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The Ends Of Narrative

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We can begin to approach what might be called the peculiarity of literature as a form of cognitive practice by comparing how literary works end with how other pieces of intellectual work end. A proof in mathematics ends by reaching its final line, where each line that is not an axiom is generated in explicit accord with a rule of inference that in principle anyone might follow. Reports of experimental results generated in a lab specify procedures that were followed in setting up equipment and carrying out tests. While they often also offer conjectural interpretations of results and suggestions for further work, they describe minimally a procedure that anyone might follow in order to achieve a like-enough result. Hence we can speak readily of objective evidence that a certain state of affairs can be produced so-and-so. In statistical social science, one finds reports of results from questionnaires or other data about populations expressed in numerical terms. Under the assumption that a larger population will not be too different from a sample, one can draw conclusions about distributions of traits and tendencies of development. History undertakes to tell us what happened, and the claims of professional historians are supported with reference to primary sources, indicated in footnotes. In economics, one often finds abstract mathematical models that describe processes of income distribution or GNP growth, for example, that are imagined to occur underneath a confusing surface of extra variables that induce deviations from the model. Among these cognitive practices, literature is perhaps most like economics in giving a model of certain processes in the world. This is scant comfort, however, since whether the processes described by economic models really do occur, on the one hand, or are rather fairy tales invented by clever calculators, on the other, is itself a subject of more than a little dispute. Literary models, moreover, if that is what literary texts offer us, are in even worse shape, since they focus only on very small numbers of mostly made-up cases, and they lack even the potential of refinement through the incorporation of further data.

Instead of focusing on literature as a form of cognitive work, then, we might think of works of literature as aiming at producing a certain sort of pleasure. Like an ice cream cone, works of literature might then end just when there is no more pleasure to be gotten from the materials at hand. Their point is exhausted in their consumption, and there is not much more to be said than this. This

view is unsatisfying, however, in that the experience of reading a good novel is not really much like the experience of eating an ice cream cone or wallowing in a warm bath. It takes some work to pay attention. It is not exactly fun at every instant. The pleasure, if that is the right word, seems not to have much to do with sensory processes, but more with the work that the reader is doing. And surely writers are trying to do something that is both cognitively available to their audiences and cognitively significant. But then, again, works of literature do not offer us results that are much like those of mathematics, laboratory science, history, or statistical social science. So we are faced with a puzzle. We seem to learn something from reading literature, but we have trouble explaining exactly how or what we learn – at least when we are in the grip of a certain picture of knowledge as the methodologically correct achievement of a replicable result.

It is easy to suggest that there must be a third way – between the forms of knowledge that are available in other disciplines and mere, predominantly sensible pleasure – in which literature is significant. We can see that this suggestion makes sense when we contrast art in general with scientific knowledge, on the one hand, and decoration and entertainment, on the other. Art is somehow in the middle here. If we are offered too much scientific knowledge by a particular work, then we are likely to find it didactic and to want more pleasure. If we are offered too much pleasure, we are likely to find the work either decorative or an escapist guilty pleasure, like the novels of Ian Fleming or Dan Brown, say. We want, at least sometimes, to work harder and to learn more than that. But just how can we do this? The mere postulation of a third way does not yet answer this question.

In their valuable comprehensive survey *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen explore a number of ways of thinking about literature as a source of knowledge. Centrally, they consider the following three suggestions. (1) Literary works might help us to know 'what it is like' to be or to be in the situation of a certain character, in the sense of 'subjective knowledge' that has been broached by Thomas Nagel and worked out with regard to literature by Dorothy Walsh. Against this, Lamarque and Olsen object first that while we have experiences while reading, we mostly have our own experiences, not the experiences of Leda or Leopold Bloom, Yeats or Joyce. In particular, we mostly observe or imagine characters having experiences. And while we take an interest in this observation, we are not learning the felt qualia of, say, fried kidney for Leopold Bloom. Second, even if we did get some sense of what things are like for characters from reading literary fiction, it is strained, Lamarque and Olsen suggest, to describe what we get as learning something. There are no methods in view for accrediting or testing any knowledge claims, such as there are in the sciences, and much of what we might think we learn, we must in fact already have known in order to understand what is going on: for example that rape is a violent, terrifying, and world-altering experience.[1] Or (2) literary works might enable us to enrich our store of concepts, or they might modify our sense of the application conditions of concepts we already have, as Catherine Wilson and D. Z. Phillips have suggested. Against this suggestion,

