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What makes bad books good? The relationship between ethical and aesthetic value

by

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Abstract

The debate surrounding the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is myopic and Procrustean. An alternative perspective is required to account for its richness. In this thesis, I first survey existing strategies for dealing of the relationship. I then show where I part ways with them. In contrast to autonomism, I believe a relationship does exist and, in contrast to moralism, I do not think ethical value covaries neatly with aesthetic value. Moreover, though I am sympathetic to immoralism, I argue that its approach is incomplete in important respects.

All these strategies try to answer the ‘thin’ question of how literary and moral value are related.

Immoralism provides the best answer – but it leaves the ‘thick’ question of how literary and ethical value might be related untouched.

I therefore pursue strategies for dealing of the thicker relationship. To this end, I scrutinise Nussbaum’s work on moral vision and how certain literary works are themselves works of moral philosophy. I then survey Lamarque and Olsen’s conception of literature as a nonoverlapping practice governed by a self-contained set of conventions and concepts. I argue that the focus of some works of literature draws attention to and challenges these conventions and concepts. I make a distinction between the ‘world of the work’ and the ‘work in the world’ to make this point clear. This distinction is crucial and illuminating for my answer to the thicker question.

These pieces in place, I closely analyse three works – Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* and Thomas Mann’s *Joseph and his Brothers* – in accordance with the newly conceived relationship. The question ‘What makes bad books good?’ invites us to overcome our myopia with regards to how art and ethics interrelate. In truth, myriad, dynamic relationships hold between art and ethics; and truly great works can capture this.

Chapter One: An introduction to the topic and two prevailing strategies for dealing of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value

Introduction

The question ‘What makes bad books good?’ implies two evaluative frameworks – one that assesses the relevant book and judges it to be ‘bad’ and the other that judges it to be ‘good’. Moreover, it invites one to consider the possible relations between these evaluative frameworks. Perhaps what makes the book ‘bad’ has nothing to do with what makes it ‘good’. In this circumstance, the evaluative frameworks that allow us to determine a book’s ‘bad’ and ‘good’ qualities are isolable from and irrelevant to one another, even if they reside in and pertain to the same text. Then again, it may be that the two evaluative frameworks have a covariant relationship, such that if a book is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in one respect it will also be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in the *other* respect as well. One might wonder, then, if this covariance is accidental, or if instead being ‘good’ in one way entails being ‘good’ in another. If it turns out the covariance is meaningful, and the two senses of being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ are importantly related to one another, it would seem to follow that whatever renders the book of our question ‘bad’ cannot contribute positively to what makes it ‘good’. That is, it will either have to be a ‘bad book’ in spite of its ‘good’ qualities, in which case whatever ‘good’ features it might possess will have failed to redeem its essential ‘badness’; or else, if the ways it is ‘good’ are sufficiently powerful that we want to champion its ‘goodness’ over and above its ‘badness’, it would seem that the book would have to be ‘good’ in spite of, and not because of, whatever makes it ‘bad’. Another possibility might be to reject either of these strategies and propose instead that whatever makes the book ‘bad’ can sometimes augment its ‘good’ features, act as a motivation to improve its ‘good’ attributes, require the book to find ‘good’ solutions to the problems its ‘bad’ qualities pose, and so on. In this case, whatever makes the book ‘bad’ will be relevant to whatever makes the book ‘good’ – but it would not follow that ‘badness’ in one respect necessitates ‘badness’ in the other. A final, subtler strategy might be to say that all the above approaches have interpreted the question in a somewhat short-sighted way. The question is *really* inviting us to explore the evaluative frameworks themselves, rather than the specific judgements those frameworks generate. In this case, it isn’t so important whether the book is ‘bad’ in one respect and ‘good’ in another – the more salient issue is whether, and in what ways, the evaluative framework that comes up with a ‘bad’ result engages with the evaluative framework that comes up with a ‘good’ one. This thesis provides an answer to the question

‘What makes bad books good?’ that embraces the latter alternative. It proposes a new perspective on how to examine the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value that is attentive to its complexity, dynamism and richness.

The existing philosophical literature has provided myriad strategies for examining why it is that a work which is morally suspect, problematic, reprehensible, and so on, can also be artistically powerful, elegant, beautiful, and so on. One kind of strategy proposes that ethical value is irrelevant to aesthetic value, in which case the work’s moral reprehensibility is evaluatively independent of the work’s artistic beauty. As such, the appropriate thing to do when confronted with a morally problematic work is to set aside whatever ethical judgements one might make of the work and instead focus on its aesthetic qualities. In this way, artistic judgement does not get distracted, or waylaid, or distorted, by considerations that do not pertain to those elements that make the candidate a good work of art qua work of art. This kind of strategy has been employed in various ways and covers positions such as autonomism, aestheticism, and formalism, depending on precisely what inflection the writer is trying to emphasise.

Autonomism implies that aesthetic judgement is free of evaluative assessment from other spheres – it possesses a sovereignty and autonomy over its own assessments. Aestheticism draws upon associations with ‘aesthetes’ and ‘the aesthetic movement’ from the late 19th Century, headed by writers such as Oscar Wilde, whose preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* includes the succinct and proverbially aestheticist statement that: “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.” (Wilde, 1890 [2004]: 1) Formalism proposes that the best way to approach evaluating a work of art is to focus on its *formal* features. By analysing, interpreting, and evaluating the inherent features of a text, one can ensure that artistic judgement does not get hijacked by superfluous concerns. Each of these strategies are distinct. They prioritise subtly different things, are sometimes made weaker and sometimes stronger, and do not collapse into one another. However, they do share a fundamental orientation toward the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value in common – namely, that there *is* no relationship, because the two evaluative frameworks are not relevant to one another.

However, various reasons have been provided for rejecting the aestheticist claim. One reason we might be cautious of it is that it seems to sit rather uneasily with our natural inclination to speak about art in moral terms. (Carroll, 1998) If there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book, it is peculiar that we often employ morally inflected language when we talk about books – whether they are well written or otherwise. Another concern is that the

autonomist directive to keep separate the realms of moral and artistic value appears to ignore the fact that some works of art are designed specifically to elicit moral reactions from its audience. (ibid) If we separate these realms when we attend to works that are designed to meld them, it may be that we are failing to engage with those works as we ought. A third, distinct yet related, reason is that a strategy like formalism, which proposes we distance our artistic engagement from the morally objectionable content of a work, might mean that we omit just those features of a work that are characteristic of it from our aesthetic judgements. (Deveraux, 1998) As a consequence, so the argument goes, some account of how ethical value impacts artistic value must be provided because in some cases ethical content is an integral feature to the work of art being engaged with.

One alternative strategy that rejects the autonomist's approach argues that, on the contrary, ethical and aesthetic value covary. That is, where a work manifests ethical flaws, that work will also manifest artistic flaws; and where a work manifests ethical merits, that work will also manifest artistic merits. (Gaut, 1998) This kind of strategy encompasses positions like ethicism, moralism, and so on. Again, there is a wide spectrum of voices covered by this strategy, with stronger and weaker commitments, subtly yet importantly different conceptions of what 'ethical' and 'aesthetic' value entails and distinct ideas about what kind of contribution ethical value makes to artistic appreciation. But the crucial common denominator amongst them is that ethically valuable content translates into aesthetically valuable content, and ethically flawed content translates into aesthetically flawed content. As a result, moral flaws, to a greater or lesser extent depending on precisely which ethicist or moralist strategy is being employed, will always undermine the artistic value of the candidate work, and can never make a positive artistic contribution.

A third strategy that is different to both autonomism *and* ethicism is immoralism. Immoralism holds that a work can be at once ethically problematic and artistically valuable. As such, there is some degree of overlap between it and other 'moderate' forms of both autonomism and moralism. However, it is crucially different in one important respect. To see what that difference amounts to, let us take a moment to briefly characterise moderate autonomism and moderate moralism. Unlike the Wildean radical aestheticist, the moderate autonomist is willing to say that a book might be immoral – but the book's moral flaws are not relevant to its artistic value. Unlike the Tolstoian absolute moralist, moderate moralism acknowledges that there might be artistically valuable yet morally flawed works of art – but the work's artistic value will be compromised by its ethical problems. The immoralist, by contrast, argues that a work of art might be artistically valuable *by virtue* of its immorality.

That is, immoralism claims that ethical value is relevant to aesthetic value – in this regard, it agrees with moralism and parts ways with autonomism. It also holds that because a significant and valuable feature of artistic expression is its “freedom from the burden of speaking always on the side of morality”, (Gibson, 2010: 1) it is possible for works to be artistically valuable precisely because of their immoral content – here, then, it has certain features in common with autonomism and parts ways with moralism.

Of these three strategies, I am most sympathetic to the third. Whilst I concur with the autonomist that “it is inappropriate to invoke moral considerations in evaluating *all* art”, (Carroll, 1998: 136) I nevertheless think the moralist and immoralist are right to claim, and the autonomist is wrong to deny, that in some, even many works, ethical and aesthetic value are importantly related. I also think the immoralist’s openness to the possibility that a work’s ethical flaws might augment rather than diminish its artistic value places it in a stronger explanatory position than either of its competitors. Autonomism holds that ethical content is never relevant to aesthetic value. Ethicism holds that ethical and aesthetic value covary. Immoralism holds that, in some cases, a work can be artistically valuable because of its immorality. As such, it provides the most nuanced and flexible account of how ethical and aesthetic value are related – which is appropriate, because ethical reasoning and artistic creation invite nuance and flexibility.

This being said, and building upon this observation about nuance and flexibility, I contend that none of these strategies adequately captures the relationship in all its rich complexity. Autonomism, moralism, and immoralism alike are all too myopically fixated on what contribution ‘getting it morally right’ makes to artistic value. That is, they are proposing an answer to the question ‘What makes bad books good?’ in the context of ethics’ normative aspect. This isn’t wrong – but it is incomplete. This is because ethics, in addition to its normative aspect which involves moral judgement, also has what John Gibson calls a “narratological” aspect, (Gibson, 2010:18) which involves trying to understand the “cultural grounds of human action and experience” and “explor[ing] the ‘living’ arrangement of values operative in a community.” (ibid: 12-3) This aspect of ethical practice does not get engaged by the three strategies detailed above. My contribution to the debate is to attend to precisely this shortcoming. In order to accomplish this, my strategy in this thesis will be as follows.

First, and for the remainder of this chapter, I shall characterise the two prevailing approaches for dealing of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. In order to draw out the aestheticist strategy, I shall consider closely the position advanced by Richard Posner that “[t]he moral content and consequences of a work of literature are irrelevant to its value as

literature.” (Posner, 1997: 2) I shall also draw attention to the “moderate autonomism” advanced by James Anderson and Jeffrey Dean. (Anderson & Dean, 1998) In order to articulate the ethicist strategy, I shall attend to Noël Carroll’s position that “[f]ailure to elicit the right moral response... is an aesthetic failure” (Carroll, 1996: 302) as well as Berys Gaut’s claim that “if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective, and if a work manifests ethically commendable attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically meritorious.” (Gaut, 1998: 182) I will conclude that neither the aestheticist nor the ethicist strategy provides a satisfactory account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, and that their respective answers to the question ‘What makes bad books good?’ are accordingly inadequate. What is required instead is an account that is sensitive to three considerations. First, a work of literature can utilise moral content without this meaning the moral value of that work directly translates into aesthetic value – the autonomist is correct when they say the ethical and aesthetic evaluative realms are distinct. Second, it nevertheless does not follow that these realms bear no relation to one another whatsoever. On the contrary, literary works may make essential use of their moral content, and an account which proposes we ringfence a work’s essential features is fundamentally mistaken. Third, the most important thing about the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is not whether the work ‘gets it right’ ethically; a work’s ethical flaws are not thereby aesthetic flaws, nor are its ethical merits thereby aesthetic ones. A new strategy is required that can accommodate these three considerations.

In chapter two, I shall begin my pursuit of this kind of strategy in earnest, starting with immoralism. First, I will outline the position advanced by Matthew Kieran that a work might be artistically valuable in virtue of its immorality. I shall closely detail how he uses obscenity as a paradigm example of immorality and Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* as a paradigm case of an obscene work. I will then turn my attention to A.W. Eaton’s work on the rough hero and the artistically interesting design problem they give rise to. I shall argue that whilst their respective positions represent a signal improvement on either the aestheticist or ethicist strategies that were advanced in chapter one, they are nevertheless inadequate in some important respects. Crucially, they appear most interested in the relationship between moral judgement and aesthetic value, which fails to capture the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value in all its richness. To augment this claim, I will then turn my attention to Adriana Clavel-Vazquez’ work on imaginative resistance and interpretative horizons, followed by John Gibson’s claim that the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is best described with respect to thick narratives. I will conclude the chapter by outlining the insights I intend to

incorporate into my own account from each of Clavel-Vazquez' and Gibson's respective analyses. Briefly, Clavel-Vazquez' strategy for explaining why rough heroines activate a different kind of resistance phenomena than rough heroes, in concert with her account of how this facilitates a special kind of aesthetic achievement, is instructive for my own position. Gibson's terminological distinction between thick and thin narratives, as well as morality's emphasis on normative judgements and ethics' narratological focus, are essential pieces in the puzzle for my own answer to the question 'What makes bad books good?'

By the end of chapter two, I will have argued that I am interested in providing an account of the 'thick' rather than 'thin' relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. The approaches that were discussed in chapter one, and the first half of chapter two, were all 'thin' strategies. In chapter three, I begin looking at 'thicker' strategies. By this point in the thesis, we will already be familiar with Gibson's contrast between 'literary moralism', which "assesses the merit... of the morally relevant attitudes... manifested in a work" (Gibson, 2010: 16) and 'literary ethicism', which "attempt[s] to fill out our sense of the ethical character of a culture". (ibid: 17) Carroll's and Gaut's positions seem to fit this first category. It appears plausible that literary ethicism might fare better. As such, I will analyse Martha Nussbaum's account of the novel as a candidate work of moral philosophy. She makes three claims for the novel that are characteristic of her distinctive account of the literary-ethical relationship. These are:

- 1) It is in novels that one finds the most appropriate articulation of the, or this, moral vision
- 2) Novels are themselves works of moral philosophy
- 3) We can find in novels a paradigm of moral activity

I will scrutinise these claims in close detail and will examine how they pertain to three literary examples drawn from her own work – namely, Henry James's *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* and Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. I shall argue that Nussbaum offers insightful and powerful readings of these respective works, but that her account of how literary and ethical value relate to one another is deficient in three important respects. On her own account, Nussbaum is too narrow about which novels, and which literary forms, might serve as candidate works of moral philosophy; she is too narrow about which moral visions can be articulated in them; and she is too narrow about what kinds of moral activity might be explored in literary works. If my account of the relationship is going to improve upon hers, I will have to safeguard against these shortcomings.

It will be clear by now that in this thesis, my principal interest in ethical value is related to its ‘thick’ rather than ‘thin’ application. Moreover, my principal interest in aesthetic value is to do with its manifestation in literary works. As such, in chapter four I will provide an in-depth analysis of Lamarque and Olsen’s conception of literature as a social practice. Their position is that literary practice’s evaluative conventions principally reside in two aspects – a creative-imaginative aspect and a mimetic aspect. Moreover, these aspects are coordinated so that they might be expressive of, and interpreted by way of, perennial themes and thematic concepts, which therefore comprise literary practice’s central focus. Two other discursive practices, philosophy and religion, are also constituted by their participation in perennial themes and thematic concepts. Nevertheless, literature does not overlap with them, and literary appreciation makes no direct contribution to either philosophical intellectual inquiry or religious observance and ritual. I will argue that Lamarque and Olsen’s contribution to the debate about literary and aesthetic value is significant. However, I profoundly disagree with them in one key respect. Whereas they argue literature is a nonoverlapping practice with either philosophy or religion, I argue that literature is quite clearly and very importantly overlapping with them both. I will close the chapter by introducing my own formulation of how we might understand the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, motivated by their observation that there exists a “positive relationship between the world and the work” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 438-9) That is, I claim that one way to answer the question ‘What makes bad books good?’ involves attending carefully to the relationship between ‘the world of the work’ and the ‘work in the world’.

In chapter five, I will flesh out this theoretical apparatus. I will argue that the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value isn’t any one especial thing. Instead, because the conventions that structure ethical and literary practice are not rigid, the relationship between them isn’t rigid either. It is elastic rather than inflexible, dynamic rather than static. But this does not entail that the relationship devolves into a free for all in which anything is permitted. Rather, the aesthetic quality of some works is correlated with their capacity to illuminate a set of ethical ‘living arrangements’ and their capacity to make a reader test, explore and challenge their relation to them. To evidence this claim, I will navigate the worlds of three literary works – Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* and Thomas Mann’s *Joseph and his Brothers* – with a view to eliciting the ways these works creatively innovate upon the literary canon they have inherited, and confront the conventions that structure how values are made. It is my contention that the question ‘What makes bad books good?’ receives its fullest and most enriching answer if we attend to the practices that produce judgements like ‘bad’ and ‘good’,

rather than the specific ‘good’ or ‘bad’ judgement. The question implies an invitation to investigate the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. That relationship is rich, dynamic and mercurial. Truly great works of literature can capture that relationship in all its extraordinary variety. Before we get to the business of proving it, however, let us consider some preliminary concerns one might have about the scope of the thesis, the major terms that will inform the thesis’ argumentative structure, and some of the ways the various central and subsidiary claims that emerge over the course of the thesis are intended to hang together. Let us begin with the intended scope of this thesis.

Some preliminary remarks about scope, major terms and themes

By asking the question ‘What makes bad *books* good?’ one may reasonably expect the examples I choose to come from the written word rather than from other candidate kinds of art, such as figurative painting, architecture, music, and so on. Nevertheless, by choosing *books* to focus on, I am not committing myself to any especial genre of written works of art, such as the novel, the epic poem, or the tragic play, to the exclusion of another. Indeed, as we will see in chapter three, one of my greatest sources of disagreement with Martha Nussbaum is the narrow and rigid scope of her interest in the ethical significance of the *novel* – and the 19th and 20th Century realist novel, at that. By omitting so much of literary practice from her discourse – satires, comedies and lyric poems – she makes what seem to me unacceptably distorted claims about the relationships that works of literature have to moral philosophy. It is a fascinating feature of Charles Altieri’s analysis of the affects in *The Particulars of Rapture*, for example, that he investigates lyric poetry precisely *because* it is a medium that “helps us resist the rush to *moral* judgment...” [my italics] (Altieri, 2003: 88) I am not competent to comment on whether Altieri correctly identifies lyric poetry as a singularly appropriate vehicle for resisting this temptation. But he is right, I think, when he identifies Nussbaum as someone especially susceptible to it – and part of her susceptibility is due to how few literary genres she is willing to engage with. Altieri is deeply concerned that “[b]y leaping so quickly to the ethical, Nussbaum tends to ignore the range of investments we make in and through emotions...” (ibid: 168) Moreover, because Nussbaum “subordinates the expressive aspects of our manners of expression to the self-justifying stories we can tell about ourselves”, (ibid) Altieri believes her approach “...cannot sufficiently engage the tensions we often experience between feeling and thinking.” (ibid: 174) Here, again, I think Altieri makes a salient point; and I think the narrow range of literary works she investigates, from the narrow range of literary genres she is

interested in, explains part of what's wrong with Nussbaum's conception of literature and moral philosophy. As such, and to address this shortcoming, the 'bad books' I am interested in will be selected from a range of genres, rather than just the novel.

Having said this, the scope of this thesis is not boundless, and the claims I make for the relationship between literary and ethical value are not intended to generalise across *all* literary works. Some works of literature do not engage with ethical content or questions – they are neither 'bad' nor 'good' in the relevant way. These works do not bear the kinds of relationship I am interested in investigating in this thesis; nor were they ever intended to. It is not to their evaluative detriment that this is the case, and the claims of this thesis should not be taken to extend over them. Nor will I have very much to say about non-narrative forms of art. I do not intend for this to imply that non-narrative texts are therefore non-*literary*, as Lamarque and Olsen contend about Ezra Pound's imagist poetry. On the contrary, I think it is a shortcoming in their account of literary practice that they make claims of this kind. Rather, it is because I am interested in the role narrative plays in our value-making structures that I limit my examples to narrative works of literature, and not because I think all works of literature must be narrative. So far as the conventions that govern *these* aspects of literary practice go, I am willing to yield ground to, and learn from, literary theorists like Charles Altieri, who has much more to say about Robert Creeley's *Words* than I do – and can say it immeasurably better. I hope, in any case, to avoid the pitfalls of any self-justifying story I might tell *myself* in the course of my engagement with narrative literature; let us hope that Charles Altieri's influence might inoculate me against this shortcoming.

There remains, however, a certain slipperiness and equivocacy in my use of the term 'books' that it behoves me to address. Although the examples I choose to illustrate my point about the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value in chapter five are all works of narrative literature, engaging with relevant commentators has also meant engaging with other forms of narrative art, most notably film. Thus I draw from Mary Devereaux's analysis of *Triumph of the Will*, Matthew Kieran's interpretation of *Do the Right Thing*, and A.W Eaton's case study of *Bonnie and Clyde*. There is a risk of muddying the water by their inclusion, as well as a danger of conflating conventions and value-making structures that are relevant to the practice of narrative filmmaking with those that are relevant to the practice of narrative literature. Certainly I want to avoid this. Film is able to 'do things' with narrative that literature cannot, just as there are 'things' literature can 'do' with narrative that film cannot. Other artistic genres can 'do' more besides – video games like Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption 2*, Santa Monica's *God of War* and CD Projekt Red's *The Witcher 3* each 'do things' with narrative that

neither literature nor film can, by virtue of the conventions that govern their practice, and vice versa. It would be a gross mistake to elide these practices, and treat whatever relationship they individually have to ethical value as identical. Nevertheless, it is a central claim of my thesis that practices can overlap. It is noteworthy, I take it, that *The Witcher* has been explored in the form of a novel series, a television series and a game series. These different iterations are of course distinct. They are not interchangeable and they do not collapse one into another. But to the extent they employ similar conventions, and structure their value-making criteria using similar concepts, it is a fruitful and instructive exercise to investigate those places that practices like film, television, video-gaming – and literature – overlap. Whatever makes *Triumph of the Will*, *Do the Right Thing* and *Bonnie and Clyde* ‘good’ or ‘bad’ will not be precisely the same as whatever makes *Metamorphoses*, *The Divine Comedy* and *Joseph and his Brothers* ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Neither, for that matter, will whatever makes *Metamorphoses* ‘good’ or ‘bad’ be precisely what makes *The Divine Comedy* or *Joseph and his Brothers* ‘good’ or ‘bad’, different literary genres having their *own* distinctive conventions. Provided we keep this in mind, though, and provided we do not erroneously and unthinkingly transpose the conventions of one practice onto the other, then an investigation of other forms of narrative art than literature can be illuminating, just as an investigation of narrative literature can profit from examples taken from a wide range of literary genres.

By ‘books’, then, I mean works of narrative literature from a diverse range of genres. ‘What makes bad books good?’ is therefore asking a question about how we structure our ethical and artistic evaluations of narrative literary works. To get to grips with this question, and in order to make clear what I mean by the second half of this thesis’ title ‘the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value’, it will be important to state clearly how I understand the major terms at stake in the argument and what I take the relations between them to be: ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ value on the one hand; ‘artistic’, ‘aesthetic’ and ‘literary’ value on the other. Moreover, it will be important to clarify how I understand ‘narrative’ and its relation to a vision of life.

I take ethics to concern the broad 'how to live' question. It therefore encompasses an enormous array of concerns we have about what makes lives better and worse, and worth living at all – but it need not make prescriptive demands. Where it *does* make prescriptive demands, we are dealing with an especial subset of ethic, namely morality. By ‘moral’, then, I mean the normative, judging aspect of ethics. Morality emphasises what we ought, or ought not, to do. Though conceptions of morality vary, the moral ‘ought’ is typically conceived of as having impersonal or universal force, embodying a standard that applies to all. An attitude might be

morally true or false, a mode of behaviour might be *morally* right or wrong. A work might endorse *morally* true or false attitudes, celebrate *morally* right or wrong modes of behaviour. We ought to endorse the morally right course of action, whereas we ought to reject the morally false attitude.

When commentators contrast artistic value with moral value, it is this normative, prescriptive, evaluative aspect of ethics that is being emphasised. It is in this sense that the ‘bad books’ of my thesis question are bad. Namely, that they are immoral. The moralist is advancing the theory that the moral rightness or wrongness directly influences the artistic value or disvalue. The moral autonomist is saying that moral truth or falsity is irrelevant to artistic value. The immoralist is saying that a work can be artistically valuable in virtue of the morally false attitudes it manifests or morally wrong behaviour it applauds. I call these moral concepts, and the moral aspect of ethics, ‘thin’ because they are merely evaluative, rather than endeavouring to articulate a deeper, more textured definition of the character, action or attitude they are casting judgement on. There is certainly a place for this in the discourse on the relationship between ethical and artistic value – I do not mean for this thesis to replace or nullify these perspectives; granted I find some of them more persuasive than others. However, I mean to investigate a different aspect of ethical value than these commentators are interested in.

By ‘ethical’, I mean to emphasise a richer and thicker kind of content that is descriptive as well as evaluative. To reiterate, moral concepts merely evaluate a course of action, whereas ethical concepts endeavour to capture the richer texture of the cultural climate in which those moral evaluations are made. Ethical concepts accomplish this by being at once evaluative *and* descriptive. They are therefore particularly well suited to narrative literature because they pick out the kind of qualities we attribute to ourselves, and to others, when we articulate how one navigates the landscape of a value-making culture like our own. A value-making culture will, of course, make normative judgements about various courses of action. Any especial course of action might be morally right, wrong, indeterminate, difficult or straightforward to adjudicate, and so on. We can analyse that normative aspect in moral terms and that analysis can be useful. But it will be a ‘thin’ analysis so long as we omit a ‘thicker’ ethical description from our evaluative account. This is because an ethical description of a morally right or wrong course of action does not trade straightforwardly in the rightness or wrongness, the truth or falsity, of any specific normative judgement that is reached. Rather, it will seek to identify how the actors are ‘cruel’, ‘courageous’, ‘generous’, ‘self-pitying’, ‘compassionate’, and so on (Williams, 1985). These thicker, ethical concepts are not principally interested in the specification of duties or obligations, nor in providing methods for determining the moral worth of an especial course of

action. Instead, they reveal the ways in which each of us embodies the value-making structure of a person. A situation may be ethically rich, abundantly expressive of the myriad desires, hopes, beliefs, feelings, passions and values that structure our engagement with that situation – even when the engagement is morally false.

This is important for my thesis because these thicker ethical notions allow for a great deal more texture and nuance regarding how we understand evaluative claims. Some evaluations may go deeper, or further, or in radically different directions. Thick ethical features may interact and inflect each other in myriad given circumstances. Perhaps, even, usually ‘good’ ethical qualities, such as compassion, can become misplaced. Being appropriately attuned to these thickly descriptive evaluative ethical concepts accommodates this openness and variety. As such, the ethical is a domain in which multiple, competing values and kinds of value can be acknowledged (and reflected on, compared, tested). There is not the same demand or possibility of reaching *the* moral judgement. In my terms, the moral is a subset of the ethical – but the ethical is not exhausted by the moral, and in this thesis I intend to explore that narratological, descriptive terrain in finer grained detail than it has hitherto received in much of the literature on ethical and aesthetic value.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have referred to ‘artistic’, ‘aesthetic’ and ‘literary’ value quite interchangeably. I shall now make it plain what I mean by these various terms. I understand the term ‘artistic’ very broadly in this thesis. It is intended to be applicable to artefacts, creators, critics, audiences and evaluations from a wide range of social practices – such as music, painting, dance, theatre, performance, architecture, sculpture, and literature. The participants in these various practices determine what counts as an artwork. This is not an inflexible or eternal determination – reevaluation is always possible in principle. A work that has hitherto been dismissed as non-artistic need not always be so, just as a work that has hitherto been considered artistic may be jettisoned by the practice’s community. The community reaches these conclusions by interpreting the candidate work in terms of the concepts and conventions that structure a practice’s evaluative frameworks. Some of these concepts and conventions will be employed by various practices, whilst others will be peculiar to specific practices. A mimetic aspect will be relevant to various, although probably not all, artistic practices; a figurative aspect will be relevant to some, but probably not all, artistic practices; some of the concepts that are essential to evaluating works of architecture will be entirely irrelevant to works of music, and so on. The practices, moreover, can value different things to greater or lesser extents in the course of their artistic histories. ‘Beauty’ may be more or less important to a practice’s evaluative framework at one time than another, and the concept of

'beauty' might itself mean something different at one time than another. These re-evaluative changes are not arbitrary, although they might be quite sudden. Rather, they are a dynamic consequence of how the practice's network of creators, audiences and critics engage with their artistic practice's inherited catalogue and canon. The canon may be revised; the catalogue may be refreshed. If this occurs, that is as a result of developments, innovations and revaluations germane to the relevant practice and their value-making structures. On this view, moreover, we can ask whether an artistic practice embraces the ethical as relevant to artistic value, in the sense that artistic value involves engaging with ethical concerns and value. Literature, it seems, is a practice where this question proves salient, because its practice includes, or in many phases has included, ethical value as relevant to literary value.

'Aesthetic' is not synonymous with 'artistic'. One way to identify aesthetic properties is that they are manifested in experience and have at least a kind of proto-valence. They are attended to with pleasure or displeasure, or are found to contribute to an experience in a positive or negative way. Sometimes, the aesthetic is tied to experience of the form of an object. So described, these aesthetic properties are clearly different from artistic features as I have defined them, since artistic properties depend on what an art practice takes to matter to achieving its goals. Artistic features need not be directly manifest in experience or in form. Now, in the literary case, the key experienced properties of the work, those we might call 'aesthetic', are core artistic properties. Examples of these core properties would be meaning and intended meaning, genre, style, narration, narrative structure, and so on. It would be artificial and futile to try to separate out the 'pure aesthetic experience' of a literary artwork because what the reader experiences is inevitably a functioning artistic work. For that reason, in the literary case, it seems permissible to use the terms 'aesthetic' and 'artistic' interchangeably.

A more important terminological distinction for my purposes exists between either 'artistic' or 'aesthetic' on hand and 'literary' on the other. All literary works are artistic. It does not follow, however, that all artistic works are literary. As such, Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers* is a work of literature and also a work of art. Conversely, Caravaggio's 'The Incredulity of Saint Thomas' is a work of art but it is not a work of literature. More contentiously, in chapter four I will argue, *contra* Lamarque and Olsen, that because they are possessive of literary value, *The Bible* and Plato's dialogues are also works of art. This is because it is possible for a work to serve multiple category functions, and be engaged with by multiple social practices. Crucially, *The Bible* and Plato's dialogues each employ concepts and conventions that are relevant to literary practice, as well as religious and philosophical practice respectively. Moreover, they each have a narratological aspect, which allows us to investigate

how they describe the texture of values and value-making in their respective practices. They will structure their narratological aspects differently, as befits the conventions that govern their respective practices (namely, religion and philosophy), meaning that their evaluations can pull in different directions. But an investigation into the structure of their value-making conventions, rather than attending merely to their specific normative evaluations, will reveal the dynamic ways they engage with their own practice, as well as other practices with which they overlap. Philosophy, religion and literature do not fall one into the other. Not all religious works are philosophical or literary; not all literary works are religious or philosophical; not all philosophical works are literary or religious. But some works *do* participate in myriad social practices, and by attending to their value-making structures, we get a clearer idea of what this involves.

Clearly, narrative does a lot of heavy lifting in my account, so I shall now say something about how I understand narrative and its relation to a vision of life. By describing a work as being a narrative work, or as having a narratological aspect, I mean to draw attention to the descriptive, 'storytelling' conventions that the work employs. A narrative account is one in which a sequence of events that are related causally gets told. Moreover, a narrative account typically focuses on individual agents and what they do. A narrative is therefore an excellent structure for showing visions of life. It can detail all the 'socio-practical activity' that surrounds a causally related sequence of events involving agents and their actions. It can pay close attention to those actions and responses that go into affirming values, treating things as valuable, feeling and experiencing things as valuable, resisting value claims, losing faith in values, and so on. Where a work has a narratological aspect, then, it is telling some such story about how agents coordinate themselves in the world and evaluate their situation. That is, narrative tells us something about how an individual engages with the world through their socio-practical activity. A narrative work therefore provides a descriptive account of how a participant in a social practice – like, say religion – uses the conventions that structure their value-making activity to make sense of the world about them, ground their place in that world, and navigate its terrain. An engagement with the world through social practice is indexical – however I view the world about me, make sense of the world about me, coordinate myself within the world, and interrogate the value-making apparatuses that structure my engagement with the world about me, will be different from however someone else carries out these kinds of activity. Moreover, different narrative works will describe different orientations to the world, highlight different perspectives from which to make sense of the world, prioritise different concepts in the matrix of value-making conventions that structure our engagement with the

world, and so on. Different participants in a social practice will not always value the same things to the same extent. They will not always bring the same perspectives to bear on the world about them. They will not always coordinate themselves toward the catalogue and canon of their social practice in exactly the same way. I do not wish to overstate the situation. These myriad perspectives and orientations don't entail incommensurability from case to case – although, no doubt, there will be occasions where two participants in a social practice fail to understand what the other is seeing. Engagement in a social practice is realisable in various ways, but it is also broadly shared and sharable. This is relevant in the case of narrative because narrative can show an action and its consequence and how the people involved respond to this, in feeling and judgement. A narrative can show someone trying to do something and their reasons for doing it, and whether other people accept or dispute their reasons. A narrative is (somehow) narrated, with huge potential for conveying judgement of the events that unfold. All of this points toward a conception of narrative that allows for sense-making and the potential for *shared* sense-making. Focusing on narrative provides, I think, a way to structure this variously realisable yet broadly sharable engagement. It helps us to make sense of how one might articulate a vision of life. It helps us to understand that one person's articulation of a vision of life might be different than another's. It helps us traverse this multiply navigable space. In so doing, it helps us recognise that there exists a plurality of perspectives, engagements, and interpretations. We do well to attend to this plurality; we do well to resist any latent "impatience with particularity". (Altieri, 2003: 159)

Having discussed the scope of this thesis, and also having clarified how I understand some of the major terms at stake, I will now take some time to discuss how the various claims and themes I address in this thesis are related. My central claim in this thesis is that existing treatments of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value are far too reductive. They do not pay sufficiently close attention to the texture and interconnectivity of value-making structures across various social practices. As a result, they fail to capture how literary-aesthetic practice enables study of ethical value, enables questioning of relations between ethically structured worlds, and so on. A work can be valued as literature whilst it asks those questions and undertakes those studies because it does something in relation to, in reflective engagement with, the ethical, rather than taking a set of ethical values as simply 'having a value'. This central claim motivates and informs various other claims I make along the way – and is also informed and motivated by various subsidiary claims that emerge over the course of the thesis. It will be useful to unpack this a little. If I can show what my approach is for the claims I make in the remainder of this chapter, and examine in what ways those claims relate to my central claim,

this will provide a roadmap for how the claims I make in later chapters relate to my central claim.

In this first chapter, I will claim that positions which regard the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value as being a concern about how the aesthetic value of a work of art might be affected by a morally objectionable outlook are too simplistic. This is for at least two reasons –first, because they view that relationship as systematically generalisable across all instances; and second, because they view the moral aspect of ethical value as exhaustive of *all* the ways ethical value might relate to aesthetic value.

This first reason can be observed if we consider the following. It seems plausible that, in some instances, a morally false attitude has a detrimental impact on the aesthetic value of a work of art. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* might be one such example, perhaps de Sade's *Juliette* is another. (Gaut, 1998) In other instances, it seems plausible that the moral status of a work is irrelevant to its artistic value – indeed, our evaluations regarding the moral status of a work might not just be irrelevant to its artistic value, but actually an obstacle to us evaluating the work's artistic merits aright. If we judge that the attitudes toward miscegenation that emerge from *Othello* are morally false, it seems wrongheaded to let this moral judgement impact how we attend to its artistic value. (Posner, 1997) So it seems premature to claim that the first position is correct in all instances, because moral judgement is sometimes irrelevant to artistic value; and yet it is also premature to claim that the second position is correct in all instances, because moral judgement isn't *always* irrelevant to artistic value. A position that claims the relationship always manifests itself in the same way (like moralism), or never manifests at all (like aestheticism), is poorly placed to capture the multifarious ways different readers engage with different works differently. One size does not fit all, and we should be wary of accounts that claim otherwise. The second reason will be fleshed out more closely in chapter two, but to reiterate what I have already said about how I understand the major terms at play in this thesis, I take moral value to be a subset of ethical value. As such, focusing on morality to the exclusion of other ways in which ethical value might be engaged with seems to me a distorting and erroneous simplification.

This claim, that these positions are simplistic, lends itself to a second claim – that we cannot just bring a set of moral judgements to a work of art and tick it off as good or bad in these terms before applying the result of that evaluation to an overall judgement of the work, including its aesthetic value. Part of the reason for this is that moral judgements do not exhaust the ways in which the value-making structures at work in ethical practice might relate to our overall judgement of a work. Another part of the reason involves a concern that we

unreflectively transpose the evaluations from one social practice to another. Even supposing we can reliably and unequivocally determine the moral rightness or wrongness of an attitude manifest in a work¹ more work appears to be required to explain what we might plausibly do with that determination. Weighing up various evaluative judgements as if they possess quantifiable units of value, with recognisable conversion rates from one practice to the next, does not seem very promising.

A third claim emerges from these various considerations; namely, that the very terms in which we discuss the value of a work of art are not always easy to categorise as ethical (or moral) or else aesthetic (or literary). An illustrative example might be useful. Let us consider D.H. Lawrence's assessment of Dostoevsky, or else perhaps Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*²: "I have been reading Dostoievsky's *Idiot*. I don't like Dostoievsky. He is again like the rat, slithering along in hate, in the shadows, and, in order to belong to the light, professing love, all love." (2L 311) There are various things we might say about Lawrence's comments. Whilst it is evidently an evaluative judgement of some type, it is unclear whether we ought to understand it as an aesthetic judgement of the novel, or of the ethical character of the work – or of, indeed, the author – or some other evaluative comment altogether. Trying to get to grips with the import of Lawrence's position must involve us being sensitive to this equivocation – stating boldly what kind of value-making structure it belongs to from the outset fails to capture it in all its nuance and potency. This example highlights how simplistic and reductive accounts of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value are inadequate. Not only is it unclear how Lawrence intends to be understood – it is unclear that we are induced to understand him in a univocal, unambiguous way at all. It seems that we are able to elicit value from works precisely on account of their ambiguous and equivocal status. In some instances, such as the works we look at in this thesis' final chapter, we value the work of literature because of its capacity to unsettle our complacent confidence in how stable a table of values really is.

¹ John Gibson has suggested that "...in modernism narrative voice... is often too ambiguous—or too opaque, too inconsistent, too alienating, too alien, too mendacious, or too chaotic—to seem possessed of a determinate attitudinal structure and so ethical character." (Gibson, 2018: 87) This may cause us to take pause before we make such suppositions too confidently.

² I am indebted to Dr Christopher Hamilton for bringing this example to my attention.

Section I

Aestheticism and autonomism

Now that we have looked closely at, and dealt with, these preliminary considerations, let us get on with an analysis of the prevailing positions in the literature surrounding the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, starting with the related positions of aestheticism and autonomism.

Aestheticism, or autonomism as it is more routinely known, involves the belief that “...the artistic realm is autonomous... [and] hermetically sealed off from the rest of our social practices and concerns.” (ibid: 294) It lends itself to more or less moderate, more or less radical interpretations. Some of these hold that speaking about works of art in moral terms is “virtually unintelligible”. (Carrol, 1998: 127) Others think a literary work’s “...prestige is... little damaged [if it] condones a morality that later readers find monstrous...” (Posner, 1997: 6) Others still think that “some works of art are, in part, aesthetically interesting because of their morally skewed perspective.”³ (Anderson & Dean, 1998: 162) The approach admits of quite a variety of emphases. Crucial to all of them, however, is a belief that “[t]he aims of art—to engage and please the intended audience—are different from, and at odds with, the goals of moral enlightenment and elevation.” (ibid: 151)

Richard Posner is representative of one such strategy. He advocates an approach to literary engagement that, following Oscar Wilde’s example, he calls aestheticism. He argues that “[t]he moral content and consequences of a work of literature are irrelevant to its value as literature.” (Posner, 1997: 2) As such, he makes three claims.

First, that an immersion in literary works does not make one a better citizen or person. That is, contrary to the claims made for the novel by a philosopher like Martha Nussbaum,⁴ for example, Posner does not think literary engagement has a morally enhancing impact on its reader. Second, neither should we be disconcerted by morally offensive views expressed in

³ This final kind of ‘autonomism’ appears to have more in common with the ‘immoralist’ approach adopted by thinkers like Matthew Kieran and A.W. Eaton. John Gibson has written in relation to Daniel Jacobson’s conception of immoralism that there is a sense in which some kinds of “‘moderate autonomism’ [might] count as versions of immoralism” (Gibson, 2010: 2) Anderson and Dean’s ‘moderate autonomism’ appears to be a candidate case of this. I shall talk at greater length about the immoralist approach to the relation between ethical and aesthetic value in chapter two.

⁴ Posner highlights Nussbaum as a prime example of “the counter tradition in literary criticism to the aesthetic...” (Posner, 1997: 2) I will have a great deal more to say about Martha Nussbaum’s approach to the novel and its implications for moral philosophy in chapter three of this thesis.

literary works. A great literary work should not “be considered maimed or even marred by expressing unacceptable moral views...” (ibid: 2) and neither is a mediocre, yet morally upstanding, work artistically redeemed by its being ethically virtuous. Note that we are able to identify the “unacceptable views” manifest in one work and the “moral views of which we approve” (ibid) in the other. Posner’s point “is not to deny that reading can have consequences, including moral and political ones.” (ibid: 1) There would be no need to insist that Pound’s *Cantos*, for example, are aesthetically valuable irrespective of their ethical value if the ethical questions they motivate are meaningless. Rather, Posner is arguing that “the proper criteria for evaluating literature are aesthetic rather than ethical” (ibid) and, as a result, his third claim is that neither the work’s nor the author’s moral qualities, opinions, commitments or proposals, should affect our *aesthetic* evaluation of the works. Posner’s aestheticism insists upon a thoroughgoing “separation of the moral from the aesthetic” (ibid: 2) that nevertheless does not involve a rejection of moral value or its importance. Posner is not an aestheticist about *life*.⁵

On the contrary, in his view, “the aesthetic *is* a moral outlook, one that stresses... in short, the values of liberal individualism.” (ibid) But a consequence of this moral outlook is that the status of a work’s literary value is neither illumined nor darkened by its ethical implications. This is because “the moral dimension of an artwork, when it possesses one, is strictly independent of the aesthetic dimension.” (Carroll, 1996: 301)

There is much to admire about the autonomist approach, not least of which is its Wildean, bullet-biting boldness. In addition to this, though, are a few further considerations it will serve our purposes to be in possession of going forward. First, it alerts us to the danger of inappropriately “insist[ing] upon the importance... to the near or even total exclusion of anything else, of the ethical... content and effects of works of literature”. (Posner, 1997: 2) At least some art is remote from ethical or moral considerations and the autonomist’s proposal that we separate the realms of art and morality is one way to ensure we do not impose moral discourse on artworks where it has no business.

A related and important advantage of autonomism, or at least the aestheticism that Posner champions, is that its wholesale excision of moral evaluation from aesthetic judgement offers some tools to mitigate against anachronistic moralising. Posner believes that to “stalk out of Othello when [one] discover[s] that it depicts racially mixed marriage as possibly

⁵ Gibson has made a similar observation about immoralists and immoralism. Valuing literature’s freedom to transgress moral conventions “should [not] be taken to imply that...being an immoralist about literature makes one an immoralist about life.” (Gibson, 2010: 2)

unnatural...” (Posner, 1997: 6) or to throw away Thomas Mann’s⁶ *Death in Venice* because of its homophobia (ibid: 5), is to “... cut off one’s nose to spite one’s face” (ibid: 8) Moreover, when it presents itself in a supercilious tone of “moral superiority [over] our ancestors”, Posner claims that it is “complacently ethnocentric.” (ibid) Posner’s robust resistance to “intolerant” and “illiberal” moralising is consistent with his broader commitment to “the values of openness, detachment, hedonism, curiosity, tolerance, the cultivation of the self, and the preservation of a private sphere”. (ibid: 2) He is unimpressed with critical voices from “the Left” (ibid: 7) that claim “the ideology which saturates [Shakespeare’s] texts, and their location in history, are the most interesting things about them.” (Dillmore & Sinfield, 1985: 206) He also rejects the “unacceptable... incommensurability” (Posner, 1997: 7-8) exhibited by “the Right” (ibid) when a critic like Irving Kristol argues that “T.S. Eliot’s later, Christian poetry is much superior to his earlier.” (Kristol, 1984: 856) Posner is scathing of any attempt to subordinate literary value to ideological, political or moral commitments; that kind of consistency is to be commended in his account of the ethical value’s relationship to artistic expression.

In my estimation, though, the most important strength that autonomism possesses is its insistence that the realms of ethics and aesthetics are kept distinct. By so insisting, one can ensure that the evaluative structures that regulate ethical and artistic value do not get conflated. This resistance to being homogenised is important because it thereby allows us to separately evaluate the contribution ethical and aesthetic value each make – in their own terms and one to another, however great or small, accidental or essential. It straightforwardly makes sense why autonomism approves of this separation. But it is also of use to other strategies that might want to say the two kinds of value *are* relevant to one another as well. If the two practices are distinct, this needn’t mean that they cannot have points of overlap, moreover. Rather, it can plausibly provide a context in which several different competing strategies might be intelligibly drawn up. My own account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value will preserve this feature of the autonomist approach.

However, for all its admirable boldness, and in spite of its important contribution to the discussion of ethical and aesthetic value, autonomism, or aestheticism, nevertheless provides an unacceptable strategy for dealing with works of art that make essential use of ethically charged content. To see why the solution proposed by autonomism is problematic, let us turn

⁶ I shall have more to say about the extraordinarily rich and layered way that Mann approaches the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value in chapter five.

our attention for the remainder of this subsection to Mary Devereaux' analysis of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*.⁷

Confronted with Riefenstahl's film, Devereaux endeavours to answer the question of whether we should "bracket questions of good and evil" (Devereaux, 1998: 242) when we attend to it. This kind of bracketing is representative of the formalist approach to literary and aesthetic value, and Devereaux characterises it as "the standard solution". (ibid) It asks one to view "...art from an "aesthetic distance"... [focusing exclusively on] the work's "formal" (i.e., its structural and stylistic) features." (ibid) Formalism, Devereaux tells us, "treats the aesthetic and the moral as wholly independent domains. It allows us to say that, evaluated morally, *Triumph of the Will* is bad but, evaluated aesthetically, it is good." (ibid) Here, then, is an autonomist strategy in the broad sense I have meant the term in this chapter. Devereaux observes that "[i]f the strategy works, there *is* no problem of beauty and evil." (ibid: 243) If one is able to bracket the ethical content of a work of art, then however it might relate to its aesthetic quality, and whatever misgivings we might have about that relationship, does not get motivated. The formalist response defuses our concern about the apparent conjunction of beauty and evil, in that so far as *Triumph of the Will* is a work of art, its ethical dimensions are not relevant to its beauty. One might be tempted to say that formalism provides us a neat and elegant solution to the puzzle, therefore. But Devereaux gives us pause for thought. She writes:

The reason the formalist strategy fails in the case of *Triumph of the Will* is that distancing ourselves from the morally objectionable elements of the film – its deification of Hitler, the story it tells about him, the party, and the German people, and so on – means distancing ourselves from the features that make it the work of art it is.

