the worldview permitted by the text is limited to aspects of experience with little interest in 'a feeling for value and significance'. Its language does not enable engagement with either. Indeed another review has a similar reservation, albeit put very differently: 'It was always going to be high risk, wagering so much on having as your central character a comic grotesque so loathsome and self-pitying, with thoughts mostly so banal, and then leaving the reader trapped, unrelieved, in his company for nearly 300 pages'.[171]

It would be a mistake, as I have argued, to interpret Leavis's focus on 'significance in living' as desiring a certain kind of life-affirming content. It would not be sufficient if Michael Beard had an existential crisis or a conversion; either would feel as imposed on the text as he is himself. The issue is rather of technique, which is felt in some way to recognise a deeper question. *Middlemarch* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, the works Leavis most praises in *The Great Tradition*, are praised not for their themes, but for a mode of composition. If it is appropriate (as I think it is) to say that Leavis admires 'seriousness', it must be understood that under consideration is not a seriousness of theme, nor even one straightforwardly of handling: seriousness perceives the importance of words in managing, first, to find what one has to say and then, actually to say it; seriousness means approaching language with the reverence appropriate for something that is means and end alike. Leavis writes of James that 'his "interests" were not of the kind that are merely written *about*'.[172] The significance of that comment, which refers to the most intimate of relations for language and thought, is only clear with an understanding of the 1930s texts and their focus on writing with all one's faculties, such that 'interests' are felt 'into' and not thought 'about', as Leavis has it in his

[171] Jason Cowley, 'Solar, by Ian McEwan', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2010.
[172] *GT*, 143.

description of realisation. The metaphor of 'feel[ing] into' versus 'think[ing] about' applies as much to the author writing as to the reader reading (with, as I said, the distinction between the two being the interior approach in the former versus the external in the latter, not a division between thought and feeling). Using words 'about' one's 'interests' would prevent them from being fully discovered.

In the Introduction, I defined 'well-written' as language used in such a manner that it is fundamental to what is communicated. I would like to suggest four further characteristics of good writing that highlight the connection between good literary writing and moral significance, ones that stress the role of a 'possible nobility' of 'spirit', as they do the role of words.[173] I offer these characteristics not to be conclusive, but as useful indicators; they are not criteria, indicating a requirement for fulfilment, but aspects of good writing consistently borne out by experience. There is no stylistic or formal prescription whatsoever; the characteristics refer to the possibilities provoked by good writing in a way that I believe helps one to focus on what language *enables*. They are: ability to communicate through generating or creating; interest in/enabling contemplation of 'ultimate questions' (questions of deepest human concern); complicating understanding or developing perception; and enabling one to develop sensitivity and discernment about what it is to be alive as a human being. The value of these four characteristics is that they focus attention on the way conceptual content is generated by, and inextricable from, qualities of form. Notably they derive from attitude—from the mode of treatment that creates the subject under discussion; they are not purely to do either with issues of aesthetics or of plotline. They are useful in thinking about how and why literature matters, and how literature's moral significance is inescapably related to the mode of using words, for all of these characteristics emerge from *how* the text is written, not *what* it says. Literature matters because of what it creates, which in turn matters because of how it has been created: and the creation arises from nowhere else but an experience of language.

Howards End provides a useful example. Henry is married to Margaret, who is worried that her sister, Helen, is unwell:

[173] Ibid., 78. Leavis says of George Eliot: 'It is not only an intellectual, it is a spirit profoundly noble, one believing profoundly in a possible nobility to be aimed at by men, that can make us, with her, realize such a situation fully as one for compassion'.

Henry began to grow serious. Ill-health was to him something perfectly definite. Generally well himself, he could not realize that we sink to it by slow gradations. The sick had no rights; they were outside the pale; one could lie to them remorselessly. When his first wife was seized, he had promised to take her down into Hertfordshire, but meanwhile arranged with a nursing-home instead. Helen, too, was ill. And the plan that he sketched out for her capture, clever and well-meaning as it was, drew its ethics from the wolf-pack.
'You want to get hold of her?' he said.

