

# The nature of fictional testimony and its role in reaching, fulfilling and promoting our epistemic aims and values

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Vidmar, Iris

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

IRIS VIDMAR

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TESTIMONY AND ITS ROLE IN  
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PROMOTING OUR EPISTEMIC AIMS  
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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Mentor: Dr. Sc. Snježana Prijić-Samaržija

Rijeka, 2013.

Doktorski rad pisan je pod mentorstvom prof. dr. sc. Snježane Prijić-Samaržija.

Doktorski rad obranjen je u Rijeci, 18. listopada 2013 godine pred komisijom u sastavu:

Prof. dr. sc. Elvio Baccarini, predsjednik Povjerenstva

Prof. dr. sc. Snježana Prijić-Samaržija, mentorica

Prof. dr. sc. Petar Bojanić, član

**MOJIM RODITELJIMA,  
BORISU I MARIJI,  
I SESTRI LANI**

## **The nature of Fictional Testimony and its Role in Reaching, Fulfilling and Promoting Our Epistemic Aims and Values**

(Summary)

In this dissertation I analyze the problem of cognitive value of literary works and literary practice. My starting point is the symmetry that I claim exists between cognitive values traditionally ascribed to literary works and cognitive states that contemporary epistemology finds valuable and desirable. In that sense, the backbone of dissertation is bringing together of the literary cognitivism (the view according to which literature and literary works are cognitively valuable) and the so called plurality view of epistemic aims and values (according to which truth and knowledge are not the only epistemic aims we aspire to reach).

Cognitive value of literature is manifested along two lines. The first one, which I call direct humanism, is based on the idea that literature offers us concrete knowledge about the world and people. This is what grounds the distinctive humanistic aspect of literature: engaging with literature is important in that it gives us knowledge of those things that primarily matter to us as human beings. The second one, the line of indirect humanism, is manifested in the way that literature influences the cognitive economy of the cognizers. Literature helps us deepen the knowledge we already have, makes us aware of the complexities of moral, psychological, political, sexual interactions, it helps us gain understanding of those phenomena that it brings to view, thus enabling us to increase the body of beliefs and knowledge we have at our disposal when we think about the world and ourselves.

In order to defend this claim, I have to show what the underlying mechanism of generating and transferring knowledge is, that is, which epistemically recognized mechanism makes it possible for us to learn from literature. In order to show this, I develop the analogy with testimony: the central claim of the thesis is that literary works are a specific kind of testimony. This is the original scientific contribution of my work: on the one hand, I show how testimony contributes to the plurality view of epistemic aims and values advocated for by the contemporary epistemology. On the other hand, insisting on this analogy creates the need to show how the author of a literary work can satisfy the conditions for sincerity and reliability that the testifier in non-fictional testimony has to satisfy. Answering this question also shows the untenability of anti-cognitivism, primarily advocated for by Plato. Once I show this, I turn my attention to the figure of reader-as-audience which profits cognitively in the process of reading, both, in the sense specified by direct and indirect humanism. Thus, I show the unique way in which literature contributes cognitively to reaching, fulfilling and promoting our epistemic aims and values.

Key words: author, cognitive value of literature, direct humanism, epistemic aims and values, epistemic monism, epistemic pluralism, indirect humanism, knowledge, literary anti-cognitivism, literary cognitivism, literary practice, reader, reliable informer, testimony, understanding

## **Priroda fikcijskog svjedočanstva i njegova uloga u postizanju, ispunjavanju i promicanju epistemoloških ciljeva i vrijednosti**

(Prošireni sažetak)

U doktorskoj disertaciji bavim se problemom kognitivne vrijednosti književnih djela i književne prakse. Moje je temeljno polazište simetrija za koju tvrdim da postoji između kognitivnih vrijednosti tradicionalno pripisivanih književnim djelima i kognitivnih stanja koje suvremena epistemologija smatra poželjnima i vrijednima. U tom je smislu okosnica disertacije spoj književnoga kognitivizma (stajališta prema kojem su književnost i književna djela kognitivno vrijedni) i takozvanoga pluralističkoga stajališta o epistemološkim ciljevima i vrijednostima prema kojem istina i znanje nisu jedini epistemološki ciljevi kojima kao spoznavaoci težimo.

Kognitivna vrijednost književnosti očituje se na dvije osi. Prva os, koju nazivam direktni humanizam, temelji se na ideji da nam književnost nudi konkretna znanja i spoznaje o svijetu i čovjeku. U tome se sastoji razlikovni humanistički aspekt književnosti: bavljenje književnošću važno je zato što nam daje spoznaje o onim stvarima koje su nam, kao ljudima, od primarnog značaja. Druga os, os indirektnoga humanizma, reflektira se u načinu na koji književnost djeluje na kognitivni aparat spoznavaoca. Književnost nam pomaže da produbimo znanja koja već imamo, da osvijestimo kompleksnost moralnih, psiholoških, političkih, seksualnih interakcija u koje ulazimo, da dođemo do razumijevanja o onim fenomenima kojima se određeno književno djelo bavi i da na taj način povećamo sustav vjerovanja i znanja koje imamo na raspolaganju kada promišljamo o svijetu i samima sebi.

Kako bih obranila ovaj stav, potrebno je pokazati koji je to pozadinski mehanizam generiranja i prenošenja znanja, odnosno koji nam epistemološki priznat mehanizam spoznaje omogućuje učenje iz književnosti. U tu svrhu razvijam analogiju sa svjedočanstvom: centralna je teza disertacije da su književna djela svojevrsno svjedočanstvo. U ovome se vidi i izvorni znanstveni doprinos mogega rada: s jedne strane pokazujem na koji način svjedočanstvo doprinosi pluralističkim ciljevima koje suvremena epistemologija zastupa. S druge strane, analogija sa svjedočanstvom nameće nam potrebu da pokažemo na koji način autor književnoga djela može zadovoljiti zahtjeve iskrenosti i pouzdanosti koji se postavljaju pred svjedoka u ne-fikcijskom svjedočanstvu. Odgovor na to pitanje ujedno pokazuje neodrživost anti-kognitivističkoga stava primarno zastupljenoga kod Platona. Jednom kada sam to pokazala, okrećem se čitatelju kao publici koja kognitivno profitira u procesu čitanja i to na nivou osi direktnoga i indirektnoga humanizma. Na taj način pokazujem jedinstveni kognitivni doprinos književnosti postizanju, ispunjavanju i promicanju naših epistemoloških ciljeva i vrijednosti.

Ključne riječi: autor, čitatelj, direktni humanizam, epistemički ciljevi i vrijednosti, epistemički monizam, epistemički pluralizam, indirektni humanizam, istina, književna praksa, književni anti-kognitivizam, književni kognitivizam, kognitivna vrijednost književnosti, pouzdani informator, razumijevanje, svjedočanstvo, znanje

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I develop a theory of the cognitive value of literature. My starting point is the symmetry that I claim exists between cognitive benefits that are attributed to literature by aestheticians and multiple epistemic values recognized by epistemologists. In that sense, I bring together two views: *literary cognitivism*, according to which literature is a source of knowledge and can be cognitively valuable, and *plurality view of epistemic aims and values*, according to which there are various epistemologically important states and processes other than knowledge. My claim is that new trends in epistemology – characterized primarily by dethroning of knowledge as the chief epistemic goal – give support to the view according to which literature is cognitively valuable initiated centuries ago by Aristotle.

Various theories have been developed to account for the intuition that literature is cognitively valuable. However, these theories have mostly been initiated by aestheticians who wanted to explain or ground literature's overall artistic and aesthetic value in its cognitive value. My approach here is different. My concern is only with the cognitive dimension of literature, not with its aesthetic or artistic value, nor with the way the two are connected. In that sense, my approach is that of an epistemologist, not aesthetician.

General idea that I set out to explore, the initial intuition, is that literature is cognitively valuable. This cognitive dimension is cashed out in multiple ways. First, literature can be a source of knowledge about the world and about people, that is human experience. The reason for that is the fact that literature is concerned with things that are humanly important; it tells us something about who we are, what we do, why we do that and what else could be done. Literature brings to view various aspects of human nature, social and political arrangements we live in, philosophical and religious doctrines we rely upon, biological and psychological make up that determine our behaviour. In that sense, our world is reflected in literary works that we read.

Second, because of the ways literature is concerned with the circumstances that shape and give structure to our world and our experience, literature often not only reflects this structure, but actively participates in challenging the basic premises of our experience. In that way, it invites readers to participate in contemplation over those conditions it brings to view. In that way, readers not only expand their body of knowledge, they also develop cognitive skills to

approach the world and think about it. Literature can thus make us more sensitive and more aware of the complexities of human situation in the world. It can also make readers reflect on their commitments, values, vices, actions and belief system.

There are two main things that I wanted to accomplish in this work: first, defend my account of literary cognitivism, which takes into consideration this diversity of cognitive benefits, and second, give it a firmer grounding in epistemology. My claim is that literature's cognitive dimension is best explained if we treat literature as a form of testimony. Another sense in which epistemology is important in my account is reflected in the sense in which literature helps us promote our epistemic aims. We want to be better cognizers, better at understanding the world and more sensitive and aware of what it is that shapes our experience. In order to achieve these aims, we have to develop cognitive skills and have cognitive economy that will enable us to grasp the world around us. As I will show, literature can immensely contribute in this search for knowledge and understanding.

My account of literary cognitivism will aim at explaining two separate questions: what is it that we can learn from literature, that is, what cognitive benefits are available from literature? Here I will be focused on showing the relation between literature and the world, literature and other knowledge-generating practices and literature and people. I will argue that we do not need any *sui generis* kind of truth in order to explain the insight that we get from literature. There is no restriction to the things we can learn from literature and we do not have to develop any special kind of epistemology to accommodate literature among our knowledge seeking practices.

Second, I will be concerned with explaining how we can learn from literature. I will invoke the analogy with testimony and claim that all the cognitive benefits available from literature can be explained if we treat literature as a testimony delivered by the author. I will show that there is a sense in which we can think about the author as a testifier who can fulfil all the conditions that testifiers should fulfil in delivering testimony. There are therefore two senses in which we can take literature to be cognitively valuable; at the level of individual works, and at the level of literature as a practice. Because of these two senses, I will talk about epistemic reliability of authors (where this is meant to account for the fact that we consider literary works to be telling us something about the world) and about epistemic reliability of literature (which is meant to account for the idea that literature as a practice is cognitively

valuable). In this way I will show literature's role in helping us reach and fulfil our epistemic goals.

Restrictions however need to be placed on the extent of my claim. First, I do not mean to imply that literature is the only practice that is cognitively valuable or that it has precedence over science or philosophy. The scope of my interest does not extend to comparing literature with science, although this is sometimes unavoidable given the way anti-cognitivists approach this issue. Second, I do not mean to suggest that every literary work is cognitively valuable. Certainly there are some works which offer more than others in terms of cognitive benefits and perhaps some that offer none. Finally, my claim about literature's cognitive value does not imply that every reader will pick up all that is cognitively valuable in a work. All of these claims will be further developed within the work.

### **1.1. Structure of the chapters**

My epistemological journey into literature's cognitive dimension begins in the second chapter where I offer an overview of literary cognitivism. I analyze various accounts put forward to explain it. In this chapter I develop my own view, encompassing humanistic theory of literary cognitivism. According to this view, literature is cognitively valuable and this value is developed along two complementary lines which I borrow from John Gibson: direct and indirect humanism. The humanistic aspect of literature is reflected in the fact that literature speaks about humanly important issues.

In the third chapter I provide an account of the epistemology of literature. I analyze various ways in which the cognitive value of literature is given an epistemological framework, as well as attempts to compare literature with science. In the second part of the chapter, I focus on the question 'how we learn from literature' and give an outline of the analogy I will defend further in the fifth chapter.

In the fourth chapter, I turn my attention to the position of literary anti-cognitivism. First I analyze Plato's position. His counter-arguments to the cognitive value of art stem from comparison between art and philosophy and the 'ancient battle' between poets and philosophers regarding their supremacy in the domain of education. I then analyze his epistemological and ethical counter-arguments to art as well as the psychological mechanism of identification he considers crucial in the experience of art. Then I move on to Jerome Stolnitz, whose claims against cognitive value of art are based on the comparison of art with

science. Finally I analyze positions developed by Stein Haugom Olsen and Peter Lamarque, questioning the extent to which they can be subsumed under anti-cognitivism.

The framework for my theory, the encompassing humanistic theory of literary cognitivism, is given epistemological grounds in the fifth chapter, where I first give an account of the contemporary trends in epistemology, characterized by the value turn and acceptance of the plurality view of epistemic aims and values. My main claim is that such a framework can accommodate both strands of my theory, direct and indirect humanism. This is important in that it enables us to answer the arguments raised by anti-cognitivists regarding the epistemic legitimacy of indirect humanism. In the second part, I analyze testimony as a mechanism of transmission and generation of knowledge and beliefs. I develop my analogy between fictional and non-fictional testimony and offer reasons for accepting it.

In the sixth chapter I turn to the figure of author. By analyzing various literary genres and some of the greatest authors from our rich literary archive, I offer an account of their reliability and thus establish them as testifiers who can fulfil the strict epistemic demands that are placed on them. In this way, I show that Plato's claim about unknowledgeable poets loses its grounds. In this chapter I further develop the intuition behind direct humanism and show in what ways literature, as a practice, is a reliable source of knowledge about the world.

Finally, in the seventh chapter, I work with the notion of reader. I develop further the indirect humanists' intuition and analyze ways in which cognitive benefits associated with indirect humanism are the result of reading. In the eighth chapter, the concluding part of dissertation, I give an overview of the questions that should be further pursued.

There are several issues that I had to presuppose in this work without giving them enough space. To begin with, I put aside two big concerns: the definition of literature and fiction and the question of the value of literature. Both of these questions matter immensely, but, unfortunately, I could not go into details due to the lack of space. I presuppose the definition of literature developed by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, the so called institutional theory of literature. As they see it, literature is primarily defined by relational, not by its structural, referential or linguistic features. Literature is made possible by the existing conventions which govern the rules of creation, reception and appreciation of literary works. I take this theory to be the best (at least among the competing theories) account of literature but I also rely upon it because it helps me evade some of the problems that might be otherwise raised against my view.

Regarding the second question; the value of literature, I remain neutral regarding various accounts on offer. This includes the question, which is crucial from the perspective of literary aesthetics, of the relation between cognitive dimension of literature and its cognitive value. In addition, I will not consider the issue of artistic-aesthetic distinction. Given that my perspective is epistemological, not aesthetic, I put this aside, though this makes my account of literary cognitivism differently motivated from the one developed by aestheticians I rely upon. On the other hand however, not being focused on the question of value gives me more space to pursue the cognitive dimension of literature. Ultimately however, nothing I say excludes the claim that cognitive dimension matters immensely – perhaps even crucially – for the overall value of a work.

Various other aspects of the debate on the cognitive value of literature will not be developed. One important figure that I say nothing about is Aristotle, the father of literary cognitivism. I also do not give enough space to theories about cognitive value of literature developed by Nelson Goodman and James Young. My reasons for excluding them have to do with the complexities of their theories and encompassing philosophical doctrines they develop which occasionally go beyond my interest. I wanted to stay focused on literature's way of being cognitive without bringing this in connection with its ability to inspire catharsis and other forms of emotional reactions, as Aristotle does. Discussing Goodman's theory would take us too far into theory of symbols, denotation and representation and in a similar manner dealing with Young's theory would ask us to spend too much time on representations. By claiming this, I do not mean to suggest that those authors I do rely upon offer any less complex or encompassing theories. They do however come closer to what I was interested in regarding this debate and their views offer a valuable spring board for my research. Ultimately however, my aim was not to present several aesthetically motivated theories of cognitive value of literature with the aim of choosing one that is to be accepted as the best. My aim was to explore different ways in which literature can be valuable, different ways in which we can profit – cognitively – from engaging with literary works and different ways in which literature supports, guides and inspires our quest to understand the world.

## 2. COGNITIVE VALUE OF LITERATURE

To claim that literature is cognitively valuable means, in the most ‘epistemic’ sense of the word, that there is something we can learn from it. This is the initial cognitivist intuition and my starting point. The aim of this chapter is to give an initial account of how literature can be cognitively valuable. I will present different accounts put forward by various philosophers who defended some sort of cognitive value(s) of literature, that is, different ways in which this ‘epistemic’ thesis was developed, as well as different cognitive benefits, or payoffs, that literature can provide. Given that the view according to which literature is cognitively valuable – literary cognitivism – is often discussed within wider framework of aesthetic cognitivism – the view according to which art is cognitively valuable – some of the arguments and claims put forward refer to art generally.

### 2.1. Aesthetic and Literary Cognitivism

Most authors who want to show that art is cognitively valuable rely on narrative art and literature to support their claims<sup>1</sup>, but there are also some authors who claim that there are cognitive benefits that can be extracted from all arts<sup>2</sup>. Debate within those who believe in cognitive values of art (cognitivists) and those who deny it (anti-cognitivists or skeptics) can at the basic level be cast in terms of pro-truth vs no-truth theories, though, as I will show, the debate has outgrown such a neat classification and can no longer be considered only in respect to truth. The most powerful, influential and persuasive no-truth theorists are Stein Haugom Olsen and Peter Lamarque. They claim the following:

we will argue, *inter alia*, that the concept of truth has no central or ineliminable role in critical practice. The point is not, of course, that critics have no concern with true judgments but only that there is no significant place for truth as a critical term applied to works of literature. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p.1.)

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Carroll 2002, 2007, Davies 2007a, 2007b, 2010a, Elgin 1993, 1996, 2000, 2007, Friend 2007, Gaut 2005, 2006, 2007, Gibson 2003, 2007, 2009, 2011, Graham 1997, 2000, Green 2010, Kieran 1996, 2005, Kivy 2006, Novitz 1984, Row 2010, Swirski 2007, 2010, Zamir 2002, 2006, Walsh 1969, Young 2001.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Gaut 2007, Graham 1997 and Kieran 2005.

Our principal debate is with those who want a ‘stronger’ sense of ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’ applied to literature; i.e. those who see the aim of literature as conveying or teaching or embodying universal truths about nature, the human condition, and so on, in a sense at least analogous to that in which scientific, or psychological, or historical hypothesis can express general truths. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 6)

It is interesting that between these two quotations we can also find the following:

Second, coming nearer to the cognitive potentiality of literature, there are further, to our mind obvious, connections with truth and knowledge which it is no part of our “no-truth” theory to challenge. *Of course* readers can pick up information about people, places, and events from works of fiction; *of course* readers can learn practical skills, historical facts, points of etiquette, insights into Regency England, etc., from literary works; *of course* writers of literary fiction often offer generalizations about human nature, historical events, political ideologies, and so forth, in their works; *of course* what readers take to be true (in the world) will affect how they respond to literary works, including how they understand the works; *of course* readers often need to have background knowledge of a cultural, psychological, or historical kind, even moral or philosophical preconceptions, to understand some literary works.

The theoretical interest lies not in defending these commonplace observations, but in integrating them into a satisfactory account of literature, literary value and fictionality. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, pp. 4-5. Italics original)

The problem of explaining the cognitive value of art and literature is not as simple as it might have seemed at the beginning. Both sides agree on the fact that we can learn from literature. Yet, where they part ways is when it comes to providing an account of the value of those learnings<sup>3</sup>. No-truth theories do not want to make it the essence of art, the backbone of its value. Truth is there, it matters, but not to the extent of being the core value or the (sole) purpose of art. On the other hand, pro-truth theorists want to show precisely the opposite: art is valuable to the degree it conveys knowledge – according to some theories which substitute knowledge for understanding, to the extent it conveys understanding.

In this dissertation I discuss and analyse arguments put forward by these two opposite parties, but my interest is slightly different: I am not interested in showing that cognitive dimension makes the core value of art/literature. My stand is strictly epistemological: as an epistemologist, I want to explore cognitive potentialities of literature, and having realized that there indeed are many, I want to see how art serves different epistemic functions (and not how

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<sup>3</sup> Lamarque recently argued in favour of abandoning the question of whether we can learn from literature – i.e. the value of truth – in favour of accounting for the value of literature: “The proper focus for the truth debate must rest with the question of value rather than the question of fact and not so much with the value of truth, which is not controversial, but the value of literature, which is” (Lamarque 2010, p. 367).



epistemic/cognitive dimension serves aesthetic). Obviously, it will be argued that these values matter to a big extent, but whether or not they are the most important of (aesthetic or artistic) values is beyond my interest. Already at this point someone might find me ‘banging at the open door’, given that all the participants of this centuries old debate recognize the fact that literature is cognitively valuable. But that would be too quick a dismissal that would fail to recognize the importance of this epistemic enterprise. Simply stating that literature is cognitively valuable is a trivial claim; we want to see *in what way* literature is cognitively valuable, besides the most obvious and the least interesting one which consists in the fact that there are many information we can pick up from literature. In order to show that, it is not enough to say that readers pick up facts while reading, we need a stronger epistemic grounding, one that will block possible sceptical attacks. Epistemic survey of literature should show how it can be that despite fictional dimension and imagined elements we find in literature, there is still a sense in which literature can be taken as epistemically serious and justified source of knowledge. If theoretical interest of aestheticians like Olsen and Lamarque lies in finding the proper place for truth-literature connection *within* aesthetic theory of literary value, my theoretical interest lies in accounting for the *epistemically grounded* cognitive benefits of dealing with literature. My interest is to see how literature advances our epistemic aims and values. In that sense, I make a sharp turn from aesthetic interest to epistemological interest.

One more reason to take epistemic perspective on literature has to do with the fact that literature has traditionally been attributed some cognitive values (such as understanding) that have only recently gained recognition from epistemologists. In that sense, and that will be the most important part of my claim, literature is saturated with different cognitive values which can be neglected if the debate is seen in terms of pro-truth vs. no-truth debate. I claim that beside truth, there are many cognitive benefits of dealing with literature. The failure to see that and to claim that literature is cognitively valuable only in the sense that it contains true propositions leaves us with deficiently poor view of literature.

My stand therefore is cognitivist, which means, at the most general level, that I accept the claim that art is not cognitively trivial, just the opposite. Unfortunately, this idea, simple as it may look, is not as simple when it comes to providing a full blown account of it. Probably part of the problem is the fact that the connection between art and epistemology has more often been discussed by aestheticians than by epistemologists, which means that we have

inherited a heavy burden of aesthetic thoughts on the issue, as well as a considerable lack of epistemic thoughts. The consequence of this is that the relation between art and cognitive elements in art has always been accounted for in terms of aesthetic resources. The view thus developed is therefore most often termed aesthetic cognitivism: it is a view which acknowledges cognitive importance of art and tries to make it inherent or intrinsic to art. This is a good place to start with my project because it gives us a general idea of what it is to claim that art (including literature) is cognitively valuable.

### **2.1.1. Aesthetic cognitivism: Berys Gaut and Gordon Graham**

Let us start with Berys Gaut's account of aesthetic cognitivism:

I am going to argue for a cognitivist view of the value of art; more precisely, I will argue that art can nontrivially teach us and that this (partly) determines its artistic value. This view, aesthetic cognitivism, need not hold that the only value of art is cognitive; indeed the sensible cognitivist holds that there is a plurality of artistic value, of which cognitive ones are just one kind<sup>4</sup>

Gaut is mostly concerned with finding the appropriate place for cognitive values among the wider spread of values that can be termed aesthetic. That however is not my line of enquiry, as I said before; my approach is more epistemological than aesthetic. Therefore, it is more interesting to see what sorts of knowledge art is said to impart. Gaut summarizes these under the following:

Moreover, most cognitivists correctly hold that there is a wide variety of different kinds of knowledge that art can impart to its appreciators: propositional knowledge, know-how (skills), phenomenal knowledge (knowledge of what it is like to experience something), conceptual knowledge, knowledge of values and of significance, for example (Gaut 2006, p. 115).

Most of this and the third chapter will be devoted to exploring these different kinds of knowledge and to showing how exactly literature affords it, for now it is enough to recognize the main idea of aesthetic cognitivism: art can impart knowledge, or, in a slightly different formulation, readers can learn from literature. However, many can find this formulation a bit problematic, particularly when attention is directed to literature. If we claim that literature imparts (propositional) knowledge, at least part of what is being claimed for is that there are

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<sup>4</sup> Gaut 2006, p.115. In his 2007 Gaut offers a more radical definition: "The core claim (of aesthetic cognitivism) is that the cognitive (or, equivalently, epistemic) merits of works of art are, under certain conditions, aesthetic merits in those works or condition their aesthetic merits" (see p. 136).

true propositions – information or factual claims – we can extract from the work and add to our body of knowledge. However, literature by its nature is not meant to be informative discourse and there are no clear cut criteria that would show how a reader is to identify true propositions. Apart from that, there are many contradictory propositions that can be picked up from various literary works, so again, it seems that readers have no criteria to decide which is true. And finally, claiming that literary works are valuable because of the true propositions we extract from them seems to severely diminish the value of literature; surely there is more, even in cognitive terms, that we can get from literature.

Arguments of this kind have convinced some philosophers to switch from grounding cognitivism in terms of knowledge to some other cognitively valuable states, and most philosophers opt for understanding. Here is how Gordon Graham defines it:

Now, a cognitive theory of art need not claim that *everything* that is commonly called a work of art is valuable because of its ability to enhance our understanding. This would obviously be false; some works are valuable primarily because they are beautiful, and others are to be valued chiefly for the pleasure they give us. Cognitivism is an explanation of the substance or significance of major works of art, and its contention is that these are not simply pleasurable or beautiful, but that in some sense they contribute to our understanding of experience.<sup>5</sup>

There are several important elements here. First of all, Graham is not concerned with providing a definition of art, but with explaining its value (an enterprise he calls normative approach). Now, I have already said that I will not try to provide an account of the value of art (literature), although I believe cognitive values attribute substantially to it. Also, Graham is right in claiming that not all art is cognitively valuable; to claim that it is would obviously be wrong. According to the theory I will develop, there are various cognitive benefits (or payoffs) that can be gained from literature, but what cognitive effect (if any) will some

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<sup>5</sup> Graham 2000, p. 47. Graham here tries primarily to explain the value of art and after examining the ideas that we value art for the pleasure and enjoyment it provides, or for the emotion it triggers, he finally presents a powerful argument in support of the idea that we value art for the cognitive benefits it has. He enlists several reasons why cognitive contribution of art explains its value better than the fact that it gives us pleasure or arouses emotions. Among these are the fact that cognitivism (unlike expressivism) explains why art has such an important place in our culture and educational system, why it makes sense to dedicate one's life to the study or creation of art and why it is reasonable to discriminate between serious and light art. As he sees it, cognitivism explains best the way people think and feel about art (pp. 48-49). Interesting as these arguments are, they have more to do with showing why cognitivism should have precedence over emotivism and I will not deal with them. However, one important thing that Graham insists upon in his argument is his claim that cognitivism reveals the importance and plausibility of the critical vocabulary. This is something that is often mentioned in cognitivism vs. anti-cognitivism and will be dealt with in the fourth chapter.

particular literary work have on any particular reader is not something that theory can predict<sup>6</sup>. I am more inclined toward the claim that ‘major works of art’ are rich in cognitive value while light art is not, but that doesn’t mean that it is by definition so. This again goes beyond my epistemic interest and has to do with deeply problematic aesthetic problem of defining the nature and value of art. Unfortunately, I cannot tackle that here. It is important to state that, like many others who defend cognitivism, I claim that *some, but not all* works of literature are cognitively valuable. However, where I part ways with them is in explaining why that is so. Namely, some aesthetic cognitivists, such as John Gibson (more on whom below) claim that it is the aim of some works to inform readers. According to this theory, a literary work is only as successful as it accomplishes this aim. My theory does not depend on this kind of demand. First of all, regardless of the aims of the authors, they themselves may not succeed in what they aim for<sup>7</sup>. But leaving that aside, my claim is that readers cannot be passive recipients of whatever cognitively literature has to offer. In order for readers to gain knowledge and other cognitive gains, they have to actively engage with the work. Because of that, my theory allows for some works of literary fiction (particularly those that are usually defined as fiction, rather than literature) to be cognitively valuable. Putting it simply, there’s no way for the theory to predict what cognitive effects particular literary work will have on the readers.

Now, going back to cognitivism, the way Graham defines it puts the most weight on the notion of understanding. Many other philosophers who are keen on defending cognitivism do so along these lines, but what we rarely find is a clear cut account or definition of understanding. Probably one reason for that is the fact that epistemologists (unlike philosophers of science) have only recently started to seriously take into consideration understanding as such and have tried to show in what way it differs from knowledge. I will explore this in the fifth chapter. For now, it will be enough to recognize that cognitive values

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<sup>6</sup> A short terminological note: in speaking of cognitive value of art/literature, we can say that literature is cognitively valuable, which means it offers cognitive benefits or payoffs to its readers. Due to its cognitive dimension, engaging with literature can be cognitively rewarding for the readers; in that sense there are cognitive benefits or payoffs that literature offers. The claim is that literature can have effects on the readers which can best be described as cognitive (unlike emotional or aesthetic). These are all variations of the same thesis put forward by literary cognitivism and I will use all of these notions. In this context, to claim that literature is cognitively valuable means that it is epistemically valuable; i.e. the two notions can be used as synonyms.

<sup>7</sup> This is the well known problem of the failure of intentions. See Livingstone 2005.

of art are not necessarily bound to the propositional truth, but include other cognitively valuable states and achievements.

From what we saw in Gaut and Graham, aesthetic cognitivism can be cast either in terms of artwork *teaching its audience*, or in terms of *providing understanding*, or in terms of audience *learning something*.

Gaut's account of aesthetic cognitivism starts with the most general and the most neutral formulation: artwork can convey or give knowledge. Gaut explains this in three different ways in which this claim can be developed:

- i) Cognitive merit of a work is explained in terms of works exhibiting an appropriate kind of understanding
- ii) Cognitive merit is explained in terms of artwork teaching its audience something
- iii) Cognitive merit is explained in terms of audience's learning something from artwork.

So these are the three formulations of aesthetic cognitivism. Gaut himself rejects the third and claims that the appropriate account of aesthetic cognitivism includes the first and the second formulation. According to i), "understanding manifested by the artist in the work (...) should be understood here to include both cognitive and broadly affective states. 'Understanding' covers the wide variety of kinds of knowledge (...) and includes knowledge about morality, values in general, psychological claims and so forth" (Gaut 2007, p. 138).

According to the second formulation, works of art can teach us certain things. As Gaut sees it, this is the most correct version of aesthetic cognitivism, because it entails formulation i), and because it acknowledges communicative dimension: we can get some cognitive merits only if there is an intention to communicate them. Obviously, the notion of teaching is the most important here and this is how Gaut explains it:

The terminology of 'teaching' should not, however, be taken to suggest that there is a classroom quality to one's relations with art; the claim is sometimes put in terms of works 'showing' us certain things, and this perhaps better captures the looser feel of one's encounter with art. (...) successful teaching is often in part a matter of active stimulation to critical reflection, of getting someone to explore the answers to pertinently posed questions, thinking through issues in her own terms (Gaut 2007, p.139).

This is the most illuminative formulation of cognitivism, the one that I want to show is correct.

Finally, let us see what is wrong with the third formulation. Gaut rejects it because “The fact that one learns from something does not entail that it has taught one that thing, or even that it understands that thing” (Gaut 2007, p. 139). He gives an example of a geologist learning “a great deal about the geological history of an area from the stone found in it” (Gaut 2007, p.139). However, it would be absurd to say that the stone understands whatever it is that geologist has learnt and that he had the intention of communicating that understanding. Therefore, learning “is an instrumental notion, and does not therefore entail anything about the understanding, or communicative intentions, or that from which one learns” (Gaut 2007, p. 140). The biggest problem with the learning formulation is that “there is not necessarily a cognitive or epistemic merit in the object or person from which one is learning” (Gaut 2007, p. 140).

Now, the question is what to make of this learning formulation. For one thing, I think Gaut is too quick to dismiss it. We have already seen from Lamarque and Olsen’s quote that it is a commonplace to speak in terms of ‘learning from art’. Also, it is wrong to claim that learning is only possible if there is an intention to cause learning in the audience. Going back to the stone example, of course it would be absurd to claim that stone understands anything and has the intention of conveying that, but it is plausible to say that geologist learnt something from the stone (although that is obviously made possible by the background knowledge he has). Later on I will develop my account of cognitive merits of literature and part of my argument will be to treat literary work as a testimony. Relying on some influential views on testimony, I will try to show that we can learn something even though our informant has no intention that we learn anything. But we’ll come to that.

Another reason to doubt Gaut’s dismissal of learning formulation is Lamarque’s account of learning from literature, developed in the article of that very name where he confronts two paradigms of learning, the one cast in terms of intentionality (which is how Gaut sees the learning process) and the one that focuses on causality:

Learning involves acquiring beliefs or skills. I take the process of learning to be fundamentally causal (transforming input to output) and I am inclined to think that more or less any process that results in the acquisition of beliefs or skills can be described as learning. The paradigm is that in which a learner actively, self-consciously and intentionally engages in the quest to learn and

acquires, perhaps through rational reflection, beliefs and skills that the learner takes to be of value.<sup>8</sup>

What is important to stress here is the active engagement of the learner (that is, audience or readers), rather than the intention on the part of the artist (writer). In the second part of my thesis it will be clear why that is important. However, nothing substantially revolves around learning formulation for my stand: an artist presents in artwork something that audience identifies as cognitively valuable (and that may very well be an understanding of something), but what is more important is that the audience uses that to enhance their own knowledge, understanding of cognitive apparatus in general. For the most part I will be focus on that.

So, what we have so far is the following: aesthetic cognitivism aims at showing that art is rich with cognitive merits, which are most easily cast in terms of understanding. If that is correct, we can certainly enrich our cognitive sphere through engaging with art. That possibility certainly gives rather strong epistemic push to art, making it similar to – or according to some radical formulations, as important as – science in its endeavour to reveal the world to us. Here is Graham again:

Aesthetic cognitivism may be said to be the view that art at its best is as a form of understanding and as such, though it differs greatly in other respects, is to be accorded the same evaluative status as science, a status which its undoubted capacity to entertain and give us pleasure could not justify (Graham 1996, p. 1).

The idea that art has equal status as science is most often connected to Nelson Goodman, who wrote extensively on art and its ways of being cognitive<sup>9</sup>. Anyone who claims that art is cognitively valuable has to show in what respects it differs from other enterprises that are also cognitively valuable and science is here the most important such an enterprise. Even the beginnings of debate over cognitive value of art in Plato were cast in terms of an ancient quarrel between poets and philosophers, philosophers representing scientists, and as is well

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<sup>8</sup> Lamarque, 2007. p. 13. See also his footnote 2 for a rejection of intentionality model. It is important however to note that Gaut wants to show that cognitive values are in a way internal to artwork, therefore for him there has to be some kind of 'intention' in the artwork (manifested of course by the artist composing that artwork) to transfer these values to the audience. Lamarque, on the other hand, wants to show that these cognitive values, which are obviously present in the artwork, do not in any relevant way contribute to aesthetic value of artwork and therefore are in no way internal to the practice of producing and appreciating art.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the complexities of Goodman's theory, as well as his overall philosophical views, I will not deal with his theory here. For a concise introduction into Goodman's theory of the cognitive workings of art and science see Elgin 2000.

known, Plato remained mercilessly convinced that poets have nothing cognitively important to say, just the opposite; they should be banned from the state for spreading lies. On the other hand, Aristotle gave precedence to art precisely because artists were more knowledgeable than scientists in that they knew not only what it is but also what might be and why things which are, are that way. So it seems that we can't avoid comparing art and science in terms of their capacity to give us knowledge.

The problem seems to be this: if we claim that art gives us knowledge (or understanding), then it is not clear what we need science for. On the other hand, if we recognize science as our best tool for exploring the world and delivering knowledge about it, then, given that art and science are completely different in their nature, it is hard to see how exactly art can do the cognitive work. So either way, we can't have both being cognitively valuable.

This is a problem for aesthetic cognitivism and a lot of discussion is dedicated to solving the problem, as we'll see in the next chapter. There are those, like Goodman and Elgin, who claim that science is not as 'scientific' as we take it to be and therefore unjustifiably holds our epistemic throne. There are also those who claim that the two should not be compared due to too big differences that exist between them. I am more inclined toward this second solution, although I find arguments that show science not to be as veritistic as it is usually considered rather convincing. For now, let me just say that I do not want to cast aesthetic cognitivism as an alternative to science. I want to explore cognitive aspects of literature, without claiming that due to these aspects we can do without science. But I am also unsympathetic toward those who claim that art should be altogether discarded because of its inability to compete with science. As I see it, it is not a competition, it is just that we have more than one way of dealing with the world.

However, one important moral to draw from the science vs. art claim is the following: if art is cognitively valuable in that it gives us understanding, we have to see how exactly it is doing that. Almost everyone who defends some kind of cognitive value of art tries to answer that. Here is Dorothy Walsh: "If works of art are in some sense revelatory, the claim that this is so will be of interest only if it can be argued that their being revelatory is bound up with their nature and their success as works of art" (Walsh 1969, p. 3).

The pressure of this kind, namely, the pressure to explain what is so special about cognitive aspect of literature, lead to elaboration of aesthetic cognitivism along two theses: epistemic and aesthetic. Here is how Gaut formulates it:



Aesthetic cognitivism, then, is best thought of as a conjunction of two claims: first, that art can give us (non-trivial) knowledge, and second, that the capacity of art to give us (non-trivial) knowledge (partly) determines its value qua art, i.e. its aesthetic value. Aesthetic anti-cognitivism is a denial of one or both of these conjuncts (Gaut 2005, pp. 436 – 437).

The first thesis, epistemic, is familiar by now. Aesthetic thesis states that cognitive values (no matter how defined) attribute to aesthetic merit of the work.

Defining aesthetic cognitivism along these two conjunctions can make it hard for me to justify my epistemic approach, but I hope that my motivation for doing so has been appropriately explained by now and can therefore justify my focusing on the epistemic thesis. I also hope that I have not lost the right to call myself cognitivist<sup>10</sup>. I think that aesthetic claim is important in showing how aesthetic means can do the epistemic work, though this leaves the worry raised by Plato about artistic means being so persuasive that artist can successfully use them to persuade people to accept as true things which are not true. Some philosophers however, like Martha Nussbaum, Gordon Graham and George Stein, argue that these artistic means have the important function of substituting ‘rational’ means of advancing knowledge, such as argument and evidence<sup>11</sup>.

As I will show later on, a lot of epistemic benefits are extracted from the work in the process of active contemplation about its content and themes, and aesthetic means are of a lesser importance here. Obviously of course, these aesthetic means contribute substantially to how ‘taken in’ by the works we get, which in turn certainly influences how much cognitive elements we will recognize or how heavily the works will cognitively influence us<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Mitchell Green, for example, also defends aesthetic/literary cognitivism without discussing aesthetic claim (see his 2010).

<sup>11</sup> See Nussbaum 1990, Graham 1997, Stein 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Kieran (2005) analyses several examples from visual arts and shows how ‘cognitive functioning’ of artworks changes with respect to how artistic means are put to use. See particularly chapter 3.

## 2.2. Literary cognitivism

Let me now turn to literature and its ways of being cognitively valuable. One such account was provided by John Gibson:

The challenge it [i.e. literary cognitivism] ultimately sets before the philosopher and literary theorist is that of articulating an adequate account of the relationship between literature and life itself, and this is among the most foundational questions we can ask in literary aesthetics. The attempt to support a theory of literary cognitivism is part of that very general struggle to make sense of the worldly interest we take in the literary work of art: to explain why we turn to literature with the expectation of having our understanding of the world refined, augmented, even shocked; to give support to the perhaps vague but none the less pervasive belief that in literary experience we often come to know ourselves and our world better (Gibson 2007, p.1).

There are several important elements that Gibson stresses here. The first one is what he calls ‘the relationship between literature and life itself’. This is part of a wider conception of literature, the humanistic one, of which we will say more below. For now, it is important to note that this adds an additional strength to our claim: part of the problem, as I will discuss in the next chapter, for literary cognitivism is to show that the knowledge literature imparts is not trivial and that it can be applied to our worldly affairs and situations. Claiming however, that there is an important link between literature i.e. fictional worlds it creates, and real world, helps us trespass the problem of imaginary elements found in literature. In a sense, what literary cognitivists want to show is that fictional world created in the novels can impart knowledge about real world. What literature has to teach us concerns our world; therefore it certainly is cognitively beneficial for us to concern ourselves with it.

Another way to express this is to claim that “... in works of literature we find some of the most powerful representations of reality ...” (Gibson 2009, p. 466). This means “that literature is the textual form to which we turn when we want to read the story of our shared form of life: our moral and emotional, social and sexual—and so on for whatever aspects of life we think literature brings to view—*ways of being human*” (Gibson 2007, p. 1).

So, the idea is that what we learn from literature has to do with our reality, with the way our world is and the way the practices we participate in are. This ‘human’ aspect of what literature deals with is important to cognitivism because, as Gibson says, it explains why we turn to literature with the expectations of gaining understanding about reality. This idea that literature deals with what is human (in the widest sense possible) is sometimes explained by what Lamarque and Olsen call mimetic aspect: “The interest which literature has for human beings, it has because it possesses a humanly interesting content, because what literature presents or

says concerns readers as human beings” (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 265<sup>13</sup>). The question of course is to show how precisely literature does that and the answer is that it does it through developing themes and thematic concepts that are important to us. This thematic level of literature (as opposed to its subject level) will be of huge importance for the claim that literature awards readers with cognitive payoffs, but before we tackle that, let’s elaborate in more details the connection between literary humanism and literary cognitivism.

### **2.2.1. Literary humanism and literary cognitivism**

We saw with Gibson that cognitive aspect of literature can be explained in terms of humanist conception of literature and the quotations from his works already give us a rough idea of what humanism – or, as he calls it, humanist intuition – is. He claims: “... literature offers us a window on our world. We might call this the humanist intuition and characterize it as the thought – or hope – that literature presents the reader with an intimate and intellectually significant engagement with social and cultural reality” (Gibson 2007, p. 2). He goes on and claims that humanism “marks in literary aesthetics a very modest proposal: that there is an important link between literature and life, and that this link, whatever it may precisely consist in, accounts for one of the central reasons we value literature” (Gibson 2007, pp. 15-16). This link between literature and life means that

we have grounds for claiming that part of the project of many (though certainly not all) literary works is to articulate an insight into some specific region of human experience and circumstances (...) The humanist wants to assert that through works of literature the significance of very real human experiences, practices, and institutions can be revealed when they were once mysterious or obscure; that a grasp of reality can be gained from close reading (hence literary *humanism*, for the claim is that literature speaks to human reality). The humanist means nothing metaphysical, implies nothing foundationalist, when he speaks of ‘reality’. He gestures only toward the everyday world we inhabit – that is, the world of actual human experience and action (Gibson 2007, p. 16).

In his article “Thick Narratives”, Gibson elaborates this thesis by showing in what sense can ethical dimension of human culture be presented in literary narratives: “That literary content is often a kind of ethical content seems in one sense obvious. After all, if literary works

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<sup>13</sup> Notice the importance of ‘humanly interesting content’ in the way they characterize literature as opposed to fiction: “Literature, unlike fiction, is an evaluative concept and a work is recognized as a literary work partially through the recognition of the intention to present something to the reader that is humanly interesting” (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 276.).

concern themselves with the stuff of human experience, they could as much ignore the ethical as they could the psychological, familial, social, or political dimensions of life” (Gibson, 2011).

Some defenders of literary humanism see it as primarily concerned with ethics. Berys Gaut (2007) identifies the birth of literary humanism as a response to Plato’s overall critical views on the ethical powers of mimetic art (more of which below). He claims that it is only if we assume the correctness of this humanistic account of the value of literature and art that we can explain why dealing with art (creating it, engaging in it, teaching about art, learning about art, building museums) is a practice worth pursuing (and financing). The reason why society generally and social institutions such as schools in particular value art so highly is the fact that art teaches us and instructs us on how to live morally. Given that Gaut is primarily concerned with the relation between art and morality, it is understandable that in his account of literary humanism he focuses on ethics and morality and neglects a more fundamental relation that has to do with art and the world, of which ethics is just one aspect.

Some scholars see literary humanism as not so much concerned with practices, institutions and activities as with the question ‘how to live’, or ‘what it is that makes life valuable’. These scholars see literature as valuable precisely because of its ability to answer this question, usually by showing different ways in which life can be worth living. Martha Nussbaum and Philip Kitcher have both written extensively on this. Nussbaum (2010) has argued in favour of joining ethical theory with literary criticism with the aim of showing that such a project is of utmost importance for people in order for them to reach self-understanding and good living conditions with others. Already in her analysis of Greek tragedies and Henry James’ novels Nussbaum demonstrated the power of literature to help us struggle with ethical questions and dilemmas<sup>14</sup>.

Philip Kitcher’s interest in cognitive powers of literature are also focused on the way literature answers the question of what is valuable in life. His analysis of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* are both oriented on showing how

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<sup>14</sup> See her 1986, and 1990. The underlying argument in both is that literature should be joined with moral philosophy.

dealing with literature helps readers evaluate their lives and come to terms with shortcomings, disadvantages, pain and troubles that life brings.<sup>15</sup> In commenting Joyce's prose, Kitcher says:

I read *Ulysses* as offering a vivid account of the worth of the ordinary, and *Finnegans Wake* as a deep interrogation of the theme. Through the swirling dream of Joyce's last work, readers are brought, again and again, to rejoice in the everyday, to laugh at its comic mistakes and misunderstandings, and, finally, to recognize the possibility that even flawed relationships may center lives of real value (Kitcher, ms. p. 26).

In analyzing *Ulysses*, Kitcher says:

What makes *Ulysses* one of the greatest novels in the English language (...) is that the reconstructed thoughts of Bloom, of Stephen, and of Molly are *worth* following, showing us what it is to struggle, to aspire, to fail, to fall, to betray and be betrayed, to befriend, to forgive, showing us some of what human life is, how it is limited and confused, how it can be triumphant and worthwhile (Kitcher 2007, p. 49).

A theoretical grounding for literary humanism that combines Gibson, Gaut, Nussbaum and Kitcher's accounts is provided by Andy Mousley, who has recently offered a humanistic reading of Shakespeare. Analyzing various forms that humanism in literary criticism has taken, he intimates: „At the heart of literary humanism is the question: 'how to live'” (Mousley 2007, p.8) which, given its ethical aspect, is firstly connected to asking ‘how should one live’, but also with questions such as ‘which way of living might be a more or less authentic expression of what it is to be human’ and also with asking for some concept of human nature. Finally, Mousley insists that the question ‘how to live’ “assumes an intimate connection between ‘literature’ and ‘life’” (Mousley 2007, p. 13)<sup>16</sup> which gets us back to Gibson.

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<sup>15</sup> See his 2007 and 2013. Van Mater Ames (1952) offered an analysis of Thomas Mann's humanism that is more in line with Gibson's account.

<sup>16</sup> The notion of literary humanism that Mousley defends (i) stands as opposition to “tendencies within certain strands of formalism, modernism and [literary] theory to remove literature from any intimate contact with life” (p.13) and (ii) is not to be identified or equated with theories that identified ‘man as the origin and source of meaning, of action and of history’” (p.14) although these theories constitute, according to Mousley, mainstream humanism of the twenty-first century. We may wonder at this point, who are the anti-humanists? From our perspective, anti-humanists are those, identified in (i), who want to deny ‘intimate contact’ between literature and life.

### 2.2.2. Direct and indirect humanism and literary cognitivism

In the previous part we showed in what way literary cognitivism (the view according to which literature is cognitively valuable in the sense that we can learn from it) is connected to literary humanism (the view according to which there is an intimate connection between our real world and a fictional world designed by author of a literary work). Taking these two together, we get the claim that what we can learn from literature has to do with the world we live in. However valuable this is, it is not all that we get out of literary works. In order to explain what that more is, one more distinction is important here, which we will, following Gibson a bit further, make between indirect and direct humanism.

As Gibson explains, in order for humanist to sustain his claim, he needs to show that this link between literature and reality is direct, in the sense that reality is (directly) contained *within the words in a literary work*. Reality (represented in a work) is not supposed to be something external to the work, something that the work refers to or builds a bridge towards, but must be in the work itself. He explains this condition in the following manner:

We might call it the ‘textual constraint’ and treat it as telling us that a satisfactory account of a proper feature of a literary work requires that whatever property we attribute to a text – say, the property of being cognitively valuable – be an actual property of the text: something we come into contact with when we explore the interior of the work (Gibson 2009, p.472).

Gibson wants cognitivists to meet this condition because he sees it as the best solution to fight off several anti-cognitivist objections to cognitivism (more on which later), as well as to ground cognitive value of literature in its aesthetic properties. However, from my perspective, such a condition should not be necessarily fulfilled. For one thing, it doesn’t matter for my purpose to defend full blown literary cognitivism (epistemic and aesthetic theses). But more importantly, part of my overall argument in favour of it is the claim that epistemic value should be attributed to various processes that reading a literary work can trigger, processes that influence our cognitive economy.

So, the proper conception of humanism he wants to defend, and the one he sees as the only plausible account of literary cognitivism, can be spelled out in terms of the following four theses:

- i) Part of the project of at least some literary works is to articulate an insight into some specific region of human experience and circumstance

- ii) Through literary works the significance of very real human experiences, practices and institutions can be revealed
- iii) A grasp of reality can be gained from close reading: literature speaks to human reality, to the world of actual human experience and action
- iv) Literary experience may be a direct appreciation of and engagement with the real world

What (i) to (iv) share is the assumption that it is the literary works themselves, rather than readers, that ‘do the cognitive work’. The question then becomes what this ‘specific region of human experience and circumstance’ is and the easiest answer is: the one that literary work brings to view. For example, it is often said that Faulkner’s novels provide a great picture of American South, including and being particularly revealing of the aspects of and connection between racism, slavery and identity<sup>17</sup>. Malcolm Cowley, one of the most famous literary critics to speak about Faulkner, says:

These extraordinary stories embody the essence – the people, the atmospheres, heat and fermenting tension – of America’s Deep South. Themes of the hunt, violence, friction between black and white, the primal corrupting influence of women, the past living in the present, surface again and again, handled with Faulkner’s insider’s genius for re-creating an intensely human world... (The Penguin Collected stories of William Faulkner).

Theresa M. Towner, in commenting *Absalom, Absalom!* says: “To some readers, it perfectly illustrates southern history. To some, it explains American race relations” (Towner 2008, p. 40). Similar considerations are found in her commentary on *Go down, Moses*: “The first three chapters of *Go Down Moses* very carefully trace (...) patterns of racial behaviour and their relationship to individual identity” (Towner 2008, p. 58). Notice that by ‘experience’ we do not need to confine ourselves to social circumstances. Already these short quotations on

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<sup>17</sup> Notice that the claim is not that we need to read Faulkner in order to get the information that American South was for a part of its history saturated with racism and racial issues. To claim that would be to trivialize literature. Rather, the idea is, and we will deal with this a lot in the following pages, nicely captured by Gibson in his commentary on Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*: „The structure of this story of racial injustice is hardly original: a black man is wrongly accused of murdering a white woman, and a lawyer who reluctantly comes to believe in his innocence fights against a community set on lynching him. We've heard this story (or at least seen the movie) before, in one form or another. Faulkner's accomplishment was not to construct a terribly original story but to tell a story in a particular way, a way that rendered intelligible how certain features of Southern culture give rise to these familiar, intractable problems of race” (Gibson 2011).

Faulkner reveal the significance of emotional and psychological aspects. So what Gibson wants to say, and what I think he rightly notes, is that there is a certain aspect of reality that, when portrayed in a work, becomes more obvious, it is brought to view and cannot go ignored or unseen.

Unlike direct humanism, which seeks to locate real world within the literary work, indirect humanism starts with the premise that the content of a literary work is always fictional and therefore cannot in any appropriate way accommodate reality within itself. Therefore, cognitive benefits cannot be found within literary work, but in some kind of connection between literary work, reality and reader. This connection is most easily explained in the attempts to “bring literature to bear on the our-wordly by exploring our ability to *apply* aspects of the content of a literary work to extra-textual reality. Thus the reader builds the bridge between fiction and reality and so unites what the work itself cannot” (Gibson 2007, p. 18).

What Gibson claims here (and what a whole bunch of philosophers readily admit, as we’ll see below) is that by dealing with literature, we somehow change the way we think about the world and perceive it. This kind of cognitive gain is not propositional.

Literature offers us the raw material out of which we can build new ways of understanding our world, either by making us question our values and concepts or by teaching us to apply these concepts in new circumstances we encounter in real life. What indirect humanism insists on is that literature influences our cognitive, imaginative and emotional economy in a way that makes us approach world differently, with enriched concepts. How exactly that works can be explained via four claims that indirect humanism advances:

- i) Literary works can invite modes of reflection, simulation, and imagination that can in turn lead us to a better understanding of our world
- ii) Literature can illustrate possibilities and offer possible ways for organizing and conceiving experience
- iii) Literature offers conceptions, stances and perspectives which we can, by using our reflective and imaginative capacities, transform into a tool for appreciating reality
- iv) Literature can suggest ways of ‘reading’ the world, presenting us with new possibilities of wordly understanding and involvement



One common aspect of i) to iv) is that these cognitive benefits cannot be reduced to propositional knowledge. This is the reason why many philosophers object to attributing cognitive value to literature: things that we can derive from literary work and that can be specified in a propositional form are few and are either dubious or trivial or have no evidential support (this line of arguing against cognitive value of literature will be further developed in the next chapters), therefore we cannot successfully attribute cognitive value to literature. However, the intuition still remains that there is more to literature than what can be specified in propositional terms. Many cognitivists claim that whatever can be specified in propositional terms is of less value than this non-propositional knowledge we can get; in fact, the power of cognitive dimension of literature lies precisely in this<sup>18</sup>. Here is how Frank B. Farrell describes the cognitive benefits of literature:

First, literature at its best should be seen as providing complex experiences that transform the cognitive apparatus of the reader so as to adapt it for an increased sensitivity to specific features of the world. (...) Literature does not so much present us with asserted truths as make us better at tracking the truth relevant features of the world (Farrell 2007, pp. 246-7).

Another reason for valuing this kind of impact that literature has, which Gibson readily acknowledges, is the fact that

real life rarely presents moral (or social, psychological, and so on) circumstance with the power and exactness of detail we find in works of literary fiction, and so novels offer us an opportunity to explore what life never quite gives us – or not, at any rate, as risk-free as literature does (...) In short, though speaking about fictions, literature can play an important role in prodding us to examine questions of vital worldly interest, and the indirect humanist is surely right to insist on this. Literary works do not need to answer these questions if we are to find a way to connect them with life; they do not even need to raise the questions themselves. It is enough that they give us an occasion for this sort of exploration, a ground upon which to carry it out (Gibson 2007, pp. 21-2)<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Philosophers who argue for such a view include Elgin 2007, Farrell 2007, Gaut 2007, Kitcher 2007, 2013, Nussbaum 1990, Poggi 2007

<sup>19</sup> Similar arguments about why in some cases we might profit more from literature than 'real world situations' are also provided by Gaut and Dilman. Here is Dilman: "We often miss in real life what literature and other arts reveal, clarify or make us feel the impact of more vividly. We may do so for various reasons: sometimes because familiarity breeds contempt, sometimes because we take it in through abstract categories or second-hand phrases, or because we otherwise tame it in our apprehension so that our response to it remains muted or second-hand or thoughtless. We may, furthermore, be afraid to take it in its full reality and find it less threatening to contemplate from the safe distance of a work of fiction. Sometimes it may have a greater living reality in the sensibility of the writer and he may be able to lend us his sensibility through the artifice of his work – in the ways he selects and arranges things in his presentation of them, sets them in context, highlights their background, and uses various other devices that are available to him as an artist and writer" (Dilman 1995, p. 265). In discussing the ways we

Gibson devotes a lot of his book to refuting the value of the claims put forward by indirect humanism. But we must be careful here. What Gibson sees as problematic in (and what gives ground for rejecting) indirect humanism is not that it offers a wrong account of how literature influences us cognitively. In fact, Gibson says, “few would deny that this act of imaginative and reflective involvement provides us with new ways of appreciating reality” (Gibson 2007, p. 22). But the problem is that indirect humanism cannot explain humanistic value of literature. In a way, once we engage in the processes indirect humanism sees literature as inspiring, we turn toward the real world and thereby we lose the literary work. That directness of the connection between literary work and our world is lost and our world is no longer contained within a work. This is too big a price for humanist to pay; he cannot save the world at the expense of a work, and there is no way to accommodate the former within the later. So if we are to save the literary value and distinctness of literary works (and the special insight they give us into reality) we have to give up indirect humanism.

Another problem is that indirect humanism focuses too much on the reader and on his overall cognitive economy and too little on the literary works. Here is Gibson again;

One finds much ink spilt in recent aesthetics on how works of literature might help improve our faculty of imagination, develop our cognitive skills, discover what we would think, feel, or value if in another’s shoes, become more sympathetic and adept moral reasoners, and so on. These are genuine cognitive achievements, and literature can certainly help us in our pursuit of them. But claims of this sort tend to say too much about readers and too little about literary works. Since literary works are, for obvious reasons, rarely *about* imagination, cognitive skills, or emotions of their readers, to gesture towards these things in an attempt to defend humanism is to gesture towards very much the wrong thing” (Gibson 2007, pp. 23-4).

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learn from art, Gaut also emphasizes the differences between real world situations and situations presented in an artwork. One of the main differences is the fact that the position of a viewer is always different in respect to artwork and this makes it easier for him to cognitively engage with what is presented. For example, a viewer is not asked to react in any way towards the literary presentation of moral dilemma, which makes it easier for him to evaluate the situation and take into consideration all of its complexities and nuances. Another advantage of the literary presentation is that viewer is given more details and explanations (particularly in the case of omniscient narratives or first person perspective) regarding characters’ emotions, worries, motives etc. In real lives we are rarely, if ever, provided with so much material. This is also seen in the fact that in literature, unlike in real life, we can go back and re-read it, take time to consider or think through a problem before we make a decision or take a stand regarding the matter. The fact that more information are given and that situations are described in more details and more vividly than we might get in the real world situations helps readers grasp the problem in a more elaborated way (see Gaut 2007, ch.8).

So, what Gibson wants is to account for cognitive value of literature by grounding it into humanist intuition about direct link between literature and reality. In order to avoid sceptical challenges, most important of which is ‘the loss of literary at the expense of wordly’, Gibson is willing to let go all the cognitive achievements that can be traced back to literature, achievements summoned under the notion of indirect humanism.

This idea is not new to us. We have seen at the beginning with Lamarque and Olsen and their no-truth theory that one reason why truth (along with other cognitive benefits such as those summoned under i) - iv) of indirect humanism) shouldn’t matter for literary/artistic/aesthetic evaluation and appreciation is precisely because if we focus on the truth, we lose the literary. The claims put forward by Gibson on the one hand and Lamarque and Olsen on the other are not identical (Gibson argues in favour of joined thesis (epistemological and aesthetic) of literary cognitivism, Lamarque and Olsen do not see epistemological thesis worthy of discussion within literary aesthetic and completely reject that it has anything to do with artistic/aesthetic value of a work<sup>20</sup>), but both parties want to preserve the idea that aesthetic/literary value of a work cannot be explained in terms of indirect humanism. Throughout their various writings, joined and separated, Lamarque and Olsen advance a claim that comes close to rejecting direct humanism as well (or, if not rejecting it, showing that, for various reasons), this ‘reality’ is not the ‘real world’ reality, but always remains reality—as-described within a novel. We’ll come to that.

Where do I stand in reference to this? Given that my perspective is epistemological, not aesthetic or that of a literary theorist, I am more at ease to accept indirect humanism into my general account of the cognitive value of literature. In fact, it is one of my main claims that epistemological analysis of literary works has to provide a theoretical grounding for the cognitive achievements summoned under indirect humanism. As Gibson himself rightly observes, within literary aesthetics the indirect humanism has a long and influential tradition (even if, as he says, indirect humanism ultimately turns against the very notion it sets out to defend) but as shown, it is easy for the sceptics to refute it. What I hope to show is that the position of indirect humanism can be given an additional force once my epistemological project has been carried out. One dilemma that remains, however, is the problem of aesthetic

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<sup>20</sup> Gaut interprets Lamarque and Olsen’s position as rejection of aesthetic claim, see his 2007, ch. 8.

claim. We saw that Gibson rejects indirect humanism because it cannot be accommodated within aesthetic claim (the loss of the literary) of literary cognitivism, and we saw with Lamarque and Olsen that they reject aesthetic claim because they don't see epistemic claim to be of any relevance to literary /aesthetic appreciation of literary works. What is an epistemologist to say to this?

First of all, I am very sympathetic toward the conjunction of both, epistemological and aesthetic thesis of literary cognitivism. I think that cognitive dimension is important for the literary value and that cognitive dimension explains why we value some works better than others. But showing that makes us 'lose the epistemic' in favour of aesthetic, and that is what I will try to avoid here. Second reason for not wanting to tie too closely aesthetic and cognitive value is the fact that insisting on such a link can make it hard to account for cognitive value of some fictional novels, genres and styles of writing<sup>21</sup> which are certainly not literary artworks. My epistemic analysis will, unlike most of those conducted by aestheticians, recognize the fact that (or, to put it differently, try to show that) even fictional (as opposed to literary) novels can be cognitively valuable. Once we give up the need to prove aesthetic thesis we are more relaxed to explore cognitive values of literary fiction.

Before I turn toward this epistemological analysis, there are two things I have to do. First, we need a theory on 'where' within a literary work to search for cognitive values. Second, we need to see how these cognitive values are accommodated within various accounts of literary cognitivism. But before that, one more clarification is in order regarding the proper aim of the analysis conducted here.

### **2.3. Literature, truth and knowledge**

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge and knowledge (of p) presupposes that p is true (according to the traditional, tripartite definition of knowledge) and that S has justification for accepting p as true. According to this, it would seem that epistemological analysis of literature will be concerned with what we can learn from literature in the sense of what we can come to know, which is for the most part what I have been concerned with so far. However, given that

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<sup>21</sup> This is so particularly if we accept claims by Young 2001 and Dilman 1995 according to which art cannot be divorced from cognitive dimension.

knowledge is intimately connected with truth, it would also follow that epistemological analysis of literature will also reveal what is true. That however is not necessarily so. Let us look at this in more details.

*(i) literature and truth*

There are two senses in which we can speak of literature and truth. One sense has to do with the question of what is true in a given literary work. For example, it is true that Sherlock Holmes is a detective who plays violin and lives in the 22 Baker Street, London. But that is not true in the real world. So in this first sense, we can ask about truth internal to the novel, that is, truth within the fiction. The truth of whether or not Othello killed Desdemona depends only on what Shakespeare wrote and it is the work itself that determines it. The murder of Desdemona is made true by the literary work which embodies this fact.

In the second sense, we are concerned with the truth proper, truth about the real world, as it might be revealed through fiction. The fact that Jim was a runaway slave is made true by Mark Twain's novel, but it is also a real world fact that there were people like Jim. Slavery was not made true by Twain's novels but by political, juridical and social institutions in the American south.

The process of reading and interpreting a literary work necessarily involves contemplation about truth in both of these senses. Many things are not openly stated in the work, yet readers assume they are so and so. Shakespeare doesn't have to tell us that Romeo will, due to his anatomy and the way human body functions, die, if the knife goes through his heart. In many cases, interpretation of a literary work has to do with figuring out and filling in precisely those things we are not explicitly given (for example, whether the relation between two main characters in Lawrence's *Women in love*, Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich, has homosexual aspects). It is impossible for an author to state all the propositions which are true in his work<sup>22</sup>. However, not all of these truths will matter for the truth proper, that is, for that which we can take out of the novel and see as revelatory of the real world. Whether Rupert Birkin

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<sup>22</sup> This problem of fictional truth is one of the most pressing concerns in literary aesthetics. One of the first to discuss it was David Lewis, whose analysis still inspires heated debates over these matters (see Walton 1990, Byrne 1993, Lamarque and Olsen 1994, Livingstone 2005, Swirski 2010 for insightful overviews of the problem. Peter Lamarque criticises such an extensive research into this question carried out by logicians, given that it directs our attention away from literary values of a work (see his 1996, ch.4).

had a mould on his back is of no concern for the cognitive potentialities of literature, but the way Lawrence explores the relationship –sexual and emotional between two people, whether of the same sex or not – might contribute substantially to how reader himself thinks of this and comes to understand it.

Only to some extent and in some cases will these two senses of truth coincide. It is true in the fictional world of Mark Twain that black people were slaves, and it is true in the real world that black people were slaves. It is true in the fictional world of *Crime and Punishment* that Raskolnikov's relation to his mother made him develop the sense of guilt and passivity which had significant influence on what he did, in the way that is explained by Freud's theory of the way human psychology works<sup>23</sup>. It is true in the fictional world of Stanislaw Lem's *The Futurological Congress* that people can change bodies and bodily features as they wish, but that is not true in the real world. The question that needs to be considered is how is a reader to know what is true in the fictional world, beyond things he is explicitly told. Though this is not my concern here, attempts to answer it reveal something that is of importance for the cognitivism I'm defending here, namely the implicit assumption that fictional and real world are alike. Namely, the reason readers are able to make sense of what they read and to supplement the content they are not explicitly given is the fact that fictional world and real world resemble one another. This is the idea behind the so called principle of verisimilitude. According to Lamarque and Olsen, "fictional states of affairs (objects, event, personages) can be assumed to be like ordinary states of affairs (objects, events, personages) failing indications to the contrary" (Lamarque and Olsen, 1994, p. 95). If this is so, then, literary cognitivist claim, we can learn about the real world. Showing how can that be will be one of the aims here<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Ilham Dilman offered particularly powerful analysis of Dostoyevsky in these terms, see his 1968, 1984.

<sup>24</sup> The principle of verisimilitude is important for the discussion of literary truth, truth per se, interpretation and appreciation of literary works, but unfortunately I can only touch upon it briefly, more elaborated discussion will be postponed till chapter 6 where I will explore in what way departure from this principle might influence the cognitive dimension of works. Stein Haugom Olsen offers somehow different interpretation of the principle of verisimilitude: "However, naturalness and verisimilitude need not be measured against reality. It can simply be measured against what is natural within the world of the work, and the desirability of verisimilitude can then more easily be seen to be a result of its artistic appropriateness in a special context. What is natural can be what is artistically appropriate and not what is 'true to life'. So verisimilitude can (and should) be explained with reference to its appropriateness in furthering a certain artistic goal..." (Olsen 1978, pp.76-7). By defining

For my purpose here, the truth in the first sense (truth internal to the world), that is, the question of what is true in a fiction, is important only to the extent that it can point toward genre conventions. As I will show later, knowledge of the genre helps readers determine how to approach a given work, what aspects of it can be taken to refer to the real world, and this is important for the final cognitive gain. If, for example, a person in a novel does not die or is not even seriously injured if pierced through heart with a knife, the reader can conclude that different physical laws are presupposed, which means that the novel in question is a science fiction novel, not realist. He is not, however, entitled to conclude that some people don't die, or cannot die, if they suffer a lethal wound. That would be an example of false belief formed on the basis of reading. Nothing in cognitivist's account I'm defending doesn't exclude such a possibility. But note that many other sources can generate false belief (false testimony) or that in many other cases cognizer can simply get things wrong (due to his bad skills with calculation). Unfortunately, we are nowhere safe from the possibility of getting things wrong.

One might also wonder what kind of truth is literature said to reveal, that is, should a literary cognitivist provide some kind of account of Lamarque's notion of the truth proper, perhaps in terms of epistemologically shaped theories of truth (such as truth-as-correspondence, truth-as-coherence etc). This is however not a project literary cognitivists are endorsing. Some have tried to come up with a *sui generis* truth, specific to literature<sup>25</sup>. More often however, when speaking about literary works revealing truth, literary cognitivists have in mind the truth about how our world is and how it functions, without any concomitant epistemological or ontological commitments.