Devereaux, 1998: 243

Devereaux's insight is, I believe, correct. The formalist strategy directs us to ignore precisely the most important thing about the work. Certainly, one can identify the film's formal strengths – and do so unproblematically, as the formalist would want. But bracketing *Triumph of the Will's* message, its vision, in favour of its strictly formal elements is to insist on missing its point. In so doing "...we omit an essential dimension of the film, and an essential dimension of its beauty." (ibid: 243-244) Devereaux believes that "*Triumph of the Will* is a troubling

⁷ I shall have cause to return to Mary Devereaux's treatment of *Triumph of the Will* in relation to Matthew Kieran's immoralist account in the next chapter.

film... because of its conjunction of beauty and evil, because it presents as beautiful a vision... that is morally repugnant.” (ibid: 235) Its vision is the essence of the film. Its essence, the conjunction of beauty and evil, is part of the explanation for its being “...a work of artistic mastery – perhaps, [even], of genius...” (ibid: 244) Formalism fails in this case because it requires us to ignore the essence of the film. It fails, moreover, “to respond fully to the work of art that *Triumph of the Will* is.” (ibid)

Section II

Ethicism and Moralism

In the previous section, we looked at a family of approaches that claim ethical value is irrelevant to artistic value. In this section, we look at an opposing family of approaches which claim, by contrast, that ethical value has a direct impact on aesthetic value. We will begin with moderate moralism. Noël Carroll argues for an approach that is sensitive to art’s moral dimension and yet does not reduce to a radical moralism, such as the position which emerges from Plato’s banishment of artists from the state in *Republic*. Instead, he “freely admit[s] that some works of art may have no moral dimension”. (Carroll, 1996: 299) In these cases, invoking moral considerations would be “not only strained and out of place, but conceptually confused.” (Carroll, 1998: 136) Nevertheless, he feels that the admonition *never* “to allow [one’s] attention to wander ‘outside the text’” (Carroll, 1996: 294) and into the realm of ethical value fails to capture the way in which “[w]ith much art, we are naturally inclined to speak of it in moral terms.” (Carroll, 1998: 126) Moreover, he argues that this natural inclination is at odds with the autonomist’s fundamental strategy, with which he is in explicit conflict. A natural consequence of their approach, so says Carroll, is that from their perspective, “the fact... we spend so much time talking about morality with regard to so many artworks appears to be virtually unintelligible...” (Carroll, 1998: 127) There arise two possibilities. Either our natural inclinations lend themselves to our being systematically virtually unintelligible when we discuss art in moral terms; or the autonomist approach fails to correctly capture the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value in some essential ways. Given this choice, and given, too, the fact that “there are many kinds of artworks... [which] naturally elicit moral responses, that prompt talk about themselves in terms of moral considerations, and even warrant moral evaluation”, (Carroll, 1996: 297) Carroll rejects the autonomist model that “the artistic and the moral realms are separate.” (Carroll, 1998: 127) On the contrary, ethical and aesthetic value are importantly related. What’s more, “...some artworks may be evaluated by virtue of the

contribution they make to moral education.” (Carroll, 1996: 299) he calls this approach moderate moralism. (Carroll, 1998)

Berys Gaut offers a closely related account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value called ethicism. (Gaut, 1998) Like Carroll, he argues that our natural inclination to speak of certain works of art in moral terms is indicative of an important relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, rather than a category mistake on the part of the speaker. Like Carroll, he rejects the absolute moralist position advanced by writers like Tolstoy, which holds that the worth of a work as art is entirely determined by its moral character, on the basis that “there can be good, even great, works of art that are ethically flawed... [just as there are works] which, though the ethical attitudes... display[ed] are admirable, are in many ways uninspired and disappointing.” (Gaut, 1998: 183) Like Carroll, he nevertheless holds that ethical flaws constitute artistic flaws. That is, the ethically flawed good or great work of art is rendered *less* good, rendered *less* great, in proportion to its ethical flaws. The great work is not ruined by its ethical shortcomings; but it is nevertheless tarnished by them. The principal difference between the two is not to do with their conclusions – they both endorse a model that says ethical and aesthetic value covary. Instead, it is to do with the underlying reasons that substantiate their similar conclusions. Whereas Carroll claims that works of art sometimes activate moral judgements in *audiences*, Gaut is interested in characterising the *work's* manifest moral attitude. Thus, Carroll writes that “...activating moral judgments from audiences is a standard feature of successful narrative artworks” (Carroll, 1996: 298) and Gaut argues that “if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective, and if a work manifests ethically commendable attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically meritorious.” (Gaut, 1998: 182) The two positions emphasise subtly yet importantly different elements of how art is engaged with when moral considerations are relevant. Carroll’s account emphasises how an audience or reader or consumer morally engages with art. Gaut’s account is coordinated to emphasise what moral attitudes are manifest in the work itself. One position focuses on how somebody might respond to art’s moral dimension; the other focuses on what a work intends for us to respond to in morally charged terms. Be this as it may, the two approaches are sympathetic to one another. They each argue that ethical and aesthetic value are related. They each argue that ethical and aesthetic value are covariant. They each assert that immorality mars, and can only mar, a work’s aesthetic value. They each argue that, in some respects and in some cases, ethical value *is* aesthetic value. As a result, they each stand diametrically opposed to the autonomist position we are by now quite familiar with.

The moralist strategy as it is outlined by thinkers like Gaut and Carroll has a number of strengths that it will serve our purposes to make clear. In the first place, it takes seriously our natural inclination to talk about works of art in moral terms. This is something the autonomist position, at least in its more radical iterations, is poorly placed to do. Moreover, there is some intuitive sense in saying that where content provokes a positive response in one evaluative context, it provokes a similarly positive response in another. This is especially true in a practice like art, which oftentimes relies on imaginative take up from its audience in order to secure its ambitions. As Carroll, Walton, Kieran and many others have observed, “audiences are particularly inflexible about the moral presuppositions they bring to artworks”. (Carroll, 1996: 303) If a work’s moral flaw causes an audience to inflexibly refuse imaginative take up, that work might have failed to secure its artistic ambition, and would have failed to that extent as a work of art. This is all to say that there is a methodological intelligibility to Gaut and Carroll’s approach that, provided it can deal satisfactorily of problem cases, we do well to take seriously. Furthermore, because both Gaut and Carroll argue that ethical flaws and merits bear a *proportionate* as well as covariant relationship to aesthetic flaws and merits, they are able to avoid the histrionic excesses of Tolstoy or Plato. As such, Gaut’s ethicism and Carroll’s moralism therefore mark a signal improvement upon either radical end of the strategic spectrum. That is, their respective approaches do not render the fact we spend time talking about morality with regard to various artworks unintelligible, as the radical autonomist position threatens to do; nor do they make the unacceptably strong claim typical of absolute moralism that moral defects irredeemably ruin an artwork’s aesthetic worth. This is all to the good.

The strategy’s greatest strength, though, and its most signal improvement over aestheticism and autonomism, is that it quite correctly identifies that some art works make essential use of moral content. Carroll is right when he says that certain works “are expressly designed to elicit moral reactions...” (Carroll, 1998: 136) His undergraduate experience of being told “moral questions lurk... on ‘the wrong side of the track’” (Carroll, 1996:294) when artistic engagement is involved cannot be right if moral questions are made a central focus in the artwork. Attending to the moral dimension of a work may sometimes involve allowing one’s attention “to wander ‘outside the text’” (ibid) and in some circumstances, this kind of wandering will be inappropriate. Both Carroll and Gaut are alive to this concern and take steps to ensure the applicability of their strategies do not become “strained and out of place”. (Carroll, 1998: 136) But works that are designed to elicit a morally charged reaction from their audiences do not activate those strained circumstances – on the contrary, one’s attention is directed to moral questions by the text. Neither moralism nor ethicism is vulnerable to the shortcoming

that plagues formalism – indeed, they appear to make an observation that is of a piece with Mary Devereaux'. Certain works do have “moral agendas as part of their address to the reader” (Carroll, 1998: 137) and one is “wilfully blinkered to miss them.” (ibid) It seems to me that the moralist and ethicist are right when they say: “moral considerations are pertinent” (ibid) in some cases of literary appreciation, and the autonomist is wrong to deny it. As such, there must be *some* kind of relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, whether it is of quite the shape the moralist claims it is or no.

However, for all their positive qualities, the moralist and ethicist strategies proposed by Berys Gaut and Noël Carroll are inadequate for the purpose required of them. They are right insofar as they identify that a relationship exists between ethical and aesthetic value. They are mistaken about the nature of that relationship in one important respect. Namely, they are wrong to think that the relationship must be invariable, regular, and move in only one direction. This observation can be drawn out in a number of ways, so let us spend some time examining them.

One concern with Carroll's moderate moralist position is that it muddies the issue whether the fault lies with the “moral inappropriateness” of the work or its author. He writes in relation to the novel *American Psycho* that “his [Bret Easton Ellis'] moral understanding of the possible significance of murders, such as the ones he depicted, was flawed, and he was condemned for promoting it. But that defect was also an aesthetic defect, inasmuch as it compromised the novel on its own terms. *American Psycho's* failure to achieve uptake as satire is attributable to Ellis' failure to grasp the moral inappropriateness of regarding his serial killer as comic.” (Carroll, 1996: 302)

There is something problematic about the target of Carroll's moral and artistic condemnation. We have *Ellis'* defective moral understanding, which is *also* an aesthetic defect, that in turn compromises *the novel* on its own terms. The transition from moral defect to aesthetic blemish is difficult to follow. Strangely, Carroll's objection appears to imply that Brett Easton Ellis' morally defective understanding *is itself* aesthetically flawed. The author's aesthetically flawed understanding then compromises the novel's artistic value. Supposing we read Carroll a little more charitably and take away the obscure suggestion that Ellis' understanding of murder is aesthetically defective. Instead, the transition goes directly from the author's flawed moral understanding to the work's aesthetic flaw. Here, there still seems to be a disconnect between the author's morally flawed understanding and the work's compromised terms. Note that Carroll takes issue with *Ellis'* moral failure, and then claims that *the novel's* aesthetic value has been compromised. The ambiguity is important because an essential claim that moralism makes is that *moral* defects are thereby *aesthetic* defects. To

substantiate this claim, there must be some explanation for how this covariance is supposed to function. Instead, what we see is a conflation of the author's and the work's moral defectiveness. This failure to differentiate between the author's moral attitude and the moral attitude manifest in the work is therefore a shortcoming of the moralist explanation. Moralism purports to explain how a work's moral flaws undermine its aesthetic value – the author's moral flaws don't obviously seem to be the relevant target.

Another problem involves an ambiguity as to whether the fault lies with the moral complexion of the work on one hand or the easily triggered and, perhaps, overreactive moral sensibilities of the audience that fails to take up the work's intentions on the other. From the tone of his objection to *American Psycho*, it appears that the novel has gotten under Carroll's skin. Just from this, it is difficult to determine whether Carroll's distaste for the novel is commensurate, or disproportionate, to its moral vacuity. If commensurate, Carroll's position may have some traction. If disproportionate, it may be that Carroll's response to *American Psycho* does not imply that the novel is aesthetically flawed – at least, not in the way Carroll says that it is. Instead, it could be that the reader has failed to attend to the work properly, rather than the work has made itself impossible to attend to. If this is true, it might be that the work *does* broadly facilitate uptake, and Carroll's condemnation of it would amount to an error of judgement. Certainly, the novel has “fail[ed] to achieve uptake as a satire” in Carroll's case. But given that literature involves expression *and* interpretation, intention *and* reception, author *and* reader, it does not follow, just from this, whether the failure is to do with Carroll's inability to engage with the work or the novel's inability to engage Carroll. I would like to say a few things about the novel to see if we can diagnose the situation aright.

Carroll thinks *American Psycho* is morally flawed, and that, moreover, its being morally flawed diminishes its aesthetic value. But it seems to me he has rather missed its point. In many ways neither *American Psycho* nor its psychopathic protagonist Patrick Bateman⁸ seem very interested in prescribing moral attitudes. Rather, the work can be understood as an exercise in how far a complete absence of any personality-defining characteristics can be pushed; how completely bereft of any admirable qualities whatsoever a character can be before an audience gives up. In its best sequences, Brett Easton Ellis' novel, with its forensic detailing of designer fashionwear, exorbitantly expensive haute cuisine, chart-topping yet soul-eroding commercial pop music, and appalling sexual violence toward women, is a satirical horror that lampoons

⁸ Patrick Bateman also has a prominent role in A.W. Eaton's discussion of rough heroes. I shall return to the topic of rough heroes in chapter two.

vacuous 1980s consumerism. Carroll appears concerned about Patrick Bateman's moral character. But the Bateman of Ellis' novel doesn't obviously have a character, but rather an overwhelming stock of Dolce & Gabbana neckties, Giorgio Armani skin treatments, Gucci wristwatches, pornographically violent fantasies and violently pornographic sensibilities. The relevance of all this is that moralism tells us that ethical flaws are aesthetic flaws. But this presupposes we have a stable idea of what constitutes an ethical flaw. It seems plausible to me that Carroll's pre-existing moral attitudes, some of which may be conscious and others unconscious,⁹ have rendered him imaginatively resistant to Ellis' literary project in *American Psycho*. It could be that Carroll is unreceptive; it could be that the work is unreceivable. But moralism itself cannot decide the issue, and it is therefore not explanatorily powerful when it is called upon.

A third problem with the way ethicism and moralism envisage the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value involves their claim that the relationship is covariant. As a result, they contend that ethical flaws must always serve to diminish artistic value. On the contrary, it is possible that a work might be artistically value in virtue of its immorality. I shall postpone a fuller analysis of this possibility until chapter two; for present purposes, a brief and illustrative example of the kind of work that might be better served by a different strategy than either ethicism or moralism will be useful.

In Knausgaard's *A Time for Everything* (2005), two brothers are searching for one of their number who is lost in the forest. Their names are Cain and Abel, and they are seeking Jared the shepherd. After many hours of searching, they discover him, mauled, on the bank of the river. "The stomach and all one side of the body up to the shoulder are covered in blood. The face has been ripped open from the temple to the chin," (ibid: 73) and after a little consultation, the brothers agree that Jared is dead. "His forehead", Cain tells Abel and us, "is ice cold." (ibid) Abel, so much the favoured, younger brother, then begins to act alarmingly. "He has thrust his entire hand into the corpse's side and is moving it gently back and forth..." and when his behaviour is checked by his brother – "We show the dead respect", Cain says as calmly as he can – Abel is furious. "'We've been forbidden' you said just a little while ago", he repeats to his brother. "Now you've said it again. But who's doing the forbidding?" (ibid:

⁹ This suggestion of a matrix of pre-existing conscious and unconscious attitudes that render us resistant to imaginative engagement with a work will receive fuller treatment in chapter two. There, we shall see how Adriana Clavel-Vazquez builds up a picture of a reader's 'interpretative horizons' based on various conscious and unconscious attitudes. More on this later.

75) Later, Abel will seek out the Seraphim that guard the gates of Eden and Cain will earn his mark by murdering his brother. In Knausgaard's novel, one is invited to meditate on the mutability of the god who "does the forbidding" and the angels that guard the forbidden. It is a fascinating narrative exploration of the recognisable biblical story, at times hypnotically quotidian and at others shocking and visceral. It is specifically designed to evoke a moral response from its reader – but it isn't obvious that that moral response is supposed to be approval *or* repudiation of any specific moral behaviour or any specific moral attitude. Rather, it appears as though "the project of the work [is] that it explores the boundaries of the moral and the aesthetic." (Anderson & Dean, 1998: 165) A different strategy, better attuned to the indeterminacy of ethical value and its relationship to artistic expression, is required to account for these sorts of projects than either ethicism or moralism can provide.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the thesis' central question 'What makes bad books good?' and the philosophical debate that endeavours to answer it. I have outlined the strategy I will employ in this thesis to articulate my own solution. In my view, one needs to offer an account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value if one is to understand aright what is at stake and what kind of judgement is being made in the case of a 'morally bad' yet 'artistically good' book. To that end, and as a preliminary to the discussion that will unfold in subsequent chapters, I provided an account of two prevailing strategies for characterising the ethical-aesthetic relationship.

The first of these is autonomism, or aestheticism, which covers an umbrella of interrelated positions that all argue that ethical value is irrelevant to aesthetic value. I argued that the most important insight we can glean from autonomism is its insistence that the ethical and aesthetic realms are kept distinct. However, I also argued that it sometimes involves us in an unacceptable bracketing of precisely a work's essential elements. *Triumph of the Will* is a paradigmatic example of this; Mary Devereaux has argued very forcefully that the formalist strategy of attending solely to its formal features is an *aesthetic* mistake because it means being blinkered to the vision that renders it structurally coherent. As a result, autonomism is inadequate for my purposes, and a different strategy is required.

The second of these strategies is moralism, which encompasses positions like Noël Carroll's moderate moralism and Berys Gaut's ethicism. This position holds, in the first place, that moral evaluation is sometimes pertinent to aesthetic appreciation and, in the second place,

that ethical and aesthetic value covary. That is, if a work is ethically flawed, it is also to that extent aesthetically flawed; and if a work is ethically commendable, it is also to that extent aesthetically commendable. I argued that moralism so conceived represents an improvement on either radical moralism or radical autonomism because it avoids their hyperbolic excesses. It is consistent with the moderate moralist position that a work might be ethically compromised and yet still a great work of art (a problem with radical moralism); it also provides us good reasons for rejecting the radical autonomist doctrine that talking about morality with regard to many artworks is unintelligible. It offers, moreover, several important contributions to the discussion surrounding the intersection of beauty and evil, principal among them being its claim that ethical value *is* relevant to aesthetic value. In this regard, they are right to claim, and the autonomist is wrong to deny, that ethical considerations and moral judgements sometimes have an important role in our aesthetic appreciation of a work.

Nevertheless, moralism does not characterise that role correctly because it claims that ethical and aesthetic value covary. Moralism is too confident when it claims that ethical value relates to aesthetic value in one regular and reliable way. There are various ways in which this regularity and reliability might be destabilised. I looked at a few of these ways, with a focus on Carroll's imaginative resistance to the moral outlook expressed in Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. I argued that Carroll confuses the issue of whether we should attend to the author's moral understanding or the understanding of moral value that emerges from the work. As it is, the target of Carroll's objection does not seem to align with the object that is aesthetically marred. I also argued that Carroll's failure to take up Ellis' satirical intentions does not necessarily entail that the work is artistically unsuccessful – it is possible that this failure of uptake signals a shortcoming in Carroll's response to the work rather than any especial problems with what the work intends for us to respond to.

I closed the chapter with a brief example drawn from Karl Ove Knausgaard's *A Time for Everything*, which invites us to meditate on the role of the forbidden in our literary and ethical engagement with the world. I briefly suggested that moralism might not be best placed to characterise what the work is up to. I will augment that suggestion slightly by saying that neither might autonomism. Instead, a different strategy is required. This strategy should endorse the autonomist proposal that ethical and aesthetic value are distinct; nevertheless accommodate the fact that these distinct evaluative frameworks are related; and also envisage this relationship as neither uniform nor covariant. Anderson and Dean's suggestion that "part of what makes [works like *Pulp Fiction* and *Lolita*] so fascinating... is that while their moral perspectives are alien, the works are (perhaps disturbingly) commanding" (Anderson & Dean,

1998: 165) is indicative of the kind of strategy I mean. In the next chapter, I will therefore undertake a thoroughgoing analysis of just this sort of approach to the question 'What makes bad books good?'

Chapter Two: An alternative strategy – immoralism

Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis, two types of strategy for dealing of the relationship between ethical and artistic value were surveyed. The first kind of strategy kept the realms of ethical and artistic value strictly separate. The second kind of strategy rejects this separation. That survey revealed fundamental issues with both types of strategy. Aestheticism, autonomism and various other formalist approaches propose that we distance ourselves from those features a work of art possesses that make them what they are. (Deveraux, 1998) Neither Gaut's ethicism nor Carroll's moderate moralism provide a satisfactory alternative. The each fail to capture the extraordinarily rich and thick relations that hold between ethical and aesthetic value. Their focus is myopic. Their solutions are, in order to make either kind of value fit, Procrustean. In this chapter, I investigate how they might be improved upon.

In the first section, I will look at various kinds of "immoralism", the thesis that literary works may not only survive their moral flaws but "thrive precisely on account of them." (Gibson, 2010: 2) In the second section, I will argue that immoralism does signal an improvement upon aestheticism and ethicism but hold, nevertheless, that the account it offers of the relationship between ethical and artistic value is incomplete, as can be drawn out with reference to Robert Stecker on immoralism's shortcomings and Adriana Clavel-Vazquez' analysis of rough heroines. A richer relationship, and a more robust account of that relationship, is required than can be found in either A.W. Eaton's 'Rough Heroes of the New Hollywood' or Matthew Kieran's 'Art and Morality'. To this end I will look at Clavel-Vazquez' work on "imaginative resistance", and John Gibson's account of "thick narratives", with a view to substantiating that richer relationship in the third section. By the chapter's close, I will have argued that immoralism is the best strategy for dealing of the 'thin relationship' between moral and artistic value. Nevertheless, a different approach is required for the 'thick relationship'. If one is to grasp adequately how artistic and *ethical* value relate to one another, a revised notion of ethical value – broader, deeper, richer and more mercurial than either the aestheticist, ethicist or immoralist has hitherto considered – is at stake.

Section I

Matthew Kieran: Art and Morality

This section shall begin by subjecting Matthew Kieran's position, as it emerges in 'Art and Morality' (2008) to close scrutiny. He begins that paper by making two observations. In the first instance, "Tolstoy's unqualified moralism, which holds that the worth of a work as art is entirely determined by its moral character, is unacceptable." (Kieran, 2008: 453). Second, "...the radical autonomists' claim that the moral character of a work is irrelevant... is just as inadequate." (ibid) The first chapter of this thesis agrees with each of these observations. What needs to be determined is whether Kieran's alternative to these unacceptable and inadequate poles describes the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value any better.

Unqualified moralism is unacceptable because it means that works we "commonly recognise... may be [morally] problematic and yet hold... to be of value as art..." (Kieran, 2008: 453) are entirely undermined by their problems. Counterexamples abound. "[I]ntriguing, original, and valuable works" (ibid) are often morally problematic, Kieran contends, and unqualified moralism cannot accommodate them. Neither is radical autonomism, such as the formalism we see characterised in Clive Bell's *Art* (1914), fit for purpose. Bell had argued that none of a work's content, be it moral or otherwise, is relevant to its artistic value, only its formal properties. This is quite straightforwardly incompatible with the intuitive position "we standardly hold that the constellation of a work's formal features can be exquisite and yet its value lessened in some way because of its content." (Kieran, 2008: 453) Its being counterintuitive does not prevent its being true, of course. But the formalist will also struggle to account for how the value of Dickens' otherwise "superb... formal construction" *David Copperfield* might be diminished by its "purple sentimentality", or how D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, for all their "formal virtues and... original[ity, might be...] preclude[d] an unqualified endorsement of their value as great art." (ibid) Moreover, if we recall Mary Deveraux's observation that formalism requires that we "distanc[e] ourselves from the features that make it the work of art it is..." (Deveraux, 1998: 243) it begins to seem not merely counterintuitive but implausible.

Unqualified moralism fails to accommodate artistically valuable works that are morally problematic. Radical autonomism ignores, unacceptably, whatever role content plays in our valuation of works of art, whether that content is morally charged or no. An alternative is required that neither rules out obviously valuable works, nor judges "the content of a work *tout court* is irrelevant to its value as art." (Kieran, 2008: 453)

Ethicism – and the related strategy, moderate moralism – are entertained as possible alternatives. Kieran characterises the “basic thought” upon which they each rely as follows. First, where a work prescribes cognitive-affective responses, those responses are intrinsically tied to the work's value as art. As such, where those responses depend upon ethical evaluation, the moral character of a work is always relevant to its value as art. Moreover, some of these responses, dependent upon ethical evaluation as they are, shall prescribe that we endorse certain ethical evaluations. Be this as it may, the states of affairs as represented in some works of art do not warrant this endorsement; when this is so, we can, and often do, legitimately fail to respond as prescribed. Where the response prescribed by the work comes apart from a legitimate, moral response, the work is, in that respect, therefore a failure. (Kieran, 2008: 457)

The belief that underpins ethicism – and moderate moralism, too – is that where a work prescribes a morally prohibited response to the states of affairs characterised in the work, those prescriptions are unmerited, and we are not provided sufficient reason to respond as prescribed. It is possible that an audience, populated by morally corrupt Sadeans, *will* respond immorally to unmerited prescriptions. But if we are attending to the work correctly, we ought not to respond positively to that prescription. Kieran is not entirely unsympathetic to this belief. In some circumstances, “it is correct to find fault with both illogicality and moral baseness, if there is no necessity for them and if the poet makes no use of the illogicality... or the baseness...” (ibid: 454) Perhaps we fail to respond as prescribed because the work makes no use of the responses it prescribes; perhaps we find the prescribed responses unmerited because there is no necessity for them. The crux of the issue for Kieran is that a work's artistic value is affected by its content or character “if and only if it either mars or promotes a work's aesthetically valuable features, such as its coherence, complexity, intensity, or quality of dramatic development.” (ibid: 454) We are correct to find fault with illogicality or moral baseness when the work is marred by its illogical or morally base character. So far, Kieran and the moderate moralist or ethicist align. Bear in mind, though, that a work's character affects its value as art if and only if it mars or *promotes* aesthetically valuable features. If moral baseness can mar a work, Kieran is not committed to the stronger, Humean claim, endorsed by the ethicist and moderate moralist alike, that a moral flaw is *as such* an aesthetic one. Rather, so long as the work's aesthetically valuable features are promoted, some works' “value as art may be enhanced in virtue of its immoral character [or illogicality or moral baseness etc.]” (ibid)

In order to formulate how this might be done, Kieran turns his attention to obscene art. He begins by acknowledging that certain artworks are obscene. Moreover, the moral character of these works of art is condemned precisely because they are obscene. Next, he entertains the

possibility that some obscene works are valuable as art “in virtue of their obscenity”. (ibid: 459) If this can be established, Kieran believes we would have grounds for holding that an immoral work of art could be valuable as art because it is immoral. The essential thing to determine is whether we are right to entertain the above possibility. Thus Kieran investigates if there is “such a work which, partly by virtue of its obscenity, is a good artwork”; one that prescribes “...in repulsive ways,¹⁰ morally prohibited cognitive-affective responses which are nonetheless found to be attractive.” (ibid: 461)

Let us recall some of the aesthetic features Kieran has suggested a work’s moral character might either mar or promote – coherence, complexity, intensity, quality of dramatic development. Let us also recall that where moral baseness is unnecessary, and where nothing is made of a work’s morally problematic attitude, we are right to find fault with its problematic attitude and moral baseness. Finally, let us recall that the ethicist and moderate moralist stance is underpinned by a belief that where the response prescribed by the work comes apart from the legitimate, morally merited response, this phenomenon is correctly described as aesthetic as well as moral, so that moral merits and flaws are also aesthetic merits and flaws. *David Copperfield*, superb formal construction as it may be, is undermined by its purple sentimentality. It detracts from the work’s intensity and compromises its dramatic development. A reader might legitimately fail to respond to it as Dickens prescribes,¹¹ and this failure can be correctly characterised as aesthetic. Mary Deveraux has forcefully argued that *Triumph of the Will*’s formal virtues and cinematic originality are inseparable from its glorification of Hitler. (Deveraux, 1998) She argues that “it is an extremely powerful film, perhaps even a work of genius.” (ibid: 249) It is nevertheless “flawed because its vision is flawed.” (ibid) Its vision is flawed “because it presents as beautiful things that are evil,” (ibid: 250) and this flaw is aesthetically relevant because “the film’s vision of National Socialism is part of the work of art that it is.” (ibid) The issue in this case, then, is not to do with its moral repugnance being either unnecessary or made nothing of – it is both necessary and made a great deal of. Rather, the attitude it prescribes is, using Kieran’s terms, unmerited. I shall return to *Triumph of the Will* later, but for present purposes it will suffice to say that, in both its and in

¹⁰ Remember that we must not value the work despite its obscene or immoral character, but rather by virtue of its obscenity or immorality.

¹¹ cf. Oscar Wilde’s characteristic sentiment that, reading Dickens’ *The Old Curiosity Shop*, “One must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing.”

David Copperfield's case, for subtly different reasons, the works' content damages their formal elegance on Kieran's reading.

Kieran thinks Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, by contrast, provides a paradigm case where morally prohibited cognitive-affective responses are prescribed in a repulsive, but nonetheless attractive, way. The reader is prescribed to be "simultaneously morally repelled and yet attracted to [the] vulgar, indecent, and sordid immorality portrayed" (ibid: 457) and, if the ethicist and moderate moralist's basic thought is right, the merited response comes apart from this prescription. We should reject the "passive acceptance of the sordid horror of the human world" (ibid: 463) as unmerited. Instead, Kieran holds that this basic thought is undermined. We do not fail to respond to the "rough, coarse and rhythmic prose, the concerns with the ordinary and mundane, [or its] narrative as a whole." (ibid: 462) Rather, these elements "sympiotically enhance one another in conveying a deep sense of Miller's understanding of and attitude towards humanity." (ibid: 457) The rough, coarse and rhythmic prose sets the work's intense pace. Its forensic concern for the ordinary and mundane, the "hardened, feckless, sentimental and callously indifferent", (ibid: 463) entirely suits its dramatic development, and contrasts powerfully with the work's "swirling, baroque narrative". (ibid 461) The "narrative as a whole" provides a coherent account of the protagonist's attitude toward humanity. Kieran claims that *Tropic of Cancer* endorses a passive acceptance "in the face of the horrors and corruption of humanity". (ibid: 462) It is a mark of the novel's success rather than its failure that the work "renders [this] response intelligible... even though we may take such a response to be, in actuality, unmerited." (ibid) Kieran's position is not that the audience must endorse the work's immorality. Rather, the audience must appreciate what the work does with its immorality. Kieran is claiming that it is possible for a work to immerse us in an immoral way of thinking that is artistically meritorious. This is done by rendering the immoral response intelligible, and by making the immoral response cohere to the work's other artistic qualities.

A.W. Eaton: Rough Heroes

Having investigated Kieran's immoralism, as it emerges in 'Art and Morality', I will now turn my attention to A.W. Eaton's treatment of rough heroes and the "artistically interesting and difficult design problem" (Eaton, 2010: 523) they give rise to.

David Hume argued in 'Of the Standard of Taste' (1757, [1987]) that "[w]here vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation; this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments..." (ibid: 246) The nature and extent of this

deformity means “[w]e are not interested in the fortunes and sentiments of such rough heroes... we cannot prevail on ourselves to enter into [their] sentiments, or bear an affection to characters, which we plainly discover to be blameable.” (ibid) The position can be unpacked into two claims, one descriptive and one normative. The descriptive claim is that we, the audience, are not interested in the fortunes and sentiments of characters drawn with a conspicuous “want of humanity and decency”. (ibid) As such, where these characters and their vicious manners are described, and yet not condemned for those vices, we cannot respond as the work requires us to. The second normative claim is that we ought not to.

The descriptive claim is implausible, insisting as it does that one *cannot* enter the sentiments presented by morally unappealing protagonists, bear them affection, discover pleasure in their confounding the limits of vice and virtue, and so on. Just as there are counterexamples to Tolstoy’s unqualified moralism, counterexamples that undercut Hume’s descriptive claim can be drawn from the works of “ancient poets” and “modern authors” alike.¹² Supposing we read Hume more charitably,¹³ the normative claim is worth investigating precisely because we can find counterexamples. If we *cannot* take an interest in the fortunes and sentiments of rough heroes, the further observation that we *should not* take an interest is, accordingly, uninteresting. If instead these claims are in tension – if we shouldn’t, yet in some cases do, find ourselves pleased by a rough hero’s confounding of vice and virtue, even in the face of our strong reluctance to find them sympathetic – then this phenomenon requires some explanation; not merely with regard to the artistic value of a work capable of overcoming this strong reluctance, but also the moral or ethical consequences of a work being so capable.

In her paper ‘Rough Heroes of the New Hollywood’ (2010), A.W. Eaton sets out to “...address [this] artistically interesting and difficult design problem, namely to get the audience to feel things that it is strongly disinclined to feel on moral grounds.” (Eaton, 2010:

¹² Hume’s claim that the characters drawn by ancient poets are conspicuous by their want of humanity “on account of the manners of [their] age”, and modern authors have an “advantage over them...” (Hume, 1757 [1987]: 246) as a result, has aged badly. Perhaps it is explicable on account of the manners of *his* age. Whether it is “excusable” as a result is a different question.

¹³ Eaton provides just such a charitable interpretation of the descriptive claim in ‘Rough Heroes’ and thus derives the following sympathy principle: “...we are typically strongly reluctant to sympathise with a morally unappealing protagonist, and the correlate point that we are strongly inclined to sympathise with morally good ones.” (Eaton, 2010: 513)

523) To this end, she provides an account of two kinds of flawed protagonist – the antihero¹⁴ and the rough hero. The antihero “typically lacks traditional heroic qualities... and is frequently led astray by [their] weaknesses...” (ibid: 515) These “frailties... render them more ‘human’ than the traditional hero”. (ibid) Moreover, it is characteristic of the antihero that despite their weaknesses and shortcomings, and no matter how “anti-social” they initially appear, they are nevertheless “revealed to be pro-social at heart.” (Carroll, 2008: 182) Their flaws might, but need not, be of a moral nature; are in any case “moderate”; and are “isolable from [their] basically good core...” (Eaton, 2010: 515) We are encouraged to sympathise with the antihero and, for Carroll, their possession of an essentially moral core “is how it should be if sympathy is to take hold across a diverse audience...” (Carroll, 2008: 182)

The rough hero, by contrast, is not “at core decent”. (Eaton, 2010: 515) They are not led astray by their weaknesses and instead “intend to do bad and feel little or no remorse about [their] crimes.” (ibid: 516) Nor does a pro-social core hide beneath an anti-social appearance; their view of the world is radically and irreconcilably hostile to society, just as society is irreconcilably and radically hostile to their worldview. To paraphrase Bosley Crowther’s comments regarding *Bonnie and Clyde*, and thus subtly change the inflection of his observation, rough heroes “are not [merely] enemies of society. Society is the enemy of them.” (Crowther, 1967) Their flaws, at least their relevant flaws,¹⁵ are “moral, conspicuous and grievous”. (Eaton, 2010: 516) And neither can these moral flaws, conspicuous and grievous as they are, antagonistic to society, unmitigated by circumstance or remorse, be separated from their character. Instead, they are integral to it.

¹⁴ cf. Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (2008). Eaton’s characterisation of antiheroes agrees in many of its particulars with Carroll’s.

¹⁵ Eaton in fact tells us “the rough hero’s flaws are always moral...” (Eaton, 2010: 516) but, just as “[i]t might be difficult to find examples of rough heroes that simply aim to be bad” (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 203), it might also be difficult to find rough heroes whose *only* faults are moral. Clavel-Vazquez makes two refinements to Eaton’s characterisation of rough heroes. First, “[a rough hero’s] vices are not outweighed by *other* more redeeming features” and second, “[a rough hero’s] vices are not outweighed by other *morally relevant* features...” [my italics] Rather than insist upon the stronger claim that a rough hero’s flaws are always moral, I shall focus for the purpose of exegesis on the rough hero’s relevant flaws – their moral flaws – and bracket whatever *other* flaws they may be in possession of.

Eaton goes on to provide a veritable rogue's gallery¹⁶ of “compelling examples of rough heroes” from film and television and then identifies two defining features common to all these “sympathetic and likeable bad guy[s]”. (Eaton, 2010: 518) In the first place, we are made “emphatically aware” of the character’s grievous moral flaws – a rough hero is “unquestionably bad”. Second, we are “lured into a variety of pro attitudes toward the character.” (ibid) That is, the audience is not permitted to forget or overlook the rough hero’s remorseless cold-bloodedness but must display strong pro attitudes toward them all the same. And, as Adriana Clavel-Vazquez has acutely observed, “...these pro attitudes should be understood as something stronger than mere sympathy...”¹⁷ (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 203) That is, “appreciators are not only meant to sympathise with the rough hero: appreciators are prescribed to ally¹⁸ with rough heroes.” (ibid)

The antihero’s flaws are isolable from their goodhearted nature. Their shortcomings, ethical or otherwise, can be conveniently bracketed in narratively appropriate moments. They are sometimes recalled in other contexts to explain, albeit not excuse, unpalatable behaviour. They might sometimes be revealed in yet newer circumstances that emphasise the nuanced and complex, muddled yet recognisably human nature of the antihero’s struggle. Oftentimes, they are drawn upon to provide the antihero texture and shade, colour and dimension. Thus, an antihero’s darker shades do not undermine their fundamentally light and decent bedrock, and

¹⁶ Michael Corleone from *The Godfather* and Hannibal Lecter from *The Silence of the Lambs* are two such examples, so rough heroes drawn from literature also feature, somewhat indirectly, on Eaton’s list. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Matthew Kieran pays close attention to Henry Miller the protagonist of *Tropic of Cancer* (distinct from Henry Miller the author of *Tropic of Cancer*) in order to define his own kind of immoralism. There seems to me a large gap in the literature concerning cases derived from video games. Arthur Morgan in *Red Dead Redemption 2*, chased by the Pinkerton agency and antagonistic to their efforts to civilise the West; Trevor Phillips’ unhinged psychopathy in *Grand Theft Auto 5*; and the inhuman nonmorality, or perhaps that should be the nonhuman amorality, exhibited by Geralt of Rivia from *The Witcher* series of games (distinct from how he is portrayed in either the *book-* or *television* series) all shine various kinds of light on how art might “encourage... various pro attitudes” toward characters whose “grievous moral flaws” we are “emphatically aware of”. (Eaton, 2010: 518) Note how these examples are all male; Clavel-Vazquez’ work on imaginative resistance might be instructive in unpicking this issue.

¹⁷ Recall that Carroll holds one *should* harbour sympathies for antiheroes.

¹⁸ cf. Clavel-Vazquez, 2018 p211. “Allegiance toward immoral characters does not require appreciators to sympathise with the hero throughout the entire narrative... Allegiance might be sustained on pity, admiration, or even fascination.” cf., too, the variety of pro attitudes toward rough heroes we are lured into according to Eaton, 2010 p519. “affection, attraction, sympathy, admiration, etc.”

the pro attitudes an audience is encouraged to foster toward them are not in direct tension with any moral or ethical condemnation those darker shades might deserve. An antihero is sympathetic *despite* their flaws, admirable *despite* their weaknesses, sympathetic *despite* their spiky, unattractive shortcomings. An audience's allegiance to antiheroes can be sustained by emphasising the "moral righteousness" (Eaton, 2010: 520) at the character's core, their frailties helping to cast this moral righteousness in sharper relief.

None of this holds for the rough hero. Their flaws aren't isolable from a pro-social core but instead describe a fundamentally anti-social one. A rough hero's defining features, because they anchor both our allegiance and our condemnation, *are* "strongly in tension with one another... [and] solicit seemingly incompatible reactions from us." (ibid: 519) Our allegiance to the rough hero cannot be sustained by emphasising their moral righteousness, as they have none to emphasise. That is to say, the rough hero's flaws are what *make them* attractive, likeable, sympathetic, admirable and so on. For Eaton, the artistic achievement that rough heroes make possible is to do with solving an "interesting and difficult design problem". Rough Hero Films, or let us say Works that we might extend the scope of Eaton's point to other forms of artistic expression, encourage us to engage sympathetically with precisely a character's unsympathetic qualities. One is enlisted as a rough hero's ally – and one's enlistment is secured by emphasising all the ways in which the rough hero does not deserve one's allegiance: all their conspicuous and grievous moral flaws; their antisocial hostility to conventional order; their delight in doing wrong; their guilt-free guiltiness. Rough Hero Works do not encourage us to sympathise or ally with their protagonists despite their moral shortcomings. Rather, they demand that we ground our sympathy or allegiance in precisely the rough hero's antagonism to "the manners of the age".

Before closing this section, we still need to unpick how this artistic achievement is supposed to be immoral; it is so far unclear why, according to Eaton, "there is [anything] morally wrong in either imagining being bad or getting (or even prescribing that) someone to do so." (Stecker, 2008: 155) Eaton argues that "... a film's moral charge accrues... to the relation between its emotive prefocussing of a protagonist and the moral quality of that character." (Eaton, 2010: 520) That is, one of the ways a film might be morally good, neutral, or flawed concerns how the attitudes an audience is encouraged to harbour for its protagonist relate to the attitudes that protagonist harbours. Let us, then, see how Rough Hero Works might fare. Remember that a rough hero's flaws are conspicuous and grievous. That those flaws are integral to the rough hero's character. That the rough hero fully intends to be, and is remorselessly, bad. That an audience is not prescribed to sympathise with the rough hero

despite their flaws, as they perhaps are with antiheroes, nor to excuse them as the result of mitigating circumstance. And remember, too, that the rough hero's vices are not outweighed by other more redeeming features; rather those vices are precisely the features an audience is prescribed to endorse. We are supposed to have pro attitudes toward the protagonists of Rough Hero Works. The rough hero's attitudes are morally flawed. Therefore, according to Eaton, Rough Hero Works are morally flawed – "...what's morally troublesome about [Rough Hero Works] is the way that immoral characters are portrayed; in particular, the [works'] endorsement of them." (Eaton, 2010: 519)

We are captivated, Eaton tells us, by the state Rough Hero Works induce in us, "and the immorality of the work is a central part of explaining just how it captivates." (ibid: 524) This ability to captivate describes both its artistic and morally suspect quality. A film's, or work's, moral failings are *also* their significant artistic achievement, in relation to how successfully they solve the artistically interesting and difficult design problem rough heroes commit them to. It is for this reason Eaton holds the position that "[t]he state that such works induce in their audience is rightly described as aesthetic." (ibid) It is for this reason, moreover, that Eaton "argue[s] in favour of 'throwing our sympathies to the side of wrongdoing,' at least in the case of... the rough hero." (Eaton, 2010: 514)

Section II

Shortcomings in Kieran's account

Kieran's position as it appears in 'Art and Morality' does signal an improvement over either the aestheticist's or the ethicist's account as characterised in chapter one. He correctly identifies the shortcomings of the two polar positions, unqualified moralism and radical autonomism. He is right, I think, to tell us that a moral flaw is not *as such* an aesthetic flaw, and his position that a work's aesthetically valuable features can be marred *and* promoted by its moral character is both interesting and instructive. This is brought out nicely in his analysis of how Henry Miller's "rough, coarse, and rhythmic prose" lends itself to *Tropic of Cancer's* "preoccupation with the indecent, vulgar, and coarsely immoral." Kieran's work provides an important insight into how content might serve form – and form might serve content – even if that content is morally suspect. Nevertheless his characterisation of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value does not provide an adequate, or let us say complete, explanation of it. Let us unpack these shortcomings.

Kieran's account of the relationship is vulnerable in at least four ways. I shall begin with an overview of these problems and will then unpack them in the rest of the subsection. First, his explanation for how a work might be marred by its moral character doesn't sit very easily with the examples he provides; his claim that moral baseness is a flaw only insofar as that baseness is of no necessity is not borne out by his examples of formally elegant works that are undermined by their moral repugnance. Second, it is not obvious that a work needs to be morally flawed to render morally flawed attitudes intelligible. If a work can make a morally flawed attitude intelligible without this requiring of the work that it is morally flawed, then it is unclear why, according to Kieran, a work is valuable by unique virtue of its moral flaws. Third, Kieran's immoralism makes the mistake, as indeed does aestheticism and ethicism, of supposing a work's ethical value is stable. He is too quick to say that because we know a work is morally flawed and yet artistically valuable, we can determine how those moral flaws can augment its artistic value. Fourth, in Kieran's treatment, a work's ethically relevant features are treated in important respects as analogous to moral judgements. The issue here is not that a work's ethically relevant features are *never* analogous to moral judgements – clearly, moral judgement represents an important aspect of how ethical reasoning is practised. Rather, the concern is that by insisting ethically relevant features are *always* analogous to moral judgements, one's account is ill-fitted to accommodate those features that are ethically valuable without being morally evaluative. As a result, Kieran's immoralism fails to capture how "...it is possible for a literary work to fail morally yet still offer readers a very significant kind of ethical insight." (Gibson, 2010: 18) Let us take these four issues in turn.

The first problem with the way Kieran characterises how a work's aesthetically valuable features might be impacted by its moral character is that the examples he gives of works that have been marred by their character don't seem to be marred for the reasons he picks out. We are told that the "manifest racism" of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and "the glorification of Hitler" in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* might "preclude an unqualified endorsement of their value as great art", even if they are "held to be good artworks because of their formal virtues". (Kieran, 2008: 453) The moral character of these works isn't the issue here – I entirely agree with Kieran that they are morally repugnant. Rather, one might wonder what it is about their repugnance that precludes an unqualified endorsement. That is, Kieran's position needs to be able to articulate what *Tropic of Cancer* accomplishes that either *Birth of a Nation* or *Triumph of the Will* fails to. Let us look at some of the resources Kieran can draw upon. One might suppose that "it is correct to find fault with both... moral baseness, if there is no necessity for [it] and if no use... [is made of] the baseness." (ibid:453) Alternatively, if a

work's theme "is badly or incoherently developed, [either] of which may be ...affected by the moral character of a work, then the work's value as art is significantly lessened." (ibid) Then again, perhaps the moral character of the work makes it "phenomenologically difficult" (ibid: 454) for an audience to respond with admiration to it as prescribed.

Kieran has provided a plausible account of how *Tropic of Cancer's* "baroque narrative, swirling around incidents of stupidity, drunken fights, lusts, adulteries, and deceptions" (ibid: 461) makes use of its "preoccupation with the indecent, vulgar, and coarsely immoral." (ibid: 462) Furthermore, "it is hard to see how [its prescribed attitude toward the human condition] could have been achieved" (ibid) without this preoccupation, so the objection that "there is no necessity" for, and "no use" is made of, its "moral baseness" can be set aside. Kieran also argues that "the intensity, integrity, and coherence of the work would have suffered" if the narrative had "aimed to induce a sense of shame rather than acceptance regarding the human condition." (ibid: 463) For Kieran, then, its value as art would have been "significantly lessened" by trying to improve its moral character. Insofar as it might be phenomenologically difficult for an audience to endorse the cognitive affective responses the work prescribes, for Kieran, it is a mark of the work's success rather than its failure that it "renders [its attitude toward the human condition] intelligible... even though we may take such a response to be, in actuality, unmerited." (ibid 462) On Kieran's view, then, the matrix of reasons *Tropic of Cancer* is enhanced by its moral content includes the following considerations. First, the novel makes a necessity of its moral baseness. Second, and counterfactually, its aesthetic properties would be compromised if its moral baseness was remedied. Third, *Tropic of Cancer* successfully overcomes the phenomenological difficulty of getting an audience to find its passive acceptance of the horrors of the human condition intelligible. Let us see if this matrix applies to the morally repugnant works with which *Tropic of Cancer* is contrasted. If it does, this will spell trouble for Kieran's account.

In Mary Devereaux's 'Beauty and Evil' (1998), she writes that "distancing ourselves from the morally objectionable elements of [*Triumph of the Will*...] means distancing ourselves from the features that make it the work of art it is." (Devereaux, 1998: 243) It is not possible to say that *Triumph of the Will* makes no necessity of its morally repugnant elements; those elements describe the film's essence. Neither can we say that its constellation of formal features, such as its intensity, integrity, and coherence, are compromised by its moral attitude. On the contrary, its moral attitude is the fulcrum around which its constellation of formal features pivots. On Devereaux's analysis, the vision of Riefenstahl's film is centred around the National Socialist slogan *Ein Volk. Ein Reich. Ein Führer. Ein Führer* is "...the first and most

important idea...”, with Hitler being identified as “...a great man who has the will and power to actualise the true will of the German people.” (ibid: 232) With regards to *Ein Volk*, Devereaux observes that “[w]ithin the universe of the film, *everyone* supports Hitler.” The “...idea of a national community [is made] visually (and aurally) concrete...” (ibid: 232) with a number of scenes “...constructed to demonstrate that Hitler’s support knows no class or regional barriers.” (ibid: 234) The idea of *Ein Reich* is tied up with this invariable support, a twenty-minute closing sequence of marching soldiers being indicative of Riefenstahl’s general strategy of presenting a visual display of power. Devereaux closes the section thusly: “*Triumph of the Will* does more than present a set of ideas; it weaves them into a story, makes them part of a grand narrative.” (ibid) The film’s moral character is precisely what renders its array of formal features coherent. Wondering how changing its moral character might impact that constellation is a vacuous exercise; there could not be an alternative *Triumph of the Will* with a fundamentally different moral attitude. The final resource we have available to us in Kieran’s terms is the phenomenological difficulty in getting an audience to respond with admiration to attitudes that “most people hold... are unequivocally evil.” (Kieran, 2008: 454) This, it seems, would be Kieran’s preferred response. But it is an inadequate response because it fails to grapple with the most troubling quality of Riefenstahl’s film. As Devereaux has put it, “...in order to get things aesthetically right about *Triumph of the Will*, we have to engage with its vision.” (Devereaux, 1998: 247) The film is troubling because that vision *is* intelligible; because it “presents as beautiful a vision... that is morally repugnant.” (ibid) Kieran wants to draw a distinction between *Tropic of Cancer*, which he believes is enhanced by its moral attitude, and *Triumph of the Will*, which he seems to want to say is marred by its attitude. But the procedure he employs to illustrate his point about *Tropic of Cancer* can also be employed in the case of *Triumph of the Will*. Kieran’s account does not seem to settle the difference; and that is a problem if we are going to accept his characterisation of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value.