Lamarque and Olsen object that while some literary works might help us to deploy new concepts or to widen the application conditions of concepts we already have, this is by no means necessary for a work to have literary value. Second, and more sharply, they suggest that some authors sometimes explore the same concepts and conditions of application in different works, so that when one reads a second work, for example, a later play by Ibsen, one may not learn anything new. But the later work nonetheless has literary value, so that learning about concepts and their application conditions is not necessary for literary value (pp. 378–86). Or (3) it might be that literary works help us to become better perceivers of the moral lives of persons and so better reasoners about what it is good or right to do when, as Martha Nussbaum and Hilary Putnam have suggested. Against this suggestion, Lamarque and Olsen object first, that improvement in moral reasoning is by no means brought about by all successful literary works, and second, that having or furthering the correct valuational stance is not a necessary condition for literary value: we can and do value as successful literature works with whose stances and points of view we disagree (pp. 386–94).

One might suspect that there is something wrong here with Lamarque and Olsen's "divide and dismiss" strategy. Perhaps what we get from reading literature is some mixture of subjective knowledge, improvement of our conceptual capacities, and moral insight. Lamarque and Olsen themselves offer the positive suggestion that literature "develops themes that are only vaguely felt or formulated in daily life and gives them a 'local habitation and a name'" (p. 452).[2] "Giving a name" at least hints that some sort of cognitive achievement is on offer. Literary appreciation, they further remark, "constitutes its own form of insight, its own kind of interpretation of thematic concepts" (p. 409). But this form of insight, they argue, is better construed as the cultivation of *understanding* than as the acquisition of knowledge of true propositions. "Literary works can contribute to the development and understanding of the deepest, most revered of a culture's conceptions without advancing propositions, statements, or hypotheses about them" (p. 22). "We can imagine, ponder, entertain thoughts, or speculate about something without any commitment to the truth of our ruminations" (p. 11). Literary practice is best understood as an imaginative exploration of themes that is guided by the literary work, which undertakes "to develop in depth, through subject and form, a theme which is in some sense central to human concerns" (p. 450).

But while this talk of understanding is a good start, it leaves us not so far beyond where we were before. Exactly what do we understand when we understand the theme of a literary work? How is this understanding related to, but different from, propositional knowledge that the author thought thus-and-so? How is this understanding cultivated by the experience of the work itself? What, if anything, makes it valuable in human life?

John Gibson suggests that the important cognitive work of literature consists in "bringing into full view our standards of representation [*and*] our linguistic criteria for what the world is."[3] A literary work may show some phenomenon "just as it is" (p. 61); for example, we may see the essence of racism in the figure

of Iago (pp. 61–62). Shakespeare's presentation of Iago "draws together at ... a level of clarity and order everything we call racism" (p. 63), thus making the shape of our concept available to us for acknowledgment. This suggestion too is a useful start. But what it fails so far to explain is how we can fail to know the criteria of some of our concepts and, hence, why we need to explore and acknowledge them. Surely we need already to have some pretty clear command of the concept of racism in order to understand Iago's actions at all. What further dimensions of our concept, then, are subject to repression or forgetting, and how do the details of the presentation of Iago as a literary character activate these dimensions? What, exactly, is the cognitive import of having our concepts activated and somehow "filled-in"?[4]

Gibson further suggests that a general reason why we turn to works of literature is that we are able there to "read the story of our shared form of life" (p. 50). This is the suggestion we must pursue, if we are to have any hope of unpacking the jointly cognitive and emotional work of acknowledging and working through themes and concepts that reading literature makes available to us. So what is the story of our form of life? This enormous question is one that will have to be faced, if we are to make any progress here.