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verisimilitude in this way, Olsen wants to diminish the ability of works to tell us something about our world. However, even if verisimilitude is defined as artistic goal, and internal to the fictional world, rather than as interpretative principle that connects the two, it is hard to ignore the fact that we recognize real world in the fictional worlds generated by authors.

<sup>25</sup> Because of this problem, some philosophers who wanted to defend the link between literature and truth invoke the notion of *sui generis* kind of truth that literature is capable of delivering. One of the most famous of such accounts is the one advocated for by Iris Murdoch, who explains this kind of truth as 'clarity of vision'. For a detailed account of the *sui generis* literary truth, see Lamarque 2009, Lamarque 2010. I will not discuss this idea here, given that literary cognitivism I am advocating here doesn't rely on the notion of *sui generis* truth.

*(ii) truth and knowledge*

Knowledge has traditionally been defined as justified true belief. Given that it is highly questionable what kind of justification can be provided for the ‘literary truths’, anti cognitivists such as Stolnitz have always insisted on the inevitable doom of literary cognitivism. But things do not have to be so gloomy. As we will see later, there are ways in which we can acquire justification for literary truths. But on the other hand, as contemporary epistemology teaches us, there are cognitive achievements which are not necessarily dependent on the truth. One such achievement is understanding, and we already saw to what extent literature contributes to understanding.

*(iii) literature and knowledge*

The question not raised so far is what kind of knowledge literary cognitivist has in mind. One question here is to what extent the knowledge we gain from literature can satisfy the conditions of truth and justification – this is one of the most pressing issues. On the other hand, the question can also be raised regarding the kind of knowledge literature presents to us. We’ll see later that J. Stolnitz claimed that the whole literary cognitivists project is futile, given that we cannot provide any sensible theory of literary (or artistic) knowledge. Should we then conclude that there’s no such a thing as literary knowledge, or should we conclude that literature presents all sorts of knowledge?

Another way to ask for the kind of knowledge that literature presents is to point to the difference between *knowledge that* (traditionally conceived of as propositional knowledge and the kind of knowledge that is most often the target of scepticism), *knowledge how* (conceived as knowledge of practical skills and procedures) and *knowledge of what or how it feels like* (some authors refer to this one as affective knowledge). Catherine Wilson and Dorothy Walsh used this distinction to account for the distinctive kind of literary knowledge (more on which below).

A lot of what has been said so far sketches the ways in which I think literature and knowledge are connected. The most radical literary cognitivists are willing to claim that literature is an instrument of knowledge and inquiry (Swirski 2007), and many others (Dilman, Young, Goodman) claim that a true artwork (including literary artwork) cannot but be cognitively valuable in the sense that readers can learn things from engaging with it. I accept these claims, but with the restrictions I’ve already indicated: my research here is epistemological, and as



such, it only aims to unravel cognitive potentialities of literature and provide them an epistemic grounding. For the form of literary cognitivism I'm embracing, knowledge is not the only cognitive benefit available in literature. Gibson's distinction between direct and indirect humanism portrays the cognitive benefits which – I want to show here – literature has to offer and these benefits are considered as epistemologically legitimate cognitive achievements. I also don't accept the claim that the knowledge we get from literature has to be either propositional or procedural or knowledge of what is like. These three kinds of knowledge intersect and all of them can be independently obtained from literature, as we'll see below.

## 2.4. Cognitive potentialities of literature

At this point, we have to ask just what it is in the literary work that carries this cognitive dimension. At the most general level, the problem is the following: given that a literary work is composed of sentences that are for the most part fictional, where exactly does cognitive value come from? The usual answer to this is to invoke two levels of a literary work: subject level and thematic level<sup>26</sup>. The idea is that on a subject level (or literal level or the level of reports<sup>27</sup>) we follow the story in terms of what happens, when and where; who are the characters and what do they do. Here's an example from Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*:

When Caroline Meeber boarded the afternoon train for Chicago, her total outfit consisted of a small trunk, a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel, a small lunch in a paper box, and a yellow leather snap purse, containing her ticket, a scrap of paper with her sister's address in Van Buren Street, and four dollars in money. It was in August, 1889. She was eighteen years of age, bright, timid, and full of the illusions of ignorance and youth. Whatever touch of regret at parting characterised her thoughts, it was certainly not for advantages now being given up. A gush of tears at her mother's farewell kiss, a touch in her throat

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<sup>26</sup> I am following Lamarque and Olsen here, see their 1994, particularly part 3. However, this distinction does not originate with them, but with Beardsley and Weitz (see Lamarque and Olsen 1994, ft 15, p. 282).

<sup>27</sup> Olsen uses the distinction between reports and reflections, see his 1978. Though arguing against cognitive potentialities of thematic level, Gibson characterizes it as “the level at which a literary work shapes and structures our understanding of the features of our world it brings to view. At what we might call the fictional level of interpretation, the level at which we analyse the content of the individual sentences of the literary work, we find only reports on the contours and happenings of a fictional world. But at the thematic level, the level at which the progression of dramatic events forges a distinct conception of (broadly put) life, we find a way of conceiving how a work of literature can actually try to *tell* us something about the nature of our world” (Gibson 2003, p.227).

when the cars clacked by the flour mill where her father worked by the day, a pathetic sigh as the familiar green environs of the village passed in review, and the threads which bound her so lightly to girlhood and home were irretrievably broken. (Dreiser, 1981, p. 3).

At this level, what we get in cognitive terms are facts about the world contained in these descriptions, provided of course the author does not distort them, that is, that they can still reliably tell us something about the world. How much is 'true' (in the truth proper sense of the word) at this level depends on many things: intentions of the author, his decision to include or exclude (auto) biographical elements, his reliance on observation and research, the genre to which the novel belongs to etc. However, the action described at the subject level gives rise to *themes* that the work is concerned with. For example, at one point in the novel, Carrie accepts some money from Drouet. Dreiser describes a conversation between the two (see chapter VI) and the chapter VII opens with the following remarks:

The true meaning of money yet remains to be popularly explained and comprehended. When each individual realises for himself that this thing primarily stands for and should only be accepted as a moral due -- that it should be paid out as honestly stored energy, and not as a usurped privilege -- many of our social, religious, and political troubles will have permanently passed. As for Carrie, her understanding of the moral significance of money was the popular understanding, nothing more. The old definition: "Money: something everybody else has and I must get," would have expressed her understanding of it thoroughly. Some of it she now held in her hand -- two soft, green ten-dollar bills -- and she felt that she was immensely better off for the having of them. It was something that was power in itself. One of her order of mind would have been content to be cast away upon a desert island with a bundle of money, and only the long strain of starvation would have taught her that in some cases it could have no value. Even then she would have had no conception of the relative value of the thing; her one thought would, undoubtedly, have concerned the pity of having so much power and the inability to use it.

The poor girl thrilled as she walked away from Drouet. She felt ashamed in part because she had been weak enough to take it, but her need was so dire, she was still glad. Now she would have a nice new jacket! Now she would buy a nice pair of pretty button shoes. She would get stockings, too, and a skirt, and, and -- until already, as in the matter of her prospective salary, she had got beyond, in her desires, twice the purchasing power of her bills.

What this short paragraph tells us is that one of the themes Dreiser explores in the novel is the concept of money, its moral significance, the way it influences people's lives and relations they enter. In discussing Dreiser's work and the themes he explores, critic Clare Virginia Eby stated: "He is among the most prominent chroniclers of wealth and poverty in the United States, especially as financial position became newly visible in the booming urban centers" (Eby 2005, p.573). So the idea here is that literary works, through development of their subject matter, present to the readers not only anecdotes of the characters, but (more importantly) various themes which, as we will see, matter greatly to people.

Compare the opening paragraph from Dreiser with the following paragraph from Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*:

People took such awful chances with chemicals and their bodies because they wanted the quality of their lives to improve. They lived in ugly places where there were only ugly things to do. They didn't own doodleysquat, so they couldn't improve their surroundings. So they did their best to make their insides beautiful instead.

The results had been catastrophic so far – suicide, theft, murder, and insanity and so on. But new chemicals were coming onto the market all the time (p. 71).

Despite the distortions of description, and the fact that unlike Dreiser, Vonnegut does not refer to any particular city or group of inhabitants, readers can still follow the story, understand what happens, who are the characters and what do they do. They understand that the story that Vonnegut is telling is not a story of a specific city, yet are able to recognize that everything in the story can be traced back to the real world. At least part of the reason of how that is possible is the fact that literary work should be analysed not only in terms of the story it offers at the subject level, but also in terms of the themes it deals with, themes which spring from the subject level. Here are Lamarque and Olsen:

We have argued that it is a defining convention of literary practice that the author should produce and the reader search for a humanly interesting content. It is arguable that this content can be formulated in a series of 'reflections' or 'thematic statements', generalizations over the characters, situations, events, actions, plots, etc, which are represented at the literal level of the work. These reflections state the theme of a work (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 285).

We have already seen this idea of humanly interesting content in the account of literary humanism, now we are interested to see how it is realized within a literary work. Subject and theme overlap, "since once one starts talking about the subject of a work at a certain level of generality, thematic concepts have to be employed" (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 286). What I want to show here is that, roughly speaking, we can claim that cognitive benefits associated with direct humanism can be searched for at the subject level (this will be my topic in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter), and those cognitive benefits associated with indirect humanism can be traced to thematic level<sup>28</sup>. This is of course only a coarse distinction (just like subject and

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<sup>28</sup> This division fits nicely with the characterization provided by Lamarque and Olsen: „However, the distinction between subject and theme can naturally be constructed as a distinction between the facts, experiences, etc. described in a work and the interpretation of these phenomena through abstraction and generalization“ (1994, p.286). Luca Poggi advocates a similar claim: “The central argument here is that thematic, as the extensional semantics of literature, operates on two distinct but strictly related levels: on a ‘representational’ level and on an ‘interpretational’ level. At the representational level, the goal of the analysis is the identification of motifs,

theme overlap, so too do the cognitive benefits of indirect and direct humanism) but it will serve as a reference point and will provide us with the frame of research.

#### **2.4.1. Thematic level**

Given the importance of the thematic level for literary cognitivism, let us analyse it more carefully. First we need an account of a theme and thematic concepts. We have already seen an example taken from Eby's analysis of Dreiser's novels. Eby's concerns are what she identifies as three most powerful forces at play in Dreiser's novels: social class, consumer society and sexuality. Here are some of her claims.

In reference to *An American Tragedy* and the way the American dream is portrayed in it, she writes: "Clyde so successfully embodies the contradictions of the American class system that he goes from the society pages to death row, making readers wonder if it might not be the class structure that is criminal" (Eby 2005, p. 576)

In reference to the problem of consumer society: "The marketability of select identities in a consumer society is another of Dreiser's most salient themes, and his novels sensitively register how notions of identity change along with the development of mass markets. (...) Dreiser captures with astounding insight how institutions of mass production and distribution such as department store instill desire by establishing a faux-personal relationship with the unsuspecting consumer" (Eby 2005, pp.576-7)

In reference to the technical innovations: "His concern, again, is with the human consequences – the most intimate effects, those impressed on the individual consciousness – of technology" (Eby 2005, p.578).

What Eby's analysis reveals is how what goes on at the subject level creates and contributes to the themes that Dreiser is concerned with: moral significance of money, social status, consumerism, technological innovations, sexual urge and sexuality, all of these in respect to individual and his character, identity, personhood and agency. In order to properly grasp the story, readers should recognize these thematic concepts and how they contribute to the themes

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namely the minimal and basic units of thematic material whose relevance can be expressed, in fact paraphrased, in propositional form. Once a 'cluster of recurring motifs' has been brought into view, we have given a theme to a text..." (Pocci, 2007, p. 95)

Dreiser is concerned with. Sarah Way Sherman also emphasises the relation between consumerism and identity as depicted by various authors in 19th American literature. In reference to Dreiser, she says:

By the turn of the century realist writers like Wharton and Theodore Dreiser had also begun to explore materialism as a socially ubiquitous, if morally disavowed, practice. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), for example, reveals a radically new approach to the relationship of materialism and identity (...) In his epic novel, materialism represents the magical promise of consumer goods to confer happiness and power; the faith of a new consumer culture. (Sherman 2005, p. 332)

In his analysis of *Sister Carrie*, Gregg Crane emphasises the problem of free will and agency, as well as how the two relate to moral responsibility. Given how forcefully Carrie is attracted to money, clothes and all the commodities money can buy, and given her inability to resist these allure as well as her belief that these commodities will make her not only happy but also better, Crane sees Carrie as a character that seems to “contradict the very notion of independent agency” (Crane 2007, p.189). Like Eby, Crane also sees the fundamental issues that Dreiser is exploring as having to do with ‘forces’ – in this case money, power, sexuality – that shape one's identity, agency, character and determine one's desires. The real question that Dreiser (like most of the authors of the realist/naturalist literature) explores is how does one go by in life and negotiate between those actions that stem from his own judgement, morality and motives (like Huck Finn's decision to help Jim) and those actions which result from such blind forces and impulses. Here is how Crane sees not only Carrie but all the characters in the novel:

Dreiser's characters in *Sister Carrie* are caught in a kind of fruitless oscillation between impulses and fears. Juxtaposition of the things one has and those one doesn't spontaneously arise, creating desire. In turn, desire propels the back-and-forth movement between longing and anxiety (...) Dreiser's characters live by habit until their routine is unsettled by some contrast between what they have and don't have into a new pattern of desire and pursuit (Crane 2007, p.199)

To go back to the subject/theme distinction, the idea here is that themes that authors work with are of importance for us as human beings, they matter because these are the questions that readers themselves worry about and try to figure out. The question of whether money can buy happiness is not a question that only Dreiser was worried about. One can trace the problem of consumerism as it is developed through various literary works such as Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*, through Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*, through some contemporary treatments of this theme by authors such as Michel Houellebecq and Kurt Vonnegut. We also should not conclude that whatever answer or view that these authors give us is the definitive answer to this issue. Consumerism is in Dreiser represented as an

impersonal force which is imposed upon individual with such a strength that one can't fight it back (think of the scene in which Carrie, looking at a beautiful clothes, feels that the clothes is speaking to her and invites her to purchase it, or the way that desire to possess better and nicer things ultimately leads Clyde to murdering Roberta). Dreiser also shows to what extent consumerism shapes interpersonal relations, particularly the way that it replaces genuine emotions of love and care (think of Clyde, who kills Roberta once the prospects of marrying a rich girl are presented to him)<sup>29</sup>. In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert uses consumerism as a possible means to escape from unhappiness and dullness. In Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* the idea that money can buy happiness is ridiculed to the point of absurdity<sup>30</sup> and in Houellebecq it is straightforwardly rejected as illusory and false.

Literary cognitivist's claim is that readers can profit cognitively from engaging with the way literary works develop their themes. In that sense, thematic level can best be seen as contributing to those achievements that indirect humanism advances. This 'cognitive' potentiality of theme was recognized, but rejected, by Lamarque and Olsen:

It permits the theorist to account for the cognitive status and value of literature without invoking the notions of truth and reference which are so problematic in connection with literary works. A theme is not the kind of entity that can be true or false. Rather it is interesting or uninteresting and thus fits with the intuition of an 'interesting content'. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p.437).

One important thing to point out is that themes that can be explored and analysed in literary works are in no way exclusive to literature but pertain to a wide range of other disciplines, practices and even to general concerns people have in virtue of being cognitive, reflective and aware human beings that seek to connect with others and find some sense and value in their

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<sup>29</sup> For a particularly interesting analysis of how literature explored and analysed the theme of consumerism, growing wealth and accumulation of capital and goods, see Lamb and Thompson eds. (2005), particularly contributions by Way Sherman and Wilson.

<sup>30</sup> Here's Vonnegut: "The driver was thinking seriously of buying aluminium siding for his home in Little Rock, and he begged Trout to give him an honest answer to this question: "From what you've seen and heard – the people who get aluminium siding, are they *happy* with what they get?" "Around Cohoes," said Trout. "I think those were about the only really happy people I ever saw." "I know what you mean, said the driver. "One time I saw a whole family standing outside their house. They couldn't believe how nice their house looked after the aluminium siding went on. My question to you, and you can give me an honest answer, on account of we'll never have to do business, you and me: Kilgore, how long will that happiness last?" "About fifteen years" said trout. "Our salesman say you can easily afford to have the job redone with all the money you've saved on paint and heat." (pp.107-8).

lives. Philosophy, anthropology, religion, medicine, cultural studies, anthropology, biology, economy and various other humanistic and natural sciences can explore and analyse the same themes and the same thematic concepts. So literature is not exclusive in the sense that it deals with some themes and thematic concepts which are only found in literature, but not in other disciplines; there are no themes specific to literature, and consequently, if literature can also give us some knowledge about these themes, there's no knowledge specific to literature. abdm if there is something cognitively valuable that literature tells us about these, then it matters from epistemic point of view for the same reasons these other disciplines do.

Finally, how is a development of a theme – through reflections and generalizations – carried out? Again, general distinction is between those which are explicit and those which are implicit. We already saw with Dreiser the explicit ones: either the narrator (which is in some cases identical with the author<sup>31</sup>) tells it immediately to the reader, or one or more characters express their point of view.

On the other hand, reflections can also be implicit. In this case, neither the author nor the characters deliver them in the novel, but the reader can still pick them out. This happens in the process of interpreting a work: in order to make sense of the work, reader has to apply various thematic concepts to the work and even figure out the explicit generalizations that the work offers. Most often, these kinds of statements are found in the works of literary criticism and not necessarily in the literary works themselves. To give one example, let us see the reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's story *The Minister's Black Veil*. The story is rather simple, in terms of its subject: one day, Reverend Mr. Hooper covers his face with a black veil and refuses to take it off, even when his fiancée breaks off the engagements and his clergy starts to fear him. After many years of service, never taking the veil off, the Reverend dies, never revealing the motives for covering his face. At the end of the story, a reader is left just as puzzled as his clergy as to why the Reverend acted in the way he did. Hawthorne himself never explains the meaning of the veil (in the sense, for example, that Dreiser explains the meaning of the money and money exchange for Carrie). However, literary critics offer various explanations. Most interpreters of the story emphasize the themes of guilt, sin and repentance, though Hawthorne

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<sup>31</sup> In the contemporary aesthetics, philosophers dedicate a lot of attention to a distinction between narrator and the author, but this problem will not be pursued here.

himself doesn't offer reflections on these notions. The motif of can be seen to have a deeper meaning, once the following interpretation is offered:

Like Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis", "The Minister's Black Veil" explores the idea of what happens when a man drastically changes his appearance. Does he become someone else, or does some fundamental core of identity remain, transcending changes in outward appearance and personal circumstance? Hawthorne does a brilliant job of examining the range of public responses to this extraordinary action, as well as their effect on the minister. (...) What happens to our relationship with others – to the identity we have for others and even for ourselves – when we make such a drastic, even if superficial, change in ourselves? (Person, 2007, pp. 47-8).

So unlike with Dreiser, who extensively offers reflections on various aspects he writes about, Hawthorne offers them only implicitly. In both cases however, a reader is invited to reflect on the issues. He can come think about identity in a different way, taking into considerations more aspects that contribute to its development and wider forces that shape it, than he originally might have thought.

The claim that literary works offer implicit theses (or even implicit truths) which are a true cognitive gain for the readers thrives in the hands of literary cognitivists, mostly because it helps them avoid one of the most pressing difficulty for cognitivism, namely the fact that literary works are fictional and therefore cannot reveal anything about real world. But these implicit theses are supposed to transcend the fictionality in that they are not bound to fictional descriptions. Given that they arise at the thematic level, and thematic level is about humanly important issues, obviously we can learn something if we focus on what is explicitly or implicitly offered to us<sup>32</sup>.

Unfortunately though, anti-cognitivists have also come up with convincing arguments that show that cognitive value of literature cannot be grounded in explicit theses. At most, what they can do is invite further reflection on the matter. In the hands of anti-cognitivists, implicit theses will become hypotheses that a work offers which cannot be seen as having cognitive value without being further tested in some sense. The problem then is, this further testing is not part of literary practice, so even if hypotheses are in fact correct, they are not derived from the work. At a more general level, the problem is this: even if there are some cognitive

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<sup>32</sup> This idea is the backbone of the so called Propositional Truth of Literary Value. According to the proponents of this theory, cognitive value of literature is to be found at the implicit or explicit thematic statements which capture truths about the world, human nature etc. This is supposed to evade the problem that at the subject level, all the characters and episodes are imagines and fictional.



benefits to eventually be gained from implicit and explicit theses, it is hard to see how that final gain can be attributed to literary work.

Perhaps a crucial problem for grounding the cognitive value(s) of a work in this way (and on thematic level generally) is the point that an additional step is needed to show that thematic statements (as well as implicit and explicit ones) indeed refer to the real world (i.e. that they can be the source of knowledge about the external world or invite reflection about it), and not to the world of the work. Peter Lamarque pressed this the furthest<sup>33</sup> and insisted that literary cognitivists can't claim that implicit thematic statements refer to the real world, only to the fictional world. The point of the argument is, these statements only reveal truth about the work and can ultimately be supported only by the textual evidence (the work itself), not by any kind of evidence from the real world.

Plausible as this claim might be, a care must be taken not to read too much into it. First of all, to go back to direct humanism, we established the link between reality and literary work. So if a literary work is about reality, then certainly at least some of the claims about the work are also about the reality. But literary cognitivists, particularly of indirect kind, want to push this even further. Indirect humanists want to claim that the role of thematic statements of this kind (and interpretation of the story itself, the process of which includes such statements) can invite modes of reflections about particular thematic concepts and thus deepen one's understanding of it. In that sense, certainly there is more to Person's claim that "In this tale and in others Hawthorne tests the proposition that human identity is contingent and circumstantial, rather than an inherent essence – that is, not identity at all" (p.49) than to see it as a statement about literary work. The problem of identity is not confined to this literary work but is of much wider concern. In that sense, no matter what conclusions one reaches regarding it in the process of interpreting a work, they will not be limited to conclusion about fictional world.

Finally, it is wrong to claim that literary works offer these statements as true statements about the world. As literary critics often emphasize (in reference to all literary genres, periods and school of writing), very often authors were not in the business of stating or claiming

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<sup>33</sup> See his 2009 and 2010.

something, rather, through their writings they were exploring, scrutinizing, negotiating etc, and in that sense, literary works can better be seen as conducting an inquiry of certain phenomena and not as making statements about it that are to be interpreted as true or false.

## **2.5. Varieties of cognitivism in the cognitive value of art**

Gibson's division between direct and indirect humanism can serve a more general function of providing us with a wider framework of cognitive values attributed to literature. Indeed, as shown, the rather plausible intuition that literature is cognitively valuable gets to be explained in different ways; that is, the initial formulation of literary cognitivism that puts most emphasis on literature as the source of knowledge/understanding gives way to various other functions that literature can fulfil, all of which can result in some kind of a cognitive gain on the part of the reader. Gibson's reasons for rejecting indirect humanism lie mostly in his desire to concentrate on a literary work, thus respecting a textual constraint and avoiding the so called problem of fictional language, philistinism and instrumentalism (the view according to which literature can and should be exploited not for aesthetic reasons such as pleasure but as educational tool). That move is justified from the point of view of aestheticians; in fact, many of those who defend literary cognitivism want to respect the textual constraint. Given that our perspective here is epistemological, in what follows I will take into consideration both horns of humanism and present various accounts put forward that aim to justify and explain this rather intuitive claim that literature is cognitively valuable. One problem however with this bold endeavour is the terminological mess found in writings on literary cognitivism. Namely, there are various ways that cognitive benefits of literature are spelled out. General idea was already present in Lamarque and Olsen's quotation from the beginning, where it was claimed that literature offers its readers possibilities to pick up information about people, places, events; learn practical skills, gain various sorts of insights, think about generalizations about human nature and the way world works etc. Let us see how various literary cognitivists account for these varieties of cognitive values, not to reiterate one and the same idea over and over again, but to give us a theoretical framework for further enquiry. Throughout my thesis, I will mostly use the terminology of direct and indirect humanism.

### *Berys Gaut*

Berys Gaut (2005) summarized cognitive benefits of literature in the following way:

i. literature can give us a kind of philosophical knowledge, knowledge of the nature of concepts, particularly those that have to do with morality. This view is most passionately

advocated for by Martha Nussbaum (1990), and more recently by Philip Kitcher (2013). Some philosophers, as we'll see, claim that literature is even better than philosophy at transmitting moral knowledge.

ii. literature can give us knowledge of possibilities, in that it presents various possible experiences readers themselves might not have had. Gaut attributes this stand to Hilary Putnam<sup>34</sup>, though Putnam is not the only philosopher who advocates this. Tzachi Zamir (2006) has developed his account of the cognitive value of literature on the premise that “the work of literature is a *suggestion*. It sets itself as a formulation that *proposes* to make sense out of a domain of life (p. 34).

iii. literature can give us knowledge of the actual. This idea was already expressed by Gibson. In reading literary works, we get to learn about our actual world.

iv. literature can give us practical knowledge, knowledge of how to do certain things, it can improve our practical skills and enhance our imaginative capacities. We'll see below how these are further developed.

v. literature can teach us the significance of events. We have seen this idea developed by Dilman. In the seventh chapter, we will go back to this idea and explore the sense in which literature is said to be revelatory of the world.

vi. literature can give us experiential (phenomenal) knowledge, that is, show us what is like to be in a certain situation. Given that individual reader can never undergo all the experience that literature presents, he can enrich his knowledge about different experiences through literature. We will develop this further in the next chapter.

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<sup>34</sup> See Putnam (1976), who objects to the claim that the kind of knowledge literature gives us is empirical knowledge. Yet, there is something we learn, and that is knowledge of possibilities. He calls this conceptual knowledge: “if I read Celine’s *Journey to the End of the Night*, I do not *learn* that love does not exist, that all human beings are hateful and hating (even if – and I am sure this is not the case – those propositions should be true). What I learn is to see the world as it looks to someone who is sure that hypothesis is correct. I see what plausibility that hypothesis has; what it would be like if it *were* true; how someone could possibly think that it *is* true. But all this is still not empirical knowledge. Yet it is not correct to say that it is not knowledge at all; for being aware of a new interpretation of the facts, however repellent, of a construction that can – I now see – be put upon the facts, however perversely – is a kind of knowledge. It is a knowledge of a possibility. It is *conceptual* knowledge (Putnam 1976, p. 488).

Gaut has here summarized most of the claims put forward by various advocates of literary cognitivism. Given the plurality of cognitive payoffs recognized, it's obvious that the debate over the cognitive value of literature is wider than pro-truth vs. no-truth theories introduced at the beginning. The ability of literature to deliver true propositions about the world is but one way in which the cognitive dimension of literature can be cashed out.

### *Gordon Graham*

Gordon Graham's account of literary (and aesthetic) cognitivism was already presented at the beginning of this chapter. Let us now elaborate it a bit further. Graham's main idea is that works of art can illuminate various aspects of human nature and human life, thus contributing to a fuller and better understanding of it. Crucial here is that "works of art can supply the imaginative apprehension of experience in all these [visual, aural, tactile, emotional, mental] respects" (Graham 1997, p. 60) and in this way "art can illuminate experience by making us more sensitively aware of what it contains" (Graham 1997, p. 61). In explaining how art fulfils this cognitive function, Graham employs various metaphors, such as "exploring aspects of experience", "providing visual images", "broadening horizons", "imagining possibilities", "exploring and elaborating human ideals". I think these metaphors fit nicely into cognitivist's framework. As we will repeatedly see in this dissertation, there is an intimate link between art/ literature and experience and literary cognitivists generally agree that literature is particularly powerful in bringing to view those aspects of experience which might go unnoticed. But literature can also provide visual image. For example, through the dialogues, actions and descriptions, *Light in August* provides a visual image of racial ideology<sup>35</sup>. Hawthorne's fictional stories, such as *The Birth Mark* and *Rappaccini's Daughter*, offer a visual image of a male-female sadistic relation, similar to Poe's *Legeia* and *Berenice*.

According to Graham, art/literature can also be in the business of "broadening horizons", "imagining possibilities", "exploring and elaborating human ideals". Notice that these can be seen as the impact that literature can have on the readers; in this sense, we are dealing here with what Gibson identifies as indirect humanism. The emphasis is not so much on what is in the work, but on how the work influences readers' cognitive and emotional economy. The

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<sup>35</sup> See Towner 2008, p. 34.

process of reading can alter the way people approach, interpret and make sense of their reality and experience, as all literary cognitivists recognize and admit. This is particularly so regarding the themes and thematic concepts authors employ in their work. Authors themselves often explore and elaborate these concepts (think of the way Shakespeare treats the problem of trust between marital partners in *Othello*) and a sensitive and contemplative reader can benefit from engaging with such works.

### *David Novitz*

David Novitz's account of the literary cognitivism encompasses direct and indirect humanism. A crucial mechanism that explains how we acquire knowledge from fiction according to Novitz is that of constructing hypotheses (about the real world, human nature, emotions, morality etc.), based on what we read, and applying them to the real world. Those hypotheses that eventually get confirmed by the real world can be accepted into reader's body of knowledge. This applies to all four categories of cognitive benefits Novitz identifies as being available from the literary works<sup>36</sup>:

- i. literature can be a source of the propositional beliefs about the world. In order for the fictional world to be in any way a source of knowledge about the real world, it has to resemble real world in all of its relevant qualities and readers have to recognize that.
- ii. we acquire certain values or attitudes: these relate to the beliefs readers already have and in turn, readers can readjust their system of beliefs. This aspect is particularly important in the moral domain, given that fictional presentation of situation can help readers gain a deeper understanding of the moral complexities. What is important is that authors should not be taken as prescribing a certain stand:

Clearly, then, whatever the values extracted from fiction, it is not as if Tolstoy instructs us in morality or imposes his own moral values on us. Rather, he brings us to reconsider our existing values and attitudes by tempting us to apply these to a complex and very life-like situation which he has sketched in abundant details and with consummate skills. If the reader believes his values adequate to the fictional situation, they will merely have been reinforced by the novel and will remain unaltered. At times, though, one may come to believe, indeed to know, that one's attitudes are unsatisfactory: that they do not do justice to do complexity of the situation. As a result, there is a shift of alteration of values (Novitz, 1984, p. 66).

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<sup>36</sup> See Novitz 1984.

iii. a good deal of what we learn is practical (and not propositional or attitudinal): skills of strategy (which help readers face real world situations) and intellectual strategies which enable readers to think more comprehensively about problems presented in the work. This set of skills can in turn enable readers to approach real world situations differently, taking into consideration aspect and relations they might have been unaware of before<sup>37</sup>.

iv. emphatic beliefs and knowledge can be gained from fiction to the extent that readers get imaginatively involved with the work and contemplates the situations that characters are in:

Clearly, then, if the problems which confront fictional characters are seen to arise in the actual world, any reader who has acquired emphatic beliefs pertinent to such problems, may well be more aware of, and hence more sensitive to, the difficulties involved in solving them. If this turns out to be the case, we are justified in saying that the fiction has imparted emphatic knowledge of the situation, that it has given readers a 'pretty good idea' or enabled them to know something about, what it feels like to be ensnared in such situation (Novitz, 1984, p. 61).

An important aspect in Novitz's theory is his claim that the hypotheses extracted from literary works have to be applied to the real world. Suggestions of this kind are put forward with the aim of finding justification for the claims expressed by literature. Though most often reducing the cognitive value of literature to hypotheses, rather than true propositions, is interpreted as diminishing the cognitive value<sup>38</sup>, I will show that this does not necessarily have to be so.

*David Davies*

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<sup>37</sup> Luca Poggi finds this aspect of Novitz's theory particularly important for the cognitive value of literature. One reason for that is his dismissal of the view that literature gives us propositional knowledge (more on this in chapter 2). Another reason is his insistence on the importance of the thematic level and themes of a work; as he sees it, it is here that we should search for the cognitive benefits of literature. These cognitive benefits should not be analysed and explained in terms of propositional knowledge, but in the way Novitz invites us to explore them. Just like Novitz, Poggi also accepts the 'active' role of a reader (something I will have a lot to say throughout the dissertation): "The kind of responsiveness that I have described shows how the cognitive elements we derive from our hermeneutic activity do not have to be *imparted to* us nor, indeed, *imposed by us*. They may (or, indeed, should) be the product of a process of negotiation, an active and attentive engagement with the purposive structures of literary texts" (Poggi, 2007, p. 100). As a result, "The acquisition of conceptual skills is arguably the most valuable cognitive experience that literature can offer us. By altering our modes of perceiving the world, literary texts may influence not only how and what we think, but more importantly, what and how we care about persons, objects, events" (Poggi, 2007, p.101). Frank B. Farrell defends similar view on the potentialities of literature to influence one's conceptual repertoire, but from the standpoint of cognitive science (see his 2007).

<sup>38</sup> See for example Carroll 2002.

David Davies is another literary cognitivist who offered detailed accounts of things we can learn from literature<sup>39</sup>. His classification is similar to the one offered by Novitz. Davies also recognizes four possible categories:

i. knowledge of matters of facts (factual information about the world): at the most general level, works of literary fiction contain descriptions of different aspects of the world which readers can pick up and accommodate within their larger scheme. This can include rather detailed descriptions scattered throughout the novels which compose the background of the story (like Maria Edgeworth's 'provincial novels' which depict different aspects of Irish society in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, or Sir Walter Scott who "opened up the novel to the full panorama of revolution, dissent, rebellion and social change"<sup>40</sup>), or can be presented in just a few sentences describing particular city, event, holiday etc.

ii. understanding of general principles (moral, metaphysical, psychological). The idea behind this claim is that works of literary fiction provide a suitable background against which different principles can be developed, taken from abstraction and presented in their complexities, given substance and developed through their different aspects. For example, many critics argue that Dickens' *Hard times* can be read as calling into question the principle of utilitarianism.

iii. source of categorial understanding: apart from enabling readers to deepen their understanding of general principles, literary works can also provide them with new conceptual framework, or categories, which can be applied to the real world.

iv. affective knowledge: given the way literary works develop the story they present to the readers, they are particularly suitable to show different aspects of emotional responses and complexities, which in turn helps readers understand what it feels like to be in particular circumstances. In engaging with the work, readers can see the situation from the 'inside'. Davies links this to moral growth of the readers claiming that this knowledge of what it would be like can bear upon our ability to comprehend, and respond appropriately, to morally complex situations we encounter in the actual world.

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<sup>39</sup> See Davies 2007a, 2007b, 2010a.

<sup>40</sup> Carter and McRae 2001, p. 239.

Davies rightly recognizes the fact that we need a different justification for each of these categories. In the case of (i) and (iv) reasons for accepting these as true can be either the readers' familiarity with them or some additional reason for finding the author reliable (from internalistic perspective) or the fact the author is in fact reliable in these matters (from externalistic perspective). Justification for (ii) and (iii), Davies claims, is provided for by drawing the analogy between cognitive value of thought experiments and literary fiction. We will explain this analogy in the next chapter.

*Noell Carroll, John Gibson: literature and cognitive strengthening*

Another important aspect of the way literature can be cognitively valuable is captured by what Peter Lamarque calls cognitive strengthening: "Again the emphasis is away from the acquisition of newly found wordly truths towards 'clarificationism' (Noel Carroll), or an 'enriched understanding' (Gordon Graham) or an 'acknowledgment' (John Gibson) of beliefs readers are likely to hold already" (Lamarque 2010, p. 381). We have seen the idea behind Graham's claim; let us now elaborate on Carroll's clarificationism and Gibson's acknowledgment.

These two approaches share the idea that literature works upon the knowledge readers already have (in Carroll's account, of particular significance are moral and emotional knowledge). According to Carroll,

Clarificationism does not claim that, in the standard case, we acquire interesting, new propositional knowledge from artworks, but rather that artworks in question can deepen our moral understanding. Clarificationism does not claim that, in the standard case, we acquire interesting, new propositional knowledge from artworks, but rather that the artworks in question can deepen our moral understanding by, among other things, encouraging us to apply our moral knowledge and emotions to specific cases. (...) In the course of engaging a given narrative we may need to reorganize the hierarchical orderings of our moral categories and premises, or to reinterpret those categories and premises in the light of new paradigm instances and hard cases, or to reclassify barely acknowledged phenomena afresh – something we might be provoked to do by a feminist author who is able to show up injustice where before all we saw was culture as usual (Carroll, 1998 p. 142).

I agree with Carroll's claim about clarificationism, though I do not think he is right when he claims that we do not obtain new knowledge in this process<sup>41</sup>. In the encounter with a literary work, readers can certainly come to realize that their own view of the matter (or the

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<sup>41</sup> For a criticism and discussion of this claim see Baccharini 2014.



perspective they had) was lacking in depth and wasn't comprehensive enough to include all the complexities and nuances of situations.

John Gibson (2003, 2007) develops a similar idea and claims that readers bring the knowledge they already have to the process of reading. The literary work then works upon the knowledge readers already have by making them aware of the demands that such knowledge places upon them. Gibson relies on the distinction between knowledge and acknowledgement developed by Stanley Cavell. The example that Gibson develops is that of a person who knows someone is in pain but fails to call an ambulance or do anything else to provide help. According to Gibson, such a person

succeeds in every case of knowledge, for he consistently reveals that he knows the 'truth' of the matter (that you are suffering, that this implies that you require aid, that the consequences are severe should we ignore this, and so on). But he has no further relation to your pain beyond his knowing it, beyond his ability to identify correctly your suffering and the rest of propositions this entails. In this sense we see that his knowledge is idle, lifeless, for his mind goes dead precisely when it ought to become animated. What we see (...) is a failure to grasp what we might call *demands* of knowledge, the claims knowledge makes on us (Gibson 2003, p. 232).

This is where Gibson sees literature at its strongest: it acknowledges the knowledge we bring to text. Obviously then, for Gibson, knowing is not the crucial and the highest cognitive achievement; the gap between the mind and reality is not closed by knowledge. This is why acknowledgement is important: "The concept of acknowledgment reveals the possibility of a residual gap; it shows us that the concept of knowledge alone does not express understanding as it reaches all the way into the world. And the claim the humanist wants to secure is that it is this remaining divide that literature is capable of addressing and overcoming (Gibson 2003, p. 236). Without such acknowledgment, Gibson claims, our knowledge is always idle and removed from the world.

I do not want to pursue this line further; given that I accept the idea of cognitive strengthening. I am however dubious as to whether Gibson remains faithful here to his main intuition about rejecting indirect humanism because it focuses too much on the reader. Even his account of direct humanism rejects the claim that literature gives us propositional truth than we can pick up from thematic level. Yet trying to find the balance between his direct humanism and acknowledgment leads to a certain tension in his theory. The fact that there is a certain kind of understanding reflected in the work does not mean the readers will automatically come to the same understanding simply by reading – they need to actively

engage in active contemplation of what they read. But then we are sliding along the slippery slope of indirect humanism, which Gibson wants to avoid.

## **2.6. Cognitive potentialities of literature and slipperiness of cognitivism**

We started this chapter with a simple intuition: literature is cognitively valuable. But once we explored this idea a bit further, we ended up with several accounts of how this cognitive dimension is spelled out. In discussing literary cognitivism, Peter Lamarque eventually concludes that it is precisely this idea of several accounts of cognitive values that is so detrimental for initial cognitivist intuition. The idea here is that cognitivist's position is particularly problematic due to the fact that there is no satisfactory account of what this cognitive dimension should encompass, leaving the cognitivists with the whole bunch of less clear notions of what exactly these cognitive benefits are. In commenting Graham and Gaut's writing, Lamarque says: "Who would deny that art is often involved with "exploring aspects of experience", "providing visual images", "broadening horizons", "imagining possibilities", "exploring and elaborating human ideals"? If this is cognitivism, then I too am cognitivist (Lamarque, 2006, p. 128-9).

So the problem with cognitivism is that it starts off as a doctrine according to which literary works provide one with knowledge, but due to the lack of any plausible and coherent account of what precisely that 'literary' or 'artistic' knowledge or truth might be, it starts the slippery process in which truth disperses into notions like those stated above. This process – slipperiness of cognitivism – is thus the original sin of all cognitivist theories and also one of the main reasons for abandoning that view.<sup>42</sup>

Although Lamarque's arguments can seem to weaken cognitivist position, I do not see them as conclusive reasons for giving up on the whole idea. For one thing, whether or not the notions that cognitivists employ are directly connected to gaining truth and knowledge is a separate epistemic concern. It cannot be denied though that literature generates new beliefs in

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<sup>42</sup> It should be emphasized though, and we will get back to it in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, that Lamarque's not objecting to the idea of cognitive potentialities in literature (as he himself says, a lot of what cognitivists say is sympathetic to his own position). For him, one problem is that assessment in terms of truth and knowledge is not part of a literary appreciation and another problem is that a lot of terminology that cognitivists employ, like the elaborated notions of truth or the metaphors employed by Gaut and Graham cannot be brought into any plausible connection with learning and knowledge, making it therefore not an argument for literary cognitivism.

the reader, and these beliefs are later used as part of the wider cognitive stock of the readers. The end result can be growth of knowledge. More importantly though, and this will be emphasized throughout this work, all of the processes and impacts of literature pertaining to indirect humanism contribute substantially to understanding. And unlike knowledge, which is primarily assessed in terms of relating one to truth, understanding, as a cognitive achievement, has more to do with seeing the relations (causal, for example) between various aspects of phenomena under discussion. In that sense, the contribution made by literature to how we see the world is cognitively (i.e. epistemically) grounded. So even if the link between literature and knowledge (and/or truth) is not as clear cut and as straightforward like in some other discourses, there's no reason to claim that literature cannot be evaluated in terms of its cognitive dimension and cognitive impact it has on its readers.

## 2.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the main claim of this thesis: the idea that literature is cognitively valuable. There are various ways in which literary cognitivists develop this idea, but, as our analysis in the previous sections revealed, despite the terminological confusion, they concur that this value is multidimensional. Therefore, at the most general level, my account takes into consideration this plurality. Cognitive value of literature is realized in various ways and any attempt to explain it (or, as we'll see in the forth chapter, to criticize it) along just one dimension is necessarily not successful.

The wider framework that can provide us a useful and helpful reference point in the discussion is given by John Gibson's distinction between those values pertaining to direct and indirect humanism. Once again, I accept the classification but do not follow Gibson in rejecting the claims of indirect humanism or his view about the thematic level. Cognitive values advocated for by other authors can be subsumed under one of these:

Author	Direct humanism	Indirect humanism
Gibson	<p>Part of the project of at least some literary works is to articulate an insight into some specific region of human experience and circumstances</p> <p>Through literary works the significance of very real human experiences, practices and institutions can be revealed</p> <p>A grasp of reality can be gained from</p>	<p>Literary works can invite modes of reflection, simulation, and imagination that can in turn lead us to a better understanding of our world</p> <p>Literature can illustrate possibilities and offer possible ways for organizing and conceiving experience</p> <p>Literature offers conceptions, stances and perspectives which we can, by using our reflective and imaginative capacities, transform into a tool for appreciating reality</p>

	close reading: literature speaks to human reality, to the world of actual human experience and action	Literature can suggest ways of ‘reading’ the world, presenting us with new possibilities of wordly understanding and involvement
	Literary experience may be a direct appreciation of and engagement with the real world	
Novitz	propositional beliefs about the world	certain values or attitudes, skills of strategy and intellectual strategies
Davies	knowledge of matters of facts (factual information about the world), affective knowledge	understanding of general principles, categorial understanding
Gaut	philosophical knowledge, knowledge of the actual	knowledge of the possibilities, significance of the events
Graham		providing visual images, broadening horizons, imagining possibilities, exploring and elaborating human ideals

In developing my account of the cognitive value of literature, I would also like to emphasize the importance of humanistic intuition. Though the question ‘how to live’ is important and literature can help us in this respect, my account relies on the more direct humanistic link, supported by Lamarque and Olsen’s characterization of it: literature reveals to us something important about the world and ourselves. It does so primarily by creating a direct link between the fictional world and the real world. Literature speaks about human reality in the most encompassing sense of the world and in doing so, it enables us to learn about it. It also creates an opportunity for us to develop our cognitive and emotional skills, so that in turn we become better at understanding various phenomena and processes that go on around us. If a name for such a position were required, I would opt for *encompassing humanistic theory of literary cognitivism*, where encompassing is meant to cover direct and indirect humanism as identified by Gibson. For the simplicity sake however, I will mostly speak of direct and indirect humanism.

Obviously, such a view demands an extension of epistemological basis of cognitivism and I have already stated that the debate has moved from the level of pro-truth vs. no-truth theories. This is so because the cognitive benefits associated with indirect humanism cannot be explained or evaluated in terms of truth alone. Gaining a more developed understanding, or

becoming more sensitive towards various aspects of our ethical conundrums involve more than grasping true propositions. As we will see in the fourth chapter, some literary anti-cognitivists do not recognize cognitive benefits associated with indirect humanism as pertaining to the domain of cognition and neglect this aspect in their analysis of cognitive value. I will argue that such a view is wrong. But before that, in the next chapter we will turn to exploring the connection between epistemology and literature.

### 3. EPISTEMOLOGY OF LITERATURE

The idea that literature is cognitively valuable is intuitively plausible and acceptable, though in various degrees to various people. A very optimistic view of this idea is defended by Peter Swirski, who claims that “... for many (though obviously not for all) writers and readers the cognitive dimension of literature is as vital as the literary” (Swirski 2007, p. 5). In addition, Swirski characterizes the cognitive dimension in the following way:

Naturally, the fact that art mutates diachronically from one style, school, or form of writing to another does not mean that it progresses in *aesthetic* terms. (...) Today we know much more about people, societies, and the world at large than we did at the time of Homer, and literature reflects (though it also sometimes forges) this knowledge. To the extent that fiction contributes to inquiry, literary knowledge *is* cumulative in the same sense that scientific or mathematical knowledge is. And, in this key sense, literature is as progressive as any other enterprise directed at understanding the world (Swirski 2007, p. 56).

A completely negative spin of this claim is usually attributed to Jerome Stolnitz, who objected to the very notion of learning from literature. Regardless of this division of opinions, the fact remains, we need an epistemology of literature. Given that we form beliefs based on literature, and that we see and evaluate literature as cognitively valuable (that is, as a practice that can naturally be evaluated in terms of its cognitive contribution), we have to explain (i) what it is that we cognitively (as opposed to emotionally, artistically or aesthetically) get out of engaging with literary works and (ii), how that kind of cognitive transfer takes place. This division is not always stated as clearly as I am making it here<sup>43</sup>, which results in incomplete accounts of the cognitive value of literature.

In the previous chapter I sketched an account of (i). I showed that literary cognitivism comes hand in hand with direct humanism, and at least traditionally, with indirect humanism (putting Gibson’s worries aside). I also claimed that within the approach undertaken here, an approach which is primarily epistemological, we need an account of cognitive benefits of literature that does justice to direct and indirect humanism equally, given that, ultimately, they both affect readers’ cognitive economy (and that is the question I am concerned with). However, we also saw that precisely this plurality of cognitive values I embrace and celebrate is seen as the

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<sup>43</sup> Exceptions to this are Davies 2007 and Green 2010.

problem for my theory, according to Lamarque’s notion of the ‘slipperiness of cognitivism’. This notion, in the hands of anti cognitivists and sceptics, leads to the following dilemma:

Although one way of arguing for the cognitive status of literature might be to show that it indeed does come under our usual understanding of knowing (...), another way to defend it might be to extend the category of knowing itself to include other possible interpretations (Kasprisin, 1987, p.18).

Lamarque and Olsen also argue that literary cognitivism is faced with only two options:

One is to redefine the concepts of knowledge and truth-seeking, at least loosening the connection with supportive evidence and argument. The other is a more radical redefinition of the whole notion of cognitive value, severing any necessary connection with the concepts of knowledge and truth. Supporters of the first alternative would attempt to retain the direct link between literature and truth and would insist that literary works yielded insight complementary to, yet as equally valid (in the same sense of ‘valid’) as, the knowledge yielded by sciences of all descriptions. Supporters of the second alternative would be ready to abandon the notion that literature has a direct truth-seeking link with the world and instead settle for a different form of insight which lent itself to appraisal in terms other than those of knowledge and truth (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, pp. 369-9).

This dilemma can also be cast as a question of whether literature is on the same footing as other truth-seeking and knowledge-advancing practices. Given that in traditional epistemology knowledge has always been defined in terms of justified true belief, many anti-cognitivists have claimed that literature cannot meet these conditions: given the fictional dimension of literature, beliefs based on reading a work cannot be justified. On the other hand, literature does not set out to describe what is true, even if it ends up delivering true propositions, and is entitled to making things up. So it is hard to tell what kind of truth is actually found in literature, which is why, as we saw, some rely on *sui generis* notions. So if beliefs based on literature are neither justified nor true, they cannot contribute to our knowledge, at least not if knowledge is taken in its usual, tripartite definition. In the light of these problems, various methods have been designed by cognitivists to save the cognitive value of literature. Swirski presented and discussed, to my knowledge, the best outline of these methods in his 2007. I will rely here on his ‘mapping of terrain’.

EPISTEMOLOGY OF LITERATURE							
Dismissive approach			Permissive approach				
Revisionist	Abolitionist		Negativist	Dualist		Affirmative	
					Illustrative	Hypothetical	Systematic

### 3.1. Dismissive approach

Let us start with dismissive approach. The common ground between revisionists and abolitionists is the fact that they dismiss traditional approaches to truth, objectivity and cognition. The most famous abolitionists are Richard Rorty and Hayden White, though various deconstructivist theories can also fall in this camp. Given that these theories do not pertain within analytic philosophy of art, and most often do not figure in discussions on the cognitive value of art, we will not deal with them here.<sup>44</sup>

The idea behind revisionists such as, in Swirski's view, Catherine Elgin and N. Goodman, is to revise the epistemic practise and inquiry and the first step in this approach is to dismiss the notion of knowledge in favour of understanding (defined as "cognitive faculty in an inclusive sense")<sup>45</sup>. As Swirski sees it, this move is neither justified nor necessary. It is not justified because the notion of understanding is "too inclusive and indeterminate to be of consequence" and "employed in an almost indiscriminate fashion" (Swirski 2007, p.18) denoting a process, an accomplishment and a skill and it is not needed because the current scientific practices are doing quite well with relying on knowledge. In that sense, substituting knowledge with a notion that is as indeterminate and blurry as understanding doesn't contribute to anything.

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<sup>44</sup> See Lamarque and Olsen 1994 and Swirski 2007 for critical analysis and eventual rejection of philosophical plausibility and tenability of these positions.

<sup>45</sup> Although Swirski's concern is targeted at epistemology of literature (in the loose sense, we can understand this as an overview of the various ways in which cognitive dimension of literature was analyzed, explored, given an account of and grounded in theoretical concepts), we should not confuse his revisionism with the so called revisionist epistemology that is, alongside the so called preservationist and expansionist epistemology, becoming of interest to epistemologists such as Alvin Goldman, Snježana Purić-Samaržija, William Alston, Duncan Pritchard, Martin Kusch etc. These epistemologists are concerned with accounting for the shifts within 'traditional epistemology' which recognize the tendency to expand the domain of traditional epistemology so as to include testimony and cognitive disagreement (preservationist camp) or to expand its domain so as to include evaluation of scientific experts, ways of diversifying scientific research efforts and introduction of collective believers and knowers (expansionist camp). On this classification (attributed to A. Goldman), revisionism does not pertain to traditional epistemology because it renounces traditional notions such as 'justified true belief' in favour of doctrines such as postmodernism, deconstructivism, social constructionism and relativism (and as we saw, Swirski classifies these as abolitionism). What Swirski calls revisionism will be introduced in the fifth chapter under the name of 'plurality view' of epistemic aims and values. This movement recognizes the need to expand cognitively valuable and desirable states from truth and knowledge to notions such as understanding. For the debates over revisionism, expansionism and preservationism see Purić-Samaržija & Bojanic 2012.



Swirski is too quick to dismiss understanding as a valuable epistemic goal. Understanding has always been acknowledged as epistemically important within philosophy of science. It has traditionally been invoked in relation to cognitive values of literature and it is currently receiving a lot of attention from epistemologists who do not necessarily follow the revisionist program but insist on recognizing that, in addition to knowledge, understanding is epistemically valuable state in its own right. On the other hand, regardless of Elgin and Goodman's claims regarding the revisionist program, there is a valuable lesson to be learnt from Elgin's work, both, in reference to epistemology and in reference to literary cognitivism. This lesson has to do with diminishing the force of those who see literature as cognitively trivial due to the differences between literature and science (a problem that will be tackled in the next chapter). Elgin has contributed substantially to showing that science and literature are distinct in how they proceed in their research and in the way they deliver knowledge. According to my reading of Elgin, I see her more on the dualist side (more on which below) than on revisionist side, although she occasionally strays away from traditional epistemic path.

### **3.2. Permissive approach**

Let us now turn to those approaches that are willing to analyze literature using epistemological tools. The three permissive approaches share the following features:

- i) all take classical epistemology to be firmly in place
- ii) all allow for the appraisal of literature in terms of its contribution to knowledge
- iii) all recognize the validity of the term literary knowledge
- iv) all claim that truth is the best criterion for its evaluation

However, how exactly they account for the cognitive dimension of literature differs substantially. Let's start with the first approach, the negativist's variation. This approach is characterized by Plato and his extensive criticism of mimetic art. Given Plato's dedication to classical epistemology (and his own definition of knowledge), his answer to (ii) is negativist: literature, evaluated by its contribution to knowledge, is exposed as deceitful, misleading and corruptive and what we see as literary knowledge turns out to be nothing but the blabbering of inspired, yet radically unreliable poet. We will deal with Plato's criticism in the next chapter.

According to the dualist approach, literature is *sui generis* practice and should not compete with other disciplines such as philosophy or science in the way it contributes to knowledge. Literature, as a practice, has its own autonomy but, even though it is separate, it is still equal to philosophy and science. John Gibson defends such a position:

More precisely, I argue that we must accept that literature's particular manner of engaging with reality is *sui generis*, so much so, in fact, that it constitutes its own form of cognitive insight. This implies, among other things, that we abandon what we might call the *philosophy-by-other-means* view of literature, and in general any defence of literary cognitivism that attempts to model literature on a theory of how other sorts of texts can have cognitive value (e.g. by showing them to mimic philosophical works, perhaps by being a thought experiment in literary disguise, a sort of dramatic 'proof', an exercise in moral reasoning by example, and other like things we in no obvious sense find when we look inside the majority of literary works) (Gibson, 2009, p. 469).

Another advocator of dualist approach is James O. Young. Young sees art and science as two distinct yet equally valid and mutually complementary cognitive enterprises. The main difference between the two is the fact that science uses semantic representations and rational demonstrations, while art, including literature, relies on providing illustrative representation and illustrative demonstration and delivers knowledge not through the use of arguments and testimony like science, but by providing the audience with perspectives on the depicted matter.<sup>46</sup> Young also claims that art and science are not delivering the same kind of knowledge and are not conducting the inquiry in the same way. Although science and art both rely on observation and are both interpreting these observations, where they differ is in the method through which they do that. Scientists, who conduct researches in laboratories and in monitored conditions, rely on models and theories. Artists, who rely on observing people in their natural environment, rely on creating and providing perspectives. Because of that, Young claims, science is better equipped to give us knowledge of the laws and natural phenomena such as global warming, while art is better equipped to teach us about emotional experience. For some aspects of our world – Young's example is French revolution – both, art and science, can be a valuable source of knowledge.

Hub Zwart is another dualist who sees science and arts as equally devoted and equally successful in their investigative efforts to reliably describe the world. Conducting what he calls 'comparative epistemology', he wants to show that "there are *other ways* of knowing

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<sup>46</sup> I am giving here only a sketch of Young's theory, given that deeper analysis would take us too far.

about nature besides science” (Zwart 2008, p. 4). Zwart is primarily interested in the way that science – which he also sees as the paradigm of how epistemologists think of researches, knowledge and truth – is proceeding in its investigation and in the ways it delivers its claims and compares ‘their epistemology’ to the epistemology of the artistic research. He claims:

Another important form of knowledge concerning nature is the knowledge articulated by artists, such as poets, novelists, landscape painters or even composers. Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) has written many poems on flowers that bear witness to his intimate knowledge of plant forms, although not everybody will regard his knowledge as being “scientific” in a strict sense. Stories by Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), situated in Russian countryside, with its endless birch forests and misty ponds, rely on his “firsthand knowledge” (...) of landscapes, birds, mammals, and trees, accumulated through years of careful observation and a close “reading” of rural environments (Zwart 2008, p. 4).

One reason why Zwart’s analysis is interesting is the fact that his focus is mainly the nature, not so much in the sense Gibson’ direct humanism was concerned with the nature of human practices and institutions, but with the nature taken as a whole of living organisms. Few would deny that it is primarily science that is dealing with this, and we saw with Young that he sees it as a specific domain that artists don’t have much to tell about. But Zwart’s analysis shows that such a classification is not justified; everything can be an object of artistic interest and there’s no reason why artists should not concern themselves with those aspects of reality that are traditionally seen as pertaining to science.

One pressing worry for dualist is to account for *how* literary works yield knowledge. As we’ve seen, dualist position is characterized by the claim that literature and science have their own, unique, distinct way of delivering knowledge and that both of these ways are equally valid. But the dualist must provide some account of how that happens. We saw with literary cognitivism generally that some kind of explanation is needed for this, given that literature doesn’t employ any of the arguments, conclusions and evidential support that other knowledge-yielding discourses employ. But a care must be taken not to read too much into this, as Lamarque warns us: “Literary works, the defender of truth might reasonably insist, simply have different rhetorical strategies and different means of support from other truth-promoting modes of discourse; that’s what’s special about them” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 377).

The biggest difficulty for the dualist approach is the following problem. If the knowledge we get from literature is propositional then not only it is unclear why we need the ‘literary machinery’ but also it is unclear what the basis for separation (literature vs. other practices) is. If however the knowledge is not propositional, then what kind of knowledge do we get from

literature? We either lose the basis for separation or we can't account for the kind of knowledge we get.

One way out of this dilemma is to redefine the concepts of truth and knowledge and claim that literature offers this – redefined – kind of knowledge. One of the first who tried to account for the cognitive value of literature in that way was Dorothy Walsh. We will look at her proposal in more details.

*Dorothy Walsh: truth as authenticity, knowledge as knowing what is like*

Dorothy Walsh in her book *Literature and Knowledge* develops the concept of 'knowledge as authenticity'. Walsh sets off by asking whether we should perceive literary work as a vehicle of some warranted epistemic claim, or as illuminating image which shows us something. Her answer is that treating it as a vehicle would be wrong because it is unclear in what way a work as such supports or gives evidence to whatever claim it is promoting. However, if we treat it as representational (or mimetic) image, then we can recognize its revelatory powers: what is interesting about this revelatory impact of literary works is that it is both, revelatory and new, and in that sense goes beyond mere acquiring of propositional knowledge that science provides: literature makes the features of the world luminously displayed. The features of the world that literature deals with are those pertaining to human experience: "general subject matter of all literary art is human experience"<sup>47</sup> and that is the reason why we turn to literature for a better understanding. The experience that a literary work provides has 'permanent presence' and unlike real world experience, it is available for full realization. But in order to recognize distinctive kind of knowledge that literature provides, Walsh claims, we need a different account of knowledge and realization. We have to go beyond the distinction made by Gilbert Ryal, distinction between what is often called propositional knowledge, that is, knowing that (something is the case) and practical knowledge, i.e. knowing how (to do something). Walsh argues that there is a third kind of knowledge, knowing what is like, which has to do with knowing in the sense of realizing by living through. As she sees it,

the kind of knowledge literature can afford is understanding as realization in the particular sense of the realization of what something might come to as a form of lived experience, we can recognize that literature is not adequately thought of as direct report about something and that if there *is* a

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<sup>47</sup> Walsh 1969, p. 80. At this point Walsh discusses different accounts of experience as provided by John Dewey. However, I will not tackle it here but will rather present her conclusions.

meaning of truth that is relevant to literature it must be different from the meaning of ‘truth’ associated with specifically formulated knowledge claims about this or that (Walsh, 1969, pp. 113-4).

It was Walsh’s argument that authors present experiences for the readers, experiences that might otherwise go unnoticed<sup>48</sup> and that if they are good at what they do, then these experiences are authentic or genuine (as opposed to being phoney and fake) and thus provide readers with the knowledge in the form of realization of what anything might come to as a form of lived experience. In that sense, literary works represent “experience to be experienced, literary arts abound in the expression of what might be called valuational attitudes, that is to say, attitudes pro or con attitudes of endorsement or rejection” (Walsh 1969, p.131). Finally, this kind of knowledge is distinctive because it has a sort of intimacy or immediacy that propositional knowledge lacks.

There are many things in Walsh’s account that are plausible and that are still part of cognitivist’s credo. She is right to insist on the need to expand the notion of ‘know’ in order for it to cover those cognitive states which are rightly referred to as cognitive but are not reducible to propositional knowledge, and which we can gain from literature. The view that literature can provide us with knowledge about what is like to be in some state, in some set of circumstances, etc. (or show us that directly) is still considered one of its most ‘cognitive’ achievement, as will be shown in the next section. Also, Walsh is right when she claims that “The artist can evoke the imaginative experience of apprehending things in a certain valuational perspective (Walsh 1969, p.131)”. We will see how through engagement with literature a reader can develop new moral and emotional concepts that make him change perspective and see things differently. But for the moment, we have to wonder whether Walsh is right in claiming that art provides us with experiences and whether the knowledge it thus conveys is rightly characterized as authentic.

I think that the answer to both questions is no. Let us start with the second one. To claim that literature provides us with a distinctive kind of knowledge which is described as authentic (as opposed to what Walsh calls phony or fake) can explain (again, as Walsh rightly recognizes)

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<sup>48</sup> Here is Walsh: “Were it not for the testimony of literary arts, those of us who are not literary artists would never suppose, dream or imagine that the kind of complicated material that finds expression in literature was ever available for realization” (Walsh 1969 p. 107).

why we value some – great or canonical – works of art more than some other. However, to claim that what the author describes – the experience depicted in the novel – is authentic can only point to *how well* the artist does that. For example, it can be said that part of Shakespeare's greatness lies in the way he portrays tragic lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*. No other account of tragic love is as moving, as powerful, as Shakespeare's. But that only shows the excellence of Shakespeare as an artist, and it also explains why we read *Romeo and Juliet* with more delight than we read other works dealing with tragic love and attribute it more value. But that is not enough to trigger cognitive value in the sense we are interested here. When cognitivist claims that literature can be a source of cognitive values and that it can convey knowledge to its readers, he doesn't mean some special, '*sui generis*' kind of knowledge, but knowledge in epistemic sense of the word. Therefore, to say that literature gives us authentic knowledge cannot include anything more than to claim that the subject matter and theme are well developed and in that sense do not seem phony or fake. Most fictional works that we feel reluctant to attribute cognitive value to are found unliterary or with no value particularly because they seem phony or fake. So the notion of authenticity should have to do with how the plot is developed, not with the kind of knowledge we get from it.

What about the claim that literature provides experience? That is not altogether wrong, but it is much less than what cognitivist wants. In reading Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middle Sex*, a reader can see the experience of a person born as hermaphrodite, i.e. the experience of seeing what is like to be hermaphrodite. Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* offers a brilliant portrayal – authentic in every possible sense of the word – of young Japanese boy who gradually becomes aware of his own homosexuality and the need to engage in what is thought as sexual perversion. But that is not enough to *have* those experiences first hand<sup>49</sup>. It is a separate question whether or not it is possible to learn from experiences that are not our own. Surely some cognitive benefits can be thus gained (otherwise we would not be able to understand other people) and literary cognitivists often point to such examples saying that literature can

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<sup>49</sup> Lorraine Kasprisin claims this is the most worrisome objection to Walsh's theory. According to Kasprisin, Walsh does not recognize the difference between experience and knowledge. The two may be connected in that experience is the basis for knowledge, but that is not the same as claiming that experience is knowledge (see Kasprisin 1987). Lamarque and Olsen also criticise theory primarily, though not exclusively, on these grounds (see their 1994, ch. 15).

show us what is like to be in a particular kind of situation. But that is far from having that experience.

Another, perhaps even more pressing problem for Walsh is the fact that not all literary works provide experience, at least not in the sense Walsh claims. There are some literary works that do not aim at providing experiences at all. To read *Gulliver's travels* as experience providing would be to terribly miss the point. There are also literary works that provide particularly moving descriptions of a certain experience (like the experience of living in a totalitarian society), but with the aim of going 'beyond' that experience in order to reflect on whether or not the conditions that govern and generate certain experience (like thought police, total control of every citizen's whereabouts, continual changing of historical facts etc) should be accepted.

Notice that I am not objecting here to the claim that the experience described in literary work can be a source of knowledge about that very experience or about the emotional impact of that experience. I'm just saying that the underlying mechanism that explains how this learning takes place is not that of *providing of* authentic experience. Notice the analogy with testimony: in listening to my friend telling me about her adultery relation, I may learn what it feels like to commit an adultery, what reasons one may have for doing that, in terms of practical skills how to avoid being caught etc. But this does not substitute for undergoing the experience myself.

Walsh's account of the cognitive value of literature triggered what became known as subjective knowledge theory of cognitive value, which can be read in its weaker and stronger version. According to the weaker version, literature is an instrument for training and extending our sympathetic understanding of other people. This is achieved by the experience that a literary work offers, and if this experience is indeed authentic, then a reader can fully understand and gain knowledge about being in particular situation.

Lamarque and Olsen raise several worries regarding this claim. As already mentioned, an additional epistemological work is needed to show that experience described in the literary works can be equated with knowledge<sup>50</sup>. Additional worry regarding this type of knowledge

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<sup>50</sup> Mitchell Green claims that in those cases when authors of literary works write about their own personal experiences, readers can indeed learn what that experience feels like. In this case, he claims, authors are

(if indeed it is knowledge) is to specify the truth conditions for it. How are we to evaluate the notion of authenticity?

The stronger version of the theory emphasizes the capability of the subjective virtual experience to enrich and modify readers' concepts and conceptual scheme. The idea here is that even if literature doesn't necessarily deliver new knowledge, it makes readers more sensitive towards what they perceive and how they perceive it. Advocators of this view claim that in this way readers can be brought to appreciate aspects of real life differently.

This account is more in line with indirect humanism and can therefore more easily be accommodated within my approach. Again, Lamarque and Olsen object to such a claim on the grounds that (i) if the new conception that readers form as a result of reading is applicable to the world, then it cannot be something that is only available through particular literary work, (ii) theory doesn't acknowledge a difference between recognizing a conception and adopting it. However, (i) should not worry us here, given that, on my account, literature does not have to be the sole source of epistemic benefits it delivers. In reference to (ii), it should be stated that on my theory, it cannot be predicted how individual reader will react to the cognitive benefits available in the work. Therefore, whether or not he will recognize the concept and accept it (on the grounds, say, that he recognizes the concept to be morally superior to the one he had prior to the reading) or reject the concept (because he might see it as morally corruptive, for example) is not something that the theory should predict<sup>51</sup>.

To sum up; according to the dualist position, literature is cognitively valuable in its own right (it is *sui generis* practice in its own right according to Gibson) and its cognitive value can be accounted for by the special kind of knowledge it delivers (knowledge as a form of lived experience according to Walsh). By claiming this, dualist can escape the epistemological burden of accounting for justification of the claims literature puts forward. The main problem for the theory, as identified, is the claim that (subjective) experience amounts to knowledge.

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delivering their own testimony about their own experience and can be taken as reliable in what they say (see Green 2010). Similar claims are also advocated for by Davies regarding affective knowledge (see his 2010a).

<sup>51</sup> I'll come back to this problem and further elaborate it in the seventh chapter, where I discuss the position developed by Matthew Kieran.