A second problem is as follows. In order to accept Kieran’s position, we require good reasons for thinking that a work has to *be* morally flawed if we are to have any hope of *understanding* moral flaws. Let us recall Kieran’s reasons for focusing on obscene works, and the insight they are supposed to provide us when we turn our attention to morally flawed works more broadly. He began by acknowledging that certain artworks are obscene. Next, he sought out obscene works that might be valuable as art “in virtue of their obscenity”. If this could be established, we would have grounds for holding that an immoral work of art could be valuable insofar as it is immoral because we would have located “a work which, partly by virtue of its

obscenity, is a good artwork". (Kieran, 2008: 461) To this end, he analysed *Tropic of Cancer* in the close detail we are, by now, familiar with. But Robert Stecker has given us excellent reasons for doubting how important *being morally flawed* is to an investigation of morally flawed sentiments. Stecker has schematised the immoralist's "cognitivist insight argument", taking Kieran to offer such an argument, along the following lines:

1. There are many different conceptions of value-related matters: conceptions of the human condition, the nature of morality and right action, the character traits that are virtues along with the specification of what those virtues consist in.
2. Artworks are particularly good at enabling us to sympathetically engage with and understand different ways of conceiving such matters.
3. Works that endorse mistaken and even patently immoral views about the above matters can do this.
4. Thus immoral works can afford us valuable knowledge or understanding.
5. Hence immoral works can be artistically valuable in virtue of being immoral.

(Stecker, 2008: 151)

He goes on to provide two related schematics, each of which develop the original cognitivist insight argument. They each claim, to a stronger or weaker degree, that "the imaginative experience of being bad-in-some-way is essential to possessing well-rounded moral knowledge." (ibid: 153) The stronger of these is the experience-based cognitive insight argument (ibid) and the other is a *weakened* experience-based cognitive insight argument (ibid: 154) Stecker observes of these positions that according to them, "experiences of being bad... can only come from morally problematic works. [But] that is a strong claim... Yes, morally problematic works can deliver such experiences, but morally unproblematic ones can do so just as well." (Stecker, 2008: 154) To take a putative illustration, *Othello*, which can give insight into jealousy's murderous force by taking us experientially into the jealous murderer's impulses, doesn't have to *endorse* jealousy, or murder, or murder inspired by jealous rage, to deliver us of those experiences. And if Kieran cannot identify what it is that morally problematic works can uniquely deliver us, so the objection goes, then it cannot be on account of its *being* morally problematic that the work is valuable as art.

A third issue with Kieran's immoralism relates to a misplaced confidence in the moral stability of both the work's content and the appreciator's attitude toward that content. A little unpacking is required to get clear on precisely what's at stake. Let us consider why the moral

character of a work is important for Kieran's purposes. Kieran wants to say that moral flaws may give rise to artistic value. To this end, he looks at the phenomenon of obscene works. If we can find an obscene work that is valuable in virtue of its obscenity, we have good grounds for thinking a morally flawed work can be valuable in virtue of its moral flaws. But for this to be true, we need to get clear on a few interrelated considerations. We need to have a firm idea of what is meant by obscenity. We need to be able to correctly, or at least plausibly, identify a work as obscene. We need to have some account of why obscenity is a moral flaw. Finally, we require an explanation of how this moral flaw can, at least partially, lend itself to a work's artistic value.

A brief history of works that have been considered obscene will be instructive for seeing why this is not entirely unproblematic. An American edition of *Ulysses* was blocked from publication because of its masturbation scene. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* inspired obscenity trials both sides of the Atlantic in 1959 and 1960. A year later, *Tropic of Cancer* provoked its own obscenity trial. A much more recent example, *The God of Small Things* was accused of corrupting public morals and Arundhati Roy was summoned to India's Supreme Court to defend the work against charges of obscenity. It is not entirely clear that the content which is supposed to render, let us say, *Tropic of Cancer* obscene (namely, its preoccupation with the indecent, vulgar, and coarsely immoral), is of quite the same type as the content which is supposed to have rendered, for example, *The God of Small Things* obscene (that is, its brief and occasional sex scenes involving a Christian woman and an untouchable). I do not wish to overstretch the point. Matthew Kieran might prefer that what constitutes 'obscenity', and thus what counts as an 'obscene work', is left quite broad. A different comparison of 'obscene' content – Velutha and Ammu's affair in *The God of Small Things* with Constance Reid and Oliver Mellors' in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, perhaps – might even appear to bring the concept 'obscene' under a tighter definition. But it nevertheless seems the case that if 'obscenity' is an unstable concept, it is hard to determine what precisely a work is supposed to be valuable in virtue of.

A related concern is that it is unclear in what way obscenity is supposed to be morally flawed. Let us grant for present purposes that these works are obscene. Let us grant, too, that Henry Miller's "love [for] everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences..." (Miller, 1960: 78) is 'vulgar' and 'coarse'. Ammu and Velutha's 'obscene' love affair appears to be something else. Culturally transgressive, perhaps. Forbidden or scandalous. But neither coarse nor vulgar. If these are moral flaws, they are of quite different kinds. Let us take another example from the above catalogue of obscene works. Supposing one grants that

the Nausicaä episode in *Ulysses* is obscene. If obscenity is morally flawed, it appears to be the case that Bloom and Gerty's mutual and public masturbation should strike its reader as vulgar, coarse, indecent and therefore morally problematic. But more vulgar, and more morally troubling, than Bloom's public indecency is his shock and pity for Gerty's lameness in one foot, or his palpable relief that he wasn't aware of it until after the "long Roman candle" (Joyce, 1969: 454) had shot off into the sky. It is not clear on Kieran's account *which* moral flaw we should be attending to, supposing that 'obscenity' might motivate *various* moral flaws. This being so, claiming a work is valuable *in virtue* of its obscenity, or *in virtue* of its moral flaws, is much less stable than Kieran's account otherwise seems willing to concede.

If *The God of Small Things* is not obscene, then it cannot be in virtue of its obscenity that it is artistically valuable. If *Ulysses*' moral flaws aren't obviously to do with its obscene content, then it is unclear that its being artistically valuable in virtue of its obscenity sheds light on the contribution moral flaws make to artistic value. All these works have at one time in their history been accused of obscenity. All these works have therefore been identified as morally flawed at one time or another. All these works are, to a greater or lesser extent, possessive of literary value. But it is not clear, first, that they were correctly identified as obscene; second, that the concept of obscenity amounted to the same thing in these various accusations; third, what moral flaw their various kinds of 'obscenity' are supposed to convict them of; and fourth, how their literary value is supposed to be augmented by their obscene moral flaws. The problem for Kieran's account is that he is claiming to provide an explanation of how artistic and moral value relate to one another in a stable and reliable way. Obscenity is supposed to anchor the relationship between moral flaws and artistic value. But it behaves much less stably than Kieran's account's confident reliance on it would seem to warrant.

To reiterate, I do not want to overstate the point. The concept is not *wildly* unstable, so that we can make neither head nor tail of what Kieran is after. It seems plausible that we can arrive at sensible ethical evaluations of certain works without fear of mistaking the ethical value of one for the other; it would be a grave and ludicrous error to elide the moral value of *The God of Small Things* with the moral value of *Triumph of the Will*. But if we assume to know precisely what constitutes morally relevant content, if we assume to know we have discovered all its ethical permutations, and if we assume to know in precisely what ways that content will strike us as morally relevant, then our account of how ethical and artistic value relate to one another will be as much an artefact of the manners of *our* age as David Hume's high-handed indulgence of the "ancient poets". The ethical landscape changes. New, unexpected, legitimate interpretations of works in ethical terms are always possible. We should not hamstring our

account of the relation between ethical and aesthetic value by deciding the matter of what constitutes ethical value ahead of time.

Unravelling the instability of a concept like obscenity looks ahead to my larger argument. The concept ‘obscene’ looks to be very context-sensitive and, moreover, very revealing of how a given community identifies its boundaries of taste and decency. Identifying a work as obscene might plausibly involve getting to grips with a matrix of conventions and concepts that frame how this kind of judgement is reached. To the extent that artworks transgress the boundaries of taste and decency, to the extent they are obscene, it may be that they have the power to highlight, challenge, and innovate upon the various conventions and concepts that determine where those boundaries are and how obscenity is understood. What’s more, it could be that this indicates a better route into their ethical value than any transitory, albeit significant, power to shock and repulse. Kieran’s choice of obscenity and obscene works as a paradigm of immorality and immoral works is inadvertently revealing of the kind of issues my thesis is principally concerned with.

To generalise from the point made about Kieran’s treatment of obscenity, it seems as though some works are valuable precisely because they cause us to reflect upon how fragile and unstable our moral perspectives sometimes are. Let us take an example from Kieran’s work, Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*. Kieran has written in relation to the film that “[o]ne of Lee’s didactic aims... was to get the audience to respond to the racists portrayed as clearly contemptible. Yet the film fails in this respect because one of the central characters, Sal, is in many ways a deeply morally admirable man despite his incipient racism... The responses [the film] elicits are more complex, sophisticated, and less sentimental from those it sought to evoke.” (Kieran, 2008: 457) Again, I do not intend to overstate my point. Kieran’s is certainly a complex and sophisticated response to the film. So, too, is racism and its contemptible nature clearly one of Lee’s targets in this film. But if Kieran thinks the film has failed didactically, he is not giving Lee the chance to have a less ‘stable’ and clear didactic aim. The film can be valued precisely for making it difficult to reach confident moral judgements, and Kieran’s account is not always especially well attuned to this possibility.

Let us look at an example from the film. The montage of different communities stringing together racial pejoratives – first Mookie about Italian-Americans (or American-Italians, supposing we take Sal at his word and acknowledge a difference), then Pino about black people, followed by the Puerto Rican community about Korean shop owners, one could go on – that is abruptly called to a halt by Mister Senor Love Daddy’s “Yo! Hold up! Time out!”, does have a clear and straightforward didactic aim. On this, Kieran and I agree. But it

isn't obviously the case that Lee is only seeking to evoke a simple, unsophisticated, and sentimental response from his audience with it. Each community is infected by its own set of prejudices. Those prejudices are related to one another, but they are not interchangeable with one another. Mister Senor Love Daddy's terse rejection of the various attitudes covered in the montage cannot be a lasting solution to any of them, let alone all of them. It won't be enough for Mookie to "Hold up!", or for Pino to take a "Time out!" The sequence doesn't appear at the end of Lee's film, where it might imply a final or resolved attitude toward race relations in Brooklyn. Instead, a much more textured and nuanced didactic aim – that neither straightforward prejudices nor straightforward solutions will offer commensurate explanations for how a community feels about itself or its neighbours – seems extractable from the film. Kieran may have identified *one* of Lee's didactic aims, but it does not therefore follow that Lee has no others, or that they must all be 'clear' and 'stable'.

I also agree with Kieran that if every character in *Do the Right Thing* had behaved in the same way that Pino does, and responded to provocation with similar one dimensionality, the film might plausibly have suffered. But even here, Pino's engagement with race is not without contour. When confronted by Mookie about his favourite artists and film stars, he responds "They're black but they're not really black." When he later tells his father "I come to work and it's like Planet of the Apes", Sal responds, "Why do you have so much anger in you?" The question is revealing and prophetic. The whole film seems to be asking the same thing.

Brooklyn as it is portrayed in Lee's film is broiling with barely repressed anger and tension. Pino appears angry at everything – including himself. Sal's incipient racism is revealed in a burst of anger – provoked, we should recall, by Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out's own anger-inflected and slur-laden boycott of the Pizzeria. Even Mother Sister, hitherto a voice of mediation and moderation, can be heard shouting along with the community "Burn it down" in the film's climactic arson scene. Brooklyn itself is 'too hot to handle'. Kieran might well be right to draw our attention to the artistically interesting ways the film's didactic aims have misfired. But we should not lose sight of, nor underplay, the fact that we are not provided a stable platform from which to make ethical decisions in Lee's film. The film does not have a stable moral perspective. Early in the film, Da Mayor tells Mookie to "Always do the right thing". The film seems painfully aware that it is not always clear what the right thing to do is.

This all leads to my principal issue with Kieran's account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. Namely, I am unconvinced that his characterisation of how moral flaws can contribute to the artistic value of a work is sufficiently attentive of ethical value's broader applicatory scope. I am sympathetic to his underlying strategy, the methodological

concerns I have raised throughout this section notwithstanding. I think he makes a plausible case for saying that Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* is artistically valuable in virtue of its coarse, rhythmic, vulgarity. I am willing to accommodate his claim that the attitude toward life that is manifest in the novel might best to be described as immoral. Nevertheless, it does not seem as though the most interesting or most richly realised relationship between Miller's ethical exploration of modern life and the literary importance of that exploration has been captured in Kieran's treatment. Let us grant that *Tropic of Cancer* is morally false. This does not exhaust the ethical relevance of Miller's proposal for how we might best navigate the circumstances that face us since the collapse of moral certainty in the advent of modernity because, as Gibson has correctly identified, "literature's ethical core... is complex, composed, in effect, of two distinct phenomena: one normative and the other narratological." (Gibson, 2010: 18) The work's moral truth or falsity belongs to ethical value's normative aspect. The work's trueness or falseness to life, however, belongs to ethical value's logically distinct narratological aspect. The relationship between ethical and literary value is not exhausted by its first aspect – but it is the only one Kieran's account is in dialogue with.

As such, when Kieran writes that "...to criticise a work on the grounds that its moral characterization fails to be 'true to life' is irrelevant to its value as art" (Kieran, 2008: 453), he is making a category mistake. Trueness to life isn't to do with a work's moral characterisation; it is to do with its ethical exploration of the values that are in operation in a community. That is, he has conflated ethical value's thin, normative aspect with its thick, narrative storytelling aspect. A work's trueness to life, or its investigation into the structures that define a way of life, is distinct from a work's evaluative assessment of that way of life, or its view on whether those structures are worth preserving. Miller's Bacchic enjoyment of life's petty licentiousness, his accepting attitude of modernity's shallowness as expressed in *Tropic of Cancer*, is logically distinct from his characterisation of that shallowness, his mimetic rendering of grubby decadence.

Kieran might well be right that, insofar as Miller's attitude is passively accepting "of the horrors and corruption of humanity", it is morally false. But this moral falseness is not related to its narrative trueness to life. When Kieran describes *Tropic of Cancer* as morally flawed, a moral failure and so on, he is in effect saying that it "manifests or is otherwise expressive of the wrong kinds of moral attitude in respect to its content." (Gibson, 2010: 17) I have no especial issue with this description. I do take issue, however, with the implication in Kieran's writing that this "exhaust[s] the range of possible ethical value a work might bear..." (ibid: 18) To briefly state a claim that I will flesh out in greater detail at the end of the chapter

when I turn my attention to Gibson's view on thick narratives, a work can be morally false *and* ethically valuable. Kieran may well be right with respect to moral judgement's relationship to artistic value. But his assumption that ethical relevance is only ever activated by moral judgement causes him to discount an entire aspect of ethical value's relationship to artistic value as irrelevant. This is a crippling and unacceptable limitation of his account that will have to be remedied in my own.

Problems with Eaton's characterisation of the rough hero

We have looked at some of the shortcomings in Matthew Kieran's immoralist account. Let us now return to A.W. Eaton's analysis of the rough hero and investigate the implications of her position. Although Eaton's position as articulated in 'Rough Heroes' signals a genuine improvement over either the aestheticist's or ethicist's characterisation of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, it is nevertheless hamstrung by some internally unstable features. Let us briefly restate the basic claim Eaton is making so that these unstable features might be made plain. According to Eaton, the rough hero is hard to like, yet these works succeed in getting audiences to like them, root for them, take pleasure in them, ally with them and so on. The works are morally troubling because they endorse immoral attitudes. The success is an artistic achievement because the puzzle rough heroes pose is an aesthetic design problem. My concern is twofold. First, it is no easy thing to pin down with any precision what Eaton takes to be artistically valuable about rough heroes. Second, nor is it obviously all that valuable on close examination. As we have seen, according to Eaton, rough heroes pose a "challenge"; represent a "difficult design problem"; and there are "tricky things" one needs to be aware of when dealing with them. In what follows, I will query whether Eaton provides an answer to why this design problem is worth solving and, additionally, whether she provides an adequate account of what the solution might look, or feel, like.

According to Eaton, the vertiginous "state of irresolvable conflict..." (Eaton, 2012: 287) induced by rough heroes is "rightly described as aesthetic" (Eaton, 2010: 524). That is, the experience we are supposed to describe as aesthetic, and moreover value, is being "pulled in opposing directions without hope of relief..." (Eaton, 2012: 287). So it seems as though rough heroes and the problem they pose is itself involved in the aesthetic achievement Eaton has in mind, rather than just the achievement of solving the problem they pose. We are not only valuing the resolution of the conflict, but also the conflict itself. Quite apart from how strange this seems, the issue of why we should value this achievement, assuming it is one, remains

unsettled. Of course, some challenging, difficult and tricky works are artistically valuable. But there are also challenging works that are tedious, difficult works that fail to pay dividends on their difficulty, tricky works that are ultimately insubstantial. Setting oneself a difficult design problem might be less valuable than composing a work such that it avoids the difficult design problem altogether. Just being tricky, difficult or challenging doesn't seem enough. Some explanation of how the problem rough heroes pose translates into, or amounts to, an aesthetic achievement is necessary. Some explanation of why the difficulty they precipitate is worth overcoming, rather than avoiding, needs to be furnished; and it appears to be lacking from Eaton's account.

This can be drawn out more sharply by comparing her position on rough heroes with Clavel-Vazquez' regarding rough heroines.¹⁹ Now, Eaton seems to be saying that because rough heroes induce a state of conflict in their audience, and because that state of conflict can be correctly described as aesthetic, featuring rough heroes in a work can itself be an aesthetic achievement. By contrast, when diagnosing the puzzle posed by rough heroines, Clavel-Vazquez makes a distinction between the challenge they pose on one hand and the aesthetic achievement obtained by overcoming the challenge on the other. She is extremely careful "...to emphasise that it is not the subversion of gender norms *itself* that constitutes an aesthetic achievement.... [instead,] the subversion of gender norms makes allegiance more difficult to achieve and thus a greater aesthetic achievement." (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 209) The thought appears to be something like the following. Because works that examine rough heroines subvert gender norms, they pose additional challenges to sustaining an appreciator's pro attitudes toward their protagonists. They require, therefore, an especially strong grasp of the myriad other formal features that secure an appreciator's allegiance. This means one way in which rough heroines impact the value of a work is that they require a work which employs them to hone its various formal features to a sharp and precise point if it is going to sustain an appreciator's allegiance. But this is not all they do, nor the most interesting thing they do. Rather, sustaining appreciator allegiance "in the face of additional challenges... constitutes [its own] special kind of aesthetic achievement." (ibid) Nowhere in this account are the additional challenges themselves an aesthetic achievement. Instead, they act as motivation for various formal, more obviously aesthetic, characteristics in the work; and also underpin special kinds of aesthetic achievement, such as overcoming the imaginative resistance appreciators have to

¹⁹ A rough heroine is a morally flawed female protagonist and Clavel-Vazquez' work looks to characterise the "new puzzling instance of resistance phenomena" (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 202) they give rise to.

subverted gender norms, or pushing back the frontier of our interpretative horizons. (ibid: 209) Clavel-Vazquez, then, provides an account of how rough heroines require a work to have their constellation of formal features, such as coherence, complexity, intensity, and quality of dramatic development, in order. She also explains how overcoming the puzzle they pose, rather than just posing the puzzle, constitutes a special kind of aesthetic achievement. The myriad formal features are one kind of aesthetic achievement; sustaining appreciator allegiance is another special kind. Eaton's picture is at once less sophisticated and less rich.

This doesn't mean her account is wrong. On the contrary, Eaton has made valuable observations regarding the rough hero's defining feature within a narrative. Carroll may be right to separate a character's immorality from the question of whether a narrative endorses that morality. (Carroll, 2013) But in the case of rough heroes and rough hero works, he has failed to grasp Eaton's important insight – they *are* presented as immoral; audiences *are* prescribed strong pro attitudes toward them; those strong pro attitudes *are* sustained throughout the audiences' engagement with the narrative. She is right to say the rough hero's attitude is endorsed by the narrative; and she is right, too, to recognise the difficulty this consequence presents. But her account of how this difficulty not only impacts but to some extent *is* the work's aesthetic value doesn't fully capture how intricate and interweaving the relationships that hold everything together are. It may appear as though I propose replacing one obscure explanation of value for another – 'intricate and interweaving' for 'difficult'. This, of course, would be inadequate. For my purposes, the difficulty, the interweaving intricacy, must illuminate the role of the ethical substance of the work. The point I am attempting to convey by juxtaposing difficulty and intricacy is that Eaton's account is quite limited in precisely this, illuminating, regard.

Let us suppose that a work involves some, perhaps all, of the following: the moral implications of the rough hero's attitude; the narrative intentions of providing the rough hero those attitudes; prescribing an audience to endorse them; the audience *actually agreeing* to endorse those intentions and implications – the list could go on, so let us terminate here for brevity's sake – and, moreover, how all this impacts the work's artistic achievements. Perhaps it *is* artistically interesting that a work can combine all these features and maintain their various tensions. But Eaton is not here tying this interest to the illumination of immorality, as Kieran does, or to a dangerous awareness of self, as Devereaux does. The claim that emerges from Eaton's account, that it might be interesting to do something difficult, could well be true, so far as this goes. But it doesn't take us far into understanding the works or the potential role of

immorality in the value of those works. Labelling the tension “artistically interesting” is much too thin an answer.

Another issue with Eaton’s position is that many of the “mechanisms for generating affection and sympathy” (Eaton, 2010: 516) she identifies in ‘Rough Heroes’ don’t obviously serve the purpose they’re meant for. Rough heroes are supposed to provoke both our moral condemnation and emotional²⁰ approval. As such, we are never supposed to lose sight of their grievous and conspicuous moral flaws, their remorselessness, their wilful criminality, their naked hostility to society and conventional morality. It is puzzling to learn of *Bonnie and Clyde*, then, that “the film’s active encouragement of various pro attitudes toward the criminal pair is... facilitated by sporadically *undermining* or downplaying their villainy”; that “...their crime spree is given a *light-hearted* and even *comic* tone” (ibid: 517); that we are given the fleeting suggestion Clyde is “something of a Robin Hood... [who] *adheres to a moral code*”. [in all cases, my italics] (ibid) Sometimes, it seems, Bonnie and Clyde aren’t quite so worthy of moral condemnation after all. Nor are their grievous and conspicuous moral flaws quite so grievous, their remorselessness quite so unyielding, their wilful criminality quite so criminal, their naked hostility to society and conventional morality quite as naked, or as hostile, as one might expect.

If rough heroes pose an artistically interesting design problem, it doesn’t seem as though undermining the foundations of the puzzle is a very artistically interesting solution. Instead, a better account of the situation would seem to require saying how, in the case of Rough Hero Works, aesthetically valuable narrative features that give the work a coherent identity are undermined, not augmented, by downplaying and undermining those features which render the protagonist rough. If a work must resort to this to encourage and sustain appreciator allegiance, if it must mitigate its episodes of wilful criminality by making them comical and light-hearted, if moments of callous indifference are undermined or downplayed, if sequences in which conventional moral codes are not ridiculed and transgressed but instead adhered to in whatever idiosyncratic way, this would appear to signal a shortcoming rather than a strength. To be clear, this is not because the hero is immoral, or because the work has endorsed the hero’s immoral attitude. Rather, the work is marred by the narrative’s failure to endorse the hero’s immorality consistently.

²⁰ Rough heroes do not always secure our emotional approval, of course. One of the motivations for characterising our pro attitudes toward rough heroes as allegiance rather than sympathy is “to make room for the fact that... sometimes [we] do not sympathise with the rough hero: sometimes we despise the rough hero and sympathise with his victims, and, yet, we remain invested in seeing him prevail.” (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 204)

It is also worth paying attention to those features Bonnie and Clyde possess that render them likeable, admirable, and so on. Eaton highlights how “beautiful, sexy and ...charisma[tic]” they are; how their “magnetic appeal [is] enhanced through makeup and wardrobe”; how “Bonnie's sleek yet slightly tomboyish style... ignited a ‘Bonnie look’ fashion craze in Paris...”²¹ (ibid: 516) This will not do. To be clear, I do not think it is implausible for audiences to like or admire a rough hero’s beauty, sexiness, charisma or magnetism; certainly, it is entirely possible to find examples of beautiful, sexy, charismatic and magnetically alluring rough heroes and heroines. No doubt all these elements help explain why they are likeable and admirable. But it is far from clear how any of these qualities can account for their roughness. An antihero might be charming. A traditional hero might be beautiful. Unless there is something morally flawed about the rough hero’s charm and beauty, unless we can explain why a rough hero is attractive by virtue of the features that render them rough, then those features do not ground the rough hero’s defining characteristic. The puzzle of the rough hero is not activated unless the grounds for morally condemning them are also the grounds for allying with them.

Remember that an antihero’s “moral flaws (if she²² has any) are isolable from a basically good core”. (Eaton, 2010: 516) As such, their core decency shines through. Their

²¹ Clavel-Vazquez has directed our attention to “the few instances of rough heroines in narrative works, compared to the high numbers of rough heroes” (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 201), and it is important to acknowledge that in Eaton’s paper, there is some nominal attention paid to rough heroines – Rough Hero Works at once “make us vividly aware of a character's moral failings and simultaneously render *her* attractive, likeable, sympathetic and perhaps even admirable.” [my italics] (Eaton, 2010: 519) But it is striking that all of Eaton’s examples of rough heroes, excepting Bonnie, are “sympathetic and likeable bad *guys*.” [my italics] (ibid) Thus we are reminded of *The Godfather’s* Michael Corleone, *Taxi Driver’s* Travis Bickle, *Pulp Fiction’s* Vincent and Jules, and so on. It is therefore especially galling in Eaton’s account that Bonnie’s “sleek, slightly tomboyish style” and “suggestively strok[ing] Clyde’s pistol” (Eaton, 2010: 516) are all the evidence we are provided for why an audience might sympathise or like her. Clyde is “some kind of Robin Hood”. Bonnie and Clyde together “exude charisma”. But the only elements of Bonnie’s character Eaton picks out that specifically relate to Bonnie are her haircut and, if we are being generous, the way she suggestively strokes a (but not even *her*) pistol. The “asymmetry between our engagement with male characters in fiction who transgress moral norms and female characters” (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 201) must be wide indeed if we cannot locate more than this in Eaton’s canonical example of rough heroes (and single example of rough heroines).

²² This parenthetical remark provides rather anaemic acknowledgement of the phenomenon of antiheroines. See Clavel-Vazquez (2018) for an explanation of why appreciators seem to overcome their imaginative resistance to antiheroines and villainesses more readily than rough heroines.

shortcomings are rendered forgivable or else, perhaps, act as prisms through which their moral goodness can be understood in complex, recognisably human ways. Now, if a rough hero's "moral failings are an integral part of their personality", (ibid) then it would seem charisma, magnetism, wit and so on might be isolable from those failings. Certainly, there is nothing obviously immoral about Bonnie's sleek tomboyishness. But if Bonnie's beauty is entirely isolable from her remorseless, villainous core, then it doesn't define her core. Her beauty might well act as a prism through which her grievous and conspicuous moral flaws are viewed in interesting and humanly complex ways. But unless the attractive qualities either ground or are grounded in the moral flaws, they are not integral to the rough hero's character; and if they aren't integral to the rough hero's character, they appear incommensurate to the weight they are supposed to carry, unequal to the work required of them for Eaton's purposes. If a rough hero's flaws are grievous and conspicuous, then their isolable charms and trinkets are too superficial an explanation for an appreciator's sustained allegiance to them.

It cannot be enough that Jules is a good storyteller, or that Michael Corleone is a shrewd businessman. For these attributes to ground our allegiance to such characters – rather than, for example, complicate and muddy our rejection of them, which would be a different aesthetic achievement altogether, perhaps relevant to certain kinds of non-traditional villains – shrewd business acumen and an assured command of storytelling principles must either serve the hero's fundamental roughness or else be plausible extensions of it. If we are going to hold fast to Michael Corleone and his campaign for New York's axes of underworldly power, it must somehow make sense that killing a policeman is "not personal, it's strictly business." (Puzzo, 1969; Coppola, 1972) If we are going to remain invested in seeing Jules prevail, it should ring true when he self-identifies as "the tyranny of evil men"; and it should not seem like hollow, soliloquising style over substance when he tells Ringo that he is "trying real hard to be the shepherd." (Tarantino, 1994)

To reiterate, the point of the objection is not that every admirable quality a rough hero is in possession of must be explicable in terms of their morally flawed core. Rather, I am claiming that our allegiance to a rough hero cannot be solely sustained by a set of admirable qualities that are entirely isolable from that morally flawed core. Clavel-Vazquez has written that "rough heroes... require a special kind of allegiance that acknowledges the hero's depravity but that guarantees our continued investment in [their] success." (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 204) A.W. Eaton's analysis of rough heroes somewhat misses the mark on two fronts. First, many of the mechanisms she identifies for encouraging our pro attitudes toward rough heroes ignore or undermine rather than reinforce the hero's depravity. Second, the qualities she

has identified a rough hero might have that justify a continued investment in their success don't really seem to have much to do with their depravity. The 'design problem' Eaton claims rough heroes inspire seems to be solved too much by distracting audiences from the depravity and adding unproblematic attractive features to a character, rather than achieving the morally difficult allegiance. Without question, A.W. Eaton has made valuable contributions to the debate by alerting us to the puzzle of rough heroes. Her analysis of them has, so to speak, set the agenda. But the puzzle rough heroes and heroines pose is deeper than Eaton's characterisation of it would indicate. The ways that puzzle might be solved are richer than Eaton's examination might imply.

Section III

Imaginative resistance and interpretative horizons

In this section, I will direct our attention to Adriana Clavel-Vazquez' work on appreciators' imaginative resistance and interpretative horizons. In so doing, I shall investigate how much richer our resources are for scrutinising the aesthetic *and* ethical value of works that treat of the puzzle of the rough hero that Eaton has identified.

At one point in 'Art and Morality', Kieran makes the unobjectionable observation that "[w]hen we engage with fictional works we are often asked to imagine things that are fantastical, improbable, and far-fetched..." (Kieran, 2008: 455) He continues to write, much more interestingly, that "with respect to factual matters, we have little problem doing so... [y]et, with respect to moral matters, we often experience difficulty in imagining states of affairs or taking up attitudes towards them that we consider to be unacceptable..." (ibid) Our "imaginative resistance" (ibid: 456) to fantastical, improbable and far-fetched states of affairs is weaker, then, than our imaginative resistance to morally unacceptable attitudes. A reader's imaginative engagement with a work is therefore challenged when it is confronted with an immoral attitude, a set of immoral prescriptions, a worldview that endorses immoral judgements, and so forth. For Kieran, one of the ways this challenge of imaginative resistance might be overcome is if the work renders its attitude intelligible.

As we are by now quite familiar with, Kieran argues that *Tropic of Cancer* can be distinguished from *Triumph of the Will* and *Birth of a Nation* for this reason. Whereas Miller's concern for the ordinary and mundane augments our understanding of the attitude toward humanity that emerges from *Tropic of Cancer*, neither *Birth of a Nation* nor *Triumph of the Will* successfully overcome the phenomenological difficulty that would render their manifest

racism or glorification of Hitler intelligible. One of these works can overcome our imaginative resistance whereas the other two cannot. I have argued that, in this particular case, Kieran's argument is not entirely convincing. However, the phenomenon of imaginative resistance and its pertinence to a discussion of how ethical and aesthetic value relate to one another deserves close attention.

Adriana Clavel-Vazquez' work on rough heroines and "the puzzling instance of resistance phenomena" (Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 202) they represent is especially noteworthy in this regard. According to Clavel-Vazquez' interpretation of rough heroes, morally flawed *male* protagonists represent a "special kind of aesthetic achievement because audiences surmount their initial imaginative resistance to engage with these deeply flawed characters." (ibid) Morally flawed *female* protagonists, by contrast, represent a different kind of puzzle and reveal a different element of narrative engagement than their heroic (rather than heroic) counterparts because "it would seem that audiences do not easily overcome [the] imaginative resistance" (ibid) they harbour toward them. That is, rough heroines present a novel challenge to "appreciators' interpretative horizons." (ibid) In the course of her analysis, Clavel-Vazquez identifies five relevant resistance-related puzzles. The first four are:

1. the imaginative puzzle of imagining deviant propositions
2. the alethic puzzle of accepting as true in the fiction said deviant propositions
3. the phenomenological puzzle of why those propositions strike appreciators as confusing
4. the aesthetic puzzle of determining their impact on a narrative's aesthetic value

(Clavel-Vazquez, 2018: 204)

The fifth puzzle Clavel-Vazquez identifies is the "the affective puzzle," which involves trying to determine why certain fictional scenarios "trigger difficulties in adopting the affective attitudes prescribed." (ibid) Rough protagonists, who invite us to enter into attitudes that fail to condemn an immoral character, activate this fifth puzzle. But the resolution to the puzzle for rough *heroes* and rough *heroines* respectively is importantly different. Whereas "narrative context can explain the affective puzzle away" (ibid: 205) when an appreciator is presented with a rough hero, the same cannot be said of rough heroines. Clavel-Vazquez argues that, by emphasising the rough hero's other character traits, such as their strength, charismatic roguishness, contempt for authority and so on, so that they appear alluring and attractive, certain works are able to ground an audience's nonmoral allegiance to them. But narratives that

present similarly anti-authority, similarly roguish, similarly charming and strong rough heroines, routinely “either fail or find it more difficult to ground allegiance”. (ibid: 206) As such, while Clavel-Vazquez believe that authors like Kieran are “right to note that narrative context plays a very important role in how we engage with immorality in fiction,” (ibid: 210) our resistance to the type of challenges rough heroines give rise to cannot be comprehensively explained with reference to just this and no more. That is, an explanation of the puzzle posed by rough heroines is not grounded sufficiently by recourse to just narrative context.

Rather, one must also attend to “the violation of gender norms and the challenge to power dynamics” (ibid) they represent. Let us consider the range of characteristics and traits that might render a rough hero endearing – and will routinely fail to achieve the same for a rough heroine we listed earlier. A rough hero’s roguishness, his contempt for authority and his strength might, one could argue, be sufficient to secure an appreciator’s admiration for his independence of spirit and capacity to ‘seize the reins’ in his own life’s trajectory. By contrast, a rough heroine “might be resisted precisely because [she] challenge[s] women’s subordinate position.” (ibid: 207-8) This kind of resistance relies on “a range of conscious and unconscious attitudes that are partly affected by our sociohistorical context and that impact how we understand and relate to others.” (ibid: 209) Clavel-Vazquez calls this matrix of conscious and unconscious attitudes the “appreciators’ interpretative horizons.” (ibid: 209) She believes that these interpretative horizons are crucially “important in explaining how receptive audiences are to moral deviance in fictional scenarios.” (ibid: 210) Her analysis of the twin phenomena of rough heroes and heroines involves our interpretative horizons, our various conscious and unconscious attitudes, because these partially structure how we understand gender identity. However willing, or unwilling, we are to ally ourselves to morally flawed characters will be impacted by that character’s adherence to, or subversion of, gender norms. The rough hero accords, and the rough heroine discords, with these expectations, and so the imaginative resistance the rough heroine faces is a different (and greater) kind than that faced by her male counterpart. Moreover, this has implications for our aesthetic judgements. Clavel-Vazquez’s account is importantly different than Eaton’s, and stronger as a result, because “narratives featuring rough heroines are not aesthetically valuable because (or when) they subvert gender norms.” (ibid: 209) That is, the difficulty isn’t itself the aesthetic achievement, which was my greatest problem with Eaton’s account. There, I argued that the account was lacking a reason why one should value the difficulty. Clavel-Vazquez has an answer to this question. On her view, “the subversion of gender norms makes allegiance more difficult to achieve and thus a greater aesthetic achievement.” (ibid)

This represents a significant improvement upon Eaton's account because it illuminates the role of the ethical substance in works that employ rough heroines. By 'ethical substance' I mean to imply both of ethical value's aspects that were introduced in the discussion of Kieran's immoralist position. Its normative aspect is exercised in Clavel-Vazquez' treatment because the attitudes manifested by the rough heroine are *morally* suspect. Its narratological aspect is activated because, by subverting gender norms, rough heroines cause us to explore the concepts and conventions that frame our moral judgements. The fleshing out of this point, and the importance of the distinction between moral judgement and ethical exploration, shall be revealed in finer-grained detail in the next subsection. I shall close this one by observing that gender norms are not the only kinds that impact our interpretative horizons – it seems plausible that myriad other cultural norms, concepts and conventions might also shape our engagement with characters who subvert these sorts of expectations. Clavel-Vazquez' incisive analysis has demonstrated how the phenomenon of the rough heroine can facilitate an engagement with and exploration of the various attitudes that structure gender norms.

Thick narratives

We now have a clear picture of how Adriana Clavel-Vazquez responds instructively to A.W. Eaton. Let us turn our attention to John Gibson's characterisation of thick narratives to see how one might respond instructively to Matthew Kieran John Gibson's 'Thick Narratives' (2010) begins by observing that literary works can, and do, draw upon "the ethical, familial, social, or political dimensions of life." (Gibson, 2010: 1) It might therefore seem in one sense obvious that "literary content is often a kind of ethical content." (ibid) But this cannot be the whole story. Gibson sees in "the great works of the Western canon... content that is from the moral point of view odious or at least highly suspicious..." (ibid) Moreover, the list of works in which this is true "would likely be considerably longer than the list of those we would take to be on the side of the angels." (ibid) Here, then, is a position at odds with both the aestheticist *and* the ethicist. If literary content is often a kind of ethical content, the latter is not irrelevant to the former. And if Carroll holds that where art is "morally obnoxious" it "...obfuscate[s] rather than clarif[ies]" (Carroll, 1998: 150), it would be a peculiar consequence of his position if he held that much of the Western canon of great works was obfuscating. "The problem the philosopher of art faces," as Gibson sees it, "is not whether ethical concerns are ever relevant to the evaluation and appreciation of literary works... [but rather] to account for the ethical dimension of literature in such a way that we can accommodate certain curious features of

literary experience.” (Gibson, 2010: 1) Let us pause to unpack some of what Gibson is saying here.

First, let us look at which dimensions of life Gibson has grouped together. As well as the ethical, we have the familial, social, and political. Let us replace “ethical” with each of them. Literary content is a kind of *familial* content; literary content is a kind of *social* content; literary content is a kind of *political* content. There is an emphasis on examining modes of life and lived experience, on cultural frameworks and fluctuations. And this is separable from making any normative judgements about how a family, a society or a body politic ought to function. This is related, I think, to Gibson’s focusing on the literary or ethical *content* as something separate from its literary or ethical *value*. A work might, perhaps, attempt to both explore and evaluate one of life’s dimensions. But exploring the structure and character of familial life does not collapse into judging how fulfilling, or toxic, being any one member of a family might be. If literature draws upon the ethical dimension of life, then its way of doing so may be focused on canvassing a mode of life and lived experience as well as (or instead of) deciding whether it’s the kind of life or lived experience one ought to pursue.

Second, literary content is a *kind* of ethical content but not, therefore, the *only* kind of ethical content. Perhaps musical content, or sculptural or performative content, is a kind of ethical content.²³ It is unclear that all these kinds of content would be structured in quite the same way, or interchanged uncomplicatedly. Cricket is a kind of sport; so too is downhill skiing. They are not the same kind of sport. An analysis of one cannot be straightforwardly interchanged for the other. To treat all kinds of ethical content alike, as though the conventions that frame those kinds are all the same, is a mistake.

Third, the way around Gibson has framed this observation is worth taking note of. If literary content is a kind of ethical content, the inverse formulation, ethical content is a kind of literary content, means something different. For Gaut, if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective. But if a work is aesthetically defective, it does not follow that the attitudes it manifests are to that extent ethically reprehensible. There might be something ugly about ethically reprehensible attitudes; but it does not follow there is something ethically reprehensible about something ugly. If Gibson is recognising literary content as a kind of ethical content, he is doing something rather different

²³ For an example of how music might be related to ethics, see Thomas Mann’s portrait of Settembrini in *The Magic Mountain* and Leverkühn in *Doctor Faustus*. For performative art, see his treatment of Cipolla in *Mario and the Magician*. For sculptural art, Goethe’s “aletheic” reading of *Laocoon* is thought provoking.

than Gaut, who is recognising ethical value as a kind of literary one. The point that emerges, therefore, is that different subsumption relations or different embeddings of content and value are possible. The ethicist position assumes only one possibility – that the ethical content fits into literary content and value. Gibson, meanwhile, is considering another, thinking about how literary content can provide ethical content and value.

Fourth, Gibson has introduced a terminological distinction of crucial importance to this thesis. *Ethical* content is distinct from its being odious or suspicious from a *moral* point of view. To see how this distinction functions, let us look briefly at a contrast Gibson draws between narrative and story. A story is what a narrative relates, a sequence of incidents, and so there can be various narratives of one story, but not vice versa. Narratives, as particular ways of relating a story, can be “thick” or “thin”. “Thick narratives” possess “an especially rich kind of descriptive content” whereas “thin narratives” are “merely evaluat[ive].” (ibid: 7) These especially rich kinds of narrative have as their goal “the articulation of a kind of content that is clearly ethical but that has very little to do with the specification of duties, obligations, or methods for determining the moral worth of possible courses of action.” (ibid: 8)

To avoid mischaracterising his position, Gibson “do[es] not think that the immoralist is wrong...” (Gibson, 2010: 2) On the contrary, he thinks that Kieran is right when he observes that “...if we had grounds for holding that a work could be valuable in virtue of its immoral character, then we would have strong reason to hold that... moderate moralism [cannot] be the right account of the interrelations between the moral character of a work and its aesthetic value...” (Kieran, 2008: 458-459) The “freedom that literature enjoys from the burden of speaking always on the side of morality” (Gibson, 2010: 2) is both significant and valuable.

Nevertheless the nature of literature’s relation to morality is more complicated than this. The distinction between an articulation of content as “clearly ethical” and a focus on “determining the moral worth of possible courses of action” is the theme that coordinates Gibson’s paper. He recognises as obvious that literary content is often a kind of *ethical* content, whilst acknowledging that from the *moral* point of view, this content as found throughout the Western canon of great literary works is routinely odious or at least highly suspicious. Praising literature’s freedom from the burden of speaking always on the side of *morality*, at the expense of paying attention to its “specific arrangement of desires, passions, hopes, beliefs, and values”, is to miss its *ethical* value as Gibson understands it: “contrary to the quite formal approach of morality, ethics so conceived... explores the ‘living’ arrangement of values operative in a community.” (Gibson, 2010: 13) Thick narratives explore the “practices, institutions, and forms of interaction that shape our world and structure our experiences and relationships.” (Gibson,

2010: 9) It is here their ethical value principally lies, distinct from the moral judgements one can extract from them. Thus a work can “get the demands of morality wrong” (ibid: 16); but here ‘wrong’ is meant in a normative sense. The moral prescriptions a work endorses, or maligns, is a separate question from how powerfully, accurately, vividly or prophetically it describes a way of life. The evaluative frameworks for ethics and morality are “logically independent of one another” (ibid) and so there is no tension, Gibson believes, “...in saying that a literary work might be morally insolvent but ethically rich.” (Gibson, 2010: 17)

In summary, Gibson’s position offers an intriguing alternative to types of both autonomism like Posner’s aestheticism and moralism like Gaut’s ethicism. By contrasting ethics with morality, rather than literature with exactly either of these, he is able to say that the artistic and *moral* realms are separate, whilst maintaining that a work’s literary content can often times be a kind of *ethical* content. An interesting consequence of this is that a Gibsonian literary ethicist does not consider “a work... aesthetically meritorious (or defective) *insofar* as it manifests ethically admirable (or reprehensible) attitudes.” (Gaut, 1998: 182) In this context, Berys Gaut is a literary moralist. Moreover, to foreshadow some of the claims that will frame the central focus of chapter three, for Gibson, a book’s “moral vision” can be “clearly false”, without this falseness being relevant to its being ‘true to life’. For all Martha Nussbaum’s talk of a *moral* vision, (Nussbaum, 1987) she would appear to be more interested in an ethical one (as will be explored shortly). Immoralism and ethicism are, for Gibson, compatible positions. What they consider valuable, or significant, lie in distinct logical spaces.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a critical analysis of the immoralist strategy for dealing of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. To this end, I have looked closely at Matthew Kieran’s account of how works can be artistically valuable in virtue of their immorality and A.W. Eaton’s claim that rough heroes pose a difficult and artistically interesting design problem. I have argued that immoralism represents an improvement over either aestheticism or ethicism as characterised in chapter one. By allowing for the possibility that a work might propose or endorse immoral attitudes in an artistically valuable way, immoralism is in a better position to account for the complex, rich, and dynamic relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. Nevertheless, I argued that immoralism so conceived is incomplete. The visions of ethical value one can elicit from Kieran and Eaton’s respective approaches are too

myopically focused on its normative aspect and the solution to technical design problems. They may be right, so far as they go. But then again, they can only go so far.

As such, I turned my attention, first, to Adriana Clavel-Vazquez' work on imaginative resistance and the way our interpretative horizons, framed by a network of conscious and unconscious attitudes, provide a context for some, though of course not all, artworks to confront those horizons for artistically substantive purposes. I argued that her account of the rough heroine picks up where Eaton's account of the rough hero leaves off; it is both richer, more explanatorily powerful, and does not beg the question of what precisely we should value about the 'difficult design problem' rough protagonists present us with. Moreover, her account of imaginative resistance is better placed to explain why we can overcome our resistance to rough heroes and yet struggle to overcome this resistance to rough heroines who manifest the same characteristics than Kieran's. It seems to me that she is right to say narrative context, whilst important to an explanation of how we engage with immorality in fiction, will not comprehensively account for this engagement. More is required to satisfactorily characterise this engagement, and therefore the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. Clavel-Vazquez' way of thinking about a work's relation to gender norms is compelling. By placing the work in an ethical, sociohistorical context, by placing it 'in the world' of cultural engagement, she provides a notional space in which part of the work's focus might be to explore, interrogate, confront and explode whatever conventions structure those norms. Her position accommodates the possibility that an author might choose to expand a readership's imaginative horizons and for this expansive ambition to be literary *and* ethical. In the final chapter of this work, I will take the lessons learnt from her account of rough heroines and place them in a somewhat different, albeit closely related, investigation of the conventions and concepts that regulate a culture's engagement with its mythmaking and storytelling practice.

I then looked closely at John Gibson's account of thick and thin narratives. I argued that he is right to draw a distinction between ethical value's normative and narratological aspects. Immoralism provides an account of how its normative aspect might be artistically valuable, but it does not have much to say about its narratological aspect. It seems to me plausible that the ethical value of a work could reside more forcefully and more importantly in how it illuminates an ethical practice, rather than in the moral values it endorses. The work can then open up the status of that practice, its coherence and flaws and the 'what it is like' to live within it. Gibson's account of thick narratives is well suited to this purpose. He is right, I believe, to think that Miller's Bacchic revelling in Parisian squalor as represented in *Tropic of Cancer* is not fully "intelligible for what [it is] without a grasp of the features of culture that

prompted [it].” (Gibson, 2010: 17) He is right, moreover, to observe that an important aspect of ethical evaluation involves an “attempt to fill out our sense of the ethical character of a culture... [and] that there is [therefore] no tension in saying that a literary work might be morally insolvent but ethically rich...” (ibid) His work facilitates an account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value such that literary works might investigate, and creatively innovate upon, the value structures operative in a culture. In due course, I shall employ this important insight in my own account of the relationship and my own answer to the question ‘What makes bad books good?’

Both positions anchor ethical value in literature via a relation to the world, such that they are not reducible to Posner’s aestheticism. Neither do they devolve into moralist ethicism – the evaluative criteria of both Clavel-Vazquez’ work on interpretative horizons and Gibson’s account of thick narratives function in a different logical space to Gaut’s ethicism. Moreover, whilst they can be consistently sympathetic to immoralism, be it either Kieran’s or Eaton’s, because they do not anchor ethical value to the world via the immorality of the immoral content, their approaches are more explanatorily powerful. They are committed to unpacking the ‘thick’ relationship, and in that respect, I intend to follow their example.

Chapter Three: This Moral Vision – Martha Nussbaum and the Novel

Introduction

By the end of the preceding chapter, I had concluded that ‘thin’ accounts of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value are inadequate. I had also concluded that, by following Clavel-Vazquez and Gibson’s example and by attending to a ‘thicker’ conception of this relationship, we might be able to revise the way we frame the whole issue. The next stage in the argument, therefore, is to turn from Matthew Kieran’s immoralism, the most plausible thin account, to some thicker versions of ethicism and autonomism. I will begin with thick ethicism because, as John Gibson’s account of thick narratives makes plain, we can quite clearly see what separates (thin) literary moralism from (thick) literary ethicism. Moreover, because these positions are logically independent, it is plausible that (thin) literary immoralism and (thick) literary ethicism might be compatible with one another. As this distinction is clear in our minds, and whilst the merits of Kieran’s immoralism are similarly fresh, let us turn to Martha Nussbaum for a literary ethicist account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value.