The fourth sentence plunges us into Henry's system of thinking, its semi-colons functioning almost as colons as each clause propels into another, equally grave. Henry's pattern of thought is one-dimensional, uncomplicated by an emotional feeling for *who* 'the sick' are. His first wife, too, loses her privilege as a person to whom he is uniquely connected once she becomes ill. Making a promise to her, quite apart from breaking it, becomes something he does easily, without an accompanying sense of obligation. She, like Helen is now, was 'outside the pale'. That Henry uses two clichés in quick succession ('no rights' and 'outside the pale') emphasises the lack of deliberation and reflection in his pattern of thought. Sickness leads inexorably to a slackening of human obligation; and Helen becomes someone 'to get hold of'. Margaret's response is troubled; she says it is 'quite impossible'. 'It's not the particular language that Helen and I talk, if you see my meaning. It would do splendidly for other people, whom I don't blame'. Margaret's remarkable diplomacy here is contrasted by the judgement of Henry that her alleged non-blame implicitly entails; her evident self-control is a device of Forster's to heighten the contrast between the two, as with his narrative intrusion about 'ethics from the wolf-pack'. Here is what Henry does with her reply:

'I see,' he said; 'you have scruples.'
'I suppose so.'
'And sooner than go against them you would have your sister suffer. You could have got her down to Swanage by a word, but you had scruples. And scruples are all very well. I am as scrupulous as any man alive, I hope; but when it is a case like this, when there is a question of madness—'
'I deny it's madness.'
'You said just now—'
'It's madness when I say it, but not when you say it.'
Henry shrugged his shoulders. 'Margaret! Margaret!' he groaned. 'No education can teach a woman logic. Now, my dear, my time is valuable. Do you want me to help you or not?'
'Not in that way.'
'Answer my question. Plain question, plain answer. […]'[174]

It is Henry who introduces the term *scruples*. The word has a halo of excess about it, as if the scrupulous verges also on the disproportionate or unwarranted. He does not use words such as

[174] E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Middlesex: Penguin, 1992), 241–42.

conscience or honesty or trust, nor terms like dignity or honour, which would direct the conversation differently. Margaret, however, does not protest at the route into which his vocabulary is leading them. Henry's speech dabbles in mockery. 'You could have got her down to Swanage by a word, but you had scruples'. It is not only the exaggeration that deliberately trivialises ('by a word'); his movement into the pluperfect tense ('*had* scruples') sets her decision already in the past, presenting the episode as an accomplished story to report to friends. The pluperfect provides a belittling tone: Margaret 'had scruples' so Helen couldn't be helped. Again, Margaret does not protest at the misrepresentation Henry's words create. She interrupts only once his trivialising of the situation becomes explicit, as when he calls Helen mad. Although she agrees with Henry that she had used that term, what she had said, in fact, was: '"Mad" is too terrible a word, but she is not well'. Henry's response is frustration, his impatience coming out in his readiness instantly to end the conversation. Once more, his lack of reflection is brought out with clichés, three this time—about women and logic, time as valuable, and the menacing final blackmail-styled question. Margaret's attempt to retain to their exchange a sense of the difficulty of the issue is battered aside by his demand for a *yes* or *no* answer. Henry's choice of vocabulary refuses to engage with the moral issue of how to help Helen in a manner that does honour to her relationship with Margaret. The couple's conversation highlights the deep differences in their 'particular language[s]', which derive from and enforce their different ideas of how to conduct themselves and of what human responsibility is to another.

I have two motives in using this passage. One is that it illustrates what I have been exploring throughout the thesis regarding relation to experience through language and the role of attitude. Margaret and Henry are husband and wife; they have been in sympathy with one another. But their worldviews, their individual attitudes to living, are different to the extent that at this point they cannot meaningfully communicate. The way in which they relate to experience is not just mediated through language, it is generated and intensified through it. The way they speak leads them ever further from one another, entailing a multitude of consequences for the direction of their conversation and indeed of their relationship. 'Attitude' to experience through language is an aspect of the passage's subject-matter, present in the passage both in the way I have been using it,

something generated by form and content together, which powerfully shapes meaning and entails a certain perspective towards life, and also appearing in the form of the *characters'* approaches towards living. The difference in their approaches to life emerges entirely from the way they use words, such that they are unable to communicate about Helen's situation, because for each of them the situation under discussion is different.