Walsh is wrong to try to account for the overall value of literature (or to put it differently, to try to launch literary cognitivism) by invoking the notion of authentic experience offered by literary works, and in that sense, Lamarque and Olsen's challenge of the futility of such an endeavour is justified. I think however there is a certain value to Walsh's claims; even if I remain sceptical, as I already indicated, over the notion of authenticity as used by Walsh. But those literary works that are primarily concerned with narrating or presenting experience can reveal certain aspects of that experience which can attribute to knowing what is like (even if that doesn't substitute having the experience firsthand). One example (which will be elaborated extensively in the seventh chapter) are the so called slave narratives, a genre of American 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction in which liberated slaves described, extensively and in many details, their experiences as slaves. For a more to date example, we can turn to what is called confessional art. It is plausible to claim that literature is often concerned with experiences that readers might not be familiar with, or might not have experienced themselves. Famous examples come from colonialism and literature dealing with the aspects of cultural/political dominance of one country over the other. Another good example is what might be called immigrant's literature<sup>52</sup>. Yet, the kind of knowledge that readers gain from these novels should not be equated with authentic experience.

So, if Walsh's 'knowing by living through authentic experience described in a literary work' is not acceptable as an explanation for the knowledge (or some other cognitive benefits) we

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<sup>52</sup> See for example Wilson (2005) where he discusses various fictional works written by immigrants and the way they describe the experience of coming to America and trying to find their way and manners in the new country. Wilson is particularly interested in the way social class and other social parameters such as race, gender and ethnicity are portrayed in literary fiction of the time. Wilson says: "In texts like Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* (1896), Paul Lawrence Dunbar's *Sport of the Gods* (1902), or Sui Sin Far's (Edith Maud Eaton's) *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), the category of class is represented through a shape-shifting filtering and contesting of mainstream gender and racial norms. Again, class was differential in that it was always measured against and within racial, ethnic, or gender designation. Writers calibrated class's differential meaning in discussions of the bachelorhood created by chains of immigration, of the place of the domestic realm in shoring up ethnic identity, of the threat of mass entertainment to cultural habits of domestic and foreign migrants." (p. 351). To go back to the idea of experience as presented in a literary work, Wikipedia praises both Cahan and Sui Sin Far for their portrayals of Americanized Russo-Jewish immigrants (in the case of Cahan, who "has few, if any, equals in the United States in depicting the life of the so-called "ghetto") and Chinese people and Chinese-American experience (in the case of Sui Sin Far). But reading these works – regardless of how revealing of the circumstances of living in a ghetto or about the situation of Chinese Americans workers who were rejected by American society they are – cannot amount to having those experiences.

gain, how are we to explain them? My answer is to invoke the analogy with testimony. Just like non fictional testimony can provide an insight into the experience the speaker undergoes, so too can the experience described in a literature.

Regarding the stronger version, what remains unexplored is the possibility Lamarque and Olsen raise when they claim that a reader might not accept the conception offered by a work. I don't think that a work fails in terms of what cognitive value it delivers if the readers don't accept the conception offered. Obviously, when the conception or perspective offered is morally superior to the one reader has, it would be advisable for the reader to accept it. But as I will show, literary cognitivist doesn't have to make a demand on the reader to accept the given perspective without thus losing the cognitive value of a work.

Before moving on, let us just briefly go back to Catherine Elgin. Unlike Swirski, I see her as advocating a dualist approach, even if her commitment to the notion of understanding makes her a revisionist (in the sense specified by Swirski). Elgin (2007) has criticized what she calls 'information-transfer' model of cognition, claiming that according to this model, the knowledge is seen to consist of various pieces of information and the epistemic aim is to collect as many of these pieces as possible. However, she claims, things which we find cognitively valuable cannot be fully captured by bits and pieces of information; we need a wider notion that will hold these together. Such notion is understanding, and we'll see in the fifth chapter how she accounts for it.

Elgin is rather critical of the claim that science (including philosophy) delivers truth; in that respect she sees art and sciences to be on the same footing:

If our overreaching epistemic objective is the acquisition of new truths, we would be ill advised to turn to art. We would also be ill-advised to turn to science or philosophy. The abundance of anomalies and outstanding problems confronting any science is reason to doubt that currently available scientific theories are true (...) Philosophy is no more reliable. Outside formal logic, few if any philosophical theses have been firmly established. Some may be true, but none supplies the level of justification needed for knowledge (Elgin 1996, p. 170).

Elgin also points toward the fact that many elements in science are "approximations, idealizations, simplifying assumptions, and other falsifications that contribute to our understanding of phenomena" (Elgin 1996, p. 171). This should at least make us cautious over the claim that scientific theories incorporate only truth.

The similarities between art and science are further seen in the fact that they both rely on the same mechanism to gain understanding and knowledge. This mechanism is thought

experiment. Both, science and literature build thought experiments in order to analyse phenomena and develop theories that explain them. We'll turn to this shortly<sup>53</sup>.

#### *Varieties of affirmative approach*

Going back to Swirski's classification, the remaining, affirmative approach comes in three varieties. Swirski attributes the first affirmative variety – the systematic – to Rene Girard. The main idea here is that “fiction is, among others, a source of coherent, rational, and systematic articulations of psychological laws of human behaviour” (Swirski 2007, p. 33). What Girard wants to say is that the psychological laws that psychology operates with are in no way (at least not epistemologically) different from psychological laws that writers rely upon in their works, even if in the case of literature these laws are not clearly and precisely stated or supported by some kind of evidence, like they are in science. But nevertheless, they are there: “Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust and Dostoyevsky (...) narrated their insights in a manner constitutive of a bona fide psychological theory” (Swirski 2007, p. 33).

The problems that Swirski identifies with this variety of affirmative approach mostly have to do with showing in what way authors of fictional works are (as) reliable in what they are saying (as psychologists). An additional thing that makes this even harder to show is the claim that “the goals of storytellers vary, and in many cases don't extend to quasi scientific formulations of psychosocial regularities” (Swirski 2007, p. 34).

Plausible as this might be, it is hard to deny that so many works of literary fiction are so often seen and analyzed as deeply and inseparably revealing of psychological laws. Probably the most famous example of this is Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and the famous claim by Freud about the profundity of Dostoyevsky's psychological vision. Notice also that laws do not have to be solely psychological but sociological, philosophical, political, biological etc, as Davies stated in his account of things we learn from literature. To go back to Dostoyevsky, one of the main themes of the story can be spelled out in terms of the justifiability of a murder. Dostoyevsky is not only telling us a story, he is also analysing whether there are any circumstances that would allow killing of one innocent (even if not morally good) person in

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<sup>53</sup> I have only sketched Elgin's theory here, leaving out what is her (and Goodman's) most unique contribution to the debate on cognitive value of art: that of exemplification. Important as it is for this problem, analyzing it would take me to far from my present concerns.

order to save or help others. To that extent, he is relying on ethical principles and debates over utilitarianism and consequentialism. Sociological mechanisms of group behaviour, paranoia and divided responsibility are seen in Faulkner's *Light in August*, culminating in the chapter in which Joe Christmas is castrated and killed on the unproven suspicion that he has killed Joana. Recall Graham's claim that literary work functions as visual mage; examples like this give grounding for such a claim.

There's no need to multiply the examples further. Now, Swirski might have a point in challenging the claim of the reliability of the authors (and thus at least implicitly the epistemic status of these principles when they are found in literature), and his worry about the aims of the authors is at least plausible, though does not necessarily pose a problem. Even if the authors do not have the aim of exposing the functioning of some psychological laws, that doesn't mean that these laws, once incorporated into the work, give any less opportunity to learn. We have to be careful in ascribing too much significance to the authors' intentions.

In later chapters, I will deal with the problem of the reliability of the authors. For now, let us allow for the possibility that literary works indeed present the workings of psychological, sociological, philosophical etc. laws and principles. Two problems need to be addressed here. First, how is a reader, who lacks knowledge (implicit or explicit) of such principles, to recognize them in the work?<sup>54</sup> Almost everybody who reads *Othello* will recognize his jealousy and Iago's manipulation and will claim that Iago tricked and deceived Othello into killing Desdemona. But not many readers will also see the play as dealing with the problem of trust (to oneself and others), with the sceptical premise about the fundamental inability to know other people's minds<sup>55</sup> or as exploring the question of whether or not one is worthy of other's love.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This problem can be seen if we take the example of Thomas Mann's *Deaths in Venice* which is very often said to rely on the philosophical principles implicit in the theories of Plato, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Yet, a reader who is not familiar with these theories will not recognize them within the work. This is the worry I raise in reference to Philip Kitcher's book on Mann. As a response, Kitcher claimed that this is the role of literary critics, who can 'explain' the hidden principles to the audience.

<sup>55</sup> This is the point that McGinn 2006 insists upon.

<sup>56</sup> This point is pressed by Zamir 2006.

Second, if the reader has some knowledge of the laws in question, can he really learn something new from the literary work that advances claims about these laws? Notice that the claim here is not that the work will be valueless, there still might be plenty of aesthetic properties to enjoy in, but certainly not much that reader can get in cognitive terms. Very often this is called either the banality problem (we will tackle it later on in more details), or the problem of cognitive familiarity. These two problems just considered raise the following dilemma: either the reader, due to the lack of knowledge necessary to follow the subject and theme, will not get any cognitive benefits from the work, or, due to the knowledge he already has, will recognize what the work offers in terms of cognitive values, but there won't be anything new he might, relying on a literary work, acquire.

One answer to this horn of dilemma is to say that a work offers a cognitive strengthening. Gibson and Carroll have offered unrelated yet similar accounts along these lines, as shown in the previous chapter. The basic idea is that literature offers cognitive benefits to the readers, but only if readers 'bring something' of their own into the work. Literature works upon knowledge - the emotional and moral concepts - readers already have. So in order to get any cognitive benefits from *Crime and Punishment*, reader must already be familiar with the principle that 'murder is wrong', because only then can he be able to engage into the dilemma that Dostoyevsky is concerned with, namely utilitarianism versus deontology.

Similar dilemma to the one presented here applies to the second affirmative variety, the illustrative model. As Swirski sees it:

Here literature does what Jesus did so well: convey and explain larger truths in the guise of stories and parables. Illustrating and popularizing lore from established disciplines, literature on this view earns its cognitive bread by clothing abstract skeletons of social-scientific theories and findings in experimental particulars (...) In this illustrative role, literary works can usefully generate framing contexts to facilitate comprehension of general theories developed elsewhere (Swirski 2007, pp. 34-5)<sup>57</sup>

An additional appeal for this model stems from the similarity between the illustrative role of literature and illustrative role of thought experiments (more on which below). But even on their own, works of literary fiction can in a very powerful way provide an illustration for

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<sup>57</sup> Swirski attributes this view to Herbert Simon, who praises literature as "a superlative tool of learning and acquisition of knowledge" (Swirski 2007, p. 34). Simon however insists that literature can fulfil this function only if the stories presented comply with the best of contemporary theory and fact, grounding in this way its epistemic reliability.

psychological, philosophical, scientific etc. theories. This fact is often emphasised within literary criticism. For example, in analysing *The Scarlet Letter*, Person claims:

The Scarlet Letter offers a brilliant analysis of group psychology – of the way, to use Dimmesdale’s term, a “hungry” group of people will believe anything what they want and need to believe about a public figure, regardless of the evidence before their eyes. That is, Hawthorne clearly understood the political dimensions of truth – the way ‘truth’ is always negotiated between speakers and listeners.<sup>58</sup>

The third variety in the affirmative strand is hypothetical model, which comes in a weaker and in a stronger form. According to the weaker form (associated most often with Monroe Beardsley), the cognitive value of literature is in suggesting (rather than arguing for or demonstrating) new hypothesis about human nature or society. The consequence of this is that cognitive potential is only implicit. We saw how the implicit reflections work in the case of Vonnegut.

On a stronger model, (Livingstone’s), literature is in the business of actively and explicitly engaging with hypothesizing role, challenging and refining principles and hypotheses from other sciences. We will devote a lot of our attention to this role of literature in chapters four and seven.

What is my position? What I have tried to show so far is that I accept the plurality view of the cognitive value of literature. In terms of *what* we learn from literature, this stands for the idea that literature gives us knowledge of the external world in the sense that Gibson specifies it when discussing direct humanism. But I also accept the importance of those cognitive achievements that go under the name of indirect humanism. According to my position, it is important to recognize this plurality. The failure to do so leads toward unjustifiably oversimplified and poor view of literature. As I will show in the next chapter, many of the anti-cognitivist’s arguments against cognitive value of literature stem from the failure to recognize this.

Graham showed us some further distinctions, mostly in terminology (“exploring aspects of experience”, “providing visual images”, “broadening horizons”, “imagining possibilities”,

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<sup>58</sup> Person 2007, p. 73. This is but one among many examples of how Hawthorne’s literature illustrates various psychological, ethical, religious, etc, principles operant within community and the way they influence individuals and their lives. Dimmesdale is in that respect illustrative of what Hawthorne condemns as Puritan hypocrisy, evil, insensitivity and unfairness.

“exploring and elaborating human ideals”) and most of these fit under the affirmative approach of the permissive strand. With Novitz and Davies we saw how all of these achievements can be nicely departmentalized into four neat compartments. The three varieties of affirmative approach explored further the various ways in which cognitive potentialities of literature can be mobilized.

The only question left unexplored is the worry raised regarding the dualist position and the basis for dividing literary way of delivering knowledge from scientific way. I have already said that it is wrong to think of literary knowledge as different in kind from historical, biological, scientific or philosophical knowledge. First, there is no special domain of enquiry that only literature, but not other sciences and disciplines have access to<sup>59</sup> (so there is no special knowledge in the sense Stolnitz claims there should be, as we’ll see in the next chapter) and second, many things we learn from literature have to do precisely with science, philosophy, history etc. However, Gibson is right in claiming that literature is *sui generis* practice. What we are mostly concerned with here are the various ways in which literature influences our cognitive economy and epistemic agency and in order to explain that we have to invoke the differences between literature and other disciplines. One of these differences has to do with the fact that a big part of cognitive deliverances of literature cannot be specified in propositional way.

Is my approach too permissive? I don’t think it is, although the worry seems plausible. But as I’ve already stated, my intuition is that cognitive dimension of literary works, particularly of good (as opposed to light) literary works is deep, rich and convoluted; and it cannot be clearly divided into one or two categories. This partly explains the everlasting dilemma over the nature of literary knowledge: is it propositional or not. Certainly there is propositional knowledge available to us from literature, but that is not the only cognitive benefit we get. This non propositional bit, even if it cannot be captured in any clear way, is still cognitively rich and results in various substantial cognitive achievements which are recognized as

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<sup>59</sup> Though Philip Kitcher (following E. Bloch) makes an interesting point in claiming that literature explores those issues sciences are not yet ready to grasp or deal with. One genre in which this is clearly visible is science fiction; many of the themes and story lines pursued by science fiction authors were 'ahead of the time' (think of transplantation of body parts from *Frankenstein*).

epistemically important. The failure to acknowledge and to account for this plurality often results in inadequate accounts of literary cognitivism.

What about *how* we learn from literary fiction? The epistemology of literature should also explain the mechanism(s) that explains how readers acquire knowledge from literature. I will now turn to this.

### **3.3. How do people learn from literature?**

From the epistemic point of view, the question how we learn from literature is posed in a form of a paradox: if literary work is fictional, how can it be used as a source of knowledge about the real world?<sup>60</sup> There are two most influential ways in which philosophers explain the mechanism behind learning from literature. The first one involves relying on the imagination, the second one involves drawing the analogy with thought experiments.

#### **3.3.1. Literature and imagination**

To claim that something is the product of imagination is very often taken to mean that it is not true and that it does not aim to convey truth. Just the opposite, imagination (like fiction) is often contrasted to truth and knowledge and the two are found to be contradictions. But such a view is slowly being abandoned today. The role and importance of imagination for any kind of cognitive work is widely recognized today, as well as the importance of imagination for successful socialization with others.<sup>61</sup>

Given that literature was often equated with imaginative writing and taken to be the product of imagination, not enquiry (like science), literary cognitivists face the tasks of having to show that not all literature is imaginative and therefore false<sup>62</sup>, which I will tackle in the sixth chapter. But on a more general level, the challenge is to show that imagination in fact contributes to and is important for our cognitive functioning, and it is here that art and

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<sup>60</sup> Swirski 2007, Dorhn 2009, Davies 2010. This is one of the main questions that contributors to Gibson, Huemer and Pocci (2007) try to answer.

<sup>61</sup> Tamar Gendler (2011) provides a nice overview of varieties of imagination and various roles imagination is fulfilling in cognitive and emotional functioning of people.

<sup>62</sup> Roger Scruton defends one such account, see his 1974.



literature are often seen as particularly helpful<sup>63</sup>. In what follows, I will present Berys Gaut's account of how imagination is said to contribute to learning from literature.

Berys Gaut offered a very detailed account of how learning from literature is possible. First of all, Gaut argues, apart from traditional epistemological sources of knowledge (perception, reason, introspection, memory, testimony) we should recognize imagination as a source of knowledge. Imagining certain circumstances, whereby we do not commit ourselves to the truth or existence of the things we imagine, we can learn a lot about ourselves and other people<sup>64</sup>. In order however for this learning to take place, imagination has to be 'constrained' first and foremost by the aim of the imagining. So if S wants to see how she'd feel in a particular situation, she has to take into consideration and imagine only things that are true about herself and situation – imagination, that is, has to be governed by the relevant evidence. Otherwise, what S does is not imagining but fantasizing and any conclusions she reaches will not be valid<sup>65</sup>.

The reason why literature is important for imagination is that it is particularly powerful in guiding our imagination towards various scenarios we ourselves didn't think of. Another reason is the fact that literature and imagination can both be employed to learn something about the world. According to Gaut, imagination and literature both can aim to discover how things are in the world. In commenting *Madam Bovary*, he says:

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<sup>63</sup> For a very detailed and interesting accounts of imagination and aesthetics see Scruton 1974, Kieran & Mcleaver Lopes (eds.) 2003, Nichols (ed.) 2006, Stock 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Here is Gaut: "I can correctly determine that I ought to become a philosopher, not a medical doctor, by imagining both careers, and seeing how I imaginatively fare in them; I can learn something about how courageous I am by imagining myself being tortured and contemplating how I react; I can learn what it is like to be a bereaved woman whose husband has died after sixty years of marriage by imagining myself in her position; I can mediate on whether there ought to be free universal healthcare by imagining myself to be poor and ill in a society without such a system, and seeing whether I can endorse what would happen to me. Knowledge about what one should choose, self-knowledge, knowledge about others and knowledge about what is morally right are all, it seems, achievable by imagination" (Gaut 2007, p. 145).

<sup>65</sup> Such disciplined imagination is not as reliable as actual experience, but, as Gaut warns us, it is also 'less costly' and risk free than actual experience. Gaut however warns us not to take this "epistemic authority of experience over imagination" too seriously, in some cases we can't have the experience (S can't be a doctor and a philosopher at the same time and can professionally train for only one of these) and the only way to reach knowledge is to rely on imagination (see Gaut 2007, particularly p. 156).

Emma shares the goal of a truthful exploration of human psychology and social relationships and unlike the Fleming novels, eschews the pursuit of fantasy – is indeed about the destruction of Emma’s fantasy about her having an insight into her own and others’ romantic needs. Literature, like imagination, can have the goal of learning about the world and in such cases shares the normative disciplines on imagination that promote successful pursuit of that goal (Gaut 2007, p. 153).

### **3.3.2. The analogy with thought experiments**

One of the first to draw the analogy between literary works and thought experiments was Noel Carroll. He saw the analogy as a good way to evade the problem of fictionality that is often said to be a crucial reason for doubting the literary cognitivist’s project. Given the fictive dimension of literary works, they are not epistemically reliable sources of knowledge (and/or other cognitively valuable states) and therefore literary works should not be trusted. Literature lacks justification for the claims it puts forward, in the sense that it gives no evidence for them and no arguments that reveal the truths of what we read. So at best, even if what we read is true, readers have no reasons to accept it as true (without being epistemically blameworthy). Carroll’s response is the following:

philosophy employs gamut of techniques to produce knowledge and learning that are analogous to those found in literature. What I have in mind here specifically are thought experiments, examples and counterexamples that are often narrative and generally fictional in nature. (...) Thus, if these strategies are acceptable forms of knowledge production in philosophy and if literature contains comparable structures, then if philosophy conducted by means of thought experiments is an adequate source of knowledge and education, then so should literature be (Carroll 2002, p. 7).

What Carroll proposes is to explain the cognitive benefits of literary fiction by invoking the similarities that exist in the way thought experiments are designed and the way an author creates a fictional world. The idea is, if TEs can – despite being made up and fictional and removed from the real world – generate knowledge (and other cognitively valuable states, as we will see shortly), then so can literature. In both cases we have an author creating a kind of a counterfactual situation which is not describing the circumstances in the real world, the attitude of the creator of this world is not to tell the truth about what he describes (but also not to deceive) but to trigger some kind of response (usually intuitions regarding the outcome of described situation) in his audience. Through engaging with the content of described TE the audience reaches some new knowledge or conclusions regarding the problem that was originally posed. Additional worries aside (such as the question of the level of details that need to be present in TE), the idea is that literary fiction can have the some impact on the readers.

More recently, this analogy has been defended by David Davies and Peter Swirski, among others<sup>66</sup>. They both see the analogy as the way out of the fictionality problem, but remain cautious as to its scope. For Swirski, the analogy breaks down in the cases of history novels, which “transmit knowledge of history in the same manner that historians transmit it” (Swirski 2007, p. 4).

Davies, on the other hand, defends the analogy not in respect to various literary genres, but in respect to the kinds of knowledge we get from literature. Given his classification (presented in the previous chapter), Davies claims that the analogy with thought experiments can only explain understanding of general principles (moral, metaphysical, psychological) and categorial understanding and the ways of categorizing our experience of the world. Davies analyses various ways in which the functioning of thought experiments is explained, accepting the so called moderate inflationist response:

The suggestion then, is that the mental models through which readers comprehend fictional narratives also provide, through their mobilization of tacit or unarticulated knowledge of the world, a means of testing those claims to knowledge of the actual world that theorists have located in fictional narratives, and thereby validate the idea that fiction can be a genuine source of knowledge of the world.<sup>67</sup>

Are these two accounts helpful in explaining how we learn from literary fiction? In some cases and for certain things they are. The importance of imagination has been repeatedly emphasized, particularly for those cognitive achievements that fall under indirect humanism. In order for one to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of ‘crime and punishment’ that Dostoevsky is employing, one has to imaginatively get involved into Raskolnikov’s state of mind, analyze his motivations, chain of reasoning that lead him to commit a crime etc. Imagination and imaginative involvement are an important aspect of the reading experience in that readers have to imagine what they are reading in order to be able to interpret the work and make sense out of it.

However, I don’t think that imagination is the mechanism that explains how learning from literary fiction is possible. First of all, despite Gaut’s claims, imagination is not a source of knowledge, only a capacity that is helpful for various cognitive processes people employ in

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<sup>66</sup> See Davies 2007a, 2007b, 2010a, 2010b, and Swirski 2007. Carroll 2002, Elgin 2007 and Dorhn 2009 are also defending the analogy.

<sup>67</sup> See Davies 2007b, 2010a for his analysis of the various accounts of thought experiments.

order to get to knowledge. Second, even if imagination is important for cognitive achievements pertaining under indirect humanism, many literary works (that contribute to those same achievements) do not ask readers to imagine the content they are presenting, but to accept it as true. Imaginative involvement with literary works is important, but imagination is not the basic underlying mechanism that explains how learning from fiction is possible.

The analogy with thought experiments will also not get us too far. I have argued elsewhere that a care must be taken in applying the analogy: Davies is right when he claims that not all cognitive benefits can be explained by the analogy, and Swirski is right in claiming that not all literary genres function as thought experiments<sup>68</sup>. My claim is that we don't need the analogy for literary genres such as realism. First of all, the motivation of realist writers was to present real world and all that this world encompasses. This motivation is not the guiding principle in construction of thought experiments. Davies defines (scientific) thought experiment as taking the

form of short narratives in which various experimental procedures are described. Competent reader understands that these procedures have not been, and usually could not (for some appropriate modality) be, enacted. She is invited, however, to imagine or make believe that these procedures are enacted and to conclude that certain consequences would ensue, where this is taken to bear upon a more general question, which is the topic of the TE (Davies 2010a p. 51).

Because of this definition, I claimed that only works pertaining to science fiction can be read as thought experiments. But even more importantly, my general worry with all the accounts that aim to explain cognitive value of literature by drawing the analogy with thought experiments is that thought experiments are not epistemically recognized source of knowledge, despite their instrumental use. An additional worry in this regard is that the analogy relies on the background knowledge and concepts readers have. Notice however that a lot of our cognitive functioning operates with the knowledge we already have and we do not need to invoke thought experiments to explain how we use it<sup>69</sup>. So any account that explains

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<sup>68</sup> Vidmar (forthcoming in *Philosophical Synthesis*).

<sup>69</sup> This claim however depends on how widely one defines thought experiment. However, if any kind of reasoning that operates with the knowledge we already have is possible only if we conduct thought experiments, then it seems that they lose their distinctive sense in which they can be used for philosophical discussion. My point is, either we keep the definition that Davies employ, where the emphasis is on the procedures that are not enacted, or we lose the distinctive feature of thought experiments which differentiates them from any other counterfactual reasoning.

the cognitive value of literature by relying upon the analogy will ultimately depend on how it defines thought experiments<sup>70</sup>.

So to conclude this part, neither the mechanism of imagination nor the analogy with thought experiments explain all the cognitive potentialities literature has to offer, although they matter to a big extent. What we need is some more fundamental mechanism which is epistemologically recognized source of knowledge. Among these are perception, introspection, reason, memory and testimony, and of all of these, literary work can best be seen as testimony.

So my answer to the question 'how we learn from literature' is to invoke an analogy, namely the one I will call the analogy between fictional and non fictional testimony<sup>71</sup>. There are several ways to ground this analogy and to use it as a basis for the account of fictional testimony:

First, the communicative view of literature, according to which literature is purposeful communication where the author has the intention to convey some linguistic content to the audience<sup>72</sup>.

Second, speech act theory of fiction, according to which fiction is a special kind of speech act in which an author is pretending to be performing a genuine speech act while in fact he is doing no such thing<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> In reference to this, Davies claimed that 'the setting' of the story – whether realistic or science fictional – does not matter for the workings of the principles that the reader is acquiring. I agree with that, but still think we need a better understanding of thought experiment.

<sup>71</sup> I use the term fictional testimony, even if more proper expression would be literary. My reason for this is simple terminology. Within aesthetics we talk about fictional characters, fictional emotions and fictional worlds, even if all of these refer to literature as well as to fiction. So my choice of the term fictional is terminologically motivated.

<sup>72</sup> For an account of this see Carroll 2001, for a refutation Lamarque 2009, ch.4. Lamarque argues that we do not approach a literary work in a same way we approach our fellow speaker in an act of conversation, so it cannot be that the same principles are operative. That may very well be, from the aesthetic point of view. However, given that my perspective here is epistemological, we have to assume that authors have the intention to transfer some kind of communicable content – the very notion of telling a story implies that much and it is enough for my account to work.

<sup>73</sup> For a detailed account of speech act theory see Lamarque and Olsen 1994, Swirski 2010, Walton 1990.

Third, in various degrees, the idea that literary works should be treated as testimony has been invoked (though, to my knowledge never fully elaborated or spelled out in details as I will do here) by Friend (2006), Davies (2010), and Green (2010). The claim is that in cases when the authors write from knowledge or experience, we can treat what they are saying as testimony. Some other authors, such as Elgin (2007) and Young (2001),<sup>74</sup> reject the idea that literary work can be treated as testimony. Robert Eaglestone suggests, in reference to the *Heart of Darkness*, that it be read “not as a novel but an act of testimony” (Eaglestone 2003, p. 161) and supports his claim by referencing various literary critics, all of whom emphasize the fact that the novel is “remarkably faithful to the facts of the Congo in 1890” (Eaglestone 2003, p. 161). Even though Green and Eaglestone come the closest to what will be my claim, my account of literature as testimony is primarily inspired by the work done in the epistemology of literature, by authors such as Robert Audi, Elizabeth Fricker, Jennifer Lackey and C. A. J. Coady. By combining the elements from the theories from these authors, I develop an account of fictional testimony<sup>75</sup>.

Why testimony? To begin with, in one way or another, in dealing with literature, whether written or oral, we are told something. Unlike other arts, literature is primarily defined as linguistic unit<sup>76</sup>. And as Jennifer Lackey has shown, in testimony we learn from words, from what we are told, not from what people believe. So treating literature as a special kind of testimony helps solve many of the problems literary anti-cognitivists point to.

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<sup>74</sup> Young allows the possibility that literature can be seen as testimony, however doesn't want to see it as the epistemic mechanism that grounds literature's cognitive value. The reason for that is that such a view would presuppose propositional theory of cognitive value (according to which literary works are cognitively valuable in the lights of informative propositions contained explicitly or implicitly in the work). Young rejects this on the grounds that such propositions cannot be justified only on the account of author's words. However, Young here presupposes the view on testimony according to which testimony (i.e. the act of delivering testimony) counts simultaneously as the evidence for the claim. Such a view (defended by Coady) was, as I will show in the fifth chapter, successfully refuted by Jennifer Lackey. Delivering testimony is not equal to providing the evidence in favor of that testimony. That means – as I will show in the remaining chapters – that the fact that literary work can be seen as testimony does not mean that it can also be seen as evidence for the claims it delivers. Anti-cognitivists claim this is precisely the problem with literature (i.e. it offers no evidence for its claims), but according to the dominant views on testimony, neither the testimonial scientific report counts as evidence, at least not if the receiver of the testimony does not have additional reasons to take the testifier as reliable and sincere. Prijić-Samaržija has written extensively on this (see her 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2011). We will come back to these arguments in chapter five.

<sup>75</sup> I developed this analogy in Vidmar and Baccarini 2010, Vidmar 2010, Prijić-Samaržija and Vidmar 2012, Vidmar 2012.

<sup>76</sup> For this dual nature of literature, as linguist unit and aesthetic creation, see Lamarque 2009.

What are the advantages of my account? To begin with, it helps us evade the problem of aesthetic thesis as well as the whole fuss over propositional and non propositional knowledge, though obviously in order to show this, I also have to show contribution made by testimony to cognitive achievements which are not completely specified in terms of propositional knowledge. I will turn to this in chapter five.

Next, analogy with testimony helps us evade some of the most often raised objections to cognitive value of art coming from Plato and Stolnitz. As I will show in the next chapter, one of the most famous attacks on mimetic art, Plato's dialogue *Ion*, can be read as a discussion in the epistemology of testimony, concerning the reliability of the informant and what I call epistemic inferiority of a reader. My claim is that approaching literary work as a testimony helps us refute all of Plato's arguments.

Finally, treating literary work as a testimony can explain some of the features of literary works that are usually seen as counting against the claim that literature provides us with knowledge and truth about the external world. One such feature are the mistakes contained in various works. Another such feature is the so called problem of contradiction. All of these will be extensively explained in the sixth chapter.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter I offered an account of the various attempts to provide epistemological justification for cognitive value of literature, i.e. to explain how literature can be cognitively valuable. Various positions have been developed, as nicely captured by Swirski's map. However, it seems that their crucial mistake is in not recognizing the plurality of cognitive values attainable within single work. *The Scarlet Letter* offers various propositions about Puritanism and their ideology – these are available in propositional terms and readers can pick them up in the same way they pick up knowledge-delivering propositions in other domains. In that sense, we do not need the analogy with thought experiments, or the imagination, nor some *sui generis* account of truth. However, *The Scarlet Letter* also embodies the psychological principle of mob behaviour and it shows how truth is socially constructed and resistant to facts. In that sense, readers are given visual image which enables them to understand this. To the extent that it deals with themes of love, adultery, betrayal and responsibility, the novel can inspire one to reflect on these concepts and develop a more encompassing understanding of what is involved in them. Obviously, the knowledge that

readers bring to the work matters for this. My account of literary cognitivism recognizes all of these various benefits and does not seek to reduce them to just one, as for example Walsh does in insisting on the notion of authentic experience.

When it comes to ‘how’ we learn from literature, in this chapter I outlined the analogy with testimony. My claim is that testimony, as an epistemologically recognized source of knowledge, has the most potential – more than invocation of imagination and thought experiments – to explain how all of these benefits are available in literature. It is through the testimony that we come to learn about the world around us – and, as Gibson’s direct humanism shows us, this is the knowledge that literature imparts. In the fifth chapter I will show how testimony of others can also contribute to the development of our cognitive economy, which will help us ground the analogy in reference to indirect humanism as well.



## 4. LITERARY ANTI-COGNITIVISM

Given the way literary cognitivism was defined (as the conjunction of epistemic and aesthetic thesis), literary anti-cognitivism is, at the most basic level, the rejection of one of these claims. Most of the arguments put forward by anti-cognitivists aim to challenge the aesthetic claim, and to show that cognitive dimension (no matter how we account for it) does not contribute to or determine the overall artistic/aesthetic value of a work. Given however that our research here is epistemological, we will mostly be concerned with those arguments that purport to show that our initial intuition (literature is cognitively valuable in the sense specified by direct and indirect humanism) is wrong and that we cannot and should not evaluate literature through epistemic lenses. This will partly include the negativist approach defined by Swirski (namely, Plato), but also some other varieties that literary anti-cognitivism has taken, particularly in contemporary literary aesthetics.

This chapter is structured in the following way: first, I will briefly present the main ideas and the main representatives of anti-cognitivism, in order to give an overall framework within which anti-cognitivists work. Then I will dedicate one part to discussing Plato, who is to this day the most fervent anti-cognitivist. Finally, I will present the contemporary anti-cognitivist theories. Along the way, some of the anti-cognitivist arguments will be answered immediately, given that the presentation of cognitivism so far already gives us, I claim, enough munitions to fight back. However, there is a set of arguments which cannot be answered by the arguments that literary cognitivists have at their disposal so far. My claim, and the main thesis of this dissertation, is that in order to answer to this set of arguments we need to invoke the analogy with testimony. In the next chapter, I will turn to explaining this analogy and then, in chapters six and seven will go back to further supporting the case for literary cognitivism by analysing examples from literary practice which can, supported by the analogy with testimony, show that Plato and other anti-cognitivist's challenges can be met.

Generally speaking, there are four main anti-cognitivists: Plato, Jerome Stolnitz, Stein Haugom Olsen and Peter Lamarque. Care however must be taken toward Lamarque and Olsen. The arguments they advance against literary cognitivism are not supposed to show that general intuition about cognitive value of literature is mistaken, just that it is misplaced, so to speak. As the quotations from the second chapter make it clear, they do no object to the fact

that literature is cognitively valuable in the sense that we can learn from it (as well as in the sense indirect humanist wants to show), their ‘no truth’ stand rejects the idea that this cognitive dimension should be taken into consideration when talking about literature *as a form of art*. Appreciation of a literary artwork should not take into consideration the truth conveyed by the work or any other cognitive potentialities of literature. In that sense they do not reject epistemic claim, just the aesthetic one. The reason however for inserting them into the anti-cognitivist camp has more to do with the fact that at least some of the arguments they put forward in accounting for their ‘no-truth’ theory can pose a threat to literary cognitivism.

On the other hand, Plato and Stolnitz have developed more serious arguments against cognitive potentialities of literature (and art generally). Their arguments aim to show that literature cannot in any way be cognitively valuable.

#### **4.1. Intuition behind literary anti-cognitivism**

Most of the arguments directed against literary cognitivism (particularly epistemic claim) stem from comparison between literature and science, that is, informative discourses or, as sometimes stated, discourses that aim at promoting knowledge, such as science and philosophy. There are several arguments that are put forward with the aim of showing the inadequacy of literature as cognitively valuable discourse. For the simplicity sake, we will briefly present them here before proceeding to the more detailed accounts of how they are developed in anti-cognitivist theories.

##### *(i) the nature of literature*

Arguments ‘from the nature of literature’ insist on the claim that – putting aside various attempts to define literature, as well as the question of authorial intentions – literature is not written with the aim of informing the audience about the great truths about the world. Literature is written with the aim of pursuing aesthetic aims and triggering aesthetic experience and whatever cognitive elements it may contain, they are not in any relevant sense constitutive of literature and should not (or need not) matter when it comes to evaluation of literature. This kind of argument is further developed by Lamarque and Olsen.

An additional push to this line of argumentation comes from considering the nature of literary texts and propositions themselves. If literary works should reveal something about the world, then the sentences in the work should refer to those things in the world they are supposed to be describing. But despite some factual descriptions which literary works may contain,

sentences in the novel do not refer to anything in the outside world. So how can we learn from literature, given its fictional dimension?

Finally, literary works, even if indeed put forward some kind of truth or other cognitive benefits, do not support that truth with necessary justification. Literary works do not argue for the claims they put forward, do not give evidence that supports those claims and do not provide any kind of justification for those claims. This line of argumentation was pressed by Stolnitz. On a more benevolent reading, the claim is that, because of the lack of justification and evidence, what we get out of literature are hypotheses about the world, not knowledge<sup>77</sup>.

*(ii) the nature of literary practice*

Some anti-cognitivist arguments can be developed along the lines of comparing not individual literary works with other kinds of works such as scientific ones, but by comparing the nature of literary practice generally with the nature of other knowledge-oriented practices. Stolnitz, Lamarque and Olsen all insist on this with the aim of showing that evaluation of literature along its cognitive dimension is not part of literary practice, nor does this practice have at its disposal appropriate means to conduct such an evaluation.

## **4.2. Plato**

The anti-cognitivist or the skeptical story about cognitive value of literature begins with Plato (although even some earlier philosophers, such as Protagoras, are said to had been arguing against cognitive value of poetry), who is to this day considered as the most forceful opponent of the aesthetic and literary cognitivism<sup>78</sup>. With the exception of Stephen Halliwell philosophers generally agree that Plato's view about art (and literature) is a negative one<sup>79</sup>, which comprises altogether three groups of arguments directed against art: ethical, epistemological and psychological. Beginning with Aristotle, philosophers have been

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<sup>77</sup> Up till now we have seen several times how the idea that literature provides hypotheses about the world is developed. On one view, such as the one defended by Novitz, these hypotheses can become part of the knowledge once the reader tests them. On Stolnitz's view however, hypotheses themselves are not cognitively valuable in any relevant manner and therefore cannot contribute to reader's knowledge.

<sup>78</sup> Plato's attack is directed at mimetic art, and his arguments are sometimes expressed against painters, sometimes against poets. Given however that he often argues against the epistemic reliability of poets, most of his arguments can be seen as targeted against literary cognitivism.

<sup>79</sup> See Halliwell 2002, Delija Trešćec 2005, Swirski 2007, Rosen 2005, Peter Lamarque 2009, Susan Stewart 2009, Christopher Janaway 2006.

concerned with showing that Plato's critique is too harsh and ungrounded, and that it neglects the positive contribution that art makes.<sup>80</sup>

Before analysing in more details Plato's dialogues in which he develops his anti-cognitivist position, let us explain the main ideas behind each of these groups. In order to understand them, we first have to explain what the accepted view of art was in Plato's times.

#### *Creation of art: mimesis and imitation*

According to the mimetic theory of art, which was dominant in Plato's time, art was seen as a 'mirror' that reflects or imitates reality<sup>81</sup>. Applied to literature, the theory states that

imitative poetry imitates human beings acting voluntarily or under compulsion, who believe that, as a result of these actions, they are doing either well or badly and who experience either pleasure or pain in all this. (Plato, *The Republic*, 603c)

Stated like this it might seem that art, because it reflects or imitates reality, is an excellent guide to that reality and that dealing with art can reveal that reality to the audience. According to such a view, which was 'the accepted view', artists were, epistemically speaking, the best possible educators; they had knowledge of reality, of human nature and behaviour and of gods. That was the reason why poetry (including myths, epic, lyric and tragedies) was occupying the most important role in education of the young. Plato however argues against such a view, and wants to establish philosophy as cognitively the most important discipline, with philosophers performing not only the role of educators but of political rulers as well<sup>82</sup>. In

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<sup>80</sup> Aristotle expresses such views in his *Poetics*. For some of the contemporary critics of this aspect of Plato's theory, see Cascardi 2010, Dorter 1990, Rosen 2005.

<sup>81</sup> This is a simplified account of mimetic theory of art. The arguments that Plato develops against mimetic theories of art are above all challenging for the claim that art (particularly literature) is – or can be – epistemically reliable, and, as the analysis will show, this challenge is equally detrimental for direct and indirect humanism. It should be noted however, that some critics have expressed doubts regarding the way Plato criticizes mimetic theories. Rosen claims that in his criticism, Plato ignores the differences between mimesis involved in poetry and mimesis involved in paintings and that his arguments are not valid in reference to both of this (see Rosen pp. 363-4).

<sup>82</sup> This poets vs. philosophers is often referred to as the ancient quarrel, which is a phrase Plato uses in the book 10 of the *Republic*. Susan Stewart is more sceptical regarding the existence of this quarrel: "Even so, perhaps this quarrel is not as ancient as Plato contends, for philosophy was in many ways being invented by Plato at that moment; he was the first to mention such a quarrel as a traditional one, and he struggled to define his intellectual enterprise against the cultural authority of poets and dramatists" (Stewart, 2009, p. 47). Christopher Janaway expresses similar view: "Plato's endeavour is to establish philosophy in opposition to the prevailing culture that prizes the arts uncritically or adopts certain ill-thought-out theoretical views concerning their value. It is a culture of sophists, rhetoricians, artistic performers, and connoisseurs who advocate the educational value of poetry, but who lack a genuine conception of knowledge, a proper understanding of beauty, and any grasp on the distinction

order to do that, he needed to show that poets cannot meet the highest standards demanded of wise, knowledgeable educators<sup>83</sup>. One way in which he tried to do that was to challenge the value of mimetic art itself.

Another aspect of mimetic theory important for Plato is the fact that mimesis includes producing not a real thing, but an image of something. Janaway explains it in the following way:

mimesis occurs when someone makes an image of the way some kind of things appears, rather than making a real thing. A painting of a bed is mimesis in that what is made is not a real bed, but an image of a bed, and one which attempts to show a way in which a bed might happen to appear (Janaway, 2006, p. 392).

Additional problem for artistic creation is revealed when we try to accommodate mimesis into Plato's metaphysical theory of Forms. An actual bed is an image of the form, and it is already removed from the truth in that it can never capture the essence of the ideal bed. Given that artistic creation is modelled upon the bed made by the craftsman, not by the Form of the bed itself, it is thrice removed from the truth<sup>84</sup>. This in itself wouldn't be a problem, were it not for the fact that artists deliberately present their creations as 'the real thing', thus deceiving the audience that what they are creating with knowledge. It is this aspect that is underlying Plato's criticism. Let us now see in what way the concept of mimesis is problematic along epistemological, ethical and psychological lines.

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between what is genuinely good and beneficial and what is fine because it brings pleasure. Without the rigour of philosophical thinking, this culture lacks the critical distance required to assess the true value of the arts." (Janaway, 2006, p. 388).

<sup>83</sup> Rosen claims that Plato is all along well aware that philosophy isn't up to the task he demands of it and that because of this reason he ridicules poetry and poets without giving a fair due to the practice of poetry itself. He also claims that at least some of his arguments can be turned against philosophers, rendering thus philosophy equally incapable of performing the tasks he demands of it, the tasks he all along claims poetry cannot successfully do. I will not go into details here, given that our main concern is Plato's anti-cognitivist stand, not the consequences of such a stand for Plato's overall philosophy, as seems to be the case with Rosen. For Rosen's criticism, see his 2005.

<sup>84</sup> This is one of the most obscure parts of Plato's theory. Janaway analyzes this part and identifies several issues that are worrisome in the overall Plato's theory. In the *Republic*, "Plato has a god bring Forms into existence, though elsewhere they exist eternally and no one creates them. Forms are often thought to be paradigms existing in nature, which perhaps makes it puzzling how there could be Forms of man-made objects such as a bed (as opposed to the Forms of Justice, Beauty, Largeness, Equality, and suchlike, mentioned in other passages). Finally, the Forms in the main body of the Republic provide the objects of knowledge for philosophers, which appears to be a different role from that of providing patterns from which craftsmen can construct objects like beds" (Janaway, 2006, p. 392). Rosen is even more critical of the way Plato's theories of Forms supports his project of establishing philosophers as the rulers and educators of a perfect state.

*Epistemological criticism of art: epistemic reliability of the poet, knowledge and deceit*

From the point of view of this thesis, the most devastating arguments against cognitive value of art are found in those parts of Plato's dialogues which are directed against epistemic credibility of poets and tragedians. These vary, from the charges developed in *Ion* and *Apologia*, according to which poets write not from knowledge but from inspiration and without any true understanding of what they say, to those which are directed against the epistemic value of mimetic art itself. As Plato argues, poets imitate not things themselves but appearances of those things and appearances can never reveal the real truth, that is, show how things really are. This is the view advocated for in the book ten of *The Republic*, which we'll discuss shortly.

*Ethical criticism of art: Plato's paternalistic arguments and censorship*

The reason Plato takes up the laborious task of evaluating art, particularly poetry and tragedy, is the fact that poets and tragedians were considered to be the wisest among people, educators of the youth and those who 'knew' how to live. As he puts it in *The Republic*,

We hear some people say that poets know all crafts, all human affairs concerned with virtue and vice, and all about gods as well. They say that if a good poet produces fine poetry, he must have knowledge of the things he writes about, or else he wouldn't be able to produce it at all. (Plato, *The Republic*, 598,e)

Given that education of the young, which starts with poetry and music, is for Plato the most important for the stability and well being of individuals and the state<sup>85</sup>, a special care must be taken to ensure that educators are indeed knowledgeable and competent. A special part of this education concerns the influence he claims poetry and tragedy have on the individual – as I will argue later, influence that can best be understood along the lines of indirect humanism. Because Plato sees poetry as extremely influential and in most cases highly corruptive, he argues for the very strict rules (or laws) that poets should follow in composing their verse. In this way, not only does he establish the first theory of censorship in the history, but also calls for a very strict epistemic paternalism regarding the content and style of writing<sup>86</sup>.

*Psychological criticism: the importance of not engaging with the art*

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<sup>85</sup> See his arguments in *The Republic*, book 2,376e-377c.

<sup>86</sup> Rosen (2005, ch.13) claimed that "The cognitive criticism of poetry thus seems much weaker than the moral criticism" given that "The poet can exhibit the full variety of the monster that is the human soul" (p.356)

As Plato sees it, “the most serious charge against imitation” is that “it is able to corrupt even decent people” (*The Republic*, 605,c). The reasons for this are again complex and have to do with the way Plato conceives of the human soul and the overall human cognitive functioning, as well as the fact that poetry was generally considered to be pleasing and that people by nature enjoy imitation<sup>87</sup>. The danger of this for morality (moral education and moral behaviour) stems from the fact that “The traditional poets have produced a picture of the gods that is contrary to sound moral views, and they also portray wicked human beings in a manner so attractive as to make us sympathize with them” (Rosen 2005, p.354).

Psychological impact of poetry is also dangerous along the epistemic lines. First, due to its “pleasing qualities” and the fact that people by nature enjoy imitation, it is hard for people to realize that poets are not in fact knowledgeable. Because of that, they will easily believe everything that poets say and they might start behaving in the way described by the poets, particularly when it comes to imitating those actions and people who should not be imitated because they are not ‘proper’. For Plato, this means they are weak, irrational, prone to crying, lamenting, not being self-composed, capable of publically expressing their emotions etc. Given that this kind of people could easily succumb to the imitative poetry, it is very important that the content and style be carefully scrutinized so as to avoid inappropriate things. This is Plato’s main argument in favour of censorship.

Second, imitative poetry influences those parts of humans which are completely opposite to reason. This means that “imitation really consorts with a part of us that is far from reason, and the result of their being friends and companions is neither sound nor true” (*The Republic*, 603,c)<sup>88</sup>. This is why Plato sees imitative art as particularly dangerous: it is produced by those who do not have knowledge but only deceive the audience, it plays upon those parts of the soul which are most easily fooled into believing what is not, it can easily trigger people to behave in inappropriate manner, it causes emotions. Because of these aspects of art’s

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<sup>87</sup> Both, Plato and Aristotle seems to agree on this point.

<sup>88</sup> Janaway argues that it is because of this aspect of artistic influence (its capacity to move the irrational parts of human beings) that poetry should be banned from the perfect state. It is not enough to eliminate arts and poetry from education in order to protect children, who because of their youth might seem too weak to resist the charms of poetry; grownups also need protection because poetry stirs emotions and touches irrational parts of human souls (see Janaway, 2006, p. 391).

psychological influence on humans, which comprise epistemological, ontological and ethical worries raised before, Plato banishes art from the perfect state<sup>89</sup>. The final verdict on the value of art issued by Plato states that “imitation is an inferior thing that consorts with another inferior thing to produce an inferior offspring” (*The Republic*, 603, b).

The crucial psychological mechanism operative in the experience of art (whether on the part of a poet or an audience) is what Plato calls impersonation. The idea is that a poet impersonates other characters<sup>90</sup> and this has an impact on the audience in that it can make them more prone to imitating others. This is further dangerous along two lines: in the ethical domain, it can lead to impersonation of improper (immoral and emotional) people. In the political domain, it can lead to the breaching of the so called principle of social specialization, according to which one person should only perform one job and have specialities necessary for doing that well<sup>91</sup>. Plato repeatedly insists that impersonating many other people, their virtues and vices, can be detrimental for the moral education of the youth<sup>92</sup>.

This is, in a nutshell, how Plato’s aesthetic anti-cognitivism is stated. Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis, let us summarize the main problems, as these are found in Plato’s dialogues:

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<sup>89</sup> The exception being hymns to gods and dithyrambs. Rosen (2005, ch.13) claimed that Plato’s arguments are only directed against mimetic poetry, not against narrative poetry, which is allowed into the *Republic* as long as it confronts to his strict paternalistic rules. He also claims that this aspect of Plato’s theory (i.e. the allowance of ‘suitable poetry’) ultimately shows “that even the rule of philosophers cannot make do entirely without poetry” (p.353).

<sup>90</sup> This is the so called imitation in which the poet speaks as if he is someone else, as opposed to the imitation in which he speaks as himself (see book 3 of the *Republic*).

<sup>91</sup> This principle is developed in Book 2 of *The Republic*. See Halliwell (2002, p. 51) who uses the term ‘social specialization’, and Rosen who talks about „political principle of one man, one job” (2005, p. 357). Plato appeals to this principle again in *Ion*, in order to show that poets cannot have the relevant knowledge of the things they write about because, given that they are poets and have the knowledge of poetry, they cannot in addition to that have another set of expertise (say about medicine) that would enable them to write knowledgeably about medicine.

<sup>92</sup> “Then, if we’re to preserve our first argument, that our guardians must be kept away from all other crafts so as to be craftsmen of the city’s freedom, and be exclusively that, and do nothing at all except what contributes to it, they must neither do not imitate anything else. If they do imitate, they must imitate from childhood what is appropriate for them, namely, people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free, and their actions. They mustn’t be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions, lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality” (*The Republic*, 3, 395,c).



	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Ethics</b>	<b>Psychology</b>
<b>Ion</b>	The problem of the epistemic reliability of the poet; the problem of the epistemic inferiority of the audience; the problem of inspiration		
<b>Apologia</b>	The problem of unknowledgeable poets who lack understanding of what they are saying		
<b>The Republic book 2</b>	The problem of the imitative poetry which presents only the appearance of things	The importance of the censorship of the form and content of imitative art	The problem of the psychological impact of art: art can trigger people to imitate vicious, emotional and in other ways inappropriate people
<b>The Republic book 3</b>			
<b>The Republic book 10</b>	The problem of the imitative poetry which presents only the appearance of things, artists who pretend to be knowledgeable thus deceiving the audience		The problem of the psychological impact of art: art influences the irrational part of the soul and stirs emotions

#### 4.2.1. The Republic

In order to understand Plato's criticism of literature, we need to first take into consideration the role that poetry, epic and tragedy occupied in ancient Greece<sup>93</sup>. We already saw that according to the generally accepted view, poets had knowledge about gods, reality, morality and human circumstances. Poetry was seen as a source of knowledge, poets as the knowledgeable ones and therefore poetry was seen as a form of education. In that sense, it is

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<sup>93</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, we can ignore the difference between these three literary forms, of which tragedy was considered the most perfect art form. What is important is that all three were seen as mimetic poetry, meaning they were imitating humans. See Nagy 2009, Stewart 2009, Bernstein 2009 and Gould 2009 for the critical analysis of epic, lyric, tragedy and comedy.

often said that in ancient times, poetry was performing the role that sciences are performing today; namely the role of educating the young, not only about the world but also about morality.

The reason why poets were given such an important role was the belief that they were inspired directly by gods and Muses themselves and that was seen as conferring justification on their poems. We will see later on how Plato objects to such a view. Another reason for valuing poetry as an epistemic source of knowledge is the fact that poetry was considered to consist of true statements about reality; this is the reason why Plato will not only in *The Republic* but also in *Ion*, demand of poets to justify their claims to knowledge, that is, in *Apology*, to prove that they understand what they are saying. For now it is important to note that it is precisely because of this view of poetry – as a true discourse about reality and morality – and its educational role that Plato sets out to analyze poetry in a way he does:<sup>94</sup>

In brief, Socrates treats poetry as constative, declarative discourse – discourse “about” (*peri*) the subjects it deals with; he therefore ostensibly requires, in both the poet and his interpreter, knowledge of these subjects (such as warfare, medicine, and a host of other things) *in their own right*; and he thus develops a position that, if followed through, would yield only one criterion of poetic merit: systematically informative truth. A corollary of this is that Socrates appears to rule out the possibility of any kind of fiction, or even of less-than-strictly-veridical poetic statements (Halliwell, 2002, pp. 40-1.).

Such a view of poetry and its role in the society is important for our purpose here for it shows that we were right all along to accept Gibson’s claim about literature providing us with the window into the world. Even more importantly, I claim, the vehemence of Plato’s criticism of poetry and its role in education can only make sense under the presupposition that indirect humanism (i.e. the impact literature has on our cognitive/emotional economy) is right. We

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<sup>94</sup> It is important to stress this, for otherwise we run the risk of attributing to Plato the etiquette of art/literature hater. That would be wrong though, because in various dialogues Plato praises art, beauty and the skills involved in art production, including the inspiration. Several authors have insisted on the need to separate Plato’s evaluation of art along what I will call the ‘epistemological lines’ (which is what we are concerned with here) and aesthetic lines. Stephen Halliwell is particularly concerned with showing that Plato himself is not at all certain how to view the arts, and this uncertainty is reflected in the way he treats imitative poetry in *The Republic*. N.D. Trešćec is also open towards the attempts to lower down the generally established view of Plato as art hater. Halliwell and Rosen stress the fact that Plato himself uses literary forms and literary style in his own, philosophical writings. Here is Rosen: “Plato was himself a great poet, whose dialogues exhibit a seamless web of dramatic and philosophical intricacy. It is now widely accepted that one cannot understand Plato’s philosophical teaching apart from the most careful consideration of its literary presentation” (p. 353). Rosen is however very critical of Plato’s anti-arts arguments, claiming that Plato deliberately ridicules some of the artistic aspects in order to prove his point.

have already seen that, according to Plato, the crucial mechanism that explains how that can happen is impersonation.

### *Book 2 and 3 of The Republic*

With these preliminary considerations in mind, we can turn our attention to Plato's book 2 and 3 of *The Republic*. It is here that Plato analyses various parts of Homer's writings in order to show that they should not be 'publically stated'. Plato's general view here is overtly paternalistic, and as already said, it is here that the strictest rules of censorship are argued for. As Plato sees it, there is a duty to protect the youth who are sensitive and can easily be manipulated. It is an obligation of the state to provide them with the right kind of education and this implies the need to sanction various kinds of content and style of poetry. Because of the fact that poetry is educative, the youth should be exposed only to highly virtuous characters, because only these characters will inspire them to become virtuous themselves.<sup>95</sup>

In books 2 and 3, Plato discusses some of the writings by Homer and Hesiod that he considers are bad influence for the youth and shouldn't be told<sup>96</sup>. In order to make sure such stories are no longer told, Plato provides us with a list of those which are allowed. Simplifying his account for reasons of space, these are the following: first of all, stories about gods should only be told in such a manner that gods portrayed in them are just, and cause of good things only (2,379a-383c). In book 3, rules are told that bear directly on how people (should or shouldn't) feel and behave; Plato's aim here is to raise brave men, who are not afraid to fight and to die if necessary. He also wants the citizens of his state to be self-composed and not prone to publically expressing their emotions. In order to achieve this, children should be told stories "that will make them least afraid of death" (386a), that praise life in Hades (386b), that

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<sup>95</sup> It is at least tempting at this point to question to what extent Plato would be willing to allow completely false stories as part of education. Janaway raises this issue, see his 2006, p. 390.

<sup>96</sup> See the *Republic*, book 2,377b. Some of the stories that shouldn't be told are the following: "Nor should a young person hear it said that in committing the worst crimes he's doing nothing out of the ordinary, or that if he inflicts every kind of punishment on an unjust father, he's only doing the same as the first and greatest of the gods" (378b), "Indeed, if we want the guardians of our city to think that it's shameful to be easily provoked into hating one another, we mustn't allow *any* stories about gods warring, fighting, or plotting against one another, for they aren't true ... If we're to persuade our people that no citizen has ever hated another and that it's impious to do so, then *that's* what should be told to children from the beginning by old men and women ..." (378c), "We won't allow poets to say that the punished are made wretched and that it was god who make them so. But we will allow them to say that bad people are wretched because they are in need of punishment and that, in paying the penalty, they are benefited by the gods" (380b).

will make people “fear slavery more than death” (387b), that do not contain “lamentations and pitiful speeches” (387c). One of the biggest problems for education are stories in which “many unjust people are happy and many just one wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another’s good but one’s own loss” (392b). Given the danger of imitation, stories should be prohibited which could inspire one to imitate “either a young woman or an older one, or one abusing her husband, quarrelling with gods, or bragging because she thinks herself happy, or one suffering misfortune and possessed by sorrows and lamentations, and even less one who is ill, in love, or in labour” (395e), bad men, cowards, those who ridicule one another, use shameful language, who wrong themselves in any way, who are mad in any way, those connected to craftsmen, those who indulge in sexual or other kinds of pleasurable behaviour, those who laugh, money-lovers, those who use bribery. The reason why all such stories are dangerous is that they seem interesting and alluring and it is easier for the young to be attracted to them than to those which praise virtuous people.

One thing that we can conclude from this is that Plato would obviously trade the truth of what is described (surely it happens that just people are not rewarded, that unjust people get away with their deeds; in that sense the imitations of poetry do not present appearances in a wrong manner<sup>97</sup>) for the moral improvement that he believes art can induce. On several occasions he actively encourages poets to only write about good virtues and good behaviour. As I already said, his arguments here can only make sense if indirect humanism is seen as the correct view on art’s impact on readers’ cognitive economy.

From the perspective however of literary cognitivism, several things need to be discerned. First, one consequence of this reading is that Plato himself doesn’t mind if poetry presents distorted truth – in fact, he actively encourages it – as long as this distortion can benefit moral improvement of the audience. From the standpoint of ethics (and political philosophy, given

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<sup>97</sup> Rosen polemicizes whether there would be unjust people in the Perfect State, claiming: “Since the poets who are permitted to remain in the just city are to be restricted in the content and form of their compositions, we have to assume that the city contains wicked and unjust persons whom the poets, if they were free to speak as they wish, would imitate. At the very least, they would be capable of inventing morally corrupted models, and the attractions of poetry are so much greater than those of the training and education furnished to the guardians that the discipline of the founding laws and customs, and so the morality and justice of the beautiful city, could not be preserved. In other words, poetry would soon counterbalance the rule of desire by spiritedness.” (Rosen 2005, p. 354).

that Plato is to the same extent concerned with individual and with society<sup>98</sup>) that might be reasonable, perhaps even admirable, but it questions the whole conception of Plato's criticism of poetry in the first place. This might be understood though, given that on Plato's views, poetry plays upon our emotional and irrational part, not cognitive and rational. But my claim is that Plato is wrong to claim that. As I will show in the seventh chapter and as it was already hinted at, the more diverse, complicated and nuanced moral conflict, behaviour or dilemma a literary work presents, the more there is for a reader to pick up. Second, we can challenge Plato's notion of impersonation as a mechanism that is necessarily operative in the process of engaging with imitative poetry. As I will argue, there's just no guarantee that readers will pick up one kind of behaviour at the expense of some other, regardless of how forcefully the work encourages or advocates any particular perspective. Third, the dominant view in contemporary literary cognitivism is that, when it comes to literature and moral domain (including behaviour and conduct between people, something which is Plato's prime concern), literature shows us the complexities of moral situation which in turn helps us understand these better<sup>99</sup>. So Plato is wrong when he insists on the need to present morally good and virtuous characters: even if that is all that poetry presents, there's still no guarantee that readers will pick up that kind of behaviour<sup>100</sup>. On the other hand, presenting situations of moral dilemma and even immoral behaviour might help readers develop their moral sensibility which can in turn make them more ethical in their behaviour. So Plato is right to recognize the potentialities of literature (indirect humanism), but he is wrong in providing guidance as to how to achieve them<sup>101</sup>. To the extent that he is concerned with, say, justice

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<sup>98</sup> See Cascardi 2010 for this point.

<sup>99</sup> See 2007, Diamond 2010, John 2010, Baccarini 2010, Baccarini 2014. Nussbaum (1986, 1990) is perhaps the most famous advocator of such a view. We will deal with this in more details in sixth and seventh chapter.

<sup>100</sup> Rosen argues that presentation of such characters would not achieve the purpose that Plato wants it to, but just the opposite: "In general, sin is more interesting than virtue, and suffering stirs us as self-control does not. We would all reject as moral or political propaganda poems and dramas that repeated over and over again the superiority of virtue to vice and prudence to madness" (Rosen 2005, p. 374).

<sup>101</sup> Someone might claim that one consequence of my theory is that it negates the possibility of children developing aggressive behaviour as a result of watching violent movies (and playing violent computer games, at least if Gaut 2010 is right in claiming that video games are one kind of films). Although this is to a large extent an empirical matter, I do not want to claim this. Notice that these kinds of movies show violence and aggression as the main point of the movie, but they rarely offer any ethically important presentation of moral conflict. In other words, violence is in the business of attracting the audience and that is what the audience responds to. In that sense they cannot be seen as carrying out any relevant moral work, even if they might inspire one in the

and fairness, literary accounts which portray unjust and unfair individuals, even gods, can only prove beneficial to viewer's own understanding of these notions. The same goes for his worries regarding the principle of impersonation. Psychological reactions to literature include various responses, only some of which might be seen as impersonation. Most scholars writing on the problem of psychological impact of literature see this impact as a positive one<sup>102</sup>

### *Book 10 of The Republic*

The most pressing epistemological challenge presented in *The Republic* is found in book 10. While in books 2 and 3 Plato's challenge is directed against psychologically dangerous impacts of mimesis which might jeopardize the moral development of citizens and social principle upon which the ideal state is founded, book 10 argues against epistemic authority of literature. In this part, Plato's epistemological criticism is grounded on his views on mimesis presented earlier. First part of the book 10 is dedicated to showing that imitative poetry is thrice removed from the 'the real thing' and is only presenting a thing under some appearance (not as the thing is in itself). An artist 'makes things' by holding a mirror against the nature (The Republic, 10, 596e). However, as Glaucom immediately realizes, by creating things in such a way, one "couldn't make the things themselves as they truly are" (596e). The argument then proceeds with Plato stating the following:

I suppose that the painter too belongs to this class of makers, doesn't he?

Of course.

But I suppose you'll say that he doesn't truly make the things he makes. Yet, in a certain way, the painter does make a bed, doesn't he?

Yes, he makes the appearance of one.

This aspect of appearance is very important for Plato, given that from this argument it follows that the poets are not presenting things (moral order, human nature, god's nature etc) as they

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reflections on the movie. A very recent example is Tarentino's movie *Django Unchained*. Although several aspects of slavery are wonderfully depicted (think of the bond between the character played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who is the master, and Samuel L. Jackson who is a slave. Their relationship portrays slavery as paternalistic relationship grounded on the ethics of care. This ideological portrayal of slavery was typical for southern American literature) the movie as a general does not discuss moral relevance of slavery (even if it inspires it) in the same sense as works by Beecher-Stowe do.

<sup>102</sup> See for example Robinson 2010, Scruton 2010 and particularly Hagberg 2010. Although these authors do not invoke the notion of impersonation, a lot of what they say regarding the psychological impact of literature is compatible with the mechanism of impersonation.

are, but only under some appearance. How worrisome for the literary cognitivist is this? In the terminology of contemporary literary cognitivism, we might say that literary works present only one aspect of situation. Rosen speaks of ‘a perspective’ from which something is presented. He sees this as a positive aspect of art, not as an obstacle to its cognitive value<sup>103</sup>. Many literary cognitivists share this intuition. It is precisely because of the fact that art focuses our attention on viewing things from certain perspectives – perspectives we might not think of ourselves were we not brought to see it in this light by works of art – that we are able to derive some kind of insight from it and learn something new<sup>104</sup>.

Plato’s next move is to show that artists only imitate things. His ontology of things includes god, who makes the original Form (of a bed), a carpenter, who makes the real bed, and an artist, who creates an image of a bed. The problem for the artist is that he imitates not the Form (i.e. the perfect bed), but the real bed which actually exists in the nature. Given however that this bed can only be imitated as it appears from one perspective, the artistic imitation always shows its object differently, even if the object itself doesn’t change (see 598a-b). Then the problem for the cognitive value of such artistic creation is the following:

Then imitation is far removed from the truth, for it touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image. And that, it seems, is why it can produce everything. For example, we say that a painter can paint a cobbler, a carpenter, or any other craftsman, even though he knows nothing about these crafts. Nevertheless, if he is a good painter and displays his painting of a carpenter at a distance, he can deceive children and foolish people into thinking that it is truly a carpenter (The Republic, 10, 598,c)

The claim that imitation ‘touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image’ is deeply rooted into Plato’s theory of Ideas and world of appearances, and this distinction is not something that modern literary cognitivism or aesthetic theories concern themselves with. The fact remains however, many anti-cognitivist’s arguments are directed at challenging the epistemic reliability of the fictionally created world. We will see the full extent of this argument later, but the general idea is that we should be careful in assigning truth value to the fictional description.

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<sup>103</sup> Here is Rosen: “The purpose of a painting, even a portrait of something as humble as bed, is to provide an interpretation or a look at the bed as it appears from a certain perspective. The ‘truth’ of the bed is exhibited (...) in each of the perspectives from which we view it” (Rosen 2005, p. 368).

<sup>104</sup> Matthew Kieran particularly emphasises this aspect of art, as we’ll see in the seventh chapter.

Far more worrying argument is raised by the claim that imitation ‘can produce everything’. It implies that artistic and literary creation is not bound with ‘what is out there, in the real world’. This claim is usually supported by the invocation of imagination and creativity as the main principles of artistic creation; unlike scientific enquiry which has to direct itself toward the real world, artist can distort facts, go beyond what is given in reality without any warning to the audience. Therefore, it should not be taken as epistemically reliable. In the next section, I will tone down this line of argumentation by showing that imagination and creativity do not necessarily imply false presentations. Even in the case of science fiction, which is the most intuitive example of the literary form not confined by ‘what is out there’, it is easy to show that writers cannot go ‘too far’ from reality, or at least not far enough so that fictional presentation loses its ability to stand for ‘our’ reality. In addition, I will also claim that the audience is in a far better position than Plato thinks; that is, they have the means to verify the reliability and correctness of literary presentation. This will show that Plato is wrong to think that poets can ‘deceive’ people into thinking that they present reality. Neither are poets as epistemically unreliable, nor is the audience as epistemically inferior, as Plato makes them.