Martha Nussbaum, at the beginning of her paper “‘Finely Aware and Richly Responsible’: Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature”, quotes Henry James thusly:

“The effort to see and really to represent is no idle business in face of the constant force that makes for muddlement.” (James, 1907: 149). She goes on to characterise the nature of this “constant force” and narrows in especially upon “[o]btuseness and refusal of vision [as] our besetting vices” (Nussbaum, 1987: 169). Morality, so conceived, involves combatting these vices, and it is “...only by painful vigilant effort, the intense scrutiny of particulars of moral attention...” (ibid) that we can do so effectively. She intends to show why this conception of morality “...finds in novels its most appropriate articulation. More: why... the novel is itself a moral achievement.” (ibid) Nussbaum is also explicit about what kind of moral achievement the novel is capable of – “...certain novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy.” (ibid)

This claim regarding “certain novels” and their identification as “irreplaceabl[e] works of moral philosophy” – rather than merely resources a work of moral philosophy might call upon, say – is not entirely uncontroversial, nor likely to pass without comment, as indeed Nussbaum herself observes in ‘Perceptive Equilibrium: Literary Theory and Ethical Theory’. There, she writes that works whose starting point for exploring ethical thought is literature

“...share [“if they share anything”] a commitment to the ethical relevance of particularity and to the epistemological value of feeling...” (Nussbaum, 1987: 61) “We tend to forget”, she continues, “how morally controversial [the novel] has been in the eyes of various sorts of religious and secular moralisms... [given that] they attach a dangerous importance to outcomes that lie beyond the control of the moral will.” (ibid: 71) We have in Nussbaum, then, some interrelated claims regarding a novel’s candidate status as work of moral philosophy and the morally controversial commitments a novel might be wedded to.

Her approach for investigating the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is importantly different from those we have hitherto examined. One might be tempted to consider her an ethicist – certainly, by asserting that novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy, we cannot call her an aestheticist – but if so, she is not an ethicist in either the mould of Berys Gaut or Noël Carroll. The relationship she defends is at once deeper, messier, and more essentially entwined than either of their approaches envisage. Instead, whereas Gaut’s and Carroll’s strategies appear to be examples of what John Gibson called “literary moralism” at the end of ‘Thick Narratives’, Nussbaum’s position has more in common with the “literary ethicist”. On her analysis of the relationship between art and morality, aesthetic evaluation does not consist in judging the extent to which a work is marred or enhanced by ethical value – by contrast, the novel, for Nussbaum, can inform how we understand ethical value rather than merely track it. Nor is the novel’s function in ethics to simply clarify judgements reached by practicing philosophy – the ethical and epistemic commitments that underpin literature might stand at odds with those inherited from the philosophical tradition, and so its function is at once more confrontational and more creative.

Both Gaut’s ethicist and Carroll’s moralism conceive of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value as being quite simple – ethical and aesthetic value, properly understood, so to speak travel in the same direction. For Nussbaum, the picture is more complicated and deeper. Right at the heart of her account is a fascinating tension – certain novels are, at once, themselves works of moral philosophy and morally controversial. What’s more, we cannot rely on discovering an easy or settled solution to that tension; perhaps the tension is irreconcilable. (Nussbaum, 1987: 73) She therefore provides a richer, meatier, and more promising account of the relationship than we were witness to in chapter one. Moreover, her position diverges in important respects from the immoralist accounts we examined in chapter two. True, her position is sensitive to how morally controversial the novel might be. But whereas immoralism holds that immoral attitudes and judgements can sometimes contribute positively to artistic value, Nussbaum claims, with regards to the novel at least, that

the relationship is entirely the other way around – certain works of literature might themselves be substantive contributions to moral philosophy. Instead, and to restate the point made a little earlier, her position is much closer aligned to the literary ethicist than either the literary moralist, the aestheticist *or* the immoralist. In contrast to any of these positions, Nussbaum’s treatment of the relationship, like Gibson’s and like Clavel-Vazquez’, expands the focus from the ‘thin’ evaluation of moral judgement to an inquiry into the nature of moral life, with literary narrative and affective-experiential methods offered as relevant to that philosophical project.

To accomplish this, Nussbaum provides examples of *which* works she takes to be representative of her claims – as is perhaps unsurprising given the quotation with which this chapter opened, she “shall argue that James’s novels are such texts.” (Nussbaum, 1987: 169) *The Golden Bowl* and *The Ambassadors* are taken to be especially indicative of her position; she returns to them again and again. In *The Golden Bowl*, James explores, and explodes, the position that “...in every conflict of loves or of values, one can... reach an allegedly guiltless consistency and harmony...” (Nussbaum, 1983: 25) In *The Ambassadors*, we meet Lambert Strether who, confronted by Mrs Newsome’s “Kantian morality”, and without entirely reneging upon it, seeks instead “...another way to be rational and moral, a way that is more hospitable to life...” (Nussbaum, 1987: 11). Both novels prize a “perceptual morality” (1987); both champion an “intense scrutiny of particulars of moral attention” (1987); and they both endeavour to explore where these commitments are brittle and vulnerable. Nussbaum’s position is that these novels are of “more than parochial interest” and are among “the best account[s] [she] know[s] of these matters.” (ibid: 169) But “best” need not imply “only”. Indeed, it would serve Nussbaum’s purposes for it not to.

Let us grant that James’s novels share a commitment to “the ethical relevance of particularity” and “the epistemological value of feeling”. If this were all her position amounted to, profound as her insights may be and important to Jamesian scholarship as they surely are, any broader application beyond these rather narrow horizons would be significantly hamstrung. One must consider how other works, with comparable epistemic and ethical commitments, and that use literature as their starting point for ethical thought, fare under Nussbaum’s forensic gaze. Only then will we be able to judge how generalisable her approach is; how much work those commitments actually do in Nussbaum’s account; and, moreover, whether her position provides either general or reliable significance for broader moral-philosophical understanding.

This chapter will explore Nussbaum’s claims for the novel. In so doing, it will flesh out how she develops a distinctive approach to the literary-ethical relationship, orientated toward

the thick rather than thin aspect of ethical value. In order to accomplish this, I shall investigate three assertions Martha Nussbaum makes:

- 1) It is in novels that one finds the most appropriate articulation of the, or this, moral vision
- 2) Novels are themselves works of moral philosophy
- 3) We can find in novels a paradigm of moral activity

In so doing, I will interrogate her treatment of the novel with reference to some of her own examples, such as Henry James' *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* mentioned above, as well as Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. By the end of the chapter, I will be in a position to claim that, whilst Martha Nussbaum's work points to a more fruitful strategy for dealing of the relationship between ethical and artistic value, richer and deeper than either the ethicist, or aestheticist from chapter one, or the immoralist from chapter two, can table, it is nevertheless inadequate. She is too narrow regarding which visions can be most appropriately articulated in novels (as well as too narrow regarding what kinds of perception might be instructive); too narrow regarding which novels stand as candidate works (as well as too narrow regarding which literary forms produce salient candidates); and too narrow regarding which activities count as paradigmatic (as well as too narrow regarding what readings are available). I shall give reasons for 'broadening out' these restrictions. Moreover, I shall close the chapter by proposing to investigate a "thought" Nussbaum entertains toward the end of *Perceptive Equilibrium* and to which I have already alluded: "...the goal might... be... a dynamic tension between two possible irreconcilable visions." (Nussbaum, 1987: 77) The actual investigation of this thought will receive its fullest realisation in chapter five, where I consider some illustrative literary examples.

A few, final, preliminary observations. Martha Nussbaum is of interest in part because she posits a relationship between practices: namely, between literature and philosophy. In this chapter, I am going to explore how she does this, both to expose some weaknesses, but also to embrace the idea that literature is not discursively isolated. However, before launching into that exploration, I shall first raise some abstract questions about what it means to put novels in the category of philosophically active discourse. This in turn will enable us to determine how her approach to the literary-ethical relationship will work. Given that there are many novels with many distinct conceptions of morality, and given that literary practice extends far beyond the confines of the early 20th century modernist novel, it will be instructive to examine in close detail how and where Nussbaum situates novels within a larger discursive pool.

One of the first things one might say of Nussbaum's position, then, is that it provides space for a conception of morality to be articulated in myriad ways without thereby committing her to anything especial regarding the make-up of those myriad ways, how many ways there are and so on. Nussbaum might choose to hermetically seal various articulable attempts from one another and carefully keep the novel separate from, and more highly esteemed than, its competitors. She could, for example, contrast James's *The Golden Bowl* with his *The Art of Fiction*, acknowledge the latter a statement regarding James's philosophy of art; the former a work of literary fiction; consider them competing approaches for articulating a conception of morality; determine the articulation found in *The Golden Bowl* most appropriate; and all the while insist on their belonging to nonoverlapping discursive practices.²⁴ She could, alternatively, contrast *The Golden Bowl* with a work such as Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; number their differences; explain their diverging strategies; state a preference for *The Golden Bowl*'s treatment of morally resonant circumstances; and yet insist on analysing them each on their own self-contained terms. In those circumstances, she would have to defend that preference, and explain how evaluative criteria pertain to those separate attempts, whether there is any overlap in their jurisdictions, whether they truly are self-contained, and so on.

The above matrix of issues involve getting to grips with conceptions of what art and morality are best placed to accomplish, how those conceptions might be related, and what sort of evaluations we might be able to reach about them. A crucial assumption to all those questions is that all these works have *philosophical* substance and are able to contribute to the *moral-philosophical* debate.²⁵ But it may be that there are grounds to question whether works of art inevitably have philosophical substance at all. Perhaps the value conferred upon a work is better described by avoiding a melding of the evaluative criteria of literature, philosophy, ethics and so on altogether. An example of what I mean may be useful. In the previous chapter, I looked at Gibson's account of how a story is what a narrative relates. As such, there can be various narratives of one story, but not vice versa. Suppose we consider different 'narratives' of one 'story' from various artistic practices – Mann's treatment of Isaac's sacrifice at the hands of Abraham compared to Kierkegaard's, for example, or Mozart's and Byron's respective

²⁴ Something like, although one should stress *importantly different from*, this approach is explored by Lamarque and Olsen, of whom I shall have much more to say in the next chapter.

²⁵ Here is one place where Lamarque and Olsen's position unequivocally diverges from the hypothetical strategy I have described.

treatments of the Dons Giovanni and Juan. Stating a preference for Mann's treatment – and defending that preference – doesn't entail that Mann is practicing philosophy, any more than preferring Byron's treatment entails he is composing music. I shall have cause to say a little more about the contrast between Mann's and Kierkegaard's respective approaches to the Abraham and Isaac story in chapter four. I do not intend for too much to hang upon the particular example in the present context. Rather, I intend to illustrate that one strategy for dealing of the relationship between various practices, such as philosophy and literature, music and poetry, is to treat them as essentially nonoverlapping and distinct. One step in that argument might be to highlight where those practices diverge precisely when they utilise similar raw material.

In any case, Nussbaum instead does something rather different and asserts the following. First, as we have seen, "this conception of moral attention and moral vision finds in novels its most appropriate articulation." (ibid:169) Second, "certain novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy." (ibid) Third, "the novel can be a paradigm of moral activity." (ibid) The first and third claims could be integrated with an approach that considers literature and philosophy as essentially distinct – a common pursuit of moral vision and activity need not entail an elision of discursive practises. But by asserting that novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy, Nussbaum rejects a model where these practices are entirely, and essentially, separable. To some extent, they must overlap. The first and third claims might plausibly inform to *what* extent they overlap. Let us therefore take each claim in turn.

Section I

This conception of moral attention and moral vision finds in novels its most appropriate articulation

It is worth noting that it seems far easier to behave viciously than virtuously on Nussbaum's reading of James. We are possessed by "besetting vices" and the "force that makes for muddlement" is "constant". The repulsion of these forces is "no idle business" and requires sustained activity. But let us flesh out the picture. Though one might be beset by many vices, Nussbaum has identified two requiring of special attention; more so than any other, "[o]btuseness and refusal of vision" make for our muddlement. These two vices are related without being therefore interchangeable. One can, no doubt, behave obtusely and yet linger, perhaps overlong, on some vision of "particulars [worthy of] moral attention". And one can, moreover, refuse to engage squarely with those particulars without thus behaving obtusely – instead, one might be complacent, lazy and so on. Nevertheless, it is telling that Nussbaum has

paired them; they reinforce and entrench one another. One's refusal to view the relevant moral particulars squarely is made worse by obdurately continuing to so refuse. As she puts it in relation to Fanny and Bob Assingham, "perception without responsibility is dangerously free floating, even as duty without perception is blunt and blind." (Nussbaum, 1987: 176) These vices have an insidious quality about them. They are deep-seated and only removed with difficulty. As such, being rid of them requires a "painful vigilant effort". They are, moreover, vices that plague us all. They are not one man's or woman's, one person's, besetting vices but *ours* and, if "intense scrutiny of particulars of moral attention" is to be an antidote to them, then this requires multiple involvement. Moral behaviour, either vicious or virtuous, "is broadly shared and sharable." (Nussbaum, 1987: 64)

What's more, they speak to a specific conception of moral attention. For Nussbaum, moral attention is intimately bound up with perception, not merely being perceptive, and involves more than some broad kind of insightfulness. She writes in relation to Jacques Derrida's *Éperons* that "[o]nce one has worked through and been suitably... impressed by Derrida's perceptive and witty analysis of style, one feels, at the end of all the urbanity, an empty longing... for the sense of risk and practical urgency that are inseparable from Zarathustra's dance... [one] feel[s] a certain hunger for blood..." (Nussbaum, 1987: 59) One does not sit sealed away in a wingback armchair and analyse a concept, for example, distinct and apart from the activities that inform those assessments and calculations; these approaches, because they let us remain distant from the experience of moral risk and the need for action, are too anaemic.

Now, if perception involves relating to the world that confronts us from without, and if moral attention involves relating to the morally significant circumstances that confront us in a way analogous to perception, this analogy could be fleshed out in various ways. Something might, or might not, feel, or smell, or taste right about a situation. One might, so to speak, lose or regain one's proprioceptive balance. And, of course, one might see clearly or poorly. It is no idle business, remember, to *see*; we are beset by an insidious temptation to refuse *vision*; duty without perception is *blind*; and in novels we find the most appropriate articulation of this moral *vision*. Thus Nussbaum notices the "inveterate tendency of both [Maggie and Adam Verver] to assimilate people... to fine *objets d'art*." ²⁶ (Nussbaum, 1983: 31) Thus the "...peculiar nature of their moral aim... is best supported by a view of persons that tends to assimilate their

²⁶ For a contrasting 'assimilation', see *In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 1: The Way by Swann's* and Swann's comparison of Odette to a Botticelli fresco.

properties to certain salient properties of works of art...” (Nussbaum, 1983: 31). And thus, too, as Maggie awakens from childlike innocence, “betray[ing] for the first time a curiosity about her situation” (ibid: 30), she “[sees] round about her, through the chinks of the shutters the hard glare of nature.” (James, 1909, II: 303) That is, she “*sees* the suffering of Charlotte, caused by her act. Her guilt has entered her *vision*.” [my italics] (Nussbaum, 1983: 34) Nussbaum discerns in James’s novels a conception of moral attention that is articulated in primarily visual terms; both in the negative sense in which one can fail to see the situation aright, a representative example being when Maggie likens the Prince to a “*morceau de musée*”, and in the positive sense, as when she begins seeing them in the “hard glare of nature”.

Nussbaum is working against a fully conceptual, or rational, model of what moral knowledge could involve. She has lighted upon perception as a model for how this knowledge might be available to us and vision as the especially relevant kind of perception. And there are good reasons why one might want to do this. Vision seems to impact the perceiver more immediately – lightning is seen before thunder is heard. Vision seems to pinpoint the object being perceived with greater precision – if one can hear a siren over there or feel that an object is round, one can additionally see the ambulance manoeuvring around traffic and mounting the pavement before going through a red light; one can additionally see the difference between a terrestrial globe betraying a north-up bias and a celestial globe modelling the southern constellations. Vision has a wide scope – one can see how tall a doorway is even if the lintel is out of reach. Vision and the associated apparatus and conditions that provide for good vision are extraordinarily prevalent tropes in our language – vision has a wide *scope*, examples can *shed light* on the bigger picture, *observations* are *illuminating* and so on. These features – and many others besides, the list is hardly exhaustive – reinforce an impression that vision provides a surer, more reliable and more fully comprehensive model of the world about us than other sensory apparatus are capable of. My convictions are stronger if I have *seen it with my own eyes*.

In all these cases, vision characterises a perceptual relationship between the subject that sees and the object that is seen. It informs the seer of what is *out there*, be it lightning on the horizon, an ambulance mounting the pavement, a terrestrial globe or a tall doorway. When Nussbaum focuses on vision as the relevant metaphor for moral attention, she frames that attention and activity as a relation between actors and circumstances, situations or agents that confront them from *out there*. But vision as a model of moral attention has important limitations; especially in the separation of seer from object seen, or in prioritising clarity. To delve too deeply into the various associations and implications of a perceptual model of moral

attention that focuses on vision to the exclusion of other sensory modalities would take us too far afield. But it appears to me no accident that Amerigo's last words in *The Golden Bowl* are "See? I see nothing but *you*"; nor is it any sort of accident that Maggie's last action is to "bur[y] her own [eyes] in his breast." (James, 1909, II:369) And if in James's writing, the metaphor of sight and seeing plays a knowledge bearing and morally important role, then it also seems important that in *In Search of Lost Time*, Combray is awoken in Marcel's imagination, and his investigation of involuntary memory is propelled, by the *taste* of a tea infused madeleine. Again, this thesis is not the place to fully explore the difference between, say, moral 'vision' and moral 'taste'. Moral vision is an explanatorily rich model for Nussbaum's purposes and will also suit ours. But it is worth remembering that not everything one perceives is visual, and it may be that a model of moral attention that prioritises a different perceptual modality might be fruitful in a way that Nussbaum's position is closed to.

Be this as it may, Nussbaum's writing on moral vision is quite ambiguous in one important respect. She writes interchangeably about both *this*, and *the*, moral vision that is most appropriately articulated. One therefore needs to be clear about what is meant by "the moral vision" and what is meant by "this moral vision". We would do well to clarify whether this moral vision implies multiple moral visions, multiply articulated in multiple works, or else if the moral vision implies a singular, articulable moral vision. If there are multiple moral visions, one might wonder if it is plausible that the novel is the most appropriate way of articulating all of them. If by contrast one is dealing with the moral vision, authoritative and canonical, supremely articulable in the novel, perhaps writers are misguided in attempting to articulate other moral visions in the novel. Perhaps, moreover, readers are mistaken to gravitate towards those other moral visions.

Nussbaum is keen to remind us that "...we tend to forget how morally controversial [the novel] has been in the eyes of various sorts of religious and secular moralisms... [given that] they attach a dangerous importance to outcomes that lie beyond the control of the moral will." (Nussbaum, 1987: 71) A variety of moral visions, both religious and secular, are articulable, then. But it is unclear how the novel is going to be in an especially privileged position to best articulate them, given the variety of moral visions that have considered it so "morally controversial". According to Nussbaum, the novel's being controversial is due, in part, to it taking literature as its starting point for ethical thought. Moreover, taking literature as its starting point predisposes that ethical thought to attach ethical relevance to particularity and to entertain the epistemological value of feeling. If the articulation of a religious or secular moral vision takes a different starting point for ethical thought than literature and is

underpinned by different commitments – perhaps it rejects feeling as epistemically valuable, or else considers universality rather than particularity as ethically relevant, and so on – it seems implausible that the novel would be the most appropriate vehicle for all these visions.

Perhaps, then, she is instead speaking rather loosely. She does, after all, write about *this* moral vision and its most articulate interpretation in *this* literary medium. Nussbaum may mean to say that the novel is in a privileged position to articulate a particular kind of moral vision, one that has a particular starting point and with its own especial epistemic and ethical attachments. Nevertheless, when she writes ‘this moral vision’, it would be curiously limiting if she meant ‘*only* this moral vision.’ This would amount to saying that this moral vision, perhaps the fiction writer Henry James’s, is most appropriately articulated in the works of the fiction writer Henry James. Not untrue, perhaps. But nor especially illuminating.²⁷

Nussbaum, I take it, cannot mean by ‘the moral vision’, ‘the *only* moral vision’. There are a variety of moral visions and some of these proceed from different starting points, are motivated by different commitments. The novel is not best positioned to articulate them all. Moreover, in order to be nontrivial, Nussbaum must mean by ‘this moral vision’, ‘this kind of moral vision’, rather than ‘this singular moral vision’. This, however, brings into stark relief a conflict that exists in Nussbaum’s account. Though there is space in Nussbaum’s account for multiple moral visions to be articulated by the novel, Nussbaum is principally interested in one; this, Jamesian moral vision (distinct from Henry James’s moral vision).

Now for Nussbaum, this conception of morality – that it is battling; requires vigilance; concerns our viewing things squarely and clearly; takes moral response to include feeling; involves “us” rather than merely “me”; is interested especially in, and about an especial, moral vision – “finds in novels its most appropriate articulation”.²⁸ We would do well to interrogate why the novel articulates it most appropriately; whether and why other literary presentations and forms are inferior vehicles for it.

²⁷ Provided one sets aside any resemblances these articulations have to articulations found in the works of the nonfiction writer Henry James. How permissible, or impermissible, it is to ascribe an attitude or moral vision to the author of a work rather than the work itself, or some narrator or character found in that work, is a separate question to the one currently under review. Nevertheless, it was relevant to our discussion of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* and we will have to deal with it in relation to Nussbaum’s treatment of Proust and Marcel in *In Search of Lost Time*. It will also be important to bear in mind when we turn our attention to Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* in chapter five.

²⁸ Though, to reiterate, not therefore its *only* articulation; indeed, a “most appropriate articulation” seems to imply *less* appropriate articulations, or minimally a *least* appropriate articulation.

Prima facie, Nussbaum seems to answer this question explicitly. She does not intend to mean that “only novels prove appropriate [vehicles], because... many serious dramas will be pertinent...” (Nussbaum, 1990: 46) Provided a work “gives sufficient attention to particularity and emotion” (ibid) – and with the express omission of lyric poetry, comedy and satire, “both in the novel itself and in other genres...” (ibid) – any literary work from any literary genre might be able to articulate the moral vision she has in mind appropriately. But let us see what this means in practice. Nussbaum writes of *The Golden Bowl* that “to work through [its] sentences and... chapters is to become involved in an activity of exploration and unravelling that uses abilities, especially abilities of emotion and imagination, rarely tapped by philosophical texts...” (Nussbaum, 1983: 43) Rarely tapped, too, it transpires, by other forms of literary expression.

For Nussbaum, “the claims of this text... are views whose plausibility and importance are difficult to assess without the sustained exploration of particular lives that a text such as this one makes possible.” (ibid: 40) Nussbaum’s formulation here does, it is true, allow room for the assessment of other texts than *The Golden Bowl* – but in order to qualify, they must be texts “such as this one”. Moreover, her formulation implies some of the qualities a text must possess if they are going to qualify. Crucially, the text must provide a “sustained exploration of particular lives” – a *sustained*, rather than an intense or clear or provocative, exploration is prioritised. This would seem to rule out shorter texts whose forms do not readily accommodate “sustained explorations of particular lives” – sonnets, lyric poetry (already expressly omitted), short stories or novellas, perhaps, and so on – from qualifying as candidate texts. Nussbaum later writes in the same paper that “[t]he novel... is the genre, among the available forms of writing, that most appropriately exemplifies...” (ibid: 46) this moral vision. Neither, then, are alternative long form literary genres – didactic or epic poetry, say – quite such appropriate vehicles for articulating it. Here, it cannot be because they fail to provide sufficiently sustained explorations of their subject matter. Perhaps, then, Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* pays insufficient attention to particularity; perhaps Virgil’s *Georgics* is insufficiently attentive of emotion.²⁹

This focused view and express omission of some genres does come with some advantages. Robert Stecker has written in ‘Immoralism and the anti-theoretical view’ in relation to Phillip Larkin’s poem ‘This Be the Verse’ that, “[a]s an *exploration*, the poem might

²⁹ In chapter five, I will have course to return to Lucretian and Virgilian epistemological claims in the context of an analysis of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. More on this later.

be thought to be pretty one-sided, but if that were presented as a criticism, it would be completely misplaced. No one should expect a balanced and thorough treatment of this complex issue in three stanzas of four lines each. That is not what poems like this do.” [my italics] (Stecker, 2008: 160) Nussbaum’s position ensures that this kind of “completely misplaced” criticism cannot happen. Larkin’s ‘This Be the Verse’ cannot be criticised for being too one-sided in its pessimism, nor Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* for laying emphasis on the nature of *things* rather than *persons*. Sustained exploration of particular lives is “not what poems like th[ese] do”.

But so too does Nussbaum’s position ensure that these works do not enter the conversation at all. She is not interested in investigating what poems like these *can* do. Or, to take an example from the short story form, Joyce writes in *Dubliners* that one “better pass[es] boldly, in the full glory of some passion than [to] fade and wither dismally with age.” (Joyce, 1914: 130) It’s difficult to see how Nussbaum’s position affords room to consider this observation, or *The Dead* more broadly, in all its crystalline pointedness – the exploration is insufficiently sustained. Martha Nussbaum prioritises sustained attention to particular lives, suggesting that this is the focus needed for moral understanding – not epiphanic moments, not transitory relations, not simple or immediate consequences, not general trends, not principles, not symbols or imagery. For her, moral understanding is gained from seeing how a life unfolds; and in order for life to unfold to its fullest, there must be room for complexity, character, relationships, and emotions to develop. She believes that the novel is uniquely well suited to accommodate the requisite unfolding. By referring to writers like Larkin, Lucretius, Virgil and Joyce, all of whom are exploring how life unfolds in various literary genres that are *not* the novel, I am claiming that this assumed focus needs further defence. Nussbaum’s position about the novel makes a substantive claim about where moral meaning is lodged, and it neglects the potential of too many texts.

Section II

Novels are themselves works of moral philosophy

We have seen that when Nussbaum speaks of the novel (or novels) as a work (or works) of moral philosophy, part of her intention is to set limits to the scope of the discussion. In principle, her position can accommodate a variety of literary forms – provided a work pays sufficient attention to particularity and emotion; provided that attention manifests itself in the form of a sustained exploration of particular lives; and provided, too, that work is neither a lyric poem, a satire nor a comedy, any work may qualify as an appropriate vehicle for

articulating the conception of moral attention and moral vision she has in mind. We have seen, moreover, how these conditions might be desirable. Insofar as some works “do not do” some of the things Nussbaum is interested in investigating, those works are guarded from “completely misplaced” criticisms. But it is a heavy-handed kind of safeguarding that entirely omits works that might be possessive of worthwhile yet different qualities. It could be that some lyric poems and satires are also works of moral philosophy – but if this is so we shall not learn it from Nussbaum.

Rather her position does not yield ground to other literary forms than the novel willingly, and appearances of flexibility are illusory. The caveats and restrictions that are imposed mean, in practice, that the pool of candidate works Nussbaum is interested in investigating is principally populated with one kind of literary artefact. As such, when Nussbaum writes that novels are themselves works of moral philosophy, she is signalling an especial interest in ‘The Novel’. But that cannot be all she means – by writing that *novels* are works of moral philosophy, she is also signalling especial instances (and not an especial instance) of the novel she has in mind. A fine-toothed investigation of those especial instances will provide us a clearer idea, not only of what kind of literary form, but also what kind of novel, produces works of moral philosophy. Moreover, we shall have some idea what kind of moral philosophy these works are supposed to produce.

Nussbaum’s work draws our attention to the novel’s potential to be morally controversial. Its dangerousness, and the challenge it poses to traditional moral philosophy, is explicable in terms of its commitment to particularity and feeling. These commitments, Nussbaum argues elsewhere, run contrary to “a view of knowledge [that] has... powerful roots in our intellectual tradition, and especially our philosophical tradition...” (Nussbaum, 1990: 262) This view, moreover, has been “defended by thinkers otherwise as diverse as Plato and Locke” . (ibid) As such, we find in Plato’s *Phaedo* a characterisation of the soul bound to its bodily prison, a “bewitched... collaborat[or] in its own imprisonment.” (81 – 85b) Thus the intellect is wilfully led astray by its attachment to particulars; its epistemic powers blunted rather than sharpened by the emotions. We see too in Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* a concern that:

...the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are perfect cheat...

(Locke, *Essay*, bk. 3, chap.10)

Locke's conception of "the artificial and figurative application of words" is entirely at odds with Nussbaum's commitment to the epistemological value of feeling. Words, applied with figurative artifice, "insinuate wrong ideas"; "move the passions and *thereby* mislead the judgment";³⁰ and are a "perfect cheat". Rather than provide us tools with which to combat our obtuseness and refusal of vision, ethical thought that begins with literature is dangerous because it encourages those besetting vices – "[s]elf-deception about our condition, when it occurs, is the result of the corruption of reason by feeling and desire." (Nussbaum, 1990: 263) Nussbaum is breaking with this tradition and, so that she might do so, selects works that are seeking out "...another way to be rational and moral, a way that is more hospitable to life..." (Nussbaum, 1987: 66)

We can now see how Henry James's novels serve Nussbaum's purposes especially well. In his novel *The Ambassadors* we meet Lambert Strether who endeavours after "a view that is internally coherent... that is broadly shared and sharable" and framed by a "standing interest in consistency and community." (ibid, 61) In *The Golden Bowl*, James introduces us to Maggie Verver who initially believes that "...in every conflict of loves or of values, one can... reach an allegedly guiltless consistency and harmony..." (Nussbaum, 1983: 26) Both novels prize a "perceptual morality" (Nussbaum, 1987); an "intense scrutiny of particulars of moral attention" (Nussbaum, 1987); and endeavour to explore where these commitments are brittle and vulnerable. Readers give both Strether and Maggie close and sustained attention, as they undergo radical moral changes of perception over the course of their respective novels. Both novels qualify on her view as candidate works of moral philosophy, and so we have gone some way to answering which especial instances Nussbaum pinpoints as representative. But we will have only gone so far. Noteworthy, of course, is the shared authorship of these works. Perhaps James's oeuvre generates works of moral philosophy; perhaps they share a commitment; and perhaps the ethical thought they begin with is singular. But still we must answer if differently authored novels – with similar commitments and similar ethical thoughts – are also works of moral philosophy or not. What we require, then, is a work by a different author that shares many of the same commitments to *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* and see whether Nussbaum comes to a similar, or dissimilar, conclusion about that work's suitability as a work of moral philosophy. Happily, we have a prime example close to hand.

³⁰ Nussbaum draws our attention especially to the inference and she is right to do so – as Locke conceives it, by moving our passions, words *thereby* mislead our judgement.

Nussbaum's paper 'Love's Knowledge' treats of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. In it, she focuses on a decisive episode that bridges either side of *The Prisoner* and *The Fugitive* – Albertine's flight. In the aftermath of Françoise's revelation that "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone", Marcel – and *not* Proust; more on this later – realises:

I had been mistaken in thinking that I could see clearly into my own heart. But this knowledge, which the shrewdest perceptions of the mind would not have given me, had now been brought to me, hard, glittering, strange, like crystallised salt, by the abrupt reaction of pain.

(Proust, III.426)

Nussbaum notes that "[t]he shock of loss and the attendant... pain show him that his theories were forms of self-deceptive rationalization." (Nussbaum, 1988: 260) She continues, these self-deceptive theories are representative of a "primary" and "ubiquitous... reflex" to "conceal[...] need", "conceal[...] particularity" and "conceal [from us...] all the pain-inflicting features of the world". They make us "dead to their assaults" rather than deaden the assaults themselves. But pain, the shocking pain of particular loss, reveals to us in ugly clarity "the all-important distinction between the face of habit and the true face of the heart." (ibid) Marcel is committed, then, here and elsewhere, to the epistemological value of feeling, with a particular emphasis on the epistemological value of pain. And though we should do the novel a disservice to interpret it as *only* interested in the epistemological value of pain – the taste of infused tea and madeleine is, after all, attended by an involuntary feeling of joy – pain and its relation to knowledge is a motif that runs throughout the work. We can see it in several of the early volumes, spanning from *The Way by Swann's* to *The Guermantes Way*. Nussbaum does an excellent job of demonstrating it here with Albertine's flight, Marcel powerless to dislodge this "dread deity, so riveted to one's being" (III.426) by calm, methodical intellectual scrutiny. And we see it, too, in the novel's final volume *Finding Time Again*.

Moreover, we can see Marcel's keen interest in "the ethical relevance of particularity" and the self-deceptive devices and habits we employ to conceal its relevance demonstrated not only in this scene but throughout the work. Marcel is obsessively interested in the particular object of his love, be it Gilberte, Odette, Oriane, Albertine. He is obsessed by their particular sexual behaviour and entirely unable to understand it because it is *theirs*. So particular is Albertine's sexuality that it is entirely incomprehensible to him. Homosexuality as a phenomenon doesn't repel Marcel; female homosexuality baffles and scares him, precisely because he has no ability to understand what Albertine, Odette, Andrée, Mlle Vinteuil or the

two maidservants he pays to have sex in front of him are *feeling*.³¹ And one might, therefore, be presented with a candidate work of moral philosophy, differently worked out and with different implications, but nevertheless grounded by commitments it shares with James's novels.

The Ambassadors, *The Golden Bowl* and *In Search of Lost Time* are, taken together and apart, revealing of Nussbaum's position on which novels are themselves works of moral philosophy. Note that to be a work of moral philosophy does not require of Nussbaum that she endorse the ideas or share the commitments found in that work. She explicitly positions herself against works whose ideas and commitments have strong roots in the philosophical tradition. She has identified James's novels as being among the best accounts she knows of these matters; that is, propounding a vision of morality and conception of moral attention that is morally controversial in the eyes of many secular and religious moralisms. She has diagnosed as a besetting vice a refusal of vision; a precise opposite of Orwell's "power of facing" (Orwell, 1946). And yet, presented Marcel's conclusions in Proust's novel, confronted with Marcel's "hard, glittering, strange... [and] pain[ful]" knowledge, Nussbaum 'refuses' this 'vision'³² and laments that "[w]hat Marcel feels is a gap or lack in himself, an open wound a blow to the heart, a hell inside himself. Is all of this really love of Albertine?" (Nussbaum, 1988: 497)

Nussbaum's eloquent diagnosis of Marcel's emotional turmoil makes the jarring weirdness of her question all the starker. Her question implies a belief that no emotion, judgement, engagement or relation involving love can be destructive, become unhealthy or diseased. But this is precisely the territory the *Albertine disparue* sequence is investigating. We are presented with an unhealthily self-absorbed young man undergoing the most emotionally searing moment of his life. A moment so seismic he has to inform all his various 'selves' – "some of whom [he] had not seen for quite a while" – of his sorrow at her departure. (V.398) A moment so unbalancing he becomes temporarily alarming and unhinged, invites a child he finds on the street home with him, considers himself insulted by the little girl's parents who do not accept his innocence. (ibid. 399-407) A moment so overwhelming he succumbs to waves

³¹ So too is he obsessed by the particular contents of particular letters in one particular pocket of one particular kimono. For a detailed discussion of the 'kimono episode', see Joshua Landy's *Philosophy as Fiction* (2004)

³² Or perhaps we should say "perception", given the earlier discussion about perceptual modalities. I don't intend to overstate the point, but it is nevertheless interesting that Nussbaum is interested in 'perceptual equilibrium' yet does not explore the fact that Marcel experiences *disequilibrium* when *hears* of Albertine's departure, nor that his involuntary memories are triggered by *taste* (the tea-infused madeleine), or *touch* (the napkin).

of panic, thinks of Albertine in his sleep, feels his suffering increase upon awaking. (ibid. 415) Moreover, it is a moment that will echo and reverberate throughout the rest of his life. However much time passes, in spite of all the changes Marcel undergoes and observes and experiences, despite the self-deceiving quality of habit, Albertine's ghost continues to haunt him years later. Even as Marcel tells us in his old age, "my memory, even my involuntary memory, had lost all recollection of the love of Albertine", we are reminded "there [are] also involuntary memor[ies]... which live on longer." He lies "in [his] room in Tansonville and, still half asleep... calls out: 'Albertine!'... thinking [his] dead lover was lying beside [him] as she often used to..." (VI.5) If all this is not really love – love gone wrong, perhaps, disfigured by jealousy and ruined by selfishness – one wonders what Nussbaum thinks all of this really is.

Because surely it is *something*. To ask whether all of this is really love isn't just a strange and discordant response from a reader as insightful and penetrating as Nussbaum. Nor is it merely to miss the point, to get side-tracked by a divergence in what narrator and reader associate love with; we would not have solved the problem if we substituted for love some other emotion more amenable to Nussbaum's sensibilities. A much older man is trying to make sense of the formative experience in his young life. He is making a real effort to see and represent that experience as it struck him then, as it strikes him now. Nussbaum's question is a refusal to make the same effort. Some account of this refusal, and an analysis of its suitability given Nussbaum's other commitments and claims, is in order. As it stands, it seems entirely contrary to her broader enterprise. That is, if James's and Proust's work offer comparable attentiveness to particulars and feeling, comparable sustained scrutiny of lives, but the morally significant fruits of this attention are rejected in the case of Proust, it seems that Martha Nussbaum needs to explain this. There must be a way to distinguish the experiences of moral perception these works offer. It does not seem she can appeal to a prior commitment to a non-Proustian conception of love; her enterprise rather commits her to taking the novel seriously as carrying philosophical weight.

Section III

We can find in novels a paradigm of moral activity

I have been building up a characterisation of Nussbaum's position on the relations that hold between morality and literature. First, the works Nussbaum is interested in are in the business of articulating an especial moral vision; they do not manifest a general, loosely defined 'perceptiveness' or 'insightfulness' but instead engage with the content with which they are built and the questions with which they are interested in a direct, focused and 'perceptual'

manner with, moreover, an emphasis placed on their possessing a moral *vision* rather than, say, a moral taste – they all “make an effort to see and really represent”. Second, they do not provide articulations of just one available moral vision. Instead, there are myriad available in the marketplace of ideas and these works articulate one specific type. Third, it is possible, perhaps probable, their articulations shall be considered controversial by various sorts of traditional moral philosophies because of the commitments that underpin them – the works shall recognise the ethical relevance of particularity and, too, the epistemological value of feeling. Fourth, they are not the only available vehicles for articulating this, arguably controversial, moral vision, but rather the most appropriate vehicles. In theory, works might be selected from a variety of genres. In practice, some genres are poorly equipped to carry out the moral vision Nussbaum is interested in. Recall that in order to understand how life unfolds, sufficient space must be available for complexity, character, relationships, and emotions to develop. The kinds of works that might furnish this sort of literary and ethical experience must be “involved in an activity of exploration and unravelling that uses abilities, especially abilities of emotion and imagination, rarely tapped by philosophical texts...” (Nussbaum, 1990: 46) Though a genre, like the short story, may have “sufficient structural complexity” (ibid) for Nussbaum’s purposes, her project involves working out “...views whose plausibility and importance are difficult to assess without [a] sustained exploration of particular lives...” (ibid) For this reason, “the ethical role of [lyric poetry,] comedy and satire” (ibid) is expressly omitted from the discussion. As such, the most appropriate vehicle is very often the novel. Fifth, not just any novel. We have seen that, despite its especial interest in perception rather than mere perceptiveness; despite its commitment to the ethical relevance of particularity and the epistemological value of feeling; despite its being a novel of significant structural complexity and despite its sustained exploration of particular lives, Nussbaum does not consider *In Search of Lost Time* a work amenable to her purposes. To understand why, we must now look at the third claim Nussbaum makes about the novel we introduced earlier in the chapter – “the novel can be a paradigm of moral activity.”

To be clear, Nussbaum’s position is not merely that from works of literature we are able to identify circumstances or events that the philosopher can then subject to scrutiny. What is ethically valuable about *The Golden Bowl* cannot be captured by condensing it to a few, or even a good many, compact statements. The elements of *The Golden Bowl* are morally significant, but so too is the form in which those elements are cast. If they were differently cast, found their expression in some different form, then its moral vision would be differently, less appropriately, articulated. Thus, when Nussbaum holds up *The Golden Bowl* as a paradigm of

moral activity, it isn't a paraphrased or abstracted rendering of it that qualifies as a paradigm. As she puts it:

How can we hope to confront these characters and their predicament, if not in these words and sentences, whose very ellipses and circumnavigations rightly convey the lucidity of their bewilderment, the precision of their indefiniteness?

(Nussbaum, 1987: 170)

This question helps narrow in on what features Nussbaum is looking out for. There are "characters" (not a single character) and "their predicament" (not their isolated predicaments). The events that take place in *The Golden Bowl*, and so too the implications of those events, are broadly shared and sharable. We are supposed to "confront" the characters and their predicament rather than, say, absorb these narrative features passively. We should not be obtuse, nor refuse to view their situation aright. We must scrutinise the particular circumstances these characters face intensely and vigilantly, even when the effort of so doing is painful. "Lucidity" is juxtaposed with "bewilderment" – indeed, these characters are so bewildering because they are conveyed so lucidly. "Precision" is juxtaposed with "indefiniteness" – indeed, we are aware of how indefinite and precarious their predicament is because of how precisely this is described. Moreover, all this can be grasped fully only so long as we follow the "ellipses" and digressions James sets up, by following his "circumnavigations", by taking the long way around. We cannot hope to fully learn about or from the morally resonant qualities of *The Golden Bowl* second hand, or vicariously; one must investigate "these words and sentences"; and must do it for oneself.

The Golden Bowl stands as a paradigm of moral activity for Nussbaum, then, because it both champions and facilitates an engagement with multiple actors or agents in a shared and sharable space. Because the nature of that engagement is proactive, honest, vigilant and eschews complacency even when the circumstances to be engaged with are difficult or unpleasant. Because it acknowledges that life involves stuttering ellipses, involves going in circles, involves digressions and circumnavigations that more schematic analyses of what the good life entails can be blind to. Because of a recognition that bewilderment and indefiniteness are human. Because of a recognition that lucidity and precision are human. Because, ultimately, moral activity cannot be fully learned about or acted out second hand; one has to carry it out for oneself. Analysing Proust's novel with reference to these conditions may highlight in what ways it appears deficient for Nussbaum's purposes.

On her reading, *In Search of Lost Time* cannot be charged with failing to face up to difficult or unpleasant circumstances and predicaments. The “intellect actively aids and abets habit”. (Nussbaum, 1988: 457) Habit conceals need, particularity, the pain-inflicting features of the world and, therefore, “the true face of the heart”. Anguish penetrates further into psychology than psychology itself (III.425) because being confronted with the painful “shock of loss” reveals our various concealments; we cannot refuse to see the truth because it is too glaring, too overwhelming, too “riveting”.

It also seems to capture the ellipses and circumnavigations that characterise life. Both the way by Swann and the Mesegliese way take Marcel back to the Combray country house – no matter that the routes they describe seem so different to someone, like Marcel’s mother, unable to recognise how closely they take one home. The structure of the seven volumes follows this pattern, taking the reader by various circumnavigating, elliptical paths to a point we were never very far from to begin with, to a ‘coming full circle’ as the way by Swann converges with the Guermantes way.

And Proust’s novel shows time and again that attempts to learn about and from life’s digressions, circumnavigations and ellipses second hand will not be fruitful. It must be *your* anguish that penetrates, *your* pain that reveals the true face of *your* heart. Learning of someone else’s pain and anguish second hand is insufficient. Knowledge is bought with your own suffering, not someone else’s. The “Swann in Love” sequence offers a salient example. The similarities one notices – Swann and Marcel’s similar predicaments, their similar jealousies, their similar blind eyes and their similar overbearing, controlling patterns of behaviour – hint at how repetitive and insidious a morbid, unhealthy relationship to love and sex can be. It is clearly intended that Marcel’s life bear resemblance to Swann’s in some of its aspects. The reader of *The Prisoner* might recognise various allusions to and hear echoes of Swann’s love affair with Odette in Marcel’s entrapment of Albertine. They might recall that “Swann in Love” is the only sequence of the novel cycle narrated in third person. They might appreciate that Marcel is reporting both tales and might meditate on how they each went wrong, how their protagonists each neglected the object of their desire, each allowed jealousy to dominate them. But should they do so, they will have to recognise that Marcel and Swann’s experiences of love and jealousy are not interchangeable. Indeed, the differences are thrown into sharper relief by virtue of the similarities. Marcel could not understand pain’s hard, glittering, strange and crystal-like quality by learning of Swann’s story; knowing it could not have shielded him from the shock of loss experienced with Françoise’s words.

Here, indeed, we locate the salient issue for Nussbaum. Remember that *The Golden Bowl* provides an account of characters and their predicament. In *In Search of Lost Time*, we have a character recognising similarities yet failing to learn from various predicaments. *In Search of Lost Time* does not express a paradigm of moral activity because "... the other's will, thoughts and feelings are, for Marcel, *paradigmatic* of that which cannot be had." [my italics] (Nussbaum, 1988: 497) "Proustian scepticism and solitude" (ibid: 500) are not broadly shared or sharable. Instead, Marcel's predicament is impenetrably solipsistic; his scepticism is overwhelming; his characterisation of love and the knowledge we can glean from it peculiarly onanistic. Nussbaum wonders if "...all of this is really love of Albertine?" Her answer is that Albertine is barely involved; "Marcel's view implies that there is nothing really but masturbation." (ibid: 506)

Nussbaum's reading of Proust – especially her reading of Marcel's relationship to love and sex – is frequently insightful, frequently instructive and always powerfully communicated. There does not need to be a canonical, prescribed, true or correct interpretation of *In Search of Lost Time* for Nussbaum's to be contrasted with. Hers is a valuable contribution to the discussion independent of whether one agrees with her reading of Proust or not. Now, when Nussbaum writes about *The Golden Bowl*, things are somewhat different. Here, it is as if there is a canonical and definitive way to read it. If one attends to Maggie's situation correctly, one is compelled to agree with the decision she reaches and the severance she effects with Charlotte and Adam at the end of the novel. Reaching that decision and effecting that severance are not harmless actions, but they are right.

This seems far from obvious to me. In order to reach this position, Maggie has acted as matchmaker for her widowed, wealthy father and (comparatively poor but nevertheless obscenely wealthy) friend from school; maintained an intense and exclusionary relationship with that wealthy widowed father; in the process jeopardised both hers and her father's marriages (also, therefore, her husband's and her best friend cum daughter in law's); been by turns blind to her husband's and friend's extra marital affair and then blind to her school friend's unrealisable aspirations to motherhood, her husband's alienation from his son; insisted that the appropriate resolution to this melodramatic mess is not to confront either party about the affair, but instead engineer her father's return to America (her school friend of course in tow); and, in so doing, deprive her son of his Grandfather's care and love, oblivious to routines, attachments or expectations the infant principino might have evolved. Perhaps the appropriate response is not to assent to Maggie's behaviour. Perhaps *The Golden Bowl* is a cautionary tale never to invest in flawed crystals.

This brief interpretation is not advanced to, as it were, refute or cancel out Nussbaum's. She makes many incisive, thoughtful and thought-provoking observations about the novel. Rather, it is intended to highlight the observation that neither should Nussbaum's account treat alternate readings as specious. A consistently vigilant effort to scrutinise the particulars of moral attention; a maintained rejection of our besetting vices; a sustained refusal to be obtuse; and a resolution to see and really represent would not merely be consistent with accommodating a variety of readings. Rather one can say something stronger. It implies that one should be open to them. One should be open to various candidate paradigms of moral activities, open to experimentation as to which is most successful, open to the possibility that this might change, depending on how different people view different particulars and attach different significance to different experiences. Nussbaum's question "is all of this really love of Albertine?", her dismissal of Marcel's heartbreak as solipsistic, her inference that for Marcel there is nothing but masturbation, does more than miss the point. If one scratches the surface, one sees that she is doing real violence to these ambitious possibilities. Her narrowing of what novels, and what literary genres, count as candidate works of moral philosophy; her narrowing of what moral visions can most appropriately be articulated by the novel; and her narrowing of what paradigms of moral activity can be manifest in the novel, represent, in my view, a refusal of vision. They indicate that she has yielded, despite herself, to that constant force that makes for muddlement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed Martha Nussbaum's position regarding the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. This has involved providing an account of her analysis of the novel as a work of moral philosophy. I have argued that Nussbaum can be interpreted as offering an approach to the novel that is consistent with 'literary ethicism', in the sense John Gibson means the term. That is, Nussbaum believes that ethical and aesthetic value have an important relationship to one another – as such, she is definitely not an aestheticist – but the intricacies of this relationship, and the way in which these evaluative frameworks relate to one another, is unlike either the immoralism from chapter two, or the ethicism from chapter one.