The other reason is that the passage exemplifies the four characteristics of good writing I suggested. Its language communicates powerfully, generating a particular sense of the characters and situation; it has bearings upon 'ultimate questions', in this case, of how one treats others; it complicates, showing how different ways of articulating a situation can altogether change the situation under discussion; and it enables a distinct kind of discernment about how different relations to experience are furthered, to the extent that they are almost beyond the control of speakers, by the language one uses. Forster's skill in writing enables the implications of Henry's way of speech, and of thinking, to be robustly generated. The use of language skilfully creates a moral clash. Forster is too blatant in his blunt casting of Henry as of the wolf's pack, and this is an aspect of the aesthetic—deliberate narrative intrusion—that reshapes, and briefly undermines, the moral significance: one knows too obviously during that line what one is to think of Henry. But in the rest of the passage the moral significance remains powerful because of the way the work has been written. One's sense of a clash between perspectives is heightened by Forster's decision to present the dialogue without identifying who is speaking, the hyphens as Henry repeatedly cuts Margaret off themselves acting as identifiers. The ping-pong back-and-forth of the exchange renders fast-paced, and disquieting, the changing definition words assume under different speakers: sickness, scruples, madness, help. The passage succeeds in creating a disconcerting sense of how a moral reality can shift, through something as seemingly insignificant, but here life-altering, as word-choice.

The passage illustrates how good writing prompts engagement with or discernment of moral issues: how humanly central issues are bound up with language. It exemplifies the role of language, such that it can alter a topic under discussion (Helen's situation), deny or obfuscate aspects that need to be contemplated (Helen's relationship with Margaret), and itself contribute to a breakdown

in communication or to the destruction of a relationship (Margaret's and Henry's). It offers an informative instance of the way one's usage of words conveys attitude. It also demonstrates the two kinds of assessment that are literary criticism's prerogative: the words can be analysed for their persuasiveness in creating the attitude; and the attitude can itself be analysed. A literary text generates an attitude 'towards life' that can be examined, and is replete with moral resonance before one takes any further step beyond the text (e.g., into examining the author's life, or the responses of readers).

In an echo of his comment on Arnold thirty years before, which I quoted earlier in this section, Leavis, in 'Valuation in Criticism' (1966), spoke of the way literature 'challenges the most serious criteria': 'significant art challenges us in the most disturbing and inescapable way to a radical pondering, a new profound realization, of the grounds of our most important determinations and choices'.[175] His mention of 'grounds' recalls his earlier stress on 'mode of'—on the attitude beneath one's 'most important determinations and choices' that decides them. For Leavis, not to treat literature as relevant to these issues is to deny an essential part of literature ('inescapable'). His view, in the parlance of aesthetics, is that the aesthetic is of the utmost relevance to the ethical because it already invokes ethical criteria. Kevin Harris argues that Leavis gave too large a sense to 'moral', but that view obscures the fact that Leavis's interest in morality is precisely in the question of how better to live, not how to define 'moral' philosophically.[176] As Booth put it,

> one reason no progress is made in our battles is that too many reduce both terms ['ethical' and 'moral'] to the narrowest possible moral codes. The essential issue for critics—perhaps in contrast with politicians—is not whether some part of a given story violates this or that moral code; rather, it is the overall effect on the ethos, the character, of the listener. And that effect is not to be measured by some simple study of overt behavior after listening: it must include the very quality of the life lived while listening.[177]

Wittgenstein's description of ethics as 'a document of a tendency in the human mind', that of 'the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable', has an affinity with Leavis's 'morality'.[178] As for Harris's charge, one might equally say, with Bell,

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[175] *VC*, 281.
[176] Kevin Harris, 'On the Determination of Values: The Case of F.R. Leavis', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 27, no. 2 (December 1993): 245–59. Leavis is defended in Carole Cox, 'The Case of F.R. Leavis: A Reply to Kevin Harris', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 27, no. 2 (December 1993): 261–66.
[177] Wayne Booth, 'Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple', *Style* 32, no. 2 (1998): 353.
[178] Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'A Lecture on Ethics', *The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 (1965): 12.

that it is Leavis's view of the aesthetic ('literary') that is large: 'Leavis uses the word "literary" with the ontological force of the word "aesthetic," in the tradition of German thought for which it is fundamental to the human and underlies the scientific. For this tradition, as in Leavis, there was only one culture and the aesthetic was at its heart'.[179]