Part of that story is the playing out of a biologically engendered imperative to survive. We need to eat, sleep, protect ourselves, and procreate in order to survive as a species, and we are, so far, wired well enough for success in these endeavors. In the absence of extraordinary strength or speed, we have managed to cope with our environments mostly through superior cunning. We are better at recognizing and manipulating more features of our environment than are members of other species. In particular, as concept-mongering creatures, we are able not only to see objects brutely, as it were, as members of kinds; we are also able to see them from a point of view, as this or that. For example, a stick may be recognized by us as a weapon, a piece of building material, an implement for drawing in the sand, or a staff. A fundamental part of learning language is developing this repertoire of seeing an object as something. We manage this achievement not simply through picking up on the individuals-just-sorted-into-natural-kinds that are present in our environment. Other animals do this as well, but lack our conceptual repertoire. My dog responds to the sound of my car, but does not think of the car as a station wagon or a Volvo. We, however, manage feats like this by picking up not only on our environments brutely, but also by picking up on how others are interacting with our shared environment, by picking up on their points of view on things.[5] Our having a wide repertoire of concepts and application criteria, enabling manifold different responses to our environment, is not a matter only of matching inner idea, or Platonic archetype, or brain state with object. It is a matter of learning to see things within multiple and shifting contexts of engagement and use, a matter of catching on to a large number of things that are done or might be done, by others and by oneself, at once with objects and with words, within practical engagements. In coming to be masters of words that encode objects, phenomena, and events seen in one way or another, in relation to multiple contexts of engagement and possible

response, we are not machines and not the quasi-automatons of Wittgenstein's language-game (2) in *Philosophical Investigations*. Rather we are creatures who have become capable of a life of plastic attention – capable, that is, of culture.

The fact that we develop conceptual consciousness not only in relation to problems of biological survival, but also in relation to cultural contexts of flexible attention and engagement brings with it certain distinctive burdens and possibilities. Not only is one trying to survive, one is trying to play the game of attending under concepts both with others and in competition with others to have one's own point of view and way of playing the game recognized. Concepts and words, for all that they register features of our environment that are there to be registered, are also, in their life within cultural contexts of shifting attention and engagement, stable enough to permit communication and sharing of a point of view on things and tolerant of new uses as new contexts of attention and interest develop.[6] Hence coming to language and conceptual consciousness brings with it uncertainties about how to go on from where we are or one is. Am I playing the game in the right way? Is my conceptual performance such that it can and should be taken up by others? Do I really know what I'm doing?[7] What are evident and exemplary fluency and command in making moves with concepts?

These questions are such that they cannot and do not arise at every moment; comprehensive skepticism is not a genuinely available stance in life. But they are also such that they can always arise at some point. As the Kantian tradition emphasizes, a life with concepts is a life in which questions of judgment are always potentially in view, and the fact of continuing responsibility in and for conceptual performance is unavoidable. R. G. Collingwood tells the following wonderful story about what it is like to come to conceptual consciousness and language, thus becoming a subject of and in culture.

> A child throws its bonnet off its head and into the road with the exclamation "Hattiaw." By comparison with the self-conscious cry discussed earlier in the present section, this represents a highly developed and sophisticated use of language. To begin with, consider the emotion involved. The child might remove its bonnet because it felt physically uncomfortable in it, hot or tickled or the like; but the satisfaction expressed by the cry of "Hattiaw" is not a merely psycho-physical pleasure like that of rubbing a fly off the nose. What is expressed is a sense of triumph, an emotion arising out of the possession of self-consciousness. The child is proving itself as good a man as its mother, who has previously taken its bonnet off with the words it is now imitating; better than its mother, because now she has put the bonnet on and wants it to stay on, so there is a conflict of wills in which the child feels himself victor.[8]

As this example shows, even very early on in our life as possessors of conceptual consciousness and self-consciousness, we bear distinctive emotions and attitudes toward our situations. We are capable of accepting, working through, and expressing these emotions, with a resulting sense of a certain kind of triumph, when our point of view is recognized by others through our performances. We