Rosen has claimed that this part of Plato’s theory is particularly weak and that it doesn’t prove the points Plato wants it to prove. First, who would, Rosen asks, mistake the real bed for the painter’s presentation of a bed? Unlike the real bed, in the painter’s presentation one cannot sleep, or sit on it, so it is highly unlikely that anyone would mistake the two<sup>105</sup>. Rosen also claims at this point that Plato’s criticism doesn’t differentiate between the art of painting and the art of poetry; this particular argument is only problematic with reference to poetry, that is, literature. Why is that so? Although Rosen doesn’t go in this direction, we have to. It is a genuine threat that the audience can take ‘fictional description’ for the real one, and if this fictional description is in any way wrong (whether due to the artistic reasons or just plain mistakes), the audience will form the mistaken belief. So Plato is right to warn us about the danger here. He is wrong however in claiming that poets would deliberately aim to deceive the audience: there are some interesting literary cases where authors tried to present their writings as scientific/autobiographic/sociological work, although what they wrote was merely

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<sup>105</sup> Rosen goes further here and claims „By choosing a bed instead of one of his other examples, such as a person or a god, Socrates further trivializes art, and in choosing painting as example of art, he picks the one that is most easily reduced to the status of copying or reproducing an original” (Rosen, 2005, p. 363).



fiction<sup>106</sup>, but this is a matter of isolated cases which cannot give justification for Plato's generalized verdict.

Given that Plato is convinced that poets are only imitators, he has to find some kind of explanation as to why the audience still believes them. He offers the following solution:

As we were saying just now, a painter, though he knows nothing about cobbler, can make what seems to be a cobbler to those who know as little about it as he does and who judges things by their appearance. (...)

And in the same way, I suppose we'll say that a poetic imitator uses words and phrases to paint coloured pictures of each of the crafts. He himself knows nothing about them, but he imitates them in such a way that others, as ignorant as he is, who judge by words, will think he speaks extremely well about cobblery or generalship or anything else whatever, provided – so great is the natural charm of these things – that he speaks with meter, rhythm, and harmony, for if you strip a poet's works of their musical colourings, and take them by themselves, I think you know what they look like. (*The Republic*, 10, 600e, 601b)

Two things are important here. First, Plato makes the artist and the audience equally unknowledgeable. Just like artists are not 'experts' in what they are creating, so too the audience has no expertise (regarding the subject of imitation) to judge and evaluate its qualities (as we will see in the next section, this argument is slightly modified in *Ion*, where Plato raises the possibility of an expert audience). However, artist has one advantage over the audience, and that is his 'techne' in creating art: artist knows how to use artistic means (words, phrases, meter, rhythm) so as to create an illusion that he is knowledgeable. We have already seen (*The Republic*, 598,e) in what way are – according to the traditional view in Greece – the artistic skills connected to knowledge: the only explanation for how can one make a great, pleasing poetry, is the supposition that he has knowledge of the things he describes in his poems. Plato however rejects such a view, claiming that this is precisely why imitative poetry is so dangerous: poets only give us the appearance of their wisdom because they know how to employ artistic means in order to create an imitation, which in fact doesn't reveal anything about the true nature of things. This makes it easier for them to deceive the audience. We have already seen Plato's reasons for negating the possibility that poets might nevertheless have knowledge of the things they write about: given the principle of one man one job, that is, one specialty one kind of knowledge, poets, who have knowledge of the artistry, cannot have other kinds of knowledge necessary to write truthfully (i.e. so as to be

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<sup>106</sup> Swirski provides a nice list of examples, see his 2010. I don't think we should read too much into this; surely other practices are not immune to individuals who try to deceive their audience in some manner.

taken as reliable) about things they write about. They only pretend to do so and because they are skilled, they manage to convince their audience that they have knowledge. This argument is also developed in *Ion*, with an additional difficulty: poets are inspired by the Muse and that is the reason for how they write. So in a sense, Plato takes away all knowledge that poets need to write good poetry. We'll come to that, and some contemporary varieties of this problem, shortly.

Obviously today, we have no reason to suspect that knowledge of artistry implies the lack of knowledge in other domains – as I will show in chapter six, literary creation and artistic practice are compatible with (and best explained by) the assumption that authors themselves have knowledge of things they write about. In fact, literary cognitivists (such as Gaut) who claim that cognitive dimension contributes to (or even determines) the literary value of a work readily insist on the claim that it is precisely because authors of great literary works have knowledge (of psychology, sociology, philosophy and all the other things literature is concerned with). Even though this kind of literary cognitivism is not my main focus here, I have already said I accept this claim. Given my epistemic perspective, I still have to show how a reader is to discern reliable from unreliable authors. We'll come to that.

Stanley Rosen has claimed that this Plato's argument is particularly weak. First of all, given that Plato himself accepts the difference between good and bad poetry, he has to accept that good poetry is good in virtue of the cognitive dimension:

(...) Socrates, as well as we are able to distinguish between good and bad poets, wise poets and fools. The criticism just noted implies that even good poems are easy to make for those who are ignorant of the topics discussed by their characters. If this is right, what is it about Sophocles that makes him superior to Agathon? One might be tempted to reply: 'the language', but the truth communicated about human nature in the Oedipus trilogy is not a question of fine diction, intricate metres, and pertinent figures of speech, or more cautiously expressed, of these alone. Socrates makes no serious attempt to explore the central function of poetry, in particular what he calls mimetic poetry. No one judges a poem to be superior if its dramatic personnel mimics the speeches and deeds of people who are known to us, and if we do not know them, we have no chance to compare the copy to the original. (Rosen, 2005, p. 369).

Rosen's argument here is that, unless we presuppose that (at least) one of the artistic values is the knowledge derived from literature, we cannot account for the difference we all agree exist

between good literature (literary masterpieces, canons) and bad literature. Most literary cognitivists accept this<sup>107</sup>.

Let us now look more closely at the arguments Plato raises against the claim that poets are knowledgeable. Four arguments can be discerned from the book 10.

First, poets themselves do not act as if they were really knowledgeable<sup>108</sup>. Plato's claim is that poets would certainly create real things, not just imitations, if they really had knowledge about these things. Second, closely related argument, states that not even people who are most closely connected with the poet-educator don't treat him with respect and considerations deserving of a knowledgeable man.<sup>109</sup>

These two arguments in themselves are not too detrimental for contemporary literary cognitivism. Certainly there's no pressure for one to pursue one particular *techne* at the expense of the other, even if Plato advocates such a view for the reasons expressed in book 2. The fact that poets chose to create poetry rather than the 'real thing' should not be seen as problematic<sup>110</sup>. In a similar manner, the fact that the community doesn't treat them with respect Plato thinks they deserve doesn't show what Plato wants it to show. Most of the issues raised here are, I think, empirical and cannot be decided independently of sociological research. Given however the high status that poetry, poets and rhapsodists enjoyed in Greece, it is possible that Plato is exaggerating here. The crucial point however is that we should not confuse the question of how poets behave and how they are being treated with our main concern: can we learn something from literature and take it as epistemically reliable source of knowledge?

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<sup>107</sup> See Graham 1997 and Gaut 2007.

<sup>108</sup> See 599b: „Do you think that someone who could make both the things imitated and its image would allow himself to be serious about making images and put this at the forefront of his life as the best thing to do? (...) I suppose that, if he truly had knowledge of the things he imitates, he'd be much more serious about actions than about imitations of them, would try to leave behind many fine deeds as memorials to himself, and would be more eager to be the subject of a eulogy than the author of one.”

<sup>109</sup> See 10,600c-d.

<sup>110</sup> Rosen claimed that this argument can, if taken seriously, be used to show that philosophers are ignorant and have no real knowledge to give. Namely, “A parallel question arises with respect to the philosopher, who is not a technician with a specific skill, like the carpenter, shoemaker, physician, or general. Socrates in particular professes to have no doctrine and to know only that he is ignorant. In what way is he superior to Homer?” (Rosen, 2005, p- 370).

The real trouble for the cognitivists however is presented in the form of a challenge Plato issues to the poets:

But about the most important and most beautiful things of which Homer undertakes to speak – warfare, generalship, city government, and people’s education – about these it *is* fair to question him, asking him this: “Homer, if you are not third from the truth about virtue, the sort of craftsman of images that we defined an imitator to be, but if you’re even second and capable of knowing what ways of life make people better in private or in public, then tell us which cities are better governed because of you, as Sparta is because of Lycurgus, and many others – big and small – are because of many other men? What city gives you credit for being a good lawgiver who benefited it, as Italy and Sicily do to Charondas, and as we do to Solon? Who gives such credit to you?” Will he be able to name one?

None.

Or, as befits a wise man, are many inventions and useful devices in the crafts or science attributed to Homer, as they are to Thales of Miletus and Anacharsis the Scythian?

There’s nothing of that kind at all. (The Republic, 10, 599,d, 600).

The challenge issued here is particularly worrisome in that the poets are asked to prove that the knowledge they express in their poems can be put to ‘real use’ and can benefit to those who rely upon it. In contemporary discussions on the cognitive value of literature, Peter Lamarque has issued a similar request, directed not to at the poets but at the audience.<sup>111</sup>

What can a literary cognitivist answer to this? At the most general level, this whole dissertation is an attempt to give an answer to this question. In the previous chapters, I have already tried to show that literature delivers knowledge and offers many other potentialities for learning. These can be pursued along the subject level, at which reader can pick up factual information about the world in the most general sense of the world, and along the thematic level which is internally connected to the cognitive benefits pertaining to indirect humanism. In the chapters ? and ?, I will analyse various literary examples with the aim of showing in what ways cognitive benefits connected with direct and indirect humanism are available from literature. So if Plato’s challenge is meant to challenge the value of knowledge we get from literature, then, given that this knowledge can be of a scientific, historical, philosophical, biological (etc) kind, the challenge is issued at the knowledge generally, not at the literary knowledge.

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<sup>111</sup> Here’s Lamarque: “Would we expect that those immersed in the great works of literature understand people and the world better than those who are not so well read? Yet there seems no evidence that such readers are especially knowledgeable about human traits, as are psychologists, or social scientists, or even philosophers. Literary critics are not sought out as experts or advisers on human affairs” (Lamarque 2007, p. 21).

This still doesn't answer Plato's challenge, who demands of poets to prove their knowledge in terms of usefulness (i.e. concrete products, actions or services that are improved because of what poets are saying). Given that poets have nothing to show for, and don't create anything of the kind Plato demands of them, Plato concludes that they do not in fact possess relevant knowledge. I don't think this should necessarily lead to abandonment of literary cognitivism. First, literature can still be seen as cognitively valuable even if it doesn't create anything new in the sense that science does; there are no new patterns or no new products that would make lives easier for people. But literature, as Swirski claimed, reflects scientific discoveries and in that sense, contributes to human knowledge. It is still wrong however to conclude that literature offers nothing of value or practical benefits to society. One aspect of literature that Plato is ignoring is the fact that literature is often concerned with questioning, criticizing and challenging established values and beliefs, as well as political, religious, philosophical and scientific systems<sup>112</sup> and develops its own views on these matters (because of this aspect, some see literature as coming close to philosophy, something we'll discuss shortly). It cannot therefore be claimed that it has no practical advantage for those who actively, reflectively and critically engage with it.

The same goes for Lamarque's challenge, although this is largely an empirical matter. I believe however there is always something to be gained from reading, something that makes those who read better off (cognitively) than those who don't. Someone who has read *Moby Dick* certainly has more information on whales than someone who hasn't (what might be at stake here is the value of such information, but not the fact that they are available from literature). In a similar way, someone who has read *Madam Bovary* can have a better understanding of the reasons one has for committing adultery<sup>113</sup>. In that sense, to the extent that people are reflective, knowledge seeking creatures, we are better off to read than not to.

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<sup>112</sup> To mention but one example (which will be discussed in details in the seventh chapter), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a literary work which many see as causing one of the biggest political and social change in the America (the abolishment of slavery). With this novel, Beecher Stowe managed to accomplish more than politicians and statesmen. Even Plato would have to recognize the force (and practical implications) of literature in this case.

<sup>113</sup> Joshua Landy (2010) claims that what *Madam Bovary* teaches us is what can happen if one's life's partner is a wrong person. Rather than blaming Emma for being immoral or Charles for being unable to satisfy his wife's desires, a reader should concentrate on what does it take to make a relationship work, so as to avoid making the

The final argument Plato raises against epistemic reliability of poets is expressed in 601c-602c. As Plato sees it, one can either make a thing (maker), use a thing (user) or imitate it (imitator – a role he ascribes to poets given that he had already shown that poets are not makers and have no knowledge of the things). When it comes to maker and user, Plato claims that user is the one who has the most knowledge about the things he uses (given that he has the most experience with the thing) and that he can convey this knowledge through testimony to the maker, who relies on this testimony to improve the things he is making. Because of the lack of experience in using the things, maker has only true opinions about what he makes. But the problem for the poets and their epistemic reliability is that they have neither:

Does an imitator have knowledge of whether the things he makes are fine or right through having made use of them, or does he have right opinion about them through having to consort with the one who knows and being told how he is to paint them?

Neither.

Therefore an imitator has neither knowledge nor right opinion about whether the things he makes are fine or bad.

Apparently not.

Then a poetic imitator is an accomplished fellow when it comes to wisdom about the subjects of his poetry.

Hardly.

Nonetheless, he'll go on imitating, even though he doesn't know the good or bad qualities of anything, but what he imitates, but what he'll imitate, it seems, is what appears fine or beautiful to the majority of people who know nothing.

Of course.

It seems, then, that we're fairly well agreed that an imitator has no worthwhile knowledge of the things he imitates, that imitation is a kind of game and not something to be taken seriously, and that all the tragic poets, whether they write in iambs or hexameters, are as imitative as they could possibly be.

That's right.

Then it's this kind of imitation concerned with something that is third from the truth, or what? (The Republic, 10, 602a-c)

What Plato is saying here is that poets, who start off as ignorant, don't even try to learn something about what they are making; i.e. they don't even attempt to gain knowledge.

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mistake Charles and Emma did in their choices. This is surely a lesson better had through literature than through experience.

Therefore, imitative poetry, which is third from the truth, should be rejected as nothing but a game.

This argument might seem plausible given that traditionally, poets were seen as writing from divine inspiration which was what made them reliable. As a consequence of this view, as the analysis of *Ion* will reveal, the truth and validity of what they were saying was not to be questioned. For the same reason, they didn't have to search for the additional evidence in support of the content of their poems. Plato however opposes to such a view and demands that, due to its educational purpose, poetry be subject to the same epistemological scrutiny that is applicable to other kinds of knowledge. However, from our point of view, this argument should be of least concern for literary cognitivists, given that there is plenty of evidence that it relies on the wrong assumption about poets not consorting with the one who knows. I will start building my full epistemic profile of authors-as-knowledgeable in the next chapter; for now it is enough to note that we do not have to accept Plato's view on how poets actually write, as well as his claim about tripartite knowledge (those of the maker, user and imitator<sup>114</sup>). Creativity and inspiration are obviously important for the overall artistic (as well as scientific) process, but they are the source of the content, and therefore, of the cognitive value.

#### 4.2.2. Apology

In the *Apology* Plato raises some of the same worries regarding the epistemic status of poetry as he does in *The Republic* and in *Ion*. The most important part is the following:

After the politicians, I went to the poets, the writers of dithyrambs and the others, intending in their case to catch myself being more ignorant than they. So I took up those poems with which they seemed to have taken most trouble and asked them what they meant, in order I might at the same time learn something from them. I am ashamed to tell you the truth gentlemen, but I must. Almost all the bystanders might have explained their poems better than their authors could. I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say. The poets seemed to me to have had a

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<sup>114</sup> This is the path taken by Rosen who argues, first, that there's no reason to accept the division between knowledge of making and knowledge of using: "If anything, it seems that knowing how to make something includes knowledge of what it is to be used for, that is, it includes knowledge of the function or capacity" (p. 371). Second, Rosen again insists on the claim made earlier about the distinction between good and bad art and claims that artist must have knowledge about things he writes about in order to produce good art (see pp. 371-372).

similar experience. At the same time I saw that, because of their poetry, they thought themselves very wise men in other respects, which they were not. (Plato, *Apology*, 22,b,c)

Most philosophers in commenting this part emphasis the claim that poets do not understand what they are saying, which is, according to Plato, explained by the fact that they are inspired and have talent, rather than knowledge. We can wonder whether it makes sense to claim that the creation of mimetic poetry (and art generally), which was explained by the metaphor of ‘holding a mirror’ that reflects nature, requires any additional inspiration or talent, but that is not my concern here. I am more concerned with the claim that poets lack understanding.

Given everything said so far about literary cognitivism, it is obvious that such a view is to be rejected. I have already presented Gaut’s view on literary cognitivism defined along the lines of literary works reflecting a certain understanding that the writer put into the work. It would be hard, to go back to the claim made by Rosen, to account for the cognitive value of canonical literary works if we didn’t presuppose that authors understand what they are writing about. It is a separate question of what it is that makes authors like Shakespeare, Lawrence, Dostoyevsky, Hawthorne so knowledgeable<sup>115</sup>; this is a question we might never find an answer to and perhaps it is best searched along the kantian lines of genius. But the fact remains, even the quickest look at some of the greatest literary works shows that it is impossible for these authors to write about things they don’t understand. A fuller account of this claim will be provided for in the sixth chapter, for now let us note that we can easily ignore Plato’s claim against literature and poets made in *Apology*. It is not supported by the literary practice, literary criticism and the practice of writing.

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<sup>115</sup> To give some examples, Collin McGin (2006) has analysed some of Shakespeare’s plays in order to explain what he sees as philosophical elements in them. His claim was that Shakespeare was paying a special attention towards philosophical systems and theories, particularly those developed by Montaigne. He was also a keen observer of human behaviour. McGin sees this as crucial to how he portrays his characters. Zamir Tachi (2006) is more focused on the psychological aspect of his plays, but they both concur in claiming that Shakespeare’s works reflect deep and profound knowledge of psychology and philosophy (McGin even claims, in reference to works such as *Macbeth*, that Shakespeare is exploring cognitive potentialities of imagination, which he sees as additional cognitive capacity). It would be indeed hard to explain how it can be that his characters are so well developed if Shakespeare himself didn’t understand the psychological mechanisms that govern human behaviour.



### 4.2.3. Ion

Plato's arguments developed in this dialogue are particularly detrimental for any account of literary cognitivism because they challenge the epistemic reliability of literature as a source of knowledge, that is, the epistemic authority of authors. There are several questions that Plato raises in *Ion* which matter for us here: some of them have to do with showing the author of a literary work as not writing from knowledge and therefore as not being a reliable source of what he writes about. Another set of issues has to do with reader not being able to judge the reliability of the author<sup>116</sup>. The first thing that should interest us here is Ion's claim that he can speak well about Homer but not about the other poets. Here is how a discussion goes:

Socrates: Is there any subject on which Homer and Hesiod both say the same thing?

Ion: Yes, I think so. A good many.

Socrates: Then, on those subjects, would you explain Homer's verse better and more beautifully than Hesiod's?

Ion: Just the same Socrates, on those subjects, anyway, where they say the same things.

Socrates: And how about subjects on which they do not say the same things? Divination, for example. Homer says something about it and so does Hesiod.

Ion: Yes, certainly.

Socrates: Well. Take all the places where those two poets speak of divination, both where they agree and where they don't: who would explain those better and more beautifully, you, or one of the diviners if he's good?

Ion: One of the diviners. (531b)

Let's stop here for a moment. With Socrates and Ion, the discussion at this point is about how it can be that Ion can't speak about other poets, if he claims, as he does, to be the master of poetry. From this springs the argument against epistemic reliability of the author. Already here Ion admits that a diviner could speak better than interpreter (poet) about divination, and that a diviner could say which of the two poets speaks better and which worse (or, which of the two speaks the true and which speaks error) when it comes to divination. Two things emerge as a problem for literary cognitivism at this point:

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<sup>116</sup> A brief note on the term reader. As is well known, Ion is an interpreter and a reciter of Homer, not a reader in traditional meaning of the word. But for the purposes of this paper, I take Ion to stand for a reader – the fact that he also interprets and explains what he reads to wider audience makes no difference to what I want to discuss here, given that the process of reading invites further interpretation on the part of the reader, and this interpretation can be, but doesn't have to be, shared with other readers. See for example Peter Kivy's account of the reading process. (Kivy 2006.)

(i) if a diviner speaks better about divination than Homer, why should we trust Homer? To put it more technically, what is it that makes authors reliable (epistemically) as a source of knowledge on what they write about, given that, at least in some areas, there are more reliable sources, such as those who are experts on the matter? In a more generalized version, we can also ask what makes author reliable at all? Call this *the problem of the reliability of the author*.

(ii) if a diviner is in a better position to judge on what Homer says about divination, given that he is an expert on the matter of divination, how can a reader, lacking such a knowledge, evaluate whether or not what Homer says is true? To put it in more technical terms, it seems that a reader here faces a dilemma: if he already knows what he reads about, then he will not learn anything new because things that a fictional world reveals to him are already familiar to him. This is sometimes called the banality problem and the idea is that art only reveals to us everyday, familiar things. On the other hand, if the reader doesn't know anything about what he reads, then he is in no position to judge the reliability of the author and is not justified in accepting what the author says, without some further supporting evidence. I'll refer to this as *the problem of the epistemic inferiority of the reader*.

The way I present this problem resembles the classical problem from the epistemology of testimony. If our informants (in this case poets, i.e. authors) are to be taken as epistemically reliable source of knowledge, they have to show that they are indeed knowledgeable in reference to what they are saying. In addition to that, as we'll see in the next chapter, they have to show that they are trustworthy, that is, sincere. On the other hand, what I'm calling the epistemic inferiority of the reader is the general view on the audience or receiver of the testimony: their epistemic position is significantly inferior to that of their informants and that makes them dependant on the informer's knowledgeability and sincerity.

As we saw in *the Republic*, it is Plato's opinion that poets and audience actually share the same epistemic position; they are both unknowledgeable. But already there, and in the *Apology*, Plato issued a very severe accusation regarding the sincerity of poets: they are just pretending to be knowledgeable, while in fact they are just as ignorant as their audience. So in a sense, Plato's criticism cuts across both conditions for successful testimonial exchange: neither are poets in epistemically better position from their audience, nor are they sincere.

Let us now turn to the problem of the reliability of the author. Going back to Ion and Socrates:

Socrates: On which of Homer's subjects do you speak well? I don't suppose you speak well on *all* of them.

Ion: I do, Socrates, believe me, on every single one!

Socrates: Surely not on those subjects you happen to know nothing about, even if Homer does speak of them.

Ion: And these subjects Homer speaks of, but I don't know about – what are they?

Socrates: But doesn't Homer speak about professional subjects in many places, and say a great deal? Chariot driving, for example, I'll show you, if I can remember the lines.

Ion: No, I'll recite them. I *do* remember. (536e-537)

(...)

Socrates: That's enough. Who would know better, Ion, whether Homer speaks correctly or not in these particular verses – a doctor or a charioteer?

Ion: A charioteer, of course.

Socrates: Is that because he is a master of that profession, or for some other reason?

Ion: No. It's because he's master of it. (537c)

The problem here is what makes Homer good at speaking about driving a chariot, given that he is a poet, not a charioteer. In contemporary discussions on the problem of the cognitive value of art, this is referred to as the no-expertise argument: "The skeptic argues that artists qua artists are not qualified to teach anything of this sort because they lack knowledge of the relevant subject" (Carroll 2007, p. 28). Carroll goes on to explain all the things artists need to master in order to become artists: "Their expertise involves mastering the tools of their trade and discovering the formal opportunities that they betoken. Artist as such, it is charged, have no special expertise in any branch of knowledge other than that pertaining to their artform and its medium"(Carroll 2007, p.28).

We can see that Carroll here, in developing (though not embracing) sceptical position raises particularly those arguments that Plato has been raising in *the Republic* and in *Ion*. Poets do not have knowledge and are not experts (at least not in the sense that a real doctor or a real charioteer are), and yet, through carefully camouflaging their verses with artistic means, they manage to convince their audience that they have knowledge.

The next step in this line of argumentation, as Carroll points out, is a set of arguments developed by Jerome Stolnitz, who claimed not only that there are no experts in art, but also that there is no 'artistic method' of arriving at truth (as opposed to scientific method in science) and no truth that can count as artistic truth, in the sense in which there is scientific

truth<sup>117</sup>. So how then can we see art, or literature, as a source of knowledge from which we can learn?

To go back to Plato for a moment, the question Ion was puzzled about was the question of why he can only speak about Homer, not other poets. His own answer was that Homer ‘speaks better’ about things than other poets. It might be asked, in what sense better; epistemological, i.e. with more knowledge, or aesthetic, that is, artistically better. This question I think remains unaddressed in a dialogue, and Socrates’ answer to Ion’s puzzle was to invoke divine inspiration: “... that’s not a subject you’ve mastered – speaking well about Homer; it’s a divine power that moves you (...) You know, none of the epic poets, if they are good, are masters of their subject; they are inspired, possessed and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems” (533).

The dialogue ends with Ion’s accepting that he is indeed inspired by divinity, which firstly touches Homer and spreads from Homer to Ion and then to his audience. From the way Plato ends this dialogue it would appear as if Socrates is right in claiming that Ion lacks knowledge completely, but it is my impression that Ion throws in the towel too quickly<sup>118</sup>. There are various possible answers to the problem of reliability of authors that are left unexplored and this is what I want to pursue here.

It is sometimes argued that this idea of divine inspiration is a problem for those who claim that creating art involves creativity<sup>119</sup>, but for our discussion here, the question is what consequences inspiration has for cognitive value of literature and epistemic reliability of the author. Plato doesn’t even leave open the possibility that what the poets say might nevertheless be true, even if in *Phaedrus* he changes his views on the importance and value of divine inspiration. Putting that aside, it might be asked, however, why we are to suppose that (i) in the act of divine inspiration one doesn’t write truth, i.e. why inspiration implies writing

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<sup>117</sup> See Stolnitz 1992.

<sup>118</sup> One reason as to why Ion gives up is Socrates’ insisting that one can only have knowledge of one thing (see 540) and Ion not being able to refute that. In 540d-e Ion, insisting on his claim to have learnt things from Homer, acknowledges that he is a general and a rhapsode and Socrates uses this conclusion to mock his position (541b-e), leaving Ion with no other option but to agree that he is indeed possessed by divinity and not knowledge. Gregory Nagy (2009) argued that the crucial mistake Ion made was not claiming that there is a special kind of rhapsodic craft.

<sup>119</sup> See Lamarque 2009.

what is not and (ii) even if poets are inspired by the Muse, should we take this Muse to be some kind of Cartesian Evil demon, who deliberately deceives the poet? In *Ion*, these issues are not addressed.

Let us modify the inspiration problem for a second. Whether or not the process of writing literary works is indeed triggered by some kind of inspiration (as Plato would have it), or is to be explained by some kinds of psychological processes involving creativity and imagination, or the linguistic process of making descriptions (as Olsen and Lamarque claim, see their 1994), or is a gift of nature to a genius (as Kant claimed), or is a form of functionally adaptive behaviour (Swirski 2010), literary cognitivist has to explain why authors should be taken as epistemically reliable, given that they indeed are not experts.

This problem can be made even worse. Consider Catherine Elgin, who, in discussing *Moby Dick*, rightly points out to another feature of literary practice:

A description of an effective technique for harpooning a whale, for example, is made plausible by being incorporated into a fictional description of a whale hunt. Even though it is in fact true and appears plausible, in the absence of further evidence, the reader ought not consider it trustworthy. For the description is embedded in a work of fiction, a context in which an author is free to take liberties with truth in order to serve his aesthetic ends. (Elgin, 2007, p. 43)

Notice that now our initial problem of the reliability of the author - why should we trust the author, given that he is not an expert in what he writes - rises to a new level: the author is free to manipulate the truth, twist it, distort it and not warn his readers about it, so how is a reader to know when he can take the author as reliable? A good literary example is Nathaniel Hawthorne, who often conducted long and extensive researches into the social and political background of his novels and short stories, but then deliberately twisted it and modified the facts. What Elgin stresses here is that, when it comes to literature, the author does not aim to tell the truth, but to fulfil artistic and aesthetic aims. In doing so, he can sacrifice the truth of what he writes. The same idea was expressed by David Davies's account of 'no fidelity constraint'.

#### **4.2.4. Conclusion: Plato and literary (anti)-cognitivism**

So, how much of Plato's criticism poses a real threat to literary cognitivism? Some of his arguments have already been rejected; let us now try to summarize the theoretical impact that his overall criticism of literature and art has for literary cognitivism defended here. That will provide us with the theoretical framework along which we'll continue our research.

Let's start with his ethical criticism. From our point of view, the most important aspect of his arguments expressed in books 2 and 3 is the recognition of those impacts of literature subsumed under indirect humanism. Though Plato obviously does not use the terminology that indirect humanists employ, his worry is justified only if some such impacts are possible, and likely, outcomes of engaging with literature. Though we cannot exclude the possibility of corruptive influence of literature (of which I will have more to say in sixth and seventh chapter), I have tried to show that Plato exaggerates when he sees this influence as necessarily corruptive. So not only does he read too much into the principle of impersonation, but his claim about poetry influencing the weakest part of the soul, namely the irrational emotions which distract us from rational search for knowledge, is not correct. First of all, there is a general agreement in aesthetics that engaging with art and literature should primarily be characterized as imaginative, not emotional endeavour. The way readers approach literature is through imaginatively engaging with its content and only through this imaginative engagement does literature influence them cognitively and emotionally. More importantly, Plato's theory of emotions as irrational is wrong. It is generally acknowledged today that emotions are not irrational but just the opposite: their contribution to the cognitive functioning of people is indispensable and cannot be made up in any other way. We can conclude then that Plato's worries are redundant and misconceived when it comes to ethical and psychological impact of literature.

What about his epistemological criticism? Unfortunately, his arguments here are a bit more worrisome. As already indicated, putting aside Plato's theory of forms and his claims about poets deliberately trying to deceive their audience, literary cognitivists have to explain how it can be that fictional worlds created by poets can be similar enough to the real world to enable readers to derive cognitive benefits from engaging with it. We already saw that some authors, such as Davies and Swirski, resolve this by drawing the analogy with thought experiments. I claimed that this analogy is helpful, but only limited to specific literary genres.

Even more worrisome problems are those developed in regard to the reliability of the author, as expressed in *Ion*. The 'testimonial' interpretation of *Ion* I offered also showed the need to establish some way in which poets/authors are sincere. Given the fictional dimension of

literature and the fact that authors can distort and manipulate descriptions as they see fit, it is plausible to conclude that, if anything, literature is in the business of lying, and not telling the truth. So literary cognitivists have to show that poets/authors can satisfy the epistemological conditions of reliable testimony: reliability and sincerity. Finally, Plato raises the question of audience: in the *Republic*, audience is said to be in no position to judge the (epistemic) reliability and value of a mimesis. It is not altogether clear why the audience is seen to be in such an inferior position with respect to the products of mimesis, but we will have to provide an account which shows that the audience is not as ignorant as Plato makes it, but also puts boundaries on when it is justified in accepting what the poets are saying. Again, the analogy with testimony will help us to do that.

### **4.3. Contemporary anti-cognitivism**

We saw with Plato that his anti-cognitivism was primarily motivated by a desire to refute art's leading role in education and to establish philosophy as the prime intellectual enterprise. However, contemporary anti-cognitivism is differently motivated. Jerome Stolnitz, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen have each offered counter arguments to aesthetic/literary cognitivism motivated by a desire to purge aesthetic/literary value from all the elements that are not purely aesthetic and by every kind of interest that is not aesthetic. Each in his own way, all three of these authors have argued that appreciating a work of art *as a work of art* necessarily includes not taking into consideration its other qualities, such as cognitive dimension. So at the most general level, we can conclude that contemporary aesthetic anti-cognitivism stems from various accounts of art for art's sake doctrine.

#### **4.3.1. Jerome Stolnitz**

Jerome Stolnitz is one of the most famous 20<sup>th</sup> century advocator of disinterestedness as the key aesthetic attitude toward an artwork. According to Stolnitz, in aesthetic experience, one should not be interested in what the object, or its properties, can do or accomplish. "Work of art" Stolnitz claims, "has no reference beyond itself"<sup>120</sup>.

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<sup>120</sup> Stolnitz 1992, published in Lamarque and Olsen eds. 2004. p. 337. All the subsequent page reference to Stolnitz refer to this edition.

For our purpose here, we will focus on just one aspect of Stolnitz's writings, namely his article *On the Cognitive Triviality of Art*, an article that is considered as one of the most influential articles written on the topic of aesthetic cognitivism. Stolnitz's main strategy is to compare literature as a practice with other practices considered cognitively valuable, such as science, history and religion and to show that literature simply cannot match the cognitive achievements of these other practices. The 'cognitive triviality' is thus exposed on several levels of the analysis, and the ultimate conclusion that Stolnitz reaches is that art is wrongly seen as being cognitive valuable.

Let us now go step by step through Stolnitz's claims. First of all, he maintains, various defenders of cognitivism often invoke the notion of artistic truth and claim it is of a distinctive kind. But, it is not at all clear how to account for its distinctive nature, or how is the artistic truth to be arrived at. Here is Stolnitz: "We have a relatively clear and firm conception of how science arrives at its truths. (...) But a 'method of artistic truth' is not matter for debate and hardly makes sense (p. 337). Obviously, it is easy to see how such an argument jeopardizes literary cognitivism and we have already seen (ch. 2 and 3) the problems with identifying the 'special or distinctive kind of' literary truth. My reply there was that we do not need to invoke any such 'special kind' of truth. To the extent that literature is concerned with the real world (in the sense specified by Gibson), the truths it delivers are truths about that world. But Stolnitz is not convinced of that. He goes on to claim that "scientific truths, once arrived at, are truths about the great world."(p. 337), but it is altogether unclear whether "the arts give us truths about the great world" (p.337).

In order to make the notion of artistic truth even more obscure, Stolnitz compares it not only to scientific truths, for which, as we saw, there is a clear method of arriving at, but also to religious truth. What Stolnitz aims to show here is that even if it might be objected that religious beliefs "are indisputably true of the great world" (p. 338), the fact remains that statements like 'Man is the creature of God' is a "recognizably religious truth" (p. 338). So the real problem with the notion of artistic, or, for our purpose, literary truth, is that it is altogether unclear what such a truth would look like or what it would amount to.



How big of a problem is this for literary cognitivism? I want to claim that it is not. One of the most powerful reply to this claim was given by Noell Carroll who claimed that the fact that there is no clear conception of novelist truth doesn't mean we can't learn from newspaper<sup>121</sup>. What Carroll here rightly recognizes is the need to separate the source of the truth from its content. In some cases, the two will collide: if one reads a history book and learns a historical truth, one can say that he learnt this particular historical fact from the particular history book. But things do not have to be so neatly compartmentalized and there are various sources of various truths available. One can learn a particular historical fact through the testimony of a history teacher or through the testimony of a literary author. In all of these cases, if one is to learn that particular historical fact, the source (whether a history book, history teacher or a work of literary fiction) has to be reliable. We will see later on how a work of literary fiction can be reliable. For now it is enough to note that Stolnitz is wrong to claim that the lack of clear cut notion of literary truth shows we should give up literary cognitivism.

At this point, literary cognitivist can also argue that the fact that there is no clear cut notion of literary truth only shows how diverse truths we can find in the literature are: literature is concerned with all kinds of truths pertaining to all kinds of other domains, without restriction. As the analysis in the sixth chapter will reveal, there's no restriction on the subject or field of enquiry in literature. Literature concerns itself with all aspects and domains of human life and is various aspects; as a consequence, all sorts of truths can be found in literature: historical, biological, sociological, philosophical, anthropological etc. In that sense, the truths we find in literature are by far more diverse than truths we find in other disciplines<sup>122</sup>. So even if the notion of artistic/literary truth can only refer to literature (art) as a source, not as a special kind of truth, this should not diminish the cognitive richness and power of literature.

Going back to Stolnitz, his attempt to find the artistic truths lead him to evaluate several candidates extracted from Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*. As he sees it, there are several candidates for cognitive gain one can extrapolate from this novel, the first being: 'Stubborn

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<sup>121</sup> Carroll 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Stolnitz himself acknowledges that: "It now falls out why there was, when we began, no trouble in finding clear cases of scientific, historical, religious, and garden variety truths, whereas no clear example examples of artistic truth came to mind. None of its truths are peculiar to art. All are proper to some extra-artistic sphere of the great world." (p. 341). This is precisely what I want my epistemological analysis to reveal.

pride and ignorant prejudice keep apart two attractive people living in Hertfordshire in Regency England.’ (p. 338). The problem with this one is that it doesn’t amount to anything but to the summary of the novel (i.e. to what we previously called fictional truth), and that is not what literary cognitivist is after. Literary cognitivist wants to show that literature reveals truth per se about the world and Stolnitz is here showing just how complicated that might be.

An additional worry that might be developed out of this is the problem of how exactly the truths available from literature are to be expressed, whether in some kind of statements (i.e. propositional truth) or in some other form. We have already seen that some literary cognitivists opt to talk about literature attributing to understanding, rather than knowledge, and one of the reasons for this shift in focus is precisely the need to avoid this dilemma of propositional truth.

I think this dilemma is wrongly articulated and it presupposes a rather poor view on the cognitive values of literature. As the analysis in the chapter 6 and 7 will show, cognitive benefits available from literature are diverse not only in terms of content, but also in terms of the forms they can take. It was already shown that a literary work can be analyzed in terms of its subject and in terms of its theme. It is the claim of literary cognitivism that various kinds of cognitive benefits are available on these two levels. Some of them are (or can be) expressed as propositional truths and these are usually found at the subject level. Some literary works, such as *Moby Dick* or *Sister Carrie*, contain a lot of propositional statements which are true. On the other hand, cognitive benefits associated with the thematic level are more easily explained in terms of indirect humanism and these are not as neatly expressed in propositional truths. Stolnitz assumes too simplified cognitive transfer to be taking place in the engagement with literature.

Moving on to what he identifies as the second candidate: ‘Stubborn pride and ignorant prejudice keep attractive people apart’. This candidate, according to Stolnitz, reveals the psychological truth and in order to reach it we have to abandon the fictional settings of the novel<sup>123</sup>. The following problem pops up here: “Yet in abandoning Hertfordshire in Regency England, we give up the manners and morals that influenced the sayings and doings of the

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<sup>123</sup> This is in a nutshell the propositional theory of literary truth that we briefly introduced in chapter two.

hero and heroine. (...) Their motivations and behaviour respond to and are thus largely shaped by these other people, fictional all, and to each other, of course, fictional too” (p-339).

The worry raised at this level of analysis has to do with the fact that literary truth we are trying to deduct is necessarily entwined with the fictional world which makes it possible for the truth to be developed in the first place. But once we try to deduct this truth, we either end up providing a summary of the novel (as candidate no 1 showed), or we peel down all the fictional layers until nothing but the bare proposition is left(candidate no2). But in this case it is hard to see how such a bare proposition can be cognitively valuable or what it is that gives it the cognitive strength.

Peter Lamarque has expressed a similar worry presented in a form of a dilemma in his discussion of a moral truth that literary works impart. Namely, the claim that literature (particularly tragedy) can be a source of moral truth is sometimes explained by what he calls ‘the moral lesson view of moral content’, according to which the purpose of some artworks is to teach us or illuminate some moral principle. But the problem with such a view, according to Lamarque, can be stated in the form of a following dilemma:

either the moral lesson is too close to the work, tied too specifically to the characters and incidents in the work in which case it cannot function as an independent, generalizable moral principle, or the moral lesson is too detached, too loosely connected to the specifics of the work to be perceived as part of the literary content or meaning that the work expresses. The tension here is precisely between the *derivability* of the moral principle and its *independence* as a general moral truth (Lamarque 1996, p.140).

Notice that this dilemma can be formulated only against those forms of literary cognitivism which express cognitive benefits in terms of propositional truth. But the literary cognitivism I’m arguing for here doesn’t merely claim that there are true claims readers can extract, it also argues that many cognitive benefits are only evident in the manner that readers come to think of the world and other people (including their moral, religious, sexual, psychological etc aspects). The true moral gain doesn’t have to be expressed in propositional terms, it can be visible in the manner that reader comes to form his own judgments about the matter, which may contribute to a change in his moral sensibility. The fact that the literary work generated

an opportunity for such considerations (perhaps even developed and guided the response of a reader<sup>124</sup>) is according to my account a valid cognitive value of a work.

Some philosophers have analyzed Shakespeare's plays with the aim of showing that they provide readers with opportunities for engaging in such reflective deliberations. Tzachi Zamir (2006) insists on the claim that literature gives readers possibilities to reflect on the experiences described by creating adequate conditions for deliberation about domains and aspects of life the work itself depicts without necessarily arguing for acceptance of the view expressed.

Stolnitz's further analysis of possible candidates for literary truth brings him to what he identifies as the problem of quantification:

The initial statements refer to Miss Bennet nad Mr Darcy, or Ajax and Creon. Do the statements of psychological truth refer to all or most or few of the flesh-and-blood beings they designate? How can we know? The drama or novel will not tell us. Praises of its 'universality' must do more than beg the question or blur it. (Stolnitz, 2004, p. 339).

The problem of quantification boils down to asking about the referent of the truths revealed in the work. Even if there are truths that can be revealed, such as truths having to do with psychological insights, Stolnitz now claims it is hard to understand to whom these truths refer to. His example here is from Greek tragedies, which are concerned with the question of *hybris* and the way it affects human life. But even if tragedies reveal that particular fact, it remains to be seen whether "His *hybris* must destroy/may destroy a great man in history [some great men?][all great men?] who..." (p. 339).

There are two problems raised in this quote. The first one has to do with the modality of the truths revealed in the literary work: what is the normative power of the psychological insight that readers can pick up from a literary work? If Stolnitz's analysis of Greek tragedies is correct and at least one lesson from these tragedies is the one expressed in the quote, should we conclude that people must or may fall the victim of the *hybris*? Literary cognitivists often invoke the example of novels such as *Ana Karenina* and *Madam Bovary* and claim that these

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<sup>124</sup> This is how Kieran sees literature and art contributing to our moral sensibility and moral knowledge generally. Elvio Baccarini (2010) has argued that one way in which narrative art can bring about a change in moral sensibility is by bringing the reader (viewer) in a position from which he recognizes that some principle he held doesn't obtain in some particular circumstances, such as those depicted by the artwork (one of his examples is the movie *Born on 4<sup>th</sup> of July*, where the reader comes to a better understanding of the notion of patriotism and the moral principles it implies).

reveal what is like to be in an unhappy marriage as well as the psychological motivation that induce one to commit adultery. What Stolnitz wonders here is whether we should conclude that being in an unhappy marriage necessarily leads to infidelity or not. The novels show what can happen, but they do not attach any modal value to their claims.

Another problem has to do with the distinction some/all: if a tragic hero in a Greek story falls a victim of his tragic luck, does it mean that all people/some people/one person can experience the same reversal of fortune? If Emma Bovary has no other solution for her unhappiness but to pursue sexual relations with other men and purchase expensive commodities, does it mean that this is true for all unhappily married women? Here we are asking not only for the normative power of the truths deduced from literature but also for their applicability. The experience shows that not all unhappily married women engage in adultery and not all people fall victim to bad luck. So if the truths deduced from literature do not apply to everyone and are not universal, whom do they apply to? And what is their normative force? Obviously literary cognitivist doesn't want to claim that they apply only to the literary character (or to the real-world person that served as inspiration to the author).

One way to solve this problem, particularly regarding the normative power of the truths is to claim that whatever truths literary works offer should only be seen as hypothesis, rather than some firm truth that necessarily befalls people. So the claim that unhappily married woman will cheat her husband that might be extracted from *Ana Karenina* is only a hypothesis about the possible, perhaps even probable, but certainly not necessary behavior of a woman who finds herself in Ana's situation. We have already seen several accounts that explain cognitive potentiality of literature in terms of hypothesis and in subsequent chapters we will develop this idea further.

Another possible reply is to tone down the normativity by connecting these cognitive aspects with indirect humanism, rather than trying to express them in propositional form. Rather than trying to deduct some propositional truths from the work and wonder whether they necessarily apply to some/all/people or one person, literary cognitivist can claim that the cognitive value of literary work is in showing to the readers possible ways in which people might react, thus making them more aware of the complexities of human situation and reactions. Rather than focusing on the statement which might be deduced from the work (such as Stolnitz's example "His *hybris* must destroy/may destroy a great man in history [some great men?][all great men?] who...") with the aim of finding the referent for it, the true

cognitive gain is in the lesson we might derive from it. One such view was expressed by Zamir's reading of *King Lear*:

Voices such as Edgar's and Cordelia's demonstrate the possibility of forgiving a parent as well as the incapacity to tell the parent that he is loved. Voices such as Racine's Hyppolytus exhibit the way kindness to a parent can be ultimately destructive. All of these are valuable as constituents of thought regarding filial obligation. All should interplay and constitute rational moral thinking about relating to a parent. None should simply be followed." (Zamir 2006, pp. 41-42).

Finally, some philosophers have attempted to answer this challenge more directly. Jenefer Robinson (2010) offers one such account. Although she is primarily concerned with the way people emotionally react to fiction, I think her conclusion points to at least one solution that can be given to Stolnitz. According to Robinson, the precondition of getting emotionally involved with fiction is that the story, as it is developed, is perceived as important for the reader in the sense that a reader "finds her own wants and interests to be at stake" (p.74). We can apply the same line of reasoning to the worry Stolnitz raises. Those readers who recognize some similarity between the fictional situation and their own private lives will recognize those aspects of fictional situation as of importance and will attend to them differently (perhaps with more interest, deeper cognitive awareness, more experience etc) than readers who are not moved by and cannot relate to the situation presented<sup>125</sup>.

I think all these possible answers to Stolnitz are plausible and successfully tone down his argument. Additional arguments can be developed to show that the question itself is wrongly articulated. From the conitivist's claim that literature is valuable and that we can learn from it

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<sup>125</sup> I do not want to go too deeply here into the problem of whether or not readers can connect to fictional characters in order to find similarities between their own lives and the lives of fictional characters. Lamarque and Olsen dismiss such an option, claiming that the situation of the characters described in a work is always too complicated and too embodied into the fabric of the work to be extracted and applicable to reader's lives (see Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 378; see also Lamarque's 2007b). I am sceptical though toward such a claim. If the situations of the characters were too far removed from our lives, we wouldn't be able to make sense of it. In addition, it is precisely through describing the situation of the characters that thematic concepts are developed, and as they claim, thematic concepts matter to our lives because they are humanly important issues. Many literary cognitivists claim that we can learn from fictional characters. Roger Scruton offers one such view: "In responding to literature we are responding *sympathetically* to an imagined situation, and we do this by 'imitating' or, more properly, *rehearsing* the motives that would lead us to sympathize towards the real-life version of the characters and feelings described. In rehearsing these motives we are 'learning what to feel', and the true work of art is the one that *teaches* us what to feel, so that we *know* what to feel toward situations of the kind it portrays" (Scruton 2010 p. 100). Garry L. Hagberg (2010) offers another explanation for the cognitive impact of literary characters. For Hagberg, literary characters and the way they are presented as having, holding and acting upon their beliefs is of a paramount importance for reader's own understanding of themselves, as well as for understanding the kind of person that a certain character represents. Similar view is defended by Kathleen Stock (2006). See also Gaut 2007 and Newman 2009.

doesn't follow that every reader will in fact learn something from every work, nor that we can predict what that will be (i.e. how exactly the cognitive potentialities will be cashed out). Here again the analogy with testimony is helpful. Notice that in nonfictional world, people share testimony about various aspects of their lives. Sometimes we react to them, sometimes we don't. In some cases, we think we can learn something from what others are telling us. The same applies to fictional testimony. Literature tells us something about human situation in the world, about circumstances that shape our lives. But that doesn't mean that every literary work addresses the situation of each individual, that would be impossible and Stolnitz is wrong to ridicule literature by demanding that of it. On the other hand, not even science 'speaks to all' with the same force and at the same time.

The problem of quantification does not exhaust all the problems Stolnitz attributes to literary cognitivism. The next thing he objects to is today known as the problem of cognitive familiarity and it has to do with the fact that art/literature either reveals truths which are already familiar to the readers, or truths which readers could have come to know through some other means, like their own experience. In commenting Adrian Poole's claim that "Oedipus' fate opens our eyes to the gaps between being and doing and understanding"<sup>126</sup>, Stolnitz argues:

Oedipus certainly acted without understanding and came to realize. So have we all, much of the time. It is less certain that those who have read the play (...) had not previously learned this truth, at the cost of their own less dramatic pain

Why is this problem? Literary cognitivism is the view according to which literature is cognitively valuable in the sense that we can learn from it. But literary cognitivist does not want to claim that this cognitive dimension consists of truths which are easily known, trivial and generally available to cognizers through some other means; that would make the cognitive dimension trivial and it would turn literature into the source of trivial truths which, because of their banality, reveal nothing about the world, at least nothing that we already don't know. On such a view, literature can be a source of knowledge, but this knowledge consists of banal and trivial truths which are, in most cases, already known to the readers. For those literary cognitivists who insist on linking cognitive dimension of work to their value

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<sup>126</sup> Quoted by Stolnitz, p. 340.

(such as Young or Gaut), this severely undermines the overall value of literature. Claiming that literature is a source of cognitively trivial truths also diminishes the humanistic value often attributed to it. So Stolnitz's claim captured in this last quote can have severe consequences for our initial intuition.

Before offering an answer to this problem, one more thing needs to be made clear. The argument of cognitive familiarity can sometimes be presented – wrongly, I believe – as claiming that readers need to have some knowledge which they bring to the reading in order to follow the development of theme and gain some kind of knowledge. So rather than claiming that the ‘lesson’ to be learnt from *Crime and Punishment* is the moral truth ‘Murder is wrong’, readers already need to know that murder is wrong in order to be able to follow the complexities of moral, philosophical and sociological situations described by Dostoyevsky. A reader who doesn't know before reading the novel that murder is wrong will not be able to gain any kind of insight from the novel.

Now, I suggest the following distinctions should be made here. The argument from cognitive familiarity can be read to claim that (CFi) readers already know truths presented in the literature, and (CFii) readers can come to learn truths presented in literature through some other means. In a very radical version, the argument from cognitive triviality can also be read as the claim that (CFiii) truths which we can gain from literature are well know, to the point that they are trivial. Claims (i)-(iii), which can be read off from Stolnitz, should not be confused with the claim (CFiv) according to which readers need to bring some knowledge (moral, psychological, emotional) into the reading process in order to get cognitive (moral, psychological, emotional) gain after reading.

Many literary cognitivists accept (iv) and we have already seen the idea behind the claim that literature offers cognitive strengthening. Let us now see whether Stolnitz's argument developed along CF claims i-iii above is indeed as threatening as he wants to present it. An easy way out of the problem for those who want to save the overall aesthetic value of those works that (supposedly) present trivial truths is to claim that the value of a work resides not in originality of truths but in the way these truths are developed.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See Lamarque 2009, p. 239.



From the point of view of literary aesthetics, this is a nice solution to Stolnitz, and he saves the value of literature that might have been lost. But from the point of view of literary cognitivism, this is not enough. Literary cognitivist wants to show that literature is cognitively valuable source of knowledge, not cognitively trivial archive of things we already know. One way to account for this is to invoke the notion of illumination: Matthew Kieran and Ilham Dilman have both offered arguments in favour of aesthetic/literary cognitivism that insist on the ability of artworks to illuminate those aspects of our world we are already familiar with. We will look into these arguments in more details in the seventh chapter.

The notion of illumination is helpful in that it takes the edge of triviality off: if literary works can still offer something new, or new way of seeing things we are already familiar with, then certainly these works are not trivial and there is a cognitive gain to be won. But let us try to find an even more satisfying answer to Stolnitz's treat. We'll start with (i): readers already know truths presented in the literature.

Certainly it is true that in some, perhaps many, cases, what we read in a literary work is known to us. That people commit murders because they are in need of money, that women and men (can) engage in adultery because they are unhappy and dissatisfied with their partners or are simply bored and in need of excitement, that abortion was not always legal in America, are truths we know and certainly we don't need to read *Crime and Punishment*, *Madam Bovary* and *An American Tragedy* to learn these things. But to presuppose, as Stolnitz does, that this bare truth is all that we get from these works is seriously impoverished view of their overall cognitive value. At the most general level, Stolnitz neglects all the cognitive benefits available in literature connected to indirect humanism. *Crime and Punishment* offers more than simple statement having to do with the wrongness of murder. Many critics read it as a philosophical analysis of the principle of consequentialism and utilitarianism, as a psychological analysis of the impact of guilt and passivity upon an individual, as a sociological study of the poverty and alcoholism that were so widely spread in the city in that age<sup>128</sup>. So at one level, there are various philosophical, psychological and sociological truths available in this novel and it makes no sense to suppose that readers know all of them before they begin to read. On the other hand, development of the story along these lines can

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<sup>128</sup> For the interpretation along these lines see Dilman 1968, Ivanits 2008.

contribute substantially to how reader himself thinks about justifiability of murder. Surprisingly perhaps, a reader might come to realize that he would act in the same way in those circumstances. Surely in that way, literature offers something new.

To claim that literature presents to the reader only those things he already knows seriously undermines some of the intentions authors might have had in presenting the story in a particular way. I have already emphasized Dreiser's obsession with poverty and the clash between rich and poor. In the abortion episode from *An American Tragedy*, he is not only reporting what the readers knew – abortion was illegal – he is criticizing the fact that even the perception of what is sinful and what is worthy of salvation is determined by one's social status, rather than by some intrinsic features of the action itself. Given their poor background, Clyde, but particularly Roberta, are seen as two sinners who committed some “dreadfull crime” (p.). On the other hand, “unfortunate” girls from rich families deserve to be rescued and resolved of their mistakes, not crimes. In that way, Eby claims: “The real sex crime that Dreiser exposes in *An American Tragedy* is the national criminalization of sexuality in the first place” (Eby p. 582). By depicting the familiar situation, Dreiser criticizes the society and its hypocrisy. He also criticizes the way that the society tries to control and sanction biological impulses: Roberta's shame and guilt caused by her desire (physical) for Clyde is the voice of society and upbringing; the inability to suppress these desires is the biological force which ultimately takes over.

What the analysis so far has shown is that Stolnitz presupposes too simplified a view of the truths that can be derived from literature. These truths trigger further cognitive work on the part of the reader, so even if they are already known, it doesn't mean they are not put to some further use by the reader. And as the example with Dreiser shows, in many cases authors present known truths in order to investigate the circumstances that lead to the state of affairs stated by such truths.

So far I have tried to show that the fact that truths derived from literature, even if already known by the reader, can still contribute to reader's cognitive gain. But at this point it is necessary to recognize that the claim itself is far too strong. There is no reason to suppose that truths derived from literature are necessarily known by the readers: some are, but certainly not all. One way to see this is to think of the literary works pertaining to cultures other than the one that reader belongs to, or of those works that were written in the past. Going back to Gibson's claim about literature being a window into the world, it is plausible to claim, contra

Stolnitz, that literary works reveal truths about this world (different countries, far away times) that reader is not familiar with. In the seventh chapter, we will look at the example of the so called slave narratives. These narratives were written by slaves, which gives them a special testimonial status and they reveal various aspects of slavery as a sociological, psychological, political, even metaphysical system. The cognitive gain from these novels surely goes beyond the simple propositional truth widely known to everybody ‘there once was slavery and some people were slaves who were badly treated by their white masters’.

Notice that the same is true for those truths that Stolnitz characterizes as psychological. The true cognitive gain of the novels is not in delivering truths about human psychology, but in showing what circumstances lead to psychological states captured by these truths, and what consequences these psychological states can have. This is what Dilman’s claim about *Crime and Punishment* reveals. Similar considerations apply to all great literary works. Those readers who, like Stolnitz, reduce the whole cognitive package to one (or several) simple truths remain blind to all that literary works have to offer.

Moving on to the second claim, (CFii) readers can come to learn truths presented in literature through some other means, such as personal experience, testimony, science, religion. The idea here is that truths available in literature are easily available through some other means, therefore literature is not in any special way cognitively valuable.

How worrisome is this for a literary cognitivist? The answer to this will partly depend on whether or not one sees cognitive value as necessary for the overall aesthetic value. Given that this line of argumentation is not my main concern here, I don’t think (ii) should worry us to the extent Stolnitz wants it to. Surely truths derived from literature are (easily or not so easily) available through some other means. But many things we know are easily available through some other means. If I know there’s no milk in the fridge, I could have come to that truth through perception (I opened the fridge and saw there’s no milk), through the testimony (my sister told me), through memory (I remember using the last bottle of milk), through deduction (I remember buying milk five days ago and that’s long it takes me to use one bottle) etc. That however doesn’t mean the truth about not having milk is any less valuable. For our perspective here, that is, epistemological, the fact that literature is not the sole source of truths does not mean that its cognitive value is diminished. What we should be concerned about is to show that the truths available in literature can satisfy the strictest epistemological

demands for knowledge (i.e. we have to show that literature is epistemologically reliable source of knowledge).

Replies to (CFi) and (CFii) should by now make it clear that (CFiii), the most radical reading according to which truths which we can gain from literature are well know, to the point that they are trivial, is also to be dismissed along the same lines as (CFi). Again, Lamarque is right to claim that the value (literary/artistic/aesthetic) is to be found not in the truth per se, but in the way this truth is developed. But literature is cognitively valuable source and the truths it delivers are many, important, and quite possibly, not as easily obtainable through some other means. Whether or not they will be trivial and banal depends on various factors: who is the reader, what is his background knowledge, how well he understands themes developed, how encompassing perspective on the world, human affairs, morality etc. he has, how willing he is to develop his views further. Also of great importance is the assessment of triviality of the themes with respect to the wider background that the author, as well as the readers, belong to. Modern readers take it as banal that woman has a right to leave her husband or engage in sexual relationship when her husband is considered missing. A work that would set out to explore such an issue would not likely hold our attention for long (unless, for example, it focuses on her emotional and psychological states in trying to connect to another person after the loss or divorce). However, for Hawthorne as well as his readers, such an exploration was not banal and trivial. Think of the way James' short stories reveal and explore the gradual change of the way women's personality, character and sexuality were perceived by the society: modern readers find it hardly worth acknowledging that women work and are free to choose their own partners and change them. But the society described in James still has a hard time accepting that and the some of his characters show how hard it was for that society to accept it<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>129</sup> Noel Carroll and Peter Kivy have both offered a similar response to the charge of triviality. They both emphasize the fact that triviality emerges only with respect to the reader, not to the work itself: "In reviewing the banality argument, it is worthwhile to notice that it raises the question of 'banal for whom?' Art and literature are customarily directed at communities broader in scale and background than the philosophy colloquium. Conclusions that might appear utterly banal or obvious for experts in ethics may not be banal or obvious to nonprofessional audiences, especially where the maxims in question figure in pitched, contextually motivated, debates about pressing issues abroad in culture. What the philosopher discounts as trivial may in fact be revelatory for the plain reader and, for that very reason, can have a fair claim to being informative and educative for the intended audience" (Carroll 2002, p.10). See also Kivy 2006, p.105.

Stolnitz doesn't stop at this and but goes on to enlist some more difficulties with cognitivism. Comparing art and science, he claims that another lacking element in art's ways of being cognitively valuable is that of the established ways of solving contradictions and of confirming the truths. In science and religion, as well as in garden variety body of truths, there are ways to overcome the contradictions. The body of evidence supports the truths and in case there are contradictions, this body of evidence solves it in favour of the truthful claim. No such mechanisms exist in art: "Art, uniquely, never confirms its truths" (p. 340) Stolnitz claims, adding "The fiction does not and cannot provide the evidence" (p. 340). In addition to this, even if there is truth found in the art (his example here, taken from Dickens, is the fact that "Estate litigation in the Court of Chancery in mid-nineteenth England moved very slowly" (p. 340)) "the truth was knowable before the fictions appeared" (p. 341).

We need to distinguish several problems at this point. First, the problem of contradictions: if we dissect literary works in order to extract the truths from them, we are very likely to come up with a long list of propositions, some of which will contradict some others. But there is an explanation for this, as well as a remedy, which Stolnitz (and all others, who focus exclusively on the propositional truths) doesn't see. It is now a good time to mention another problem related to the problem of contradictions, that of mistakes. Sometimes literary works contain mistakes, and because of precisely this lack of supporting evidence, very often these mistakes go unnoticed and uncorrected (in the work itself). On a very superficial reading of literary cognitivism, that might be a reason to give up the idea that literature is cognitively valuable. But a care must be taken here in not giving too much significance to this problem. First, as I will show in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter, there is an explanation for the mistakes. Very often, these mistakes are the result of a background beliefs that the authors have been relying upon, beliefs that are, at the time of writing, an accepted (scientific) truths about how things are. More detailed analysis of this will have to be postponed but notice already at this point that one reason for the mistakes is the reliance of authors on the scientific research.

Similar reasoning can be provided for the problem of contradictions. Again, postponing the literary examples till later, notice that if Gibson's claim about literature being revelatory of our practices, and Swirski's claim about literature being cognitively progressive in the same

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way as science is, it is to be expected that there will be contradictions in literature. That however should not diminish the power of literary cognitivism for the following reasons:

i) unlike in science, where mistaken views and contradictions get to be eliminated in favour of a true theory<sup>130</sup>, literary works are valued not only for their cognitive elements, which means that the audience does not lose interest in a work even if the work does indeed contain mistakes. Scientific works may go out of existence once they are proven wrong, but literary works have a lot more to offer. It is a separate issue, one we will tackle in the next chapter, how is a reader to know which literary work offers unreliable views. Our analogy with testimony will be helpful for that.

ii) to claim that contradictions are the problem for literary cognitivism once again presupposes an oversimplified understanding of the cognitive value of literature. Literary cognitivism (defended here) is not the view according to which the cognitive benefits available to the readers can be summarised in one or two propositions, some of which might contradict some other propositions derived from some other literary work. What matters is the way these views are developed and the impact this has on the readers, which is what indirect humanist insists on.

iii) being presented with contradictory views can in many cases enrich one's understanding of the problem. Reading Hume's and Kant's theories about causation is an example where a reader, faced with contradictory views<sup>131</sup>, expands his own understanding and reaches his own conclusions. No one would claim that because of these contradictory claims, both Kant and Hume are to be discarded and their views found invalid or invaluable. The same goes for literature.

What about the problem of evidence, or the lack of supporting evidence in literature? This is a much bigger concern for the literary cognitivist and it is a problem that has often been discussed. Both, Lamarque and Olsen have, in their joint and separate writings, dedicated a

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<sup>130</sup> This is of course a very simplified view of how science works. There are many contradictions across various scientific fields that are not resolved (examples being Hume and Kant, the question of how Aristotle thought of catharsis, genetically modified food and its (dis)advantages for health). However, Stolnitz presupposes that science is much more scientific than it actually is.

<sup>131</sup> See Gaut 2007.

lot of space to it, as we'll see shortly. Noel Carroll, David Davies and Peter Swirski (all defenders of literary cognitivism) discuss it at length, and develop the analogy with thought experiments in order to avoid this problem, given that, according to the analogy, the supporting evidence comes from the knowledge readers already have. Stolnitz sees this as the conclusive reason to abandon literary cognitivism: without supporting evidence and arguments, the truths found in literature remain unsupported and therefore unjustified. As a consequence of this, literature cannot function as a source of knowledge. My answer to this, derived from the analogy with nonfictional testimony, is to claim that readers need to have evidence before accepting the claims that a work offers. We'll come to that in the next chapter.

The final problem Stolnitz pointed out in the above quote is the fact that truths were known before they appeared in the work. This implies that they do not gain their authority in the same way as scientific truths gain their authority: many, perhaps all, scientific truths were not known until they appeared in scientific work. This is not so in the case of literature. However, two things need to be distinguished here: first, it is true that Dickens' readers knew that legal system of their time was slow, just like Dreiser's readers were familiar with the way factories developed. But for us, today, these works can give us new, unknown information about social, political, economical circumstances dominant at the time these works were written. Second, even if literature does not generate truths in the same way as science (i.e. being part of a fictional discourse does not give them authority, whereas being a part of scientific discourse does), that doesn't mean that the value and validity of such truths is lost.

Finally, Stolnitz reverberates some of the concerns raised by Plato regarding the epistemic authority of writers. As he claims, truths derived from art "do not require specialists" (p. 342) and these truths, even when compiled, do not amount to artistic knowledge. His final verdict on the cognitive value of art is the following:

In either case, there is no method of arriving at it (i.e. the truth) in art and no confirmation or possibility of confirmation in art. Artistic truths, like the works of art that give rise to them, are discretely unrelated and therefore form no corpus either of belief or knowledge. Hence formal contradictions are tolerated effortlessly, if they are ever remarked. Only rarely does an artistic truth point to a genuine advance in knowledge. Artistic truths are, preponderantly, distinctly banal. Compared to science, above all, but also to history, religion, and garden variety knowing, artistic truth is a sport, stunted, hardly to be compared. (p. 342).

This claim stands in opposition to Gibson's view, shared by Swirski and accepted in this thesis, about literature creating a corpus of knowledge and beliefs. I have already said I'd postpone until chapter six the problem of contradictions, but the way Stolnitz presents this problem shows a radically impoverished view of literature and literary practice generally. It also ignores the fact that these contradictions arise precisely because of the fact that literature is deeply concerned with cognitive achievements from other areas, such as science, psychology and philosophy, and the contradictions found in literature very often reflect contradictions from other domains.

#### **4.3.2. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen**

To the extent that Lamarque and Olsen, in their separate as well as in joint writings, do not deny that we can learn from literature, they are not as radical as Plato and Stolnitz. They even make a positive contribution to literary cognitivism by providing an account of how fiction gives us the possibility to learn about universalities, not particularities. This is so because of the descriptive content of fiction. Therefore,

Not all that can be learned from fiction is propositional. Much of what we know about love, mortality, pride and prejudice we have learned from fiction, not by adopting 'the attitude of scientific' investigation but by an imaginative engagement with fictive content which can be judged to be about these conceptions (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 135)

They are also sympathetic towards those cognitive benefits that indirect humanism advocates:

The point is that fiction can provide an occasion for imaginative reflection that perhaps otherwise would not be available to us. Even being in the position of bringing to mind certain imaginary states of affairs can enrich, as we might say, our conceptual repertoire. Through reflecting *on* certain conceptions in works of fiction, we learn to reflect with those conceptions in other contexts. Similarly by adopting certain points of view towards imaginary states of affairs, under the direction of a story-teller, we might come to adopt those same points of view in comparable situations elsewhere (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 136).

That being said however, there are several aspects in their work that pose problems to the literary cognitivism. To go back to the way literary cognitivism was defined by Gaut, as the conjunction of epistemic and aesthetic theses, Lamarque and Olsen reject the aesthetic one: cognitive value does not contribute to the aesthetic one, and more importantly, it should not be considered as of work's literary importance. So they deny aesthetic claim and ignore the epistemic one. In that sense, my approach here is reverse: I ignore the aesthetic one and try to prove the epistemic one.