This is because she conceives of ethical value, as it pertains to literary works, in its 'thick' rather than 'thin' sense. Her position is a signal, although not unqualified, improvement upon either of the strategies from chapter one or the immoralism from chapter two as a result. She is committed to an account of how literature relates to and experiments with ways of living,

and to the extent her analysis of the novel stays true to this commitment, it seems to me that her position is compelling. However, when her account makes moral judgements about a literary work's 'ethical experiment', when it determines that one novel 'gets it right' whilst another novel 'gets it wrong', I contend that her position runs into difficulties which render her approach unappealing. Nevertheless, there are a great deal of constructive and positive insights that can be learnt from her exploration of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. As such, and in order to determine which elements of her account are worth preserving (as well as which elements are best avoided), I looked in close detail at three interrelated claims she makes about the novel.

In Section I, I interpreted her claim, "this conception of moral attention and moral vision finds in novels its most appropriate articulation", to involve a rejection of two besetting vices – namely, obtuseness and a refusal of vision. I also observed how the conception of moral attention Nussbaum is interested in involves a set of epistemic and moral commitments that are quite characteristic of 'literary' approaches to ethical discursive reasoning, but that various more conventional moral philosophies might consider controversial. I broadly approve of the moral vision Nussbaum thinks the novel is most appropriately place to articulate, although I did tentatively suggest, and in a parenthetical way, that an overreliance on moral *vision* may not capture the full breadth of associations that a perceptual model of ethics might offer. I did not wish to linger overlong on this concern, however, because of a more significant area of contention I had with Nussbaum's account. More problematically, Nussbaum's first claim is too narrow about the kinds of literary genres that might appropriately articulate the moral vision she is interested in, as well as too narrow about the kinds of moral vision literature is capable of articulating. That is to say, by omitting certain genres from her discussion altogether such as, but not limited to, lyric poetry and comedy, she provides a narrow, misrepresentative and distorted account of how literature and its relationship to ethics. It seems plausible that a range of literary works, borne from the practice's broad catalogue of creative genres, might articulate a variety of morally attentive visions. Nussbaum's narrow interest – in *the* novel and *this* moral vision – risks missing out on, and perhaps even misinterpreting, this enriched possibility. Within the tight strictures she has imposed, Nussbaum's account might well be right – perhaps the novel *is* best placed to explore the kind of ethical issues she is interested in. Nevertheless, Nussbaum's position is curiously blinkered and myopic, given that she places such an emphasis on *vision* in her characterisation of the literary-ethical relationship.

In the second section, I observed that her claim, "novels are themselves works of moral philosophy", did not *preclude* other literary genres from also qualifying as works of moral

philosophy in theory, but that the sustained exploration of particular lives required of the work, as well as the requisite application of emotional and creative-imaginative abilities, meant in practice that the novel is best placed to be the kind of work of moral philosophy Nussbaum is interested in investigating. Here again, though, I argued that Nussbaum's position was applied much more narrowly and myopically than its scope could accommodate. To bring this out, I contrasted her analysis of Henry James's novels *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* with Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. I argued that her literary criticism of these various works is incisive, well-observed, and illuminating of the texts. However, I also asserted that Nussbaum's broader enterprise commits her to taking the novel seriously as carrying philosophical weight. Given that *The Golden Bowl*, *The Ambassadors* and *In Search of Lost Time* share the kinds of commitment that were described in Section I; given that they each, in their own ways, are consistent with the view that obtuseness and a refusal of vision are insidious habits we should try to overcome in our lives; and given their respective sustained explorations of particular lives, it seems as though we might be presented with three good candidates for 'works of moral philosophy' in Nussbaum's terms. In the case of James's novels, she makes good on this commitment. In the case of Proust's, she signally, and surprisingly, fails to. Nussbaum's position would be stronger, I think, if she granted that *In Search of Lost Time* was also a work of moral philosophy, albeit not one entirely to her tastes. Her failure to do this is indicative of where Nussbaum herself yields to a refusal of vision unacceptably.

In Section III, I examined Nussbaum's third claim, "we can find in novels a paradigm of moral activity". The kind of paradigmatic moral activity Nussbaum thinks the novel can manifest looks something like the following. It will involve, among other things, a proactive engagement with a community in a shared and sharable space; an acknowledgement that living attentively and fully in the world will involve both ellipses and circumnavigations; moments of precision and lucidity as well as periods of indefiniteness and bewilderment; and, perhaps most crucially, that this activity cannot be experienced vicariously but instead requires of finely aware and richly responsible moral human beings that they undertake the ethical investigation for themselves. I contrasted the kind of moral activity that appears in *The Golden Bowl* with the kind that appears in *In Search of Lost Time* and argued that the principal difference between the two cases, or at least the principal salient difference for Nussbaum's purposes, appeared to be the solipsistic thread that runs through Proust's novel and is proactively eschewed in James's. My issue with Nussbaum's argument is not primarily to do with any specific interpretative divergence with the particulars of her reading of either work. As I have stated at length throughout this chapter, I think that her interpretations of Proust and James are

stimulating and valuable, whether I agree with them or no. And in a sense, this is the fundamental problem with Nussbaum's account.

It should be permissible for a variety of thoughtful, morally attentive and emotionally imaginative readers to elicit a variety of ethically important observations from literary works if they are structured in the way Martha Nussbaum says they are. The expression of a new and unusual, perhaps uncomfortable and alien, ethical viewpoint in a work ought to represent an opportunity to experiment with that viewpoint, interrogate it and imaginatively explore its implications, determine how the viewpoint might align neatly, or else clash violently, with pre-existing sentiments that the reader has brought to their literary experience of the work. This, it seems, could be part of ethical value's contribution to literature, as well as part of literature's contribution to ethical value. Nussbaum's position appears to have many of the pieces in place to accommodate the possibility that certain literary works might expand our imaginative horizons in the way Clavel-Vazquez argues the rough heroine can. Instead, what emerges from Nussbaum's analysis of Proust's and James's literary output is a dismissive rejection of the viewpoint expressed in *In Search of Lost Time* on the basis that it does not accord in all particulars with the viewpoint that emerges from *The Golden Bowl*. Moreover, these viewpoints might not be the only ones that *could* emerge from the texts, but rather the ones that Nussbaum has elicited from them. The dismissal is puzzling, therefore, because it seems antithetical to her broader enterprise. Despite her attentive and perceptive reading, one gets the sense that Martha Nussbaum has succumbed to obtuseness and a refusal of vision at a crucial point in her investigation of the relationship between literary and ethical value.

I will close this chapter by briefly offering a cautious endorsement of an observation Nussbaum makes toward the end of 'Perceptive Equilibrium'. There, she writes that the goal of ethical reasoning might sometimes be to explore "a dynamic tension between two possible irreconcilable visions." (Nussbaum, 1987: 77) It seems to me that literary engagement might well involve trying to reckon with this dynamic tension – between works that are composed at different literary epochs, between works that express different attitudes toward similar themes and thematic concepts, between works that share various commitments and yet employ them in divergent, incompatible ways, and so on. What's more, it appears plausible that some literary works might make this dynamic tension between irreconcilable visions their central focus. The specifics of how this might be realised, and the implications this will have to my account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, will be fleshed out over the course of this thesis' remaining chapters.

Chapter Four – Literature as a social practice, the world of the work and the work in the world

Introduction

In this thesis, I have so far sought to provide an account of how ethical and aesthetic value relate to one another. So far, I have concluded that neither the moralist's account, grouping together various distinct but related positions such as Berys Gaut's ethicist and Noël Carroll's moderate moralism, the autonomist's approach, as characterised by various kinds of formalism, aestheticism and so on, nor the immoralist positions put forward by A.W Eaton and Matthew Kieran, are satisfactory. This is because they all focus on answering the thin problem of how aesthetic value relates to moral value, rather than the thicker problem of how aesthetic value relates to ethical value. I am sympathetic to immoralism. But, if I am going to endorse some form of immoralism, I want to ensure that it is coherently incorporated into an account that is sensitive to the thick relationship and not merely attendant to the thin one. My immoralist strategy will have to engage more deeply with a work's ethical dimension, and the relation or relations that dimension bears to a work's artistic dimension, than existing immoralist accounts seem willing to envisage.

To this end, in chapter three I examined Martha Nussbaum's work on moral vision and the novel as a work of moral philosophy. I believe one can reasonably describe Nussbaum as a kind of ethicist, but her brand of ethicist is interested in a very different relationship between ethical and aesthetic value than the kinds of moralism canvassed in chapter one. Her work describes a fascinating tension right at the heart of these questions – certain novels are, at once, themselves works of moral philosophy and morally controversial – and her solutions to these controversies are grounded upon very illuminating and attentive readings of the literary texts. But she, too, offers a Procrustean solution to the problem. Her position is too narrow about which novels, and which literary genres, count as candidate works of moral philosophy; which moral visions can be articulated by the novel; and what paradigms of moral activity can be manifest in the novel. As a result, Nussbaum's thick, literary ethicist inadequately describes the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value.

Nevertheless, her position has the considerable virtue of taking literature's commitment to investigating perennially, humanly interesting content seriously. Her position is willing to re-examine the ways in which literature can approach questions of enduring human interest. She is also alert to the fact that literature's approach is oftentimes very different to the kind of

approach one comes across in, say, philosophical treatises, or various religious discourses and rituals. The commitments that underpin literature are not the same as those that underpin either philosophy or religion, even if the themes they investigate spring from the same cultural fount. If we must reject thick literary ethicism and instead seek out thick autonomism, it would be desirable if those virtues could be preserved. Therefore, because Lamarque and Olsen's account of literature as a social practice provides a richer account of the conventions that underpin literature than Posner's aestheticism, as well as better reasons for insisting upon a separation between the spheres of ethical and aesthetic evaluation, a thoroughgoing analysis of their position is an ideal next place to turn.

In section one, I will provide an exegesis of Lamarque and Olsen's account of literature as a social practice. I will examine the conceptual apparatus they use to describe literary practice and then the two aspects in which they believe literary value to reside. I shall also outline their reasons for thinking that religious, philosophical and literary practice, though they share an interest in the same perennial thematic concepts, are not merely distinct but nonoverlapping. I will argue that Lamarque and Olsen's characterisation of literature as a practice is a useful and instructive one in myriad ways. First, their procedure for describing and categorising the various concepts that constitute literary practice is, a few interpretative disagreements notwithstanding, well-chosen because it can accommodate the fact literature is a communicative, relational practice rather than a static one. Second, it does not reduce the practice to any one, invariable constitutive concept or convention but rather envisages it as being manifested by various evolving interrelated concepts and conventions. Third, it correctly believes the creative-imaginative and mimetic aspects are crucial to the value-making conventions of literary practice. Fourth, it provides compelling reasons for conceiving of these aspects in relation to their participation in themes of perennial human interest – in its creative-imaginative aspect because the creative imposition of form on subject contributes to an engagement with those enduringly resonant themes; and in its mimetic aspect because, “for the sake of tradition and convenience” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 265), ‘mimetic’ is the term they use to encapsulate humanly interesting content.

I nevertheless maintain that their position provides an incomplete, distorted picture of literary practice and therefore gets wrong the relationships that hold between it and other social practices. In particular, I profoundly disagree with their characterisation of how literary and philosophical practice relate, and therefore their account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. In section two, I will flesh out this disagreement by considering three especial problems I have with their account.

First, I will observe that the perennial thematic concepts they believe are constitutive of literary value are also constitutive of works that are, on their own account, not of literary value. Furthermore, some of the works they believe *are* of literary value seem to engage with topical thematic concepts just as much as other works they do not think pass muster. I do not have an issue with any specific evaluative disagreement – practices are, after all, blurry at the boundaries. But their robust guarding of the boundaries and their very definite judgements regarding which works do and do not qualify as literary is somewhat at odds with this. They appear to want to keep literary practice cleaner than it is, and their occasional ad hoc explanations for why some works are literary, and some others are not, betrays this desire.

Second, I will observe that despite the attention paid to both non-literary fiction and non-literary social practice, there is far too little attention paid to nonfictional literature. There is, of course, a rich history of nonfictional novels, a notable recent example being Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle* sequence, but the real target of the observation is the fact that some canonical works of philosophy, history, religion and so on, are also valuable literary works. A characterisation of literary practice which does not explore this facet of the practice appears incomplete; perhaps problematically so.

Third, whilst I agree with them that these three practices are distinct, as indeed are various other practices with similar interests, such as history, oratory, politics and so on, I will argue they are mistaken to claim that these distinct practices cannot overlap. Distinct practices routinely overlap. In some cases, the overlap might be of little or no interest, sometimes it might be parasitic and unhealthy, sometimes it might be symbiotic. One might have different things to say about each of these kinds of relationship – but that they are *nonoverlapping* doesn't seem to be one of them. I will argue that because they insist upon the nonoverlapping of literary, philosophical and religious practice, Lamarque and Olsen fail to capture how these practices are oftentimes practiced – there seems to be an extraordinary proclivity for each practice to discuss the other, given they are not supposed to overlap – and thus inadequately and implausibly characterise how they relate to one another.

These problems together will act as motivation for section three of this chapter. I will summarise where I think Lamarque and Olsen make a positive contribution to the debate, highlighting in particular that I think they that are right to conceive of literature as one amongst myriad social practices; are right to argue that the creative-imaginative and mimetic aspects are each crucial to understanding the evaluative conventions of literary practice; and are right that these aspects engage with perennial thematic concepts. Nevertheless, although their desire to ensure the practice of literature is not subsumed by or subordinate to some other practice is

well motivated, Lamarque and Olsen's characterisation of the practice is distorted by the limitations they place on it and their insistence that being distinct entails being nonoverlapping. Their position means that a work cannot at once be evaluable by ethics and literature, and this is a profound mistake, comparable to the one Carroll thinks the aestheticist is making. On the contrary, some canonical literary works "...can *at the same time* serve... [and be] intended to serve another function... [my italics]" (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994: 436) than literature, and Lamarque and Olsen's insistence that this cannot happen is a shortcoming with their account that must be addressed.

The chapter will close by noting an observation Lamarque and Olsen make toward the end of their book. There, they write that the "...present account seems to stretch the notion of mimesis... [but this] is because the debate about the positive relationship between the world and the work, which must be present to guarantee a universally interesting content, has already stretched the concept." (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 438-9) This will serve as a launchpad for my own position, expanded upon in the final chapter with an analysis of some literary examples we have become familiar with throughout this thesis, that the key to understanding the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is in investigating the relationship between the world of the work and the work in the world. This relationship is crucial to my approach for answering the question 'What makes bad books good?' I contend that understanding immorality can be a way of examining one's relation to the work and its world, and to one's own world. The encounter with 'immorality in art' can therefore be valuable for encounters with moral otherness and for exploratory testing of where you stand and why.

Section I

Literature as a social practice

The concepts of literature and fiction are, in Lamarque and Olsen's treatment, "...distinct and invite separate analysis." (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994: 255) The distinction lies, at least partially, in their extension. Fiction, they tell us, "...covers a large subclass of all invented stories, which can be realized in a number of media... 'Literature', on the other hand, covers only a small subclass of *linguistic* expressions..." (ibid) Even if *Dynasty* and *The Tempest* are both covered by the 'fiction' subclass, "...the majority of linguistic expressions, even those in the fictive mode, do not fall under the concept 'literature'." (ibid) Crucially, moreover, literary works and fictions are not different kinds of text; there are "no syntactic,

semantic, or even loosely ‘rhetorical’ features of a text that define it as a literary work.” (ibid) Instead, the difference involves what kinds of concept fiction and literature each are. In this regard, Lamarque and Olsen claim that whereas fiction is a descriptive concept, “[l]iterature is an evaluative concept.” (ibid) Both *Dynasty* and *The Tempest* can be described as fictions; one identifies *The Tempest* or, more implausibly, *Dynasty* as a literary work by employing the relevant evaluative metrics.

There being no rhetorical features as such for defining a work as literary, the onus is therefore on Lamarque and Olsen to provide an account of how a literary work is identified and evaluated. They begin by suggesting that literature may, in addition to being an evaluative concept, be understood as “an institutional concept... that is defined within a practice involving authors... texts, and readers.” (ibid) The reader and the author are each essential to the identification. The reader must read and understand the text they are presented with as belonging to the practice of literature; the author must intend for the text to be so understood. The author must intend for the text they produce to invoke the literary response, and the reader must be invoked to respond literarily, for a text to be identified as a work of literature. Lamarque and Olsen “call this whole complex of attitudes the *literary stance*”³³ and adopting the literary stance toward a text entails of a reader that they “identify it as a literary work and apprehend it in accordance with the conventions of literary practice.” (ibid: 256)

As they put it, “[o]nly by using [the relevant] concepts and conventions can the reader identify the features of a literary work construed *as a literary work* within the practice.” (ibid: 257) It is therefore crucial to have a firm grasp of what concepts and conventions are definitional and regulative of literary practice – those that make the concept of literature, and

³³ It is worth pausing for a moment to unpack some of the consequences of their position. For Lamarque and Olsen, the institution of literature requires of an author that they intend for the text they produce to invoke the literary stance – that is, intend for it to be read within the framework of conventions that define the practice of the institution. Moreover, the institution of literature requires of a reader that they adopt the literary stance toward the text an author has produced. This would seem to entail that, according to Lamarque and Olsen, if either the author does not intend to invoke the literary stance, or the reader fails to adopt the literary stance, the text under discussion would not fall under the evaluative concept of literature. It is crucial that a text be intended to induce the literary stance *and* that the inducement is taken up. Neither the author’s intention nor the reader’s response would seem to be enough in isolation. A reader that responded literarily to a text which was not intended to invoke such a response would not seem to be participating in the literary practice – nor would an author who produced a text with the failed intention that it invoke a literary response. We shall see the full weight of this consequence in Section II.

the literary stance required to determine whether a text is literary, possible – distinct as they will have to be from other social practices, such as storytelling, law-making³⁴ and so on. The next step in their argument is to attend to this demand, and they begin by dividing the concepts used to identify literary features into three levels.

First, there is a descriptive level “which to a large extent is technical in nature...” and its function is mainly, though not only, “to identify formal structures and formal elements”. (ibid: 258) Dactylic hexameter, *terza rima* and the *Volta* all belong in this level. Identifying these elements and structures “eases literary appreciation” but none of the conventions described are constitutive conventions, nor is the level itself constitutive of literary appreciation. That is, they, the concepts, are not individually “essential within the practice” and it, the level, “...is constitutive of appreciation only in conjunction with the other levels of the conceptual scheme of the practice.” (ibid: 259)

Second, there are concepts which “characterize... the *subject* of the literary work...”, its characters, its characters’ actions, its settings and so forth (ibid). These concepts are also utilised in everyday life to characterise actions and objects and, insofar as these concepts are familiar, Lamarque and Olsen say that they are “unproblematic”. The reader will then “...supplement these concepts [“draw[n]... from the text itself”] with whatever further concepts he feels are needed to grasp the subject of the work.” (ibid) Here we can see why Lamarque and Olsen are careful to say that, though the vocabulary itself may be unproblematic, it may nevertheless be problematic in its application. This second level is not simply, or unambiguously, descriptive, but may require interpretation, the plausibility of which may or may not be controversial.³⁵ Because the function of the second level is “to bring the subject of

³⁴ Law-making is, like literature, characterised as an institutional practice. Institutional practices are a subclass of social practices – in the sense Lamarque and Olsen mean the term, all ‘institutional practices’ are social, though not all ‘social practices’ are institutional.

³⁵ They discuss Yeats’ ‘Leda and the Swan’ in this context, writing that “...the application of the word ‘rape’ with its entirely negative connotations [might be] problematic; nor is it obvious that so specifically a human concept, rooted in human moral behaviour, is applicable to something un-human like a god or a swan.” (ibid: 260) To my mind, *their* interpretation has a peculiar inflection given that *being* raped, as much as rape itself, is rooted in human behaviour and that Leda is neither a god nor a swan, nor even a nymph, but a female human – a feature of the poem, and the myth the poem is based upon, that appears to have entirely escaped Lamarque and Olsen. Moreover, one feels as though more attention should be paid to how the pantheon of Greek deities oftentimes represent the superlatives of human activity, with respect to both its apotheoses and nadirs. It seems entirely plausible that ‘Leda and the Swan’, ‘The Rape of Europa’, the stories ‘Io’ and ‘Callisto’, each treated in various ways throughout the western literary canon and by no means an exhaustive list of similar examples when taken together, are not just

the work under descriptions that clarify it..." and because "alternative descriptions are in principle always possible", interpretation, "even at the level of subject" (ibid: 259-60) is not necessarily uncontroversial.

The first level is not constitutive of literary appreciation except in conjunction with the other levels. Rather, its role is to promote and augment one's appreciation. Literary appreciation is possible without it; but one's appreciation will be heightened, perhaps greatly, by firmly grasping the technical apparatus that structure the work being appreciated. The second level, by contrast, "is necessary to the appreciation of a literary work." (ibid: 260) As Lamarque and Olsen quite rightly put it, "[t]he work exists for the reader only through the subject and the way it is presented..." (ibid) If the subject is unintelligible, appreciation of it cannot get off the ground. Nevertheless, apprehension that does not "move beyond an apprehension of subject would be rudimentary and unsatisfactory." (ibid) Alone, apprehension of the subject does "not capture the qualities that make the [work] a valuable work of art." (ibid) For this, a third level is required: the level of thematic concepts. They are used "to identify the point and purpose of the subject and the way [it] is presented." (ibid) It is only when the subject of the work is apprehended in this broader context "that the poem [novel, short story and so on] is appreciated as a literary work." (ibid: 261)

The concepts and conventions that characterise literary practice are distributed amongst these three levels. In concert, they "make a work of literature what it is: i.e. a work with aesthetic value."³⁶ (ibid) That is, a work with aesthetic value is understood, and can only be

about "the adventures of God as a rapist" (Bloom, 1970: 363), but also offer potent treatments of the abuse of power. Note how it is not merely the idea of sexual violence, perpetrated by the king of the gods, that is treated variously throughout the canon – the examples of the king of the gods being sexually violent are themselves myriad as well. We are familiar with multiple incidents of Zeus committing subterfuge in pursuit of sexual gratification; of Zeus scapegoating his victims; of Zeus raping mortals; and so on. Moreover, whilst it should be acknowledged that nymphs and goddesses are also victimised by Zeus, whilst entertaining the possibility that the concepts of 'rape' and 'victimhood' might not be applicable to something un-human like a god or a swan, and whilst glossing over the fact that scapegoating clearly *is* applicable to both gods *and* animals, these acknowledgements also make apparent another striking feature of these episodes one shouldn't lose sight of. The victims of Zeus' sexual violence are routinely women, be they mortal *or* immortal. Even when the abducted object of his desire *is* male, like Ganymede, from whom we quite tellingly derive the word 'catamite', they are often an adolescent. The concern that "...the application of the word 'rape' with its entirely negative connotations [might be] problematic" might plausibly be more problematic than the application itself.

³⁶ Or let us say more narrowly 'literary value'. One might wonder if the concepts and conventions that determine a sculpture's aesthetic value also describe a painting's aesthetic value, a piece of music's, a novel's, and so on.

understood, in relation to the (technical-, subject- and thematic-) conventions that constitute the social practice the work is part of. The work could not be apprehended as a work with literary value outside the conventions that regulate and define literary appreciation. But this is not to say that literary value is reducible to any one concept, nor to any one of these levels. For Lamarque and Olsen “[aesthetic] value is assumed to reside in two principal dimensions of the literary work: the imaginative and the mimetic.” (ibid: 261) Let us take them each in turn.

The creative-imaginative aspect of literary practice

Lamarque and Olsen write that “to recognize something as a literary work is to recognize it as a creative-imaginative effort.” (ibid: 261-2) This creative-imaginative aspect presents itself in two ways. First, form can be given to, invented or created for, a subject or a story which need not itself be invented by the author. The creative-imaginative aspect manifests itself in “the way of seeing the story that endows it with significance.” (ibid) This might involve defining an innovative new perspective on a pre-existing story, inventing dialogue for the characters that populate that story, perhaps inventing new characters to augment the cast list, conceiving of these perspectives, dialogues, characters and settings in a novel way, and so on. Of course, the invention of a new perspective or conception of a familiar, pre-existing story, be it fictional or drawn from real life, is not a kind of creativity unique to literary practice – more on this later – but insofar as it pertains to literary rather than philosophical, religious or historical practice, Lamarque and Olsen’s point is a good one. Examples of literary works being manifestly creative in this way are abundant throughout the canon. Marlowe and Goethe have each created their own *Fausts*; not because their subjects are new, but because their way of seeing the subject and the form they impose upon that subject are new. To take another example, Mann’s tetralogy *Joseph and His Brothers*, with its deeply Jungian interest in myth, cultural identity, archetypes and so forth, shares a story but not a narrative with the biblical tale. And then again, the creative aspect of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is not so much to do with its “encyclopaedic stock of Greek and Latin literary history”, but in its using the idea of transformation as the “single potential unifying thread that r[uns] through the chaotically diverse bundle of stor[ies]” (Feeney,intro., Ovid, 2004: xiii) that populate the Graeco-Roman

For present purposes, I shall follow Lamarque and Olsen and use the terms interchangeably, but their conflation of the two, combined with their insistence that various specially related social practices do not overlap, will prove relevant later in this chapter.

literary and storytelling tradition. I shall have more to say about both Mann's tetralogy and Ovid's poem in chapter five.

But of course, literary works can also consist, wholly or to some extent, of descriptions and stories which are themselves made up or constructed – “literature is *poesis* also in the sense that it is invention rather than report” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 262) – and this is the second way Lamarque and Olsen think the creative-imaginative aspect of literature can be made manifest. Literary practice also involves the creation of “new stories, new conflicts, new plots and... new worlds...” (ibid) and not just new conceptions of or new perspectives on those stories, conflict, plots and worlds. Authors of this stripe “do not merely create form (a perspective, embellishment)”; they create subject too. (ibid)

This final contrast of “merely creat[ing] form” and inventing new subjects is typical of a thread that runs throughout Lamarque and Olsen's account. They very carefully and insistently distinguish subject and form and believe this is worth doing “since most prominent literary theories [in the 20th century, such as the New Criticism, structuralism and poststructuralism] have assumed that the distinction is somehow naïve and theoretically invalid.” (ibid: 263) It will be instructive to spend a little time investigating their reasons for so doing.

Even if form and subject cannot exist one without the other, and though they agree there is “one obvious sense in which... the Orestes/Electra story as presented by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, are really different narratives with different characters and different visions of the world...” there is a “sound logical basis” for insisting upon the distinction since it allows them to say there is another, similarly obvious yet entirely different, sense in which “...the three tragedians and their various audiences... recognize that they deal with the same story.” (ibid)

Moreover, drawing the distinction between form and subject allows them to ask what contribution they each make to aesthetic or literary value. Their answer is elegant. One way this might happen, they claim, is that the creation of form facilitates a novel conception of subject which “...may confer on the subject (invented or not) literary value.” (ibid: 264) A second way is “...to say that the aesthetic value defined by the creative-imaginative aspect of the concept of literature is constituted by the imposition of form on a subject.” (ibid: 265) Notice that in both ways, the aesthetic value defined by the creative-imaginative aspect is *analysable in terms of* the conceptual conventions that describe and regulate literary practice without aesthetic value being *reduced to* those conceptual conventions. Nevertheless, however elegant their answer, and however neatly Lamarque and Olsen make new and innovative use

of concepts we are already familiar with from different aspects of their analysis of literary practice, there remain a few issues regarding how form and subject confer value on a work that it behoves us to make plain.

Now, in order to reinforce their position about how form and subject might confer value, they invoke Shakespeare's historical plays and compare them with his historical sources for them, any one of which they believe "will illustrate [their] point." (ibid) The thought is that Shakespeare's creation of form imposes upon the subject a coherence that was not there before. It may, of course, be true of Shakespeare's historical plays and untrue of, to take up Lamarque and Olsen's own example, Sir Thomas North's *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, that newly created form has possessed the subject of Antony and Cleopatra's demise with coherence. However, it does not seem entirely clear that either the creation of form, the imposition of created form on a subject, or the coherence a subject is supposed to be possessed of now a created form has been imposed upon it, are actions or attitudes unique to literary practice, nor conferrers of uniquely literary value. On the contrary, creation of form does not seem a uniquely literary achievement, nor does it seem an unattainable achievement for the historian; to paraphrase Lamarque and Olsen, any cursory glance at Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* will illustrate the point.

One can also find analogous illustrations in the other practices that Lamarque and Olsen believe bear to literature "a special connection" (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 410); namely, religious and philosophical practice. Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and Mann's *The Tales of Jacob* are each sourced in the biblical tale of Abraham and Isaac. They each impose a newly created form on the story. Their creative imposition of form on the story possesses it of thematic coherence – one theme being the tension between morality and faith, another being the tension between cultural heritage and individual sensibility; there are, of course, myriad others one could elicit from the texts. It seems plausible that at least one way value might be conferred on Mann's *The Tales of Jacob* would be to analyse how the work possesses its subject of coherence by imposing a newly created form upon it. In this regard, I am in broad agreement with Lamarque and Olsen. But it seems equally plausible that one might confer value on Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* by subjecting it to a similar analysis. It remains a puzzle for Lamarque and Olsen, it seems to me, how one determines that the value conferred on *The Tales of Jacob* by imposing form on a subject is properly regarded as aesthetic, or literary, whereas the value conferred on *Fear and Trembling* is properly regarded as philosophical, or religious. Perhaps one solution would be to, so to speak, 'relegate' *Fear and Trembling* to a

literary rather than theological or philosophical work; but this does not seem to align with how the work is responded to by these practices.

One difference between the cases might be that, by virtue of the kind of practice that has given rise to the text and in line with the authors' intentions, it is appropriate to adopt toward *The Tales of Jacob* a literary stance and a philosophical or religious stance toward *Fear and Trembling*. That is to say, the value conferred upon *The Tales of Jacob* is literary because the work is a product of, and engaged with by way of, the conventions and concepts that define and regulate literary practice. Furthermore, *Fear and Trembling* is an artefact of religious or philosophical practice, so should be evaluated by way of religion's or philosophy's defining and regulating conventions and concepts. But if this is true, Lamarque and Olsen will still have to account for two salient considerations. First, the concepts and conventions are the same, or else very similar, in each practice. Second, there is a sense of equivocation regarding precisely which practice Kierkegaard's work belongs to. A work like Sartre's *Nausea* might give rise to a comparable equivocation, given that Roquentin's journey of self-definition is so essentially existentialist. *Nausea*, moreover, offers an example of equivocation between literary and philosophical practice, rather than philosophical and religious practice, and thus presents a more direct challenge to Lamarque and Olsen's position. None of this to deny that the distinction between subject and form is a useful one, nor to query whether the imposition of form on subject might confer value upon a work in the way Lamarque and Olsen describe. Rather, I am making the observation to flag up the possibility that other discursive social practices might employ some of the same concepts and conventions that Lamarque and Olsen say literary practice does; to raise the possibility that at least here, in the conferral of value upon a text by way of a practice's creative-imaginative aspect, literary practice might overlap with other social and institutional practices; and to tentatively suggest that it is not always unambiguous which stance it is best to take toward a work, nor entirely clear which stance an author has intended for their work to accommodate.

The mimetic aspect of literary practice

Be this as it may, Lamarque and Olsen believe that these "values [are not] *sui generis* but [instead] acquire value through contributing... to the definition of a *humanly interesting content*." (ibid) Accordingly, the conveyance of humanly interesting content is the second "central and ineliminable facet of the concept of literature" (ibid); their interpretation of what it means for literature to have a mimetic aspect is framed by it. When they say, therefore, "...the

mimetic aspect of literature manifests itself... in rendering of subject and the presentation of theme” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 266), we should not understand them to be saying these themes or subjects must be in some sense ‘true to life’, or reliable reflections of life. On the contrary, they believe there are “good reasons for avoiding terms like ‘truth’, ‘knowledge, and ‘insight’.” (ibid: 438) These and similar concepts “raise the temptation to see imaginative truth and literary insight as having the same epistemological status” as they would in other cultural discourses, such as science, history, or philosophy. The “better way”, they believe, “is to dispense with the use of these concepts altogether.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 438)

Whatever the evaluative metrics are for these other practices, literary appreciation “...does not involve understanding a literary work as an exemplum of a general concept” (ibid: 402) as might be appropriate to scientific or philosophical inquiry. This observation is broadly in step with their critique of positions that believe the cognitive value of literature is analogous to the cognitive value of the sciences, as well as of positions like Hillary Putnam’s and Martha Nussbaum’s that certain literary works are themselves works of moral philosophy. That is, because “each literary work defines its own unique subjective experience...” it does not seem plausible to Lamarque and Olsen “that literary works taken as a whole... will present situations that could provide a coherent and unified experience describable as ‘knowing what it is like’.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 378) One might plausibly add to their example a few other experiences, such as ‘knowing how best to live’, ‘knowing what the right thing to do is’, and so on. Unlike either science or philosophy, literature’s engagement with humanly interesting content, even the *same* humanly interesting content, is framed by each work’s self-contained, self-defined subjective experience. The engagement will be different, not just insofar as science, philosophy and literature employ different conventions one to another, but insofar as each work *as a product of literary practice* shall have defined “its own unique subjective experience”. (ibid) It is not, therefore, the kind of practice that is conducive to generalisability, in Lamarque and Olsen’s treatment. Nor does literary evaluation reach out beyond the work itself in order to secure measurement or assessment by an independent, non-literary yardstick.

Instead, one “apprehend[s] the various aspects and elements of the work through a network of concepts, [in a way that] involves a mutual interpretation of work and concept.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 402) Just as the author and the reader are each necessary to the practice, thus entailing a work is literary only so long as the author intends the reader to take up the literary stance toward their work (and only so long as the reader *does* take up the intended stance), neither interpreting the concepts nor interpreting the work is done in isolation because both elements are constitutive of the practice. Furthermore, they galvanise one another.

Interpreting the work nourishes our understanding of the concepts pertinent to it, just as interpreting the concepts shall augment our understanding of the work. But truthmaking is no more part of this practice than imbuing a reader with knowledge or furnishing them with insight is.

If literature's mimetic aspect is not to do with how reliably it tracks truth, bears upon knowledge, or facilitates insight, to name just a few ways these terms might be employed in different practices, but instead involves its engagement with humanly interesting content through its rendering of subject and its presentation of theme, it remains to be seen which themes literature is most interested in and how engaging with those themes confers value upon a work. In the first place, Lamarque and Olsen make the plausible observation that "[f]rom literature at its best it is expected that... descriptive detail will constitute a context for the presentation of universal human concerns." Moreover, in a move we will be familiar with from their analysis of literature's creative-imaginative aspect, they say of 'literature at its best' that "form is imposed on subject thereby yielding a representation of general human interest." (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 266)

Now, it might be argued that there is a tension here between the yielding of "a representation of general human interest" through the imposition of form on, and thus the securing of coherence for, a subject on one hand; and how literature is *not* supposed to be conducive to generalisability, precisely because "the virtual experience offered by literature is specifically literary as well as unique" (ibid: 378), on the other. One might wonder how two works as disparate as, for example, Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* and Euripides' *Hippolytus*, can each yield a representation of general human interest in a way that preserves Lamarque and Olsen's conviction that literature is regulated and defined by a matrix of conventions, as well as their conviction that these works' representations will not be conducive to generalisability.

To this end, they are entirely willing to say that "the novel [*Lucky Jim*] is totally unlike [the tragedy] *Hippolytus*. But," they continue, "it can nevertheless be appreciated by applying exactly the same thematic concepts..." (ibid: 406), specifically, the general theme of the freedom of the will and responsibility. Of course, if a work defines its own unique subjective experience, this won't entail that the object of the uniquely defined experience is uninvestigable by any other work. Various works might, and routinely do, investigate the same subject and will, no doubt, apply to that subject the same themes. Indeed, it is often the case that two works apply those concepts in altogether different, even diametrically opposed, ways. Jim Dixon might be radically unlike either Phaedra, Hippolytus or Theseus; he might, in Amis' treatment of the freedom of the will, respond to the inevitable tide of a predetermined existence in

precisely the opposite way that Euripides' creations respond to their predicament in *his* treatment of the freedom of the will. And yet "the thematic concepts themselves [would still] remain the same." (ibid)

There isn't, then, anything especially "...surprising or novel in the observation that two literary works deal with the same theme" (ibid) – the theme of the freedom of the will and responsibility has, after all, been of enduring interest for various forms of cultural discourse, rearing its head in various iterations and in various treatments, for as long as we have a written record of human activity. Themes of this type are "perennial" – they "are permanent focuses of interest in a culture because they are unavoidable... They identify the culture... When they change, the culture itself changes." (ibid) The questions those perennial themes define may change – *Lucky Jim* might be asking a different question of the freedom of the will than *Hippolytus* is. The application those concepts are put to might develop along myriad different tracks, might be employed in myriad different circumstances, "...but [so long as the culture remains recognisably the same,] the concepts themselves [will also] remain the same." (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 406)

If Lamarque and Olsen believe that perennial themes are permanent focuses of interest for a culture, if they claim that a change in the themes signals a change in the culture, entailing therefore that the culture cannot exist independently of the themes, they also hold that the themes "[do not] exist independently of the way[s] in which [they are] developed in various cultural discourses. It is through these treatments that the theme is defined." (ibid: 402) The theme of freedom of the will and responsibility does not exist independently of the way it is treated of in Euripides and Amis; both authors are participants in a social practice, engaged in generating products wrought of humanly interesting content and possessed of coherence by virtue of their investigation of perennial themes through the application of perennial thematic concepts. Those concepts are in part defined by their creative output; they would not be precisely the concepts they are if neither Amis nor Euripides had contributed *Lucky Jim* and *Hippolytus* to the cultural discourse. Note, too, how Lamarque and Olsen speak of their development in *various* cultural discourses – literary practice does not just borrow the concepts from one of its neighbour social practices. Perennial thematic concepts do not, Lamarque and Olsen argue, "...receive their definition in philosophical discourse or through the role they play in religious practice... [before being] borrowed by the reader of literature who wants to appreciate a literary work of art." (ibid: 407) Nor do they receive their definition in literature before being borrowed by the philosopher or the religious dedicant. Instead, perennial thematic concepts achieve the importance they have within a culture, the definitions they are possessed

of, and the content they are in receipt of, by virtue of the ways they are applied in *each* of these social practices. They are what they are because religious practice, philosophical discourse and literary appreciation says so. (ibid)

Supposing that we now know *which* themes and concepts literature is most interested in, it remains to be determined how Lamarque and Olsen propose literature employs those themes and concepts to an evaluative end. As we are by now keenly aware, perennial themes and perennial thematic concepts have been “a constant focus for various types of cultural discourses” (ibid: 417) – most pertinently for our purposes, they have been a constant focus for literature. Moreover, literature is the kind of practice which is defined and regulated by the concepts and conventions that it engages with, focuses on, invests with value, and so on. From these two observations, it follows that if a text does *not* ask questions whose parameters are defined by perennial themes, does *not* engage with perennial thematic concepts in its rendering of subject, then no matter how valuable it might be to some other discourse or practice, supposing it is appropriate to take up the stance characteristic of that other discourse or practice toward it, the work will not be identified as literary or evaluated as such.

It is in this context that Lamarque and Olsen contrast *perennial* thematic concepts with *topical* thematic concepts, and the works they use to illustrate their point are Ray Bradbury’s *The History Man* (1978) and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). I shall have more to say about the specifics of their interpretation of these works in Section II, but for now it will suffice to see how they employ these two works to illustrate the difference between perennial and topical thematic concepts. This, in turn, will help to clarify how perennial thematic concepts always contribute to literary value and topical thematic concepts never can. According to Lamarque and Olsen, Bradbury’s *The History Man* describes “...a picture of a society whose institutions and individuals are seriously threatened because they do not have sufficient moral and ethical resources³⁷ to withstand an aggressive radicalism that builds on a shameless opportunism and a shallow rationalism. It is a picture of a society in an intellectual and ethical³⁷ crisis.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 421) *The History Man*, they continue, is “...great fun. It is excellent satire, sharply observed with just the right amount of exaggeration.” But however much fun Bradbury’s novel is, however excellent its satire and however sharply its observations cut, *The History Man* “...has no broader meaning. It is not informed and animated by a general, universally interesting theme which would appeal to all reflective people.” (ibid: 423)

³⁷ Note the conjunction of – and implied contrast between – moral and ethical resources. ³⁷ Note that society is in ethical, not moral, crisis.

The theme *The History Man* is primarily engaged with, Lamarque and Olsen believe, is a topical theme. A topical theme is “a formulation of problems and issues of particular interest to a group of people... for a certain period.” (ibid: 425) The object of Bradbury’s satire is defined by reference to its historical and social situation, in relation to a “group of people [that] see [themselves] or society as a whole as being caught up in [a historical and social predicament] at [a] particular time.” (ibid) But that time and those socio-political circumstances have changed; the work has therefore “lost much of its interest.” (ibid: 424) Its gaze is too myopic, the scope of its inquiry is too narrow, its content, however humanly interesting it might have been in 1978, is too transitory to be of lasting literary value. Nevertheless this “absence of a broader meaning” is not due to *The History Man* being a satire. Unlike Nussbaum, who explicitly omits lyric poetry and satires from her account of the novel as a work of moral philosophy, Lamarque and Olsen are keen to say that “*Gulliver’s Travels* differs from *The History Man*... [insofar as] the concepts one has to employ... like ‘sexual passion’, ‘pride’ and ‘human nature’ [in the case of *Gulliver’s Travels*] are perennial thematic concepts...” whereas the concepts one employs with respect to *The History Man* are essentially topical. The difference is not to do with genre but to do with the third level thematic concepts one has to employ to understand the point and purpose of each work. In this respect, Lamarque and Olsen hold that *Gulliver’s Travels* is as much unlike *The History Man* as *The History Man* is unlike either *Lucky Jim* or *Hippolytus*.

A work can only be identified as literary provided adopting the literary stance toward it elicits an engagement with perennial themes and thematic concepts. So much is required of the text. It also involves being prepared to make the requisite effort to identify the qualities that mark out its engagement with those concepts and themes. So much is required of the reader. The literary work must be a worthwhile object of appreciation and the reader must be sufficiently attentive to appreciate why the work is worth the while spent on it. Adopting the literary stance is not just to settle on *any* theme that one might be able to elicit from the work, therefore; it is to make the effort to engage with just those themes which will “maximise the aesthetic reward” the work has to offer the reader – provided those themes are there to be engaged with. As Lamarque and Olsen pithily put it, “a literary work, in effect, is only as rewarding as the interpretation(s) it can sustain.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 426-7) The upshot of this position is that “if an interpretation using perennial concepts seems artificial or strained or implausible or ill-supported then consequences must be drawn about the literary value of the work itself.” (ibid: 427) This, perhaps, describes what else might be wrong with or disqualifying about *The History Man*. Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* “does not have the

intense imagination which could see in the *fact* of disease an emblem of essential truths about society” (Stephen Gill in introduction to *Mary Barton*, 1970: 13) and any attempt to elicit a sufficiently intense imaginative creativity from it “seem artificial or strained” in Lamarque and Olsen’s terms. Ian Fleming’s cycle of “Bond stories do not *develop* a concept of either good or evil at all” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 436) and any attempt to discover a sustained development of those concepts will be, in their view, ill-supported. Part of Lamarque and Olsen’s problem with *The History Man* appears to be, intriguingly, that despite the novel’s myriad formal qualities, qualities that other theories would point to as indicative of literary value, because it cannot sustain the requisite rewarding interpretation, judgement of its literary value must suffer.

Before we turn our attention elsewhere, let us recall that apprehension of a literary work involves a mutual interpretation of work and concept. There is a reciprocity here between interpreting the work and interpreting the concept; each element of the practice pertains to, feeds and augments the other. Interpretation, creativity, receptivity, are all essential qualities of literary practice – whether it is manifest in literary readership or authorship. As such, one might reasonably expect to see a similar kind of reciprocity going on between a work’s susceptibility to interpretation and its *own* interpretative activity. That is, if literary appreciation involves interpreting a work through the prism of perennial themes and thematic concepts, one might reasonably expect the work *itself* to also offer interpretations of perennial themes and thematic concepts, rather than merely be a facilitator of interpretative activity.

Sure enough, Lamarque and Olsen write that “a work expresses a perennial theme both when it can be interpreted through, and when it itself interprets, perennial concepts.” (ibid: 434) This is what makes literature’s mimetic aspect specifically *literary* – not merely are terms like ‘truth’, ‘knowledge’ or ‘insight’ inapposite of the practice; not merely does literary practice involve examining questions pertaining to humanly interesting content; not merely does literary practice *contribute* to humanly interesting content; not merely, even, does it define part of its evaluative practice as pertaining to perennial rather than topical questions. What’s more, “the literary work develops theme through literary form... [and] it is this merging of theme and form, this emergence of theme from form, that makes literary interpretation of a literary work necessary and literary appreciation possible.” (ibid: 436) It is this, moreover, that leads Lamarque and Olsen to conclude that “the mimetic aspect of literature is its thematic aspect.” (ibid: 437) Theirs is a bold vision of a dynamic, living and breathing social practice that is simultaneously fed by and feeds the intellectual heartbeat of a culture. Literary practice is at once defined by “mortal questions” (Nagel, 2012; Lamarque and Olsen: 406) and defines how

mortal questions ought to be understood. The way it can do this is through its mimetic aspect; through literature's being a contributor to and interpreter of questions, themes and concepts of perennial, enduring human interest.

Literature as a nonoverlapping social practice

The thematic concepts bear an interestingly 'dual aspect' relationship to both the culture and the cultural discourses they are pertinent to. They are part of what determines how those discourses function and how that culture is orientated. They are possessed of substance because of the central role they play in the cultural discourse of the western tradition, manifest in religious discourse, in philosophy, in social sciences – and, of course, in literature. But they are also only significant because the culture and the discourses say so. By themselves, the thematic concepts are vacuous.³⁸ They “cannot be separated from the way they are ‘anatomized’ in literature and other cultural discourses.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 403) The reason they are properly described as “perennial” is not because they have some supra-institutional or quasiplatonic significance that a culture and a family of cultural discourses must always calibrate themselves to. Rather, “it is the role which these concepts play in literature, philosophy, and religious practice which makes them perennial thematic concepts, and they acquire their significance because they are fruitful focuses of both intellectual discursive interest or religious practice, and also imaginative creative interest.” (ibid: 408) But, as one might anticipate given the list of distinctly intellectual discursive, religious practical, and imaginative creative interests, given the plurality of fruitful focuses, the way these perennial themes are treated of in these various cultural discourses will to some extent depend upon which cultural discourse is treating them.

Lamarque and Olsen want us to be especially attentive to the fact these different discourses will treat of them *differently*. They hold that philosophical discourse, for example, integrates thematic statements and concepts “in a different way from that of the discourse belonging to literary practice.” And whilst there “are analogies between philosophical and literary discourse”, neither does philosophical discourse turn into literary appreciation nor

³⁸ The tantalising question of whether this implies that Lamarque and Olsen think a culture without the thematic concepts is *also* vacuous gets raised as well. One suspects they don't think the circumstances can arise where it gets mooted; it seems as though a culture will always be framed by perennial themes of one stripe or another and at once invest those themes and be invested by those themes with substance – but those themes don't need to be the same ones that animate this western culture.

literary output turn into philosophical inquiry, “no matter how complex the examples become.” (ibid: 404-5) Moreover, the ‘different way’ the statements and concepts are integrated in philosophy and literature respectively should not lead us to think they are different modalities for ‘doing the same thing’. This holds even though some “philosophical concepts... are interpreted and developed not only in philosophical discussion about the nature of the reality to which they refer, but also through their application in the appreciation of works of art...” (ibid: 408); some religious concepts are interpreted and developed through their application in the discursive practice of philosophy – faith, or *bad* faith, for example – some artistic concepts are interpreted and developed through their application in religious ritual – intervallic theory and harmony, perhaps – and so on. Literature, Lamarque and Olsen want to say, isn’t “offer[ing] the exemplum to philosophy’s concepts or religions’ ethical precepts.” (ibid: 407-8) Rather, it is a fact about literature, and “a literary culture like the civilisation of the West”, that the kinds of concepts that are constitutive of other discourses and practices such as philosophy and religion are also a central focus of literature. This doesn’t entail that the practices collapse one into another – indeed, if the practices *don’t* turn into one another, then it is essential of our account of them that we preserve their distinctness. If, moreover, the practices share certain features in common, it is important to see how this is possible. That is to say, we had better get straight how, and how differently, literature and the other cultural discourses ‘anatomise’ their constitutive concepts.

To this end, Lamarque and Olsen observe of philosophical discourse that it is essentially about issues. Furthermore, “these issues are defined through thematic concepts, and philosophical discourse is concerned with the nature of the reality to which the concepts apply.” (ibid: 408) As such, perennial thematic concepts play a constitutive role in the intellectual activity of philosophical practice because the applicability of those perennial concepts to reality gives point to philosophical activity. Lamarque and Olsen also claim that the situation is analogous for religious belief and ritual. This is because “...the nature of religious ritual is defined through concepts which, if changed, change the nature of the ritual.” (ibid) For example, the ritual of communion is defined through concepts such as transubstantiation, sacrifice, (vicarious) redemption, and so on. If bread and wine are tokens of the body and blood of Christ rather than *really* his blood and body, if Christ has *really* died for *your* especial sins or else hasn’t, if one cannot escape the consequences of wrongdoing except by casting them into sacrificial goats, or else if one thinks that sacrificing animals to purge a community of its wrongdoing is itself a wrongdoing, then the religious rituals that are constituted by these

concepts will have a different meaning and purpose however those conceptual puzzles are resolved.