are capable also of sullenly shirking our emotions, avoiding them, or otherwise failing to express them, with a consequent sense of disappointment, frustration, and failure, and, sometimes, with a further wish to escape or reject the burdens of the responsibility for expression. When this happens, we then suffer or merely undergo our emotions, as we remain stuck in the state of having what Spinoza calls an inadequate idea of an affection: we don't know what is worth caring about; we take no delight in the investment of our energies in our performances, and confused, unexpressed feelings wash over us.[9] Our actions are as much reactions as expressions of our selfhood. Philosophical skepticism and its intimate antagonist epistemological realism are both at bottom misbegotten intellectualized efforts to repudiate the situation and expressive possibilities of conceptual consciousness and self-consciousness by describing them away. (What Stanley Cavell calls the truth of skepticism is the fact that the skeptic, at least, registers a certain failure and disappointment that attach to this effort.[10]) More happily, however, there are also what Charles Altieri calls "the kinds of satisfactions that are available for agents simply because of the qualities of consciousness they bring to what they are feeling."[11] We can do something with these qualities of consciousness. As Wordsworth argues in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet, through thinking "long and deeply" in relation to our feelings may uncover "what is really important to men," with the result that, when this course of discovery is taken up and followed, "the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified."[12] Friedrich Hölderlin on infinite satisfaction[13] and John Dewey on consummatory experience describe in quite similar terms the distinctive sorts of satisfactions that are open to us as human subjects.[14] The achievement of further understanding coupled with strengthened and purified affections, with both understanding and affections then discharged in a dense, medium-specific performance of working through, in which a point of view is made manifest and recognition and like-mindedness are successfully solicited, is what I have elsewhere called the achievement of expressive freedom.[15] It has, I think, some claim to be regarded as an immanent *telos* of human life, made both possible, partially, and valuable for us by our mysterious possession of conceptual consciousness and self-consciousness.

It is impossible to prove the correctness of this view according to the standards of proof that are held in place in the Cartesian tradition. (Those standards were specifically enforced in order to block talk of the purposes of things.) But it remains nonetheless an articulation of what is going on in human life that may be unavoidable and illuminating. If it has any chance of being right, then Lamarque and Olsen are wrong when they remark that "Mostly, we simply do not meet the grand themes in trivial daily life" (p. 455). Yes and no. Yes, we do not meet them clearly formulated and perspicuously manifested there; there is too much muddle for that, and there are too many different circumstances in which lives are led for it to be just obvious that we are in pursuit of expressive freedom. But no, we do meet these themes there latently, to be acknowledged, as we come to see our lives as in part caught up *in situ* in the pursuit of expressive freedom.

Great writers, then, manage to achieve expressiveness: that is, to face up to and work through the emotions and attitudes that come with being a human subject, as those emotions and attitudes are given specific contours in specific situations. They make it manifest for themselves and for us how a specifically shaped emotion, mood, or feeling has been brought about in or by a situation and how, further, that emotion, mood, or feeling can be accepted as appropriate. As a result, the emotion, mood, or feeling is actively accepted, not passively suffered. Barbara Herrnstein Smith describes the achievement of poetic closure from the reader's point of view in just these terms:

> Closure occurs when the concluding portion of a poem creates in the reader a sense of appropriate cessation. It announces and justifies the absence of further development; it reinforces the feeling of finality, completion, and composure which we value in all works of art; and it gives ultimate unity and coherence to the reader's experience of the poem, by providing a point from which all the preceding elements may be received comprehensively and their relations grasped as part of a significant design.[16]

For the reader, that is to say, the poem itself is experienced as coherent, closed, and designed, as its parts form a self-completing whole. This experience is a function of form, but not of form alone. It occurs in part because the poet has succeeded in making sense of experience and emotion, has succeeded in working them through to achieve acceptance and composure. As Herrnstein Smith notes, "the experience of closure is the complex product of both formal and thematic elements" (p. 40). This means that the poet has found, formally, words and structures to thematize, connect, and accept experiences and emotions that were initially burdensome, troubling, exhilarating, or provocative. She goes on to note that many contemporary poems, beginning with Eliot and reaching a high point in Robert Lowell, exhibit increasingly "dialectical–associative" thematic structure. "In much modern poetry," she remarks, "the occasion for a poem is ... likely to be the existence of an ultimately unresolvable process" (p. 247). There is what she calls a "poetry of non-statement" (p. 254) that takes both subjective-lyrical-stream of consciousness guises and Objectivist-Imagist-Language Play guises. The reason for this development is that we have grown, appropriately, skeptical of the availability and liveability of "they lived happily ever after." Nineteenth-century novels, as both Henry James and David Lodge mordantly remarked, seem to end only with marriage, death, or an inheritance. In contrast, we have grown suspicious of the availability and value of these kinds of closure in life, which seems to us to be more complicated than that. But even in the contemporary poetry of anti-statement, the shape and feeling of a particular instance of perplexity are expressively worked through, at least when things go well. The writer and the reader afterwards come to know and accept exactly how there are complexities of situation and feeling. As Herrnstein Smith puts it, "A poem allows us to know what we know, including our illusions and desires, by giving us the language in which to acknowledge it" (p. 154). Such an