I would modify this last clause to say that for Leavis, 'attitude' was at the heart. Attitude, generated by word-choice and syntax, rhythm and other formal qualities, is always relevant to living. It points to both realms, and ensures an inextricability to their relation. Booth writes: 'I can think of no published story that does not exhibit its author's implied judgments about how to live and what to believe about how to live'.[180] Leavis would perhaps agree with the mention of 'author', but I believe the focus is better placed on the work itself as conveying attitude, which ensures attention remains on the way it is written as well as what it says. An attitude to living is always created; like Booth, I believe that applies to all literary works. Well-written literature is able to be that which is most morally meaningful: writing that enables contemplation of the profounder aspects of human life—emotions, moments of choice, mistakes, however tiny, whose consequences endure, etc.—such that one's thinking about those aspects is deepened in some way. There is no specific way in which this ought to take place, no particular form or style that bests another. Nor do the issues at hand need be ones that correspond with our own experience of life: fantasy and science-fiction can be just as humanly relevant even if they feature no humans. Again, the focus on 'fiction' dissuades from the agency of the language and what it uniquely brings into being. It is language, not genre or plotline, that has 'verbal agency'.[181] Leavis writes that 'depth, range and subtlety in the presentment of human experience are the criteria'.[182] Literature is an art that functions through 'presentment'; what is created emerges from presentment alone. It is legitimate to distinguish between superficiality of presentment, which in literature, unless managed ironically, creates superficiality of issue (*Solar*), and profundity of presentment, and so of issue. That is an appropriate distinction, rather than, say, whether novels are comical or serious. Leavis's 'impregnable

[179] Michael Bell, 'Creativity and Pedagogy in Leavis', *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (2016): 174.
[180] Booth, 'Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple', 353.
[181] Marina Warner, 'A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of All Souls College, Oxford', 10 June 2012.
[182] *DHLN*, 18.

humourlessness', 'notoriously Puritan habit of approach' and 'absolutism' have been noted, but I think a rightful understanding of his 'seriousness' perceives that it is by no means antithetical to comedy.[183]

The kind of value one perceives in literature is connected above all to how one thinks of it functioning. The focus on attitude, enabling, and process, suggests, I hope, ways in which literature's cognitive and moral significance can be spoken about in ways that do not obscure what literature fundamentally *is*. In stating that good writing is what enables literature's moral significance, I am not performing an equivalence of the kind Casey perceives in Leavis's work. Good writing does not *equal* relevance to morality in literature because relevance to morality in literature does not *equal* good writing. But good writing does *enable* relevance to morality, and relevance to morality in literature can only emerge from good writing; without it, the relation between morality and literature will be misconceived, with interpretations proceeding on the idea that literature's plot 'promotes' a moral value or 'virtue'. Good writing has moral significance when it is contemplated or analysed, as well as entered into during reading; both stages are required in order for its moral relevance fully to emerge. If stylistic considerations, such as rhythm or syntax, are thought of as incidental, literature's moral relevance will always be related to properties of plotline. What I hope to have established in this thesis is that in order for literature's moral, and cognitive, significance to be traced, literary technique must be entered into, then analysed. Attention to the form of a text is what will yield interpretations of its moral significance. Such interpretations may be debated and argued about, but they will have taken into account how literature operates and they will have treated a literary text as a literary text and not as a document, moral treatise or 'guide', or biographical evidence. Those excavations are worthy on their own terms, but they must not be confused with a *literary* interest, nor with an interpretation of literature's moral significance *as literature*.

[183] Martin Amis, 'Return of the Male', *LRB*, 5 December 1991; William Walsh, 'F.R. Leavis: On the Personal Side', *The Sewanee Review* 87, no. 4 (1979): 582; Bernard Heyl, 'The Absolutism of F.R. Leavis', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 13, no. 2 (December 1954): 249.

Coda

Stanley Cavell's treatment of *King Lear* as an 'Avoidance of Love' presents a powerful instance of what I have been discussing: engaging so deeply with literature *as literature*—as ideas belonging to and only available through literary language—that it is of profound relevance to one's own attitude to living.[1] Cavell situates the play as of the deepest importance to life and moral—'humanly central'—conduct. His article suggests how the felt moral resonance of a text can be used as a way of examining one's own attitudinal responses. The affinities of treatment do not extend to technical approaches; Cavell's introductory remarks about words and characters do not align with the perspective I am arguing for here, and he is not concerned with language in the way that I am. However, his essential point—'How could any serious critic ever have forgotten that to care about a specific character is to care about the utterly specific words he says when and as he says them; or that we care about the utterly specific words of a play because certain men and women are having to give voice to them?'—holds entirely with my position.[2]