The most important counter arguments to literary cognitivism developed by Olsen and Lamarque were already presented in the first chapter. Olsen's counter-arguments to literary



cognitivism stem from comparison between literature and what he calls informative discourses, such as science, history and philosophy. Olsen's arguments are directed against those who see literature as fulfilling the purpose of informing and influencing readers' beliefs, rather than evaluating literature on the grounds of its aesthetic value. Here is Olsen:

Literary discourse and informative discourse are two mutually exclusive classes. However, the thesis does not imply that one cannot at different points in time interpret the same piece of discourse as on one occasion literary and on another occasion informative. It is possible to change one's point of view from an aesthetic one to one where piece of discourse is seen as informative (and to change back again at will). What is impossible is to see the informative function as being a part of the literary function. It is a category mistake to let judgments about the truth of a piece of discourse interfere with one's aesthetic understanding or evaluation of it (Olsen, 1978, p. 58 Unless otherwise indicated, in what follows all references are to 1978).

Olsen and I agree on the claim that literature can be evaluated from epistemological standpoint. However, where we disagree is to the extent to which such an evaluation will yield a positive verdict. According to Olsen, it will not, for the following set of reasons. First, in order for an utterance to be informative, it has to be "interpreted as intended to influence beliefs" which means it "must fulfill the requirement that it should be aimed at causing the response in a *rational* way, and that it should be recognized by the receiver that there is a certain relationship between the intended response and the utterance involved..." (p. 53). If a literary work is interpreted as a purposive discourse, "then the purpose of a literary work may be explained as an attempt to change the reader's beliefs or outlook, or to supplement the tools he has at his disposal for dealing with the world" ( p. 53). This is obviously in lines with indirect humanist's claim, but the problem with this approach according to Olsen is that "Literature as informative discourse is the means to certain end. It is instrumental: not to be valued for itself but for the results it produces" (p. 54)

Some literary cognitivists might be pressed to accept this<sup>132</sup>, but this is not my concern here because my evaluation is strictly epistemological. I think however that there are examples of works where the intention to influence beliefs and bring about a certain kind of change in the reader is explicit. We will deal with some examples in the seventh chapter, where we'll

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<sup>132</sup> If one claims that cognitive dimension of literature is what grounds, enhances or even determines its value, but the cognitive dimension is (for whatever reasons) inactive and does not produce any kind of cognitive change on the part of the reader, then that will affect the evaluation of the work and seriously undermine its value. This is not my concern here, because it is not the kind of cognitivism I'm defending.

analyze the type of cognitivism defended by Matthew Kieran<sup>133</sup>. It is a separate, and a much discussed issue of whether literature can rationally induce beliefs, given that it offers no justification or arguments for its claim. What Olsen thinks literature cannot fulfil is what he sees as the crucial aspect of informative discourse: “It is essential to one’s understanding of utterances as being informative that the hearer recognizes that the speaker intends there to be some reason which will support the belief that such and such is the case” (p. 54). We will deal with that in the third part and the claim there will be that such a reason is provided by the fact that literature is deeply rooted into the real world and reflects reality and that authors can be seen as reliable in what they are saying.

According to Olsen, the reason why literature cannot be seen as informative is the fact that it lacks the features that make a discourse informative in the first place: it is not susceptible to judgments about correctness/incorrectness, accuracy/inaccuracy or truth/falsity, because there

The question of whether or not the practice of literary criticism should be taken as the kind of debate Olsen has in mind is unsettled in the debate<sup>134</sup>. My view is that literary criticism should not be neglected. First of all, literary criticism often provides a wider background to the work itself, thus being informative on the specific motifs that an author had in writing his work. A good example here is the critical analysis of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* delivered by Janis McLaren Caldwell (2004). Caldwell reveals the background of the story, analyses the influence that the current medical and scientific practice had on Shelley, recounts Shelley’s research in preparation for writing and provides a reader with an account of the background philosophical and psychological debates that Shelley was relying on. This reveals *Frankenstein* as an investigation into the justifiability and morality of science and as a philosophical study (which goes hand in hand with the one conducted by Locke and Hume) of the sympathy. This does not take off of Shelley’s greatness as a literary writer (as Olsen fears) but adds a lot to understanding the problems she was concerned with. Here we not only have the cognitive benefits that reader might get from the novel (one example might be the

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<sup>133</sup> This claim can also be supported by invoking the authors themselves who explicitly stated they desire to influence readers' and their beliefs. At least one such example is Anton Chekhov, see Borny 2006.

<sup>134</sup> M. W. Rowe issued a criticism of the claim that criticism is not connected to the truth or falsity of the views expressed in the literature, see his 2010. Berys Gaut (2007, ch.8) also objects to Olsen’s claim.

delineation of science and pseudo-science in the 19<sup>th</sup> ct England), we also see Shelley as actively participating in the search for knowledge and understanding of the human psychology and biology, conducted simultaneously with established scholars of her time.

Another reason for giving a credit to literary criticism is the fact that at least in some cases, there is a genuine debate going on over whether or not the work expresses (or should be taken to express) a certain perspective or advances a certain judgements. One such example is provided by Jashua Landy (2010), who summarizes extensive debates going on over the role and responsibility that Charles Bovary played in Emma's death. Another example is Geoffrey Borny's (2006) critical study of Chekhov's plays. Borny passionately refutes some of the critics who see Chekhov as advancing pessimistic 'nothing to be done' attitude toward life. These examples might be taken not to show that here are debates over the truth expressed in the work, but the problems surrounding our practice of interpretation. This then cannot be taken to refute Olsen, given that the question becomes not 'whether the work expresses truth' but 'whether the interpretation is a correct one'. But at least to the extent that interpretations are about the cognitive dimension of works, we can claim that at least one aspect of criticism has to do with cognitive dimension of a work.

Let me point to something else. The way Olsen describes informative discourse is certainly in line with our everyday scientific practice. However, there are cases when truth is evaluated independently of such practices, on a more fundamental level than Olsen's analysis seems to allow. Take the case of our everyday testimonial exchange<sup>135</sup>. Elizabeth Fricker claimed that in order to learn from what other people tell us, we first of all need to be competent in understanding language, and she and Robert Audi have both claimed that the evaluation of spekaer's sincerity and reliability (i.e. of whether or not what he says is true) goes on, at least in some cases, at the unconscious psychological levels, which enables listeners to accept or decline the testimony<sup>136</sup>. We don't have any reason not to suppose that some such mechanism isn't operative in the encounter with the literary work. At least a tacit evaluation of whether or

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<sup>135</sup> Putting aside the difficult question of what testimony is, I here have in mind what Adler calls our default position – asking a passerby in a strange city where the cinema is (see Adler 2002, ch.5).

<sup>136</sup> See Fricker 1995 and Audi 1997.

not what the work says is true (or, as Peter Kivy in his 2006 argued, as we shall see shortly, plausible) is going on as the reader tries to make sense of what he reads.

There's no reason not to suppose that the 'debate' over the truth of literary work is going on in the reader's mind, as he is reading a work. It is hard to understand how a reader is to interpret, understand and even evaluate and appreciate the work if he doesn't make the accompanying judgments about the truth of the work, given his background web of belief. Given that I am interested in the impact of literature on the cognitive economy of a reader (and, as I'll show in the next chapter, demand of a reader to check the truth independently of a work), I see no reason to conclude that the lack of debate necessarily implies that there's no sense in which we can talk about truth (and more importantly, other cognitive values) in literature.

And finally, though I will not press this here, recent work in social epistemology seems to suggest that the practice of scientific research, as Olsen describes it, is not necessarily the best guide to truth. My aim here is not to subject science to epistemological scrutiny, only to show that those who deny literature its epistemic value often do so without taking into consideration that in some cases science itself does not satisfy the criteria demanded of literature. Some philosophers, such as Amy Mullin and Catherine Elgin, severely criticize the view of science as reliable source of truth. Here is Mullin: "...supposedly expert scientific knowledge may itself be infected by shared sexist or racist biases of the experts, particularly when the community of expert knowers is neither itself diverse nor open to criticism from without" (Mullin 2000, p. 126).

Going back to Olsen. In the first chapter, we saw that he recognizes two levels within literary works: subject level, or, as he calls them, reports, and thematic level, or reflections. In what follows, I will present his arguments for as to why these parts can't in any way turn literature into an informative discourse.

The problem with the reports (i.e. sentences which describe individual places, events, characters etc) is the following:

(i) if they are intended as informative, then readers should have a way of differentiating between those which are fictional and those which are not. However, there is no way in which readers can do that; in fact, not even literary critics conduct researches along these lines to establish which reports are true and which are not

(ii) one reason for the fact that there is no such practice is that well educated reader is familiar with these things

(iii) if truth of the reports matters to the appreciation of literature, then reports which are not true severely undermine the value of work

(iv) reports cannot be taken as informative, since that would interfere with approaching the work as a work of literary fiction

We don't have to concern ourselves with (ii) and (iii) here, given that they only jeopardize cognitivism as defended by Gaut. But (i) in itself is problematic. It asks us to explain how we can differentiate between what is fictional and what is factual and, on top of that, if we still want to claim that we learn from literature, how we can learn from what is fictional. This is a worry for literary cognitivism and a lot of my chapter six will be an attempt to surpass this. However, I remain sceptical towards Olsen's claim that not even literary critics conduct researches in order to see which reports are true. It is my impression that a substantial amount of work is done by literary critics to answer precisely this question. Let's take an example from Edgar Allan Poe.

Given some of his common themes – death of young women, various mental states such as paranoia and mania, the need to inflict pain on other living creatures for no obvious reason, live burial, inability to separate madness from sanity – modern readers might conclude that he was a master of imagination and creativity, that is, that all of his reports are fictional and untrue. However, his creative brilliance apart, all of his themes sprang from real events and can be traced back to technological and scientific, primarily medical, innovations and discoveries, as the following critical comment suggests:

Medical science in Poe's era was just beginning to take strides away from superstitions and folksiness. Poe's alertness to medical subjects is responsible for galvanic battery shocks in several tales, and of course he knew firsthand the symptoms of tuberculosis and of paralytic stroke. Ramifications of medical science are evident in the live burial motifs that some readers think are so dear to Poe... The sensational aspects of premature burial caused very real uneasiness in actual life, because when embalming was not mandatory one could, for example, enter a death-like trance and actually be interred as if dead. There are newspaper accounts from as late as the 1920s that address the topic. So Poe wrote with knowledge of very real possibilities when he composed live burial situations (Fisher 2008, pp. 22-3).

Fisher also indicates the importance that Poe attached to researching, as well as his attentiveness to presenting correct facts. Apart from the fact that Poe was a well educated man, he was also very eager on research and was gathering information from various sources. Fisher points out that Poe was often rewriting his stories in order to correct factual mistakes

(an example being “The Fall of the House of Usher” which originally featured identical twins but given that identical twins cannot be of different sexes, Poe rewrote the story). Fisher however maintains that it is still not known where and how Poe gained all of his knowledge of psychology, but regardless of that, his psychological realism remains his greatest artistic achievement.

Claim (ii) reverberates some of the worries raised by Stolnitz (CF(i) in reference to Dickens, and as I already said, I don’t think this is a valid claim. Literary works can contain reports on (descriptions of) things readers are not familiar with. For example, the detailedness of the description regarding the whales and whaling industry in Melville’s *Moby Dick* by far surpasses the knowledge that common reader (one who is himself not an expert on the matter) brings to this book.<sup>137</sup>

Finally, Olsen raises serious concerns regarding the possibility of the cognitive value of reflections which are supposed to refer to the real (as opposed to fictional) world. Here is one of his worries regarding the reflections in Arnold’s *Dover Beach*:

What precedes this reflection in the poem is nothing like an argument. There is nothing here to justify the reflection as a general statement about experience. The reflection interprets for the reader the facts presented in the work, but these facts are not reasons for accepting it as true about the world (...) The debate which is the necessary criterion for accepting literary works, or parts of them, as informative cannot be found in the works themselves. In literary works one will find reports and reflections which stand in a certain relationship to each other, but reports are not reasons for accepting the reflections as true (p. 70).

In contemporary debates about the cognitive value of literature, these concerns are summarized under ‘no argument’ argument and ‘no evidence’ argument<sup>138</sup>. The underlying principle is that literary work does not provide evidence for the claims it puts forward. Think back to the examples from Dreiser, nothing that we read in *Sister Carrie* serves as justification for his reflections on the role, importance and moral significance of money. In the similar manner, the anti-cognitivist claims, literary works do not argue for the claims they put forward and there are no accompanying arguments to support them. This makes literature

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<sup>137</sup> See Zwart 2008, particularly ch. 4.

<sup>138</sup> See Davies 2010 and Carroll 2002.

quite different from other knowledge generating practices and it makes its cognitive value questionable.

As a response to this, recall, Noell Carroll, Peter Swirski, Catherine ELgin and David Davies have developed the analogy with thought experiments, thus finding the arguments and evidence for the claims in the background knowledge that the reader already has. Olsen however rejects the possibility:

If therefore one wants to argue that reflections are to be construed as informative one must argue that the reasons supporting them can be assumed to be in the possession of every reasonably educated and experienced reader, or to be readily available for such a reader. [But this] “presupposes that the reasons possessed by the reader are such that they would lead him to agree with other readers on the acceptance or the rejection of a reflection. And this is obviously not the case. It is highly unlikely that any reader would agree with *all* the reflections, derived or direct, (...) if they were construed as general statements. (p. 71)

This is an interesting point. The only way that reflections can be seen as being cognitively valuable is if there’s some underlying reasons all the readers can refer to as justification for the truth of the reflection, yet, for sure, it is highly unlikely there is such a reason, not to mention the possibility of a consensus regarding what that reason is. However, I don’t see why literary cognitivist should insist on this point. First of all, even if there was such a consensus, it still wouldn’t imply that the reflection is in fact true; as contemporary epistemology teaches us, consensus does not guarantee the truth.

Second, and more importantly, I don’t think we should necessarily evaluate reflections in terms of their truth value. My suggestion is to treat them as world views, a perspective on the matter, a way of looking at things and making sense of experience, and these cannot be evaluated as true or false (though they usually are evaluated in terms of acceptable or unacceptable, comprehensive or invalid). We will see in chapter seven how Matthew Kieran develops such a position and there we will explore all the cognitive benefits available from reflections (and thematic level generally).

Olsen claims that literary criticism includes issues regarding the “handling of certain themes and concepts” (p.71) which does not extend to the evaluation of the truth of factual debates and reflections. If there were such evaluations, then literature would be more similar to philosophy and other practices. But notice that, in many respects, literature is concerned with precisely those concepts that are of interest to philosophy, and offers reflections on those same issues. Let’s look at the example from Houellebecq’s novel *Atomised*, where the following reflections about human beings and the world are offered:

(R1) But, as he watched, the unshakeable conviction grew that, taken as a whole, nature was not only savage, it was a repulsive cesspit. All in all, nature deserved to be wiped out in holocaust – and man's mission on earth was probably to do just that (p. 38).

This gloomy and pessimistic view of the world is further supported by deterministic ontology that makes the backbone of the fictional world Houellebecq portrays:

(R2) Human behaviour is predetermined in principle in almost all of its actions and offers few choices, of which fewer still are taken (p. 97).

Once the parameters for interaction were defined, he thought, and allowing for initial conditions, actions took place in an empty, spiritless space; each inexorably predetermined. What happened was meant to happen; it could not be otherwise; no one was to blame (p. 104).

Finally, human behaviour is in principle no different from animal, and all in all, "Human reality (...) was a series of disappointments, bitterness and pain" (p. 77) and "... life was an unrelenting succession of lies" (p.89). The only solution to this cold, unfriendly and devastating human situation which offers no hope or room for happiness and love, the book argues, is to use all the scientific knowledge available and to create new species, new kind of people, better people. The perspective of the human race offered at the end is the following:

(R3) This vile, unhappy race, barely different from the apes, had such noble aspirations. Tortured, contradictory, individualistic, quarrelsome, it was capable of extraordinary violence, but nonetheless never quite abandoned a belief in love. This species which, for the first time in history, was able to envisage the possibility of its passing and which, some years later, proved capable of bringing it about. (p. 379).

It is my intuition that R2 can be subject to the same evaluation as the overall theory of determinism philosophers engage in. But that doesn't hold for R1 and R3. They should not be evaluated as true or false, they should challenge reader's preconceived opinion on the matter. With cases like this, there is no right or wrong, one's world view generally cannot be evaluated in terms of truth. They can however be informative in the sense that reader can be encouraged to view things differently. I can rest satisfied with that.

A great deal of Olsen's criticism is directed at the claim that literary criticism is concerned with finding out if the reports and reflections express truth. Some critics believe that the fact that certain works are 'true to' life or that they are particularly revealing of human nature renders these works informative and therefore justifies our claim to the cognitive value of literature. Olsen objects to such a view and claims that the step from being true to life to being true in the sense that would render the work informative is not a valid one. Recall that according to him the principle of verisimilitude is an artistic device the aim of which is to



determine what is natural within the fictional world, not how similar the fictional world is to the real world.

I think that such an approach is wrong. Olsen's criticism presupposes too simplified view of how literature is cognitively valuable (note that he doesn't say anything about the impacts of literature acknowledged for by indirect humanists, except that literature shouldn't be taken as instrumental in that sense). This is further complicated by the fact that he sees it as bound up with informative discourse, truth and the practice of debates. However, cognitive value can be defended without invoking such notions. At least two things should be noted here.

First, even if a discourse aims at being informative, there's no guarantee that the reader will get the relevant information and gain a new instance of knowledge, given that communication failure is always a possibility. Second, discourse or proposition can be informative even if the speaker doesn't have the intention to confer information. The fact that author in his writings pursues artistic aims and doesn't intend to be informative, doesn't mean that those features of his works that are informative will not operate in informative manner<sup>139</sup>. In pursuing the artistic aims, author certainly cannot have the intention to exclude the possibility that somebody be informed by what he writes.

One final aspect of Olsen's overall anti-cognitivist's position concerns his discussion about the problem of the relationship between fiction, literature and reality<sup>140</sup>. At the basic level, the problem is how to combine the fact that literature is imaginative creation, that is fictional, and the claim that it tells us something about the world and human position in it. The challenge is here aimed at direct humanist's intuition about literature giving us knowledge of the real world. Those who claim that literature speaks about our reality claim that this is possible either because it refers to our world, or strongly resembles it. So even if literature is imaginative creation, it is still 'close enough' to the real world to allow us to recognize our world in the fictional world and learn from it. But Olsen doesn't accept this:

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<sup>139</sup> Olsen himself recognizes that: "Of course, knowledge may be gained from literature about habits and linguistic peculiarities by those who do not share the knowledge. Thus literature may be a source for the historian, the sociologist and the linguist, but this does not change the fact that the *function* of literature is *not* to be a source for these types of research." (pp.78-9).

<sup>140</sup> See his 1987. See also Lamarque and Olsen 1994, Lamarque 1996.

There is little doubt that Bradbury's *The History Man* originated in Bradbury's experience of the student revolt of 1968 and of the attitudes of certain professors and academics to and in that conflict. The fact that these events inspired the novel, that Bradbury kept these events in mind when he wrote, is, however, not a sufficient, and probably not a necessary, condition for saying that the novel refers to these events (Olsen, 1987, p. 166).

Two things are important here. Even if the events (or characters) in the fictional world resemble (are similar to) the events (or people) in the real world, this isn't a reason enough to claim that they refer to the real world, given that similarity "... is neither necessary nor sufficient for reference" (p.167)<sup>141</sup>. Even the fact that descriptions of a fictional entity can be attributed to some real-life entity doesn't allow for the reference to be established. Descriptions of the real-life entities are made true by what is in the world, descriptions of the fictional entities are made true by the way the author decided to portray them. So they cannot be taken to refer to the real world.

Olsen here debates with the adherents of the so called novelistic theory of literary truth, according to which (to put it simply) a work of literary fiction is composed of descriptions of the real world events and can therefore serve the cognitive function cognitivists claim. I will not go into details of novelistic truth<sup>142</sup>, since it would take us too far, but the problems Olsen points to can be taken to diminish the force of any theory of literary cognitivism, including my own. Olsen makes two further claims: understanding the fictional world does not include presupposing that it refers to the real world (reference is unnecessary for understanding of a work) and it doesn't play any important role in the literary appreciation.

I think both of these claims are too radical and cannot be applied to literary fiction generally. Authors may be interested in pursuing artistic aims only, without paying any attention to the problem of truth and reference and certainly in these cases literary appreciation will not

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<sup>141</sup> These points are also raised by Lamarque (1996), who claims that even if authors do "draw on reality (...) they do not necessarily write about it". The fact that fictional world resembles real world isn't enough to establish that it refers to it, given that similarities "can be found anywhere". Even if readers "can note parallels and similarities between the content of fictional proposition and events that are actual and known to them... But it would be wrong to say that these actual events or instances are the *referents* of the propositions in the fiction. The connection is rather that the very same predicates that feature in fictional descriptions could be applied to real-world events and probably are, in fact, true of many such events" (pp. 43-4). For even more encompassing account of the relationship between fiction and reality, see Lamarque and Olsen 1994, part 1.

<sup>142</sup> See Olsen 1987 ch. 11, Lamarque and Olsen 1994, part 3.

include deliberating about them<sup>143</sup>. But some works, and my intuition is that this also includes *The History Man*, rely too strongly and too obviously on the real-world events for these to be ignored, for understanding and for appreciating the work. This is also important for works which aim at challenging or prescribing a perspective (as we'll see in the third part). Olsen ignores the fact that some authors are entirely concerned with the aspects and changes in the real world<sup>144</sup> (that is, that they in fact draw on it and write about it) and that in many cases the artistic techniques, styles and genres developed are put to the aims (or have the impacts) which are best described as pertaining to cognitive dimension<sup>145</sup>. To cut the relation of

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<sup>143</sup> I remain sceptical however whether there is a work which could be subject to literary evaluation and appreciation without also being seen as being about the world. One might think that Joyce's work is an example, due to his literary style, use of mythologies, symbolism etc. But note that despite this aspect, many critics agree that his portrayal of Dublin was true to the time and spirit, not to mention to the way human mind works (see Carter and McRea 2001). Eric Bulson (2006) offers an interesting insight into the way Joyce was writing and an elaborated list of thematic concepts that his works explore, like the union and relation between two people, the impact of infidelity, homosexual desires etc. Philip Kitcher (2013) claimed that Joyce is one of those writers, alongside for example Thomas Mann and Shakespeare, who can be interpreted as developing unique philosophical systems in his literary works.

<sup>144</sup> It would be impossible to enlist all the authors that are particularly determined to stay focused on and write about the reality they were part of. I will pursue this question further in the sixth chapter, but here it seems suitable to give at least two examples. In analyzing the works of Edith Wharton, Jennie A. Kassanoff (2004) presents various letters from Wharton's personal correspondence, which testify to her choice of themes and show her concern with the real world: "the assumption that the people I write about are not 'real' because they are not navvies and char-women, makes me feel rather hopeless. I write about what I see, what I happen to be nearest to" (*Letter 91*, cited in Kassanoff 2004, p.16). Another example is Anton Chekhov. Geoffrey Borny (2006) repeatedly insists on this need to write about what is out there that is the motivating factor behind all of Chekhov's plays. Analyzing various Chekhov's plays, essays and personal correspondence, Borny claims: "Chekhov committed himself as an artist to the conventions of realism because he believed that "literature is called artistic when it depicts life as it is [Chekhov's correspondence]. Everything in his art had to be true to life" (Borny 2006, p. 28).

<sup>145</sup> One such example may be taken from the Gothic genre. In James Watt's discussion of Gothic, we find the following: "Arguably the most powerful exploration of the significance of the Gothic as a materialist genre, a literature of self-analysis which emerged at a stage 'when the bourgeoisie ... began to try to understand the conditions and history of their own ascent'. In a period of industrialization and rapid social change, according to Punter, Gothic works insistently betrayed the fears and anxieties of the middle classes about the nature of their ascendancy, returning to the issues of ancestry, inheritance, and the transmission of property. 'Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of a literature whose key motifs are paranoia, manipulation and injustice, and whose central project is understanding the inexplicable, the taboo, the irrational' (Watt, 2004, p. 2). Many other critics have stressed the connection between central aspects of Gothic literature (the motif of vampires and blood sucking, lunacy, madness and irrationality) with the themes developed and explored by these authors (the question of immortality, creation of new race, preoccupations with the reason, knowledge and intelligibility). For an overview see Seed 2005. As Brantlinger concludes, "The conventions of both Gothic and science fiction reflect important features of the real world and both can be seen employed for purpose of conscious psychological exploration and social criticism" (1980). For another interesting example of how development of literary styles is directly connected to cognitive dimension, see Bradshaw and Dettmar eds. 2006.

reference or to claim that similarity of events and characters is not enough to see these works as powerful visual images of what the real world is like seriously undermines the overall impact that literature has.

That being said however, it must be stated that we still lack an account of fiction that would help us explain how we can learn from fiction, given the problems of reference that Lamarque and Olsen indicated. Literary cognitivist remains vulnerable to the claim that his knowledge of the real life is derived from fictional dimension. Note that this doesn't change, even if fiction is not defined as made up or false. Olsen and Lamarque claim that fictionality is not to be explained in terms of reference or relation to the real world, but in terms of the origin: fictional utterance originates in the linguistic act of descriptions which is rooted in a practice of story-making. Because of that,

To speak of a fictional object (or character) is just a way of speaking of a certain kind of descriptive content; it does not involve reference to what does or does not exist in the world. A fictional object (or character) is an intentional object originating in a fictional description, such that the characteristics of the object are determined by the way it is described. What is important is origin not reference (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, pp. 42-3).

A proper response to this kind of fictional content is what they called fictive stance, which involves pretending that “the standard speech act commitments associated with the sentences are operative even while knowing that they are not (...) One consequence of adopting the fictive stance is that many (though probably not all) inferences are blocked from a fictive utterance back to the speaker or writer, notably inferences about the speaker's or writer's beliefs” (pp. 43-4). This is captured by the invitation issued to the reader to “entertain the sense and make-believe truth and reference” (p. 77).

This is the problem for literary cognitivist: the fictive stance demands of a reader not to believe that what he reads to be the case is what the author actually believes is the case. So the proper attitude toward Dreiser's description of Chicago is to entertain the sentence without taking them to be telling us something about the real world Chicago<sup>146</sup>: the relation of reference is cut off and the gap is created between fictional and real. This gap is primarily one of a cognitive distance: “The idea that fiction is ‘distinct from fact’ or that there is a ‘gap’

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<sup>146</sup> This argument is further supported by their claim that fictional narrative depicts world-under-description, not the real world. They use the example of London, as it figures in the Sherlock Holmes stories. Whatever aspects are given to London in the narrative are determined by the description, not real world facts.

between fiction and reality can best be explained in terms of the cognitive distance, under the fictive stance, between what is said and what can be inferred” (p. 44).

My general worry regarding the fictive stance is that it doesn't differentiate between sentences which are true even though they are part of the literary fiction, and those which have no true value outside the work. Why should a reader block inferences to the real world in cases when he recognizes the work as a true report on some real-life events? How plausible is to decide not to believe something he knows is true? A bigger worry is raised along this line in reference to those works like *In Cold Blood* (the so called journalistic fiction) and some have argued that these works cannot be accounted for within the fictive utterance theory of fictionality.<sup>147</sup>

My second worry has to do with the fact that there are cases within literary practice where fictive stance was not the attitude taken toward the work. Most recently, Michelle Houlllebecq was on trial under the accusation that his novels express anti-Islamic view. Other famous cases include Flaubert, Joyce, and Lawrence, all of whom were facing public trials because of the views expressed in their works. My claim is not that fictive stance should be abandoned; it is a valuable principle which tells us how to approach literary fiction. But it asks too much of readers: for as long as readers are aware of the fact that they are reading fiction, rather than scientific report, fictive stance can be operative without placing the additional demand on the reader asking him not to form judgments about the author's belief or the world.

Ultimately however, Lamarque and Olsen consider the fact that there are truths in the fiction which are not make-believe, as well as the fact that supplementing the content (i.e. figuring out what is true in the fictional world) can only be accomplished if we presuppose the principle of verisimilitude. According to them, even if inferences going from fictional to the real have to be blocked, "... inferences going the other way are not always blocked: we can infer what is true in fiction from what is true" (p. 95). Therefore they conclude, "Anyone who supposes that fictions are radically cut off from the world will need to confront the obvious

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<sup>147</sup> See Davies 2010, Gibson 2007.

fact that fully supplemented fictional ‘worlds’ incorporate a great deal of straightforward information about the real world” (p. 95).

What are we to make out of this one-way direction? There are some philosophers who claim that fictional world and real world supplement one another<sup>148</sup> and as we have seen, literary cognitivists generally agree that we can rely on fictional world to supplement our knowledge of and understanding of the real world. I think that at one point, Lamarque and Olsen have to acknowledge that as well. If they want to claim that “(o)*f course* readers can pick up information about people, places, and events from works of fiction; *of course* readers can learn practical skills, historical facts, points of etiquette, insights into Regency England, etc., from literary works...” (p. 4), they have to allow for the possibility that the cognitive gap between fictional and real world doesn’t necessarily mean blocking the inferences from fictional into the real. The problem for them, and for me, becomes the one of showing how to determine in which cases such inferences can be allowed. I will go back to this problem in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter.

In some more recent writings, Lamarque accepts the claim that we can learn from fiction:

That we can learn from fiction – acquire beliefs or skills as a result of reading works of fiction – is, on this account, an obvious matter of fact and not even especially interesting. We can and do acquire beliefs about all kinds of things from reading fiction: the nature and feel of a place, historical or biographical facts, matters of etiquette, how people behave when they are angry, greedy or jealous. We can learn about horse racing from the novels of Dick Francis, Navajo folklore from Tony Hillerman, rural deans from Anthony Trollope. Likewise we can acquire skills or practical knowledge from fiction: how to fix a broken carburettor, how to survive in the wilds, how to rob a bank. The possibility of learning so easily from fiction arises from an obvious characteristic of imaginative storytelling, namely that “made up” stories must perforce rest on a factual or experiential base (Lamarque 2007, p.14).

He describes cognitive dimension by saying that it offers “potentialities for learning” (p.16) and has aspects that “can be exploited for cognitive ends” (p. 16). These include “bringing to mind what otherwise might not have occurred”, “imaginative material for training the emotions”, “imaginative supplementation” of what is not explicitly given, which includes judgements about the reliability of the narrator and drawing on the background knowledge one has (pp. 16-7). However, the reason Lamarque is often interpreted as anti-cognitivist is

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<sup>148</sup> One example is the theory developed by Ira Newman, who claims that we understand fictional characters because we understand real people. On top of that, Newman argues, fictional characters help us understand real people because we project the types of character into the real world (see Newman 2009).

the fact that he rejects the idea that these cognitive potentialities of literary fiction are in any way inherent to the practice of literature: “Unlike in philosophy, learning and the expectation of learning are not integral to the response demanded by fiction qua fiction, this of course is compatible with readers in particular cases acquiring all manner of beliefs or skills from their reading fiction, or storytellers having the supplementary aim they should do so” (Lamarque 2007, p. 16). The fact that sometimes the actual learning takes place on the part of the reader is just a contingent by-product.

So far nothing that Lamarque says is a real threat to the type of cognitivism I’m defending here. We simply have different perspective from which we judge literature, and he might be right to reject my epistemological scrutiny either on the basis that its results are trivial (of course literature is cognitively valuable) or that they are not interesting from the standpoint of literary aesthetics (given that it doesn’t say anything about the value of literature or literary experience).

However, there are two aspects of his stand that may diminish the theory of literary cognitivism I’m defending, which is why I want to explore it further here. The first one is his notion of the slipperiness of cognitivism, and the second one is his claim that the thematic level is not to be associated with cognitive benefits. We have already mentioned both of these ideas in the second chapter. Let us now elaborate them a bit further.

Recall from the second chapter that Lamarque objected to the claim that cognitive dimension of literature can be explained by invoking the fact that literature provides visual image, possibility to broaden horizons, explore aspects of experience and human ideals and to imagine possibilities, mostly because it is not in any way obvious how these are connected to truth. In that respect, he comes close to Olsen’s criticism of cognitivism: as long as we cannot establish that literature is in the business of being informative and delivering truths, we cannot see it as cognitively valuable.

In a response to this, I first have to say that my intuition is different: it seems to me that there is a legitimate epistemic gain in cases when literature can function so as to provide visual images, possibilities for broadening horizons and exploring aspects of human experience and ideals. Notice that the notions that are employed here can easily be incorporated within the claims i – iv of indirect humanism.

Many literary works are a wonderful visual image of certain phenomena or aspects of reality. Works like *Robinson Crusoe* or *Heart of Darkness* can serve as visual images of how the process of colonization took place, *The Scarlet Letter* offers a visual image of the way that the truth is socially constructed and determined by the voices of majority rather than the facts and evidence etc. Examples can be found to match these other controversially cognitive payoffs, and I will pursue this further in the seventh chapter. The underlying rationale however, is that where cognitive benefits are cashed out in these terms, they can offer an illuminating experience that can lead to what literary cognitivists usually call enhanced understanding. Now, Lamarque is equally sceptical towards the claim that literature offers illuminating experience or that it enhances understanding. According to him, not only are these notions unclear and undefined so that it is hard to specify what they amount to, but it is equally hard to see how they manifest and in what ways readers (and critics) are cognitively better off than non readers. I believe this challenge has been met by the recent developments in the epistemology, where philosophers like Duncan Pritchard, Jonathan Kvanvig and Wayne Riggs have developed such theories.

Finally, Lamarque rejects the claim that cognitive potentialities of literature are to be searched for at the thematic level. Given that this level is not fictional, many cognitivists and particularly literary critics see it as that aspect of literary works which generates cognitive value:

Because literary themes are usually matters of general human interest, often of a philosophical, moral, or theological nature, such as desire and forgiveness, pride and prejudice, social and personal duties in conflict, love, hope, and despair, they are commonly thought to be at the heart of literature's cognitive contribution, indeed the very matters on which literature most obviously provides "instruction". However, while the universality of such themes attests to the *seriousness* of literature, it would be wrong simply to take for granted the next step, that the aim of literature is to yield knowledge through its thematic content (Lamarque, 2007, p.19).

In order to give an answer to this, we have to show that seriousness of the content of the thematic level can be connected to cognitive value. I am not quite sure how such an argument might be developed, except to appeal to the mimetic dimension of literature: if literature speaks about things that concern us as human beings, and if we are reflective, knowledge seeking rational beings whose epistemic aim is to develop a rich and encompassing understanding of as many aspects of our world as possible, then the seriousness of literature's themes cannot be seen as of no importance in such a cognitive endeavor. Love for knowledge and understanding is an intellectual virtue. Given that the way literature develops the themes



and invites modes of imaginative engagement and reflection on these, it can contribute to our knowledge and our understanding of the world.

One way to show this is to see how a development of a theme is relevant for those cognitive payoffs of literature that were just under discussion. If literature is in the business of exploring human experience, and one of the relevant aspects of human experience is the influence of money and consumerism on individual, then the analysis of these themes I offered in the second chapter in reference to Dreiser, Flaubert and Vonnegut is a good starting point for my claim. Again, examples can be summoned to fit the other pay offs as well.

There is another way in which I believe the thematic level can be seen as cognitive. In order to see how this can be, I'll invoke the view of literature as an instrument of knowledge<sup>149</sup>. Here the focus is on the way in which the authors are often interpreted as analyzing and exploring various themes. It is here that literature meets other knowledge-seeking practices. I'll turn to this in the sixth chapter, for now, it will suffice to recall the interpretations of Dreiser's work by Eby and Sherman or the interpretation of *Frankenstein*.

### **4.3.3. Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have analysed various anti-cognitivist's arguments against cognitive value of art and literature. I have tried to diminish the force of some of them, while some others are still radiantly vivid. In order to defend the main cognitivist's intuition, we have to show that those anti-cognitivist's arguments can be answered. To recapitulate: the worry Plato left us with is that or the reliability of the authors. We have to show that authors write from knowledge and that because of that, literature can be a valuable source of knowledge. Following Stolnitz, we have to provide an account for the fact that literary works contain mistakes and contradictions. Our prime concern after reading Olsen is to show that the fictional/factual distinction doesn't undermine cognitive dimension. With Lamarque, the challenge is to show that 'slipperiness of cognitivism' works in favour of, rather than against, literary cognitivist's claim. This will depend on whether or not we can show that truth and knowledge are not the only relevant notions that can bear on epistemic analysis of a work.

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<sup>149</sup> Swirski 2007.

## 5. FICTIONAL TESTIMONY AND EPISTEMIC AIMS AND VALUES

In the previous three chapters I was analyzing literature from the point of view of epistemology. My motivation for conducting such an analysis was the intuitively plausible belief that literature is cognitively valuable. This is supported by the long tradition of philosophical discussion about cognitive value of literature, as well as by the numerous examples from literary criticism. Readers form beliefs on the basis of the works they read and literature can be a source of various other cognitive benefits, as expressed under the indirect humanism. We have seen that one possible objection to such a claim was the fact that for some of these benefits it is hard to see in what way they relate to truth and knowledge. I claimed that such cognitive benefits can be accounted for if we abandon this narrowly understood, monist view of epistemic goods. The theoretical support for such a claim is the so called value turn in contemporary epistemology which is characterized by a certain move toward recognizing the epistemological importance of various states and processes that are left out by the monist approach. The working hypothesis in this part is the claim that all the various cognitive payoffs that literature can afford can be accommodated within this wider framework of pluralist epistemology. To put it differently, cognitive benefits that literature can afford are among those achievements that epistemology recognizes as valuable. That means that literature is a valuable tool that can help us reach and fulfil our epistemic aims and values.

This claim should not be read as saying that only literature (but not other practices) can assist us in the pursuit of our epistemic aims or that every literary work has the capacity to do this or that this is why literature is valuable. As before, my aim is not to ground literary value in the cognitive value understood along these lines. My claim is only that, if we evaluate literature from the epistemological point of view, this is the result we will get. It would take an additional step which I am not about to take here to show that aesthetic/artistic value derives from this.

Someone might ask about reasons for subjecting literature to epistemological scrutiny in the first place, particularly if such an analysis does not have the further goal of accounting for the aesthetic value of literature. An uninformative answer to this challenge would be that anything can be an object of epistemic evaluation. More theoretical answer has to do with

what I have already indicated: it is undeniable that literature influences readers' cognitive economy and once this is recognized, we have to wonder how it fares with respect to what we find cognitively valuable and worth pursuing. In order to answer this, we will now turn to first providing an account of epistemic aims, goals and values<sup>150</sup>.

### **5.1. Epistemic aims and values: monism vs. pluralism**

Epistemologists of all persuasions tend to invoke the goal of obtaining truth and avoiding error. This goal seems to be of specific interest to epistemology. No other goal is invoked as frequently as this one. No other goal is given as much weight or is treated with as much respect as this one (David, 2001 p. 151).

David here expresses the traditional, monist view on what is our epistemic goal: reaching truth. Given that this goal implies that of avoiding error, the two come hand in hand. Jonathan Kvanvig calls this Twin Goods View: "There are exactly two goods that are distinctly and purely cognitive or epistemic. They are (1) having true beliefs and (2) avoiding false beliefs" (Kvanvig 2002, p. 88).

Given the way our epistemic goal is defined, all the epistemological assessments (whether of individual belief, sets of belief, believer or process) will only take into consideration how what is being evaluated fares with respect to this goal. Ultimately, even the value of knowledge has to be derived from the value of having true and not having false beliefs.

In the previous chapter we have seen that some literary cognitivists evaluate literature in precisely this way. Plato, Stolnitz and Olsen have each denied literature its cognitive dimension because it came out bad when evaluated through the lenses of our twin goals. Given its fictive dimension, artistic liberty in deviating from the truth and manipulation of the descriptions, as well as the alleged lack of expertise on the part of the authors, literature as a practice did not get passing grades with respect to twin goals. I argued there that such an approach was wrong and that it radically oversimplified the overall cognitive workings of literature, given that it didn't recognize the epistemic importance of indirect humanism. If

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<sup>150</sup> Short terminological explanation: in what follows I will mostly talk about epistemic aims and values, though epistemologists sometimes use notions such as epistemic goods and epistemic goals (see Riggs 2003, 2008, Kvanvig 2005, David 2001). The idea is, those states (such as knowledge) or properties (such as truth) that we find epistemically valuable are also what we aim to reach, because possessing them is an epistemic good. Riggs worries over whether this might be seen as circular, but it seems to me that the idea here is rather clear. We value knowledge (additional and much discussed issue in contemporary epistemology is why) because we recognize that knowledge is epistemically valuable, that is, it is epistemic good. Because of that, it is our aim, or goal, to reach knowledge.

truth is all that matters, as the monist would make us believe, then all the contribution that indirect humanist insists upon are not cognitively valuable, as Lamarque pointed out. Such a view is at least implicitly committed to Twin Goods ideology. So in order to get past the main anti-cognitivists' claims, we have to show that there are other ways in which we can think about our epistemic goals.

One such way is suggested by Jonathan Kvanvig. He argues that The Twin Goods View is wrong. His reasons for that claim have to do with a discussion on the value of knowledge, as opposed to the value of its components; for my purpose here, we don't need to take up on this<sup>151</sup>. But a valuable lesson from Kvanvig is that, if we focus too much on the (value of) truth and knowledge and praise these achievements on their own, we lose sight of the active role of a cognizer. Such reasoning is motivated by drawing the analogies with what we praise in the domain of moral behaviour: "We value morally right acts because we are *responsible* for the good outcome that results. We are correctly granted *credit* for the good outcome" (Kvanvig 2002, p. 104). This same reasoning applies to what we value in epistemology. One can get to the truth by lucky coincidence, or just by chance. In this case, cognizer reached truth (and avoid error), but somehow the intuition is, this is not enough to make this achievement epistemically valuable. So, Kvanvig concludes, in addition to valuing the goals of getting to the truth and avoiding error, we "value the properties of having reliable processes, epistemic virtues, truth-directed motivations, and so forth. But, in addition, we value being responsible for the satisfaction of our cognitive goals. Such responsibility requires at least that the goals are reached by way of our very own epistemically valuable properties" (Kvanvig 2002, p.104).

So the first lesson from Kvanvig's objection to monist epistemology is to acknowledge the importance and significance of the responsible cognizer. This includes not only his epistemic character, but also his ability to actively guide himself in his search for knowledge: to know which questions to ask and how to ask them so that the answers he gets are fully informative. Within my enquiry, I will use this figure of responsible cognizer to build up the figure of a sensitive and reflective reader. This in turn will help me block some of the anti-cognitivists'

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<sup>151</sup> This in itself is a book-long debate, so for the reasons of space we will not engage in it. Valuable and insightful contributions to the problem are found in Kvanvig 2003 and Pritchard, Millar and Haddock 2010.

worries regarding the formation of beliefs (and acquisition of knowledge) on the basis of reader's being in inferior epistemic position.

Another possible reason for abandoning the epistemic monism (and the epistemic primacy of truth) is the fact that such a view doesn't differentiate between good, bad and pointless truths. In discussing the problem of pointless truth Kvanvig is more concerned with showing that truth (and knowledge and understanding, whose value derives from their connection to truth) has unqualified and universal value, but such a view has to explain for the fact that we find some truths (the number of the sand on the beach of the number of the blades of grass in one's backyard) trivial<sup>152</sup>. But if our main epistemic goal is believing truths, then even pointless truths seem to be of importance and we should aim at knowing them. If not, one has to find a criterion for differentiating between those that do and those that don't. Here I do not aim to offer any such criterion, but to point toward the fact that the way I characterized mimetic and humanistic aspect of literature helps us go beyond the problem of pointless truth. Literature is concerned with what matters to us as human beings, it deals with perennial themes which are of the lasting importance for people. And if, as I claim, literature can also tell us something epistemically important about these things, then certainly it is in the business of revealing to us valuable, rather than trivial truths<sup>153</sup>.

Wayne Riggs offered another argument for abandoning the Twin Good View of what matters in epistemology. According to him, one worry that such a view raises is that trying to fulfil the goal of reaching truth and avoiding error might in the end be counterproductive. Given how easy it is to get things wrong (that is, how hard it is to know with certainty that truth, rather than error has been reached), cognizer might end up restraining from epistemic pursuit and suspending their judgements even in cases when no such suspension is necessary. That might seriously undermine our epistemic pursuit as well as lower the amount of things we know. Riggs' own solution to balancing these goals is to recognize the epistemic importance

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<sup>152</sup> See his 2008.

<sup>153</sup> Obviously, different readers will find different themes pointless or valuable. This depends on the individual interests, as well as on the themes dealt with and the circumstances described. It is important to recognize that because literature is not concerned with pointless truth, it cannot be charged with the arguments from banality and triviality.

of a goal that supersedes the two, and that is pursuit of understanding. We'll turn to this shortly.

Abandoning monist picture of epistemic aims and values brings about a change in how we understand epistemology. Riggs characterizes such an approach to epistemology as the value turn in epistemology, given that the defining aspect of it is the recognition of other cognitive values beside truth and consequently, an expansion of our epistemic goals so as to include these values. Riggs calls this 'new' kind of epistemology a value-driven epistemology and sees it as expanding the domain of epistemological enquiry beyond that determined by the traditional monistic view according to which epistemology was defined as theory of knowledge. According to Riggs,

perhaps the greatest potential effect of value-driven epistemology is its openness to new epistemological investigations that are not tied to accounts of either knowledge or epistemic justification. As important as those concepts are to epistemology, they do not exhaust the range of epistemic evaluations that are worthy of study" (Riggs 2008).

There are various developments within epistemology itself that brought on such a change in the epistemological enquiry. Certainly one of the most influential was the increasing interest in the question of the value of knowledge as opposed to the value of true belief, a question that was, at least according to the traditional reading, developed in Plato's *Meno* but remained neglected throughout epistemological discussions influenced by Descartes. Of particular importance to the development of value-driven epistemology are theories developed by virtue epistemologist, particularly those that answered to the value problem by invoking the epistemic agency and intellectual virtues or skills of cognizers. Generally speaking, such theories see knowledge as a kind of cognitive achievement which deserves credit.

I think there is a lot that is valuable in the virtue epistemology primarily because it recognizes the important place that individual cognizer and his cognitive apparatus and intellectual character hold in the human pursuit for knowledge (and other epistemic aims). That doesn't mean however that these theories are not entwined with their own problems and inconsistencies, but it is not my aim here to solve them. The lesson I want to take from them is the importance of the active role of the cognizer, who is asked to reflect not only on what he thinks he knows, but also on his cognitive skills and belief forming processes. I take such a cognizer and his intellectual character to be important because it will allow us to resist seeing the process of learning from literature (with all the additional impact literature can have that were discussed under indirect humanism) as a process in which reader passively accepts what

he reads without thinking it through and evaluating it. I will develop this active role of a reader in the second part of this chapter; for now however it is important to keep in mind that reaching any kind of knowledge, and particularly attaining some more complicated goals such as understanding, requires active participation on the part of the cognizer.<sup>154</sup>

All of these questions are important and worth pursuing but doing so would take us too far from our problem. There are three lessons to take from value-driven epistemology which will matter for us here. I will not go into reasons for preferring value-driven, pluralistic view of epistemology over monistic view; suffice to say that I find Kvanvig and Riggs' accounts more promising in providing an explanation for human cognitive behaviour taken in the widest sense possible. The three lessons are the following. We have already seen that this account expands the domain of epistemological research beyond 'knowing that p'. This, I will now show, helps us answer those arguments against literary cognitivism raised by Stolnitz, Olsen and Lamarque. If there are other epistemically valuable states besides knowing that p and if literature can generate such states, then that should diminish the force of anti-cognitivism. In addition, this pluralistic view enables us to move beyond pro-truth vs. no-truth theories of the cognitive value of literature and to provide an epistemological grounding for those values related to direct and indirect humanism.

Second, in providing an account of these other values and goals, Riggs and Kvanvig give us a valuable insight into the notion of understanding, which, recall, has one of the crucial roles in the way literary cognitivism is defended by Gaut, Graham and Gibson.

Third, this account takes into consideration the cognitive behaviour of cognizer, including the way he forms the beliefs he has and expands his cognitive economy by modifying it in virtue of the new insights he acquires. Recall that one of the reasons for Gibson's dismissal of indirect humanism was the claim that it focuses too much on the way reader cognitively responds to the literature. My claim was that this is precisely what we want to investigate

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<sup>154</sup> Here I open myself to the well know problem for Zagzebski's account of virtue epistemology: simple cases of knowledge (such as the knowledge that the light is open) do not require the use of intellectual virtues such as intellectual honesty or curiosity. That certainly is the case, but my claim is that these virtues matter for the more encompassing cognitive pursuit people engage in: that of trying to understand the world around them and make sense of their experience, behaviour and actions of other people etc. This is where literature can be seen as particularly useful, but, I claim, it's cognitive potentialities can only be cashed out if the reader itself is reflective and willing to engage.

within epistemological analysis of literature. With this wider epistemological perspective, we are given an epistemological background against which to evaluate indirect humanism.

### **5.1.1. Epistemology: a wider conception**

So, if the focus of epistemology is no longer on knowledge, what is it on? Here is how Kvanvig sees it; the extent of the quote only testifies to the expansion of epistemological concerns:

At the most general level of characterization, epistemology is the study of certain aspects of our cognitive endeavours. In particular, it aims to investigate *successful* cognition. Within its purview, then, are various kinds of cognizing, including processes such as thinking, inquiring, and reasoning; events such as changes in one's world view or the adoption of a different perspective on things; and states such as belief assumptions, presuppositions, tenets, working hypothesis and the like. Also within its purview is the variety of cognitive successes, including true beliefs and opinions, viewpoints that make sense of the course of experience, tenets that are epistemically adequate, knowledge, understanding, theoretical wisdom, rational presuppositions, justified assumptions, working hypothesis likely to be true, responsible inquiry and the like (Kvanvig 2005, p. 286).

What we see here is an expansion of the domain epistemology was traditionally seen as occupying.<sup>155</sup> The challenge for literary cognitivist now is in analyzing literature through the parameters issued by Kvanvig. Here's an attempt to do that, though much more elaborated example of such a scrutiny will be presented in the following two chapters. Let us start with the first aspect: epistemological research includes various kinds of cognizing, including processes such as thinking, inquiring, and reasoning. Obviously, thinking, inquiring, and reasoning are all involved in the very process of reading a work. We have seen that the process of understanding a work involves filling in the gaps not explicitly given and asking about fictional truth: these processes of negotiating between fictional world and real world would be impossible unless the reader engages in thinking about what he is reading, inquiring into the connections between characters and reasoning about how the episodes within the novel are structurally connected and depend upon each other. But this is not enough; we want these processes to bear upon the knowledge about the real world that they might bring. One way in which reading a literary work invites thinking, inquiring and reasoning about the real world is captured by the way indirect humanist explains the impact of literature. We saw that

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<sup>155</sup> It is worth pointing out that this is not the only way in which contemporary epistemologists think of epistemology. We have already seen Swirski's account of Elgin's revisionist model. Another new approach to epistemology is the one pursued by Roberts and Wood who have recently developed an account of what they call regulative epistemology (see their 2007).



reading a literary work can invite new patterns of thinking about the real world situations. It can also develop new, enriched concepts that readers can apply to the world and it can create various cognitive perspectives we can take toward the world. Readers can develop new evaluative and descriptive patterns through which they think about their experience, they can realize that their previously held view was lacking in depth or was too superficial, non sensitive towards complexities that make our experience and ask for our judgment. So in many ways, the cognitive processes we engage in, in the process of reading, can be evaluated positively by epistemic standards.

The next important aspect of epistemology is evaluation of “events such as changes in one’s world view or the adoption of a different perspective on things”. I take this to be one of the most valuable impacts of literature; in the seventh chapter we will develop an account of different ways in which literature can bring about a certain change in the way readers understand the world. Many philosophers emphasize the ability of literature to cause a change in perspective. I argued that the failure to recognize this lead anti-cognitivists to search for one propositional truth that can be extracted from the work. But when literature brings about a change in perspective, more complex processes take place and these involve not just formulation of propositions but deepening of awareness and understanding. Coming to appreciate the extent to which male-female relationship can be devastating can only trivially be acknowledged when expressed propositionally, yet Hawthorne’s *The Birthmark* and *Rapaccini’s Daughter* can gradually lead readers toward grasping, on a deeper and deeper level, how profound and devastating man’s inability to come to terms with his female companion can be and what can happen when his only way out of it is to destroy her. If even those relationships that are seemingly based on love, acceptance, support and harmony, such as the one between Georgiana and her husband in *The Birthmark*, may turn out to include deep patterns of abusive behaviour that can lead to self-loathing on the part of the woman and her eventual death, then a very gloomy aspect of male-female relationship is revealed. One should become sensitive toward tracking those patterns in the relations he develops in his life.

Next, epistemology concerns itself with “states such as belief assumptions, presuppositions, tenets, working hypothesis”. At this point of course it is not yet clear how such states lead to any recognizably valuable cognitive goods, but at least it is recognized that they do have a role to play in our attempt to reach cognitive grasp of our world. One of the anti-cognitivist’s claims against literature’s cognitive value was the claim that it can only be seen as a source of

hypothesis, not about the real world. This was supposed to diminish its cognitive value, given that the cognitive strength of a hypothesis is lesser than that of knowledge. Knowing that p is always better than assuming (even if correctly) that p. However, it is wrong to claim that hypothesis and assumption have no epistemic value. They are of great importance for the scientific research. Why then shouldn't we claim they can also be used by individuals, in their daily attempts to reach knowledge and gain a wider cognitive grasp on various aspects of reality? To go back to *The Birthmark*, one of the hypotheses that Hawthorne is questioning is that of the limits of science and its benefits for people. If science can be in service of eugenic aspiration and be used to purify and perfect other human being from their inborn qualities, all in the name of love, then we have to wonder whether it is necessarily good for humanity.

Finally, Kvanvig inserts variety of cognitive successes on his list, including true beliefs and opinions, viewpoints that make sense of the course of experience, tenets that are epistemically adequate, knowledge, understanding, theoretical wisdom, rational presuppositions, justified assumptions, working hypothesis likely to be true, responsible inquiry and the like. Putting knowledge aside, given its traditional importance for epistemology, let us focus on these other cognitive successes. If all of these count as cognitive successes, then all of these are states we should strive towards. Notice however that these are precisely those cognitive achievements indirect humanist has been insisting on. Literature offers us viewpoints (or, as I will develop this in the seventh chapter, perspectives) and epistemically adequate tenets, hypotheses (as anti-cognitivists like to insist on) and justified assumptions.

### **5.1.2. Epistemic aims and understanding<sup>156</sup>**

We saw that the abandonment of monistic picture of epistemology means recognizing that there are more epistemic goals we should be striving towards. According to Kvanvig, this plurality of epistemic goals include “knowledge, understanding, rationality, justification, sense-making” (Kvanvig 2005, p. 287). More or less, this list exhausts the key notions of contemporary epistemological debates, with the addition of wisdom. Once the epistemologists turned their attention toward understanding, it did not take it long for it to win the epistemic

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<sup>156</sup> Some of the claims developed in this part are developed in my 2013.

game of thrones and replace knowledge as the chief cognitive success<sup>157</sup>. Duncan Pritchard, Jonathan Kvanvig, Wayne Riggs, Catherine Elgin, Linda Zagzebski and George Gardiner all provide arguments that show that understanding is more valuable than knowledge<sup>158</sup>.

Despite the constantly growing interest in the notion of understanding, there are still many grey areas left to explore. Is understanding to be understood as a process, whereby the cognizer comes to understand something, or is it to be understood as a state, quite like knowledge, where a cognizer can say ‘I understand that’ or ‘I understand how’. A question that precedes such considerations is the question of what it is to begin with that can be understood. This is particularly problematic for two reasons. First, if analogies between knowing that and understanding that are brought too close, then one has to explain what is it that is ultimately distinctive of understanding that makes it different from and superior to knowledge. Couldn’t we just claim that understanding is a kind of knowledge, perhaps in the sense that the one who understands simply knows more?<sup>159</sup>Baccarini (2014) develops these concerns with regard to moral understanding.

Second worry is that one might end up explaining what understanding is by providing an example of it: understanding is what it is involved in understanding a sentence, or a mathematic proof. Though this is a good pointer towards how to think of understanding, it is radically too narrow and does not allow for a full impact that understanding as cognitive success bears. One of the reasons why some philosophers are so sceptical over the epistemic significance of understanding is their inability to recognize various ways in which understanding is important for our cognitive economy. Swirski claimed that one problem with it is that it is unclear whether it is a process or a state. But the fact that understanding can be a

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<sup>157</sup> The most recent developments in epistemology suggest that the next epistemic battle between values and goals will be the one between understanding and wisdom. Several philosophers now seem to be giving precedence to wisdom and provide accounts of it that are based on the fact that reaching wisdom, that is, becoming wise, is what all epistemic agents should strive towards. See Mišćević 2012, Ryan 2012.

<sup>158</sup> Particularly loud in regard to this claim has been Duncan Pritchard, see?? See also ??? – The exception to this is Mikael Janvid (2012) who disputes the higher epistemological value of understanding

<sup>159</sup> Kvanvig calls this (and argues against) the common assumption about the nature of understanding: “Though the nature of understanding is not often addressed, it is nonetheless commonly assumed that knowledge and understanding bear a direct and intimate connection, for the assumption is that understanding of the theoretical sort is a species of knowledge. The assumption is that the kind of understanding at issue when regarding our cognitive success and achievements is some type of deep and comprehensive knowledge concerning a particular subject, topic, or issue (Kvanvig, 2003, p. 188)

gradual process as well as a state should not be interpreted as a negative aspect of understanding. There is a valuable difference between ‘we are coming to understand better and better the impacts that social networks such as Face book have on social connections children make with their peers’. The reason why such an understanding is a process is the fact that new aspects of these impacts are revealed with time, aspects which couldn’t have been taken into consideration before. On the other hand, ‘A child understands Pythagorean Theorem’ implies a state he reached. It can be manifested in his ability to solve various mathematical tasks in which Pythagorean Theorem is used. But notice that as he starts to engage with more and more complex calculations, his understanding of Pythagorean Theorem develops and can again be seen as a process. In order for the child to be able to successfully perform these calculations it is not enough to know the correct formula. He needs to understand the way it functions and the implications it has. As Baccarini (2014) claims, understanding gives him the relevant abilities (to recognize the domain of application of the theorem, the way it intersects and connects to other theorems, and to use it in order to successfully solve mathematical tasks).

These kinds of considerations lead Richard Mason, whose *Understanding Understanding* (2003) is one of the most insightful, elaborated and systematic contribution to this problem, to claim that critical theory of understanding cannot be based on the critical theory of knowledge. Analyzing various ways in which we might think of the relation between knowledge and understanding and the priority of one over another, he claims that “there is no reason to suppose that understanding needs ‘conditions’ of a kind that would mirror those in a theory of knowledge” (Mason 2003, p. 48).

A more restricted analysis of understanding is found in Riggs, Zagzebski, Pritchard and Kvanvig, all of whom explain understanding in terms of grasping certain aspects of the object of understanding. According to Riggs,

What is involved in having understanding may well be even more obscure than what is involved in having knowledge. But it seems clear enough that it includes having a true grasp of some significant part of reality without being deeply deceived about it. Thus achieving it requires achieving our two traditional goals ... Understanding some part of the world requires an appreciation for order, fit, and pattern. It requires that one ‘see’ how things fit together and why they are the way they are (Riggs, 2003, p. 350).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Riggs believes that accounting for understanding in this way allows us to surpass the practical and theoretical limitations that are traditional epistemic goals of believing truth and avoiding error impose on us. Namely, from

Linda Zagzebski (2001) retains this basic idea. According to Zagzebski, it was already in Plato that understanding was given epistemic precedence over knowledge, but somehow epistemologists lost this from sight because of their constant unyielding focus on justification. But understanding can better further our epistemic goals of obtaining ‘cognitive contact’ with structures of reality. According to her, there are three elements that figure in the understanding. First, “...understanding is a state gained by learning an art or skill, a *techne*. One gains understanding by *knowing how* to do something well, and this makes one a reliable person to consult in matters pertaining to the skill in question” (Zagzebski 2001, p. 241).

If we think of literature as being capable of assisting us in our efforts to reach understanding, we might be inclined, on Zagzebski’s model, to think that authors are reliable in what they are saying because they have the ability to make us understand things they write about better. This is precisely what Plato objected to so strongly and it is the idea behind the ‘no expertise’ argument. On the other hand however, if we look at the literary practice, many examples will pile up testifying to the extent to which authors are taken as reliably portraying various aspects of reality and experience, thus enabling us to understand these better. Freud’s praise of the psychological insights and correctness of Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* is already common knowledge. What so many critics emphasize repeatedly is the incredible precision in which Raskolnikov’s mind is depicted by Dostoyevsky, and in the following quote, a critic is interested in accounting for the role that Raskolnikov’s mother had in his actions. Here is Dilman:

If I were to try to sum up what lead to Raskolnikov’s murder of the pawnbroker, I would mention the way in which his external circumstances interact with his inner state and bring certain pressures on him to the boiling point, and I would single out the following aspects of his personality for comment. I would first mention Raskolnikov’s passivity and what sustains it. It is important to see it as defensive response to his mother’s attempts to control him through self-sacrifice and indirect accusation. Its consequences are guilt and inability to do good and to feel he exists in his own right. Raskolnikov wishes to get away from these consequences without giving up what sustains the passivity. He wants to prove to himself and the world that he is somebody that counts and he uses the violence that has accumulated in him to break away from this passivity – what Freud would call a ‘reaction-formation (Dilman, 1984, p. 103)<sup>161</sup>.

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the theoretical point of view, our epistemic desire to acquire as much truth as possible might be restrained by our fear of getting things wrong. But if we aim at understanding, and understanding can be reached even if there are some erroneous components in the wider system, then one can still gain cognitive benefits that might be unreachable if we were careful not to make a mistake. The claim that understanding can be attained even if there are some errors in the wider cognitive construction is not unique to Riggs, as we’ll see.

<sup>161</sup> Ivanits also emphasizes this aspect, see her 2008, p. 55.

Similar observations are found in reference to Hawthorne and Shakespeare, among others, and the theoretical question for us is to see whether Zagzebski's account provides an answer to the problem of the reliability of the author. Obviously, we cannot claim that Dostoyevsky, Shakespeare or Hawthorne were trained psychologists with working knowledge of psychological principles. Yet, we cannot ignore the depth and profundity of the psychological mechanisms they portray in their stories. My intuition here is that we have to allow for the possibility that these authors really understood the convoluted ways of human mind, even if we will never be able to explain how they came to possess it. But we can presuppose that such understanding could have been gained from their own personal experience combined with their profound interest into the world and people and their ongoing participation in and negotiating with social, political, religious etc. changes that they were witnessing. Though a further analysis of the reliability of the author with respect to what he is writing will be pursued in the next chapter, here I want to take a short detour to support the claim that we have to presuppose that authors such as Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare knew and understood enough of human psychology to write about it with epistemological authority.

Linda Ivanits (2008) analyzed Dostoyevsky's work, including not only his fictional works but his journalistic writing and private letters. In her book, she emphasizes the extent to which his autobiographical elements are included in various of Dostoyevsky's works. Of particular interest here are the years he spent in prison, surrounded by people who were in prison for various criminal activities, as well as political ideas they advocated. Ivanits argues that it is this experience that is evident in many of his works; his idea about Russian people – *narod* – which is always in the background to the main stories in all of his novels were inspired by his experience and contact with these people. She cites Dostoyevsky's letter, where he states the following:

How many folk types and characters I carried out of prison with me! ... How many stories of tramps and bandits and in general of this entire dark, woeful way of life! It will suffice for entire volumes! In general, my time has not been wasted. Even if I didn't get to know Russia, I got to know the Russian people well and perhaps better than many know them (Ivanits 2008, p. 20).

Ivanits also analyzes Dostoyevsky's own struggle to come to terms with religion and the idea of God. As it is evident from his works, his views on God and his love and benevolence were changing and this is reflected in his characters. As Ivanits explains it,

Four years of forced labour tipped the scales toward a more profound awareness of the human inclination toward evil. No doubt it was in this school, where gratuitous malice was a far more palpable reality than human compassion or the presence of divine, that

the writer came to understand first-hand the overpowering arguments for atheism he would give to some of his greatest characters. (...) His own difficulty in believing in the reality and goodness of God while enduring a world of cruelty and injustice becomes a central problem for his heroes from Raskolnikov to Ivan Karamazov (Ivanits 2008, p.31).

Going back to Zagzebski, the second feature she identifies as relevant to understanding is that “understanding is not directed toward a discrete object, but involves seeing the relation of parts to other parts and perhaps even the relation of part to a whole. It follows that the object of understanding is not a discrete proposition” (p. 241). We have seen this idea already in Riggs, and as it stands it is one of the most emphasized aspects of understanding.

How is one to come and see the relation of part to other parts or to the whole? Literary cognitivists claim that this is what literature is good at. To go back to Raskolnikov, what the work shows is how various parts of his psychological economy acted upon him and this enables us to understand how a person, who is in other respects prone to helping others even at the expense of her own well being<sup>162</sup>, is capable of committing a murder:

His [Raskolnikov's] state of soul brings in the dimension of his relation to good and evil, and the portrayal of this, in turn, involves the moral perspective of the novel. Dostoyevsky is interested in both and in the interaction between them. He is interested in the way pride, humiliation, anger and resentment can turn into a force for evil and feed on each other, and in the way they end their energy to ideas that inspire the desire for grandeur in the self and contempt for other people. He is equally interested in the way the ideas which Raskolnikov adopts – the utilitarian, socialist, and Nietzschean ideas which were prominent among the young radical intellectuals in Dostoyevsky's Russia – reinforce Raskolnikov's pride and anger, and organize his destructive tendencies by giving him an aim which he would not have had without them (Dilman 1984, pp. 96-97).

The third feature that figures in Zagzebski's account of understanding is that it “represents some portion of the world nonpropositionally” (p. 242). Zagzebski sees the world to be composed of various structures and finds it “unlikely that propositional structure exhausts the structure of reality” (p.242). Therefore, the manner in which we come to grasp these structures is through understanding: “I propose that *understanding is the state of comprehension of nonpropositional structures of reality*” (p. 242, italics original). This aspect of her theory is important in that it makes the connection between our mind and our cognitive states and the world. Though understanding is, as we shall see shortly, primarily internal state

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<sup>162</sup> Ivanits analyzes the motif of charity giving in *Crime and Punishment*, particularly in the way it reflects Raskolnikov's self-image and the views he had about who he is and who other people are.

it reveals to us something about the world and its aspects, or in Zagzebski's terminology structures. And so, if literature is particularly well equipped to give us understanding, then this understanding is understanding of those aspects of reality it brings to view, in the sense specified by Gibson. Notice that this does not exclude understanding oneself and one's motives, hopes, desires and attitudes better, as well as the relations one makes with other people.

In order to further analyze the nature of understanding and the differences between knowledge and understanding, let us see the theory developed by Jonathan Kvanvig. His interest is in two senses of understanding: when understanding is claimed for some object, that is, subject matter, and when it involves understanding that something is the case, which covers understanding why, when, where and what<sup>163</sup>. On a first approximation, knowledge and understanding are both factive. One important difference however is that in some contexts, knowing (Bill Clinton) does not imply understanding (him). Note however that from understanding (a body of information) follows that one has the knowledge (of the information). According to this view, understanding is a species of knowledge, and not identical with it. This implies that understanding adds something that the knowledge itself lacks. Here is how Kvanvig accounts for it:

The central feature of understanding, it seems to me, is in the neighbourhood of what internalist coherence theories say about justification. Understanding requires the grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a large and comprehensive body of information. One can know many unrelated pieces of information but understanding is achieved only when informational items are pieced together by the subject in question (...) Whereas knowledge can have as its object individual propositions, understanding may not (Kvanvig 2003, p. 192).