achievement of acknowledgment is available and important for us just insofar as we are human subjects who attempt to lead lives actively, with senses of meaning and of appropriate responsiveness to events, unlike Nietzsche's cows, who do little besides undergo their lives.[17] Unlike other animals, we remember and anticipate incidents quite widely, together with an awareness of how incidents and things are seen by others from multiple points of view. And so we wonder: who am I to see, remember, and anticipate things like this? To what extent are my point of view and emotions toward things apt and appropriate? Am I genuinely acting as a reasonable subject in seeing things and feeling as I do?

In the grip of a healthy empiricism, it is of course possible to find this talk of expressive freedom and of leading a life actively to be quite misplaced in relation to what is after all also a sheerly material situation. There is, again, nothing like a proof by Cartesian standards that expressive freedom is the immanent *telos* of human life. But what does it look like, according to this conception, when someone rejects it and denies that expressive freedom matters for us and that it is partially, but only partially, available to us through different actions in different settings? (It is possible to say anything.) The Humean–skeptical, Darwinian–naturalist insistence that we are nothing but natural beings who must simply cope with things and the Cartesian–Platonist insistence that absolute knowledge of our place in nature can guide us, if we but somehow think aright, both appear as hysteria-driven denials of what it is to be a finite, active being in time. "You ask me," Nietzsche once wrote, "which of the philosophers' traits are really idiosyncrasies? For example, their lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism. They think that they show their *respect* for a subject when they de-historicize it, *sub specie aeterni* – when they turn it into a mummy."[18] To deny that our lives are caught up in becoming and in possibilities of the achievement of expressive freedom in part, but only in part, in relation to it can look like an attempt to deny or kill human life, because it is too painful.

Yet as Nietzsche also remarked, it can also sometimes happen – if and when we manage ourselves to work through and express our emotions in a dense, commanding performance, or if and when as readers we follow and participate in the workings-through of others – that we are left with the sense, at least for a time, "that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable."[19] A pattern can be discerned, partially and dimly, in our relations as subjects to things and events, and emotions, feelings, attitudes, and moods can be experienced and worked through as appropriate to that pattern. Discovery and exhilaration are mixed with a sense also of mystery and complexity in the face of a becoming, a life in time, that is not wholly masterable. For this reason, great endings, as Steven Winn remarks, define and disappoint, frustrate and gratify. They confer meaning and confirm the structure of what's come before – in a movie, a sonata, a work of fiction. But they also kill off pleasure, snap us out of the dream, and clamp down order on experience that we, as citizens of the modern world, believe to be open-ended, ambiguous, and unresolved.[20]

This experience of an ending is like what Aristotle describes as the catharsis – at once the clarification and unburdening – of an emotion in relation to a situation. But, as Frank Kermode notes, whereas "For Aristotle the literary plot was analogous to the plot of the world in that both were eductions from the potency of matter,"[21] which eductions are presided over purposively by divine intelligence, for us the sense of plot in life proceeds at least in part from our own "store of contrivances" (p. 40), as we are driven by "a need to live by [*a*] pattern" (p. 109). We half-believe in these patterns, as we experience our lives within them and experience possibilities of clarification of our situation. And yet we remain also aware of our own role as contrivers, aware of the lack of presiding pattern that is everywhere evident in human life, and aware also of our own failures to live in perfect freedom and infinite satisfaction, in the face of the mysterious complexities of becoming. And so we tell stories and attempt to work through our emotions in relation to the particulars of changing situations, so that we can, as Kermode puts it, both "avoid the regress into [*a*] myth" of presiding purposiveness and yet preserve the sense that "the scene [*of human significance*] has not yet been finally and totally been struck" (p. 42). Fictions that find plots, so as to work through emotions in relation to situations and experiences, remain for us both "deeply distrusted," since they are only our contrivances, and "humanly indispensable," since only these contrivances can give us the sense of leading a life meaningfully and actively. They offer us a way, even the way, to cope with both anxiety at a sense of the pervasive contingency of things and bad faith in fixed, master supernatural plots we can no longer trust (p. 151). They are our means of coping with "the tension or dissonance between paradigmatic form and contingent reality" (p. 133), between the sense that every life is a parable of each, with meaning to be found, and the sense that there is only brute and empty material happenstance.