Cavell's approach to art, like Leavis's, demands 'what for?' and attempts an answer. He is interested in 'placing the words and experiences with which philosophers have always begun in alignment with human beings in particular circumstances who can be imagined to be having those experiences and saying and meaning those words'.[3] This is a critical approach that is also an ethical one: Cavell attends to the literary text not just as having relevance to the 'real' world of living people, but as speaking about, even speaking through, human beings. *Approach*, as I said at the beginning, can be a misleading term: the attitude that goes with Cavell's and Leavis's mode of engaging with the text is not a stance; it derives from an ontology of literature—from an understanding of what literature is, how it works and thus the mode of engagement it calls for. Neither thinker, that is, sees himself as choosing from one among many standpoints, and equipping

[1] Stanley Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love', in *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 267–353.
[2] Ibid., 269.
[3] Ibid., 270.

one's critical self accordingly.

For Cavell, *Lear* is an opportunity for ethical—what Leavis would call moral—exploration. His critical analysis of the play figures its characters, situations, actions and responses, all of which are 'made' through words, as realities that demand profound contemplation and analysis.[4] His central thesis is that Lear's motivation following the realisation of his treatment of Cordelia (what Cavell calls 'his insight', and locates at the end of Act IV) is '*to avoid being recognized*'. He interprets the play with moral categories appropriate to an interpretation of modes of living, offering observations such as 'joking is a familiar specific for brazening out shame, calling enlarged attention to the thing you do not want naturally noticed'.[5] His diagnosis of Gloucester as suffering from shame derives from evidence borne out by Cavell's own understanding of experience, prompted by the text itself. '[I]f the failure to recognize others is a failure to let others recognize you, a fear of what is revealed to them, an avoidance of their eyes, then it is exactly shame which is the cause of his withholding of recognition'.[6] Cavell disapproves of various other readings of the play on the grounds that they are 'psychologically fantastic', insisting on applying the criteria of real living to the play because for him those are the kind of criteria the play demands. The play demands to be made sense of as a reality: 'To hold to the fact that Edgar is avoiding recognition makes better sense to me of that grotesque guiding of Gloucester up no hill to no cliff to no suicide than any other account I know'.[7] He takes the play psychologically seriously, such that he is not satisfied with readings that regard some of the play's dramatic action simply as artistic (or enactive). '[T]o regard [the Dover cliff scene] as *symbolic* of the play's emphasis on the grotesque misses what makes it so grotesque […] It is grotesque because it is so *literal* a consequence of avoiding the facts'. Cavell reads the play in ways that do more than permit it to be meaningful to one's life; his reading commands that such meaning be sought, just as Leavis insists on posing the 'what for?' question. He has the dual goal of (a) understanding the play more deeply so as to enable (b) its

[4] '[W]hat [words] mean, and whether they mean anything, depends solely upon whether I am using them so as to make my meaning'. Ibid., 271.
[5] Ibid., 277.
[6] Ibid., 278.
[7] Ibid., 283.

relevance to living to be as full and as fruitful as possible. Thus the Dover cliff scene

> is not the emblem of the Lear universe, but an instance of what has led its minds to their present state: there are no lengths to which we may not go in order to avoid being revealed, even to those we love and are loved by. Or rather, especially to those we love and are loved by: to other people it is not *easy* to be known. That grotesque walk is not full of promise for our lives […] It shows what people will *have* to say and try to mean to one another when they are incapable of acknowledging to one another what they have to acknowledge.[8]

Such a reading makes a moral challenge of the text. Cavell's construal is also an excavation of life-experience; his interpretation suggests a moral understanding that has developed out of life-experience, whether his own or others, or indeed other literary experience. Cavell is doing what I earlier called reading as a power for life, or, as Josie Billington has it, 'reading for life': reading in order to interrogate criteria which will help one to live better.[9] His judgement that Lear 'cannot bear love when he has no reason to be loved' pertains to all human desire to be loved, but it is powerful because of the play that compels that judgement upon one. Cavell acknowledges that his reading is in part 'imagine[d]', and even says 'It may be felt that I have forced this scene too far in order to fit it to my reading'.[10] That reading, which takes *King Lear* seriously as both art and a response to living—in the way that Harrison's focus on 'daughterliness'—drastically misses, itself suggests the kind of relevance the former has, precisely by being itself, to the latter. In an offhand bracketed remark, Cavell writes 'The validity of such feelings [a memory prompted by his reading of the play] as touchstones of the accuracy of a reading of the play, and which feelings one is to trust and which not, ought to be discussed problems of criticism'.[11] That comment is important. For Cavell, a literary text *and* one's sense of it prompt feelings, which themselves are discussible and worthy of examination in relation to the work.