So what is of crucial importance are various elements within one's cognitive grasp and the way they are related to each other. This relation may be explanatory, logical, probabilistic or of some other kind that brings about a coherence and unity among them. What is crucial for

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<sup>163</sup> One more aspect is 'understanding how', but Kvanvig doesn't take it to be of importance for theoretical, only for practical purposes. I find this notion rather illuminatory in discussions on the cognitive value of literature. Many philosophers who defend some such view claim that literature is powerful in delivering the 'knowing how' something feels like. My view is that is even better at making readers understand how something happens. Again, my claim is not that literary works can replace the actual experience, but it can be revelatory enough for some such understanding to take place. Think of *The 1984*. One of the cognitive payoffs of reading Orwell's masterpiece is in the way it shapes the circumstances in which readers can come to understand how political regime can be so strong to demolish the natural bond between children and parents, making it equally likely that parents will report their children to the police and vice-versa.



understanding is that the cognizer sees how these relations among elements are held together and how they interact to one another, producing a state of affair that is the object of understanding. Kvanvig calls this ‘theoretical understanding’ and what is important is that it is not directed at particular propositions, but at the whole they create.

Given the overall coherentist structure of this account of understanding, a worry might arise given the traditional problems that surround coherentism. I will not develop this further, neither in the direction of proving that coherentism is the best account of justification nor in the direction of answering the challenges to it. For my view, and to the extent I want understanding to feature in explanation of the cognitive impact of literature on a reader, both internalist accounts of justification, coherentism and foundationalism are valid. For example, if one demands his beliefs to be coherent, then the beliefs triggered by literature will be evaluated according to the overall beliefs he already has. If one is fundamentalist, the test will be how the new beliefs fare with respect to those beliefs he takes to be fundamental.

Further questions arise at this point, particularly those having to do with readers’ reaction (where this includes change in perspective, acceptance of new beliefs, deepening of or broadening of moral sensibility). I do not want to raise the question of moral improvement through literature<sup>164</sup>, and I will argue in chapter seven that we cannot predict the impact that a literary work will have. Our question here is to see how literature can contribute to understanding and I am trying to show that this can happen regardless of whether one is coherentist (as the structure of understanding seems to be) or fundamentalist.

The reason it makes sense to claim that literature can deepen one’s understanding of some subject is the fact that understanding, unlike knowledge, comes in degrees. This makes understanding different from knowledge, and it also makes it possible for us to talk in terms of understanding something better or with a greater degree of understanding. This is one of the reasons why Kvanvig eventually rejects the view according to which understanding is a species of knowledge. The fundamental difference between the two is revealed in the fact that knowledge is primarily directed at the world and the relevant connection is that between the mind and the world. On the other hand, understanding is directed at the connections of beliefs

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<sup>164</sup> See Baccarini 2010 and Baccarini 2014 for this problem.

within the mind. The final requirement that Kvanvig puts forward for understanding is that the grasping of these relations be psychological: “The way in which all the information fits together must be part of what the person is aware of” (Kvanvig 2003, p. 202). The idea here is that one cannot understand something without being unaware of it.

There are two controversial issues when it comes to understanding. The first one concerns its connection to the truth, the other one has to do with the question of whether it is propositional or non-propositional. We have seen with Wiggs that understanding includes a true grasp of some significant part of reality without being deeply deceived about it. It remains unclear what is meant by ‘true grasp’ but the addition of not being deeply deceived about it leaves room for the possibility that at least some of the elements that are pieced together in one’s understanding are not true. According to Kvanvig, both knowledge and understanding are factive and in that sense truth (of what is understood) matters to understanding, but the difference between the way truth is connected to knowledge and understanding is in the role that truth plays in Gettier-like cases. While instances of gettierized true belief are not considered knowledge, Kvanvig suggests that understanding is not vulnerable to gettier-like cases. Given the cognitive effort at the part of the cognizer to reach understanding, one cannot come to it by luck or by accident.

Roberts and Wood point toward another way in which understanding can be evaluated with respect to truth: “Something like truth is typically a condition for understanding” (Roberts and Wood, 2007, p. 43) and this can be further explained in terms of adequacy: “Understanding anything typically has to be more or less adequate to what it is about” (p. 43-44). However, they argue against Zagzebski’s claim that understanding is non-propositional: “So, on our view, understanding can perfectly well be directed at propositions, and this is one of the most common kinds of cases. But there are also plenty of cases of non-propositional understanding” (p. 46). At least one such case is that when understanding is clearly a matter of seeing connections among things. What is important here is that understanding should be seen as an ability to recognize how things hang together.

There is one further aspect of Roberts and Wood’s theory that is appealing and that is the way they connect understanding to the active engagement of the cognizer: “Understanding often emerges only with concerted intellectual activities like exploring, testing, dialectical interchange, probing, comparing, writing, and reflecting” (p. 50). This is important because it further grounds the role that literature has in aiding us reach understanding. Literary works

provide us with material with which we can actively engage at the level of emotional and cognitive engagement. This cognitive engagement consists of intellectual activities noted by Roberts and Wood and often include those that Kvanvig enlisted under epistemic successes.

The most developed account of understanding is the one by Catherine Elgin, in her book *Considered Judgment*. We have already seen Swirski's account of her revisionist epistemology, and I argued there that such an approach is not to be discarded as quickly as Swirski does it. The book itself is deeply concerned with how we get from individual propositions and beliefs to more coherent and encompassing, full developed theories. In developing such a view, Elgin relies on the Rawlsian model of deliberations in domain of politics and her central notion is that of reflective equilibrium and coherentist account of how we get to know something and justify it. Such a coherent system includes not only beliefs of which it is composed but also values, rules, categories and methods of justification, all of which are subject to constant revision and reconfiguration as the new beliefs, new values, new aims etc. come along. This is radically oversimplified account, but it gives us enough to go by. Here I am interested in her account of understanding and the role it plays in our cognitive economy. A lot of what she says will figure in my account of accepting the fictional testimony.

Elgin begins her account of understanding by noting that cognitive progress is no piecemeal accretion of separately established facts but a dynamic interplay of novel proposals and entrenched commitments. Integration of new material often requires reconfiguration of commitments already in place, revision or repudiation of earlier adoptions. What is crucial is that she does not take the result of such a process to be knowledge but understanding. In accounting for such a view, her account of understanding and the crucial ways in which it differs from knowledge is revealed.

According to her account, knowledge and understanding do not share the same conditions. Knowledge is "a permanent achievement, its justification unconditional and [it is] insensitive to the changes in epistemic climate" (p.122). On the other hand, understanding, as epistemic achievement that is accomplished only within a wider structure of reflective equilibrium, is a result of various elements falling into place (elements such as values, rules, categories, methods) which guide the research and these cannot be evaluated with respect to some permanent truth. This allows for the possibility that a falsehood is inserted into the system,

which cannot be the case with knowledge. However, Elgin urges, falsehoods can have a valuable role in advancing understanding. Her example is the law of gravity, which

is not strictly true since it neglects the gravitational attraction of everything except the Earth. Still, it provides genuine insight into the behaviour of falling bodies, contributes to a general theory of terrestrial motion, connects observations and measurements with physical laws, and closely approximates the vastly more complicated truth. It is plainly epistemically valuable, even if its falsity disqualifies it as knowledge (Elgin 1996, p. 123).

It is important here to emphasize that on this account, understanding is not restricted to facts and it does not have to be “couched in sentences” but “located in apt terminology, insightful questions, effective nonverbal symbols, intelligent behaviour” (Elgin 1996, p. 123). Nevertheless, it represents a valuable cognitive achievement, one which is “more comprehensive than knowledge ever hoped to be” (Elgin 1996, p. 123), given that it extends to domains and objects that cannot be captured by knowledge. These include understanding rules, reasons, actions, passions, objectives, obstacles, techniques, tools, forms, functions, fictions, facts, pictures, worlds, equations, patterns. What is important is that these are “not isolated accomplishments; they coalesce into an understanding of a subject, discipline, or field of study” (Elgin 1996, p. 123). Finally, Elgin, as well as Kvanvig, Zagzebski and Roberts and Wodd, sees understanding as something that comes in degrees.

#### *Lacking understanding and literature*

Can we now say something about the lack of understanding, in order to account for the way literature assists us in reaching it? At the first approximation, we may claim that lack of understanding over a subject matter is evident when a person lacks appropriate resources in her cognitive economy to see the subject matter as well supported, coherent system that leaves no room for uncertainties and unresolved issues. A person who understands something will not be in need of any additional information or judgment to be able to see the connections and to grasp the situation in all of its complexities.

A lack of understanding may also be visible when one’s perspective on the subject matter is incomplete and the cognizer’s beliefs are indifferent and disconnected. This might be manifested in one’s inability to come up with an account he himself is ready to offer to others or to accept himself.

Elvio Baccarini (2010, 2014) wrote extensively on what the lack of understanding of moral principle consists in. One of the aspects of understanding that he sees important has to do with the abilities that the cognizer has once he understands a certain moral principle. This includes

grasping the reasons behind the principle. This is important because without such grasping, moral agent cannot be said to be responsive to moral reasons, he cannot make the proper relations between various moral principles, he cannot recognize the instances covered by the normative requirement and cannot see the relevant domain of the application of particular principle. Art is particularly important for providing the experience that will enable the agent to come to fully grasp the significance of the principle.

Literary cognitivists, particularly those who focus on what Lamarque calls cognitive strengthening, argue that literature can provide us with the opportunity to reflect on the story as they are developed and in the process to work with the knowledge we already have, where this includes primarily moral and emotional knowledge. In the process of reading, this background knowledge is activated and firmer connection between beliefs can be created, or the beliefs (or principles, in the case of morality) can be rearranged, so as to include and account for more details of a moral situation that the story presents. Noel Carroll claims that the cognitive process of this kind is not that of knowledge but of understanding. Here is his rather longish account of understanding, which includes all the aspects that are included in the theories developed by epistemologists:

I intend here to draw a contrast between knowledge and understanding such that understanding is meant to mark our capacity to manipulate what we know and to apply it with a sense of intelligibility – not simply to have access to abstract propositions and concepts, but to employ them intelligibly and appropriately. Understanding is a capacity to see and to be responsive to connections between our beliefs. A person with understanding has the ability to find her way around in the mental geography of her own cognitive stock. Understanding is the ability to make connections between what we already know. With understanding, we acquire increasing familiarity with concepts and principles that are at first bewildering. Understanding is the activity of refining what we already know, of recognizing connections between parts of our knowledge stock, of bringing what we already know to clarity through a process of practice and judgment (Carroll 1998, pp.143-144).

Given all the accounts of understanding, I take it is now rather obvious that it should be one of our highest epistemic aims. Whether or not it is only a species of knowledge or a state of its own, it is obvious that being in the state of understanding something is preferable to not being in such a state. To the extent that literature can contribute substantially to our coming to the state of understanding, we have to briefly ponder one final question: does the fictive dimension of literature compromise its ability to afford us understanding?

I don't think it does. First of all, in accordance with what I argued so far, literature is immersed into to real world and its subject and themes have to do with the real world. Therefore, even if the story that is being developed is fictional, that doesn't mean that something about the world isn't revealed in it. How can a fictional story help us understand what it is involved in two people who are completely unable to understand one another? Take the following case:

If Charles had but wished it, if he had guessed it, if his look had but once met her thought, it seemed to her that a sudden plenty would have gone out from her heart, as the fruit falls from a tree when shaken by a hand. But as the intimacy of their life became deeper, the greater became the gulf that separated her from him. Charles's conversation was commonplace as a street pavement, and everyone's ideas trooped through it in their everyday garb, without exciting emotion, laughter, or thought. He had never had the curiosity, he said, while he lived at Rouen, to go to the theatre to see the actors from Paris. He could neither swim, nor fence, nor shoot, and one day he could not explain some term of horsemanship to her that she had come across in a novel. (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, ch. 7).

In this part, Flaubert first starts describing the differences between Charles and Emma, differences having to do with their moral values, expectations, hopes, desires, life style, expectations etc, which will in the end prove to be too big to be overcome, and the two partners too detached from one another to even try. What this chapter brings forward is Emma's realization that a mistake has been made, that she should not have married the way she did. The full extent of her misery and despair is revealed in the final paragraphs of the chapter:

Her thoughts, aimless at first, wandered at random, like her greyhound, who ran round and round in the fields, yelping after the yellow butterflies, chasing the shrew-mice, or nibbling the poppies on the edge of a cornfield. Then gradually her ideas took definite shape, and, sitting on the grass that she dug up with little prods of her sunshade, Emma repeated to herself, "Good heavens! Why did I marry?" She asked herself if by some other chance combination it would have not been possible to meet another man; and she tried to imagine what would have been these unrealised events, this different life, this unknown husband. All, surely, could not be like this one. He might have been handsome, witty, distinguished, attractive, such as, no doubt, her old companions of the convent had married. What were they doing now? In town, with the noise of the streets, the buzz of the theatres and the lights of the ballroom, they were living lives where the heart expands, the senses burgeon out. But she—her life was cold as a garret whose dormer window looks on the north, and ennui, the silent spider, was weaving its web in the darkness in every corner of her heart. (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, ch. 7).

Flaubert here brings Emma, as well as the reader, step by step, to understand what it is to be truly unhappy in one's relation and how such a state can develop. Note that authors do not have to be as detailed as Flaubert is here in order for such an understanding to shine through. The following is the extract from Hemingway's *Cat in a Rain*

She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck.

‘Don’t you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?’ she asked, looking at her profile again.

George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy’s. ‘I like it the way it is.’

‘I get so tired of it,’ she said. ‘I get so tired of looking like a boy.’

George shifted his position in the bed. He hadn’t looked away from her since she started to speak.

‘You look pretty darn nice,’ he said.

She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.

‘I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,’ she said. ‘I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.’

‘Yeah?’ George said from the bed.

‘And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.’

‘Oh, shut up and get something to read,’ George said. (Hemingway, *Cat in a Rain*)

With Hemingway, unlike with Flaubert, readers are not given an insight into the character’s minds, yet the story is a visual image of the total lack of understanding on the part of the two.

Obviously, we all know that sometimes people don’t understand one another. But knowing that isn’t enough to make us understand how deeply profound and detrimental such a lack can be. Does it matter that Emma and Charles are fictional, or George and his American wife? I don’t see why it should.

## **5.2. How do we learn from literature? Analogy with testimony**

I have already said that the problem of learning from literature can be raised with respect to what can be learnt and how. Most of the previous three chapters were dealing with the ‘what’ question. Now we have to consider the ‘how’ question. In chapter three, I sketched two answers to this question commonly found in literature; the one which focuses on literature’s ability to guide imagination, and the other, which invokes an analogy with thought experiments. I have also claimed that both of these approaches have something to recommend, yet both are too narrow to explain everything that literature affords us cognitively. There is a mechanism which is more fundamental than imaginative involvement and activation of underlying knowledge that enables us to gain all the cognitive benefits. This is the mechanism of testimonial exchange. My claim is that we can develop an analogy

between literary work and testimony. Due to the lack of space, my account of testimony will have to be selective and perhaps inconclusive, but it will give us a theoretical framework within which to think of the way that the acquisition of knowledge from literature can be explained by the mechanism of testimonial exchange of information.

Let us first examine the nature of regular, everyday testimonial exchange. I will refer to such testimony as non-fictional testimony.

### **5.2.1. Non-fictional testimony: learning from others**

It took some time for epistemologists to recognize the importance of testimony for the overall knowledge people have, but today it is widely accepted that our knowledge would be considerably poorer were it not for the testimony of other people. We could never come to know as much as we do on the basis of our own experience alone, we need others to share their knowledge with us, in the same way as they need us and our knowledge. Everything we know that goes beyond our own personal experience is acquired through testimony, including the language itself. Other people tell us what the weather in England is like, how many pyramids are in Egypt, what plants are edible. We rely on our doctor to tell us why we're in pain and we rely on our car mechanic to tell us if the car is safe. Various people have various expertise, most of which we lack and in order for us to know these things (in theoretical and practical sense) we take what they tell us and apply it to our knowledge. So testimony is important for every aspect of our life and without it, we truly would not be able to know as much as we love to think we know.

There are two distinct questions when it comes to testimony: what is testimony and how we learn from testimony. According to the most simple, basic idea, in the act of testimony, one person – testifier, informer or speaker – tells to the other – audience, hearer or listener – something that he knows. Thereby, the audience comes to possess that knowledge. There are several aspects of this exchange that should be distinguished:

- (i) speaker asserts what he believes to be the case (to obtain, or to be true): testimony ultimately has to do with reporting our beliefs via assertions we make
- (ii) if this belief is true, then speaker is justified in believing what he does; therefore he has knowledge. In the act of testimonial exchange, this justification, or warrant is transmitted to the listener



(iii) the resulting knowledge on the part of the listener counts as testimonial knowledge only if it is generated and sustained only by the content of the speaker's utterance, not by any/some additional factors (such as memory, perception or any other kind of inference)

Two additional factors need to be satisfied on the part of the speaker if what he says is to count as testimony: he has to be a reliable believer (i.e. believe what is true) and he must be sincere (i.e. report only what he believes to be true). Some epistemologists add that for the successful testimonial exchange, hearer should not have any kind of defeaters for the claim being made by the speaker, where these refer either to doubts about the speaker's sincerity and reliability, or to the content of the testimony. This view of testimony is called The Belief View of Testimony<sup>165</sup>. Many epistemologists accept the claim that testimonial exchange has to do with transferring beliefs. For example, according to Duncan Pritchard, "the paradigm case of testimony [is] the intentional transfer of a belief from one agent to another" (Pritchard 2004, p. 326), where this transfer can be done either via speech or via writing.

I take this to be the most intuitive account, unburdened by any theoretical accounts, of what it means to learn something from what others tell us. If this is testimony, then my claim about the analogy stands little chance of being accepted. Notice that it makes no sense to claim that authors write what they believe – though there are many cases showing that they do – and that it is hard to account for their sincerity. Given the fictional dimension, imagination and creativity that are inherent to the process of writing, freedom to step away from what is the case etc, it is hard to see how the statements within a literary work could ever have the epistemic properties that would render them justified and warranted; even harder is to show how these are transferred to the audience. This account seems to support precisely those anti-cognitivist's voices I was trying to silence in the previous chapter. Obviously, if we want to defend the analogy between testimony and a work of literary fiction, we have to give a different account of testimony. In order to do that, let us analyze in more details how epistemologists see testimony.

One of the first who offered a definition of testimony was C. A. J. Coady. According to him,

S testifies by making some statement that p if and only if:

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<sup>165</sup> I rely here on the classification of testimony offered by Jennifer Lackey, whose book *Learning from Words* is to this day one of the most encompassing and elaborated analysis of the problems of testimony.

1. S's stating that p is evidence that p and is offered as evidence that p
2. S has the relevant competence, authority, or credentials to state truly that p
3. S's statement that p is relevant to some disputed or unresolved question (which may or may not be whether p) and is directed to those who are in need of evidence on the matter. (Coady, 1992, p. 42; I take it from Lackey, 2008, p. 15)

The way Coady defines testimony seems to imply a very narrow domain of communication which counts as testimonial exchange (for that reason Lackey calls this The Narrow View of Testimony). Testimony covers only those cases where one person has the epistemic authority over some unresolved issue and what she says about it should resolve it. Her words are the evidence for the claim she is making. For example, if I need to know what time it is but I do not have the watch, I can ask the person standing next to me who has a watch. Upon looking at her watch, she tells me it is noon. Her stating that 'It is noon' should resolve my question and what she tells me should be taken as evidence that it is noon. It is important to note that on this view, I don't need any additional evidence. Note that testimony happens only when there is someone who is 'in need of evidence on the matter'. Knowledge gets transferred from one person to another and in that sense, testimony is preservative source.

If this is how we should think of testimony, then we have to reject the analogy. Even if readers do in fact have some unresolved questions, it is highly unlikely they will turn toward literature to find answers. Even less likely is that authors wrote what they did with the intention to resolve someone's issues. Note that on Coady's account, the intention on the part of the speaker to solve the problem of those who are in inferior epistemic position with respect to that problem by testifying is the crucial aspect of testimonial exchange.

Luckily however, this view came under severe attack, mostly due to its narrowness. Elizabeth Fricker, Catherine Elgin, Peter J. Graham and Jennifer Lackey have all argued against it<sup>166</sup>. Fricker argues extensively against Coady's claim that testimony can be taken as evidence for the claim. Graham argued that the notion of evidence Coady employs is too severe; it raises the epistemic bar of what counts as evidence too high<sup>167</sup>, as well as against his claim that the

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<sup>166</sup> See Elgin 2002, Fricker 1995, 2006, Graham P. 1997, Lackey 2008.

<sup>167</sup> Graham sees this aspect to be issuing from the fact that Coady's account of testimony is too closely connected to formal testimony delivered at court to be of any informative value for the epistemology of testimony that is under consideration here, where we try to see how can we learn from what others tell us.

act of testifying is determined by the listener's needs. Lackey and Elgin also offered reasons to suspect Coady's account. Taking these objections together, there are three main problems that Coady's account is liable to. First, if defined in this manner, testimony is by definition a reliable source of knowledge and it is impossible to have unreliable informer. However, our everyday epistemic practice shows us that there are instances when relying on what others tell us is not a road to knowledge. There are unreliable informers as well as insincere informers and we have no reason to accept that their word is evidence for their claim. Next, testimony can be a source of knowledge independently of the intention of the speaker to be one's source of knowledge<sup>168</sup>. Finally, someone can testify even if the listeners have no unresolved questions<sup>169</sup>.

I agree with all the counter arguments presented to Coady's view. In addition to them, note that if testimony is a source of knowledge, then it cannot depend on whether or not the audience is in need of information. Obviously, I will come to know many things because I am in need of information (what is the time, how to reach London if I have a business meeting etc), but the view according to which we enhance our overall body of knowledge only when we need information seems to radically undermine our practice of learning. There are some epistemic agents who engage in various enquiries and these enquires determine the questions which need to be asked. Some epistemic agents are curious and this curiosity makes them ask questions. But sometimes we learn things and acquire information even if we are not even aware there is a question to be asked. This is where I see literature to be of enormous importance. Literature often makes us ask precisely those questions we were unaware of or not willing to ask.

If testimony is not to be explained by the Narrow View account, how should we explain it? My suggestion is that the proper account of testimony was provided by Robert Audi, Elizabeth Fricker and Ernest Sosa. Again, following Jennifer Lackey, we will call this The

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<sup>168</sup> One of the examples that Lackey offers in support of this claim is overhearing. Whether the act of overhearing is intentional or not, one can learn something in that way regardless of the speaker's intention to in fact inform someone else.

<sup>169</sup> Graham insists on this: "Just because I do not *need* the information you set out to convey to me by telling me something, it does not follow that you are not testifying" (Graham 1997, p. 231).

Broad View. Here is how these authors conceive of testimony. According to Elizabeth Fricker,

it would clearly be a mistake to define the link of testimony so that only those occasions on which knowledge is successfully communicated count as instances of it. What we want is the notion of a type process such that on its *favourable* exercises knowledge is transmitted. This will leave, for example, cases where the speaker is lying, or is mistaken, as (unfavourable) instances of testimony (Fricker, 1987, p. 68, ft.15).

According to this account, one can testify simply by telling things, without the additional need that his testimony be taken as evidence that is to resolve the question that the audience is in need of. So the act of testimony is defined neither according to the needs of the audience nor according to the content of the utterance, but by the act of telling itself. Therefore, what counts as testimony is much wider than Coady admits. Testimony, on this account covers cases of, “tellings in general (i.e. with no restriction either on the subject matter, or on the speaker’s epistemic relation to it)” (Fricker, 1995, pp. 396-397).

Broadening the category of testimony, it seems to me, implies that we now have to accept that testimony can cover those instances of communication, where what is being transmitted falls short of justified, true belief. Tellings in general include sharing one’s opinions, judgments, attitudes, fears, assumptions, hopes and other doxastic states which are not necessarily informative of p (though of course they share the information that speakers is worried over p, or has the attitude that p etc) but reveal something about what the speaker believes and to which degree of certainty.

Another epistemologist who accepts this broader view is Robert Audi. Audi has written extensively on testimony not only from epistemological point of view, but psychological – having to do with how people react to testimony – as well<sup>170</sup>. Epistemologically interesting cases of testimony, he claims, go far beyond what one has seen and testified to firsthand and can be about “something not witnessed, such as the implications of a scientific theory” (Audi

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<sup>170</sup> See his 1997, 2006. Audi’s concerns about testimony go far beyond my interest here. His main question is whether testimony is basic source of knowledge and justification in the sense that perception is, or is it inferential, in the sense that in addition to testimony, we rely on the additional beliefs (about the reliability of the speaker) to come to know something. Many epistemologists have written on this inferentiality aspect (see Lackey and Sosa 2006 for the most diverse accounts of the debate) but for my purpose here, we will only focus on the nature (i.e. definition) of testimony and its scope.

1997, p. 405), but it nevertheless remains unclear just how broad the category of testimony is in itself:

For the causal giving of information, say in telling where one was last night, ‘testimony’ is a heavy term. We could speak of ‘informing’, but this is too narrow, both in suggesting a prepared message (...) and in implying its truth. We might regard all testimony as a kind of saying, but not all saying – even apart from what is said in fiction – is testimony. Someone who says ‘Ah, what a magnificent tree!’ is expressing a sense of its magnificence, but not giving testimony that it is magnificent.

For the moment, we will leave aside the explicit rejection of fiction as testimony and focus on Audi’s view on limiting the instances of testimony. What we need is an account that will allow us to include those instances which are informative, yet not trivially so as the case with the tree suggests. Audi’s own solution is to define testimony as “people telling us things” (Audi 1997, p. 406). I take this to imply the claim previously made by Fricker; testimony, in the widest sense, covers all cases in which people tell us things.

Such a view implies that we can no longer think of testimony as one-proposition long expression of belief. In describing reaction to testimony, Audi speaks about progression of “narrative” (Audi 1997, p. 407). I find this important for two reasons: first, it is more in accordance with our testimonial practice generally. Notice that we are rarely told individual, piecemeal statements that transfer information even if this happens when we ask someone to help us resolve some issue. But more often, our conversation with others include stream of sentences of various informative strength; some are offered as information, others are offered as statements of support, opinions, judgments, expressions of worry etc. Second, because of this aspect, we can use Audi’s account to shed light on the idea of fictional testimony. If testimony can be wider than individual proposition (as epistemologists usually take it), then it can be wide enough to include narratives and stories, even if Audi does not see this option.

A third advocator of the broad view is Ernest Sosa. According to him, what counts as testimony is “that it be a statement of someone’s thoughts or beliefs, which they might direct to the world at large and to no one in particular” (taken from Lackey 2008, p. 20). With Sosa we see that the scope of testimony is extended even more than with Fricker and Audi, given that it includes the expression of thoughts.

Lackey objected to the broad view of testimony, claiming that it is too broad and as such, “it fails to recognize the distinction between entirely *non-informational expressions of thought and testimony* (Lackey 2008, p 21). Conversational-fillers in the conversations and thoughts expressing opinions or stating the obvious (such as the tree example from Audi), statements

offered as encouragement or supports are expressions of thoughts but should not count as testimony. According to Lackey, it is internal to the way we think of testimony that we see it as information-conveying. So if we want to save the broad view of testimony, we have to find some balance between being completely uninformative – we might call such use epistemically blank reports of thoughts – and being informative enough to count as testimony.

One such account was provided by Alan Millar and we will turn to it shortly. But before we do that, let me just note one more thing relevant for this discussion. I think Lackey is wrong in the way she characterizes the two poles, in that according to her, on one side there are information conveying statements and on the other conversation fillers, statements of encouragement and similar, non-informative statements. It seems to me such a view does not recognize one important category of statements we regularly make in conversation, those which I discussed in connection to Fricker's account, which include sharing one's opinions, judgments, attitudes, fears, assumptions, hopes and other doxastic states. This is the interesting case; these are not epistemically blank as conversation fillers or statements of support, even if it remains hard to determine how informative they are. To go back to the tree example, even if the speaker's comment about the tree was just a conversation filler or expression of his thoughts, his statement might contribute to the way hearer thinks about the tree or about what is magnificent. To put it differently, speaker's reflections on the matter might reveal to the hearer another point of view from which the matter might be evaluated and thought of. The cognitive gain in this case does not have to be knowledge, but it can still be seen as cognitive. In that sense, I believe testimony can contribute to hearer's overall system of beliefs and ultimately his knowledge, even if it is 'weak' in informative aspect.

Let us now turn to Alan Millar, who takes the straightforward case of testimony to have the following features:

- (1) It is entirely natural to suppose that recipients gain knowledge of what they are told from being told it. As a result they can rationally be assured of the matter and cease any enquiry into it that they have been pursuing. Should the need arise they could responsibly vouch for the truth of what they have been told.
- (2) Recipients do not deliberate about the likelihood or otherwise that what they have been told is true. They unhesitatingly accept what they have been told. (Millar 2010, p. 175)

In addition to these two features, there is also the third one, which states that "recipients are not indiscriminating" (Millar 2010, p. 175) when it comes to accepting testimony. We'll leave this aside for the moment.

With this characterization, it appears we are back at Coady's claim that testimony is offered as evidence and that it settles the unresolved issue. However, Millar's account is much wider than this. He relates the act of testimony giving to the wider practice of the speech acts of telling<sup>171</sup>:

My telling you that p is an act of saying you that p by which I give you to understand that I am informing you that p. Informing you that p is a matter of saying to you that p, speaking from knowledge, with the aim of bringing it about that you come to know that p from my saying that p (Millar 2010, p. 177)

What is important for Millar is that speakers and hearers belong to the same linguistic practice, which enables listeners to recognize that they are being informed. This is important, because there is a wider class of speech acts that speakers may employ, and these are cases of sayings which are "plainly not acts of telling" (Millar 2010, p. 178) in that they are not informative and are not meant to be informative. These include giving advices, asserting qualities, stating opinions and expressing emotions. This feature of Millar's account is important because it enables us to preserve the basic intuition behind the Broad View of Testimony, according to which testimony is not limited in topics and it can be stated regardless of speaker's epistemic relation to the content, but with the additional place for deliverances such as opinions, judgments, expectations etc.

Should we worry that on this account listeners will get things wrong, i.e. take non-informative statement as informative? As I said before, sometimes what is meant to be non-informative can in turn invite reflections on the part of the hearer such that he might end up with new beliefs, judgements, opinions etc. But that does not imply that participants in the language practice will not know what kind of speech act is being delivered. According to Millar's third condition, participants have acquired a range of perceptual-recognitional abilities which make it possible for them to recognize what kind of speech act is being delivered. In addition to that, there are some other clues for that, like characteristics of the content, manner, style, the context in which something is being said, as well as what is known about the speaker, where

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<sup>171</sup> It is important to emphasize the fact that the speech acts are embedded in a practice, because the existence of practice implies there are rules that govern the behaviour of those who participate in a practice and that these rules are familiar to all those who participate in a practice. This enables us to understand one another. We can recognize what our fellow speakers are doing with the words when they use them: they ask us something, tell us something and so on. For a more detailed account of the linguistic practice that govern speech acts of tellings, see Millar (2010a), and Millar (2010b).

this includes his reliability with respect to the subject matter and his propensity to speak the truth, lie or simply joke.

Notice however that, if testimony is a source of knowledge for the recipient, not for the speaker, then the decision of what counts as testimony rests at least partly on the listener: upon hearing a particular statement, whether intended as telling or as saying, listener will see how it contributes to his overall cognitive economy. Imagine a speaker, Helga, who, in a conversation over coffee, tells me that her father is disabled, due to the stroke he suffered, and that she has to take care of them. She goes on describing in details all the medical procedures that her parents underwent and she describes what she has to do in order to feed him, bath his etc. Upon my commenting her for her dedication and bravery in facing such hard situation, she simply says, 'It is life; you have to take what it gives and keep the positive attitude.' Obviously, her last comment is not meant to be informative on the situation her father is in, not on the procedures needed to keep him in a decent shape. She is also not informing me that something is life. She is simply offering her opinion, based on her experience and considerations, on how to handle hard situations. According to Audi and Lackey, such a statement is a conversation filler, an act of encouragement or expression of thoughts and is not to be considered as testimony. Yet, my view allows for such a statement to count as testimony and I claim that it can contribute to my knowledge and the way I perceive the world. First of all, I may come to learn something about Helga – that she is an optimistic person. This is obviously something I inferred from her statement (given that at no point she said I am an optimist). Second, it may change the way I think (and feel) about various aspects of life and the way I react to it. And this can happen even if Helga never had any intention of changing my world-view.

This fact that testimony should be considered from the point of view of speaker and the hearer was recognized by Lackey. Her account is unique in the epistemology of testimony for two features that she emphasizes. The first one is her Statement View of Testimony, the second one is testimony's Dual nature. Let us briefly go through these.

First, Lackey severely criticizes the Belief View of testimony, according to which in delivering a testimony, speakers deliver their beliefs. Even if they do, we in fact learn from what they say, not from what they believe. Lackey offered several arguments purporting to show this and the most famous and well discussed among them is the so called Creationist Teacher. According to the example, Stella is devoutly Christian and as such, believes in



creationism despite being aware of the overwhelming evidence against that view. Stella is a fourth grade teacher and in delivering biology lesson to her students, she asserts that ‘Present day homo sapiens evolved from Homo erectus’. In preparing her lectures, Stella consults reliable scientific sources and bases her lectures on scientific evidence which advance evolutionism. Lackey claims, and I concur, that Stella’s students can in fact learn that ‘Present day Homo sapiens evolved from Homo erectus’ even though Stella doesn’t believe it. What matters is what her statement is grounded in reliable source, which in this case is<sup>172</sup>. The proper account of testimony then, according to Lackey, is the Statement View of Testimony (SVT):

According to the SVT, the process of communicating via testimony does not involve a speaker transmitting her belief to a hearer, along with the epistemic properties it possesses. Instead, a speaker offers a statement to a hearer, along with the epistemic properties *it* possesses, and a hearer forms the corresponding belief on the basis of understanding and accepting the statement in question. Statements are not, therefore, merely vehicles for expressing beliefs, but rather, they are the central bearers of epistemic significance themselves (Lackey 2008, p.72).

The Statement View of testimony has advantages over the Belief view. First, it does not make the act of testimony dependant neither on the intention of the speaker to inform, nor on the need of the audience to be informed. Rather, it recognizes two independent aspects of testimony, one having to do with the speaker, the other with the hearer. Lackey calls this account The Disjunctive View. What is distinctive of this view is that it recognizes testimony as intentional act on the part of the speaker and testimony as a source of belief or knowledge for the hearer. There are therefore two aspects of testimony to consider: Lackey refers to these as s-testimony and h-testimony. S-testimony “captures the sense in which testifying requires some intention on the part of the speaker to convey information” (Lackey 2008, p. 31). On the other hand, in T-testimony “a hearer may take a speaker’s act of communication as conveying information comprising multiple propositions” (Lackey 2008, p. 32). One consequence of this is that testimony is no longer only preservative source of knowledge, but generative as well. This is the second advantage that the Statement View has over the Belief View.

Second important feature in Lackey is what she calls dual nature of testimony. The moral from her Disjunctive View was to recognize that there is a sense in which speaker testifies and a sense in which hearer gains beliefs and knowledge from speaker’s communicable

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<sup>172</sup> For a detailed account of this view see Lackey 2008, ch. 2.

content. However, we have to further specify which conditions both of these parties have to meet in order for the successful testimonial exchange. Without such conditions, there would be no way to differentiate between reliable and non reliable testimony. According to Lackey's dualist account,

For every speaker A and hearer B, B justifiedly believes that p on the basis of A's testimony that p only if: (1) B believes that p on the basis of the content of A's testimony that p, (2) A's testimony that p is reliable or otherwise truth conducive, and (3) B has appropriate positive reasons for accepting A's testimony that p (Lackey 2008, p. 170).

The crucial aspect in dualist account is that it demands both parties involved in the testimonial exchange to do their part of epistemic work. Condition (1) recognizes the importance of the content expressed by the speaker, which was already emphasized in the Statement View. Beliefs are formed in the hearer on the basis of the content; that what is expressed.

Now it becomes easier to see why literary fiction can be seen as testimony. By engaging with the literary work, readers are confronted with the certain statements and it is these statements that trigger the consequential epistemic work (reflection, hypothesizing, gap filling, learning, forming beliefs, etc) rather than the beliefs of the author. This is in line with the fictive stance attitude demanded by Lamarque and Olsen: even if in some cases authors write what they believe and even demand of readers to adopt such a perspective, ultimately it is the content that readers engage with, not beliefs.

Condition (2) specifies the role that the speaker has in testimonial exchange. What is important is that he is a competent believer and a sincere testifier, which means that "the speaker must form her own beliefs in an epistemically acceptable fashion, and then report to others what she herself believes" (Lackey 2006, p. 171)<sup>173</sup>. This is important because it puts boundaries to what kind of content can be expressed in testimonial exchange. Demanding that the speaker forms his beliefs in epistemically reliable manner and sincerely transmits them implies that he does not state that which he lacks justification for or that which he knows is not true.

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<sup>173</sup> Lackey does not stand alone in claiming this. It is generally accepted that speaker must be reliable (or competent) and sincere in what he is reporting. It is only if these two conditions are satisfied that his testimony can be seen as a source of knowledge.

Obviously, the claim of literary cognitivism in general depends on whether or not it is possible to show that authors are reliable in what they are saying. Plato, Stolnitz and Olsen claimed that they are not. That was their main reason for rejecting cognitivism. Before providing an account of authors' reliability, let us elaborate on Lackey's condition regarding the active role of the hearer.

Condition (3) specifies the role that is on the hearer to fulfil before she can accept testimony. The claim that hearer should have positive reasons means that she mustn't have (or be aware of) any defeaters which might undermine the reliability or sincerity of the testifier. There is a long and still booming discussion in the epistemology of testimony over how to satisfy this account. The most pressing concerns arise here with respect to the so called reductionism vs. anti-reductionism. According to the reductionism, a hearer cannot accept testimony unless he can reduce it to some more basic sources of knowledge. In other words, he needs to have evidence that the testimony is reliable before he can accept it. This evidence should account for the reliability and sincerity of the speaker. Many epistemologists claim this is not something that a hearer can ever acquire due to the fact that she is by definition in inferior position with respect to the speaker. Particularly in situations in which the speaker is unknown to the hearer, the hearer cannot find evidence about reliability and sincerity of the speaker. Because of this, these epistemologists argue we should accept the main anti-cognitivist's credo, according to which hearer does not have to have positive reasons that speak in favour of reliability and sincerity of the speaker, it is enough that he does not have any overall negative evidence that undermines the speaker or his testimony.

Snježana Pijević-Samaržija, who has written extensively on the epistemology of testimony, has dedicated a lot of attention to this problem. According to her position, a listener is epistemically justified in accepting the testimony only if she has the evidence which makes such an acceptance rational and justified. This is the so called evidentialist position in epistemology, according to which we must never trust anyone or anything without sufficient evidence. The crucial question in this discussion is: what kind of evidence does one need in order to be justified to accept the testimony?

Pijević-Samaržija considers two possibilities. According to the first one, the evidence must support the content of the speaker's testimony, i.e. the listener should find additional evidence for the claim the speaker is making. Such a demand however cannot be met, given that, by default, the epistemic position of a listener is always inferior to that of a speaker, given that he

lacks precisely that knowledge he should use to confirm the content of the testimony. To make things worse, any attempt he might make to find such evidence will depend on some other testimony, rendering thus the whole process circular<sup>174</sup>. Some anti-evidentialists see this as a conclusive reason to reject the evidentialist position.

Prijić-Samaržija however offers the second possibility. Instead of the evidence in favour of the content of the testimony, suffices that one has evidence in support of the speaker's moral and epistemological character. Roughly, this means the listener should have the evidence which shows that the speaker is sincere and trustworthy, that is, a reliable source of information. In order for her to obtain such evidence, additional conditions are required. First, the evidence that she has to a bigger extent must support acceptance of testimony (rather than non-acceptance or restraint from accepting it). Second, she must not have the evidence that speaks against the reliability of the speaker. Third, she must have empirical and inferential evidence that speaks in favour of accepting the testimony<sup>175</sup>. There are two relevant factors that can help the listener reach such evidence: the background beliefs she has and the context of testimonial exchange<sup>176</sup>. These factors play important role in providing us with the information regarding the aspects of the situation in which testimony is being offered, as well as the relevant features of the speaker. Given our practice with delivering and receiving testimony, we can differentiate between trustworthy and non-trustworthy speakers as well as between those contexts in which there is a bigger chance we will be deceived or misinformed. Finally, we also have the abilities to differentiate between those topics on which people are more prone to lie about or be less reliable. All of these factors contribute to how the listener judges the conversational context and the epistemic and moral character of the speaker. In that

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<sup>174</sup> For the problem of circularity see particularly Fricker 1987, 1995 and Lackey 2008.

<sup>175</sup> See Prijić-Samaržija 2007, particularly pp. 678-679.

<sup>176</sup> See Prijić-Samaržija 2007 and 2006. Prijić-Samaržija claims that our experience and the long history of participating in the testimonial exchange help us differentiate between acceptable, non acceptable and partly acceptable testimony. It also teaches us that the practice of communication is characterized by stability and uniformity. Both of these help us recognize the aspects of situation in which we are being delivered a testimony; this is what our evidence consists in. She develops an example with the passer by whom we ask directions to reach a museum in a foreign country. According to her, given that our practice shows that passers-by rarely lie or deceive in such occasions, we can trust what he says even if we do not have evidence regarding his sincerity in this particular situation (see Prijić-Samaržija 2007, particularly p. 680).

sense, this is what is meant by the epistemically justified and rational acceptance of testimony.

Similar considerations are found in Lackey. On a general level, Lackey objects to both, reductionist and anti-reductionist. Her claim is that debate in these terms does not recognize the dual nature of testimony and the contribution that both parties have to make in order for the successful testimonial exchange. We have already seen that the speaker has to be reliable and sincere. But that is not enough. Hearer is also demanded to be active in the exchange, and not to passively accept what he is being told. It is not enough not to have negative reasons, he should search for the positive ones. In doing so, there are at least three classes of relevant reasons which a hearer might come to possess which can justify him in accepting the testimony. First, Lackey notes, there are “criteria for individuating epistemically reliable contexts and contextual features” (Lackey 2006, p. 173). The idea here is that a hearer can differentiate between those sources which are generally found reliable and those which are not (such as scientific reports as opposed to bad journalism). These same discriminative capacities are employed to evaluate the epistemic reliability of the speaker: “calm and coherent stranger reporting a robbery a few blocks away versus an apparently confused person who is smelling of alcohol reporting the same” (Lackey 2006, p. 173). The second class includes recognizing the differences between various topics of the report: as Lackey notes, we usually take a more critical stance toward someone who is delivering a political speech or talking about his children’s achievements and qualities than about someone who is reporting the time of a day. And finally, in the third class are criteria that have to do with individuating reliable speakers with respect to the subject matters. An accountant will be more reliable source when it comes to taxes, while politicians in the middle of their campaigns are known to be prone to distort the facts and offer false promises.

A valuable lesson from Lackey’s account is the insistence on the active role of the hearer. I will develop this account further with respect to my claim about the active role of the reader. But before that, let us briefly summarize features of testimonial exchange that are relevant for explaining how gaining knowledge from what others tell us is possible.

First, testimony should be defined according to the Broad View: testimony includes tellings generally with no restrictions on the subject matter. This means that it comprises informative statements, as well as expressions of opinions, judgments, emotional states, expectations, predictions etc. Just how informative the given statement will be ultimately depends on the

hearer<sup>177</sup>; and the speaker cannot predict how his testimony will affect the hearer's system of beliefs and overall cognitive economy. The reason for that is the fact that testimony is generative source of beliefs and knowledge.

One implication of my claim is that my account of what counts as testimonially based belief is wider than how epistemologists such as Lackey define it. According to Lackey, epistemology of testimony should only be concerned with purely testimonial beliefs, that is, those which are generated only by testimonial exchange. On my view however, s-testimony can be the source of beliefs, but that does not mean that the beliefs one forms as a result of the reflections triggered by s-testimony do not count as epistemically relevant. On Lackey's view, such beliefs are hybrid forms, not purely testimonial and because of that she dismisses them from epistemological purview. Given that I am interested in the way tellings generally influence our cognitive economy, I can accommodate these hybrid forms into my account. I think this is more in line with the impact of testimonial exchange in our everyday life. For example, if a friend of mine tells me that the trip by bus from Rijeka to Dubrovnik takes nine hours, I will form the corresponding belief that it takes nine hours to reach Dubrovnik by bus. But in addition, knowing that I dislike long bus rides, I may form the decision to travel by plane or by boat. What other people tell us has consequences not only for what we come to know, or believe, but also for what we decide to do<sup>178</sup>.

What cognitive benefits can be derived from my account of testimony? To begin with, hearer can gain true beliefs and knowledge, if the conditions of sincerity and reliability are satisfied. That much is readily admitted in the contemporary discussions on testimony. We should however recognize that testimony can benefit us in reaching states such as understanding. A testimony delivered by my friend Sara who has a bipolar disorder about her state is a source of knowledge about specific aspects of disease, such as the exchange of episodes of frenzied

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<sup>177</sup> By claiming this, I do not mean to imply that testimonial exchange is not governed with at least some expectations of what the hearer needs and what the speaker can give. To go back to the watch example, if the only information that H needs at the moment from S is the time, and S can deliver this information (because he has the functioning watch and can tell the time, and is sincere in reporting the time, then his statement that it is noon will be the information required by H). As Catherine Elgin (2002) showed, Gricean norms of communication are operative in the testimonial exchange, but what counts as 'Be informative' changes according to the shared knowledge between S and H.

<sup>178</sup> For a further distinction between pure and hybrid form of testimonially based belief see Lackey 2008 and Audi 2006.

states and depression, troubles with sleep and insomnia, inability to make rational decisions and inhibition of action. But in addition to that, it can help me understand how such states exchange and how this exchange affects her everyday life and the way she deals with the world. Thus, not only do I become more knowledgeable about the disease itself and its symptoms (which in turn might help me recognize them or be more attentive and perceptive towards them), I gain an understanding of what is involved in having this disease and going through life with it. The example with Helga showed us that testimony can affect our world view and make us reconsider our approach to life. Perhaps this might be characterized as developing practical skills (to borrow from Novitz) to negotiate with the experience.

### **5.2.2. Fictional testimony**

Let us now see how the analogy between literary fiction and testimony might be developed. I will start by elaborating a bit on the motivation behind my claim. As I briefly mentioned in the third chapter, my starting point is the fact that the generative principle behind literature is the practice of storytelling. In this sense telling may involve a creation of fictional world inhabited by fictional people, but it may also involve telling nonfictional things about our own world. And given that it is hard to deny that there are cognitive benefits we get from the stories we are told, the only way to ground this cognitive gain in epistemically recognized source of such gains is to invoke the analogy with testimony. I claimed in the third chapter that of all the epistemically recognized sources of knowledge, literary fiction can only be seen as a testimony.

In order to get the intuition going, think of works which have the structure of testimony; works written from the first person perspective where the narrator tells us the story of his life. Think of the beginning of Melville's *Moby Dick* or Fowles' *The Magus*. When Nicholas Urfe informs us "I was born in 1927, the only child of middle-class parents, both English"<sup>179</sup>, we understand this in the same way as when a real-life person tells us that he is an Englishman, born in 1927 and that he is the only child. The same applies to works written from the third person perspective. The way Dreiser tells us the story of Carrie is structurally the same as my friend's telling me of the experience of someone whom she knows. It might be claimed that

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<sup>179</sup> John Fowles, *The Magus*, ch. one.

the difference lies in the fact that fictional testimony is always semantically dense due to the literariness of the language, but that is not necessarily so. We can certainly use stylistically elaborated and embellished sentences rich in symbolism, metaphors and other literary devices in real life and still participate in communication and talk to people. On the other hand, literary work can be devoid of all such semantic embellishment, think of Hemingway's prose.

Whether or not my analogy is plausible depends on the notion of testimony one accepts. Those inclined to accept strict, narrow account developed by Coady will be resistant toward my suggestion. Those who see testimony as being broad enough to include non-informative expressions might be more sympathetic. Note however that there are various ways in which the notion of testimony can be enlarged so as to grow beyond "a single line of transference" (Coady 2006, p. 254). Think of testimonial exchange with a friend who retells the details of her honeymoon or business trip to some foreign country. It is likely this testimony will include a lot of factual descriptions about the geographical, sociological, meteorological etc. aspects of the country she visited. It will also include many of her impressions and judgments on these matters. Perhaps it will include some generalizations or reflections on various aspects of the cultural, religious or economical aspects of the way people live in the city she was staying. We include all these tellings into our non-fictional exchange and can adjust our response to what we are being told. Epistemologists nowadays talk about expert testimony and wonder whether we should trust experts without subjecting them or their reports to some additional testing in order to confirm their reliability and sincerity<sup>180</sup>. So if the notion of testimony can be thus extended, why shouldn't we at least have a look at the possibility of developing the analogy between non-fictional testimony and literary fictions?

An epistemically motivated reason for invoking the analogy comes from the work of C.A.J. Coady, who analyzes the instances of what he calls pathologies of testimony<sup>181</sup>. These include lying, gossip, rumor and urban myth and what characterizes them is that they are "distortions of or diseases of the normal case of telling and relying on what is told" (Coady 2006, p. 254). There are two reasons why I think a work of literary fiction can and should be analyzed as

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<sup>180</sup> See Snježana Prijic-Samaržija 2011.

<sup>181</sup> See Prijic-Samaržija and Vidmar 2012 for discussion on Coady's view on the pathologies of testimony and the analogy between literature and testimony.



another possible candidate for the pathology: its similarity to how pathologies are formally (as opposed to context-wise) described and second, the overall epistemic gain they deliver. According to Coady, gossip, rumour and urban myth “are highly narrative in form; they are presented in a dramatic mode, sometimes even in song or poem, and they often contain, explicitly or implicitly, strong interpretative and evaluative elements” (Coady 2006, p. 254). In reference to rumour, Coady however does not object to the view that “it is a form of testimony, because it involves the transmission of propositions from one or more persons to others” (Coady 2006, p. 265). Here again we see that testimony does not have to be delivered in “a single line of transference”, which gives additional push to the idea that works of literary fiction can be understood as a special instance of testimony. However, now we have to give some account of how exactly to understand the analogy: is the whole literary work to be understood as one act of testimony, or should we break it down into smaller bits, perhaps report-by-report or reflection-by-reflection?

The question is important and it does not admit of any easy answer that can be generalized. There are some literary works – think of Hemingway’s *A Very Short Stories* – which have the form of a testimony in the most formal sense of the word. Sentences are precise, informative (though informative on what goes in the story, that is, with fictional characters), there are no reflections on any theme, there are no description, symbols, metaphors or any similar literary devices that are not (usually) inserted into our everyday, non-fictional testimonial exchange. With such cases, it is easy to see why the analogy might work: the story simply is told in a way non-fictional testimony is told. And as Coady recognizes, “whether some communication is a degenerate form of testimony cannot be simply read off from the form or content of its telling” (Coady 2006, p. 269).

What about works which share this testimonial structure, but include reflections and are burdened with symbolism, metaphors and other literary devices that make them semantically dense, such as *Moby Dick*, *The Magus*, *Sister Carrie* or *War and Peace*? Despite their testimonial form, there are interchanging parts of reports and reflections contained in these works, not to mention reports of the conversations and reflections of the fictional characters themselves. Should we treat this as one testimony or should we break it into smaller parts? And finally, what about those works such as *The Sound and the Fury* or *The Collector* which

have more than one ‘speaker’ within the text<sup>182</sup>, or works such as *The French Lieutenant Woman* which offers alternate endings. Can the analogy be applied to them?

My answer here is twofold. First, yes, the analogy can still be applied and we can think of these works as testimony. However, that does not imply that we cannot break it into smaller aspects and evaluate each of them individually. Again, this is something we do when we receive non-fictional testimony as well. Any testimony can be broken down into smaller bits and evaluated separately<sup>183</sup>. Given that opinions cannot be evaluated in terms of their truth-value, obviously hearers react differently to various parts of the testimony. This can be applied to the literary work. Consider the following example:

The place smelled of the oil of the machines and the new leather -- a combination which, added to the stale odours of the building, was not pleasant even in cold weather. The floor, though regularly swept every evening, presented a littered surface. Not the slightest provision had been made for the comfort of the employees, the idea being that something was gained by giving them as little and making the work as hard and unremunerative as possible. What we know of foot-rests, swivel-back chairs, dining-rooms for the girls, clean aprons and curling irons supplied free, and a decent cloak room, were unthought of. The washrooms were disagreeable, crude, if not foul places, and the whole atmosphere was sordid. (Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 39).

Dreiser here gives us a factual description of the working conditions in the factory Carrie was working in. This description consists of informative sentences and the reader can form beliefs about factory based on this description. He can also evaluate this description in terms of truth-conditions, for example by consulting history book.

Now consider another example:

Among the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilisation is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason. On the tiger no responsibility rests. We see him aligned by nature with the forces of life -- he is born into their keeping and without thought he is protected. We see man far removed from the lairs of the jungles, his innate instincts dulled by too

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<sup>182</sup> My discussion here might overlap with the problem of the narrator (who is it that tells the story, the author who wrote it, the character who retells it from the first person perspective, the omniscient narrator who retells it from the third person perspective, the controlling intelligence, impersonal voice etc? These questions matter within literary aesthetics, particularly various theories of narrative, but I will not pursue them here. I want to preserve the idea that once the author decided to write a literary work, and a reader approaches the work, there are cognitive benefits that can be cashed out and the mechanism that explains this transfer is that of testimonial exchange.

<sup>183</sup> Sanford C. Goldberg offers an account of how this might be done, see his 2001. What matters for Goldberg is that various aspects of the same testimony can be differently evaluated with respect to the speaker’s reliability.

near an approach to free-will, his free-will not sufficiently developed to replace his instincts and afford him perfect guidance. He is becoming too wise to hearken always to instincts and desires; he is still too weak to always prevail against them. As a beast, the forces of life aligned him with them; as a man, he has not yet wholly learned to align himself with the forces.

If we try to analyze this passage in terms of thematic concepts that are being developed here, we will get something approximately like the following list: reason, instinct, passion, will, human being, truth. The problems being raised here include that of a human being and the role that instincts, on the one hand, and will and reason on the other, have with respect to his actions and behaviour. Along the way, the question of his moral responsibility is brought up. Without any information on the source of the text, we might conclude it is a text from philosophical book, pertaining perhaps to Descartes or Hume or Spinoza, given their interest in these topics. In fact, it is another part of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (p. 73). But that does not mean there's nothing cognitively valuable for the readers to get from it. Dreiser questions the very nature of our identity and self here, as well as the forces that shape it, putting forward his own views about these concepts. I claimed that this kind of reflections are not to be evaluated with respect to truth, but in terms of how they contribute to the way reader himself thinks of these concepts<sup>184</sup>.

Let us go back to the problem of pathologies of testimony. Pathology is, as we saw, distortion of the normal case of telling and relying on what is told. The most obvious instance of pathology of testimony is a case in which speaker delivers a false testimony because he is insincere: he is presenting a false content as a true one<sup>185</sup> with the aim of deceiving the speaker. As a result, speaker picks up wrong (false) information and creates false beliefs.

Given the fictional dimension of literary works and the no fidelity constraint which governs the creation of literary fiction, it might be stated that authors are in fact lying. Even if Dreiser's descriptions of nineteenth century America are true, there never were Carrie, Clyde or any other of his characters so he is in fact lying. Therefore, literary works are clear cases of pathologies. The same applies for the second defining feature (relying on what is told). Given

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<sup>184</sup> Vidmar and Baccarini (2010) offered a further analogy, according to which the 'reports' part of the story corresponds to Millar's tellings, and 'reflections' part to Millar's sayings.

<sup>185</sup> It is important to stress this aspect in order to differentiate it from the cases in which speaker deliver testimony which is false, although he does not know that is false but believes he speaks the truth.

that the reader knows that he is reading a literary work rather than a scientific one, he cannot rely on what he is being told in the same sense as he can in the case of non-fictional testimony.

This line of reasoning has to be rejected on several grounds. First of all, the authors of literary works have no intention of deceiving their readers: by choosing to write a literary work, authors express their intention not to write scientific work or any other kind of work where fidelity to facts is the governing maxim in writing. More importantly, unlike in the cases of insincere testimony where listeners remain oblivious to the lies they are being told, readers are aware of the fact that what they are reading is a literary (not scientific) work. I said before that literature is made possible by the existence of the conventions that guide the actions and expectations of those who participate in the practice. Therefore, no one is being deceived by the literary works. We cannot treat literary works as a deceitful testimony, even if they do not follow the normal paradigm of delivering testimony.

Based on Coady's analysis of pathologies of testimonies, there are two main conditions that turn testimony into a pathological instance. Both of these have to do with the speaker's relation to the truth. An act of telling is pathological in case when the speaker does not have a good basis for his testimony, given that he has not observed what he is reporting firsthand (i.e. he has not witnessed it) or that he is not competent with respect to what he is reporting.

In the light of these conditions, is fictional testimony an instance of pathology? An answer to this cannot be given without a detailed analysis of the figure of the author and his role as a testifier. This will for the most part be the topic of the next chapter. My general claim at this point is that the question of pathology with respect to literary fiction cannot be given a generalized answer meant to cover all literature. As the next chapter will reveal, various literary genres and periods dictate various commitments to truth and the way it should be presented in a literary work. In some cases authors can easily step aside from what is true without being liable to blame, either epistemological or aesthetic. But in some cases, they cannot. So in many ways there is a reason to speak of authors as testifiers. Even if fictional dimension, no-fidelity constraint, the impact of imagination and creativity challenge the extent to which authors can be seen as reliable and sincere, we should not a priori claim that they are necessarily unreliable and insincere.

On the other hand, I want to further stress the guiding intuition behind this thesis: literature is cognitively valuable not only in the sense that there are true beliefs we can pick up from a

work, but more importantly in the way it contributes to our cognitive economy. Coady acknowledges that pathologies of testimony “need not be altogether worthless” (Coady 2006, p. 269) in that they can invite further research and enquiry into the subject matter. In that way, hearers might still end up more knowledgeable. The same is true of literary works, even if there are reasons to treat them as pathology – which I do not think is the case – their overall contribution to one’s belief system and knowledge, not to mention conceptual repertoire, should justify the claims of literary cognitivism. Their cognitive impact does not stop with their last sentences. In the seventh chapter we will see how Philip Kitcher and Peter Kivy develop this further.

It appears then that when it comes to deciding on whether literary works should be treated as pathology, there are three important principles that will guide the decision making process:

*(i) distortion principle:* Coady’s initial idea about what constitutes pathology. We saw that Coady defines pathology as distortion on the normal case of telling and relying on what is told. This primarily means that there is something wrong with the speaker’s relation to what he is saying. This is easily applied to literature, given the no fidelity constraint, imagination, creativity and distortion of descriptions that are involved in writing. All these make ‘relying’ on what is told by the author different from the normal cases of telling. I argued however, that due to the awareness of and familiarity with the literary practice, the potentially pathological operation of literature is diminished. That brings me to the second principle:

*(ii) practice principle:* Lamarque and Olsen’s analysis of the conventions of literary practice and the principles operative in creation and reception of literature. I did not dedicate much space to this aspect of Lamarque and Olsen’s theory. We have seen however that literature should not be defined in terms of its reference to truth: nothing in literature per se makes it the case that authors imagine or invent the content of their story. At the same time, readers’ awareness of participating in the literary practice implies that the readers are aware of the possibility that the work distorts the facts. But this is neither something that all works do, nor something that no work does. That is why I said that the verdict of whether or not the work is a pathology cannot be brought a priori and cannot be applicable to all works.

My intuition is that the practice principle can accommodate the distortion principle. There are literary works that distort facts – for various reasons which I will elaborate in chapters 6 and 7. I will also show that not even these cases of distortion necessarily render the author unreliable, given that it is the practice of specific literary genre (that is, the norms guiding the

creation of a work pertaining to that particular genre) that obliges the author to distort facts in such a manner. Again, as participants in the literary process, readers expect such distortions and can recognize them.

Someone however might have a different intuition and claim that the normative power of the distortion principle is greater than the normative power of the practice principle. Such a view is surely justified in that domain of testimony as such is much wider than the domain of fictional testimony: if by nature literature is conceived as distortion of the normal cases of telling and relying on what is told, then the practice principle will simply tautologically acknowledge that fact. That may very well be (though it implies a complete rejection of my view on literature's reliability), but it still does not eradicate cognitive value of literature, given the principle (iii).

*(iii): the pathological benefits principle:* Coady himself acknowledges that pathologies can be epistemically important in that they can inspire further epistemic work on the part of the listener which can end in cognitive gain. In that sense, even if distortive dimension of testimonial pathology takes away the primary effect of testimony (conveying knowledge), it does not follow that no knowledge will be gained in the end. And that is what I was claiming literature can inspire.

*Fictional testimony: author as speaker*

We can now start with the more substantial account of author-as-speaker in order to analyze his role in the testimonial exchange. We have already rejected the view according to which authors are insincere – the practice of literature and its guiding conventions make such an assumption ridiculous. Perhaps the best way to avoid this kind of possible objections is to state that the notion of sincerity does not apply to the authors and what they write. Even in cases when we come across distortion of facts or misrepresentation, these can usually be explained (as we'll see in the next chapter).

However, we have to provide an account of author's reliability. Otherwise, anti-cognitivists might still claim that despite authors' sincerity, they do not have epistemic authority over what they are writing.

We have seen in the second chapter that the cognitive benefits of literature are available not only at the subject level, with respect to reports and factual descriptions, but also at the thematic level, that is, at the level of reflections. There are therefore two aspects of reliability

of authors: one having to do with what he says regarding the reports, the other with respect to the reflections. These two aspects differ in the sense that reflections, as we already established, cannot be evaluated in terms of truth-value. Even in non-fictional testimony, one's sayings (i.e. expressions of judgements, opinions, perspective etc) are not subject to evaluation in terms of truth value.

When it comes to the reliability with respect to reports, literary cognitivist has to show that Plato was wrong to claim that authors are unknowledgeable and that Olsen was wrong to claim that literary works cannot be informative. In order to show this, I will rely on the four theses of direct humanism. Following Gibson and Swirski, and with examples from literary practice and literary criticism, I will show that the gap between fictional and factual, created by no fidelity constraint, is not an obstacle to viewing literary works as telling us something about the world. In addition, I will show that authors do not write from imagination or inspiration, at least not in the sense presupposed by Plato.

When it comes to the reliability with respect to reflections, a different evaluation is in order. Here the reader will not think of whether or not the views and perspectives presented are true but whether they seem plausible, coherent, sensible, challenging, revelatory and/or illuminating with regard to the aspects of the world (people, society, etc.) they bring to view. Notice that the two levels of reliability do not have to cohere: an author can be unreliable in what he is saying on the subject level (in terms of how truthful to real world he is) in order to pursue moral or psychological phenomena which he finds important at the thematic level. In the next chapter we will examine several examples from the literary practice that show this.

#### *Reacting to fictional testimony: reader as hearer*

So, according to my theory, how should a reader react to fictional testimony? Anti-cognitivists such as Plato want us to reject the value of literature on the charge of it being epistemically unreliable and morally corruptive. Such a view implies that a reader accepts what he reads without any prior considerations over the content. Plato thinks this happens because of the alluring pleasures of imitation and the process of identification. Such a view is however too hasty; there is plenty of space for epistemic work between reading a literary work and accepting what it says.

On the other hand, Olsen claimed that literature can never inspire the relevant belief in the reader because the author never has a sufficient reason for his claims. Therefore, literature can

never be informative and we cannot expand our knowledge. Again, such a view is too discriminative not only with respect to those authors who wanted to inspire new beliefs and had reasons to do so, but also with respect to the readers. There is enough power in good literature to invite various cognitive processes (such as reflection, doubting, wondering, negotiating over the plausibility, denying, accepting as well as those identified by Roberts and Wood) which may bring about a change in cognitive economy of readers, including changes in beliefs. Though for different reasons, Plato and Olsen both presuppose a reader who is like an empty board: on Plato's view, he'll uncritically accept everything, on Olsen's view, he will lack the means to differentiate between true and false reports and reflections and no tenable cognitive gain will be achieved.

My proposal is to find the middle way between the two. Such proposal will acknowledge the importance of active role of a reader defined along the line of Lackey's account of the role of a hearer. It will also acknowledge the fact that reader has at his disposal his own system of beliefs and knowledge which gets activated in the process of reading.

Literary cognitivists in various ways emphasize the importance of active and reflective listener. Wolfgang Iser states the following:

the cognitive value of literature depends not only on the text, but also on the receptive reader. We must not see the reader as an empty sheet of paper on which the author inscribes truths, but as a rational agent who weighs the author's opinion against hers, who reads critically, and who has the freedom to accept or dismiss insights from literary texts, and even if she dismisses the insights, she is invited to form an informed judgment on a new topic. (...) Literature (...) negotiates with reader, as it were. By doing so, it enriches our reflective abilities. Narrative texts focus our thoughts on a topic; they enrich our understanding by inviting *acknowledgment*, and urge us to arrive at an informed judgment about topics we might otherwise have neglected (Iser 1976, p. 242)<sup>186</sup>.

It is at least plausible to presuppose that what works of literary fiction offer, whether in terms of reflections or in terms of reports, can be evaluated with respect to the initial tenability of what is expressed. I borrow this from Catherine Elgin and here I rely on how she describes the process and formation of reflective equilibrium<sup>187</sup>. So neither will the reader immediately accept, nor will he reject, what he reads. This is particularly so with respect to reflections on

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<sup>186</sup> Peter Kivy has also written extensively on the role of the reader, insisting on his active engagement with what the work says (see his 2006.)

<sup>187</sup> See her 1996.



the themes and thematic principles. The fact that a reader finds some reflection acceptable does not mean he will accept it without proper evaluation of it, and vice versa; unacceptable reflections should also be given a proper evaluation. In this process of evaluation, reader's system of beliefs can go substantial modification. Integration of new material can bring about reconfiguration, revision or repudiation of earlier adoptions. Cognitive range of reader can become more extended and his understanding more profound.

What is important to note is that according to this view, the responsibility for the cognitive growth of the receiver of testimony (i.e. reader) does not lie solely on the author (speaker). I do not deny the importance of his reliability and sincerity, but without reflective and receptive reader, cognitive potentialities of literature would not be recognized.<sup>188</sup> It is also important to note that the claim put forward by literary cognitivists is not that all literary works are cognitively valuable and that we can learn something from all of them: only some literary works are cognitively rich and offer knowledge. Other literary works offer other rewards: they are fun, interesting, amusing etc. Some readers do not want to pursue literature because of the cognitive values it affords, but because of some other of its benefits. Literary cognitivism, as I advocate it, recognizes and respects this diversity of the aims and interests in approaching literary works. It also respects various artistic and aesthetic aims and values that literature affords besides cognitive ones. But that does not diminish cognitive value of those literary works which are indeed rich in terms of cognitive benefits they offer.