In a famous sonnet appearing as the first of his *New Poems: Second Part* (1908), one of his so-called "Thing-poems," Rainer Maria Rilke describes what it is like to come suddenly to a sense of our middle situation, between dead materiality and perfect transcendence.

Archaïscher Torso Apollos

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,
sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.
Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

und brächte nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern

Archaic Torso of Apollo

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,
gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.
Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:
would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.
trans. Stephen Mitchell[22]

This poem describes not simply an object, but preeminently an experience of an object. The statue-fragment is characterized above all in terms of its effect on the speaker-viewer, in its overwhelming presence to a viewing consciousness. Within that experience, the fragment presents itself as having an inside, felt as a source of expressive and sexual power that is brought to fullness of presence in its outer surface. The formed surface glows (*glüht*), gleams (*glänzt*), blinds the viewer (*dich blenden*), bears a smile (*ein Lächeln*) as a promise of responsive sexuality. Its parts are not detached or misplaced (*entstellt*); instead the stone glistens (*flimmerte*) in its translucent falling (*durchsichtigem Sturz*), as though everywhere breaking out of its borders (*brächte aus allen seinen Rändern*), as if seeing us from every part of itself. These verbs describe the presence of what is inner in what is outer. The statue-fragment is intensely expressively present, so that it serves as a standing rebuke to us, who fail to bring our own personality, intelligence, and expressive and sexual powers to full embodied expression, but instead live at second-hand, palely under conventions that lack full life for us. Hence the fragment rebukes us for failing to be what we dimly feel we might and ought to be as possessors of unexpressed inner intelligence and power: more fully animate, more fitly ensouled.

And yet the poem is itself a classical sonnet, with an octave rhyming *abba cddc* followed by a sestet rhyming *eef gfg*. In place of a classical turn or *volta* after the octave, however, there are two turns: in line 5, with a move into the subjunctive in order to clarify and deepen the initial sense of the fragment's glowing, and then in line 14, with the sudden and brutal ascription of quasi-agentive sight to

the fragment, issuing in a rebuke to the viewer-subject, who falls under its gaze and judgment. This rebuke, felt by the viewer-subject and addressed first to himself and thence to us, his readers, is startling. But the *eef gfg* scheme of the sestet houses this rebuke in a structure of strong formal coherence, giving a sense of appropriateness and closure to the experience. Through the tightly controlled form and images, the rebuke is earned by the experience as it is registered in the poem itself. The poem itself, that is to say, strikes us, through its form and images, as a composed, animated, ensouled whole, both rebuking us, its readers, in the way that the fragment has rebuked the viewer-subject and showing us concretely that the housing of expressive power in controlled surface is still possible and commanding for us, even after the loss of the older dispensations. For the poet, and for us who follow and share in his experience, first of the fragment and then of the poem itself as constructed, yet as it were a living object, it remains possible for experience to mean something, possible to have an adequate idea of an affection, with full investment in one's responses to things, at least at times.

To be sure, this poem is in a way a fiction. It does not report a material reality that is independent of subjectivity and discerned through practices of measurement. Rather it tells a story about an experience and its significance, where the terms of significance involve a sense of emplotment and possibility in human life that are not simply given in tradition or ordinary experience. That sense of emplotment and possibility is itself felt, both by the poet initially and subsequently by we who follow him, as shaped or contrived in human time, as first the fragment and then the poem have been shaped or contrived: we, like the poet, must construct it. Yet this sense is also felt as inevitable, present, and altogether other than arbitrarily invented: it is commanded of us in our contrivings by something that makes itself manifest in the formal and thematic working through of experience. In this working through, both the emplotment of this experience and the relation of this particular emplotment to a larger emplotment of human life are both constructed and accepted as given, by the poet and by us.

Perhaps we should not call what we get from deeply absorbing, cathartic, yet contingency-acknowledging constructions of experience, knowledge. Even framing the issue about the role of literature in our lives in terms of knowledge as it is construed paradigmatically in the natural sciences expresses the philosopher's characteristic bad faith in wanting everything circumscribed and life guided by rationally obligatory rules. Yet we cannot live as human persons without this literature; what we get from it is a sense of life in a human reality that is, if marked by brute contingency, not everywhere dominated by it. Arriving at this sense is a way of knowing by acknowledging what and where and how we are.