Criticism such as Cavell's treats literature as inherently a means to exploring emotions and modes of relating to experience—something that is only possible because the text matters so much as an end-in-itself. Its intrinsic literary worth is what makes it morally significant. Cavell's criticism

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[8] All Ibid., 284.
[9] See Josie Billington, '"Reading for Life": Prison Reading Groups in Practice and Theory', *Critical Survey* 23, no. 3 (1 January 2011).
[10] Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love', 292; 294.
[11] Ibid., 294.

is an instance of using a literary text as a resource for thinking through 'moral', humanly central, issues, precisely because it is important and valuable as itself. These issues are not the important life-problems that one might think of first—I dislike my job; my life is boring; my marriage is difficult—but the sorts of issues that might underlie such complaints: a particular way of thinking about life, a certain idea of what constitutes values and which count, or of what these values *are*, or of what makes for significance, and how. The issues, that is, are not 'content-focused', but attitudinal, meaning that any piece of well-written literature, regardless of 'the bare action of plot', might help a reader to think through difficult questions, precisely through 'the mode of […] contemplati[ng…] life' it generates, to adapt Leavis on Eliot. The process of 'realizing' literary language, if one allows it to be, is a coming to awareness of the language one uses oneself in approaching living, and the kind of attitude one holds towards life. For Cavell, *Lear* cannot be anything other than a mode of examining intense moral tensions and 'placing' them. His essay, like Leavis's life-work, suggests how literature might have a profound, and urgent, link with living, for the very reason that human living, and the language that shapes it, are inescapably the animating forces of any well-written literary text.

Yet while Cavell's work rightly emphasises a key aspect of the relevance of literary works to human living, he achieves that emphasis without conceptualising what literature is, or how it works: both vitally necessary to the creation of a robust theory of literature's human significance. He offers an important instance of *why* it matters. The conceptual work that makes that *why* rigorous decisively shaped Leavis's literary intelligence and, I would maintain, forms, in his constant appraisal of *how* it is that words relate to experience, the centre of his lasting achievement. For Leavis, it is what literature *is* as superb uses of words intent on generating relations to experience that enables it to have vast life-relevance. What is important is the way the work is written. As he puts it, 'one is compelled, in the taking, to achieve a new realization of the nature of experience'.[12] Words not used well do not compel, nor do they enable a relation to experience that can be 'realized'. *Nature of* again stresses the role of attitude. Such a conception of literature's operation

[12] *ELTU*, 129.

positions literature as a 'feeling into' attitudes to living. Frank Kermode writes that 'It is not expected of critics as it is of poets that they should help us to make sense of our lives; they are bound only to attempt the lesser feat of making sense of the ways in which we try to make sense of our lives'.[13] I have argued throughout this thesis that discerning relation to experience—a 'making sense of the ways in which we try to make sense'—is part of the remit of literature itself. Literary works enable a new kind of procedural attention to differing modes of relating to experience, one entirely dependent on what literary language can uniquely generate.

A 2013 book on Cavell refers to Leavis's 'posturings as a reader' and critic of the novel.[14] Dismissals of Leavis, increasingly commonplace over the last half-century, usually respond to a caricature figure and result from neglect of his work. Rudrum's is based on the briefest of comments that there are 'only four novelists in the English language who were "great" enough to deserve his attention', when even a hostile reading of *The Great Tradition* has to acknowledge that there are a number of other writers whose contribution to the 'tradition' Leavis deems valuable. As I have argued, Leavis's criticism is amenable to misapprehension because of the fact that his most important conceptions emerge through practice. I hope it is by now clear how notions of his 'intense moralism' and 'the moral fervour of Leavis' overlook the subtleties of those conceptions.[15] In his criticism, there is no preset abstraction, like Arnold applying touchstones: Leavis had a highly conceptual but not 'theorizing' intelligence. He writes that the 'modes of thought distinctive of the field [of literature] entail, as essential to—as essentially in and of—the thinking, kinds of judgment of quality and value that don't admit of demonstrative enforcement'.[16] His criticism here itself acts as an unfolding, the prose correcting itself as it goes on.