Plato's reason for rejecting cognitive value of literature is the fact that, no matter what the authors write about, there will always be someone more knowledgeable on the matter, who is at the same time in a better position (in terms of epistemic competence) to speak about that or to judge what the author has written. Therefore, neither authors are the most reliable source on the matter, nor are readers able to evaluate epistemic reliability of the authors. Setting the standard for the knowledge transfer so high is a praiseworthy epistemic aim, completely in accordance not only with Plato's rationalistic thought but also with modern 'Cartesian'

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<sup>188</sup> Obviously, this does not hold only with respect to fictional testimony. Paul Thagard (2006) defended one such account in explaining the way people psychologically react to testimony, particularly in case when testimony is delivered in the form of the comments (suggestions, information, opinions etc) at various Internet web sites, blogs etc. In this case, we cannot know the identity of the speaker S, and we cannot evaluate him in terms of reliability and sincerity. Yet, Thagard argues, given the track record of the plausibility of S's comments, as well as the extent to which his comments are supported by his overall contribution, we can evaluate S's testimony.

epistemology. But we have to wonder about the consequences of this model. Literary cognitivist does not claim that reading a novel by Dreiser will turn one into an expert on the nineteenth century America or a play by Shakespeare into an expert on human psychology. But to claim that there is nothing we can learn from these authors is an ungrounded claim which also has far reaching consequences regarding whom we take as reliable in our every day epistemological practice. We are not always in a position to ask experts, sometimes we are told false things and sometimes we get contradictory advices, even when these are given by the experts. So it is not like Plato's criteria are satisfied in all other domains, but not when it comes to literature. And just like in those other domains we get by and gain knowledge, so we do in literature. It may very well be that we will never come up with a theory that explains how come some people, such as Shakespeare, Dreiser, Dostoyevsky etc. managed to write in the way they did, or how it can be that we get so much from their works. But the fact that we can't explain their brilliance in a way that Plato would be satisfied with doesn't mean they can't teach us anything. Various factors will play a role in determining author's reliability from the perspective of a reader and sometimes all of them taken jointly will not be enough to determine whether what the authors write is indeed true. But I don't see this as a reason to reject literary cognitivism.

So, how is a reader to overcome his epistemic inferiority? One factor which is important is knowledge of the literary conventions that govern writing, including the more specific conventions regarding the distinctiveness of genres. A reader has to be familiar with various reading and interpretive protocols that are in play when approaching a literary work. Reading a work of science fiction requires different reading protocols than reading a realistic novel: to approach *Brave New World* as a realistic novel would be to seriously miss the point. Robert Eaglestone insists on the importance of genre:

Genre is not just a way of writing: it is a way of reading too. It is where reading and writing meet. Genre – with all its signs, both textual and extra-textual – forms a horizon of expectations. Genre is the context of a work that both frames it and makes it comprehensible, as it were, 'externally' and gives it shape 'internally' (Eaglestone 2003, p. 160).

Stacie Friend concurs with this claim. Drawing on the work from psychological explorations of how people obtain information from narratives, she claims: "This suggests that readers familiar with genre conventions or the techniques of certain authors – even if they cannot articulate the specific conventions or techniques – are more likely to track true and false information accurately" (Friend 2006, p. 48).

Reader should also be aware of the context of creation and at least to some extent of the background beliefs common in the community to which the author belonged. This is a tricky part; on the one hand, the claim is that by reading a novel we can get an insight into various aspects of the world that the novel depicts, on the other, a reader should be familiar with it in order to better understand the story. But as we saw, sometimes knowledge of the art-historical context of creation explains what we might see as mistakes. In some cases, reader will learn new things about things he already has some vague notions. One such example can be taken from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Readers are usually familiar with the problem of slavery and know that at one point, anti-slavery voices started to dominate. But just how profound and deeply rooted pro-slavery attitudes were, not to mention to what extent the degrading views on Black people were dominant in the society, is seen from the moral dilemma Huck has when he considers giving Jim over to the authorities. From his perspective, he is not only breaching the laws of the state, he is also breaching divine laws and is likely to go to hell for helping a Black person and a fugitive slave. When approaching this, a reader should be sensitive not to dismiss it as an exaggeration on the part of Twain but see it as a part of the society Twain is describing and criticizing. In some cases perhaps finding out the balance between those elements in the novel that are reflections of the real world and those which are not can only be done if the reader undertakes an independent research into the matter.

It is already obvious that there are some ways for the readers to evaluate the reliability of the author of fictional testimony and this evaluation can be done with respect to those same aspects of evaluation that Prijic-Samaržija and Lackey claimed are available to the hearers when they are evaluating the positive reasons for accepting the testimony. To use Millar's terms, readers have perceptive capacities to differentiate between various kinds of reports they are being given. In the same way that we can differentiate between a scientific report and bad journalism, so too we can make a distinction between cognitively trivial fictional whodunit and complex, psychologically rich detective novel that explores the criminal mind. Such a novel can be cognitively rich in the way it explores the psychopathology of the criminals, their lack of sensitivity and empathy etc.

We can also claim that readers can recognize the differences in the authors, not only in terms of artistic/aesthetic aims they are pursuing, but with respect to their reliability. This is similar to the ability to recognize different kinds of reports: a sensitive reader is aware of a difference

between novels by Henry James, Theodore Dreiser, Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky and novels by Hedwig Courths-Mahler. The difference I have in mind includes above all the depths and truth to the facts of psychological, sociological, political and economic portrayal. One example should prove the point: social and economical circumstances surrounding the development and working of factories feature in both, Dreiser and Courths-Mahler. However, while in Dreiser this dimension is described in depth and provides a psychological grounding for the motivation of the main character, in Courths-Mahler the whole setting is notoriously unrealistic, unconvincing and obviously presents an oversimplified view on industrial development. The same goes for psychological portrayal of characters and their relationships, social movements etc. A well trained reader obviously recognizes the differences. This is again connected to the ability to recognize epistemically reliable speakers. Portrayal of human psychology in Dreiser and Courths-Mahler differs radically precisely because Dreiser is epistemically more reliable, more 'true to life'<sup>189</sup>.

Finally, and again in line with Prijic-Samaržija and Lackey's account, readers can successfully individuate reliable speakers with respect to the subject matter. Let's take Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as an example. Two aspects of the novel are often emphasized by the critics: the powerful visual image of the colonizator's mind and the lack of psychological reactions one would expect in a person who has been isolated and brought to live in Robinson's circumstances. But the suggestion here is that readers can recognize this discrepancy and not take Defoe as reliable when it comes to portraying isolation. In the same way, a politician may not be taken as reliable in what he says in his political speech, but that does not mean he cannot be reliable in reporting about the football match, provided he is a football fan.

One final point regarding the role of the readers. Those epistemologists who accept some kind of reductionism with respect to testimony claim that hearer should independently confirm the testimony before accepting it as true, which means searching for additional evidence that

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<sup>189</sup> The difference I'm insisting on can also be explained by the claim that Courths-Mahler, unlike Dreiser, was not writing literary works, only fictional love stories. Writing within the guiding conventions for fictional love stories, Courths-Mahler was not under the obligation to provide a realist setting for her characters or to represent the psychology of human behavior and their moral conduct in epistemologically reliable way. But that only proves the point of literary cognitivist such as Gibson and Graham, cognitive dimension indeed contributes to the overall aesthetic value.

support the claims made by the speaker. This demand can easily be accommodated within my framework of literary cognitivism. In fact, several literary cognitivists have claimed that readers can accept what they read in the literature as true only after they have tested it independently of the works. According to the theory developed by David Novitz, readers extract various beliefs from fictional world and apply them to the real world situations which resemble those from the fictional world: “If a particular factual belief acquired from fiction and tentatively projected on to the world does not enable us to negotiate the world better, we will reject this mode of thinking and observing” (Novitz, 1984, p. 63). On the other hand, if the beliefs acquired from fiction prove useful and valuable to how we understand the world and other people, then indeed we can say to have learnt something from fiction. The necessary justification for this will come from the fact that readers rely on their ‘real world experience’ to confirm the beliefs from fiction.

One reason why this ‘additional testing’ is sometimes frowned upon is the fact that conducting such a testing is not part of our literary practice. As Davies argues, it is external to the experience of reading, and therefore, even if beliefs extracted from literature are supported by further evidence and experience, we cannot say that literature was the source of these beliefs. Therefore, cognitive dimension does not contribute to the aesthetic one. I don’t think this is a problem for my account. Even if testing is done independently of the literary work, it still is motivated by the work itself. It is therefore plausible to claim that dealing with literature can have cognitive benefits for the readers.

Baccarini (2014) seems to think the same. According to him, literature never is and never should be the sole source of learning. He accepts a coherentist view of knowledge and justification, according to which any belief that a cognizer has should be further supported by other beliefs. To the extent that literature provides us with the experiences which enable us to gain a better understanding of the moral principles, beliefs obtained through our engagement with the work are part of the wider net of beliefs one has. Epistemological activity is in that sense external to the artistic practice.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was twofold. First, I wanted to sketch an outline of the contemporary trends in the epistemology which, according to my claim, allows us to move beyond the level of no-truth vs. pro-truth debate in accounting for the cognitive dimension of literary works. Obviously, those epistemologists who argue for the plurality view still have a long way to go

before the fully developed account of this variety of epistemic aims is completed. One of the crucial questions that remains unresolved is the question of the relation between knowledge and understanding, that is, knowledge and other epistemic aims and states identified as valuable. Epistemologists whose views I presented argue that understanding is a *sui generis* kind of cognitive achievement that has supremacy over knowledge. On the other hand, some still claim that understanding simply means knowing more and that there is no real difference between the two.

Additional question concerns the relation between processes and states that Kvanvig identifies as epistemologically relevant and knowledge. Forming a right hypothesis, thinking about a specific problem from the epistemologically appropriate point of view, taking into consideration all the relevant data, changing the world view when one is found deficient seem to enable us to reach knowledge. But epistemologists like David raise a legitimate question when they wonder over their value independently of knowledge, and how they assist us in reaching knowledge. Do these states have a value on their own or only instrumentally, in that they help us reach knowledge?

This question is a legitimate concern for epistemologists who are discussing the value of knowledge. However, for my view, suffices to recognize the importance of these 'instrumentally' valuable states. Following Kvanvig and Riggs and their view of the responsible cognizer, I think even those cognitive states and processes that fall short of knowledge are important, in that they reflect the epistemic character of a cognizer. Perhaps Sosa's distinction between animal and reflective knowledge provides a framework within which we can see the importance of such traits.

I have insisted on the claim that literature can make us change a perspective, take a different world view, explore other possibilities and sometimes I claimed this can end in cognitive gain such as coming to know. If in fact it does, then even the most stubborn anti-cognitivists would have to accept that literature is cognitively valuable. Yet, to the extent that I am here interested in how literature affects our cognitive domain, I don't think it is good to easily reject the value of acquiring a perspective, or forming a sensitive hypothesis about the world, even if this value is only instrumental. These certainly have to do with our cognitive economy, with the way we negotiate between our experience and the world, with the way we think of other people and other 'humanly' important issues.

What about the notion of understanding? I presented several accounts of how epistemologists see it. At this point, there still isn't an accepted definition, but I think that accounts developed by Riggs, Zagzebski, Elgin, Kvanvig and Roberts and Woods – despite the occasional differences among them – give us a theoretical framework within which we can work. Baccarini's account was helpful to provide us with more specific details of the moral understanding. What matters is that understanding is more encompassing than knowledge, that it includes some non-propositional aspects and that it gives us skills and possibilities that knowledge does not. Although more work needs to be done in this respect, my main claim was that it is important to recognize that the cognitive benefits of indirect humanism can be accommodated for within the plurality view of epistemic aims and values.

The second aim of this chapter was to design the analogy between testimony and literary work. In order for such a proposal to work, we have to abandon the view of testimony according to which testimony is evidence for the claim(s) it puts forward, in favour of Fricker, Audi and Sosa's broad view's 'no restriction' on the subject matter and the relation of the speaker towards the proposition. Following Purić-Samaržija and Lackey, we have to recognize that there is a separate epistemic work to be done by the speaker (i.e. the author) and the listener (i.e. the hearer). In that way, the fictional testimony will be measured up by the same epistemic standards as non-fictional testimony. Because of that, I claimed that the notion of pathology cannot be universally applied to literature. In the next two chapters I will develop in more details the author-as-speaker and reader-as-listener concepts.

## 6. EPISTEMIC RELIABILITY OF LITERATURE: DIRECT HUMANISM

The aim of this chapter is to use my account of fictional testimony to support John Gibson's claims about cognitive values of literature developed along the lines of direct humanism, and Peter Swirski's claim of literature reflecting the cognitive achievements. In order to do that I will primarily be concerned with refuting Plato's claim that poets (authors) speak from ignorance, not knowledge. The answer I give to Plato will ground the figure of author-as-speaker. That should answer the 'no-expertise' argument, as well as the issues raised by Elgin, Lamarque and Olsen about distortion of descriptions.

My claim that literature is cognitively valuable (in the joint sense of direct and indirect humanism) can be taken to mean that individual work provides various cognitive payoffs to its readers. This is, I claim, already enough to show cognitive power of literature. But my aim here is wider than that; I want to show that literature, as a social practice, abounds in cognitive benefits. If this can be shown, it will become clearer why the most radical literary cognitivists claim that literature can be attributed the same status as science in search for knowledge. It will also give an additional force to the claim that literature itself is a form of knowledge, whether in the sense Gibson develops it (as an 'archive' of human experience) or in the sense Swirski advocates (as reflecting cognitive achievements in other domains).

*John Gibson: literature as the archive of human experience*

We have already seen the most important claims in favour of literary cognitivism advanced by John Gibson. In this part, we will push them a bit further, bearing in mind his main idea:

the literary perspective (and the artistic perspective more generally) is the definitive *human* perspective: the standpoint from which we are best able to bring to light the range of values, desires, frustrations, experiences, and practices that define the human situation. On this view, works of literature, at least when they live up to their promise, represent cognitive achievements: they embody ways of *knowing* the world (Gibson, 2009, pp. 467).

The metaphor that Gibson employs in order to account for the way literature provides us with knowledge is that of an archive that comprises our literary heritage<sup>190</sup>. This literary heritage is

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<sup>190</sup> See Gibson 2007, ch. 2.



important because we can turn to it in order to make sense of our own experience with the world. Gibson claims:

it strikes me as plausible to think that the act of telling a story, of weaving a narrative, is a way of giving structure to a certain conception of human experience and circumstances – a way in which we ‘are’ in the world. And the point I am putting on offer is that writers of many of our great works of literature offer us narratives that (...) ‘give order’ to the world (...) by being representative of various regions of it” (Gibson 2007, pp. 72-2).

Gibson develops further this claim in his analysis of Faulkner. Part of his argument is the claim that, in writing, “writers often assume the guise of documentarian. They try to “bear witness” through their stories, and, to this extent, one of the *narrative goals* of many literary works is to explore practices, institutions, and forms of interaction that shape our world and structure our experience and relationships.” (Gibson 2011). His example is Faulkner’s novel *Intruder in the Dust*:

Faulkner’s accomplishment was not to construct a terribly original story but to tell a story in a particular way, a way that rendered intelligible how certain features of Southern culture give rise to these familiar, intractable problems of race. Faulkner was a writer of fiction and not a sociologist, so his work consisted not in statistical surveys but in telling a story that reflects in general way how Southern culture hangs together: that reflects its character, at least once upon a time and from one vantage-point (Gibson)

What Gibson emphasizes is literature’s ability to present to readers “a feel for the fabric of the culture”, that is “... a sense, in short, of how the culture it explores is constituted, at least in respect to the questions Faulkner asks of it” (Gibson 2011).

If we think back to Gibson’s account of direct humanism, we will recall that he emphasizes the fact that literature can provide an insight into, and significance of, specific region of human experience, circumstances, practices and interactions. Similar idea was put forward by Martha Nussbaum, who tried to emphasize how important it is for the literary theory (joined with ethical theory) to join a public discourse regarding the question ‘how should we live’. According to Nussbaum, literature presents us alternatives to how we should understand and employ concepts such as justice, property, rationality etc, concepts which are the key concepts for those practices – such as law, economy, psychology etc – that shape the lives of citizens.

Literary works present us with conceptions (of what is good, what is a valuable life, of various kinds of rationality, justice etc) and these conceptions matter to us and we should be familiar with them in order to make our lives better. The crucial part of Nussbaum’s argument is her urging the literary theory to stop being silent and to join other disciplines that shape our lives. Unless literary theory advances, describes and makes visible the alternatives that are portrayed in the literary works,

we will go on being governed from day to day by conceptions of rationality that seem impoverished next to the ones we know well and care about in novels that we love. Worse, most people will not perceive, and therefore not really have, the choice among conceptions (...) If we do not take hand in these choices, they will be made by default without us (Nussbaum 2010, p. 263).

Now, it might be asked why I'm bringing up Gibson and Nussbaum here, in trying to answer Plato's challenge. However, notice that both Gibson and Nussbaum insist on literature's ability to provide insight regarding precisely those issues that Plato saw literature as incapable of illuminating (or doing it in a deceiving manner). Gibson sees literature as being cognitively valuable with regard to those issues Plato/Socrates used to refute epistemic reliability of the author. When Socrates asks who's a better judge on matters of war, charioteer and medicine he is asking precisely the question of should we trust the way these practices are described in literary works; described by poets, not those who are experts in them. On the other hand, when Plato rejects literature as a source of ethical knowledge, he in fact argues for precisely the view Nussbaum is arguing against.

In order then to answer Plato's challenge, we have to show that literature indeed speaks about things Gibson and Nussbaum claim it speaks, and that it does so in a manner that makes it possible for readers to rely on what the authors say. So in this part we will primarily deal with the problem of the epistemic reliability of the author and epistemic inferiority of a reader. However, in order to do that, we will analyze various literary works with the aim of proving Gibson's claim about literature giving us 'a sense of the world'. What we need to show is that literature is indeed deeply concerned not only with reality but with various other aspects of knowledge-seeking social practices that we can indeed take it as a reliable source of knowledge. In other words, we need to show that literature is immersed into the real world and that it reflects real world back to its readers. Recognizing this can also explain some of the aspects of literature that anti-cognitivists see as rendering it unable of being cognitively valuable, which in turn helps diminishing the overall anti-cognitivist stand.

### **6.1. Being knowledgeable: the problem of the epistemic reliability of the author**

A lesson from *Ion*, enhanced by considerations raised by Elgin, was that poets are not knowledgeable and are allowed to deceive their readers by manipulating descriptions. In the previous section however, we have seen that it would be wrong to think of authors as dishonest, at least in the way that these notions are used in reference to invalid non-fictional testimonies. Given the social practice of literature, we know that the authors are in the

practice of story-telling and that they are allowed to deviate from the facts. Now I want to give an account of how it can still be that despite this deviation, what authors write about can be reliable. There is a way to save epistemic credibility of a poet, that is, of the authors generally. In what follows I will provide one such account, relying on various literary works and literary criticism. Given that Plato's challenge was directed to literary artists, they are the ones that should – and throughout the history often did – strike back.

### *Epistemic reliability across literary periods and genres*

First of all, almost everyone accepts that literature contains a lot of true sentences that are showing us and telling us something about the world. The question is no longer whether there is something that is true in literature, but how to recognize what that is, that is, when the author can be taken as reliable. Of course, literature has to do with imagining things and combining well known real-world elements into somehow rearranged patterns of events that we read about. But, we, as readers, expect that. We know, because we belong to the practice of reading, and do not confuse it with a scientific report, even if in some cases this distinction itself is not clear cut<sup>191</sup>. What is important however is that being a part of a literary fiction does not necessarily mean being cut off from the real world and because of that, not being informative about the real world.

A good place to start with an account of epistemic reliability of authors is with Noel Carroll, who gives the following response to the no-expertise argument:

To be truly beholden to the artwork on its own terms, then actually requires acknowledging the kind of work of art it is. And the kind of artwork it is may mandate that one attend to it as something other than a *sui generis* formal design. (...) Consider, for example, the realist novel. Given the nature of the realist novel, we do not expect of it that it simply confect a coherent novelistic form. The realist novelist is also expected, as part of his *essential* job description, to be an accurate and penetrating observer of society, or, at least, of the social milieu that he describes. This is absolutely central to his charge as a realist novelist (Carroll 2007, p. 32).

A lesson from Carroll is that, at least when it comes to realist novel, for a lot of things we are justified in accepting them as true, *not doing that* would mean that we don't know how to participate in a literary practice. Knowledge of the real world that we bring into reading, as

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<sup>191</sup> A good example is the so called journalistic fiction such as often discussed example of *In Cold Blood*. Swirski (2010, ch.4) discusses examples of miscategorization of fictional and non-fictional works. The problem of 'fictional' vs. 'factual' can be traced back to the beginnings of literature. One author with whom this sort of worries was often raised was Edgar Allan Poe (see Fisher 2008).

well as knowledge and familiarity with various genre conventions, help us differentiate between what is true and what is not. I am not claiming here that a reader will know in every single case what is true and what is not, that is, in which matters the author is reliable, but that doesn't mean that, generally speaking, all authors are unreliable in everything they write.

To go back to Carroll, he wants to show that literary realism can, due to the features inherent to this genre, be taken as accurate description of society. Many accounts of realism support this claim. Gregg Crane expresses such a view, claiming that writers pertaining to the genre of realism "... share a general conception of fiction as a detailed and accurate representation of historically specific characters and settings – their manners, ways of dress, speech patterns, social habits, main concerns, and topics of conversation" (Crane 2007, p. 156). Crane's analysis of literary realism reveals realism as "empiricist in orientation", grounded upon "concrete examples", focused on an "exploration of the here and now", on the "world of concrete personal experiences", "inductive rather than deductive, experimental and open to uncertainty" (Crane 2007, pp. 157-8). Realism is also characterized by depicting, for the first time, everyday aspects of life:

In pursuing detailed rendering of the scenes before them, realists were, to varying degrees, determined to examine subjects, images, or actions previously scorned by sentimental novelists and romancers as common, brutal, or even sordid. So in addition to portraying everyday events such as ordering lunch for the first time in a Chicago cafe (*Sister Carrie*) or riding a street car in lower Manhattan (*A Hazard of New Fortunes*), they also describe with striking frankness war, suicide, disease, crime, and poverty (Crane 2007, p. 165).

The idea of a realist writer as 'observer' of society can be applied to all writers pertaining to this genre. In reference to William Dean Howells's novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Crane writes:

Howells paints a panoramic portrait of urban life. His novel abound in richly detailed descriptions of people representing the socio-economic spectrum, including recent immigrants, transplanted Southerners, old money and the newly rich, artists and writers. The points of view expressed by these characters include a property-is-theft socialism, a conservative Gospel of Wealth capitalism, and a remnant of the Old South's feudal aristocratic perspective. The crisis of Howell's novel, a bloody riot, reflects the harsh inequities of capitalism in the late nineteenth century and the class conflict simmering just below the surface of New York society... (Crane 2007, p. 161).

Theodore Dreiser was another important figure in realism, and as many realistic writers, he was also a journalist. Clare Virginia Eby has shown in what ways his journalistic perspective enables him to observe the social reality and write about it, exploring in what ways technological developments of his time, social classification and growing consumerism work upon individual and his consciousness: "Dreiser captures with astounding insight how

institutions of mass production and distribution such as the department store instil desire by establishing a faux-personal relationship with the unsuspecting consumer” (Eby 2005, p. 577).

Henry James, the master of psychological realism, presents to his readers “the world he knew, that of rich and cultivated upper class of his time in America and Europe” (Scofield 2006, p.79), and one of his most obvious interest was in “the changing nature of the modern (usually American) woman and the social attitudes that surrounded her” (Scofield 2006, p. 80). Scofield does a brilliant job in analysing how James’ fiction reflects the changes in social reality and morality and readjustment of moral and social boundaries, regarding the young, modern women, their financial situations and marital status, concluding that James “has ‘snapshotted’ one small but vivid corner of the social scene” (Scofield 2006, p. 82).

The same set of aesthetic principles governed writers in Russian realism. Turgenev expressed this, saying of himself: “I shall say briefly that in the main I am a realist, and above all interested in the living human physiognomy” (Terras, 1970, p. 20). Relying on Turgenev’s letters, Terras characterizes Turgenev’s writing in the following way: “He prefers observation to invention, research to free fantasy”, seeing truth as “the ultimate criterion of art” and as the “objective essence of contemporary social reality” (Terras 1970, p.20), concluding that, Turgenev and the great French realists, “represent the reality of their times as organically emerging from the historical processes which determine the life of that period” (Terras 1970,p. 32).

This brief analysis so far revealed that Carroll was right when he claimed that, at least for realistic writers, observing the society and reporting about what they saw was the principle aim that governed their writings. Some authors are credited with being particularly eager to show true account in their works or to reach the bare truth itself. In the Introduction to the Penguin Classics of *War and Peace*, we find the following observation: “‘The one thing necessary, in life as in art, is to tell the truth’ was Tolstoy’s doctrine, and his life was bound up with this anxiety, this search for the inward truthfulness which is reality. Tolstoy does not contrive: he records...”<sup>192</sup>. We can find similar idea in regard to Dostoyevsky, who was, according to what he wrote in his letters, extremely concerned with the way reality was

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<sup>192</sup> Edmonds 1957, Introduction to the *War and Peace* (Penguin Classics).

pinpointed in the works of art: “Reality, is the most important thing of all”<sup>193</sup>, he says to his friend in a letter immediately after finishing his *Idiot*, obviously very concerned about whether or not readers will find his reality too fantastic.

French realists express similar concerns. Scholars interested in Gustave Flaubert often emphasize his special concern with reporting what was really true, as well as extreme effort he put into researches. This is particularly so with regard to two of his novels, *Bouvard and Pechuchet* and *Salamambo*. Flaubert claimed to have read about a hundred books in preparation for writing *Salamambo* and although this claim has been challenged, the fact remains that most of what we read in *Salamambo* can be traced back to Polybius’ *Histories*<sup>194</sup>. The extent to which *Bouvard and Pechuchet* can be analyzed from epistemic point of view is perhaps best seen in the fact that Ronald T. Swigger sees the work as one of the first modern encyclopaedic fictions which is “a satirical, encyclopaedic critique of nineteenth-century perversions of the Faustian impulse to know”.<sup>195</sup>

Epistemic reliability of the authors is often discussed within literary criticism. Literary critics often praise authors for portraying the reality in their works. Here is Edmonds again: “*War and Peace* is a hymn to life. (...) it is ‘complete picture of human life; a complete picture of the Russia that day; a complete picture of everything in which people place their happiness and greatness, their grief and humiliation. That is *War and Peace*”.

The idea here is that writers pertaining to realism described society with all the circumstances, changes and conditions they lived in. In that sense, they might not be reliable in respect to some single ‘*techne*’ or ‘*art*’ as Plato would have it, but notice that they are nevertheless valuable source of information on whatever it is they were writing about. We can see them as delivering firsthand witness testimony about the world they lived in. Given that they were

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<sup>193</sup> Magarshack 1955, Introduction to *The Idiot* (Penguin Classics).

<sup>194</sup> Krailsheimer 1977, *Introduction to Salamambo* (Penguin Classics). In this introduction Krailsheimer discusses just how much Flaubert cared for historical accuracy, claiming that „factual accuracy was not optional extra for Flaubert and in his attempted recreation of the past he demands to be judged by the most exacting standards of scholarship, as well as art“.

<sup>195</sup> Swigger, 1975, p. 357. In his article, Swigger claims that many literary authors – such as Flaubert, Borges, Pynchon, Vonnegut, Nabokov, Calvino – can be seen as writing encyclopaedic fiction characterized by “Rabelaisian gusto of learning and expert elaboration” (p. 353). Swigger’s overall claim is that arts and literature should be studied in “terms of its use and aspirations toward knowledge” (p. 351).

primarily concerned with capturing the reality in all of its aspects, we have no reason to doubt the veracity of their descriptions. In most cases, they satisfy Coady's demand for perceptual encounter, that is, witnessing. Another important aspect is the insistence on research and this aspect shows that Plato was wrong to claim that authors write without being knowledgeable.

Going back to Crane, here are some of the issues these writers were concerned with:

Realist fiction responded to and participated in a period of sweeping and dramatic transformation following the nation's bloodiest war. Among other things, the post-war era included Reconstruction and its failure, the rise of Jim Crow, unprecedented population growth, revolutions in transportation and communication, a vast influx of immigrants and migration of rural Americans to cities, a turbulent economy characterized by a number of bankruptcies, depressions, and panics as well as by an equally staggering record of economic growth (Crane 2007, p.167).

Sceptic might claim that we do not need literary fiction in order to get this information. We have history books, sociology, anthropology and various other disciplines, and these are much more reliable than writers and authors of realistic literary fiction. That may very well be so, but two questions have to be distinguished here: first, if we want to know what happened in Chicago in the early nineteenth century, why not go to history books rather than to Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*? Second, once we start reading *Sister Carrie*, can we take Dreiser as reliable in what he is saying about the early nineteenth century Chicago?

Let's start with the first question. Simple, and brief answer is to say that if our interest is finding out social, political and economical circumstances of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Chicago, certainly we are better advised to go and read history books. But I don't think this is what the discussion is all about. I am not interested in motives people have for reading this or that, and I also don't want to defend or refute epistemic primacy of one discipline, such as history, over literature (as Stolnitz does, for example). Here I am only interested in the second question: once we take *Sister Carrie*, can we take Dreiser to be reliable in what he is saying? Based on analysis Crane gives us, we can.

But then the question arises: in respect to *what* exactly is Dreiser reliable? Certainly in describing social circumstances and practices, economical growth, technical innovations, entertainment industry and financial system, to mention but some of the things he writes about. The way to reach these is through factual descriptions. Here is a part of the novel:

In 1889 Chicago had the peculiar qualifications of growth which made such adventuresome pilgrimages even on the part of young girls plausible. Its many and growing commercial opportunities gave it widespread fame, which made of it a giant magnet, drawing to itself, from all quarters, the hopeful and the hopeless--those who had their fortune yet to make

and those whose fortunes and affairs had reached a disastrous climax elsewhere. It was a city of over 500,000, with the ambition, the daring, the activity of a metropolis of a million. Its streets and houses were already scattered over an area of seventy-five square miles. Its population was not so much thriving upon established commerce as upon the industries which prepared for the arrival of others<sup>196</sup>.

It is plausible to claim that it would be hard to correctly pinpoint the source of this paragraph if the reader hasn't been given the information about its author. This is the idea behind Lamarque and Olsen's claim that an interpretation of a *text* is only possible once we know to which practice (or to which narrative) the text belongs to<sup>197</sup>. In this case, it is a *work* of literature. But until we know its classification, nothing in the sentences themselves reveals that it is a literary work, which means that being part of a literary fiction doesn't mean being false – that is the reason why fictionality is defined in relation to its origin, i.e. the fictive utterance, not in relation to the truth or reference.

Every sentence from the quoted paragraph is informative and facts stating. Given everything we know about early American cities and the process of industrialization, we have every reason to take this description to be true. This means we can actually learn something about Chicago from reading *Sister Carrie*. Given what the novel is about, it is rather important to keep this in mind while reading, because we can only follow (and understand) Carrie in her adventures if we are familiar with socio-economic situation she is placed in. Apart from that, we know that Dreiser belonged to the realist period and thus expect his description to be true, as Carroll pointed out. In that way, through reading Dreiser, we can learn a lot about Chicago infrastructure, development of show-business, first clothes factories etc.

So far, in defending the epistemic reliability of the author, I relied on the examples from realism, particularly factual descriptions. I claimed that:

- (i) realism, as a literary genre, cannot stray away from truthfully representing the world;
- (ii) given that aim, authors are epistemically reliable in what they write. This reliability stems not only from first-hand witnessing the events they were writing about, but also from meticulous researches and observation;

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<sup>196</sup> Dreiser 1981, *Sister Carrie*, ch.2, p.15. (The Penguin American Library)

<sup>197</sup> See Lamarque and Olsen 1994. Of course, the same ideal was expressed already by Aristotle in *Poetics*.



(iii) readers are aware of the conventions governing realistic writings and can therefore accept what they read as truthful presentations

But some problems lure. First, how are we to account for epistemic reliability of authors that do not belong to realism? Second, does the fact that sometimes factual descriptions within literary works (including realistic novels) contain mistakes diminish cognitivist's claim? Third, how damaging is Elgin's worry about deliberate twisting of descriptions? Unless these worries are addressed, the case for treating literary works as pathologies increases. Let's take these in turn.

*Epistemic reliability outside realism: literature and the real world*

How can a literary cognitivist defend epistemic reliability of works that are not realistic? Part of the answer depends on how we understand realism. When defined chronologically, realism is the dominant paradigm in novel writing in the nineteenth century, including the works of the authors like Balzac, Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, Howells, James etc. We saw with Crane that realism can also be characterized in terms of principles and conventions governing the selection of themes (detailed portrayal of reality and psychological workings of the characters) and methods of writing (photographically descriptive, journalistically explorative, to use Scofield's terms). In realism, unlike in other literary genres, artistic/aesthetic aim is to portray and describe reality: this artistic aim corresponds with the epistemic ideal of reliable informer. In other literary periods and with other genres, these aims do not necessarily collide, in fact, with some genres such as romances and futurologies, artistic/aesthetic aims include deliberate rejection or turning away from reality and abandoning epistemic ideal of reliability. To defend literary cognitivism, I have to provide an account of how this turning away from reality can nevertheless have cognitive payoffs. In order to do that, I will analyze various literary works that fall outside realism and that, due to the conventions of the period/genre they belong to might seem as giving force to anti-cognitivist's claim.

The idea that authors of the works of literary fiction are reliable in the accounts of reality they put forward for the readers can be traced back to the beginnings of literary practice. Our analysis here may start with Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, in reference to which Ronald Carter and John McRae claim that "the greatest innovation is to use the 'here and now': the London area and the English society of the time" (Carter and McRae, 2001, p. 31). Despite the fact that Chaucer uses the whole range of genres, styles and subjects, as well as

the fact that he shifts between mocking his characters and portraying them in ironic tone, his work

absorbs literary, historical, religious, social, and moral concerns, and transcends them all. It gives a wide ranging view of the late fourteenth century world and its people. The specific people and places described become emblems of their period and the text becomes an image of its time (Carter and McRae, 2001, p. 33).

The reason why Chaucer is important for us in this context is the fact that, it is with Chaucer that literature can be seen as a mirror of reality and an author as a figure who speaks with epistemic authority about the society<sup>198</sup>. We can trace this epistemic authority of authors from Chaucer onwards, and recognize that all of literary forms and genres were, with their own distinct artistic and aesthetic styles and techniques, reflecting, describing, challenging, provoking, exploring and commenting on the real world, society and its institutions, people and their ways of being human. This culminates in the development of a novel. In discussing the rise of ‘English novel’, David Daiches writes:

The class consciousness shown by the novel from the beginning, the importance of social and financial status and the use of the rise or fall from one class to another as reflecting critical developments in character and fortune, indicate the middle-class origin of this literary form. Like the medieval *fabliau*, also a product of the urban imagination, the novel tended to realism and contemporaneity in the sense that it dealt with people living in the social world known to the author (Daiches 1994, p. 700).

The extent to which real world is the backbone of fictional worlds developed in literary fiction can also be seen in some of the most prominent writers of Romanticism, such as Samuel Richardson and Tom Fielding. One thing that makes it hard for modern readers to follow the stories of *Pamela* or *Joseph Andrews* is the fact that they both rely on, and to a certain point develop their own views on, the moral norms dominant at the time of writing. In their own way, they both bring forward for the readers various, complex patterns of English reality and society divided by social classes. Richardson is “obsessed” with “social context” (Daiches 1994, p. 710), and throughout his novels he explores the complex relationships that exist between social classes, morality and individual character and psychology, earning the title of “the first important English writer to deal with basic moral problems in a detailed

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<sup>198</sup> Here are Carter and McRae: “Chaucer’s world in *The Canterbury Tales* brings together, for the first time, a diversity of characters, social levels, attitudes, and ways of life. The tales themselves make use of a similarly wide range of forms and styles, which show the diversity of cultural influences which the author had at his disposal. Literature, with Chaucer, has taken on a new role: as well as affirming a developing language, it is a mirror of its times – but a mirror which teases as it reveals, which questions while it narrates, and which opens up a range of issues and questions, instead of providing simple, easy answers.” (p. 35).

social context” (Daiches 1994, p.710). In Richardson’s novel, a portrayal is given of male-female relationship and the obstacles, moral, social and financial, both parties had to surpass in order for the marriage to take place. The way he portrays female position within family and within society, her dependence on her father and husband, as well as how that position changes once the woman marries, mirrors the social reality of the time he describes.

Apart from Richardson, many authors, particularly female writers, were at the time concerned with describing scenes from domestic life, thus producing “the novel of contemporary social and domestic life in which the chief interest is the delineation of manners” (Daiches 1994, p.742). One author who stands out here is Jane Austin: “What Jane Austin did – and no author before her had attempted it so successfully – was to apply the techniques of the novel to the accurate observation of society in microcosm” (Carter and McRae 2001, p.326). Daiches agrees with this point, claiming: “The world which her books present to us is essentially an eighteenth-century world in its habits, tastes, and appearance” (Daiches 1994, p.744).

One example that gives the additional push to the idea of the author as reliable observer of society comes from Ruth Perry’s analysis of the way poverty was represented in the eighteenth century fiction. What is particularly interesting is Perry’s claim that historical reports for the most part and until recently lacked any such accounts<sup>199</sup>. This shows that at least in some cases, literary fiction tackles issues that remain unrecognized as important by the scientists, which reflects Mullin’s claim about cases where artists are for various reasons more perceptive toward reality.

Going back to our analysis of the reliability of the author, our next stop is Victorian novel, whose main representative is Charles Dickens. Although Dickens’ novel *The Great Expectation* is a kind of a case study in contemporary literary cognitivism due to the factual mistakes it contains<sup>200</sup>, Dickens is nevertheless often accredited with being primarily concerned with social and economical reality of his days. Here’s a quote from the critics:

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<sup>199</sup> See Perry 2005. Perry’s analysis is centred on the motif of paying the rent, which is a recurring motif in many of the novels of this period. As Perry shows, many economical processes are revealed in these episodes. Another important motif in these literary works but neglected in sociological studies is that of purchasing of vast areas of land and turning them into parks and lakes at the expense of poor people losing their shelters and occupations.

<sup>200</sup> Lamarque (2009) gives reference to Adams 2005 for analysis along these lines.

a more serious tone soon enters Dickens's work, as he begins to play on his readers' awareness of social problems and the growing conscience of the age. *Oliver Twist* (1837-38) highlighted the problems of poor city children who after the Poor Law Act of 1813 ended up in the workhouse, or at the mercy of crooks like Fagin and Bill Sykes. (...) In many of Dickens's novels he portrays the diversity and disorder of the rapidly growing capital... (...) Dickens's scope expands greatly during the 1850s, from the concentration on the individual hero to examinations of society, lay industrialism, trade unions... *Hard Times* (1854), subtitled *For Those Times*, is the most familiar of Dickens's 'state of nation' novels. It contains a picture of the industrialised English Midlands which emphasises the dehumanising aspects of the Industrial Revolution... (Carter R. and J. Mcrae 2001, pp. 251-253)<sup>201</sup>.

The literature of the nineteenth century is particularly revealing of the deep connections that exist between literature and the real world. Writers of this period – Dickens, Brontes, George Eliot, Elisabeth Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy, Henry James among the others – were not only writing literary masterpieces that help us gain an insight into Victorian life, but, perhaps even more importantly, they were actively participating, with other sciences and pseudo-sciences of the area, in the search for knowledge. Both of these facts are widely acknowledged by the critics.<sup>202</sup> What is however of the greatest significance for us here is the fact that in this period, literature was not cut off from the world of facts and experiences but was valued just as highly as other knowledge seeking practices with respect to what they had to say about the world. We will come to this shortly, for now it is important to bear in mind that the idea of authors who are exclusively pursuing artistic aims is simply mistaken.

Realistic elements are also the back bone of literature of the twentieth century. Modern British fiction, as Dominic Head's analysis of over two hundred novels from the modern British fiction written in the period of 1950-2000 conclusively demonstrates, is concerned with all the aspects of reality and all the forces that shape lives of individuals living in that period. Starting with the claim that "novel is a form of knowledge", Head claims that "the novel in Britain from 1950-2000 yields a special insight into the most important areas of social and cultural history" (Head 2002, p. 1), which include middle to working class concerns, poverty, education, crime, break up of traditional nuclear family, violence of modern post war society, consequences of satellite broadcasting, social inequality and

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<sup>201</sup> Similar idea is found in a critical commentary on Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*: „In taking his characters through various parts of England, Dickens is able to give us a sense of the early nineteen-century social scene, a feeling of English town and country just before the Industrial Revolution changed its face so startlingly, in the last phase of the great coaching days before the railways put an end forever to that phase of English life" (Daiches 1969 pp. 1051-52).

<sup>202</sup> See Brantlinger and Thesing 2002, Hayes 2007, Henry 2008, O'Gorman 2005.

poverty, alcohol abuse and drug related problems etc. Head's claim is that "narrative fiction plays a crucial role in assisting our comprehension of public life, our understanding of cultural forms and our recognition of diverse social identity" (Head 2002, p.11). One reason why Head's critical analysis of these particular novels matters greatly to us is the fact that most of these novels are so closely connected to the concerns of the time they were written (such as the government of M. Tacher) that it is hard to see them as dealing with themes of perennial interest. Yet, and I will press this further in the next chapter, even works which do not pertain to literary cannon can be revelatory of the real world.

The sense in which literature is a form of knowledge is further reflected in the Modernist literature of the twentieth century. Bradshaw and Dettmar's 2006 *Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture* analyze the extent to which literature is inseparable from such domains as religion, politics, physical sciences, biology, psychology and anthropology.

In this analysis of literary masterpieces from Chaucer to contemporaneity, I have been insisting on the claim that literature reflects real world, even when there are literary styles and techniques that make this connection less obvious. Literary works in the form of tales, in the form of letters, diaries, reveries, memories, literary works ridden with symbolism, allegories, mythologies, written in stream of consciousness, from first or third person perspective – all of these literary devices might seem to obscure the central aspect of these works: the way they reflect reality in all of its complicated aspects, shapes and structures, including the most intricate aspect of all: people and society. It is important to note that literature always remains deeply humanistic and mimetic in its intellectual pursuit. Questions it asks are always questions about man in the world – how to understand the world, how to survive in it, how to shape it, how to control it, how to conquer it – trying to make connection with others.

One question that poses itself at this point is whether there is some literary genre that, due to its subject theme and literary devices, cannot be taken as reflecting reality, but perhaps being completely imaginary? Can we ever go so far away from reality as to end up somewhere where nothing real is recognized, to the extent that no cognitive benefits can be cashed out for the readers?

One possible example here might be the genre of gothic novels and science fictions. The genre of science fiction is "arguably, and in several respects, the most challenging form of literature yet devised. (...) [I]t can be shown that reading (or even viewing) any form of science fiction does involve one extra *intellectual* step over and above those necessary for

reading other forms of fiction” (Shippey 2005, p. 11). What Shippey here primarily has in mind is the fact that science fiction presents to a reader what he calls *nova data*, that is, new things given: “The basic building-block of science fiction is accordingly the *novum* – a discrete piece of information recognizable as not-true, but also as not-unlikely-true, not-flatly (in the current state of knowledge)-impossible” (Shippey 2005, pp.13-4). Another important aspect of science fiction is its engagement with the ‘far away’ in time and space; in this sense, Fred Botting talks about science fiction’s “unbounded explorations of change, outsiders, escape: its ‘freedom of imagery’ is freedom from realistic conventions” (Botting 2005, p.112). Many other science fiction theoreticians talk about defamiliarization of the familiar, radical disjunction from the real and cognitive estrangement typical of science fiction. Yet another essential feature of science fiction is that it deals with scientific discoveries not made or not possible in the real world, or with presenting political, social and/or religious systems and communities that operate on significantly different principles from the ones we know. A defining feature of science fiction is that every one of its aspects has to be recognized by the reader as not real, not actual, not of this world. So how then can science fiction be reliable testimony of our world?

To answer this, we have to ask for the reasons why science fiction deviates so radically from reality. Does it really want to go far beyond our world? I don’t think so, in fact, my claim is that in going so drastically beyond what is here and now, science fiction has the distinctive cognitive power of making us reflect on that particular aspect of reality that it exaggerates in describing. For all its exaggeration, sublimity, gothic atmosphere and surreal setting, destruction of the world and technological innovations, science fiction deals with deeply important human issues and “asks fundamental questions about the world and the nature of selfhood” (Seed 2005, p. 3) that bear importantly on how we conceive of ourselves, other people and the world around us. To give but a few examples, one theme that is repeatedly being developed through the writings of H.G. Wells is that of genetic engineering, as well as the impact of Darwinism and evolution on people, which raises important questions about the identity and agency of human beings, as well as the boundary between species and the role of science and its impact on humans. Stephen R.L. Clark analyzes the way science fiction treats religion and religious issues, principles of organized religion and faith, showing that what is ultimately brought into question is the possibility of a religion that is true. Particularly important in this respect are works pertaining to utopias and dystopias, which not only explore different political principles and social arrangements, but also question the nature of

human beings, their willingness and abilities to connect with each other and form meaningful relations, not to mention their identity and self awareness which can only find expression within society and wider social context. Philip E. Wegner shows the dependence of utopia on the particular political regime, that is, the historical context out of which it emerges:

through its presentation of this alternative community, the Utopian narrative has the effect of both highlighting in a negative light many of the problems of the reigning social order, and perhaps even more significantly, of showing that what is taken as natural and eternally fixed by the members of that society is in fact the product of historical development and thus open to change (Wegner 2005, p.80.).

Considerations along these lines show that, despite a high degree of breach from ‘reality’ and ‘here and now’, science fiction is deeply rooted with what is of the deepest human concern and can therefore certainly contribute in substantial ways to our cognitive endeavour of understanding the world.

## **6.2. Facts, fictions and verisimilitude: how fictional can you get?**

So far in this chapter I have been concerned with showing to what extent the literary fiction reflects real world, with the aim of showing that authors can be taken as reliable in their portrayal of reality. The analysis can also be put in terms of the gap between fictional world and real world, or, as I will call it, fictional versus factual. Given that the fictional dimension of literary works can always be seen as rendering them unreliable, literary cognitivist has to show that this gap is never big enough to make the work unsuitable for delivering cognitive benefits.

One conclusion that can be reached from these examples is that regardless of the artistic aims being pursued, it is not an easy thing to violate realistic norms. A theoretic grounding of this claim was provided by Peter Swirski<sup>203</sup> who develops a three-level account of mimeticism that literary work can reflect: logical, scientific and psychosocial. These permit four classes of narrative structures: those that violate no norms, those that violate any one norm (i.e. logical or scientific or psychosocial), those that violate any two norms (scientific and psychosocial or logical and psychosocial or logical and scientific), those that violate all three norms. Based on the variety of literary genres, this is, very roughly and a bit simplified, how they can be classified:

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<sup>203</sup> See his 2007, ch. 2.

1. Violate no norms:

literary realism, naturalism, expressionism, avant-garde, modernism, science fiction featuring robots, rackets (due to the fact that they don't violate logical, scientific or social-behavioral norms of verisimilitude)

2. Violate any one norm

Violates only logical norm	Violates only scientific norms	Violates psychosocial norms
Empty set: "I cannot think of a story, even less a whole genre, that would violate logic but not science..." (p.62)	Fictional works extending beyond empirical realism: science fiction, fantasy, myth, classical tragedies and comedies	Harlequins and pornography

3. Violate two norms

Violates scientific and psychosocial norms	Violates logical and psychosocial norms	Logical and scientific norms
Fantasy and science fiction	Empty set	Time travel stories

A lesson from Swirski is that modeling realism is a wider class than narrative realism. If we think of the three norms as the three aspects of our world and experience, then Swirski's analysis shows that it is not possible to create fictional work that is so far removed from our world to be 'impossible'. And for as long as there are some connections, we can agree with Gibson's claim that literary works reflect reality and open a window towards it. Even if Olsen is right when he claims that the principle of verisimilitude designates what is natural in the fictional world, rather than that it connects fictional and real world, it can still be interpreted as performing a valuable cognitive function.

We can illustrate this possibility with some examples. William Faulkner's novels are for the most part set in the Yoknapatawpha County, which although modeled on and inspired by the Mississippi county, is not, nor it ever was, real. Similar example is Foster's *A Passage to India*, in which the action is set in the fictional city Chandrapore. Can we still claim that these novels provide us with the knowledge about the real world, if they describe fictional world?



My intuition is that we can. For one thing, in reading Foster, readers have no problems recognizing the nonfictional colonization processes being described<sup>204</sup>. As Gibson pointed out in reference to Faulkner, we generally acknowledge these novels as providing us with the unique sense of what life on American south was like. In the second chapter I offered quotations on Faulkner by Towner and Cowley about the profundity of Faulkner's portrayal of South. According to Cowley, all of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels are unified by one central theme:

it is the decline of the planting aristocracy to which the Faulkner belonged; it is the rise of new men descended ... from bushwhackers and carpetbaggers; it is the poverty of the white farmers ... it is the growing hostility between two races; it is the slow bleeding of the land itself and the decomposition of a whole society... (quoted in Schwartz 1982, p. 236).

What I want this example to show is that worries about fictionality of descriptions (as raised by Elgin, Lamarque and Olsen) do not impede cognitive potentiality of works. Faulkner's novels still provide visual image of the American South and help foster the understanding of the change in society, racial patterns and sense of one's identity, even if Yoknapatawpha is just fictional. What matters is that the fictional world resembles real world. David Novitz insists on this aspect and claims that learning from fictional works is only possible if fictional world has some properties in common with the real world which readers have to recognize. Unless fictional world resembles the real world, readers will not be able to follow the story, and more importantly, will not be able to see how the fictional world is relevant for the real world.<sup>205</sup>

The same argument is stated in reference to the psychological, ethical and philosophical principles that may be extracted from literary works. Bertram Jessup defended one such view:

To suppose that meaning and truth are ungendered when they are fictionally used or fictionally attached seems to me to have no reasonable grounds at all. The confusion upon which such a supposal rests is like

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<sup>204</sup> See Israel 2006 who analyzes how Modernists such as Foster and Conrad presented the colonization and exploration of the colonies.

<sup>205</sup> See Novitz 1984. There are at least three levels of resemblance between fictional and real world. First, fictional world describes the same properties that we find in the real world, such as poverty or greed. Second, the language used in fictional works functions in the same way as in the real world, which implies that "the world must be conceived of as furnishing the same experience or possibilities of experience – that is, the same truth conditions – as the actual world" (Novitz 1984, p. 53). Finally, fictional characters deal with the same problems as people in the real world, so in getting imaginatively involved with the situation of literary characters, we also pick up practical skills and emphatic knowledge that we can use to solve real world problems.

the confusion which might lead one to say that if an aesthetic object, say a Maillol statuette, is used as a paper weight or a doorstop, it *ipso facto* ceases to have its aesthetic properties, that it is no longer a work of art. Indeed, if the mere placing of a proposition or an argument in the mouth of an imaginary person necessarily rendered it fictive, then not a little scientific and philosophical writing would lose its character of being scientific or philosophical (Jessup 1965, p. 485).

What is the cognitive impact of works which violates scientific and psychosocial norms, as routinely happens in works of science fiction? My claim is that this breach serves a valuable cognitive aim: to reflect on our psychosocial behavior. What is the function of emotions for people? How do we form meaningful connections on the basis of our emotional responses towards them? One possible way to answer that question is by reflecting on a scenario in which such connections are not made and emotions do not have the role of informing us about our internal states, things we care for and find important. That is the reason why it is so hard for Iljon Tichy to find his way in the world of Stanislaw Lem's *Futurological Congress*. Cases like this one show that deliberate distortion of norms and facts can sometimes more powerfully bring home the cognitive lesson<sup>206</sup>.

### **6.3. Reliability with respect to what? Literature and other knowledge-generating discourses**

To summarize, we tried to show that even if authors are not experts in one particular field, as Plato points out, that still doesn't mean they are not epistemically reliable in what they are saying about our world. We saw that literature presents a valuable source of knowledge of our society, social practices, institutions and human interaction and a reason for that is precisely the way authors construct fictional worlds so that these reflect the real world. But obviously, it would be a misconception of literature to claim that this is all that authors do. In order to account for the cognitive dimension of literature, it is important to show that literature deals with 'humanly important issues' that other knowledge-generating discourses deal with and

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<sup>206</sup> Tamar Yacobi defends a similar view with respect to satire. Discussing the fact that the main protagonist of *Gulliver's Travels* violates the norms of psychological coherence, he claims: "But however essential to works concerned to project a fictive world that parallels and approximates to extraliterary reality, such psychological coherence lies outside and indeed interferes with concerns of satire. For the informing principle of satire, the effective exposure of objects in the real world, calls for a multi-directional use of every agent and situation. Like the rest of the dramatist personae, in other words, Gulliver becomes more useful once the constraints of realistic consistency have been loosened. (...) The generic legitimization of inner tensions and discontinuities within the represented reality promotes the economy and the effectiveness of the many-sided attack on outer reality" (Yacobi 1981, p 116).

that in doing so, it intersects with these discourses, relies on them and challenges their findings.

In our discussion of Victorian literature, we emphasized the fact that literature was considered as on a par with various sciences. Several critics emphasize the connection between literature and psychology. Nicholas Dames (2005) argued that in the nineteenth century, psychology as a discipline evolves simultaneously with the novel as literary genre and what is crucial for both is the overlap of their formal concerns (ways of narrating the self and one's own experience) and their shared goals (gaining a complete image of the mind's processes). Athena Vrettos concurs:

Indeed, almost anywhere we look in Victorian fiction, we can see the influence of and interest in psychology, ranging from explicit engagements with contemporary philosophies of mind, to theories of character development (...) to fictional experiments with the more speculative branches of Victorian science and pseudoscience – physiognomy, phrenology, and, later in the century, psychical research into telepathy, trances, ancestral memory, and other mysteries of the mind. (Vrettos 2002, p. 70)

The fact that there is an overlap of thematic concepts and subject matter between literature and psychology still does not show that what literary authors say about these concepts has the same epistemic status as what psychologists say. We have to show that authors were writing from knowledge, rather than from inspiration (as Plato would have it) or pure imagination, unbounded by relevant facts. To put it differently, we have to show that authors had some expertise in what they were saying and that they participated in the same intellectual quest for knowledge as psychologists. Various literary critics suggest that the interest in psychology as well as profound knowledge that some authors such as James and Eliot reveal stem from their “friendships and familial connections”<sup>207</sup>. Probably the most famous example are brothers

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<sup>207</sup> Here is Vrettos: Eliot's intellectual circle included both Darwin and Spencer, and she lived with George Henry Lewes, whose *problems of Life and Mind* (1879) made important contributions to the field of physiological psychology. Many of Eliot's writings demonstrate the same psychological principles as we find in Lewes's work, and critics such as Gillian Beer and Nancy Paxton have shown how Eliot's fiction offered an ongoing dialogue with the work of Darwin and Spencer. To take just one example, we can see Eliot and Lewes delineating some of the same ideas about the formation of sympathy. When Lewes writes that we “see in many highly wrought natures . . . an habitual outrush of the emotional force in sympathetic channels” (1879: 387), he articulates the same psychological principle upon which Eliot draws to delineate Dorothea Brooke's highly wrought nature and her repeated attempts to make sympathetic connections with those around her in *Middlemarch*. This is, furthermore, the same principle that informs Eliot's narrative voice in her attempts to create habits of sympathetic identification in the reader. Eliot frequently frames her own psychological observations in the language of physiological psychology, as when, in *Adam Bede*, she delineates the problem of

Henry and William James. Critics routinely suggest that Henry's interest in and knowledge of psychology can be explained by the fact that he was deeply interested in his brother's field of research and was able to pick up first hand his psychological theories and discuss them with him<sup>208</sup>.

In her analysis of the nineteenth century literature, Janis McLarren Caldwell (2004) explores various ways in which "several influential literary and medical writers were allied in one project, that of negotiating between two distinctly different ways of knowing – between, that is, personal experience and scientific knowledge of the natural world" (Caldwell 2004, p. 1). Caldwell analyzes some of the most influential and well known literary works of the century (*Frankenstein*, *Sartor Resartus*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Middlemarch*) tracing the influences – psychological, philosophical, medical – that shaped the creation of these novels. It is important for us to recognize that with their writings, these authors actively participated in the intellectual debates with scientists and philosophers.<sup>209</sup>

The extent to which literature and philosophy intersect and overlap has lead some philosophers to claim that the two should be merged together and some of the work in contemporary literary aesthetics is dedicated to delineating the lines between the two disciplines<sup>210</sup>. Here I do not want to pursue this debate, but to show the implications of it for the claim that literature is cognitively valuable. Philosophical dimension is indispensable in great many literary works, ranging from 'philosophical romances' of Hawthorne, Poe and

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griefs that endure too long: "Our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy . . . we get accustomed to mental as well as bodily pain, without for all that, losing our sensibility to it. It becomes a habit of our lives" (ch. 50)" (Vretos 2002, p. 71).

<sup>208</sup> An exception to this is Meisel (2006), who claims that Henry James in his literary works goes beyond the psychological findings of his brother and includes the domain of unconsciousness. Meisel's analysis of the Modernist literature offers an interesting insight into the way Modern literature relies on psychology, as well as the impact it had on various psychologists.

<sup>209</sup> To give but one example, Caldwell analyzes the way Mary Shelley came to write *Frankenstein*. Though this novel is often seen as the beginning of the science fiction genre, Shelley was in fact inspired by the current medical researches having to do with the attempts to determine the nature of the 'vital principle' which enabled life. This concern did not spring from Shelley's imagination, but from intellectual climate she participated in.

<sup>210</sup> See Shusterman 2010, Shiner 2010, Jost 2010, Danto 1984/2010, Vidmar (forthcoming in the *Arts*). For an illuminating and thought provoking views on the intersection between the two, see Elridge 2009.

Melville<sup>211</sup>, Shakespeare's tragedies<sup>212</sup>, Dostoyevsky, Joyce, Kafka, Fitzgerald, science fiction, utopias etc. If literature is primarily conceived of as humanist, and philosophy tries to answer precisely those questions, then it is only natural the two will come close together.

The claim that literature is intimately, perhaps even intrinsically, connected to morality and human ethical concerns is well accepted and rarely negated. The reason for that is the fact that there is hardly a literary work that is not, at least to some extent, concerned with a problem, dilemma or challenge that might be considered as an ethical one. Even the beginnings of literature are connected not so much with pleasing and satisfying but with being educative and instructive, particularly regarding matters of ethics and morality. Part of Plato's anti-literature stance was based on his claim that literature is full of bad moral examples and can because of that have bad and dangerous, morally corrupting effects on the youth.

However, within contemporary literary cognitivism, there is a growing tendency to recognize that literature can be a very powerful tool for dealing with moral concerns, even better than moral philosophy. Martha Nussbaum is one of the most fervent advocator of this view. She claims that at least some literary works, such as the novels by Henry James, should be part of moral philosophy. Eileen John and Cora Diamond have claimed that literature is much better equipped than philosophy to show us all the moral complexities of our everyday encounters with people, and they both (just like Martha Nussbaum) credited Henry James for being particularly successful in doing this. Cora Diamond claimed that the phenomenology of moral disagreements is never understood and explained in all of its complexities when explored by moral philosophers, whereas the literary portrayal is more faithful to how we experience these disagreements in our lives. Diamond concludes:

If James describes for us the varieties of forms which can be taken by our disagreements with each other on moral matters, philosophers should learn more from this than just that they had had an inadequate idea

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<sup>211</sup> See Crane 2007 for detailed portrayal of philosophical romances. Swirski (2000) offers an analysis of Poe's *Eureka* analyzed primarily from the standpoint of epistemology. One aspect that many literary critics insist on when discussing Melville's work are deeply rooted metaphysical and ontological concerns having to do with the meaning of existence and the human inability to ever reach the finite answers that would enable people to surpass scepticism and gain knowledge (see Crane 2007, Hayes 2007).

<sup>212</sup> McGinn (2006) has offered one of the most profound analyses of the philosophical aspects of Shakespeare's plays, insisting on the irrefutable influence that Montaigne's philosophical concerns had on the great bard. According to McGinn, there are three main topics in Shakespeare: knowledge and scepticism, nature of self and character of causality.

of the phenomenology of moral disagreement. (...) So what we need from James is also his portrayal of what these differences between us mean in our lives, what their significance is. (Diamond 2010, pp. 278-9).

Eileen John concurs with her in this, claiming “We should not assume that explicit philosophical theorizing about morality exhausts our conceptions of morality and we should be open to the complications that may result from consulting literature as a source” (John 2010, p. 297). What John wants to show is that literature’s way of portraying moral conduct recognizes that in life (unlike in philosophical discussion) there are no ‘easy’ solutions captured by moral principles or judgments of praise or blame.

Elvio Baccarini sees art as contributing substantially to the development of one’s moral sensibility. In the previous chapter, we have seen his view on how literature helps us gain a better understanding of moral principles. Recall that, according to his view, one cannot grasp the demands of morality by only knowing the propositional form of the moral principles. Engaging with art is important in that

Experience with artworks can help us to reorganize the hierarchy of our moral categories and premises, to interpret these categories and premises in a new way with the help of new paradigmatic cases and hard cases, to classify already known phenomena in a new way (...) For example, a person who enjoys in an artwork can realize the possibility to see how deeply a belief is rooted in her system of beliefs. By seeing the connection of this belief with other beliefs, the person can become more vividly aware of other beliefs, or she can better understand the proper interpretation of the meaning and scope of moral concepts (Baccarini 2010, p. 11).

Psychology, biology, philosophy and ethics are not the only domains that feature immensely in literature. Seeing “the social novel as a form of discourse that can reach into all other areas of social experience” (p. 5), Dominic Head (2002) explains the impact of novel on society in the following way:

Here there is a direct bridge between seriousness of novels that scrutinize the status quo, and less reflective expressions of popular culture. The post-war novel has done much to discredit a rigid distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, and, indeed, the prominent protagonists, from Jim Dixon to Bridget Jones – characters that have been rightly seen to typify new social moods – have invariably had popular, or at least middlebrow tastes.

The novel, in short, has managed to cultivate a new intellectual space: it is the middlebrow art form par excellence, with unique and unrivalled access to every corner of social life, but a form that retains that ‘literary’ or serious quality, defined as the ability to deliberate or stimulate reflection on social and cultural questions (Head 2002, p.6).

There are several aspects from this quote worthy of consideration. First of all, the idea that novel has “unique and unrivalled access to every corner of social life” explains why is turning

to literature rather than to some other practice like sociology in this case, a better way for readers to grasp the full complexity of whatever it is that novels bring to view. One way in which this is seen is the fact that many of these novels treat social class in a way that exposes “ideological and economic definitions of class standing” (Head 2002, p. 57). To give but one example, let’s analyse how literature of the 1950s and 19560s present the problem of social class, social changes and transition in relation to individual’s lives, live-choices, identity and self-awareness.

As Head shows, the central question that novelists set for themselves was to explore the question of whether an individual is engaged within the social class he was born into and the living conditions characteristic of this class (as Sid Chaplin’s *The Day of the Sardine* seems to suggest<sup>213</sup>), or was there a chance for him to break free and create a life for himself. The fact that not many characters managed to do so (and those who do are usually rejected as betrayals) suggests that novels of this area “serve[ed] to expose ‘the myth of opportunity and upward mobility’” (p. 56). One domain in which this is particularly visible is the domain of education and the way it was presented and analysed in novels, which were, incidentally, often written by the members of the work class themselves. This gives the additional strength for our testimonial aspect of literature. One such example comes from David Storey’s novel *Saville* which shows the consequences that class mobility have for the individual and his families, most often resulting in child’s alienation from his background as well as his inability to merge into the new social class his education should provide for him. It is important to remember that all of these novels are to a big extent rooted in autobiographical elements and rely on or encompass and deal with consequences of social, political, educational, medical etc. measures (such as Butler Education Act of 1944).

What is the theoretical impact of the analysis of the intersection of literature and other knowledge-generating practices? I do not want to claim that literature can substitute them or that the same kind of or amount of (philosophical, psychological etc.) knowledge is readily

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<sup>213</sup> The novel is a story of Arthur Haggerstone, a factory worker in the North-East England. Here's how Head sees it: „The title conveys the sense of an inevitable destiny for sardine packers (...). Haggerstone's awareness that he's been 'caught' (...) only adds to the claustrophobia that this novel successfully evokes. Chaplin does not, however, offer a properly articulated class struggle; indeed, the novel demonstrates that Haggerstone does not have an effective alternative to his looming fate.” (pp. 56).

available from literature as it is from these disciplines. It is also important to bear in mind that in many cases, the philosophical or psychological dimension of a work will only shine forward under particular interpretation. That being said, however, we have to recognize the fact that, to the extent that literature shares thematic concepts with these disciplines and to the extent that these thematic concepts are in themselves of epistemic importance for how we understand ourselves and our world, literature matters and has a lot to contribute to our worldview and the way we come to understand our experience. I have also wanted to press further the point of reliability of the authors: Plato claimed that they lacked knowledge and are therefore unreliable in what they say. Yet, we saw that in the majority of cases, authors are writing from knowledge which they obtained firsthand from (what we today would recognize as) experts. So we have good reasons to reject the author-as-unknowledgeable paradigm advocated for by Plato and Stolnitz. We have to reject the view according to which the claims put forward in literature are not grounded in facts, but express merely opinions. To go back to the analogy with testimony, a lot of what the authors are saying should be read as the acts of informative tellings.

#### **6.4. Homer versus Hesiod: epistemic reliability in the face of differences, mistakes and contradictions**

Now that we have established that authors can be taken as reliable, we have to answer two further problems. First, does the fact that sometimes literary works and factual descriptions within them contain mistakes diminish the claim of literary cognitivists? Second, how to respond to the problem of contradictions?

My answer to the first question is, no. Anti-cognitivists attach too much significance to the fact that sometimes factual descriptions are wrong, ignoring the fact that other discourses are not error free and that they too sometimes present incomplete, mistaken and inaccurate perspectives on things. The fact remains, however, to the extent that mistakes are contained in literature, mistakes which might go unnoticed, the cognitive value of literature can be diminished. One way to avoid such a conclusion is to show that mistakes do not arise from author's ignorance (which would make them incompetent and unreliable) or desire to deceive (which would make them insincere). In order to do that, I provide the following categorization of mistakes that might be found in literature.



The first category contains mistakes as unintentional distortion of facts springing from author's own ignorance. Examples here include Philip Larkin's poem *Absences*: the way Larkin portrays the breaking waves is wrong<sup>214</sup>. In these cases, we have a distortion of facts which serves no artistic aims and purposes and it cannot be explained by any underlying system of beliefs on the part of the community to which the author belongs. These mistakes simply are false accounts of reality. The fault lies in the relation between the speaker/author and the content he expresses. Remember however our lesson from the epistemology of testimony: speakers can deliver false testimony because they may not be aware that it is false, but take it as true. So the problem here is not that of honesty and sincerity, but of reliability. The problem however is that Stolnitz treats all mistakes as if falling into this category and then concludes that because of them, literature generally (rather than particular literary work) is unreliable source of knowledge. But that is wrong. Not all mistakes are of this kind.

In order to see that, let us consider the case of Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts*. One of the crucial aspects in this work is the motif of syphilis. As Lamarque claims, following Olsen's analysis, "Much of the symbolism in Ibsen's *Ghosts* rests on the moral stigma of syphilis and its being passed from Captain Alving to his son Oswald. But Ibsen and his contemporaries had a quite different conception of syphilis from our own: they were wrong about the heritability of the disease" (Lamarque 2009, p. 199). However, if this wrong conception were corrected, the whole moral and symbolic dimension of the play would be lost, to the extent that it would make the play "virtually unintelligible" (Lamarque 2009, p. 199). Olsen uses this example to show that the correctness of the reports should not be seen as contributing to the value of a work. However, I think there are two lessons to be extracted from this example. First, we are given a clear example of the mistake that falls into the second category: mistake as unintentional distortion of facts reflecting not the author's ignorance or prejudice, but the mistaken views of the time the work was written. Similar examples include mesmerism in Dickens, phrenology in Charlotte Bronte, physiognomy in Trollope. What is important to note here is that what seems to be a mistake from the perspective of modern readers, was not a mistake for the readers contemporary with the author, as our analysis of Victorian novel

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<sup>214</sup> I take this example from Lamarque, who claims: "There is no artistic intention behind the distortion of fact so no explanation is forthcoming in terms of "artistic license". Here a factual mistake does lead to a literary weakness. It is a failure of mimesis or verisimilitude" (Lamarque 2009).

revealed. Second, notice that the cognitive gain in such cases is double: to the extent that literary work embodies scientific, political, religious and sociological beliefs of the time it was written, it can reveal these beliefs to the contemporary audience which might be unfamiliar with them. Second, mistakes of this kind do not render literary work incapable of being revelatory and illuminating of some aspects of reality, morally complex situations, psychological difficulties etc. Unreliability at the subject level does not necessarily imply unreliability at the thematic level. We still recognize *Ghosts* as dealing with the problems of dysfunctional families, duties, socially determined roles etc. I do not see reason for treating cases like this as instances of pathology.