The case, however, is different for literature in Lamarque and Olsen's estimation. In contrast to either philosophy or religion, literature "is attached to thematic concepts only indirectly." (ibid: 408) Let us recall from their analysis of the mimetic aspect of literary practice that the thematic concepts and the literary work are connected "through the reader's [imaginative] creation of a network of concepts...", with literary appreciation having to do with the "constructive labour" (ibid) of establishing those connections. Let us also recall how literary practice, understood as an evaluative concept, does not measure itself by a non-literary yardstick but is instead self-contained. Unlike philosophy, which endeavours to make generalisable claims grounded in the thematic concepts that constitute its intellectual activity, or religious belief, which may make use of and be constituted by various concepts that imply a reality beyond the scope of this one, such as life after death, spirit, transcendence and so on, "literary appreciation... is not concerned with any further reality to which these concepts might be applied in their other uses." (ibid: 408-9) Instead, it is concerned with their application in a particular literary work. A literary investigation of the theme of 'moral vision', for example, would seem to be contained to the treatment it receives in *The Golden Bowl* or in *The Ambassadors* respectively; it is not the business of literary practice to then generalise about those treatments and say something beyond their application in those particular cases – no matter how complex Henry James' examples of moral vision or blindness become. According to Lamarque and Olsen, "the nature of [James' especial] insight can be analysed by giving a description of how thematic concepts are attached to [his] literary works. But one can do nothing further to throw light on it." (ibid: 409)

This is another reason they believe Nussbaum's account of the role literature plays in ethical reasoning is gravely mistaken. Where the claims Nussbaum makes for some novels "seem to be claims for these novels under an ethical interpretation" (ibid: 396) Lamarque and Olsen think an ethical interpretation, because it involves making general claims about the content found in the work, does not have anything to do with literary appreciation. Even if one grants the "possibility of applying thematic concepts in literary appreciation [their application nevertheless] makes no direct contribution to philosophical or theological insight, nor is it tied to any such aim." (ibid: 409) Even supposing Martha Nussbaum is right to believe of moral philosophy that it ought to "make more extensive use of examples from literature", as indeed Lamarque and Olsen seem perfectly willing to concede, "this [would] not make literary works,

as such, a necessary part of moral argument” (ibid: 396-7) and neither would it make moral argument or ethical interpretation a part of literary appreciation.

Thus Lamarque and Olsen believe it must be concluded that at the same time as there is unquestionably “a special connection” between literature and philosophy and religion insofar as they have many of the same concepts in constant focus; are sometimes employed in analysing how the other practices apply concepts they themselves pay especial attention to in their own, characteristic modes; each contribute to how the concepts are understood; and each have an instigating role in why the concepts are possessed of the significance the culture attaches to them, “these discourses *are not overlapping or interchangeable.*” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 410) [my italics] *Fear and Trembling* is not a literary artefact, does not participate of literary practice, and cannot be said to have literary value. Henry James’ or Marcel Proust’s novels cannot be said to have philosophical value – whether or not a philosopher like Martha Nussbaum or Joshua Landy chooses to make extensive, exemplary use of either *The Ambassadors* or *In Search of Lost Time*. Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* neither competes with nor complements religious belief or ritual. That is, it can’t be competing with religious belief or ritual so long as we think it is a literary work. It is possible, I suppose, for Lamarque and Olsen to think that the ‘the fifth gospel’ is essentially a religious work, in which case identifying it as a literary work and ascribing it literary value is a meaningless category mistake. Ascribing literary value to either the Luther or King James Bible would have to be an even graver category mistake, indicative of a wild and far-reaching misunderstanding of both literary and religious practice. All this because, in Lamarque and Olsen’s estimation, “literature does not compete with philosophy, nor does it complement it.” (ibid: 410) Though they meet in their engagement with thematic themes, “it is not a meeting which leads to marriage or even to holding hands.” (ibid) One wonders how religion feels about the ‘hand holding’ or, even more scandalously, the ‘meeting outside of marriage’. Their relationship, one to another and also with religious discourse, is a more distant one, they believe. Despite their springing from the same cultural fount, and despite the way they each ensure the cultural fount does not run dry, these three cultural discourses are, to borrow Lamarque and Olsen’s turn of phrase, less cousins and more “neighbour[s] in the same important area of a culture.” (ibid)

Section II

The principal issues with Lamarque and Olsen's characterisation of literary practice

As the previous section has made plain, there are many things to admire about Lamarque and Olsen's account. First, their model of literature as a social practice has the distinct advantage of being grounded in what literature is in the business of *doing*, rather than what a theoretician might *want it to do*. On paper, their theory is also quite naturally accommodating of development and change, since practices organically change and develop insofar as their practitioners change and develop. Moreover, conceiving of literature as a practice neatly reflects the fact that it isn't carried out in a solipsistic way, but rather requires various interrelations between authors, readers and texts.

Second, their analysis of the different levels the concepts that define and regulate literary practice pertain to makes sense. Dividing them into descriptive, subject-fixing and thematic categories is useful, clear and intuitive. Furthermore, their account of which levels constitute the practice and to what extent is sound. It is appropriate that the technical concepts found at the first level aren't constitutive of the practice, for example, but rather augment one's appreciation of it. It seems entirely plausible that understanding the subject of a work is necessary to, yet insufficient for, a fuller engagement with literature. It seems correct, moreover, that the third, most sophisticated level of concepts they identify as being constitutive of literature are the thematic concepts used to determine the point and purpose of the work. It is also a significant virtue of their position that interpretative disagreement is built into the structure of their account of these concepts; they appreciate that reasonable disagreement between literary appreciators isn't just a feature of the practice but can be a galvanising influence on and a catalyst for development in the practice.

Third, their focus on the creative-imaginative and mimetic aspects as being where literary value principally resides is well chosen. They very elegantly utilise the concepts we are familiar with from the three levels; do a good job of justifying the distinction between subject and form (and make good use of the distinction); and appear to provide an accurate reflection of how value judgements are made in the practice – appreciators of literature *do* value creativity and they *do* prize an engagement with humanly interesting content.

Fourth, the especial attention they pay to literature's mimetic aspect, both with respect to what that aspect looks like and how it contributes to literary judgement, is as meticulous as it is well spent. If we recall some of the issues we have had with other approaches to literary value and its relationship to ethical value, specifically that 'getting it right' played far too

prominent a role, Lamarque and Olsen's account has a readymade answer to these issues. Humanly interesting content need not be 'right' or 'moral' or 'knowledge bearing'; they are, in fact, "not the kind of entity that can be true or false." (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 437) Rather, we are able to say that an attitude, or a vision of the world, bears upon our literary appreciation of a work to the extent it is engaged with humanly interesting content. The attitude or vision is important to our literary appreciation, but the 'truthfulness' of that vision or that attitude, whether it's morally suspect or problematic, enlightening or prescient, isn't what makes it important. Moreover, saying that the human interest must be *enduring* rather than transitory is a sensible and solid criterion for what it takes to be constitutive of *literature's* mimetic aspect, rather than some other discursive practice where topicality might play a more important role. Rather nicely, their position doesn't entail that topicality, moral judgement and so on, are *never* relevant to social practice. Instead, the substance of those concepts, whatever they may be, will depend on the role they play in the various practices that make use of them.

Fifth, and building upon this last observation regarding the context within which these concepts are employed, it is an excellent feature of Lamarque and Olsen's account that the various cultural discourses don't merge into one another and lose their unique character. Philosophy, religion, history, the social sciences, the natural sciences, mathematics, lawmaking, politics – and literature – really *are* distinct from one another and Lamarque and Olsen's resistance to any one of them being subsumed into the other, with an especial attention paid to the possibility of literature being subsumed into philosophy, is both well-motivated and potently argued for.

All these features are to my mind strengths in their account of literature and should be preserved if at all possible. Nevertheless, there are, I believe, three principal ways in which their position is flawed. The first way is to do with how they distinguish between literary and non-literary fictions. The second is to do with how they *don't* talk about fictional and nonfictional literature. The third, and most important, is to do with how they insist, implausibly, that social practices are not just distinct but nonoverlapping, or at least minimally that literature is nonoverlapping with either religion or philosophy.

These three flaws are problematic because they are not merely interpretative or evaluative disagreements; a practice, after all, should be able to make space for reasonable disagreement amongst its practitioners. We have seen in relation to Martha Nussbaum's work on the novel as a work of moral philosophy that a canonical or definitive response to a text is neither desirable nor necessary to our account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, and if Lamarque and Olsen's account can preserve that elasticity, then all to the good.

Rather, because they are saying certain works are not and cannot be literary because they fail a conceptual test; because they are saying certain works are not and cannot be literary because they are not intended for literary engagement; and because they are saying certain works are not and cannot be literary because it is not possible for literature to overlap with other discursive social practices, their account involves making claims about how literature is, or isn't, practiced that do not seem to be correct.

I believe there are good reasons for adopting a social practice model for literature, and there are many features of Lamarque and Olsen's model of that social practice that I admire and am in broad agreement with. But these flaws mean their account is, to varying extents, incomplete, distorted and mistaken. As such, however literature relates to other social practices, such as philosophy or religion, it isn't in exactly the manner Lamarque and Olsen envisage. My account will have to steer clear of the pitfalls theirs is vulnerable to. In this section, I will make it clear precisely what those pitfalls are.

Distinguishing between literary and non-literary fiction

By this point, we should be keenly aware that Lamarque and Olsen want the characterising feature of literary appreciation, insofar as appreciation resides in literature's mimetic aspect, to be its participation in, or expression of, perennial themes and thematic concepts. This means literary appreciation necessarily involves interpretation – not merely so one can determine what the work is about, but also so its point and purpose can become clear. Moreover, the interpretative work is not only done by the reader but might also be undertaken by the author and expressed in the text as well. As Lamarque and Olsen put it, “a work expresses a perennial theme both when it can be interpreted through, and when it itself interprets, perennial concepts.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 434) If a work is going to be identified as literary and invested with literary value, it must be possible to sustain an interpretation of the work which involves an engagement with perennial themes and thematic concepts. It follows that if an interpretation using perennial concepts seems “artificial or strained or implausible or ill-supported” (ibid: 427) then one can conclude the work is not of literary value and cannot be correctly identified as literary.

One way a literary interpretation of a work might be artificial, strained, implausible or ill-supported is if it “expresses an exclusively topical theme... [in these circumstances, the work will have] fail[ed] to be original and profound in [the requisite] way.” (ibid) On Lamarque and Olsen's reading, a work, such as *The History Man*, whose theme can only be formulated

in topical thematic terms “is artistically or aesthetically weak. It is aesthetically weak because it lacks universality: it does not deal with mortal questions.” (ibid: 429) Now, it is important to make plain that expressing topical themes is not itself an artistic or aesthetic weakness. Literary works will, of course, express and be amenable to interpretation through topical thematic themes. Understanding the subject of *In Search of Lost Time* will require engaging with themes such as the Belle Epoque, chinoiserie, salon culture, barracking and coquetry. To look at one of Lamarque and Olsen’s own examples, a passage in *Gulliver’s Travels* “is surely about George I” and the protracted political battles between Whigs and Tories in early 18th century England. “On a satirical reading... a reader must invoke contemporary attitudes to the king”, and the topicality of those contemporary attitudes “is a significant constraint in understanding the work.” (ibid: 128-9) But neither *In Search of Lost Time* nor *Gulliver’s Travels* expresses these topical concepts and themes to the exclusion of perennial ones. Time, guilt, self-expression, self-determination, “‘sexual passion’, ‘pride’ and ‘human nature’” (ibid: 424) are expressed and investigated in these works as well. The point of their criticism, then, is not so much to say possessing topical themes is something literary works must never do; rather, a work expressive of exclusively topical themes isn’t literary because it *lacks* perennial themes. (ibid: 432)

Another way that a work might be adjudged non-literary is if its interest in perennial themes is merely surface level, merely nominal, merely tokenistic. Lamarque and Olsen appreciate that a critic of their position might observe how “...large parts of the pulp fiction market seem to be concerned with love and hate and jealousy, with right action and death, with the struggle between good and evil, etc.” (ibid: 434) Consequently, so the criticism might run, if literature shares with pulp fiction a perennial thematic aspect, then concepts like ‘theme’ and ‘perennial theme’ are of no use to an explanation of how humanly interesting content “confers on literary works their special value and cultural prestige...” (ibid) Their response to the would-be critic unfolds over two stages. The first is to remind us how an author must intend to invoke the literary stance if their work is going to participate in literary practice. If “non-literary works of fiction are not presented to the reader as literature; [if] the reader is not invited to take up the literary stance to them”, then the experience offered to the reader by pulp fiction is in “a different *function category* from literature.” (ibid: 435) The second is to say that even if one *did* take up the literary stance toward the work, it being possible in principle to adopt the literary stance toward any work, the non-literary work shall nevertheless fail to “yield what a literary work is expected to yield.” (ibid) The perennial thematic potential is not realised in a non-literary work but is instead “simply left as a vacuous cliché.” (ibid)

There seem to me significant issues with the mechanics of both these strategies for distinguishing literary and non-literary works from one another. But I do not intend to quibble with the particular cases. As I have said repeatedly, it is a virtue of Lamarque and Olsen's account that interpretative disagreement is built into their model of literary practice – whether I agree with them about *The History Man*³⁹, *Dr No*, *Gulliver's Travels*⁴⁰ and so on or not isn't the concern. Moreover, it is to be admired in their account that they remain cognisant of and open to the possibility that a critic might succeed in “showing that a work of fiction so far regarded as non-literary... did yield to a [suitably literary, unforced and unstrained] interpretation...” (ibid: 436) Such a demonstration, they believe, would have revealed the work in question *to be* a literary work. Divergence of critical opinion, and the process of reevaluation this divergence might give rise to, is correctly identified as “a constant feature of criticism [and] an activity that purifies the canon...” (ibid) My issue, rather, is that for all the laudable lip service paid to reevaluation, to “bring[ing] new works to the canon” (ibid), Lamarque and Olsen seem to be very prescriptive about what belongs or does not belong to the practice on one hand – when the practice isn't nearly so prescriptive itself – and curiously unpersuasive about what sets apart works we pretheoretically seem able to distinguish very easily on the other. Two distinct puzzles rear up from their attempt to split the difference, therefore – one related to a work's engagement with perennial or topical thematic concepts, and one related to a work's literary or pulpy category function. To see what I mean by this, let us look at the perennial/topical and literary/pulp dichotomies each in turn.

From their discussion of fiction and literature and their account of the difference between these concepts, we know that Lamarque and Olsen do not think there are any rhetorical

³⁹ If the novel is occupied with the concept of ‘the history man’, which does seem to have lost many of its resonances and much of its interest, it also seems to be offering a portrait of an ailing, sick society in ethical and intellectual crisis – these are the terms Lamarque and Olsen describe it. Quite why this doesn't strike them as fertile ground for the investigation of perennial themes is unclear.

⁴⁰ Again, I am unconvinced that Swift's and Bradbury's works are quite so dissimilar as Lamarque and Olsen claim they are, even on their terms. *Gulliver's Travels* is integrally knotted to the political machinations of the Whig and Tory parties of the 18th Century; that is, to social and political circumstances at a much more distant and less interesting remove than “the events of 1968”. (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 410) It is unclear why one can extract perennial thematic themes from Swift but not from Bradbury. Themes such as society in decline, society in an ethical and intellectual malaise, the tension between performative gesturing and progressive action, might all be described as perennial. The closer we look at the two cases, the blurrier the divide seems to be between them.

features *in* a text that make it literary; rather, we identify certain texts as being literary and invest them with literary value by applying toward them the literary stance. Taking up the literary stance is to take the time to elicit from works the maximally aesthetic experience one can get from the work. To the extent that a maximally aesthetic experience resides in the work's mimetic aspect, the work is of literary value so long as one can plausibly interpret it through the application of perennial themes and thematic concepts. Now, because Lamarque and Olsen do not think that literary value resides in the syntactic, semantic or rhetorical features one might be able to locate in a work, and instead think that literary value resides in the work's engagement with perennial themes and thematic concepts, at least insofar as we are locating the literary value in the work's mimetic aspect, no matter how expertly a work delivers those rhetorical features, efforts in this direction will count for naught if they are not in the service of interpreting perennial thematic concepts or making the work interpretable through their application.

This is why *The History Man* is not possessed of literary value; the concept of 'the history man' is too transitory and topical to be of enduring human interest and so does not have literary value conferred upon it. Neither is Ezra Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro', or imagism more generally, possessed of literary value for similar reasons. Of the imagist agenda, they write that "the expectation that a piece of writing should be intended to convey directly a fresh impression is at best only contingently related to the literary stance, while the expectation that a piece of writing is intended to have a theme is definitive of it." (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 415) Because imagism is essentially focused on what Lamarque and Olsen think is only contingently related to literary value, and not much interested with what Lamarque and Olsen think is an ineliminable facet of literary practice, they "hesitate to call it ['In a Station of a Metro'] a literary work, a genuine poem... [it] give[s instead] the impression of incompleteness." (ibid: 414)

To reiterate, I do not contend the specific cases. It may well be that neither Pound's 'poetry', as Lamarque and Olsen invariably style it, nor Bradbury's satire is of literary value – at least insofar as the satire and poetry are manifest in *The History Man* and 'In a Station of a Metro' respectively. But Lamarque and Olsen's analysis seems to be disqualifying them even from the discussion; and that I *do* contend. The point here is not about evaluative disagreement. Lamarque and Olsen don't just say *The History Man* and 'In a Station of a Metro' *aren't* literarily valuable. They say that whatever virtue these works may possess – they certainly possess *some* virtues so far as Lamarque and Olsen are concerned: Bradbury's satire is excellent and his observations are sharp; "Pound's lines have rhetorical merit... the images are precise

and the juxtaposition is striking” (ibid) – those virtues *can't be* literarily valuable because the works they come from do not participate in the practice of literature. They are not motivated by ‘literary’ interests, nor defined by ‘literary’ conventions, and instead belong to some other practice where rhetorical features are welcome. It isn't just that these are poor literary works in Lamarque and Olsen's estimation; they aren't literary works of any calibre whatsoever.

All this seems to be extraordinarily resistant to developments, changes, reinterpretations and so on, in what is supposed to be a constantly re-evaluative practice. One presumes, for example, that the imagist authors thought they were practicing literature. As might their readership. If one recalls that literary practice requires of an author that they intend for their work to invoke the literary stance and of a reader that they in fact take up the literary stance toward a work, both these criteria appear to have been met with respect to how the imagists conceived of literature. One must conclude, therefore, that they must either *have been practicing literature*, contrary to Lamarque and Olsen's judgement, or else entirely misunderstanding the practice they think they were participating in. The latter of these conclusions, of course, might be the case. It could well be that the imagists were not setting their stall by the requisite conventions and concepts that define and regulate literary practice. But before deciding the case too swiftly, and whilst acknowledging that theirs was quite demonstrably a very different programme for literature than Lamarque and Olsen's, engaged principally in the direct conveyance of fresh impressions rather than humanly interesting content, it is surely also noteworthy that the imagist movement was motivated by its desire to press at the boundaries of what defined literature. And that motivation would seem to be as much a part of literary practice as either its creative-imaginative or mimetic aspects, even if loosely rhetorical features have no direct bearing on literary evaluation.

When it comes to the category function of literary and non-literary works, there does seem to be a sense in which Lamarque and Olsen are right when they say, “pulp fiction is intended to be undemanding and relaxing, to satisfy needs for excitement and romance through vicarious experience.” (ibid: 435) There also seems to be some mileage in the thought that non-literary works of fiction are intended to serve a different function than literary works. But if this is meant to imply that literary fiction must be demanding and unrelaxing, or that fulfilling the “much simpler function... of stimulating the imagination... to satisfy needs for excitement and romance” is somehow ‘beneath’ literary practice, fit only for the presentation of “vacuous clichés”, then Lamarque and Olsen's conception of literary practice is much gloomier, more exclusionary and overbearingly elitist than it has any need to be. And not merely because literary works are often much more engaging, exciting and romantic than their characterisation

here might give one cause to suppose. As we saw with respect to Eaton's immoralism, being difficult or challenging or demanding isn't itself a sufficient conferrer of value. The difficulty, the challenge or the demand must be toward some purpose. Lamarque and Olsen say it is toward the yielding of literarily appreciable experience. When we probe further, though, and ask what makes the experience worthy of literary appreciation rather than suitable only for pulpy, vicarious fantasising about excitement and romance, the answer appears to be that it is harder, more challenging and more demanding to be possessed of a literary experience than a pulp fictional experience.

The unpersuasive flimsiness of their justification for withholding literary value from pretheoretically straightforward cases makes one wonder about their motivations for guarding the conferral of literary value so jealously. There is an attitude of 'holding the barbarians at the gate' in Lamarque and Olsen's account that there needn't be. Whether there is any serious threat of these works being identified as literary, one gets the impression that Lamarque and Olsen *don't want* Ray Bradbury's *The History Man* or Ian Fleming's *Dr No* to cheapen the literary canon by their inclusion. The desire seems of a piece with their insistent protection of literary practice against any overlap with other cultural discourses. I will have more to say about that shortly. Suffice it to say for present purposes that if Lamarque and Olsen want to use the model of a social practice to make sense of literature, and it seems as though there are many good reasons for so doing, then their model must be *true* to the practice and not morph it into tidier, more theoretically amenable shape than it, in practice, is. If literature decides that Fleming's oeuvre is literary – *Casino Royale* is a better novel than the sneering, pejorative label of pulp fiction would lead one to expect – or that the imagist programme has its place in the practice – niche and eccentric and out the way as that place may be – it does not seem permissible to ignore where the practice leads. What's more, these concerns seem to go right to the heart of the periphery. Literary practice does not require guardians to preserve its sanctity, or gatekeepers to purify its canon. It appears to be perfectly capable of regulating itself without that kind of interference.

Failing to distinguish between fictional and nonfictional literature

However we may interpret their intentions, it is clearly part of Lamarque and Olsen's programme that a literary appreciator might, in the fullness of time, succeed in showing how a work of fiction so far regarded as non-literary might yield to a literary interpretation. Moreover, should this occur then the literary appreciator would have demonstrated that the work of fiction is a literary work. This is in keeping with Lamarque and Olsen's view that revaluation is "a

constant feature of criticism”, and “an activity that purifies the canon.” As such, their account is consistent with a permeable divide between literary and non-literary fiction – even if, as we have seen in the previous discussion regarding Ray Bradbury’s, Ian Fleming’s and Ezra Pound’s creative output, they appear very keen to ensure this nominally permeable divide is guarded very closely. But there is an omission from the account of literary practice they have presented us with that their contrast of literary and non-literary fiction makes glaring. That is, the contrast between literary fiction and literary nonfiction.

For Lamarque and Olsen, a work is only literarily valuable provided it is accommodating of the literary stance. It must also be the author’s intention that the literary stance be taken up toward their work. Furthermore, crucially, Lamarque and Olsen think that “if the work at the same time serves, and is intended to serve, another function, then there is no good reason for labelling it a literary work.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 436) It would appear to follow from this final consideration that a work cannot serve another function *in addition to its literary function*; different functions must replace one another. One can see why this condition serves their account of literary and non-literary fiction rather well – at least insofar as it explains why pulp fiction isn’t literary even if it shares a thematic aspect with literature.

Indeed, it might appear to render their belief that it would be “ridiculous to see the James Bond stories as a saga of the struggle between good and evil⁴¹” (ibid: 434) surplus to requirements, in addition to incommensurately hostile to an interpretation no one really seemed to be entertaining. If Ian Fleming doesn’t intend for his work to invoke the literary stance, then it shouldn’t really matter what an audience does with his novels; there is no good reason to label it a literary work because it is intended to serve another function – the non-literary and much simpler function of satisfying a need for excitement and romance through vicarious

⁴¹ Quite who is making this suggestion isn’t altogether clear. The James Bond stories don’t lend themselves to a discourse on the ethical implications of international espionage nearly as well as they do a wry cynicism about using ethical language at all to describe what spies are up to. Bond, especially in the early Fleming novels, is not motivated by whatever the ‘morally upright’ course of action might be, or the ‘morally abhorrent’ behaviour of his target. He is, for all intents and purposes, a professional gun for hire whose job would be made more difficult by moral vacillation – so he steers clear of asking those kinds of questions altogether. This, in fact, is part of John le Carré’s problem with the Bond stories and why the *Karla* trilogy is required as an antidote to him. Of course Bond isn’t engaged in a saga of the struggle between good and evil – he’s an international gangster and hitman. Lamarque and Olsen might be right that *Dr No* isn’t a literary work, but they are searching for the wrong perennial themes in the wrong places when they say the very idea of *Dr No* being a literary work is ridiculous from the outset.

experience. There are some sticking points. Some attention might be required of Lamarque and Olsen to explain how a work can replace its non-literary function with a literary function, given how important authorial intention is to their account of literary practice and assuming they are serious about the re-evaluative aspect of literary criticism. But these concerns aside, their observation about the saturation point for a fictional work's function capacity is intelligible.

When we turn our attention to nonfictional works, the issue becomes much sharper. If there is such a thing as nonfictional literary works and if literary value is untethered to truthmaking conventions, then they, nonfictional literary works, will have to serve various functions at once – minimally, they will have to function nonfictionally *and* literarily. Because their account is so geared toward investigating *fiction* and literature, Lamarque and Olsen seem to have forgotten how nonfictional works might fit into their scheme, or else have opted to omit them from the scope of their inquiry. But Lamarque and Olsen are working on the model of literature as a social practice; if the practice includes nonfictional as well as fictional works, and *prima facie* it does at least seem plausible that it might, then one's account must be able to accommodate them. We need, therefore, to determine how nonfictional works fit into Lamarque and Olsen's picture of literary practice. The answer appears to be not well at all – and that poses a serious problem for their account.

Let us make their position plain and in so doing clarify the shape of the problem they face. In the first place, if a readership does not take up the literary stance toward a work, then it is not a literary work. In the second place, if an author does not intend for the literary stance to be taken up toward their work, then it is not a literary work. In the third place, whatever a work's literary intentions, if a work is intended to serve another function – of especial interest for our purposes is if that additional intended function is nonfictional – then there is no good reason for labelling it a literary work. As such, if a work does not find a literary audience, or it finds a literary audience in defiance of its author's intentions, or it is also intended to function in some other discursive capacity than literature, then it cannot be possessed of literary value.

Let us also recollect that according to Lamarque and Olsen's account, literature's mimetic aspect doesn't have anything to do with truth or knowledge or insight. That is, literature does not serve the function of preserving truth, collecting knowledge, furnishing insight, or any other comparable function – the concepts are not at home in literary practice. Supposing a work does lend itself to the furnishing of insight, the collection of knowledge or the preservation of truth. It would seem, therefore, that when it does this, the work isn't functioning as a literary artefact, but instead in some other discursive capacity – as a historical tract, a biography, a philosophical treatise, a religious meditation, and so on. Now, if literary

value is untethered to terms like truth and knowledge, and if nonfictional works *are* intended to serve the function of being tethered to terms like truth and knowledge, then they are serving another function than literature. But if nonfictional works are serving another function, and they are intended to serve another function, it appears to follow on Lamarque and Olsen's account that there are no good reasons to label them literary works, or to say they serve a literary function in addition to their non-literary function. Moreover, if there are no good reasons to label them literary works, then it is because they do not and cannot participate in literary practice and therefore are remote from literary evaluation. A philosophical work cannot also be literarily valuable. Nor can a religious text or a scientific monograph. They are not amenable to literary evaluation, because their discursive function is already exhausted.

This might be true, but if it is, it is a surprising consequence that seems at odds with some very resilient pretheoretical literary judgements. It is not necessary to furnish a great number of examples from a broad swathe of cultural discourses, but it will be useful to highlight two – one each from philosophy and religion respectively, given the special connection they are each supposed to have to literature. First, it does not sit at all comfortably with the view that “the best [of Plato's⁴² dialogues] are regarded not only as great works of philosophy but also as great works of literature... his dialogues have aesthetic form and dramatic quality... many connoisseurs regard his prose as the finest Greek prose ever to have been written.” (Magee, 2009: 15) Second, it is jarringly at variance with the widely held judgement that “the Bible⁴³... holds a unique and exclusive status not merely in terms of the religious history of

⁴² The one and only time Plato is mentioned in the entirety of *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* is in the context of “the poet's ability to move the passions by producing invented imaginings.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 261) There, Lamarque and Olsen quote Socrates' question to Glaucon: “[T]he power which poetry has of harming even the good (and there are very few who are not harmed), is surely an awful thing?” (*The Republic*: i.605c) It is, of course, an enduringly intriguing irony of Plato's work that his indictment of the artist and of art is presented in a first-rate work of art and provides ample evidence of Plato's literary genius. To take another example, with a work like the *Symposium*, literary and artistic conventions have an essential bearing on how the philosophical inquiry is conducted; the work would not be the work it is, and the philosophical inquiry into love would not be of the type it is, unless the dialogue at once functioned as a philosophical and a literary work. None of these observations fit at all easily into Lamarque and Olsen's account of literature. ‘Plato is a philosopher, his work serves a philosophical function and there is an end to it’ seems about all they can say – and that, in my estimation, is not nearly enough.

⁴³ I have taken this quotation from a foreword to the King James Authorized Version of the Bible; but a similar point could be made in relation to the Luther Bible. German literature owes an enormous debt to Luther's translation; it is itself a founding member of a unified, German literary canon. Without it, one would not have, to

the western world but also in literary history and even in... our collective cultural psyche.” (Carroll, intro., Authorized King James Version of The Bible, 2008: xi) Lamarque and Olsen will have to do something with these objections; they cannot afford to leave them unanswered.

There appear to be three options available to them. First, they could bite the bullet and say that these works, contrary to the evaluative judgements of many literary appreciators, do not possess literary value because a work can only ever serve one function and these works quite obviously serve philosophical and religious functions respectively. Second, yield some ground and concede that, where a work serves a nonfictional function, there is at least conceptual room for it to *also* serve a literary function because its nonfictional aspect, where concepts like knowledge, truth or insight are salient, stands at a remove from its literary aspect. Third, they could say their inquiry only pertains, and was only ever supposed to pertain, to literary fiction; whatever conclusions one might reasonably draw about literary nonfiction is beyond the scope of their analysis.

The trouble with the first of these options is that it appears to prescribe how literary practice should be carried out, rather than let the practice dictate its own terms of engagement. If literary appreciators confer value on nonfictional works and authors intend for their works to serve other functions in addition to their literary function, then there *are* good reasons for giving them the label of literary works, regardless of whether Lamarque and Olsen say differently. With respect to their second option, it seems an undesirable compromise to say that *some* literary works can accommodate multiple functions, the nonfictional ones, but other literary works, the fictional ones, *can only* accommodate one. If a more amicable and consistent resolution to the puzzle is available, it would do us – and Lamarque and Olsen – well to discover it. The third option seems the most likely, and also the most appropriate, response. It is only fair to bear in mind that their inquiry is essentially focused on the relations between truth, *fiction* and literature, after all. It would seem reasonable for them to respond to my criticism by saying that the phenomenon of nonfictional literature, supposing it is a thing, just isn't within the scope of what they set out to explain. The problem with this response, though, is that when one *does* extend the scope of the account, the shape of the practice they are trying to describe is different. If literature only pertains to works of fiction, then it might be plausible to say that when a work is intended to serve another function, there are no good reasons to label it literary.

name just two virtuosic German stylists, either the works of Nietzsche (who is referenced only once in one footnote: “Truths are illusions of which one has forgotten they are illusions.”) or the works of Goethe (who is not referenced at all) in quite the form we do.

But if literature also pertains to works of nonfiction, then the account we have been furnished with has been distorted by its incompleteness. Lamarque and Olsen might be offering us an account of literary practice's fictional aspect – but if literary practice also has a nonfictional aspect, then it seems plausible that an account of the fictional aspect will need to be adjusted so that the practice remains coherent when one turns to its nonfictional aspect. Lamarque and Olsen's account as it stands seems too rigid to accommodate the adjustment required.

Literary practice and its overlap with other social practices

As we have seen, Lamarque and Olsen want to say that the themes pertinent to religious, philosophical and literary practice are perennial because of the role they play in these discourses. A theme like the freedom of the will and responsibility sees itself treated by theologians, artists and philosophers alike. But treating of the same topic doesn't make of the theologian an artist, of the artist a philosopher, of the philosopher a theologian, and so on. Nor are the theologian, philosopher and artist doing the same thing in a different modality. The practices, and the application those themes and concepts are put to in those practices, are all distinct. All of this appears sound and well-motivated – one doesn't want to have a model of these social practices such that one is subsumed into another, or turned into another, because that isn't what they do *in practice*. Nor does one want for the practices to be “interchangeable”, and it is a virtue of Lamarque and Olsen's account that they expressly write, “these discourses [literature and philosophy, literature and religion] are not... interchangeable.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 410) But Lamarque and Olsen make the further claim that despite their “special connection” to one another, religious, philosophical and literary practice are not merely distinct but nonoverlapping; and this claim seems much more controversial. Practices, it seems, routinely overlap. To see what I mean by this, and also to see why it is important to one's account of how distinct practices relate to one another, let us steer away from the triad of practices we are by now very familiar with and focus briefly on two apparently very different ones – different, that is, both from the triad and from one another – namely, sport and commerce.

The conventions and concepts that define and regulate these two practices are distinct. The way one evaluates a sporting result is not the same way one evaluates a commercial result. And though some of the concepts used in each of these practices might be the same – winning, shrewdness, tactical acuity, flexibility, power, strength, bullishness – those concepts are not doing the same thing in different ways; nor has one practice turned into the other. It isn't just

possible to say they are distinct practices – it is desirable to insist upon their distinctness. We do not want to see sport become “subordinated” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 385) to commerce or else commerce subsumed into sport. Maintaining that they are distinct helps to preserve what is characteristic of these practices and also goes some way to resisting either the subordination or the subsumption of one practice into the other. And yet of course they overlap, at least inasmuch as *professionalised sport* belongs to each practice.

Cristiano Ronaldo owns the license to his own likeness. The Rajasthan Royals are willing to pay 16.25 crore for Chris Morris. The European Super League was mooted because association football is in dire financial straits – and shelved so quickly because European fans didn’t want to pay to see franchise football, there being no real sporting culture for it in the concept of a ‘football pyramid’. The practice of sport is distinct from the practice of commerce. Much of sporting practice has nothing to do with commercial practice. When commercial practitioners ‘are in competition’, their practice has not turned into a sporting knockout tournament. They are, of course, distinct. But to insist they are nonoverlapping is demonstrably false because professional sport participates of both practices. Moreover, that they overlap isn’t some incidental or contingent fact about professional sport; it is an essential part of what makes professional sport what it is. Morris is a valuable commercial commodity – he is also a valuable sporting asset. The Rajasthan Royals want to win the Indian Premier League because it is financially lucrative *and* because it is a significant sporting achievement. The LA Lakers are worth so much money because no other basketball team is so decorated in championship success. Ronaldo’s likeness is worth owning because he is one of the greatest footballers to have ever lived. European fans like the football pyramid because it means ardent supporters of Yeovil Town might get the chance to compete with Manchester Utd; Yeovil Town’s shareholders like the football pyramid because a home tie against Manchester Utd might pay for a new stand – or souvenir shop. If one is going to use practice as a model for how different human activities are conducted, and I must say I am sympathetic to Lamarque and Olsen’s enterprise in this regard, it is essential to be faithful to how the practice is carried out. Only then can one hope to get the activities right, as well as the various relations that hold, or don’t hold, between them. With regards to the practices of commerce and sport, it seems entirely proper to say they are distinct. It also seems inescapable to say they are overlapping. There may be many other judgements one could reach about their points of overlap – perhaps even that it is a tragedy that they *do* overlap. One might wish to argue, for example, that the commodification of football is a mixed blessing, one that makes it possible for lifelong lovers of the game to see the greatest footballers in the world in their hometowns – provided they are

willing to foot the bill for their £500,000 per week price tags. But one thing it does not seem reasonable to assert is their distinctness entails their nonoverlapping. On the contrary, they are distinct *and* overlapping, and one can even partially determine in what ways they are distinct by examining where they overlap. So much for sporting and commercial practice. Let us see if this short interlude might shed some light on the situation as it pertains to literary, philosophical and religious practice.

If it is going to be at all illuminating, we should get clear on precisely what Lamarque and Olsen mean when they say literary practice is a distinct and nonoverlapping social practice. Moreover, we should try to determine precisely what they are claiming. Perhaps they are making the strong claim that distinct social practices *per se* do not overlap with one another. Perhaps they are making the somewhat weaker claim that religious, philosophical and literary practice do not overlap with one another. Or perhaps they are making the minimal claim that literary practice does not overlap with either religious or philosophical practice, bearing to them each a neighbourly rather than a familial relationship. This needn't commit them to any particular claim about the overlapping or nonoverlapping quality of social practices which do not share a special interest in perennial themes and thematic concepts, and can leave the question of however closely philosophical and religious practice are related to one another open. Only when we have determined the scope of their claim and the meaning of their terms will we be able to see the full weight and implications of Lamarque and Olsen's position.

One *prima facie* issue with Lamarque and Olsen's claim is that in several obvious senses, literary, religious and philosophical practice *do* overlap on their account. They overlap insofar as they are all social practices. They overlap insofar as they are each centrally focused on perennial themes and thematic concepts. They overlap insofar as they contribute to our application of those concepts in various cultural discourses. They overlap insofar as the culture's understanding of those concepts depends upon the importance each of literature, philosophy and religion attach to them. They overlap insofar as their discursive activity very often reveals an intense interest in one another. I suggested in section one that they overlap even insofar as some of the mechanics of value conferral, such as the creative-imaginative imposition of form on subject, look to be very similar. One could go on. When they say literature and philosophy and literature and religion do not overlap, Lamarque and Olsen must have something else in mind than these myriad ways the practices quite obviously share lots of things in common.

What they appear to be claiming is that literature does not overlap with either of religion or philosophy with respect to *how* it carries out its discursive activity; *how* our understanding

of the concepts depends upon the investment it pays into them; *how* it contributes to our application of perennial concepts and themes; and *how* it focuses on those themes and concepts in the first place. Specifically, I think by ‘nonoverlapping’ they mean to say that a work cannot be *at once* literary and philosophical, or literary and religious. This is because, in the first place, the practices are not interchangeable and, in the second, because literature bears an indirect relation to the concepts it is centrally focused on whereas philosophy and religion are directly constituted by those concepts.

As to how strong a claim they are really making, it seems to me we can infer their intention from how they quite carefully write that literature and philosophy *and* literature and religion have a special connection. They do not also say philosophy and religion have a special connection because it isn’t “these discourses” they want to safeguard from interchange or overlap. The implication seems to be that certain works *do* overlap the boundary between philosophical and religious practice. They can do this because “it is of the essence of philosophical discourse that it is about issues [which are] defined through thematic concepts... [and] the situation for religious belief and religious ritual is analogous.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 408) To return to the example first proposed in relation to literature’s creative-imaginative aspect, and assuming this interpretation of Lamarque and Olsen is correct, there isn’t any conceptual problem with Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* being at once a religious and a philosophical work. Provided the thematic concepts *Fear and Trembling* expresses define the philosophical issues it raises, and provided religious belief is defined through their application in an analogous way, the work is at once an artefact in two overlapping yet distinct practices. Now, it does not follow from this overlap that religion is subsumed into philosophy or that philosophy is subordinate to religion. It is entirely consistent with their overlapping that they are distinct. *Language, Truth and Logic* participates in philosophical but not religious practice. The *Qur’an* participates in religious practice but not philosophical practice. ibn Rushd’s commentaries, Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, Augustine’s *Confessions* and Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* might plausibly participate in both.

But if we return to the *other* discursive work influenced directly by the Abrahamic story that was alluded to in section one, *The Tales of Jacob*, because it is first and foremost a *literary* work, its relationship to the concepts and themes it focuses on is such as to make overlap with either philosophy or religion impossible according to Lamarque and Olsen. Even if *Fear and Trembling* is to some degree valuable by virtue of its imposition of creative form on a subject, and even if it shares a subject with another work which is *also* valuable in some degree by virtue of *its* imposition of creative form, the “imaginative working-out... [in the literary case]

is incommensurable with the philosophical deliberation on theme: one cannot transfer insights from one sphere to another..." (ibid: 391) The consequence is that literature neither competes with nor complements philosophy, and neither "...moral or philosophical truth is... a standard governing literary appreciation." (ibid: 394)

This is relevant to our investigation into the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value because it does not seem possible for Lamarque and Olsen to believe that a work can be at once aesthetically and ethically valuable. If we for a moment recall the example of sporting and commercial practice, Cristiano Ronaldo is at once commercially and sportingly valuable because the two practices overlap. Participating in commercial practice doesn't preclude participating in sporting practice; rather, professional sport involves participating in both practices at once. But according to Lamarque and Olsen, taking up a religious or philosophical stance toward a work *does* preclude taking up toward that work a literary stance. Now, it follows from their account that a work is only valuable to the practice in the context of its participation in the practice. Therefore, if works cannot at once be participating in 'ethical' practice and literary practice, and it seems at least plausible that both religious and philosophical practices overlap with and cannot be isolated from ethical practices, then they cannot at once be 'ethically' and literarily valuable. The corollary of this is that if a work is at once ethically and literarily valuable, then the practices must overlap and Lamarque and Olsen's account of how they relate to one another must be mistaken. It is relevant, therefore, that commerce and sport overlap in professionalised sport, softening the ground for a position amenable to the overlapping of *discursive* social practices. It is relevant, therefore, that perennial themes and thematic concepts play a constitutive role in both philosophical and religious practice, showing how at least *some* of the social practices that are centrally focused on answering "mortal questions" *do* in fact overlap. And it is relevant, therefore, that literature appears to overlap with philosophical and religious practice in several ways, even on Lamarque and Olsen's terms.

But these relevant considerations do not decide the issue. The fundamental point of disagreement between my position and theirs is that they do not think it makes sense to label a work as literary if it serves another function than literature, and I think there are clearly occasions where a work *does* serve another function in addition to its literary function. In these circumstances, literary practice is related to other discursive practices, such as religious, philosophical or ethical practice, in a way that is essentially different from and incompatible with the way Lamarque and Olsen's account characterises the relationship. This represents a serious issue for Lamarque and Olsen because if literature is one among many social practices,

and if their position fails to capture how literature relates to the other practices, or establishes its evaluative conventions, then their model is critically at odds with the reality they are trying to model. There are many things to admire about Lamarque and Olsen's model, but if there are examples of works that at once serve another function in addition to a literary function, then the social practice model of literature will have to be revised to accommodate this phenomenon. I claim examples can be furnished. Therefore, I claim revisions to the model are required.

Before we look at these revisions in closer detail, it is worth pausing to summarise the objections I have made in this section. Common to all three of them, and a persistent problem I believe runs through Lamarque and Olsen's account, is that even though literature has been understood as one among many social practices, their model diverges in various important ways from the reality of literary practice. That is, Lamarque and Olsen are positing a "positive relationship between the world and the work" (ibid: 438) and, moreover, a "strong and positive relationship between literature and 'life'" (ibid), but the felicity of the idea of literature as a social practice seems to falter when the world treats the work in ways they find theoretically inelegant. Where the "'living' arrangement of values operative in a community" (Gibson, 2010: 13) might blur the boundaries between social practices, Lamarque and Olsen want to keep the boundaries tidy. But if literature is practiced with a permeable, indeterminate or blurred boundary between it and other cultural discourses, and one is using the model of a social practice to explain how literary works relate to the world, then it will not do to pretend otherwise. What I require, then, to improve upon Lamarque and Olsen's position, is a model for how the world and the work relate to one another, such that it preserves the instructive and useful elements in their account but is not vulnerable to the same pitfalls. Specifically, I need to provide an account of how a work might function as a 'Cristiano Ronaldo' – at once a participant in literary and philosophical or literary and religious practice.

Section III

Literature and its relation to life

Lamarque and Olsen tell us there exists a strong and positive relationship between literature and life. This is not a "direct representational relation... [based] on the paradigm... of the 'mirror of nature'". (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 438) Instead, the "principal representational quality of literary works resides in a kind of aboutness – explained as thematic content..." (ibid) and the positive relation should be understood in those terms. This is because literature is one among many cultural discourses with a central focus on "mortal questions".

These questions ask how life is to be understood and how it is lived. (Nagel, 2012: ix) Literature's characteristic way of answering them is coordinated by its presentation of universal human concerns, rather than its responsibility to the truth, its reliable furnishing of insight and so on. As such, we can identify a work as literary by its expression of universal human concerns and its amenability to interpretation through the concepts and conventions that frame those concerns. The interpretation is done by practitioners – in the case of literary practice, these practitioners are authors and readers, but other practices might have different practitioners – and the expression is found in works. For Lamarque and Olsen, the existence of a positive relationship between literature and life involves another positive relationship, therefore – this time between the 'world', understood here to mean the network of cultural discourses that invest their constitutive concepts and conventions with significance, and the work wherein these concepts are expressed.

But just as the work relates to the 'world' that contains it – and is interpretable through the themes the 'world' has adopted as its central focus – the work also functions as a contained expression of *its* central focus. It has, so to speak, its *own* world, namely, the world of the work. We have, then, to provide some account of *two* worlds if we are to characterise how literature bears a relationship to life appropriately. On one hand is the world of the work, understood to mean the contained expression of a central focus through a network of concepts and conventions. On the other is the work in the world, understood to mean how that contained expression is engaged with by participants of various cultural discourses. If this is right, there are a few different, interrelated things one might want to say about each of these elements. In the first place, one might wonder how the world of the work is established. Second, and especially pertinent to Lamarque and Olsen's "stretch[ed]" notion of mimesis, one might wish to account for how the work exists in the world. And third, tying each these considerations together, one might require an explanation for how the world of the work relates to the work in the world. The relationship between literature and life involves providing an answer to all three.

In this chapter's final section, I intend to flesh out the claim, paying due attention to the elements I want to preserve from Lamarque and Olsen's characterisation of literary practice as described in Section I, and also steering clear of the problems I think their characterisation is vulnerable to as outlined in Section II. This fleshed out account will serve as the backbone for my understanding of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, presented in the final chapter with literary examples we have encountered throughout this thesis.

To give a brief glimpse of what is to come in that final chapter, the relationship, in my view, is not a covariant one as the moralists would have it. Nor does jettisoning any relationship

at all, as the aestheticists propose, seem to me a promising strategy. Moreover, I do not think that ethical value, as it pertains to literature, is merely a catalyst for the accomplishment of a technical feat. The relationship is a deeper and more important one than the immoralist's conception would lead one to think. The immoralist is primarily interested in how *moral* judgements contribute to aesthetic value, how *moral* rightness and wrongness might be rendered artistically valuable. But if literature's mimetic aspect is its thematic aspect, and if themes are "not the kind of entity that can be true or false", (ibid: 437) then rightness or wrongness isn't the salient metric. *Ethical* value can be conceived in a richer, thicker way than this. And yet it isn't quite right to say, as Martha Nussbaum does, that this thickness and richness means certain literary works are themselves works of moral philosophy either. Literature and moral philosophy serve different discursive functions and the evaluative practices of those different discursive functions are distinct from one another. It is useful and appropriate to insist on their distinctness. The relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is not best characterised by positing the merging and melding of ethics and literature into one homogenous lump. But we should not take this to mean, as Lamarque and Olsen conclude, that literature is a nonoverlapping social practice, atomised apart from its brother and sister cultural discourses. By contrast, this can be precisely the point and purpose of works borne of these practices, and one's account of them must be able to accommodate this. In my view, the best way to understand this multifaceted relationship is to engage with how literature relates to life; and the way to understand how literature relates to life is to investigate how the world of the work relates to the work in the world. Let us therefore get to it.

How the world of the work is established

A work is a product of discursive social practice. It is wrought by the social practice's creative cohort and consumed by the social practice's readership. It is imbued with value by the social practice that receives it. In one sense, then, a work only exists because discursive social practices produce it and is only of interest or importance so long as the social practices say so. But whereas the readership of a social practice might change, whereas the creative cohort's intentions might change, whereas the conventions that define these readers' and authors' activities might change, the works around which this activity spirals do not change, even when they are *about* change. Of course, new iterations of those works might appear within the social practice's network. New versions and editions might be published, and these might, so to speak, update the works with which the social practice engages. But provided the earlier

versions are not lost, it is entirely permissible for participants of a social practice to engage with earlier and later versions of the work as distinct, contained products of cultural discourse, albeit with unusually close relations to other culturally discursive products – specifically the other iterations that it is a version of.