The point is as much that literary thinking does not admit of demonstrative enforcement as that distinctive kinds of judgements do not. Leavis's criticism responds to that challenge by functioning through an emergent sort of wisdom rather than an explicit framework. As with literature itself, the

[13] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 3.
[14] David Rudrum, *Stanley Cavell and the Claim of Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), 31.
[15] Bernard Williams, 'How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song?', *LRB*, 2 April 1981; Jonathan Bate, 'Saint Terence', *LRB*, 23 May 1991.
[16] *ELTU*, 3.

precision of the argument is found in a movement of language that could not have been established beforehand. That is not an unusual feature in Leavisian criticism, and it seems to be prompted especially when he is speaking of the relationship of words to experience and of literary language to thought. He says of *Ash-Wednesday*: 'Its precise thisness of meaning entails—*is*—a creative precision in the evoked concrete of what we may properly call the complete process of thought'.[17] His own criticism shows a concern with evoking thought: as indeed is similarly evident in that remark, the prose again characteristically correcting itself. The stylistic differences between he and his wife and collaborator, Q.D. Leavis (QDL and FRL here for clarity), are remarkable, not least given their apparent consensus on many literary topics. QDL's essay on 'Literary values and the novel' proceeds with a different kind of logic. She makes her claims with stark clarity:

> a great novelist is one who has an impelling theme, arising originally inside himself, springing from his own deepest experience and the pressures of his own life; and though starting from his own experience not limited to picturing it but extending to embrace the quality and nature of life in his time, the life characteristic of his concern for humanity.[18]

Considering the ostensible similarity of their claims, the different impression received is worthy of note—a point that itself contributes to the argument about meaning as formed by the way something is written and the attitude in generates, whether or not in literature. QDL uses an analytic logic in her writing style: she makes a claim and proves it. FRL operates more allusively, touching on ideas in one place, moving forward and elsewhere, and returning to the ideas again later. QDL is able to say 'I can now advance for your consideration several propositions', whereas the movement of Leavis's argument is rarely directed through sign-posting. QDL writes that the novel 'must be about and contain felt *life*'; FRL's characteristic way of proceeding is to ask again the question that became a refrain to his criticism ('What for? —what ultimately for?'), or to remind his readers of the necessity of that question in some other way: often quoting Lawrence, who described himself as writing 'out of one's moral sense—for the race, as it were'.[19] The very intonation of that phrase apparently appealed to FRL, who always quoted it in full; QDL also quotes Lawrence, and gives

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[17] *VC*, 260.
[18] Q.D. Leavis, *Collected Essays*, ed. G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 199.
[19] Ibid., 205. For Lawrence: *AK*, 12; *ELTU*, 51. See also R.L. Houghton, 'What for–What Ultimately for? The Leavises in the Sixties and Seventies', *The Cambridge Quarterly* XVII, no. 1 (1988): 66–77.

the phrase as 'I write for the race'.[20] Again, she demonstrates less of an interest in the rhythms of critical prose, and how it might itself make felt its argument.

While QDL's 'must' feels like a criterion, FRL's invocations of life, at their best, are less a scheme for good literature and more an aspect of an evaluation of why and how literature is essential to living. The pair's claims, similar though ostensibly they are, are made in such different ways as to change the way the arguments function. QDL's essay prescribes what makes good literature and good criticism: an ability to see that art is to do with, and never in isolation from, life. FRL's repeated question argues for the profound relevance of literature to life; and part of the strength of the argument is in his use of language that, though not literary, in that it is not of a literary text, functions in a mode that employs characteristics conventional to literary language, especially evocation and an appeal to emotion. QDL's mention of 'felt *life*'—the emphasis on 'life' rather than 'felt', whereas for Leavis the emphasis on 'felt' is at least as important—is not evoked. One does not feel it as one reads, whereas FRL's question is often felt as a swelling crescendo. Herbert Simon writes that 'Meanings are *evoked*', evocation being 'a specific set of psychological processes […] that bring meanings, or components of meaning, into attention'. 'In literature, as in music, emotion is usually evoked not by using words like "sad" or "happy" but by creating situations to which we respond with sadness or happiness'.[21] FRL's criticism shares something of this in its desire to make its own judgements, and the process of his coming to them, *felt* through the *form* of writing. His method is partly literary, neither philosophical nor theoretical, and highly conceptual. Indeed, Chris Joyce goes so far as to call him a 'conceptual reformer'.[22] The criticism itself tries to enable a process of thinking, which, as Ian Gregor pointed out, makes a 'drama' of his criticism.[23]