Notes

1 Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 369–78. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main text by page numbers in parentheses.

2 Lamarque and Olsen are quoting Theseus in Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act V, Scene i.

3 John Gibson, "Reality and the Language of Fiction," in: Wolfgang Huemer and Marc-Oliver Schuster (eds), *Writing the Austrian Traditions: Relations between Philosophy and Literature.* Edmonton: Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, 2003, 49–65, p. 63. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main text by page numbers in parentheses.

4 Gibson takes up these questions in much greater detail, in ways that fill in a story about human life in a manner that I find congenial, in his forthcoming *Fiction and the Weave of Life.*

5 The cognitive developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello has recently developed a rich account of language learning as depending essentially on intention-reading in his *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999 and *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. His account builds in part on Wittgenstein's work on seeing-as in Part II of *Philosophical Investigations* 3rd. ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958. I survey the affinities between the views of Tomasello and Wittgenstein in "Wittgenstein on Aspect-seeing, the Nature of Discursive Consciousness, and the Experience of Agency," in: William Day and Victor Krebs (eds), *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew: New Essays on Aspect-Seeing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming. R. G. Collingwood treats language-learning and concept-learning in similar terms, as a matter of learning by interacting with others how to attend to aspects, in Collingwood, *The Principles of Art.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938, esp. pp. 239–41.

6 I take the idea that language *must* be both *stable* in providing us with ways of thinking of things that we internalize and use unhesitatingly and *tolerant* of new usages from Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 185–6.

7 I take up the essential 'immigrancy' involved in our inheritance of language and development of conceptual consciousness in "Cavell and Hölderlin on Human Immigrancy," in: *The Persistence of Romanticism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 229–45.

8 Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, op. cit., p. 239. Collingwood is almost surely thinking here also of Freud's account of the development of the ego in and through plays of mutual attention and contestation. See Freud on the *fort-da* game in Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, New York: Bantam Books, 1961.

9 See Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics in Selections.* John Wild (ed.), New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930, Part V, Propositions III–X, pp. 369–77.

10 Cavell develops his account of the truth of skepticism in various major writings, including "Knowing and Acknowledging" (1969), *The Claim of Reason* (1979), "Being Odd, Getting Even" (1986), and *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990). For an overview of Cavell's thoughts about skepticism, see Eldridge, "'A Continuing Task': Cavell and the Truth of Skepticism," in: *The Persistence of Romanticism*, op. cit., pp. 189–204.

11 Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 107.

12 William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," in: *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, Jack Stillinger (ed.), Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965, p. 448.

13 See Friedrich Hölderlin, "On Religion," in: Thomas Pfau (trans. and ed.), *Essays and Letters on Theory.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 90–1.

14 John Dewey, *Art as Experience.* New York: Penguin, 1980, inf.; esp. Chapter III, "Having an Experience," and pp. 17–19.

15 See Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 6–7; *The Persistence of Romanticism*, op. cit.,

pp. 19–20, 55–7, 158–63, 235; and *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 7–12, 262.

16 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 36. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main text by page numbers in parentheses.

17 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*. Trans. Adrian Collins, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1949, p. 5.

18 Nietzsche, "'Reason' in Philosophy," trans. Walter Kaufmann, in: *The Twilight of the Idols*, excerpted in: Walter Kaufmann (ed.) *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: The Viking Press, 1954, p. 479.

19 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House, 1967, p. 59. In *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Herbert Marcuse argues that "aesthetic affirmation" in life that is not a matter of escapist fantasizing must include a sense of the ontologically "irreconcilable" and that it is expressed aptly in the last words of the Song of the Tower Warden in Goethe's *Faust*: "Es war doch so schön" (Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*. Trans. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978, p. 59. See also the concluding discussion of gratitude as a response to the experience of the truth of skepticism in Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life*, op. cit., pp. 286–90).

20 Steven Winn, "Endings Are a Catharsis," in: *San Francisco Chronicle*, Saturday, January 1, 2005; archived at http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/01/01/DDG7VAJAL81.DTL

21 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction, with a New Epilogue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 138. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main text by page numbers in parentheses.

22 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell, New York: Random House, 1982, pp. 60, 61.