That there exists a B edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* doesn't stop the A edition from existing, nor preclude philosophical practice from engaging with it. Though there may have been changes one to the other, this does not mean one has changed *into* the other. They are distinct from one another and invite separate evaluation. If one claims the B edition of the *Critique* is philosophically superior to the A edition of the *Critique*, or else thinks the A edition is superior to the B edition, or else again contends it is neither better nor worse just different, then each of these judgements are possible to make because the A edition remains an independent – and unchanged – product of philosophical practice. The same idea applies if we compare the various versions of Joni Mitchell's 'Both Sides Now', the two endings of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the verse and prose versions of Homer's *Iliad*, the various *translated* versions of Homer's *Iliad* and the canonical version we have from antiquity, and so on.

If philosophical practice reevaluates the two works and notices things in the A edition that, upon reflection, seem to have been better cast there than in the revised B edition, develops a nuanced reading of the B edition that resolves fundamental issues with the A edition, argues that, actually, these ideas were more concisely and compellingly presented in the *Prolegomena* than in either the A *or* the B edition, then the evaluation of the A edition will have changed, the response of the philosophical readership will have changed – but the edition itself will have stayed the same.

There is, then, something resilient about works, even if they are contingent upon authors for their existence and contingent upon readers for their value. Whatever the practice does with the work in the fullness of time – whether it adopts the work, champions the work, devalues the work, censures the work, revises its opinion of the work, repurposes the work when the practice moves on – the work endures as a contained expression of what the author intended at the time it was wrought. This contained expression is the world of the work. It is worth examining some of its features in a little closer detail.

The world of the work is elicited from the text it springs from. But as Lamarque and Olsen have correctly observed, there are “no syntactic, semantic, or even loosely ‘rhetorical’ features of a text that define it as a literary work” and we can say something similar about the worlds of those works. The same goes for a philosophical work, a religious work, and so on.

These practices might investigate the worlds of certain works. Authors may have intended to contribute to one or another social practice's constellation of worlds in works. Readers from other social practices might identify features of some of these worlds that are amenable to their practice in ways the original authors had not envisaged. The worlds of the works might not be of any interest to any member of any social practice whatsoever. But all these various circumstances will be relational facts about how the works are approached by the world, rather than how the work of the world is itself wrought.

Lamarque and Olsen's observation holds even if the work must possess certain syntactic, semantic or rhetorical features (which in turn has implications for how the world of the work must be structured in certain ways that accord with those features) in order to participate of any specific social practice. That is, an absence of certain features may be enough to indicate a text is not a literary, philosophical or religious work, may indicate that the world of a work isn't one governed by religious, philosophical or literary conventions. But being in possession of any especial set of features won't be enough to secure membership to any one of them. This is because the same formal features might appear in a literary and a non-literary, a philosophical and non-philosophical, a religious and non-religious work; and so too might the world of a literary work have the same structural apparatus as the world of a non-literary work. The world of the work is not literary, philosophical, or religious only so long as it possesses formal features from those discursive practices. Rather, it is either hospitable or hostile to exploration by these practices. If a sonnet must be a fourteen-line poem, it does not follow that any fourteen-line text, or even any fourteen-line poem, is a sonnet. The question of whether the candidate text comprises part of the cultural discourse or not, whether the world that can be elicited from it is amenable or poorly suited to engagement by a social practice's array of actors, is determined by how the cultural discourse receives the work and whether the discourse chooses to navigate its world. Only if it is identified as a literary, philosophical, or religious work by those respective communities will it be accommodating of religious, philosophical, or literary evaluation.

A community does not make this identification arbitrarily, however. Rather, a work can only be identified as participating in a practice and a world can only be explored by a practicing readership if it manifests an engagement with the defining concepts and conventions of that practice. As we have seen, there are good reasons for adopting Lamarque and Olsen's scheme for dividing these concepts into three levels when it comes to literary practice. The first level describes the formal, syntactic and semantic concepts that do not in themselves constitute the practice (and will not secure membership to the practice, however many one is able to identify)

but will augment our engagement with the practice if we are familiar with and conversant in them. The second level concepts ensure the subject of the work is sufficiently stable to gain a rudimentary awareness of what is going on in it. The third level thematic concepts allow for a more sophisticated interpretation of the work's point and purpose. All this is in accordance with Lamarque and Olsen's position. But as their focus is primarily to do with works, and I am suggesting that a useful way to conceive of these works is to talk about the imaginative worlds one can elicit from them, we will need to adjust tack a little to ensure we are focusing on the world of the work rather than the work's location in the world – although we will return to this topic shortly.

If the world of the work can be approached by a social practice, it will be structured in such a way that these concepts make it intelligible, or 'mappable'. It will be wrought in such a way that its structure can be described with technical concepts, the events, characters and settings that populate its terrain can be interpreted stably (and yet differently), and its cartography can be expressed in thematic terms. If the world is approachable by literary practice, these themes will, moreover, be of a perennial kind. But this needn't mean all literary appreciators, philosophical interlocutors or religious believers will have to arrive at the same landmarks, examine the same geography, or chart the same coastlines. The world of the work is open to multiple interpretation and capable of being pioneered in various directions. We are after all talking of about the *world* of the work, and a visitor to that world needn't restrict their investigation to just those locations the author has charted explicitly. The phenomenon of an 'extended universe', be it cinematic, televisual, novelistic – one could go on – points in this direction. The worlds of certain works might not be exhausted by the treatments they receive in those works.

Now, I do not want to push too far in this direction; doing so risks losing track of how the world is explored by the candidate religious, philosophical or literary *work*. *The Mandalorian* is not the same work as *A New Hope* and *Pulp Fiction* is not the same work as *Reservoir Dogs*, even if one is disposed to say they explore the same worlds.⁴⁴ But they do seem to give credence to the thought that it is possible to sustain various interpretations of the

⁴⁴ This seems a little more plausible in the 'Star Wars' example than it does in the 'Realer than Real World' example, whatever Quentin Tarantino's intentions might be.

world of the work's topography. Phillip Pullman has provided a characterisation of his own discursive practice⁴⁵ in 'The Path Through the Wood' (1999) by saying:

Each novel or story is a path... that goes through a wood. The wood is the world in which the characters live and have their being; it's the realm of all the things that could possibly happen to them; it's the notional space where their histories exist and where their future lives are going to continue after the story reaches the last page.

(Pullman, 1999: 87)

Though we should not attach too much weight to Pullman's metaphor, his point accords with the idea that the world of the work is susceptible to diverse exploration. Nor is it entirely different from Lamarque and Olsen's observation that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are each "presenting different conceptions of the same" Orestes/Electra story. (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 264) Pullman's *Dark Materials* offer one pathway through the world in which his characters live and have their being. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are offering *their* pathways through the worlds in which *their* characters live and have *their* being. Because those paths are constituted by a network of concepts and conventions that different readers may interpret in a heterogeneous way, one might expect those paths to admit of different impressions.

To return to an example Lamarque and Olsen spend some time analysing – somewhat controversially, we will recall – one literary appreciator may notice how the world of 'Leda and the Swan' comes to "represent the origin of Western civilisation in passion, blood and violence." (Lamarque & Olsen, 261) Another might observe how Leda is "mastered by the brute blood of the air", might examine Zeus' "indifferen[ce]" to her "terrified... fingers push[ing]" him away in vain – his "sudden blow" has already rendered her "helpless" – and might see in this act of sexual violence, given that "[t]he broken wall, the burning roof and tower" are in Troy and not atop Olympus, a paradigm of absolute power's inhuman impunity from worldly consequence. (Yeats, 1923) Provided the world is rich enough in texture and the

⁴⁵ Whether Pullman's works participate in literary practice, or whether the worlds of those works are approachable by literary practitioners, does not need to be determined for present purposes. One suspects he does not care very much either way if the "practitioners of literary theory... throw their hands up in disgust" (Pullman, 2017: 87) or applause. His comments, in any event, are quoted here as an illustration of how the world of the work might be approachable from myriad perspectives and accommodating of various interpretations, rather than as support for an argument to that conclusion.

appreciator is equipped with the relevant resources to sustain them, the world of the work can admit of myriad plausible interpretations, might be trackable along myriad plausible paths. This being said, the value of those myriad plausible paths cannot be accounted for by examining the world of the work in isolation. This is because value is only conferred upon a work, the value is only conferred upon the exploration of the world of a work, in the context of the cultural practice that examines the work and explores its world. That is, identifying a work as partaking of literary, philosophical, ethical, historical practice is principally a function of how the work is received by the world, understood to mean the social practice that invests the work with value or rejects it as worthless.

How the work exists in the world

The way the work exists in the world has been extensively examined by Lamarque and Olsen. It is ingrained in the way they conceive of literature, religion, and philosophy as cultural practices with a central focus on perennial themes and thematic concepts. It is worth reiterating, though, that a practice is not static, and doesn't involve authors whose intentions are eternal or readers whose stances are petrified. Rather, social practices involve the dynamic engagement of both creators and consumers with works – reevaluation, after all, is a constant feature of criticism and an activity that purifies the canon. Movement and mutability are essential features of a social practice. One should therefore expect to see the social practice engage with works in a mutable, moving, re-evaluative way.

This 'way', too, might be expected to change throughout a social practice's process of maturation. A creator might intend for their output to be engaged with in one way and an audience might engage with it in another way entirely; key to practice is the galvanising and productive quality of interpretative and intentional multiplicity. An audience might do things with a work the author had never intended. An author might have intended for an audience to respond as it never does. But the practice, as cumulatively and dynamically defined by its practitioners, both authors and readers, dictates what counts as participation in the discourse; whether theoreticians approve of the direction the practice is taking or no. This means, as we have seen, that several audiences might take up the same work and an author might intend their work for several audiences. Of course, an author is not required to intend their work for myriad audiences, and it is not required of a work that myriad audiences adopt it. Some works might not be able to sustain the various functions they are intended for or subjected to. I am not arguing that all works adopted by a social practice must behave in the same way or that a practice demands of all works the same things. But some works might be amenable to sustained

engagement in various modes – though this won't mean the work is doing the same thing in all those modes, Lamarque and Olsen are right to insist that literary, philosophical, and religious practice are doing different things and not the same thing in different ways – so one's account of social practice should be able to accommodate this amenability even if it isn't always exercised.

Sometimes, the practices the works are artefacts of, and the stances required to understand how they might be engaged with in those practices, will be distinct and nonoverlapping with one another. Sometimes, there will be points of inconsequential or unimportant overlap. Sometimes, the point of overlap is the point and purpose the work is expressive of. In this last circumstance, being able to elicit the maximally valuable experience from the work involves getting a handle on where the work overlaps with other practices and determining what contribution those areas of overlap are making. It may be that the relationship between the two overlapping practices is asymmetrical, symbiotic, parasitic, and so on. But unless one acknowledges the overlap, and unless one endeavours to understand the way the areas of overlap contribute to, or even perhaps detract from, the value one might elicit from the work, then one's apprehension of the work, and one's apprehension of the work's role in the practices, will be incomplete and to that extent distorted.

We have spoken principally about discursive social practices, but an analogous point can be made about non-discursive practices. If we consider the example that gave rise to the idea of overlapping practices, ascertaining why Cristiano Ronaldo is commercially valuable involves understanding professional sport's sporting aspect. An analysis of what makes Cristiano Ronaldo a valuable sportsperson involves understanding professional sport's commercial aspect. Ronaldo's sporting value is not subsumed by his commercial value, and neither is his commercial value subsumed by his sporting value. But having a complete grasp of how sporting and commercial value are conferred upon him, or his commercial-sporting activity, involves being alive to the fact professional sport involves a dynamic network of both practices, defined by their own evaluative conventions. Sport and commerce are not closely related practices; their points of overlap and the degree to which that overlap contributes to commercial and sporting value respectively reflects this. But a complete understanding of both sport and commerce involves taking into consideration professionalised sport; to the extent one ignores this point of crossover, one misrepresents both practices. To the extent one ignores the point of crossover, one misrepresents how the world responds to sporting commodities like Cristiano Ronaldo.

Religion, philosophy, and literature are many times closer related to one another. They are, I think Lamarque and Olsen are right to conclude, distinct practices with many, even most, works from each of these practices having no point of overlap or else points of inconsequent or unimportant overlap. Moreover, even where there *is* overlap, it is, of course, possible for two appreciators of a work to reasonably disagree about how much of a contribution either one of these aspects is making – provided they are alive to the possibility the author intends for the work to perform more than one function, they are not bound to reach the same conclusion regarding how well the author carries out their intention, or even how deeply the author intended the overlap to be engaged with. But still the point remains that some works *do* overlap the practices in important and consequent ways; some works *are* to a greater or lesser extent about the point of overlap. Thus Wolf-Daniel Hartwich writes of “the late Mann [that he] goes beyond the description and analysis of religious matters and makes literature the vehicle for theological speculation.” (Hartwich, trans. Robertson, 2008: 2) Moreover, *Joseph and His Brothers* presents both Jacob’s “predominantly ethical stance” which “retains the normative aspect of religion” and Joseph’s “model of aesthetic autonomy” as “necessary for Mann’s literary engagement with myth and religion.” (ibid: 3) The thematic concept of the sacred in Mann is at once presented as “ethically normative and, at the same time, aesthetically autonomous.” (ibid)

Grappling with the work’s literary value must therefore involve understanding how it is engaged by and with religious practice. Understanding the work’s engagement with religious practice, and thus its engagement with religious value, must also involve identifying the work as an artefact of literary practice. Its engagement with both these practices is crucial, not merely to understanding its subject, not merely to recognising its matrix of formal apparatuses, but to establishing a coherent, cogent thematic interpretation of the work’s point and purpose. Its literary value doesn’t get subsumed by its engagement with religious practice; nor is its estimation of religious value subordinate to the literary stance required of it. But unless one recognises and takes seriously how the work is participating in each of these practices, then one’s appreciation of the work will be to that extent incomplete, distorted and misrepresentative of how the world engages with the work.

How the world of the work relates to the work in the world

It would be a different kind of distortion and misrepresentation to assume the work is appreciated in the same way by the practices for ever and always. *Joseph and his Brothers* is a

work that makes literature the vehicle for theological speculation. It also explores the idea of “cultural *evolution* as determined by [developments and changes] to the religious as well as the artistic domain.” [my italics] (ibid) That is, the work explores how religious and artistic practice both influence a culture that evolves and develops. They function dynamically rather than statically. The following sequence that spans volumes two and three of his tetralogy will be instructive for illustrating what I mean by this.

The sons of Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah – excepting the absent Reuben, hurrying, already too late, towards Joseph in the well – sit “beneath the spreading branches of the pines” (Mann, 1978: 400) and lament the course events have taken. They are no longer convinced, if they ever were, by the distinction Reuben draws between “doing and happening”.⁴⁶ On the contrary “[i]t was”, Judah says to the arrayed brothers, “contemptible that we threw him [Joseph] in the pit and persuaded ourselves that his blood was spared thereby...” (ibid: 400-401) They had desired “to be like Lamech in the song” but could not so act; “our customs are not of the ancient time and of heroic mould.” (ibid: 401) Neither the desire to murder their brother nor their fearful reluctance to manifest that desire is contemptible, but rather was their attempt to sanitise both the fear and desire. To permit the beating and binding of Joseph (because it was, after all, merely a happening) and to sidestep any responsibility for his fate in the well (having not done anything) – this, rather than battery or murder, constituted contemptible behaviour. To let Joseph die, rather than killing him, “was a bastard thought, begot of an ancient saga and the modern customs.” (ibid) The brothers are conscious of an atavistic and violent impulse. They are conscious that yielding uncomplicatedly to that impulse is not an available option, appropriate, perhaps, to an ancient time but not to their current context. And they are conscious

⁴⁶ An example here of Thomas Mann’s threading Nietzschean ideas through his literary exploration of a theme. Another example crops in the same passage – “it had been once and it recurred.” (Mann, 1978: 402) Mann does this most overtly in *Doktor Faustus*, but examples abound throughout his oeuvre. He also routinely treats of Schopenhauerian ideas – in *Buddenbrooks*, of course, where Thomas relates his epiphanic, albeit misguided, interpretation of *The World as Will and Representation*, but also in his short stories like *Gladius Dei*, where Hieronymus’ futile final sermon in the art shop is scarcely intelligible except within the context of Schopenhauerian metaphysics: “Art is the sacred torch that must shed its merciful light into all life’s terrible depths, into every shameful and sorrowful abyss; art is the divine flame that must set fire to the world, until the world with all its infamy and anguish burns and melts away in redeeming compassion...” (Mann, 1998 :109) Mann returns again and again to the literary exploration of concepts and conventions that are also constitutive of philosophical practice – storytelling, immorality, moral consciousness, one could go on. An account of *his* contribution to literary practice that ignores this aspect of his work would be critically incomplete.

that, for all their earlier obfuscations, it is untenable to leave Joseph at the bottom of the well. They are “gloomy” because the problem appears insoluble.

And then a resolution to their predicament presents itself on the horizon. They spot Ishmeelite merchants on Dothan’s hill. They do not know that their half-brother Joseph is one of the riders in this caravan; on the contrary, they think it is now “too late to fetch Joseph.” They nevertheless recognise an opportunity and are “firmly resolved... not to lose [it].” (ibid) They intend “to attach the boy [that is, their brother] to these Ishmeelites that they should take him out of sight and sound and so set the brethren free.” (ibid: 401-402) They do not merely “yield somewhat to the conditions as they exist, [...but instead] conform to them altogether.” (ibid) For twenty silver Phoenician shekels, they are set free by selling their brother to the merchants. But rather than condemn the brothers’ actions, the narrator reminds us of the mythical resonances that have piled up throughout the preceding four hundred pages. The sun and the moon; the red man and the white; the hairy and the smooth – “the situation had roots; it had been once and it recurred.” (ibid: 402) Somehow, this terrible event – this happening, this doing – is meant to be.

Literary engagement with *Joseph and his Brothers* invites the reader to behave like the characters that populate the work’s world – and in so doing, recognise that one cannot always manage it. The brother’s behaviour belongs to a time and context it would be inappropriate to expect them to transcend. Indeed, they behave as they do just because the behaviour of Lamech belongs to a time and context it would be inappropriate for them to repeat. It was composed in the context of Mann fleeing Germany and into exile. It relates the story of a protagonist who is sold into exile. The world of Mann’s creation is different than the world he created it in and different again from the world that now engages with it. Its narrative is one of cultural shift and developing practices. It invites myriad stances – and those stances develop and change in myriad ways as well. That is the point and purpose of the world in Mann’s work; our account of the world outside the work must be alive to that point and purpose. Because of this, an interpretation of *Joseph and his Brothers*, as well as an interpretation of various other works that trawl similar seas, demands an engagement with literary, philosophical, religious and ethical practice. This is not merely insofar as the world of the work presents these practices as dynamic, but also because the world outside the work is dynamic. Literature cannot be evaluated aright unless we acknowledge its dynamic aspect, make accommodations for it, even celebrate it. *Joseph and his Brothers* offers a paradigm of how literary practice bears deep and enriched relations to other cultural discourses. This is evident in the works it explores and in

the diverse activity its practitioners engage in. In my view, Lamarque and Olsen's account is flawed because it distorts and misrepresents those relations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Lamarque and Olsen are correct when they say literature, philosophy and religion are distinct social practices with distinct evaluative conventions and distinct discursive functions. They do not provide the same answers to mortal questions 'in a different way' because they do not interpret mortal questions in the same way. They demand of their readers different stances and require of their authors different intentions. I have argued, moreover, that their scheme for dividing the concepts and conventions that define literary practice is coherent and their focus on literature's creative-imaginative and mimetic aspects is appropriate. But I have also argued that their account fails to explain how literary practice relates to other discursive social practices. This is because their intelligible and well-motivated desire to preserve literature's distinctness has led them to the erroneous conclusion that literature cannot overlap with other social practices, either with respect to an author's intention, a reader's activity, or a work's openness to a diverse range of stances.

On the contrary, I have claimed that it is sometimes possible for an author to intend for a work to accommodate more than one stance and it is sometimes possible for a reader to take up more than one stance toward a work. Of course, not all authors intend this of their work and not all audiences will be induced to take up more than one stance to a work. Moreover, an author might fail to realise their intentions and a reader might respond to a work inappropriately. Attempts can misfire and fail; they do not of themselves ensure success. But Lamarque and Olsen are wrong to say there are no good reasons to label a work as literary if it serves another function – sometimes the point and purpose of the work is to simultaneously serve a literary and another function, whether that be something like John Donne's devotional poetry which is intended to express religious belief through literary output; something like Plato's best dialogues, which use the conventions of literary practice in order to facilitate philosophical enquiry; or something like Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers*, which "goes beyond the description and analysis of religious matters and makes literature the vehicle for theological speculation." (Hartwich, trans. Robertson, 2008: 2) In these circumstances, when the other function does not supplant but is instead intended to operate in concert with the literary function, there seem to me very good reasons indeed to label a work literary. Sometimes a work is intended to investigate precisely where the boundaries between discursive functions lie and

whether those boundaries might be crossed. It will not do to say literature cannot overlap with other practices because engaging with the point and purpose of some works involves determining where, how and why those works investigate the overlap between various cultural discourses. For these works, literary appreciation involves being sensitive to how the work is serving its other function. For these works, taking up the appropriate stance involves considering how other stances might impact one's literary response.

One might be concerned that this lengthy chapter is somewhat at a remove from the argument as it has been developed in the preceding chapters. But my investigation into Lamarque and Olsen's account of literary, philosophical, and religious practice has not been a digression, far from it. This is because their analysis bears very directly on how literary and ethical practice is structured, and this in turn dictates how literary and ethical value are conferred upon works by those practices. Let us close the chapter by making the situation plain.

Ethical practice is not literary practice; neither is literary practice ethical practice. They demand different stances and employ different evaluative conventions. It only makes sense to confer value on a work in the context of whatever practice that work is participating in and whatever stance is appropriate to that practice. It therefore follows that literary value pertains to literary practice, that ethical value pertains to ethical practice, and that it is a mistake to conflate the two or expect them to reach the same judgements. Herein lies the trouble for the moralist. But if a work participates of both practices, or asks questions of both practices, or investigates the points of overlap between the practices, then one's evaluation of that work must be sensitive to the point and purpose the work expresses. Herein lies the trouble for the aestheticist.

Works are not valuable independently of the social practices they are members of. Value is only conferred on a work in accordance with the evaluative conventions of the relevant practice. The practices, comprised of works, authors and readers, are sovereign over their own judgements. If they overlap with other practices, this doesn't mean their value-making conventions are thereby subsumed into the other's, or are rendered subordinate to the other's, or dictate the other's. By contrast, each of the overlapping practices will still have their own characteristic evaluative conventions and will be able to arrive at their own, perhaps entirely different, perhaps even opposed, evaluative conclusions. But the points of overlap will have to be accounted for notwithstanding this sovereignty of practice and judgement. Those value-making conventions cannot just be silent about the overlap, or pretend the overlap isn't there. Some account of how the overlap contributes to, or detracts from, the work's value to the practice will have to be provided.

In the context of ethical and literary value, then, if some works are at once intended to participate in ethical and literary practice, then accounting for ethical and literary value will have to be cognisant of the overlap; it will have to have some story of how they each contribute to or detract from one another, augment or diminish one another, are in conflict or in concert, stand aloof from one another or synergise. Moreover, if the answer to this is different for different works, if sometimes the overlap is symbiotic and other times it is parasitic, if sometimes the evaluative practices dovetail and if sometimes they diverge, some explanation of how this is possible must be furnished. I have proposed that this furnishing might be achieved if we think of practice as involving a relationship between the world of the work, conceived as the contained expression of a work's central focus, and the work in the world, conceived as the dynamic and evolving way that work is engaged with by a cultural discourse. Moreover, I have proposed in this chapter that some literary works intend to investigate this dynamic tension between the world of the work and the work in the world. It is sometimes precisely this that social practice, and literary practice in particular, is in the business of doing.

One final observation before moving onto this thesis' final chapter. The approach I have proposed has implications for the question that drives Gaut, Kieran and Eaton's respective accounts. In situations where the practices overlap, it is sometimes the case that ethical truth can simultaneously matter to literary value and yet not matter stably. That is, the view that the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is dynamic allows for the possibility that a work's literary value absorbs the weight of, say, the immorality that a given real reception of a work ascribes to it – but is not settled by that ethical weight. The immorality is not 'merely fictional' or 'merely an aesthetic flourish'. Nevertheless, its value in literary practice is always open to unsettling.

Chapter Five: The manifold dynamic relationship between aesthetic and ethical value in three representative works

Introduction

In this thesis, I have been building toward an answer to the question ‘What makes bad books good?’ For my purposes, a work is ‘bad’ in the sense that it is ethically or morally suspect, flawed, problematic and so on, and ‘good’ in the sense that it is artistically or literarily elegant, well realised, beautiful and so on. I am interested, then, in determining if and how these two senses impact upon one another and have canvassed various strategies to this end. Each of those strategies have been framed by how they account for the relationship between the two kinds of evaluative framework, one that returns an ethical evaluation and the other a literary evaluation. So too is my answer framed by how I account for this relationship. In the sense I have meant it, ‘What makes bad books good?’ is an invitation to analyse the relationship between ethical and literary value.

It should be clear by now that I am unconvinced either autonomism, be it Posner’s aestheticism or Lamarque and Olsen’s model of literature as a nonoverlapping social practice, or ethicism, of either a Gautian or Nussbaumian flavour, can provide a satisfactory account of the relationship. Furthermore, I do not think immoralism, as it has been characterised by philosophers such as Eaton and Kieran, captures the relationship in all its multifaceted richness. It is nevertheless worth pointing out that I might have grouped these various strategies for dealing of the relationship differently than they appear above. I have orientated them by the conclusion each strategy draws. If, though, we shift our focus somewhat, we can redraw the lines and emphasise different parallels between the strategies. If we focus instead on whether the strategy principally focuses on thin moral value or thick ethical value, a different picture emerges.

Despite their wildly incompatible conclusions, Gaut and Posner are in alignment, intriguingly, insofar as their understanding of the relationship is underpinned by a belief that ‘getting it morally right or wrong’ is the best way to conceive of ethical value. Similarly, if we think about Nussbaum’s literary ethicism and Lamarque and Olsen’s odd variety of literary humanism, some interesting observations can be made. Their conclusions are diametrically opposed – Lamarque and Olsen go so far as to say “that Nussbaum’s discussions of James and of classical tragedy seem more illuminating as pieces of literary criticism, than as contributions to a moral debate.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 396) But if Posner’s and Gaut’s approaches are thin, Nussbaum and Lamarque and Olsen’s approaches are each much thicker. They manifest

a fascinatingly similar commitment to literature and philosophy being centrally focused on, and substantive contributors to, our understanding of perennially significant mortal questions.

If we think along these lines, it seems to me that Eaton and Kieran's immoralism, although it comes to a very different conclusion, has more in common with Gaut and Posner than it does with Nussbaum and Lamarque and Olsen. They diverge insofar as for them, 'getting it wrong' *can sometimes be* artistically valuable, whereas for Gaut and Posner 'getting it wrong' is *never* artistically valuable. But this too is an answer framed by an interest in the thin relationship, not the thick one. It therefore remains for me to provide an account that is sympathetic to immoralism but committed to a deeper and richer account of ethical value, aesthetic value, and their mutual relations. In this chapter, I set out to do just that.

In my view, literature is best understood as one among many social practices that are defined and regulated by a variety of conventions and concepts. Its evaluative conventions, moreover, reside to a substantial extent in the practice's imaginative-creative and mimetic aspects, and these aspects are themselves orientated toward the presentation of enduringly, humanly interesting content. That content, expressed in works and interpreted by way of an engagement with perennial themes and thematic concepts, is a central focus in literary practice. But literature is not the only social practice that makes perennial themes a central focus. Nor is it the only social practice that bears a "strong and positive relationship between [it] and 'life'," (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 439) or a "positive relationship between the world and the work" (ibid) is relevant for determining how it relates to 'life'. As such, although literary practice – and therefore literary value – is distinct from other social practices and value-making frameworks, this does not mean it is isolated from those other social practices, nor erects its value-making framework in isolation. It seems to me that part of grasping how literature carries out its practice involves understanding its relationship to other social practices, such as philosophy and religion, in which mortal questions play a central and ineliminable role.

To that end, I propose examining the relationship between the 'world of the work' and 'the work in the world'. To achieve this, in what follows I will look at the way some works facilitate imaginative 'navigation' of their worlds, and how the cultural practices that help us to navigate works are themselves dynamically and organically changing. I will argue that because the world of the work can be navigated in myriad ways – recalling Pullman's characterisation of his own writerly practice, the author provides us one 'path through the wood' – and because the cultural practices these works pertain to are not rigid, we shouldn't expect the relationship between ethical and literary value to be rigid either. 'What makes bad books good?' can only be answered provided we understand the value-making conventions of those practices which

determine a work is 'bad' - and 'good' - and provided we account for how the world of the candidate work is navigated.

Moreover, because the relationship between ethical and literary value is not rigid, and because the conventions that define and regulate ethical and literary practice are not rigid, one might expect for different paths through different woods – different works with different worlds – to reveal different aspects and shades of that relationship. If the practices are dynamic and subject to organic growth, one might expect to see in its myriad epochs different motifs being accented, different emphases being placed on the perennial themes that remain of central focus, and different perspectives coming to the fore; both with respect to the authors and readers of these works. The products of these practices, wrought in a specific, yet engaged with in an evolving, cultural landscape, will not be quite the same, nor yielding of quite the same evaluative permutations, for each and every person that engages with them. That is, ethical and literary practice are not merely dynamic, in their own right and in relation to one another, but dynamic in manifold ways.

I will unpack this manifold dynamism by closely analysing works produced at various staging points in the development of a practice – namely, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers*. In so doing, I will demonstrate how, in my estimation, the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, and the answer to the question 'What makes bad books good?', is not best accounted for by judging literary works on the basis of any 'immoral stuff' going on in them. Rather, some literary works manifest a fascinating relationship between the world the work asks its reader to navigate and the world outside the work the reader inhabits. The relationship between ethical and aesthetic value isn't any one singular thing – but neither is it an unstructured free-for-all in which anything is permissible. It is elastic rather than rigid, variable rather than unchanging. Nevertheless, the relationship can be systematic, even if elastic and variable. The aesthetic goodness of some works is not correlated with their ethical content, with attitudes, prescriptions, truths and so on. Rather, it is correlated with their power to illuminate a set of ethical 'living arrangements' and get us to test, explore and challenge our relation to them. The attention these works pay to the workings and status of an ethical practice shifts the artistic goal away from a concern for truth, prescription, attitude – away from *content* – and toward an understanding of, and sometimes a confrontation with, that practice. As Robert Stecker has incisively observed, "[t]here are lots of systematic relationships between two items that are not invariable... even if ethical and artistic value interact or fail to [in various ways] they might still be systematically related." (Stecker, 2008: 147) Let us now get to the business of characterising that relationship.

Section I

'A warning against prohibited love' – Book 9 of Metamorphoses

Book 9 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* opens with three tales in which Hercules features as a key figure. Following on from these tales, and by way of Miletus' "land[ing] in Asia and buil[ding] the walls of the famous town named after its founder" (ibid: 447), we are introduced to his children, "Byblis and Caunus, twins of astonishing beauty." (ibid: 451) It is their tale, and more specifically Byblis' tortured predicament, with which I will be principally dealing.

By stages, Ovid unpacks Byblis' inner turmoil. At first, she sees "nothing wrong in kissing him on the lips rather often, or tenderly throwing her arms round Caunus' neck..." (ibid: 458-9) She "d[oes] not understand the growing passion insider her" (ibid: 455) and "delude[s] herself this feeling was perfectly natural". (ibid: 460) But incrementally, things begin to unravel. She proves "over-keen to display her charms" (ibid: 462), becomes "jealous of anyone else who [is] more attractive" (463), secretly calls Caunus 'my master'⁴⁷ rather than 'brother' and "wishes he'd address her as Byblis and not keep calling her 'sister'." (ibid: 466-7) During her waking moments she can keep the mounting tide at bay, but in her dreams, she imagines "her brother and she were one flesh [and] blushe[s]" in her sleep. (ibid: 470-1) Soon even this façade crumbles. "[T]orn by conflicting emotions", (ibid: 474) Byblis "l[ies] quiet for a while [upon waking and] trie[s] to recapture the picture she'd seen in her dream..." (ibid: 473-4)

In these psychologically acute and beautifully delicate lines, Ovid provides Byblis a rich and desperate character portrait. By turns we come to believe in her creeping, insidious self-awareness; recognise the subtle yet irrevocable changes in her behaviour; understand why she guards her waking moments and blushes through her sleeping ones; and can imagine vividly how fissures begin to widen in her resolve as she allows herself, against her better and conscious judgement, to prolong her night-time fantasies into the day. At this point in the poem, Ovid transitions from third personal narration to first personal soliloquising. We no longer infer Byblis' anguished and irrepressible passion from the outside; we feel and see and live it from her standpoint.

She asks, "what on earth can it mean, this dream in the night... why am I having these dreams?" (ibid: 475) She answers, almost despite herself, "He's beautiful! I like him, and I could love him, if only he weren't my brother..." (ibid: 476-7) She places conditions on her

⁴⁷ That is, *Dominus*, used as a term of affection.

feelings and allows certain concessions toward her behaviour, deciding provisionally that it may be permissible “so long as I never attempt to commit such a sin in the daytime.” (ibid: 479) When this fails, she tries to persuade herself that “it doesn’t matter how often it happens at night in my dreams” on the grounds that “no one can witness a dream” and, in any case, dreams only “give a kind of mock pleasure.” (ibid: 480-1) But Byblis’ protestations ring hollow and she immediately undermines them. It is a strange kind of mock pleasure that can impel her to say, “How vivid the passion that thrilled my body! What pure satisfaction I felt in the depths of my being!” (ibid: 483-4) Far from being a mock pleasure, its intensity is such that her dreaming “was all too brief”. (ibid: 485) She can hold it back no longer – having rehearsed and reneged upon these various excuses, Byblis expresses with an extraordinary clarity the weight of her awful circumstance. “Oh Caunus, if I were permitted to change my name as your sister and be your wife, how good a daughter I’d be to your father! What’s more, dear Caunus, how good a son you would be to mine... Well, beautiful youth... I am merely your sister, and all that we share is the bar that divides us.” (ibid: 487-94)

The question that first motivated these self-revelations is reprised, this time with a different inflection and a different hope. Whereas before, Byblis tried to take consolation from the fact “it doesn’t matter how often it happens at night in my dreams”, she now wonders if “even a dream can come true.” (ibid: 496) Her entertainment of arguments and hollow justifications returns, this time with recourse to the gods and their conduct – “Saturn was married to Ops... Ocean and Tethys are husband and wife, like Juno and Jove.” (ibid: 498-9) So, again, does she reject her arguments and deliver immediate rebuttals – “It is idle to measure our human codes and customs against the different conventions of heaven.” (ibid: 500-1) And, having tried to will away her “incestuous longings”, having begged them, her feelings, not to “force me to love my brother, except as a sister should!” (ibid: 510), she invents a fantasy circumstance in which the “forbidden desires from my heart” might be requited and vindicated: “If Caunus himself, however, had fallen in love with me first, if *he* were burning with passion, perhaps I could gladly surrender.” (ibid: 511-2) She concludes that her “hidden feelings can be revealed in a secret letter” (ibid: 516) and, with an impeccable structural symmetry, her soliloquy closes – “thus she decided and thus she resolved her conflicting emotions.” (ibid: 517)

Ovid manifests an erudite irreverence for the literary, religious and ethical sources with which the *Metamorphoses*’ “thread from the world’s beginning down to [his] own lifetime” is spun in this “one continuous poem.” (Pro. 3-4) His work invites us to be playful and experimental with the structures and conventions that define our engagement with cultural

discourses. The 'Byblis narrative' is an exemplary case of his creative unpicking of those conventions and his willingness to bend, contort, experiment with and test their usefulness at precisely those points where transgressive and prohibited, yet recognisably human, activity threatens to destabilise them.

One of the first things we should get clear on is whether Ovid's work, however well executed and however incisively conceived, can properly be said to have *literary* value conferred upon it. If we consider Lamarque and Olsen's critique of *The History Man*, for example, the salient issue at hand was not Bradbury's ability to execute an array of formal features, but rather the non-literary topicality of the themes his satire was allegedly dealing with. Ovid's being "great fun" (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 423) won't, in and of itself, be enough. It is therefore noteworthy that "[o]ne of the negative labels most frequently applied to early imperial literature is 'rhetorical'..." (Hardie, 2002: 3) and that the label 'Ovid the rhetorician' has been applied to him by his contemporaries and retrospective critics alike (Schiesaro, 2002:9) If this is a somewhat uncharitable aesthetic judgement, there is a sense in which the label might be repurposed. Ovid's work can be described as 'rhetorical' in the sense that he employs techniques that are at home in the rhetorician's school and yet shape the reality of the world he is rendering in literary form. That is, in Ovid's poetry the outside world does not possess an essential or permanent shape but is instead "constantly shaped and reshaped by desire and interpretation, by the gaze and words of the beholder." (ibid) His work is wonderfully well suited to being interpreted in accordance with a wide array of "shifting points of view and more or less preordained patterns". (ibid: 10) As such, my identification of his *Metamorphoses* as a literary work is not founded upon any "even loosely 'rhetorical' features of [the] text" (Lamarque & Olsen, 255), but rather on the way his work is amenable to a 'rhetorical-literary' stance in its expression and interpretation of thematic themes and concepts. Ovid is using the conventions of rhetorical practice as a framing device that facilitates an exploration of themes that are central to literary practice proper.

He is, moreover, one in a long line of poets who "explored relentlessly the nexus between poetry and knowledge and elaborated quite different theoretical positions and practical recommendations." (Schiesaro, 2002:1-2). We see manifest in Ovid's oeuvre, and in the *Metamorphoses* especially, a rejection of both Lucretian and Virgilian models for navigating this nexus. "Lucretian certainties are not for him... [s]imilarly, a strong theological approach is out of the question." (Schiesaro, 2002: 2) Gods do exist, they do intervene in human affairs and they do bear upon human value-making practice. But as the examples of Juno and Jove, Saturn and Ops, Ocean and Tethys all too clearly demonstrate, they cannot provide Byblis, nor

humanity generally, any “certainty in ethics, politics, and physics – not to mention theology itself.” (ibid)

I have used the term ‘irreverent’ with respect to Ovid’s literary work and his ethical attitude. By this I mean to highlight his characteristic co-option of ideas and turns of phrase from the literary canon he has inherited to their opposite, or at least distinct and less austere, effect. An example of this is provided by the above discussion regarding his engagement with Lucretian and Virgilian epistemology. Schiesaro has written that Ovid’s work shows that “...tradition and aetiology are inextricably linked ingredients of any attempt to make sense of the physical, mythical and historical universe we inhabit...” (Schiesaro, 2002: 5) Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* and Virgil’s *Georgics* are each “...excessively confident that a well-defined and unique truth... may emerge from the turbulent waters of phenomenological experience.” (ibid) As such, Ovid is suspicious of any explanation of the world that seems “monolithic”, (ibid) and will undercut those explanations with his own idiosyncratic and witty reworkings. Ovid introduces Byblis’ tale as “a warning against prohibited love.” (Ovid, *Med.* 9:452) He goes on to reveal how infinitely richer a narrative than this tame, asinine and “excessively confident” judgement would lead one to expect. It is precisely this kind of ‘irreverence’ I have in mind.

In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid proposes that the stories and values inherited from tradition are not to be held sacred – they are to be ‘transformed’. To accomplish this, he draws upon an encyclopaedic knowledge of the poetic, mythic, philosophic, and religious discourses that influence his poem’s subject and form. Ovid’s willingness to treat those discourses playfully and irreverently if it suits his purpose is part and parcel of this ethically ‘transformative’ proposal. He does not merely regurgitate the canonical iterations of various well-worn stories in an unreflective way, but instead often chooses to emphasise idiosyncratic and esoteric versions of them, or else casts them from a less usual perspective. In so doing, he goes out of his way to “let out the secret that epic and historical traditions are not simply faithful mirrors of things done... but partial constructions of a version of reality...” (Hardie, 2002: 4) So it is that Book 7 is concerned with Medea’s rather than Jason’s perspective on the Argonautic tale (1-402); so it is that Ovid takes the opportunity to provide a rival to Virgil’s description of Rumour in Book 12 (39-62); so it is that Book 13 focuses, for its first 400 lines and in a way that is “striking, as always, for its internal variety and for its wide range of literary associations with different genres of epic, tragic and pastoral poetry” (Raeburn, 2004: 495), on Ajax’ and Ulysses’ staking claims for Achilles’ armour in the “Judgement of Arms”, rather than Achilles’ death itself – or the fall of Troy, for that matter.

Ovid knows his source materials in forensic detail and, by virtue of his self-conscious and explicit ambition to advance through various poetic genres (Ovid, *Amores*: 1.15), he is happy to innovate upon it and render it pliable for his literary purposes. For Ovid, "...mythical narrative means intertextuality."⁴⁸ (Graf, 2002:3) Moreover, in Ovid's treatment, these narratives are "... not only open to change in point of detail: an individual poet always had the freedom to create his own myth." (ibid) As Tarrant has put it, "Ovid's demonstration that all stories can be retold – and that therein lies their vitality – has helped make his writing endlessly appealing to storytellers in all media." (Tarrant, 2002:20) Crucially, Ovid's intertextuality and innovation, his endlessly appealing demonstration of how all stories can be retold, has an ethical point. His irreverent stance does not just facilitate artistic freedom or untethered play with the literary tradition. More importantly, it is orientated toward his position that the culture's ethical assumptions, and the way its stories have contributed to value-making and enforcement, must be challenged. In place of monolithic epistemologies, Ovid offers a rich tapestry of atomised narratives, such as the Byblis narrative, in which his proposal that the perspective of the desiring, dreaming individual is its own source of value gets expressed. The trajectory of Byblis' tale is not just surprising or interesting storytelling, therefore. It also exposes ideas about what stories are supposed to do, ethically speaking, and whose ethical perspectives are worth articulating.

Taking all of this together, it is significant that in Ovid's treatment of the Byblis narrative, there is a palpable and ironic distance between the explicit didactic intention of conveying this story and the richer ethical permutations of exploring this terrain. For Byblis knows that her incestuous desire is taboo. She does not need to be provided a warning against prohibited love. This straightforward and explanatorily thin moral prescription is inadequate to the weight of her situation, and the various transitional stages she moves through in coming to grips with her predicament go some way to prove this. But if Byblis' struggle against, and disastrous submission to, her body's deepest and most terrible desires are the subject of Book 9, we still need to think more closely about the point and purpose of telling this narrative. Only

⁴⁸ This commitment to intertextual engagement extends, or circles back, to his own oeuvre. Byblis tries at one point to justify her desire for Caunus by citing "Aéolus' sons [who] weren't frightened of going to bed with their sisters". (Ovid, *Met.* 9: 507) She immediately asks "how do I know about them? And why do I quote this example?" (ibid: 508) She knows about them, and can quote their example, because in *Heroides* II, Ovid "makes one of Aéolus' daughters, Cance, write a pre-suicide letter to her brother Macareus by whom she had a child." (Raeburn,2004: 655)

then will we understand its literary enterprise – and its ethical significance. The specific target of Byblis' desire is a contingent element in the narrative. It could well have been some other desire that Byblis kept secret from everyone; herself included. The structure of how she by stages comes to terms with it is, powerfully and recognisably human. She is struck by a feeling she cannot properly name. The feeling invades first her unconscious dreaming and then her waking moments. She lies to herself about her feelings toward her brother, downplays the importance of those feelings, searches for precedent cases that might mitigate the awfulness of her feelings, yields to them and transfers her responsibility for those feelings to someone else. The reader will recognise these various movements in their own behaviour. They may not have struggled with Byblis' secret and shameful desire; but they will be able to think of analogous vices of which they are analogously ashamed and are analogously weak-willed about. Perhaps it is some other form sexual licentiousness. Perhaps it is a habit of passing someone else's work as their own. Perhaps it is smoking, or avoiding the responsibility of looking after an ailing loved one, or a failure to carry out civic duty, or something else altogether different. The important point is not the specific vice of which one feels shameful, but the mimetic bond the gets established between Byblis' shame in the world of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and our shame in the cultural world outside the work. Ovid's careful unpacking of Byblis' slippery descent into iniquity is immeasurably more valuable than the thin moral directive with which the narrative began because it is so much richer in humanly interesting content.

Moreover, it is salient that the vice Byblis yields to, and that Ovid gives such sympathetic voice to, is culturally and sexually taboo. The juxtaposition between what the culture condemns as morally repulsive and the individual values more highly than anything else invites us to interrogate the evaluative structures that permit of such divergence between the private and the public spheres. No less salient is the fact that one of the reasons Byblis knows that her vicious desire is unpardonable is that it is idle to measure our human codes and customs against the different conventions of heaven. So in the world of Ovid's work, this morally condemnable desire is also divinely sanctioned. The very nature of the sacred and the profane is called into question as a result. What's more, if we consider how the Roman pantheon are often interpreted as humankind's most uninhibited drives and desires, there is a suggestion here that civilised society condemns precisely those drives that are scandalously all too human. Ovid's account of the Byblis story, then, facilitates an extraordinarily rich inquiry into the nature of some perennial thematic concepts. In the course of this inquiry, we are able to securely elicit a mimetic thread that runs from Byblis' prohibited love, to the very different codes of conduct that structure the conventions of the gods in the world of the *Metamorphoses*,

to the readership that engages with the work from the world outside it. The world outside the *Metamorphoses* has changed dramatically since its creation. And yet, the work remains valuable because the themes it explores, and the conventions it calls into question, remain enduringly human.

The Byblis narrative in Book 9 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is therefore an unusually rich example of the kind of relationship between ethical and aesthetic value that I have been investigating in this thesis. The bald statement with which it begins gives us cause to think of the role of moral judgement in artistic evaluation. We soon see, however, that attending to its richer, descriptive, narratological elements yields a much more rewarding and valuable engagement with it. Through that engagement, we interrogate the evaluative structures that enable us to invoke the kind of thin moral prescription that the poem invites us to peer behind. We recognise our human frailty in nuances of narrative description. We attend to the different spheres of the public and private self. We meditate on the relationship between the human and the divine. We remould and recasts and reimagine the material of which our cultural world is built. And we elicit value from the playfully irreverent act of calling our most long-lived moral judgements and evaluative structures into question. Ovid's poem invites us to wonder whether we really know what it is to divide up the conceptual terrain clearly into the ethical and the literary, the aesthetic and the moral. It does this by destabilising the foundations upon which our evaluative frameworks are built. Ovid's work deals in ironic terms in this way too, then – part of what makes the *Metamorphoses* a valuable work of art is how it calls into question our apparatuses for deciding that a work of art valuable.

Section II

'Instigators of scandal and schism' and 'Cocytus was frozen' – Cantos XXVIII and XXXIV of Inferno

Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is similarly erudite, similarly inventive, and similarly knowledgeable. It is also deeply steeped in and conversant with sequences from Ovid – see, for example, the recurring motif of Phaethon in the *Inferno*⁴⁹, the *Purgatorio*⁵⁰ and the *Paradiso*⁵¹. See, also, his *own* metamorphosing of characters and narratives from the Graeco-Roman tradition, such as his reimagining of Cerberus in Canto VI as “a cruel and outlandish

⁴⁹ cf. Inf. XVII 106-8

⁵⁰ cf. Purg. IV 67-74; also cf. Purg. XXIX 115-20.

⁵¹ cf. Par. XVII 1-3

beast” (Inf. VI: 13), a “great dragon” (ibid), “a dog who barks when he wants food, [a]nd quietens when he gets his teeth into it, [f]ighting and straining only in order to eat”. (ibid: 2830) He is monstrous and insatiable; and therefore perfectly cast as the guard, and inmate, of the third circle of hell in which the gluttonous abide. This reveals in miniature how Dante and Ovid – who appears alongside Homer, Horace, Lucan and Virgil in the ‘ante-Inferno’ (Inf. IV: 8890) – orientate themselves differently toward their inherited material. That is, both Ovid and Dante are clearly operating within the same discursive practice. They are clearly conversant in the same kind – though of course not *exactly* the same – of literary heritage. They are clearly both innovating creatively upon the material their practice’s canon has provided them. They are each bringing their broader conception of the world and its various practices to bear when they undertake their creative innovations. There is a great deal of continuity between the two authors, the two readers, the two literary practitioners. A crucial difference, however, is to do with their respective attitudes toward their practice. Whilst the attitude manifest in the *Metamorphoses* is often irreverent and playful, the attitude manifest in *The Divine Comedy* is much more reverent and much more serious.