John Gross was not, I think, right to say that Leavis's 'whole rhetorical manner and method of

[20] Leavis, *Collected Essays*, 201.
[21] Herbert Simon, 'Literary Criticism: A Cognitive Approach', *Stanford Humanities Review*, Bridging the Gap: Where Cognitive Science Meets Literary Criticism, 4, no. 1 (1995), http://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/4-1/text/simon1.html.
[22] Chris Joyce, 'Rethinking Leavis', *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (2016): 139; See also Chris Joyce, 'The Idea of "Anti-Philosophy" in the Work of F. R. Leavis', *The Cambridge Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1 March 2009): 24–44; Chris Joyce, 'Meeting in Meaning: Philosophy and Theory in the Work of F.R. Leavis', *Modern Age* 47, no. 3 (2005): 240–49.
[23] Ian Gregor, 'F.R. Leavis and "The Great Tradition"', *The Sewanee Review* 93, no. 3 (1985): 435.

approach have tended, certainly since the late 1930s, towards the setting-up of a closed system'. Undoubtedly, Leavis's tone is not always helpful: Trilling commented, following the Snow-Leavis debacle that 'it is a bad tone, an impermissible tone'.[24] But a closed system is far from Leavis's aim, and there is no drastic shift in tone between the 1930s texts and *The Great Tradition*, probably his most controversial work; indeed, they are remarkably similar. Gross himself seems less than certain of his verdict; he continues by stating that 'What is galling about the Leavises and their followers is not that they are altogether wrong, but that they give a cause which deserves a wider hearing a bad name through distortion, omission and strident over-statement'.[25] A closed system is unlikely to be something deserving of a wide hearing. But I think Gross is correct that, where Leavis's criticism is felt to distort, omit, or overstate, it does undermine its objective. One way of putting the aim of this thesis is to develop Leavis's 'cause' for the 'hearing': for the essential mission of that cause is literature's relevance to human living.

For Leavis, 'the establishing of the poem (or the novel) is the establishing of a value', and

> 'value' is inextricably bound up with 'significance'. And so far from valuing being a matter of bringing up a scale, a set of measures, or an array of fixed and definite criteria to the given work, every work that makes itself felt as a challenge evokes, or generates, in the critic a fresh realization of the grounds and nature of judgement. A truly great work is realized to *be* that because it so decidedly modifies—alters—the sense of value and significance that judges […] 'Creates' is the right word […].[26]

Literary texts matter because they work on the way one 'mak[es] sense of the ways in which we try to make sense of our lives', creating new understandings of and meanings for the 'value and significance that judges', altering the very criteria by which lives are lived. They do so by generating specific, subtle senses of ideas and thoughts that exist as they are only in their worded precision, but which have relevance beyond the experience of literature, as one assimilates them into a larger ongoing process of knowing. John Horton pointed out that 'One can be a highly discriminating reader of such texts while being morally shallow and corrupt'.[27] One can, but it takes effort to remain 'morally shallow and corrupt' after reading certain texts attentively and with utter regard for

[24] Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation To Be Intelligent* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 150.
[25] Gross, *RFML*, 274; 271.
[26] *ELTU*, 50–51.
[27] John Horton and Andrea Baumeister, eds., *Literature and the Political Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1996), 88–89.

the capacity of language to affect, and effect, ways of living. A use of language spacious enough to perceive meaning where one might not have seen or imagined it, and willing to take risks in the way in which it generates the mode of its grappling with living, forms literature's human significance. Approaching texts as uses of language that might enable one better to comprehend relation to experience, and even to 'modif[y]—alte[r]' or 'creat[e]' it, permits the possibility that literature might have an impact on the way one lives; that is why there is so close a relationship between how one thinks literature operates and what one thinks it can (and allows it to) do. Focusing on literature as a use of language rather than a 'fiction', a content-driven tale, or even a promoter of empathy, can radically change what one accepts from it, and permit it a depth of human relevance where there had been none.

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