Schiesaro has written that “Ovid thinks Virgil’s and Lucretius’ epistemology [and ethics] are too monolithic.” (Schiesaro, 2002: 5) By contrast, Dante’s work goes so far as to erect an entire mountain. This serious attitude toward ethical, theological, political and literary questions is palpable throughout the *Comedy*, but for the purposes of what I would like to discuss, as well as for the sake of brevity, I will focus principally on two episodes from the *Inferno* – Canto XXVIII in which the “instigators of scandal and schism” (Inf. XXVIII: 35) are rent apart as punishment for their sins; and Canto XXXIV in which Dante and Virgil descend to the Inferno’s deepest circle and observe “The emperor of the kingdom of pain [with] half his chest sticking out of the ice” (Inf. XXXIV: 28-9), frozen in place at the centre of Lake Cocytus by his own beating wings. By working through these two sequences, and by engaging with the implications of Dante’s writing, I will argue that it is untenable to claim, as Lamarque and Olsen do, that literary practice, and therefore literary value, is entirely isolable from other kinds of discursive practice, such as religion and moral philosophy. This is because an ineradicable feature of *The Divine Comedy* is Dante’s unambiguous intention to contribute to philosophical and theological insight. Ignoring this feature, or claiming that it doesn’t exist, entails taking up a mistaken stance toward the work and blinking oneself to an essential aspect of it.

Moreover, I will argue that the role this essential aspect plays in our literary engagement is not principally to do with whether the work ‘gets it right’, either morally or theologically. Instead, it is to do with the clarity of its vision, the ambition of its endeavour and the boldness

of its execution. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* represent one kind of navigation through the world of value-making practice, one kind of ethical experiment, one kind of creative confrontation with the values operative in a community. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* offers another kind of navigation, another kind of ethical experiment and another kind of confrontation. Literary appreciation, as it pertains to ethical evaluation, involves getting to grips with how the world of the work is navigated, how the experiments are conducted, and how operative values are confronted. Let us see how *The Divine Comedy* fulfils this role and determine what consequences this has for my position.

Canto XXVIII opens with typically Dantean poetic irony. He doubts whether anyone "could, even in a prose description, [g]ive an account of all the blood and wounds I saw..." because "[n]o tongue, certainly, would be capable of it, [f]or our speech, and our intelligence, [l]ack the capacity to comprehend so much." (Inf. XXVIII:1-6) He goes on, of course, to provide an extraordinarily vivid description – not in prose but in *terza rima* verse, no less – of "the ninth cleft, with its unspeakable ways." (ibid: 21) Dante and Virgil encounter those who "were instigators of scandal and schism, [w]hen they were alive, and so they are split here." (ibid: 35-6) There are "[m]ore than a hundred of them," (ibid: 52) some who have "a sword wound through [their] throat," (ibid: 64) some with their "nose[s] cut off right up to the eyebrows," (ibid: 65), some with their "tongue[s] cut off and [their] throat[s] open," (ibid: 101) their "hands amputated... [and] blood pour[ing] over [their] face" (ibid: 104-5), and some even that are "bod[ies] without a head" who hold them "swinging in [their] hand like a lantern". (ibid: 119-122) In each of them is "observed retaliation" (ibid: 142), or *contrapasso*, a principle that has its origin in the biblical injunction of Exodus: "Wherever hurt is done, you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound..." (Ex. 21.23-5) and that Dante follows rigorously throughout his presentation of the punishments of hell. The sinners in Malebolge's ninth valley instigated schism in their lifetime and pay for that sin by being torn apart in the hereafter.

Foremost among them is the figure of "mangled Mahomet [sic]" (ibid: 31), who is "[r]ipped open from the chin" and has "[b]etween his legs, his guts... hanging out..." (ibid: 23-25) This eviscerate depiction of Muhammad, hacked apart again and again each time he makes a full lap of the circle "because the wounds close themselves up each time [b]efore anyone gets back to where he stands" (ibid: 37-42), is extraordinary for its vividness, its brutality and its cruelty. Muhammad is here, we should recall, because he is a schismatic and irredeemable sinner in the *Christian* tradition. The emphasis here is important. The ante-Inferno in which Dante and Virgil converse with the pantheon of poets is populated by "spirits" who

“have committed no sin” (Inf. IV: 34). The inhabitants of this space, neither Heaven, Purgatory nor Hell, find themselves where they do “because they are not baptised, [w]hich all must be, to enter the faith which is yours [or,] if they lived before the Christian era, [t]hey did not adore God as he should be adored... For these deficiencies, and no other fault, [they] are lost; there is no other penalty [t]han to live here without hope, but with desire.” (ibid: 34-42) Amongst the unbaptised and the pre-Christian are three noteworthy post-Christian figures. First is Salahuddin, “standing by himself” (ibid: 129); then Avicenna, who is in the company of Hippocrates and Galen (ibid: 143); and “Averroes, who wrote the great commentary.” (ibid: 144) Being a Muslim doesn’t condemn one to hell in the world of *The Divine Comedy* – in its author’s treatment, Muhammad is unspeakably yet justly punished because he is a heretic.

Dante, the character, stares with repulsed fascination at this tormented man whose body is more “gap[ing]” than “a cask with the bottom knocked out” (Inf. XXVIII: 22-3) and, in a moment of jarring, horrifying dramatic tension, the man looks back at him, opens his chest with his hand and says “[n]ow see how I undo myself!” (ibid: 28-30)

But Dante and Virgil cannot stop here in the ninth valley; they must leave Malebolge and descend deeper into the Ninth Circle. Canto XXXIV deals of Judecca and its select few prisoners. In its very centre, with “his chest sticking out of the ice” is Dis, “[t]he emperor of the kingdom of pain”. (Inf. XXXIV: 289) This ‘emperor’, three-faced in foul parody of the Holy Trinity and coloured red, yellow and black by hate, impotence and ignorance (Higgins, 2008: 572), “dared to rebel against his maker.” (Inf. XXXIV: 34-5) Enraged and seething with bitterness, he beats his three sets of wings so that “several winds went out from him”, (ibid: 46-8) weeps, and dribbles a mixture of tears and blood down his three chins. (ibid: 52-4) He is also subject to retaliative punishment – not only in that “he was [once as] beautiful as he is now ugly” (ibid: 32), and not only in that this once charismatic and imposing leader of rebel angels is no longer capable of speaking, only “dribbling” (ibid: 53). Most inventively, he is imprisoned in the ice, and “all Cocytus was frozen”, by his own beating wings, his own desperate attempt to escape. In each of his three mouths is a sinner, each one also condemned for mounting a rebellion against their master. In the central mouth, being bitten and clawed “so that... his spine [w]as left stripped of every scrap of skin”, (ibid: 69-60) is Judas Iscariot “with his head inside and kicking his legs.” (ibid: 62-3) On either side of him is Brutus, “twist[ing] and say[ing] not a word”, and Cassius “whose body looks so heavy.” (ibid: 65-7) This grotesque mechanical monster at the very bottom of the lowest circle represents the archetypal sinning against the spiritual and temporal orders. It locks in place the circles that spiral up above it and freezes each inmate from each canto in everlasting, unendingly tormented place. Dante and Virgil

climb down the body of “the beast who makes a hole in the world” (ibid: 108) – and then up his legs – before they “emerge to see the stars again” (ibid: 140) on the shores of Mount Purgatory. We shall not follow them, but instead take some time to reflect upon their navigation of the Nine Circles.

When Dante writes that Muhammad is being rent in two, he intends for this to be theologically serious and not merely aesthetically striking. *Contrapasso* is not merely a literary device but a seriously intended tool of retributive justice. One’s sins are one’s own doing – the Inferno itself only exists because Dis fell from heaven and punched a hole in the world – and one’s punishment is suited especially to it. That we take Dante seriously, both with regards to the structure of the world of his work and the relation it has to the world the work resides in, doesn’t mean that we have to agree with his construction. Trying to work out how the work’s moral suitability corresponds with its literary quality is a profound mistake. The work is representative of a bold, ambitious, ethically serious and literarily creative experiment to make sense of the world as it appeared to Dante. It is great because the experiment was executed with extraordinary aptness; not because its conclusions were right or else because it succeeded in getting us to swear allegiance to its wrongness.

Putting these considerations together, we have seen that an essential, ineradicable aspect of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* is what I have called its ethically serious and ‘reverential’, though not uncritical, attitude toward the various discursive practices that frame both its creation and our engagement with it. Dante is proposing that we need innovative storytelling that will solidify a shared value structure; one cannot make sufficient head or tail of that proposal unless one reckons with this attitude. This reckoning involves taking seriously its religious and ethical implications, as well as trying to do justice to its ‘hermeneutic’ quality. Literature, because it is a practice, has an evolving set of conventions and concepts that define how it is carried out. If it has ineliminable aspects, such as its mimetic and creative-imaginative aspects, the conventions that structure them are not quite so rigid. They will be more or less significant, more or less indicative of the practice’s current state and future trajectory, only so long as the practice continues to structure its creative output or interpretative engagement in accordance with them. Dante’s oeuvre generally, and *The Divine Comedy* more specifically, is indicative of how the practice can respond creatively to criticism; as well as how criticism must respond creatively to the practice. Its ‘hermeneutic’ quality is one such way it indicates a responsive creativity. The *Comedy* invites an engagement with its literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical dimensions because it is responding to and setting the agenda for 14th century literary theory. The practice as it stands today does not need to commend or laud those

dimensions as it did at the time the work was written. Nevertheless, part of one's explanation for how literary value *was* conferred upon the work in the past, *is* being conferred upon the work today, and *will be* conferred on the work in the future, must be sensitive to the malleable and transformational quality of our evaluative structures.

If we allow for this, Dante's literarily creative, reverentially serious yet ambitiously executed work lends itself to thick ethical engagement, whatever else our feelings are about its thin moral prescriptions. In the world of the work, Muhammad's sin is not reducible to his being Muslim because Salahuddin, Averroes and Avicenna are each in the ante-Inferno alongside the pantheon of Latin and Greek poets. Instead, it is due to his being a schismatic figure. His punishment is intelligible only so long as retaliative punishment is intelligible. And if *contrapasso* is not just intelligible but a principle that structures the world of the work's very topography, then it follows as a direct consequence that he is doomed to be everlastingly rent in two because he broke faith with Christianity and rent the church apart. I want to stress that, so far as moral judgement goes, I entirely part ways with Dante regarding his analysis of Muhammad as a schismatic figure. I reject his account of justice as retributive and retaliative; I reject his conception of Muhammad as a Christian heretic; I reject his eschatology. But this rejection of some of the moral implications derivable from *The Divine Comedy* lends itself, it seems to me, to the view that the extent of literature's relationship to ethical value cannot be exhausted by its moral aspect. If it was, I would have to part ways with the work a quarter the way through its discursive experiment.

So much for the instigators of schism; let us attend duly to the traitors of masters. The 'hermeneutic' stance means that we should be receptive to the fact that there are *four* traitors in the Ninth Circle. Dis is the traitor of heaven and is himself a prisoner of the Inferno, bound by chains of his own making, trapped in frozen Cocytus by his own beating wings. He is chewing upon three other traitors – Judas, Brutus and Cassius. Note that Brutus and Cassius are *political* traitors – traitors of a *secular* emperor. Dante means it when he writes that "Rome, which was the maker of the good world, [u]sed to have two suns, by which could be seen [b]oth the road of the world and the road to God." (Purg. XVI 106-108) Recall that Dante is proposing that we solidify a shared value structure by innovating creatively on the material we have inherited from our culture. This pertains to both our spiritual and our temporal inheritance, is illumined by both of Rome's suns. He really does think that a betrayal of the world, typified by Cassius' and Brutus' betrayal of Caesar, and a betrayal of God – the Father by Dis and the Son by Judas Iscariot – are crimes deserving of the Inferno's lowest circle. Against this backdrop, Lamarque and Olsen cannot be right that a literary appreciation of *The Divine*

Comedy is entirely unconcerned “with any further reality to which [the] concepts [with which it deals] might be applied in their other uses.” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 408-9) They cannot be right that applying the thematic concept of *contrapasso*, for example, “makes no direct contribution to philosophical or theological insight, nor is it tied to any such aim.” (ibid: 409) They cannot be right that all one does when one takes up the literary stance toward *The Divine Comedy* and endeavours to appreciate its literary dimension is to analyse “the nature of its insight... by giving a description of how thematic concepts are attached to literary works.” (ibid: 409) They cannot be right that “one can do nothing further to throw light on it.” (ibid) Instead, the reader that disputes Dante’s rigorous application of *contrapasso*, that rejects this even-handed punishment of religious and secular betrayal, and is, perhaps, also unsure why it should be at the deepest depths of punishment, will have to reckon with the poem’s evaluative fallout. The poem is neither ‘bad because it is morally wrong’ nor ‘good because of its internally cogent poetry’ – it is great because it goes wholeheartedly exactly where it means to go. It leaves readers in no doubt about the theological-ethical worldview it asks us to accept. Furthermore, it uses its literary tradition and poetic project unapologetically in doing this. Dante’s *Comedy* is a valuable ethical achievement. We are able to accept this while vehemently rejecting its doctrines.

This work expresses an extraordinarily rich array of value-making relationships. There are various relationships internal to literary and religious practice, such as Dante’s reverential yet critical familiarity with Ovid’s work and his theologically novel idea of an ante-Inferno. His work exists in a boldly realised, ethically uncompromising world, where ethical value-making conventions shape the world’s geography and order the cosmos’ structure. There is no Mount Purgatory at Jerusalem’s antipode; nor is there a ninth, empyreal sphere in the heavens. But if our exploration of *The Divine Comedy*’s extraordinarily vivid world foundered upon its getting things geographically or astronomically right, we would have failed, and failed miserably, to engage with it to its fullest, deepest, richest and thickest degree. Something similar, it seems to me, can be said of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. We can reject the work’s moral and religious claims whilst celebrating how the architecture of its world, framed by a robust and far-reaching ethical vision, is artistically realised. Neither ethical nor religious value have a uniform or covariant relationship to literary value in *The Divine Comedy*. But our literary appreciation of this fragmentary yet unified poem requires of us that we reckon with its ethical and religious seriousness.

A few final words on what this reckoning requires of us and what this implies about our value-making structures. *The Divine Comedy* is unusual for how intimately related its ethical

value-making apparatuses are to its literary project. The whole structure of theology which animates the work, its vision of life and its conception of justice, impacts and informs its every detail, from the Ninth circle of Hell to the Ninth empyreal sphere of Heaven. As we have seen, even the geography of the world of the work is structured in accordance with its ethical interpretation of life and the life after. So one cannot avoid attending to its moral vision when one engages with the work; meaning that there is a significant way in which we either assent to or else reject the work as a whole. Any attempt to isolate individual, ethically significant instances, subject them to evaluative review, judge them each individually (one instance as objectionable, another as laudable), map those judgements to another set of literary evaluative criteria, and then provide a piecemeal and patchwork account of how ethical and aesthetic value are related to one another in the work is doomed to failure. It constitutes another profoundly mistaken approach to the work. For the ethical and the aesthetic are extraordinarily intimately bound in this work. Attending to it ethically entails that we attend to it literarily, just as attending to it literarily entails that we attend to it ethically. The work is incredibly morally inflexible. Precisely because of this, its descriptions of monstrous punishments are magnificently expressed. Every beatific vision of heaven, every cruel and sadistic depiction of hell, is made vivid and real and serious in a way that cannot be approached by pale and insincere imitation.

And thus the work compels us to think long and hard about how we demarcate the ethical from the literary. They are inseparable in this work, interdependent and overlapping in ways that very few other works approach. *The Divine Comedy* is at once a work of literature and a work of theology. With it, Dante has made of ethics a literary project and made of literature an ethical system. It straddles both literary and religious practice in such a way that it renders attempts to keep them isolated from one another utterly baffling. Of course this is a work of theology; every line is animated by its religious seriousness. Of course it is a work of literature; its creative-imaginative exploration of perennial themes and thematic concepts is a superlative artistic triumph. As such, it is not at all clear that we neatly and clearly divide up the conceptual terrain, with ethical value in one conceptual space and literary value in another. If we find the work cruel and inflexible, austere and magnificent, it is not obvious that these are purely ethical or purely literary evaluations. Moreover, it is not at all clear that our literary and ethical intuitions pull in the same direction; even in spite of their inseparability. If we find its inflexibility repugnant, a simple account of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value would seem to suggest that either this should detract from our appreciation of the work, or this fact should be irrelevant. But neither of these options are plausible. What's more if

instead we assent to or reject the work as a whole, it is not obvious that we can tell whether our rejection or celebration of the work is moral or not. Indeed, it is partially on account of this mystifying quality that we value *The Divine Comedy* so highly; even as we reject it so vehemently.

Section III

'The smitten one' – Mut-em-enet and Joseph in Joseph and his Brothers

Joseph and his Brothers, and Thomas Mann's oeuvre more generally, provides an extraordinary breadth of opportunity to investigate the kind of relationships I am interested in. The novel is a paradigmatic case of Gibson's "thick narrative", taking some 1400 pages to navigate Genesis chapters 10 through 50. I accepted Lamarque and Olsen's claim regarding the creative-imaginative aspect of literature, and how it is sometimes realised, with reference to his broader literary output. The first concrete example I used to gesture toward the dynamic between the world of the work and the work in the world came from the tetralogy's second volume, *The Young Joseph*. In what follows, and in order to demonstrate yet another way in which the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is richer and more mercurial than existing treatments of it have hitherto envisaged, I will look at an extended sequence from the novel sequence's third volume *Joseph in Egypt*. However, as a quick prelude, and in order that we might possess a firm grasp of the cultural fabric that frame Joseph's and his fellow tribespeople's actions, it will be instructive to outline the Canaanite world, with all its mythic, ethical, pedagogic and religious attachments, that Joseph inhabited before his brothers threw him in the well.

Let us take a moment to examine the "young Joseph, sat at the lesson hour in the leafy shade of the tree of wisdom..." (ibid: 281) and gazing up at Eliezer, the "oldest servant." (ibid) Eliezer has the reputation of having "resembled" Abram. The narrator is willing to concede this might be true, but then again "he may have looked different... the assertion that Eliezer, Joseph's teacher, looked like the moon-wanderer certainly had nothing to do with the person of the learned head servant *as now manifest* in the flesh." [my italics] (ibid: 279) We are led to understand that the "as now manifest" (ibid: 281) Eliezer, who teaches Joseph his letters and numbers, educates him about the heavens and horoscope, and who relays for him the story of "Abraham's spiritual family" (ibid), is one in "an endless perspective of Eliezer-figures". (ibid) Joseph's teacher is at once describing the mythic origins of his people *and* the especial, impossible role he uniquely played in the origin myth. Throughout the work, there is no assurance that any of the Eliezer-figures are *the* Eliezer; that the 'moon-wandering' Abraham

is *the* Abraham; or even that the Joseph in whose company we have been for some three hundred pages and will remain for some thousand pages more, is *the* Joseph. All these characters, and the world they inhabit, are equated with, and yet at an unbridgeable remove from, their archetypic, biblical correlates.

In this short sequence at the beginning *The Young Joseph*, the reader is presented Joseph's world in all its multi-textured (and multihued) variety. The distance it bears, not only to the world in which the progenitive story it is emulating "was first told... [by] tell[ing] itself" (ibid: 667) but also to the modern world its narrator and commentator inhabits, is routinely called attention to and insisted upon. The "historical gap" between, for example, "the original Nimrod" and "Abram's Nimrod" is "immeasurable" (ibid: 279) and the "events [which are] supposed to have taken place during his reign... of course have no discoverable historical foundation." (ibid: 280) "Abram's Nimrod" possesses, therefore, a "presentness through which shine ever older pasts" (ibid); and his emulation of those events without discoverable historical foundation "issue out of... still profounder deeps of time." (ibid) At an even further remove from the events are the "later learned editors and commentators" (ibid: 281) who "cast upon the story" their own peculiar "light" (ibid). And then again, somewhere between the two vantage points, is Joseph. He is "familiar with the variants" (ibid); able to "reconvert [them] in the interest of truth and justice" (ibid); and is "attend[ing] to other, perhaps more important things than those which the severely practical master is commending to [his] attention." (ibid: 282) His world is overlaid again and again with the echoes of mythical and religious stories that are not simply passed down as tokens of a cultural memory, as touchstones in a shared history, but are also identified with in a deeply personal, immanent and accessible sense.

He does not possess the sensibility of a later and learned commentator. Neither is he quite like Eliezer, "who confused not only the language but also the matter of the story somewhat" (ibid: 280) in his telling of it. Nevertheless, Joseph has a personal stake in a fabric of stories his culture has endlessly iterated upon. What's more, his behaviour is not merely influenced by his investment in those stories, but intimately bound up in how they have traditionally unfolded. That is, they have a normative effect upon him – and at the same time he has an instantiating effect upon them. In part, he is acting out an expected role. In part, he is creatively improvising upon a motif that has been handed down to him by his culture. In part, he is forming that motif for himself and for the first time. He would not act as he does without that fabric of stories. Nor would those stories be woven quite as they are without his actions. Crucial to this activity, that both draws upon the example set by his predecessor Joseph-figures and shall act as an example to the Joseph-figures to come, and crucial, too, to our engagement

with Joseph's navigation through the world of Mann's work, is his "personal identification with mythical prototypes; [and his] cultic re-enactment of primeval stories..." (Hartwich, 2003: 7) such that the "symbolic and spiritual character" (ibid) of those stories is accentuated in each re-enactment.

However, if Joseph carries with him into Egypt a personal identification with mythical prototypes, then the situation is entirely different for the Egyptian cast of characters he interacts with. They have different primeval stories, different myths, and entirely different orientations toward them. His is a foreign and alien perspective, underpinned by completely different and unfamiliar commitments. Some, of Joseph's interlocutors are charmed by his foreign perspective and warmly curious about his different commitments. Some are confused by and dismissive of his attitude. Others still recognise in his alien interpretation of Egyptian society, as well as his personal charisma and exotic beauty, a moral, political and religious danger that cannot be tolerated. Moreover, for a select few of this final category, the tone of their hostility toward Joseph's worldview is more zealous, more crazed, and more panicked, for fear of that worldview's overwhelming and irresistible quality.

Potiphar's wife Mut-em-enet is one such zealous, crazed and panicked character whose entire cultural coordination is threatened by Joseph's presence. His elevation in Potiphar's house represents for her a crisis of faith, a crisis of personality, and a crisis of cultural mooring. Her tale is integral to the structure of *Joseph in Egypt*. The narrator's sympathetic rendering of her internal struggle, her moralising self-delusion, her emotional turmoil, and vengeful anathematising of Joseph, is one of the most engaging sequences in the whole novel cycle. Moreover, it illustrates in microcosm how the relationship between distinct value-making structures, even if that relationship is antagonistic and precisely because it is not uniform or regular, is sometimes made the central focus of a literary work. When this occurs, an ineliminable aspect of one's literary appreciation of the work must involve a reckoning with it. Let us therefore see how Mut-em-enet reckons with *her* ethical crisis and try to determine what implications it may have for my account of the relationship between ethical and literary value.

As soon as Mut-em-enet is introduced, Mann's narrator acknowledges that "what... Potiphar's chief wife is supposed to have said when she cast her eyes upon Joseph" (ibid: 667) is known to "all the world". (ibid) He goes on to concede that "she did actually so speak, did make use of the frightfully direct and frank expression which tradition puts in her mouth." (ibid) Nevertheless, he declares himself "horrified at the briefness and curtness of the original account" (ibid) and prepares to treat the "final outcry" of Eni's "utter agony of spirit and flesh" (ibid) with "as much dignity and importance" (ibid) as it deserves. To this end, he promises to

pay as close attention to “the discussion of the ‘how’ as to the transmission of the ‘what’.” (ibid)

In contrast to the “deceptive picture of unbridled lust and shameless allurements” (ibid: 668) that tradition – and later learned commentators – furnishes us with, a new one is established wherein Mut is described as “haughty... reserved, a moon-nun, [and possessed of] a nature with a bitter fragrance of myrtle leaf.” (ibid) It is explained to us that she was betrothed to Potiphar as a child while “the claims of sex... were still but a germ, still slumbering within her.” (ibid: 671) As such, Mut’s “loving, life-denying” chastity is “untouched by the knowledge that its long stem is rooted in the black slime of the depths.” (ibid) She is “moon-chaste” (ibid), a “wife of Amun” (ibid: 674), and “connect[s] her priestly office with the singularity of her marriage”. (ibid) She associates her “membership in the order of Hathor” with “being set apart...” (ibid: 674) These descriptors put the reader in mind of their first introduction to Joseph, communing with the moon in hymnic rhapsody, of the myrtle wreath he weaves for himself in the Adonis grove a short while later, and of how he has interpreted his situation to mean his life experience “set[s him] apart to [his] god like a bride.” (ibid: 347) When Potiphar later tells Mut that “if I love to have him about me, believe me that it is because often he reminds me of you...” (ibid: 701) it does not come as a surprise; the attentive reader will also have made some of these connections for themselves. But if the allusion does not surprise the reader, it nevertheless scandalises Mut-em-enet. She recoils at the comparison made between her and a “Hebrew slave”. (ibid) She demands of her husband that “the boy” – she refuses to repeat Joseph’s name – is removed from her home and “giv[en] back... to the desert whence he came.” (ibid: 704) When Potiphar refuses, Mut “turn[s] her back” and “shrouds her face in her garment’s folds”. (ibid)

Her response to Joseph, hyperreactive and laced with xenophobic panic as it is, has an extraordinary richness and multi-layered texture. She is, after all, “a saint, a chaste moon-nun of high social position, whose strength [is thereby] transmuted into spiritual pride.” (ibid: 674) One should not underestimate the importance of pride, or indeed of spirituality, in her outrage. She is a committed consort of Amun, a god that “hates the laxity of foreign ways and the disregard of pious old custom...” (ibid: 691) The “mobile sense of Aton-Re, inclined to broadness and conciliation” (ibid), not merely accommodating of multicultural variety but celebratory of its expansive potential, and better suited to Potiphar’s sensibilities than Amun’s “moral discipline” (ibid), lends itself to a “weaken[ing of] the marrow of the land” (ibid) in Mut’s estimation – precisely because it “toy[s] with foreign ways.” (ibid) She has an ideological and religious justification for despising Joseph’s presence. His influence, and the influence of foreign culture

more generally, has heralded a "...conflict between [the] eyes and mouth [which] had not existed in those early days" (ibid: 670) of her marriage.

We should recall, though, that Enti's 'moon-chastity' is grounded in a decision that her parents made for her. Her sexuality, her opportunity to learn what that might have been, was robbed from her before she was even aware of it. An important component in the narrative arc of Mut's tragedy is related to how her sensuality has never been provided a non-religious outlet, even though she lives "among a people... whose attitude toward death and worship of animals betokens and induces a certain fleshliness... [and] light moral attitude." (ibid: 671) If "other ladies of the order, harem women of the god" are described as "play[ing] fast and loose in the point of morals" (ibid), by dint of circumstance – she and Potiphar cannot have children (ibid: 668) – and by virtue of decisions made for her in her childhood, Mut's "body knew its greatest moments, its highest satisfaction and fulfilment... only on the feast days when she took her rattle and danced the cult-dance before Amun-Re." (ibid: 671)

This is the context in which Joseph's youthful beauty, his upward mobility, and his introduction of concepts like 'sin', 'shame' and 'guilt,' initiate their destabilising, panic-inducing and world-rending influence on her. Before his arrival, "not even in dreams was she confronted by images from that sphere" (ibid: 675) of 'fleshliness', 'sinuousness' and 'nether power'. This changes dramatically, and in a way that causes Mut to suffer "bewilderment, panic and shame" (ibid), when she dreams of Joseph for the first time. In the dream, she cuts herself deeply with a bronze knife and "stain[s] the pure white of her garment". (ibid: 679) Joseph alone notices her wound, takes up her injured hand, and "carrie[s] it to his mouth, so that the fingers l[ie] on his one cheek and the thumb on the other, the wound on the lips between." (ibid) She emerges from her dream, "cold with horror, then hot with ecstasy of her healing and aware that life's rod had been laid about her shoulders." (ibid: 681)

Her experience of the dream is comparable to Byblis' of hers; and the crisis it spells for her is similarly seismic. Despite her best efforts, Byblis soon realises that it is untenable to try and mitigate the significance of her dreams of Caunus by stating that they can only "give a kind of mock pleasure". (Ovid, *Met.* 9:480-1) Quite the opposite, they provide her a "pure satisfaction... in the depths of [her] being" (ibid). With comparable intensity, Mut experiences "ecstasy" when the dream-Joseph stanches her wound. There is no turning back for either of them now that their innermost desires have been revealed to them.

Byblis' fullest and most meaningful fulfilment can only be seized by transgressing those "human codes and customs" she is not permitted to measure against "the different conventions of heaven." (Ovid, *Met.* 9:498-9) Mut's ecstatic longing for Joseph involves "...a surrender to

the Asiatic tendencies of Amun.” (Mann, 1978: 676) For both women, desire involves a sacrilegious yearning for the forbidden. They cannot afford to feel as they do; nor can they rid themselves of those feelings – they can only submit to them and bear the responsibility for so doing.

This is the weight of Mut’s “entreat[y of Joseph] that he should lie with her.” (Mann, 1978: 792) The words tradition puts in her mouth do not merely jeopardise her marriage or social status; they do not involve her in some petty, irreligious licentiousness; they do not indict her of playing fast and loose in the point of morals. Instead, the stakes are immeasurably higher. When she begs her husband to remove Joseph from the house, she tells him:

I am utterly and entirely Amun’s, in piety and devotion, for I am the bride of his temple and of his house of women, Hathor am I, and dance before him in the garment of the goddess, that is all my honour and my desire and further have I none, this honourable rank is my life’s sole content.

Mann, 1978: 692

Realising that she loves Joseph therefore requires her to renege upon her “life’s sole content”. The man she loves is a totem of everything that she has a religious compulsion to abhor. The implications of her dream, and the consequence of her yielding to temptation, mean that her loyalties are divided between Amun and Aton, even though “the two are not reconcilable” (ibid: 688). Her love means that she has been mistaken to imagine herself signally set apart by her membership to the order of Hathor. Quite apart from a moon-nun or consort of the sun-chamberlain, it makes of her a “Babylonian maiden” and bedfellow of a “Shabirite slave”. (ibid: 697) She is having to come to terms with a “deep, unspeakable anguish in her soul” (ibid: 680) and a chasmic divide between the woman she has spent her life becoming and the woman she has at last, and too late, realised she is.

Moreover, by giving up Amun, she does not thereby gain Joseph’s jealous God Elohim. That is, if the perspective of her personality as it has hitherto stood loses itself, there is, unlike in Eliezer’s case, a great deal to mourn. She cannot replace her religious devotion to Amun with Joseph’s cultural inheritance – her renunciation of Beknechons’ ‘pious old customs’ leave her bereft of any customs at all. She has repudiated the cultural conventions she is familiar with and cannot regulate or define her activity with reference to anybody else’s. For contrast, let us compare her sacrifice to the risk that Joseph runs by continuing to confer with Mu-em-enet after she has made her intentions toward him clear.

Mann's narrator tells us that Joseph's refusal to avoid his mistress amounted to a "coquetting with the world, [out of] sympathy with the forbidden thing;" that it placed him at risk of "falling away from the death-name he had chosen and from the state of salvation in which he had stood." (ibid: 757) It is important to remember, though, that his "arrogant self-assurance" (ibid), and his "willingness... to push matters to the uttermost" (ibid), is at all times underpinned by "a secret knowledge of his course and the line it took." (ibid) He is possessed of a confidence that, because he is re-enacting a primeval story and convening with a mythic archetype, the temptation that Mut-em-enet embodies for him is one he must endure "...if all that was to be fulfilled which was written in the plan." (ibid) Eni has no such reassurances. She is not re-enacting any primeval stories when she entreats Joseph to go to bed with her; she cannot take consolation from a personal identification with any mythical prototypes when he rejects her advances. She has no notion of an endless perspective of *Enti*-figures, all of whom say, "*I am utterly and entirely Amun's*", and then again, "*Unwise am I, out of my measureless longing for your flesh and blood...*" [my emphasis] (ibid: 797) She cannot be acting in order that "all that was to be fulfilled which was written in the plan". Whatever else is demanded of her, however else tradition might interpret her history, Mut-em-enet's journey is singularly her own. She bears the full weight of her disavowal of Amun. She must come to terms with her appalling personal truth, must deal with her sacrilegious repudiation of everything she has hitherto held dear, must understand the meaning of sin, must learn the names of 'Shame' and 'Guilt' and 'Mocking Laughter', entirely alone.

Her tragedy, brought out with extraordinary vividness by Mann's bold storytelling, is that by limiting the personal for the sake of higher considerations, and then in turn repudiating the higher considerations as well for the sake of Joseph, she cannot live either in accordance with the tenets of barbaric antiquity or the strictures of a more advanced age. She is neither a child of her time nor a champion of ancient precepts. She cannot live in sincerity and she cannot aim for anything loftier. "I am the loving Isis and my gaze is death" (ibid: 797), she shrieks at Joseph in the chapter's closing moments. But because she has given up everything for him, including the "the cow's horns with the sun's disk between" (ibid: 674) headdress that, according to ancient Egyptian religious tradition, Isis inherited from Hathor, this identification with the moon goddess and moon-chastity is no longer available to her. Joseph's denial of her love is devastating and unhinging because it leaves her utterly bereft. Her reckoning with an ethical crisis has cost her everything and bought her nothing. 'Tradition', with its "laconic terseness" and "compress[ed]" moral attitude, judges Mut-em-enet a "seductress" (ibid: 667) and moves on. Mann's rich and thick treatment of her predicament, with its characteristic and

virtuosic interweaving of literary creation, ethical investigation and theological speculation, invites us to elicit infinitely more from the story than this thin assessment would ever lead us to expect.

* * *

Let us try and track what might be made of this example. As a preliminary, it is evidently the case that *Joseph and His Brothers* is a novel in which the narrator routinely invites us to suspend our most immediate judgements and our most habitual ways of thinking. More than just this, though, Mann is making several proposals about the role stories and storytelling play.

First, Mann proposes that stories can combine living and mythical stakeholders without their collapsing into one another. His main protagonist makes a personal identification with the mythic Joseph and creatively re-enacts the sequence of events that describe the mythic Joseph's story. But Potiphar's wife Mut-em-enet, who falls in love with him, renounces everything she holds dear on his account, and ultimately renounces even this, has none of these attachments.

Here, then, is Mann's second proposal – stories can show but not reconcile clashes of values. Her cultural inheritance is different, her engagement with myth and religious piety is different. There is a genuine clash of worlds and loyalties and perspectives. Her rendering of the world about her, the evaluative framework that allows her to navigate life, is threatened by Joseph. She loves and despises him in equal yet irreconcilable measure. Thus we are presented Mann's third proposal – stories can leave human ethical circumstances without 'a truth'. Mut cannot arrive at a singular, definitive assessment of everything Joseph means to her. Getting any sort of hold on the danger he poses, the hope he promises, the desire he awakens in her being, cannot be touched by a thin moral judgement. She cannot elicit value from her membership to the order of Hathor in spite of her love for Joseph. She cannot conclude that the value of Aton-re is irrelevant to the value of Amun-re. She cannot say that her love for Joseph poses an interesting design problem that, provided she can provide a solution to it, will augment her positive relation to life. Her intense longing for Joseph and her hostility toward everything he represents render these kinds of answers unequal to the burden she carries. Whether she 'gets it right' or not is quite clearly *not* all the narrator intends for us to extract from the latticework of her religious, ethical and cultural practice.

This work quite clearly is inviting us to meditate upon the relationship between the world of the work and the work in the world. Joseph's engagement with the world about him is predicated on the cultural framework he has inherited from his forebears. It provides him reassurance that his activity, whatever it may be, is underpinned by historic precedent and

interpretable in terms that his community will understand – although not always condone. He exudes a confident expectation that, whatever and whomever life throws at him, he will not come to harm in the fullness of time, but rather rise through adversity to his proper station, “set apart to [his] god like a bride.” (Mann, 1978: 347) This immanent interpretation helps us focus on what has happened in the novel; it helps pin down the novel’s subject. But left just as it is, it does not tell us what the point and purpose of Joseph’s complacent easiness in the world about him. Isolated from a thematic interpretation, it does not tell us how the world of the work relates to the work in the world. But Joseph’s self-satisfied expectation that everything will come out alright, that everyone loves him and values him and makes space for him in their plans, does reach outside the novel. Moreover, his violent dislocation from a space in which he is at home to a space in which he is in exile, speaks volumes about a world in which the “ethics [of] today means not being at home in one’s house.” (Adorno, 1951: 39) The world of wartime European in which the work exists is metaphorically dislocated from home in the precise respects that Joseph is literally dislocated from his world inside the work. European culture and Joseph each are suffering for the complacent confidence they place in the cultural framework they have inherited from their forebears. A self-assured expectation that everything will be alright because the value-making apparatus that structure an engagement with the world can be relied upon is not available to Joseph in the work – and nor is it available to us outside it.

But if Joseph’s hubristic confidence in his inherited system of values cannot secure him safe passage in the world, nor can Mut’s dysfunctional engagement with the other secure *her* safe passage either. She is at once repelled and seduced by the alien and alienating influence that Joseph’s ascendance in her house represents. Mut suffers a chasmic division of loyalties – on the one hand her pious and devoted “moon chastity” and on the other her crazed sexual desire for Joseph. This personal struggle finds a cultural analogue in the religious divisions that divide the Egypt of Mann’s novel – the broad and conciliatory values of Aton-Re at one pole and Amun-Re’s anathematising of foreign at its antipode. The personal and cultural battles that ravage the world of the work reach outside the text and establish a mimetic bond between the worlds of Mut and of Mann’s readers. The work compels us to assess our relationship to the other, and to investigate honestly our reception, or rejection, of outside influences. One might hope to be open and conciliatory. But one might also fear the laxity of foreign ways and regret the disregard of pious old custom. These tensions are in us individually and in our culture collectively. Moreover it is rarely far from the surface. It has erupted violently in recent times in the form of ‘Brexit’, ‘Black Lives Matter’ and ‘Make America Great Again’ (the ‘Again’ is especially important), and played a substantive role in the war-torn Europe of Mann’s. It may

seem far-fetched and overly strained to draw associations between Mut-em-nut's lustful pursuit of Joseph and either the Second World War or cultural schisms of today. But it is precisely the narratological structure of Mann's novel that allows us to do this. We establish associations and links between the world of Mann's work and the world that work now inhabits. It remains prescient, meaningful and valuable because it successfully supports this kind of engagement.

Thus we come to terms with the point and purpose of Mann's novel. We cannot rely on our existing ethical frameworks because they render us vulnerable and vain. We cannot ignore our tense and volatile relationship with the other because we routinely fear and love and revile and desire those foreign impressions we do not properly understand. We cannot rely on moral value to determine how valuable *Joseph and his Brothers* is, because the novel casts serious doubt upon the evaluative structures that allow us to make moral judgements. If the novel is a success, then it shows that our ethical frameworks are not fit for purpose. Moreover, if the novel succeeds, it has cast doubt on the way in which we describe evaluative judgement. Mann's novel serves as a damning indictment of the world he inhabited. This indictments echoes and reverberates presciently today. But whether we ought to understand that indictment in literary or ethical terms is not at all clear. Indeed, the work serves to cast doubt upon the whole framing of the issue. The work is valuable precisely because it proposes that our neat and tidy contrast of ethical and literary value, our interpretation of the issue as moral value vs aesthetic value, is itself a simplification of our responses to works of art.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is elastic and variable. It changes dynamically, by virtue of the fact that the practices that structure their evaluative claims also change dynamically. We should not expect the relationship to be static because the two practices so related are not static. An account of how their value-making conventions interact with one another, or else stand remote from one another, must be sensitive to this. It is to be expected that a literary work from one epoch might manifest a different relationship between literary and ethical value than another work from a different epoch, or indeed manifest a different relationship between these kinds of value at different points in its history of reception. I have argued that one good way to draw this out is to investigate works from distinct literary epochs. By looking at the way these works draw upon their influences, innovate upon the material those influences have also put to creative use, by asking questions of the value-making structures that have provided them form, and offering

new solutions to the puzzles those questions bring to the surface, we are able to observe how the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value is not best interpreted as any one especial thing but rather a manifold of myriad dynamic relationships that push and pull one another in a number of different ways.

I have focused on three works to illustrate this claim – Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* and Mann’s *Joseph and his Brothers*. I have chosen these examples, of course, because they are works that highlight the relations between mythmaking and ethical value. They are unusually dense in their relevance to my thesis and are, perhaps, somewhat idiosyncratic choices. One might wonder how straightforwardly ‘bad’ they are in the sense I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. But that does not weaken their significance. They show what I want to show about the ethical-aesthetic relation. First, it is not always clear that we make ‘straightforward’ judgements of how morally ‘good’ or ‘bad’ a work is when we engage with them. Second, that moral judgement is not the only, nor even the principle, aspect of ethical value we engage with in literary appreciation. And third, exploring the ethical permutations of a situation, interrogating the ethical conventions that frame our navigation of those situations, involves us in a dynamic and creative dialogue, sometimes conciliatory and sometimes combative, with the ‘origin stories’ of those value-making conventions. The worlds of these works are structured by the questions they ask of literary and ethical value – and indeed of cultural practice more broadly. They interrogate the conventions that define and regulate the practices they engage with. They reveal where those conventions appear vulnerable and brittle, where they appear to break down and clash. They propose new solutions to the puzzles their revelations and interrogations bring to the surface. The works then exist in the world of cultural discourse, where literary appreciators, discursive ethical thinkers, religious observers and so on, engage with them in accordance with the conventions that define and regulate *their* practice – and the process begins anew. They each invite us to navigate their respective worlds in comparable yet distinct ways. They therefore reveal a different aspect of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value.

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* expresses an ‘irreverent’ attitude toward the literary, mythical, philosophical and religious sources he draws upon, in the sense that the work will often prioritise an idiosyncratic or less familiar narrative interpretation of a story than is in common coinage, in order to reinforce the position that “epic and historical traditions are not simply faithful mirrors of things done... but partial constructions of a version of reality...” (Hardie, 2002: 4) The various partially constructed versions of reality provided us by tradition are, moreover, “constantly shaped and reshaped by desire and interpretation”. (Schiesaro, 2002:9)

Its ‘irreverence’ is targeted at “monolithic” epistemological and ethical solutions that are “excessively confident... a well-defined and unique truth... may emerge from the turbulent waters of phenomenological experience.” (ibid: 5) I have cited the Byblis story from Book 9 as evidence of this. The sequence is clearly not a mere “warning against prohibited love.” (Ovid, *Met.* 9: 452) It instead offers an example of somebody coming to terms with an appalling, forbidden personal truth. Its ethical aspect is not exhausted by the thin moral judgement of whether Byblis’ resolution to her conflicting emotions, or Ovid’s “warning” against her example, is ‘right’. Rather, in the *Metamorphoses*, ethical value, and its relationship to literary value, is engaged with most fully in the thick, narratological sense. Ethical practice, and therefore ethical value, is crucially important to its appreciation. But focusing on its moral ‘badness’ or ‘goodness’ blinkers us myopically to its richer unpacking of the conventions that underpin various value-making practices. The work might be interpreted as ‘immoral’ or ‘bad’ in the sense that it is critical of the morally evaluative conventions of the tradition it has inherited. There is no one thing that ‘makes it good’ – but part of the explanation involves its creative exploration and irreverent navigation of its world, and the evolving way the world outside it engages with it.

Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* expresses a much severer, more ‘reverent’ attitude. It is also more obviously a navigation of an ethically, religiously, and philosophically structured world, such that the earth’s topography and the heavens’ cosmology is influenced by those structures. The temporal and spiritual world that Dante and Virgil explore is shaped by Dis’ fall. Dante’s literary theory, and the literary theory of his contemporary commentators, is heavily influenced by the religious practice of hermeneutically interpreting the Bible in fourfold, literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical terms. I have argued that it is therefore a distorting mistake to claim it “makes no direct contribution to philosophical or theological insight, nor is it tied to any such aim.” (Lamarque & Olsen: 409) Of course, we do not have to rigidly interpret him in accordance with the conventions that characterised 14th century literary practice. But we nevertheless fail to engage with the work in its fullest sense unless we are receptive to its exploration of ethical and theological aspects because Dante’s literary creativity is motivated by his investigation of these kinds of question. Naturally, engaging with the work’s ethical aspect does not preclude us from parting ways with its moral proposals. To my mind, the work’s cruel treatment of unbaptised children, glorification of imperialism, and thoroughly misguided condemnation of Muhammad, are all examples of where it ‘gets it wrong’. But it is much more ethically rich than this kind of characterisation lends itself to. Ethical value’s relationship to literary value is not exhausted by its moral dimension. Rather, the relationship

has a richer and more complex orientation that involves a work's interrogation of the living arrangement of values operative in society. There are many ways in which *The Divine Comedy* seems a morally 'bad book'. It is nevertheless an extraordinary and ethically rich book. Its literary 'goodness' is, moreover, intimately related to this ethical richness.

Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers* offers another kind of exploration through the world of a work. We are placed at an enormous remove from the events it navigates; and the world itself is at an "immeasurable" remove from the story that has influenced it. The world through which Mann's path twists and turns is extremely complex, multiply traversable, and interpretively ambiguous. Its cast of Judaic characters have a personal identification with the mythic archetypes they are the "present manifestations" of and behave so as to "re-enact" the primeval stories that structure their worldview. The "monkey land" of Egypt is very differently ordered. If Egypt plays a prominent and morally abhorrent role in the primeval stories that shape Jacob and his family's interaction with the world about them, Egypt itself has utterly different attachments. Potiphar's and Mut-em-enet's world is a cultural battleground in which Aton-re's mobile, broad and conciliatory sense and Amun-re's hatred of "the laxity of foreign ways and the disregard of pious old custom" (Mann, 1978: 691) wage war. Joseph's cultural stance is a dissonant and rogue element. His influence in the house shatters Mut's entire worldview and demands of her an ethical and religious reckoning. Joseph's appearance in her dreams represents a sacrilegious repudiation of everything that she has hitherto held dear. Her love for him entails a renunciation of her life's sole content. His rejection of her advances leaves her bereft and rudderless. We cannot get to grips with the themes it expresses unless we engage with its ethical aspect. But that ethical aspect is not best articulated with reference to moral judgement. As Mann's narrator puts it, "[i]t is not our affair to sit in judgement on the morals of Wese... We must, where we cannot sustain a position, abandon it." (ibid: 671) This is because a thicker exploration of Wese's ethical texture is available to us than a thin judgement on their morals would lend itself to. Mut's crisis of faith and personality is ethically significant. Mann's narrative expression of it is literarily significant. The significance is not principally to do with whether, for example, Eni is 'wrong' to falsely accuse Joseph of "tr[ying] to do her violence", (ibid: 833) or Mann's narrator is 'right' to think Joseph's "object[ion] to being degraded into the feminine and passive by the wooing of a mistress who behaved like a man" is "understandable". (ibid: 751) *Joseph and his Brothers* is about the clash and evolution of values, about coming to terms with one's heritage, about the circumstances in which that heritage can sometimes anchor us and sometimes weigh us down, about fear and desire, about fear of desire, about love and pain, about pride and shame, and immeasurably more besides. It

is 'made good' by an infinitely richer, and entirely more enriching, relationship between ethical and literary value than this anaemic 'moralising' treatment can offer.

These three works are, of course, very different in various ways. They come from different epochs in the tradition of literary practice. They have different cultural influences, different religious and ethical attachments, are expressive of different thematic concepts and, even where the concepts are similar, approach them with different attitudes. They offer different proposals and make different demands of their readers. Understanding the differences between works such as these – what they achieve and how they relate and conflict – involves being sensitive to their real differences around the status of ethical practice. Turning a blind eye to this would be antithetical to the approach I have offered in this thesis; failing to notice this means failing to attend fully to the works and their myriad dynamic relationships. But one thing all these works *do* is take seriously literature's ability to show how an ethical practice is sustained and how it can be assessed. In them, the storytelling and rhetorical modes are used to show how people live within ethical practices and to explore and test what supports, or undermines, such practices. Their capacity to enable a reader's participation in the exploration and testing is crucial to their artistic achievement, rather than howsoever the reader comes down on the problems and worldviews on offer in them.

In this thesis, I have argued that one's answer to the question 'What makes bad books good?' is underpinned by one's understanding of the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. I have demonstrated that existing strategies for dealing of that relationship are inadequate. This is not merely because there are varying shades of grey, a greater degree of nuance than a simple dichotomy of 'yes' and 'no', 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad', lends itself to. It is because their account of the value-making aspects of discursive literary and ethical practice are too myopic and Procrustean. Literary and ethical value are thicker, more mercurial, harder to pin down and yet vastly more life enhancing, than any specific literary or moral assessment. There exists an extraordinary dynamism between ethical and aesthetic value. By showing us how a diverse array of ethical practices get sustained, and by challenging us to confront the conventions that provide those ethical practices their evaluative foundations, truly great works of literature can capture that dynamism in all its life-affirming variety.

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