Third, mistakes can be characterized as intentional distortion of facts aiming to manipulate readers into accepting the perspective of the author. Famous example of this kind of mistaken description, which we will deal with in the next chapter, include the representation of Indians in the early nineteenth century American fiction with the aim of convincing the readers that they should be destroyed. These novels present clear cases of pathologies of testimony. Given that these descriptions present a distorted view of reality, they might seem as unreliable. However, as Prijić-Samaržija claims, readers have the capacity to recognize those features of testimony which render them unreliable and can therefore adjust their level of trust. In the next chapter we will see that in this particular genre, the intentional distortion of fact – i.e. the pathological nature of testimony – is not an obstacle to cognitive gain.

So, what is the theoretical impact of the analysis of the mistakes contained within literary works? First of all, what counts as a mistake will to a great extent depend upon the genre of the work, art-historical context of its creation (including the authors/target audience's accepted beliefs), aesthetic/artistic principles operative at the time of work's creation. When discussing the relevance of mistake for the overall cognitivists' claim, a distinction needs to be made along the lines I sketched: not every mistake is epistemically relevant. The hardest cases for literary cognivist are those in which the author deliberately deviates from facts without making it obvious. However, even in cases of factual mistakes that spring from author's ignorance, they do not diminish the cognitive value of a work (exception – arguably – being historical novels and realism), given the importance of thematic level of work.

What about contradictions? Socrates and Ion pondered about the differences in the way Homer and other poets write about the same thing and the question was how to judge which of the two got it right. Stolnitz claimed that the fact that contradictions are tolerated within

various literary works and that there are no clear cut mechanisms that would determine which author holds the correct view, show that literature, unlike science, does not satisfy the criteria that other knowledge generating practices do. What should we say to this?

As with the mistakes, one reason for contradictions is the fact that literary works reflect scientific (i.e. political, religious, sociological, philosophical etc) attitudes and beliefs accepted (presumably) by the author and his intended audience. In some cases, as the next chapter will show, the authors deliberately contradict the established world view of his community in order to challenge the accepted morality and overall ideology. Crane pointed out that in some cases, such as realism and naturalism, the differences between the two can be explained by the general perspective on one problem, such as the problem of free will and responsibility<sup>215</sup>. Head showed to what extent the modern British fiction reflects social changes, but what is of interest here is the fact that various authors perceive various factors as causing these changes and suggest different remedies for social ailments. To what extent is that a problem for literary cognitivism?

I will argue that it is not. First of all, to reduce the entire literary work to one view it expresses is wrong and implies radically impoverished view of how cognitive payoffs of literature are cashed out. Cognitive value of *Sister Carrie* cannot be entirely explained by what it says about human agency, given that the importance is in the way it makes us think about it and in the conclusion we reach once we start to consider it. To the extent that at least one of the cognitive payoffs from literature is wider, more encompassing and deeper understanding of the world, different ways (even contradictory) that literature deals with the same, or similar issues, can only contribute to how big a perspective we have.

Relying on my claim that literature is immersed into the world and that it therefore reflects cognitive achievements of other practices, I want to claim that the fact that there are contradictions in literary works is not to be explained by the fact that one work 'got it wrong' and the other 'right', but by the fact that literature actively engages in social happenings and reflects the changes that society undergoes. Contradictory attitudes in literature resemble the

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<sup>215</sup> "The naturalist and realist differ in that the realist insists to a greater degree on the importance of consent and human agency. Unlike naturalism, realism insists on the possibility that people can voluntarily structure their relations through agreements and mutual understanding." (Crane 2007, p. 162). See also pp.186-203.

pattern of contradictory attitudes in other domains (Hume and Kant on causation) precisely because literature is interested in analyzing, researching and challenging the same notions, problems and worries as other domains.

However, contradictions are more visible in literature than in science because of literary qualities which keep us interested in particular literary work, even when the views expressed are ‘mistaken’, outdated or contradictory. In science, the change of paradigm usually means that the paradigm that is changed is no longer of concern, but that doesn’t happen with works of literary fiction<sup>216</sup>. Mesmerism and phrenology are outdated scientific theories, but Eliot’s works are not outdated literary works because of their other qualities – artistic, aesthetic, literary. Given the artistic dimension of literature and aesthetic delight and satisfaction they inspire, great works of literature do not get neglected even if they contain mistakes or the views expressed contradict a dominant scientific, political or religious doctrine<sup>217</sup>.

The fact that literature generally contains contradictions which are not ‘corrected’ can also be explained by the fact that literature not only reflects, but also, and more often, criticizes and challenges not only scientific changes but also general attitudes of the public towards specific issues. Contradictory views expressed on the issue of slavery (in the so called plantation fiction and anti-slavery fiction), the gradual loss of free will and agency reflected in the literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century followed by the changing attitudes towards the idea of social contract which governs not only the arrangement of society but of families as well (as demonstrated by Crane) are not to be judged as true or false. Philosophical, social, political, scientific and religious attitudes change, become more developed and more encompassing. Literature simply reflects that change and in a very important way, serves as an archive of the general growth and development of humanity.

Finally, even when literary work expresses, advocates or represents mistaken views, or attitudes which are in some way corrupting, there is still a cognitive gain to be attained from

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<sup>216</sup> Though the fact that certain genres simply die out or that certain themes (such as, for example, seduction tales from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Crane discusses) are no longer of interest point toward the conclusion that in art, as in science, paradigms shift.

<sup>217</sup> Think for example of Dickens. *Great Expectations* are to a big extent concerned with various legal issues, but as has been demonstrated, Dickens gives us a completely wrong and mistaken account of how the legal system operated in those days. That however does not diminish the overall value, including cognitive, of the work.

it. Pro-slavery fiction can, in a sensitive and reflective reader, trigger thoughts on the value of human being, about the value of freedom, the need to protect it at all cost, and thoughts like these can eventually bring a real change.

One way in which contradictions with respect to  $p$  can be analyzed is in terms of disagreement over whether  $p$  or not  $p$ . Much has been said about disagreement in contemporary epistemology and the prevailing view is that disagreement is a powerful epistemic mechanism that ultimately brings about advancement in knowledge. Miriam Solomon (2006) emphasized the fact that dissenting voices, even if express incorrect view, still bring about important information which might have gone unnoticed were it not for the dissent. The same point is pressed even further by Thomas Kelly, who sees three important roles that disagreement fulfills (Kelly 2005). First, an awareness of disagreements can point one's attention toward arguments and evidence one might have not perceived. Second, disagreement and diversity of opinions can contribute to the research process and the total amount of evidence that will bear on the question under dispute. Finally, disagreement can serve the role of falsifying claims considered to be justified.

Now, if we approach the problem of contradictions in this way, as interpreting it either as a disagreement between two authors or between author and reader, there's no reason to presuppose, as Plato and Stolnitz do, that the mere fact that contradictions exist should be taken as argument against epistemic reliability of literature. Quite the contrary, not only is the reason that contradictions exist precisely the fact that literature, as other knowledge generating practices, actively engages itself with the world, but contradictory views can lead to growth of knowledge and deeper, better understanding.

### **6.5. Inspiration, imagination and reliability**

This chapter has been dedicated to refuting Plato's claim about epistemic unreliability of what authors say in their works. For him, the main reason for this unreliability is the fact that authors write not from knowledge but from divine inspiration. But in the lights of the arguments presented here, we have to wonder: what's left of that view?

Rather than being inspired and having no control over what they are writing, as Plato claimed, we saw that the process of writing requires extensive researches, detailed and meticulous studies, observation and various other methods that enable authors to become knowledgeable in what they are writing. The idea of inspiration which overcomes the poet guiding his

creative work is often connected to theories of romanticism and expressivism, but other theories of literary creation do not necessarily advance this claim. However, everybody agrees that imagination plays a very important role, not only in the process of creating a work of literary fiction but also in engaging with it and interpreting it. So nowadays, Plato might object to literary cognitivism by claiming that writers do not write from knowledge but from imagination, and imagination, particularly unconstrained, can't ground reliability and give rise to justified beliefs.

Again, such a conclusion could easily be refuted. I will not go into details here, due to the reasons of space, but there are at least two possible answers a literary cognitivist might give here. First, various accounts point towards positive contribution that imagination makes to our cognition. The mere fact that something is imagined does not prevent one from gaining knowledge from it<sup>218</sup>. Imagination is not to be understood as creating things which are nonexistent and false, nor is to be understood as making things up. At least within the context of artistic creation, imaginative aspect more often has to do with artistic and aesthetic dimension than with the cognitive. We saw that even in the case of science fiction (taken broadly enough to include futurologies, utopias and dystopias), imagination is still firmly grounded in what is real. Going beyond 'what is given' in reality serves important function in inviting reflections on things that might otherwise go unnoticed, particularly in terms of the consequences and changes that might develop. It can also contribute to a deeper understanding of some problem. Second, imagination and creativity are important in science and scientific researches, but nobody claims that this practice is any less cognitively valuable because of that<sup>219</sup>.

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<sup>218</sup> Prijic-Samarzija and Vidmar (2012) provide an account of imagination's contribution to cognition. A good guide to imagination and cognition are Kieran and Lopes eds. (2003). Dorner 1990 discusses the role of imagination in the acquisition of knowledge through arts. See also Gaut 2007, whose claim about learning from imagination was introduced in the first part. Valuable contributions to the topics are Nichols 2006 and Stock 2011.

<sup>219</sup> At least one way, but certainly not the only one, in which imagination plays a very important role is in construction of thought experiments which are often used in science.

## **6.6. Conclusion:**

In this part I have tried to establish the epistemic reliability of author-as-testifier and thus provide grounding for the claim that literature is cognitively valuable in the sense specified by direct humanism. The underlying assumption has been that the mechanism that explains the acquisition of knowledge on the part of the audience is testimony. To the extent that I offered an explanation for the ‘mistakes’ and contradictions, anti-cognitivists’ arguments about the unreliability of literature have been diminished, as well as the claim that literature should be seen as pathology. In addition, we have seen that many authors claimed that they are writing about things they see in the world around them; in that sense, they satisfy Coady’s demand for the perceptual groundnessness of testimony.

That however is not the entire story of the cognitive value of literature and in the next chapter I will turn to cognitive benefits of literature that are subsumed under indirect humanism, or under the paradigm of pluralistic aims and values. We saw that Stolnitz and Plato do not take this into consideration as a possible cognitive payoff of literature, and that Lamarque, though acknowledges it, remains sceptical over whether these indeed are cognitive benefits. My assumption was that they are.

## **7. LITERATURE AND EPISTEMIC AIMS: THE CASE FOR INDIRECT HUMANISM**

In this chapter I want to bring together the claims put forward by epistemologists who argue for the plurality view of epistemic aims and values and the view put forward by indirect humanist about literature's unique way of influencing readers' conceptual and emotional repertoire. I have already sketched how the two work together in the fifth chapter, here I want to press it further, taking into consideration conclusions we reached in the previous chapter regarding literature's active engagement with and interest in the real world. The claim that a certain aspect of reality is always reflected in a literary work will be developed further, but with additional look at how this influences the readers' cognitive economy and the way they think about the world. What I am interested in here is to analyze how reflections, that is, thematic level, contribute to those cognitive benefits associated with indirect humanism, that is, epistemic values. Analysis along these lines will give us a framework within which we can further develop the view of author as epistemically reliable. In this part however, the reliability has more to do with the overall plausibility and acceptability of the perspective that the author presents in his work.

Another problem that I am interested in here has to do with the role of the reader. I have been insisting that cognitive benefits of literature can only be recognized by the sensitive and reflective reader who actively engages with the work. My claim was that Plato and Olsen were both misconceiving the way readers respond to literary works because they failed to acknowledge the epistemic work (to use Lackey's claim) demanded of the reader. For this same reason, those anti-cognitivists' arguments which tend to diminish the cognitive dimension of literature by claiming that most we get out of it are hypotheses can now be silenced. Given the grounding of epistemic reliability of authors (in observation, research and consulting with experts) it is wrong to claim that works deliver hypotheses. However, even if readers do not want to assign reliability to the work and consider what the work delivers in terms of hypotheses only, it is important to recognize that hypothesis can be put to good epistemic use and can in the long run deliver various cognitive benefits to the reader.



## 7.1. Literature and perspectives

One author who has always been interested in the way art influences people morally and cognitively is Matthew Kieran. In what follows, I will rely on his book *Revealing Art* to develop further some of my claims regarding cognitive value of literature. Although he is mostly concerned with visual art, a lot of what he says can be brought into connection to literature. The main idea that Kieran puts forward is that of the perspective that an artwork offers to the audience. Many authors have tackled this problem taking for granted the idea that artworks prescribe perspective<sup>220</sup> which is part of their content and a proper appreciation and understanding of the work should involve recognizing it (and accepting it, at least according to some). To the extent that this perspective is not only a moral one – that is, that the work presents a certain ethical view – but can also have scientific (i.e. philosophical, political, sociological, biological) aspects, in this part I want to explore how presentation of such a perspective can be accommodated within literary cognitivism and its two strands, direct and indirect humanism.

There are at least three ways in which perspective can be presented in a literary work, and each of these can be seen as being cognitively valuable in its own way. These three ways are the following:

- (i) literary work can present a perspective on things, showing how things are
- (ii) literary work can present a certain perspective with the additional aim of prescribing it (make a demand on a reader to accept it)

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<sup>220</sup> It is also important to note that there are two senses of the notion of prescribing. In the sense we are interested here, it means that artworks advocates acceptance of the perspective it puts forward, as examples will show. In another sense, to claim that artworks – particularly literary works - prescribe something reflect the view of literature according to which an author, in writing sentences and creating fictional world, prescribes to readers what they ought to imagine in the process of engaging with the work. This is not the sense we are interested here. In some formulations however, these two senses come sufficiently close, like with Kieran: „At least typically, artworks prescribe us to imagine certain characters and states of affairs. Furthermore, the nature of an artwork’s prescribed imaginative content is partly determined by the way it is artistically shaped and manipulated: for example, the particular medium, genre, and artistic conventions utilized. Through prescribing particular imaginings, an artwork promotes particular imaginative understanding of the state of affairs represented.” (Kieran, 1996, p. 338).

(iii) literary work can, through development of a certain perspective, challenge some other accepted (moral, religious, philosophical, psychological) perspective, moral claim, world view etc.

I will term these descriptive perspective, prescriptive perspective and challenging perspective. This divide, as presented here, is obviously a bit oversimplified in that one gets the impression that individual work can either fall into (i) (ii) or (iii). This is in line with Kieran's classification, because he claims that whether a work aims to present a perspective or prescribe it is determined by the intention of the author.

I will argue against this; I think that the final decision is the reader's (although that doesn't mean I object to the claim that the aim of some works is to do something along these lines). Once he is offered a certain perspective, even if the intention of the author is that it be accepted, reader is still 'free to decide' whether or not to do so. On the other hand, reader may simply fail to recognize (for various reasons) the aim of the work. Given that in my thesis I am concerned with (cognitive) impact of literary works on the reader (not with the aims of the author and successful or unsuccessful execution and recognition of these aims) I reject Kieran's claim. This is also in line with the general epistemology of testimony accepted here: even if an informer has the aim of persuading his audience that a certain proposition is to be accepted as true, the audience is free to decide, based on its own evidence, system of beliefs, additional evidence etc, whether or not to accept the proposition as true. However, this does not mean that authors are free to say whatever they want. What I say regarding the role of the reader does not in any way diminish the need for the authors to be reliable. My claim is only that no matter how reliable they are, whether or not there will be some cognitive transfer taking place is not entirely up to them. Similarly, they cannot control the impact their work will have on the readers. Again, I do not think that such cases of communication failure are unique for literature. Or non-fictional practice of testimony shows that in some cases listeners fail to get the message or the message they get is wrong.

Second reason for claiming that the decision is not the author's but the reader's is that for many literary works, the boundary between the three is blurry and certainly there is a space of overlap between them, dependent on individual reader and the impact that a literary work will have on him.

Finally, claiming that each work fulfils only one function (descriptive, prescriptive or challenging) seriously undermines the complexities of literary works. As I hope to show in

what follows, even if for some literary works it might be clear to which category they belong to (although more often than not this too will depend on the interpretation) very often these functions overlap and intersect. In that sense, it might be more correct to speak of descriptive, prescriptive and challenging aspects of literary works.

As will be clear from the examples, descriptive perspective is just an additional step to claiming that literary works are entangled with society, social practices and experience (as advocated by Gibson and developed in the previous chapter). In that sense, the knowledge we get is propositional and has to do with facts. Prescriptive and challenging perspectives are, on the other hand, more connected to indirect humanism, in that cognitive benefits do not necessarily, and certainly not explicitly, consist of propositional knowledge, but should be explained in terms of influencing reader's cognitive, imaginative and emotional economy. The task here is to show that works of literary fiction indeed have this potential and that engaging with them can result in cognitive benefits on the part of the reader.

Here I want to show that dealing with literature generally, that is, with various literary works, can benefit readers, in the sense recognized by indirect humanism. Actively and reflectively engaging with literature expands reader's cognitive economy, enriches his conceptual repertoire, helps him reach more profound, more thought through awareness of the situations, phenomena, problems, dilemmas and circumstances it brings to view, enables him to think hypothetically and to draw new evaluative and descriptive distinctions. This enables readers to expand their body of beliefs and to build wider, deeper and more encompassing understanding of various aspects of the world and our experience. As Kvanvig and Riggs showed us, these are all valuable cognitive achievements.

So, let us see the theory developed by Kieran. Kieran defends aesthetic cognitivism in its strongest form: artworks are cognitively valuable and it is part of the reason we value art so highly. These cognitive workings of artworks are always achieved by how artistic means are put to use; in that sense, cognitive dimension is always something internal to proper grasping of artworks. He sets out to show how the capacity of art to "cultivate insight, understanding and ways of seeing the world" (Kieran 2005, p. 100) matters to its artistic value. In this part however, we will only focus on the cognitive dimension Kieran attributes to art and on the ways he sees it working.

*Offering a descriptive perspective*

In the previous chapter I explored how literary works reflect social practices and part of my argument was the claim that not only in terms of factual descriptions, but also in terms of morality, psychology, politics etc literary works represent real world and mirror its various aspects. This claim can also be expressed by saying that literature offers a descriptive perspective on how things are or were. We also saw in the previous part that there are mechanisms that help readers determine how reliable authors are in presenting these perspectives, that is, how justified readers are in accepting them.

It might be argued by anti-cognitivists that, if this is all that literary works do, then not much cognitive value can be attached to them. For one thing, literary works present things we are already familiar with and in that sense there is nothing new for us to gain cognitively. This is what the argument from cognitive familiarity, presented in chapter 4 was all about.

An answer to this, proposed by Kieran, is to claim that artworks, even when presenting things we are familiar with, can still serve the role of *illuminating* them, rather than only presenting them. In commenting Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*, he says: "What the work teaches us does not lie so much in knowing about the conditions of the peasants. The picture is not a substitute for sociological information. If it were, then the point of looking at it would be lost as soon as one found a more detailed source of information concerning the conditions of the peasantry" (Kieran 2005, p. 103).

He takes this idea even further in his analysis of Goya's *What more can we do?*

The horror of war is not something many of us aren't aware of. We know it involves pain, cruelty and the wanton destruction of life. In one sense, Goya's series doesn't really tell us anything we didn't already know. Yet the series does foreground, in a vivid, explicit and harsh way, what we normally shy away from. It forces us to concentrate on, to dwell on, the bloodshed, bestiality and annihilation of war. (...) Works can start by drawing our attention to things we already glibly take for granted and, through our engagement with them, come to show or remind us of the nature of ourselves, humanity and how we ought to respond to them (Kieran 2005,p.110).

Similar claim was put forward by Ilham Dilman, who sees art – good art – as telling us, or saying to us, something about the real world. Given that "we may speak of the *truth* contained in a novel and of *learning* from it" (Dilman 1995, p. 264), we have to explain what the connection between real world (that is, "various aspects of human life" (Dilman 1995, p. 264) and the novel is. As Dilman sees it, "One can express what this relation comes to by saying that it mirrors reality, that it clarifies some aspect of it or gives us a clearer view of it than we have in the course of our engagements with it in real life" (Dilman 1995, p. 265). According

to Dilman, the mere fact that art speaks about things we are familiar with makes the whole cognitive transaction possible. If the author is successful in what he writes, then

he makes us see something familiar to us in real life more vividly than we see it in our actual transaction with it (...). We learn from it because it can now give us or make accessible what we have known but not seen, what we have interacted with but not distinguished. It is as if a new light is lit in our world which, if only for a moment, makes vivid the colours of things and even changes some of these colours; though whether we can sustain this change, keep it alive, is a matter for us (Dilman 1995, pp. 269-270).

These arguments stand against the claim put forward by Stolnitz about cognitive triviality which springs from the fact that literature presents us things we are familiar with. Both Kieran and Dilman stress the fact that there is always something more we can get from literature, in the sense that things we already know can be further illuminated by the literary presentation of them. This adds to the claim that literature can be the source of understanding. As we have seen, understanding, unlike knowledge, comes in degrees and can be deepened. The importance and value of literature is precisely in constantly drawing our attention to new perspectives which might be illuminating of yet another aspect of the world we know of, but are now given the chance to understand better.

### *Prescribing a perspective*

One aspect of artworks that Kieran emphasizes is the fact that in some cases

art is aimed at prescribing and promoting, through aesthetically manipulated conventions, particular ways of seeing the world. We can see in the canvas how we are to conceive of the characters, events, states of affairs and worlds represented, or imagine what it would be like to be such a character, or to have certain feelings, beliefs and attitudes (Kieran 2005, p. 102)<sup>221</sup>.

What is interesting here is Kieran's claim that art can actually prescribe and promote certain attitudes and perspective, which is something he sees Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* are doing: "What the picture seeks to teach us is that a particular imaginative understanding of the peasants' lives is appropriate..." (Kieran 2005, p. 104). By doing that, Kieran concludes,

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<sup>221</sup> One reason why Kieran might be insisting so strongly on this aspect is his desire to show that artworks do not only show familiar things, i.e. do not only show how things are. His argument is much stronger one, in that he sees art as contributing substantially, irreplaceably and distinctively to our moral understanding of the world and therefore presenting facts as they are – that is, portraying in an artwork what is in the world, is not enough to make art relevant for our moral understanding. Even if an artwork presents familiar things, it must do so by illuminating them.

artworks offer ‘prescribed understanding’, that is, demand of the audience to accept a certain perspective offered by an artwork. Here is his argument:

The landscape is not used by Van Gogh as some springboard for his artistic fantasies. Rather, throughout the use of a developed, formalised style, he is striving to represent in a fresh, bold and nuanced way how the landscape might be understood. This is not merely a question of how the landscape may be perceived. Rather, his work expresses a particular way of conceiving of and valuing the landscape (...). How Van Gogh prescribes us to attend to the landscape may not only deepen our visual experience by foregrounding aspects of the natural world we previously hadn’t noticed; it may reveal to us an understanding of the landscape as a place from which order can be forged, emotions given form and solace sought (Kieran 2005, pp. 104-6)

Two things are important here; one is Kieran’s claim that artworks can point our attention to things we previously hadn’t noticed. In that sense, as we have just seen, they can be illuminating. Second, he claims that artist can sometimes prescribe a perspective. Kieran places a lot of emphasis on this: “it is unsurprising that much art is aimed at prescribing and promoting, through the artistically manipulated conventions, particular ways of seeing the world” (Kieran 2005, p. 102)<sup>222</sup>.

In literature, this is sometimes brought in connection with didactic literature. The claim is, some literary works primarily aim at instructing and teaching, more than at pleasing or fulfilling artistic/aesthetic aims. Some literary forms are intrinsically characterized by this aspect. In the very first American novels, such as those written by William Hill Brown and Hannah Foster, conveniently labelled seduction tales „... the exercise of independent judgment and the flouting of convention are criticized and dutiful obedience to established authorities is recommended” (Crane, 2007, pp.6-7). The aim of instructing is achieved by portraying the devastating consequences that befall those who fail to succumb to parental authority or who don’t manage to resist the allure of sexuality and seduction. In many of these works, characters directly speak to readers inviting them to learn from their unfortunate faith.

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<sup>222</sup> See also Kieran 1996, where in commenting works by Millet, Rodin, Degas, Constable etc, he claims: “The techniques, viewpoints, and aspects manipulated in all these artworks aim to promote imaginative understanding. (...) Their point is to evoke a particular imaginative understanding in relation to the subject portrayed and thus to deepen our imaginative understanding of our own world. (...) The artwork directs us toward the way certain things are to be seen and imaginatively understood, as opposed to merely stating that “they are or might be”. The work, its manipulation of conventions, style, and associations, prescribes particular imaginative experiences and, possibly, the reordering of our expectations” (p. 343).

Even stronger claim is made in reference to works that “overtly seek to push society in a particular dimension” (Crane 2007, p. 2), an intention behind many of the nineteenth century American novels which were deeply engaging with various aspects of social and political happenings. Two main examples will suffice here, both characteristic of nineteenth century American literature: the question of Indians and the problem of slavery as portrayed and depicted in various literary works.

The so called frontier romance struggled to come to terms with the concept of national identity in the face of white European settlers who came to America which was at the time the homeland to Indians. Although various portrayals of Indians and their way of life can be found in literary fiction of the time, the fact remains that these novels advocate the need to eradicate them, or at least to find means to tame them and force them to accept the settlers’ way of life, in order for progress and civilization to settle in. Here's how Crane sees it:

Without exception, as far as I am aware of, all of the nineteenth-century frontier romances assume the inevitability of the conflict between whites and Indians as well as the eventual dominance of white Americans, but they approach this conflict and its result from somehow different perspectives. Some see it as tragic if inevitable (e.g. Cooper and Simms). Others see it as a subject of some degree of national disgrace (e.g. Child, Sedgwick, and Jackson). And still others view the first two positions as absurd, even dangerous, given the threat posed by this savage race to the forces of civilization (Bird, Edward Ellis, and Edward Wheeler) (Crane 2007, p. 45).

Means through which this kind of perspective is advocated include representation of Indians as savage, cruel and animalistic:

In response to the positive portrayals of Indians by Cooper and others and the suggestion that there is something tragic or perhaps even shameful in the decimation of Indian people, Robert Montgomery Bird, Edward Ellis, and Edward Wheeler offered romances redolent of deep racial aversion” argues Crane, adding “In Bird’s *Nick of the Woods*, Ellis’s *Seth Jones* and Wheeler’s *Deadwood Dick*, Indians are unfeeling, blood thirsty savages, without any respect for the value of human life (Crane 2007p. 49).

Advocating for a perspective and prescribing to accept it is even more strongly connected to the romance of race and slavery set in plantations of American South, predominantly occupied with the question of slavery and the (metaphysical, ethical and legal) status of African Americans. These openly ‘proslavery’ (or plantation fiction) and ‘antislavery’ (or slave narratives) novels brush upon much wider categories and issues (pertaining to a great extent to political philosophy and theories developed by Locke and de Tocqueville), such as the question of (justifying) political dominance of one party over another, the issue of sovereignty and obedience, capitalism and market forces, technical innovations etc, as well as upon some deeply important metaphysical and ethical questions such as the essence of

personhood, freedom and agency. However, all of these concepts were used in order either to provide a justification for keeping the 'old system' of slavery, an unified intention behind all of proslavery - plantation fiction - or to fight against it and show it to be deeply inhuman and immoral, which was what antislavery writers wanted to do.

The reason why this particular genre of literary works provides a great example for the power of literature to prescribe perspective is twofold. On the one hand, these literary works are often described as testimonial narratives, rendering personal experiences of slaves (Phillips 2004 insists in this point). These novels were mostly written by escaped slaves and were presented as truthful portrayals of horrifying experiences slaves were suffering in the South. So in these cases, we can speak of testimony even in the strictest sense demanded by Coady who claims that testimony has to begin with the act of witnessing.

On the other hand, the rhetoric power of these narratives was soon recognized by the wider social network of abolitionists who used it as a very powerful weapon in fighting against slavery. The idea was that everybody who engaged with these novels simply had to realize the wrongness of slavery. The power of these novels was so strong that the Southerners "eventually came to feel politically committed to a very different project: that of defending the plantation and its institutions" (Grammer 2004, p. 62).

Proslavery romances often portray a "vision of timeless agrarian paradise characterized by gracious and unhurried living in harmony with nature and benevolent relations between those who have the power and those who don't" (Crane 2007, p.53) and this vision is then contrasted to "aggressiveness and artificiality of the Northern mercantile or capitalistic system" (Crane 2007, p.53) which threatens to destroy idyllic conditions of life in South. In order to do that, these romancers had to "make the act of will involved in putting and keeping people in bondage disappear so that the peculiar institution will seem as natural and inevitable..." (Crane 2007, p. 57)<sup>223</sup> and the literary means to doing that was to present the master-slave relation as natural, desirable and based not only on mutual consent between the

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<sup>223</sup> Phillips identifies four different types of proslavery apologia that antislavery novelists were fighting against: plantation romances, which celebrated the past and the slavery system; philosophical 'positive theory of slavery' according to which plantation regime was the ideal solution to the class struggle between capital and labour; theological dissertation which claims slavery was a God's plan to uplift heather Africans and ethnological treatises which claimed Blacks were adapted by nature to serve the superior white race. See Phillips 2004.



two parties, but on some sort of eternal, cosmic justice and prudence according to which black people were predestined for being slaves. What these novels ultimately advocated was the idea that the colour of one's skin determines one's social position and roles one should fulfil. These are however set by some sort of divine order and follow natural, moral order of things and should not be questioned.

Writers of the so called sentimental novels took part in pro vs anti slavery debate even more openly. Sentimental novels, characterized primarily by their "depiction of conversion moment, the moment when a flood of emotion transforms the individual, revealing moral truths and human connection previously ignored by or invisible to the convert" (Crane 2007, p. 104) relied primarily on invoking powerful emotional experience in their readers which was to justify the perspective offered. These writers saw novels as actively engaging in public debates and reconceived them as

the emotional awakening of an entire society (...) leading to the transformation of the nation's legal and social norms. Among other things, sentimental fiction has been used to argue for temperance, against prostitution, for the relief of the poor, and against the removal of American Indians. The most famous and influential of the efforts to turn sentiment outward in the direction of political, legal and social reform is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe applies the techniques of the sentimental novel to the most provocative issue of her day – race and slavery. (...). Her emotionally charged narrative episodes (...) are designed to enlist our sympathies in a general recognition of the moral invalidity of slavery and the legal claims of black Americans to freedom (Crane 2007, pp. 125-6).

This is perhaps one of the most obvious examples from the literary practice of literature's active engagement with the social concerns. The rhetoric that these novels put forward was used 'in real life' by abolitionists<sup>224</sup>. As a response to that, "A number of anti-Tom novels were inspired by the perception that the South needed fiction defending the Southern way of life..." (Crane 2007, p.136). A very important and influential defender of the Southern way was Caroline Lee Hentz whose novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) aims to portray slavery as natural order grounded in the benevolent, even parent-like care that powerful white land owners exhibit over weak, needy slaves thus making the whole system, even if based on inequality, exploitation and ownership, nevertheless peaceful, pleasant and affectionate. All in all, a reader should come to the conclusion that "freedom in the North is far worse than slavery in the South" (Crane 2007, p. 137). Hentz thus not only advocates against

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<sup>224</sup> See Crane 2004, Crane 2007, Robbins 2007.

abolitionism, but in her novel “the moist eye and throbbing heart expose abolitionism to be founded on prejudice and ignorance, and they reveal that slavery is more compassionate than capitalism, which has no respect for the great mass of labouring individuals it consumes and casts off” (Crane 2007, p. 138).

The point of this brief analysis of sentimental novel was to give a literary example to Kieran’s claim that one of the aims of some artworks is advocating for, or even prescribing, a certain perspective, where this means accepting the presented point of view as the right one. Relying on the analysis of these novels, I tried to show that these novels aimed primarily at changing readers’ view of situation (social arrangements, political decisions being made at the time, etc) and that they were extremely influential in doing so.

Although these novels relied mostly on their power to invoke feelings, the end result was acquisition of new beliefs (and moral attitudes and beliefs) on the part of the readers, which, in the end, brought about the change antislavery novelists advocated for. These new beliefs were to be justified by the whole, emotionally coloured experience these novels presented through the testimonies of their writers. From the epistemological point of view we have to ask how are we to know when the perspective advocated for is the one reader should also embrace. In Kieran’s terms; “There is a genuine question to be asked about how we can distinguish between works which aim to show us a possible way of apprehending their subjects and works which aim to persuade us that we should conceive of them as represented” (Kieran 2005, p. 107).

Kieran resolves this by making it a decision of the author: “What makes it prescriptive is a function of how the artist actually intended the work to be understood – whether as a possible way of conceiving of things or as a prescription as to how we should perceive things aright” (Kieran 2005, p. 107). From aesthetic point of view the answer is plausible, even more so given that in some cases proper appreciation certainly involves accepting the perspective. However, from epistemic point of view, the difference between the two is, ultimately, of a lesser importance. What truly matters is the epistemic work of thinking, becoming aware of, judging the evidence, researching etc, that the reader conducts when the perspective offered triggers him to do so. This is what ultimately can end in cognitive gain.

Arguing against Kieran's prescribed understanding, Amy Mullin claimed: “I do not think we can be so sure as to the kind of understanding any one person’s imaginative engagement with a work will promote” (Mullin 2000, p. 129). This is an important point that needs to be taken

into account in epistemological analysis of literature. It is also a point that is often neglected by cognitivists, particularly those who are eager to show that artworks can enrich us morally or help us come to a more ethical behaviour in our interactions with others. For now however, it is important to note that Mullin for one leaves open the possibility that reader does ‘his own epistemic work’, as I call it, and that there is no guarantee that this work will result in (cognitive or moral) gain. Just like artists can fail in their intentions, so too can readers fail in not recognizing the cognitive potentialities of a work (whether or not in such cases the fault lies with them or with the author is a separate issue). This was the idea captured in the dual nature of testimony: how is one to respond to testimony cannot be fully determined by the speaker’s intentions.

It might seem that at this point I am putting too much emphasis on the role of a reader at the expense of abandoning the main intuition behind my analogy: we can learn from literature because the author is reliable. The whole analogy with testimony makes sense only if we hold firmly to the authority of the figure of author-as-speaker, in which case however we should follow Kieran and not Mullin.

I do not think this is the case. First of all, what the author says, the story he develops, is what the reader engages with. And already here he can evaluate speaker’s reliability, according to the pointers Prijić-Samaržija and Lackey develop. Only in case he finds the author reliable, will he engage in the further contemplation of the story and only in that case will there be some kind of cognitive gain. That was the lesson of the comparison between Dreiser and ‘’. So the epistemic importance of the author is not abandoned or diminished due to the active role I am giving to the reader.

That being said though, it is important to keep in mind that in this part I am dealing with beliefs that the reader will come to form once he contemplates about what the work says; that is, about the reflections developed implicitly or explicitly at the thematic level. These beliefs are triggered by testimony, but they are not entirely testimonial beliefs. They should be thought of as the hybrid kind of beliefs, as Lackey calls them. In that sense, as I said, my notion of testimony is much broader than traditionally conceived.

Another set of problems that literary cognitivists have to settle at this point is the fact that a novel which sets out to prescribe a certain perspective (even if that particular perspective is – to put it a bit ambiguously – the right, or correct one) might use various, non-epistemically

justified means to convince readers of the appropriateness of perspective. One of these means might be manipulation. Recall the discussion of distortions of factual descriptions and mistakes from the previous chapter. The mere fact that literary work can present a faulty or mistaken perspective diminishes the claim of its being able to deliver cognitive benefits. What should a cognitivist say to this?

Cases like this, as identified in the previous chapter, are cases of pathology. First thing that should be emphasized here is that manipulation is by no means exclusively bound with literature. Scientific literature can also present perspectives in a manipulative way, just like other practices we rely on or take into account when we form beliefs, like journalism or religion or even every day testimonial exchange with other people, can be manipulative. So the charge of manipulation is by no means intrinsically bound with literature: not all literary fiction is (or aims to be) manipulative, and various other practices are not manipulation free.

From the point of view of the analogy I am defending here (between testimony and literary works), the charge of manipulation can be further diminished if we recognize that even if works prescribe certain perspective, that does not automatically imply that a reader should accept it. The reader I have in mind does not form beliefs in unreflective, uncritical manner. Even more importantly, in most cases it is rather easy for the readers to recognize that the perspective offered is biased, partial and subjective and that the way the story is presented is not reliable. As Crane indicates, “Of course the student of American history knowing the similar horror white Americans inflicted on Indians, black Americans and others cannot help but see an unintended and grotesque irony in this condemnation of the Indian” (Crane 2007, p. 49).

Similar observations apply to plantation romances which are always referred to as ‘literary pastoral’ which, although indeed provided a window into the ‘life in the South’, were so obviously ideologically burdened that it would take a truly inexperienced (and epistemologically naive) reader to accept as true the portrayals of slaves as ‘freest people of all’. One way in which this partiality of view is reflected is the fact that plantation fiction for a long time completely ignored the political, ethical and metaphysical burden of accounting for the (justification of) slavery, presupposing it as a natural order of things and aiming at

preserving this paradise. It was only after antislavery novels started to give loud enough voice to slaves, that Southerners realized that the issue can no longer be ignored.<sup>225</sup> The reader I have in mind here is, (just like epistemically reliable listener) sensitive enough towards this.

Another thing worth noting is that even if these works set out to prescribe perspective (and even if reader judges that perspectives to be wrong, or recognizes various manipulative techniques employed by the authors), there are still many facts and information one can pick up from these works. Both Crane and Phillips insist on this informative aspect of sentimental novel, which, despite aiming at triggering emotional response and change of heart, nevertheless stands firmly grounded in facts.

### *Challenging a perspective*

In the previous chapter I argued that literature is actively engaged in our search for knowledge and understanding. One way in which this is reflected is its possibility to challenge and provoke the existing perspectives, or world-views. Kieran recognizes this aspect when he claims “Many works aim to provoke thoughts and reactions with respect to their subject matter” (Kieran 2005, p. 106). There are various ways in which literature can achieve this. By drawing our attention to some particular aspect of our reality, it makes us wonder whether the commonly accepted view is the right one. This was part of what anti-slavery writers were doing. Writers such as Beecher Stowe and Hentz expressed their attitudes on certain social and political issues relevant at the time they were writing. In advocating for their perspective they brushed not only upon political happenings and technological innovations of their time, but also raised some metaphysical and ethical questions regarding personhood, the essence of being human, the value of human life etc. The problem of slavery and race, as developed in these novels, is intrinsically bound to this wider philosophical background and to a considerable degree can be read as working out of various philosophical problems. These philosophical questions are broad enough and include various philosophical disciplines. In

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<sup>225</sup> Grammer 2004 analyzes plantation fiction and describes the ideological efforts these writers put into their works in order to assert “the essential rightness of slavery as a system of labour and a morally appropriate condition for African”. Grant (2004) gives a historical overview of how politicians and intellectuals on both sides participated in this debate, reflecting and overlapping with literary debates. Robbins (2007), in discussing Stowe's work, points several times at real life events and speeches that influenced Stowe in her writing, as well as in her own journey from anti-slavery supporter to abolitionist.

terms of metaphysical debates, antislavery novels set out to challenge ‘the great primary truth’ advocated for by proslavery novels, namely the thesis that Black people are by nature, divine will, their genetic code and general predispositions, inferior and need masters to guide them and constrain them. This great truth justified the whole social arrangement that supported institution of slavery as well as moral and legal conduct which allowed for all sorts of physical and sexual atrocities being done to slaves. In order to show the wrongness of that, antislavery novels attacked the notion of racial essentialism, trying to show that race (and all that it entails) is a social construct, not a natural thing. Metaphysical questions brought up also challenged the meaning of freedom itself, claiming that those people who were willing to jeopardize their lives to escape from the bounds of slavery have more rights to freedom than those who were free to begin with. The great truth allowed the American constitution not to recognize that black people are part of the nation and that they should have a right to legal protection, which consequently allowed slave owners to treat black people as things, given that ‘Niger’ by the very meaning of the word implied certain ontological (black people are by nature inferior and have no value in themselves) and ethical consequences (they can be treated in whatever way their masters see fit)<sup>226</sup>. Finally, the experiences described by runaway slaves portray not only the social, political and legal journey from slavery to freedom, but also show how drive to independence and a desire for freedom do not include only freedom from obstacles and constitutionally provided right for freedom, but also freedom of mind. The perspective offered by these novels on what a difficult journey it is to travel from being a slave to being a free person to conceive of oneself as a free person surely reflects wider issues that individuals go through in order to fully develop themselves and exercise their own agency and identity.

Various other literary works can be read as challenging the established world-view, scientific theories, moral doctrines etc. Think back at the way psychology and literature intersected in Victorianism; it is not an exaggeration to claim that authors such as George Elliot and Henry

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<sup>226</sup> Phillips (2004) analyzes in some details how the meaning of words like master/slave, which ultimately are defining identity traits, get to be treated in these novels. With proslavery novels, they come close to meaning parent – guardian – protector, which ends up in the view according to which slaves are the freest people in the world, given that they are under constant watch of their masters/protectors who, like parents, know best and can anticipate their every need. On the other hand, in antislavery novels, master is identified with demon and robber, who steals lives, breaks families apart and tortures (physically, sexually and psychologically) those over whom we has command. (See Phillips 2004, esp. p. 47).

James were exploring the way human mind works and creates experiences, relying (mostly) on the ongoing philosophical doctrines. One such doctrine was John Locke's associationism which came under severe attack with the development of Thomas Reid's 'faculty psychology'. According to Dames, "Many nineteenth-century voices were raised in protest over associationism" (Dames 2005, p.95) where these include Dickens and Bronte who were more prone towards Reid's theories. Challenging the existing social, scientific, political, religious (and any other, depending on one's favourite example) order or world view, authors tried to settle questions and problems that haunted them personally, or they tried to influence the way society regarded various phenomena.

Another example of author who through his works actively participates in intellectual debates of his time and challenges them is Hawthorne, who in almost all of his stories and novels, examines the male and female role within the society and within the family<sup>227</sup>. In *The Scarlet Letter* this aspect is visible in Hester, being a single mother as well as the social rebel, but even more so in the character of Dimmesdale who, despite his confession, forever remains unacknowledged father of Pearl. Person insists on this point:

Hawthorne's depiction of Dimmesdale's attitude toward Pearl makes *The Scarlet Letter* a compelling case study of the psychology and the ethos of nineteenth-century American fatherhood. Examined in the light of various advice books of the period, especially Henry Clarke Wright's *Marriage and Parenthood*, published only four years later, the novel entered an ongoing nineteenth-century dialogue about parenthood and, especially, about a father's biological, psychological, and moral responsibilities to his children (Person 2007, p. 77).<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> The importance of this aspect in Hawthorne is dual. On the one hand, critics emphasize the deep, personal importance of this question for Hawthorne, who was struggling with his own role of a father, as opposed to a husband and writer. So this aspect of his works can be read as his own negotiation between demands of parenthood, marriage and career – and what is important for my purpose here is the testimonial aspect (testimony in the sense of expressing one's opinions, worries, thoughts etc). On the other hand, this was the period in which various feminist movements were slowly but loudly developing, and more and more women chose to be writers. This led to redefinition of the traditional roles of woman and man. Again, all of these concerns were not only part of the social reality that Hawthorne shared with his contemporaries, but were also Hawthorne's personal worries. In that sense, what he writes is not only grounded upon his observation of the social changes, but also in his own experience. If we think of the nineteenth-century reader, then certainly all the questions Hawthorne raises (like the responsibility of a father and the roles he should fulfil or the strict moral code of Puritan society) are the questions that are relevant and negotiated on a day to day basis by the reader himself, given that they are part of the wider social background he himself belongs to.

<sup>228</sup> See pp. 77-81, where Person analyzes various parts of *The Scarlet Letter* and the arguments presented by characters in it dealing with the questions of parenthood, maternal instinct and the more general questions of the education of children, particularly with respect to explaining them their birth and the role of parents in their coming about, and draws the analogy to how these issues are taken up by Henry Clarke Wright.

Another sense in which literary work can be seen as challenging a perspective is to bring readers into a situation where they have their own understanding of various themes, concepts or even their own world-views challenged. Authors sometimes makes us reconsider our commitments, our principles, things we think we hold dear, things we are ready to defend or stand for, perspectives we advocate, stands we take. They do this by showing us that the view we had was not encompassing enough, that our understanding of the problem or situation was not deep enough, that in our judgement we did not take into consideration all the relevant factors or that we simply failed to acknowledged the importance or complexity of all the elements contributing to a situation. This is where the force of literature to give us understanding is most powerful, as Baccarini showed with the example of patriotism and Born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Readers may feel that their perspective on the matter has been changed once they engaged with the literary experience. Notice that in this respect, reading works which are built upon the same thematic concept might be particularly revelatory of all the aspects of what is included in the particular concept. Think about the complexities and aspects involved in the notion of crime. What does it mean to commit a crime, does crime by its very definition include breach of state laws, or divine law, or one's own moral law? How is society to pursue criminals? Are they entitled to redemption? How does one deal with one's own crimes and how does committing a crime influence one? All of these, and no doubt many more, are questions which can be raised with respect to crime. Understanding the notion of a crime involves being able to answer all of these questions. However, it is unlikely that one can ask all of these questions without being prompted to do so. And literary works bring us into a position to ask them and to try to come up with answers to them.

One author who challenges the notions of crime and punishment is Hawthorne, in his novel *The Scarlet Letter*, which centres on a forbidden love affair between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in the strict Puritan community. There are many elements relevant for the story, particularly Hawthorne' analysis and criticism of Puritan morality (which, throughout the novel, as well as in his short stories, he exposes as basically immoral, cruel, vindictive, insensitive and inhuman). Yet, the basic question a reader is faced with here is whether Hester's punishment (being expelled from the society and forced to wear the scarlet letter as a sign of adultery) fits her crime (having a sexual relation with a man who is not her husband). According to Person, "Hawthorne has given us a way of thinking about crime and punishment – about the psychology of punishment and the desire we have to know the truth of guilt or innocence with a certainty that warrants such punishment" (Person 2007, p. 67). The reason



why this is challenging is the fact that Hester's actions are only seen as a crime by the society. Hester does not conceive of herself as the guilty one (despite having knowingly broken community law as well as going against public morality); in fact, a reader may be struck by how stubbornly she refuses to succumb to public opinion of her and accept the identity society imposes on her, thus questioning the whole meaning of punishment in the first place<sup>229</sup>. More importantly, Hawthorne here challenges the right of an individual to make herself into a person one wants to be; despite her own vision of herself, Hester's identity is perpetually designed by the society which remains blind to her real self:

*The Scarlet Letter* tells a human story (...) of what it means to be branded and identified by others, but in the end, what Hawthorne really makes clear is that individual identity is negotiated between individuals and society (...). The Puritan's punishment has temporarily obliterated Hester's identity and given her a new one – an identity for them and thus for her. Hawthorne recognized that society has such a power (Person 2007, p. 71).

Ultimately then, what Hawthorne explores in the novel is relation between individual and society, between individual's system of norms and values and that of society, and the power that society has over individual<sup>230</sup>.

A different view on the notion of punishment is given in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Recall Dilman's analysis of the psychological motives that led Raskolnikov to commit the crime. In Dostoyevsky, we are not concerned with the way society imposes the status of a criminal on an individual. We are concerned with how individual comes to commit

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<sup>229</sup> Many literary critics see this as the most important aspect of the story, in that Hester, who is based on actual person, is seen here as actively participating in the fight for women's rights through her actions of disobedience and disdain. Crane particularly insists on this aspect, claiming that Hester's behaviour implies the need for change in order for the progress to take place. „Hester's defiance raises one of the novel's central questions: can continuity in the form of social orthodoxies and convention coexist with dissent and resistance? Or must one side of the antithesis overwhelm the other? Both principles have positive and negative aspects. Continuity in the form of adhering to traditional conventions and norms produces order and affirms membership in the large groups, but it can also be stifling and tyrannical. Change may come with welcome innovations and progress, but it may also produce chaos and work to unravel the social fabric” (Crane 2007, pp. 80-81).

<sup>230</sup> This element is particularly strong in Crane, who claims that „Hawthorne's romance examines the coexistence of ostensibly opposed concepts, such as submission to authority and rebellion, tradition and innovation, religious orthodoxy and antinomianism“ (Crane 2007, p. 80). In the end however Crane insists that the novel in fact prescribes an understanding: „...Hawthorne's narrative implicitly argues for a salutary if difficult balance between forces pulling in opposite directions. Tradition, history, established religion, and membership in a cohesive community pull in the direction of conformity, continuity, and orthodoxy. Individual aspiration and the free play of the imagination pull in the direction of rebellion, change, and heterodoxy. Refusing to endorse one or the other side of this opposition to the exclusion of the other, Hawthorne's novel suggests that we do and must live in the paradox that both sides of this dichotomy are necessary to our well-being and that we are constantly in a process of transformation as a result” (p. 86).

the crime and how he justifies such an action to himself. Besides psychological factors, what matters for Dostoyevsky are social, religious and philosophical aspects of Raskolnikov's deliberation. As Ivanits pointed out, "Though the focus is on the hero and his crime, the poverty and human misery surrounding Raskolnikov provide a good deal of the fuel generating his rationale for the murder (Ivanits 2008, p. 62)". This is seen in the philosophical aspect of the justifiability of crime that the novels open. When Raskolnikov cries "One death and a hundred lives in exchange – after all, it is a matter of simple arithmetic" (Ivanits 2008, p. 69) he is in fact stating the utilitarian principle justifying the acceptability and justifiability of that action that will bring better consequences to greater number of people.

The perspective on crime offered in Dostoyevsky is mostly internal, in the sense that Raskolnikov's crime is not publically i.e. socially determined as Hester's is. Dostoyevsky is interesting in the way human being comes to terms with his own actions; in that sense, Raskolnikov's punishment has to do with<sup>231</sup> his own consciousness and the way he comes to redemption.

Another masterpiece dealing with the impact of a crime on individual character, identity and personality is *Macbeth*. Like Raskolnikov and Hester, Macbeth is at the beginning of a play an innocent person who turns towards crime. Most of the play is concerned with the effects that committing the crime have on him and in that sense, "The play is centrally concerned, at a dramatic level, with the effects of evil actions on the soul of the perpetrator" (McGinn, p. 92) and the main problem for Macbeth and his Lady is their inability to foresee what effects will these actions have on their conscience and selves. One thing that Shakespeare does in this play is to explore the concept of evil which stems from self-interest and ambition<sup>232</sup>. However, at the more general level, Shakespeare is here concerned with analyzing the relation between character and actions. McGinn argues that Shakespeare here goes against the accepted view according to which one's character determines the actions and shows how actions, and self-awareness which accompany them resulting in self-knowledge, gradually

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<sup>231</sup> Ivanits presses this point further by analyzing, in addition to psychological, sociological and philosophical aspects of Raskolnikov's crime, the religious aspects.

<sup>232</sup> In that sense, as McGinn nicely shows, Macbeth and Iago stand as two opposite concepts of evil: „Iago's interest in evil is inhumanly pure, whereas Macbeth's stems from simple self-advancement, the most human of failings“ (McGinn, p. 93).

change one's character and identity<sup>233</sup>. Finally, and perhaps even more importantly, the play is concerned with the power of imagination. Here is McGinn: "While traditional authors restricted themselves to the three faculties of Reason, Passion, and Will, Shakespeare adds the faculty of Imagination, to be accorded the same status as the classic three. The imagination is just as much of a force in the psyche as the other three, and cannot be reduced to some sort of "faint copy" of sense impressions (...). As a natural psychologist, Shakespeare is insisting on the centrality of the imagination in the human mind" (p. 99).<sup>234</sup>

With the examples of Hawthorne, Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare I wanted to press further the claim that various literary works contribute to, perhaps even shape, how we understand what is involved in committing a crime. At this point, anti-cognitivists might claim, following Lamarque and Olsen, that the situations described in these works are too specific to be applicable to people in the real world. In the fifth chapter I have already presented some views (Robinson's, Scruton's and Hagbegr's) which resist such conclusions. Let us now further explore the cognitive benefits of perspectives offered within a work to see why such anti-cognitivists' claims are to be dismissed.

## 7.2. Epistemic benefits of the perspective

The perspectives presented or advocated for by the authors are most often developed from reflections on the thematic level, and as we have seen in the second chapter, this can either be done explicitly by the author or character, or implicitly, in the process of interpretation by the reader himself. In the line with humanistic and mimetic aspect of literature, these concepts have to do with matters that are of genuine human concern and it has been my claim that we want to know as much as we can about them – in Riggs' terms, these are the relevant truths we want to have in our total stock of knowledge. We have also seen that knowledge does not exhaust everything there is to grasp and in that sense, I have claimed that literature offers us a possibility to understand themes it develops. Now I will pursue this further by claiming that

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<sup>233</sup> Here is McGinn: „Macbeth is a play about the psychological power of nonlinguistic action. This is a rather anti-Cartesian perspective, because the body is placed at the heart of the mind: the soul does not float free of our active bodies (...) instead, the mind and the acting body are inseparable. To put it in philosophical language: the essence of the human being is *embodied agency*, not some immaterial essence or transcendental soul.“ (p. 96).

<sup>234</sup> Similar claims about the importance of imagination for learning and particularly self knowledge are nowadays advocated for by B. Gaut (see his 2007).

engaging with literary works which tackle the same or similar thematic concepts is epistemically rewarding in that it sheds light on the various aspects of the problem, helping readers gain a deeper understanding of it. This is the main idea behind the indirect humanism as defined by Gibson.

So what is a literary cognitivist to make out of this? Within a literary work, the way the story is developed is designed so as to show that the perspective the work puts out is true. Does that suffice as justification for accepting the perspective? The answer that anti-cognitivist gives is 'no'. At best, we can say that the perspective advocated for can be applied only to the fictional world (this is Lamarque's claim) and therefore it says nothing about the real world, or that the novel, at best, shows how the world looks like to someone who accepts the given perspective (recall Putnam's claim about literature's providing us with the knowledge of possibilities). Whatever the work has to offer, it is at best a hypothesis about the real world, not an actual, epistemically reliable claim about the real world. Anyway, there's no any real, cognitive gain for the reader.

Cognitivists however are more willing to search for cognitive benefits that might lay hidden within the perspectives, and as the general claim of this dissertation is, the new waves in epistemology now finally give it a theoretical grounding to do so. To begin with, a perspective advocated for can indeed inform a reader, as the case with antislavery novels show. These novels managed to silence years and years of prejudice against the Black people and expose them as engaging in the same kinds of emotional relations as their owners. Similar changes could be brought about by literary and art works which tackle various forms of sexual and gender issues, such as homosexuality or hermaphroditism. To borrow an example from film think of *Boys don't cry*. In terms of cognitive benefits, this film offers a valuable insight into transgender person, insisting on the difference between transgender person (a person born as a woman who feels is a man) and homosexual person (who feels sexual desire and love towards the person of the same sex). This is something not many people are aware of and they seem willing to classify it as homosexuality. But the movie is particularly informative in insisting on this difference (Teena's repeated insistence on her claim that she is not a lesbian). The perspective the movie offers is one that demands acceptance and support toward this person, rather than violence, homophobic behaviour and disgust. In respect to that, viewers can profit from watching it. They are asked to reconsider their judgments and attitudes toward transgender /homosexuality and the new perspective the viewer reaches is in

this respect more informative. Viewer is given the opportunity to learn. The same is true for Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *The Middle Sex*, where the main character 'tells the story' of his life: born with both, male and female sexual features, she/he starts a life long journey of trying to find his identity, accept himself and hopefully find a life companion.

Perspectives that literary works offer can invite reflections on how we think of our interactions with other people. For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story *Young Goodman Brown* can be read and interpreted as epistemological exploration of the problem of other minds and first person/third person asymmetry. The events that Goodman Brown experiences in the woods open the question of trust in oneself and others, trust in one's community and marriage and the value of bondages we create with others. From epistemological point of view, it also tackles the problem of perception and introspection. In a similar manner, Collin McGinn (2006) claims that *Othello* should primarily be read not as a story about psychological impact of jealousy, but as a story about epistemological tragedy of human life: the fact that we can never know what the other person thinks, feels and wants to communicate to us. This makes it possible for others to deceive us, manipulate us and breach the trust we place upon them, as Iago demonstrates. In addition, this also makes it an option for us not to give our trust when it is deserved and called for, like the case with Othello's refusal to believe Desdemona shows, and the option of trusting those who should not be trusted, as Othello does with Iago.

What are the epistemic benefits of approaching these works in this way? Think of *Othello*. One option is to develop highly distrustful attitude toward oneself and the others. But that would be wrong, not to mention irrational. But what we can learn from *Othello* is to be more careful and prudent in our dealings with the others, and to consider our own conducts with them. Part of Othello's blame is the fact that he took Iago for granted, on several occasions (in failing to promote him, in not considering Iago's motives and honesty) as well as the fact that he never really considered his own conduct with Desdemona (as Zamir raises the question, why was it hard for Othello to love and be loved?). Shakespeare might be preaching scepticism about other minds here, but a reader is given a big space in between blind trust in others and complete distrust. What *Othello* shows is that one has to be aware of one's own character (Othello would never have fallen for the infidelity story had he been aware of his own jealous character, insecurity and naivety) and this is only achieved through reflection and

introspection, both of which Othello lacks and he therefore too easily falls a prey to his own character, his own insecurities and sensitivity<sup>235</sup>.

Of special concern in this part is the question of literature's influence on moral sensibility and moral development of readers. Recall that Diamond, John, Carroll, Baccarini, to mention but few, insisted on literature's ability to present moral dilemmas in particularly clear way, making it easier for the reader to understand all the complexities involved in reaching a moral judgment or recognizing the proper way that a moral principle is to be applied. Baccarini emphasized this aspect, claiming

Artworks contribute better to the improvement of moral knowledge as part of gradual and reflective mutual adjustment and clarification of beliefs. In such a procedure, the moral epistemological role of experience of artworks is part of a wide reflective equilibrium and of the process of refinement of our understanding of general moral principles, in particular of the range of their application (Baccarini 2010, p. 20).

One of the most recent contributions to the debate on the cognitive value of literature is Philip Kitcher's book on Thomas Mann. Although Kitcher is mostly concerned with analyzing the ways philosophy can be done through literature, I see a lot of what he says as contributing to further the claims made by cognitivists, particularly regarding the benefits associated with indirect humanism.

In describing the sceptic's stand, Kitcher says:

Sceptics dislike the thought that a work of literature (or music) might expand our conceptual repertoire, leading us to approach our experiences with new categories and to react to experience in different ways: perspectives inspired by our imaginative identification with a character or with the significance of a particular emotional response would be *wrongly* acquired – we would have been seduced into new ways of seeing things, not enlarging our horizons through the sober assessment of reasons (Kitcher 2013, ms. p.20)

In his work, Kitcher insists on the impact of literature (as well as some other art forms, such as music) to show new perspectives to the reader and to inspire some reflections. In that sense, proper engagement with literature (and critical commentary) is to

bring (...) readers to a previously unanticipated perspective, a different Gestalt on life and on the factors that make a difference to its mattering. We envisage a process in which people are brought to see or hear or think or feel in novel ways, so that questions that had been viewed as unanswerable admit of solution" (Kitcher 2013, ms. p. 146).

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<sup>235</sup> See Zamir 2006, McGinn 2006, and Mousley 2007.

So Kitcher not only sees literature as being able to inspire readers to think differently about the world and to approach their experience in novel ways, but as being able to provide readers with some concrete answers. In order to claim this, Kitcher needs to show that the perspective that the reader takes (or gains) from a work can serve as justification for the subsequent attitudes, judgments and conclusions he develops as a result of reading and reflecting on what he read. Anti-cognitivists generally argue that such a justification cannot be obtained, and even if literary work has in fact some kind of influence on how readers perceive the world, this influence is only episodic, short lived and lacking any serious grounding.

In answering this, Kitcher relies on his pragmatic background. As he claims, there is no substantial (i.e. epistemic) difference from the perspective we develop as a result of reading, and perspectives we obtained in the course of our lives, which developed as a result of being a part of certain communities and social groups. The epistemic justification (or warrant) of the concepts developed as a result of engaging with literature and living in particular time and place is the same: “it is not that we achieved our concepts and categories through some insight into their special worthiness – there was no Cartesian moment at which they were rigorously assessed and found to pass muster”(ms.p.20). The concepts through which we perceive the world and make sense of our experience are acquired from our culture and as we go along, we change them and adjust them so that they make a more-or-less coherent whole. In that sense, literature is just one more tool available to us, but a tool that can have particularly powerful influence on us.

How exactly does this happen? Kitcher and Kieran both offer a similar explanation of the psychological processes that take place in the reader. Here’s (a bit long) quote from Kitcher:

In reading a work of fiction or a poem, or in listening to a piece of music, we pass through a sequence of psychological states, partly shaped by our antecedent judgments, conceptions and emotions, partly the product of our apprehension of the words or the sounds. We imagine the actions and situations described in words, we identify the emotions and moods expressed in the music. The occurrence of these states sets up connections with other parts of our psychological lives, recalling past judgments or emotions, sometimes modifying our established ways of conceiving and evaluating. The result is what I shall call a *synthetic complex*, whose elements may be radically disparate: memories of our own experiences, images from earlier perceptions or encounters with other works of art, judgments previously endorsed or rejected, emotions now excited by different objects, or even emotions of types we have not previously felt. The power of some works of literature and music to build synthetic complexes accounts for their enduring hold on us – as we return to them, again and again, the synthetic complexes they generate grow and change, perhaps expanding into areas of our psychological lives that were initially quite remote from their influence, so that we come to think of the pertinent works as inexhaustible. (Kitcher 2013, p.146).

One extremely important aspect of synthetic complex is that it becomes part of a reader's internal cognitive economy and it mixes up with all the other elements of it, becoming a part of reader's coherent system of beliefs<sup>236</sup>. This gives an additional strength to the cognitive benefits available in literature; by internalizing them and making them a stable part of reader's internal cognitive economy, they become (or have the potential to become) what internalist/evidentialist such as Matthias Steup, Richard Feldman and Earl Conee call justificators: they serve as factors that can justify the acceptance of some future proposition or commitment.

If Kitcher's account here is correct, then what the literary work has to offer in terms of cognitive benefits it delivers doesn't need to be checked or confirmed by some process external to the reading itself because the creation of synthetic complex is, presumably, either simultaneous with the reading, or takes place shortly after the reading (in the process that Peter Kivy, on whom more later, calls 'the afterlife'). Two things might be raised here: first, could Kitcher be wrong, in the sense that no such thing as synthetic complex develops as a result of reading and second, even if synthetic complex develops, can it have the same epistemic power within the coherent system of beliefs as, for example, perceptive or testimonial beliefs.

Kitcher himself provides an answer to this by developing further the cognitive impact that synthetic complexes have on the readers: "The first grade of reflective stability comes in admitting only those synthetic complexes that achieve the best overall fit with prior attitudes and commitments" (Kitcher 2013, ms, p.150).

If this was all that synthetic complexes do, it would be hard to see how literature has the power to challenge perspectives we have and inspire new (better, fuller, more complex) ways of seeing the world. Note however that within overall Kitcher's story, this first grade serves important functions. For one thing, his focus on literary cognitivism is mostly concerned with the question, often seen as the most important philosophical question, of what makes a life

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<sup>236</sup> In Kitcher's words, „Responsible building of such complexes should be *reflectively stable*: that is, as the reader or listener ponders the connections she makes in light of the full range of her antecedent attitudes and commitments, she should discover that the complex is sustainable. The reader of *Bleak House* jettisons some old convictions, but the synthetic complex that displaces them accords with quite general and fundamental commitments to avoid wishful thinking and to suspend judgment about what has been casually taken for granted, once it is clear that it can be called into question



valuable or worth living. Given that a response to this can only come from a cognizer's self reflection and self-examination, it is understandable that perspectives advocated for by a literary work have to be tested against his overall system of belief, not against the real world. On the other hand, as noted before, his pragmatist background, which recognizes the same epistemic grounding of all the concepts and perspectives we operate with, allows him to treat literature as on an equal pair with other disciplines and experience itself. And finally, and most importantly, from the way I understand Kitcher, although he is *mostly* concerned with literary cognitivism that is focused on philosophical questions, the way he deals with skeptics shows that he is just as eager to defend the claim that literature is a source of knowledge generally (not only philosophical). To support this claim let's go back to the roles Kitcher sees as being performed by synthetic complex:

The formation of synthetic complexes, when they persist as stable parts of our thinking and feeling, can revise our conceptions and judgments. Of particular concern are *endorsements* and *rejections*, judgments in which a subject concludes that some state of affairs is tolerable or to be resisted, or in which she takes a scenario as a serious possibility for herself, a goal to be worthy of pursuit, a course of action she has hitherto viewed as necessary to be trivial and dispensable (Kitcher 2013, ms. p. 147).

A good example of how this works is the example of anti-slavery novels discussed earlier; we saw that these literary works had the power to change reader's attitudes and judgments about the moral, legal and even metaphysical status of slaves. That certainly wouldn't have been achieved if the (cognitive) influence of these novels was only episodic and/or inspired only by emotional impact. Skeptic might claim at this point that even if literary works had this capacity, it certainly was not the only factor that influenced these far reaching political changes; public speeches, political campaigns, economic factors and all other sorts of things joined together made people change their attitudes. I don't think this necessarily diminishes the impact of literary works. For one thing, literary cognitivist doesn't have to claim that literature is the sole means through which cognitive benefits are achieved; as long as it plays *some* role it has to be given *some* credit for what it does. As Kitcher remarks,

Prior endorsements or rejections are evoked by reading or listening, they are brought into the synthetic complex generated, and they may be reinforced by it, found to align themselves with the judgments and emotions now made or felt, or, conversely, they may jar with the present contents of consciousness. In the latter case, the experience of the work of art may lead to the embedding of a *stable* synthetic complex, produced by *discarding* the endorsement or rejection previously made (Kitcher 2013, ms. 148).

On the other hand, if my analogy between testimony and literature is plausible, than we should also have in mind that even though testimony *as a source of knowledge* is unique and irreplaceable, particular instances of knowledge we get through testimony of others is by no

means exclusively testimonial, i.e. it could have been obtained through some other means (my knowledge that there are no eggs in the fridge based on my sister's testimony could also have been obtained through looking in the fridge, or through remembering that I used the last egg yesterday. My sister's testimony can give additional justification to my claim that there are no eggs in the fridge). The same applies to fictional testimony.

One final aspect of Kitcher's view on perspectives triggered by literary work, important for our present discussion, concerns the two impacts that can be achieved. In commenting Dickens' *Bleak House*, he writes:

Dickens' great novel should not be treated as a source in empirical sociology – it can be the provocation to investigate the facts about how poor people live in cities, but it cannot rightly substitute for any such investigation. Encounters with works of art can thus lead people to inquire into matters they had previously taken for granted, playing a role in *discovery*, but having no force as *justification*. Yet that is not the only possibility for the reader. Perhaps the impact of *Bleak House* leads him to view familiar phenomena in a different way, to understand that in situations he knows to be widespread, options he had assumed to exist are not available, to see his casual assumption that those options – “the deserving poor can always escape through hard work” – are the uncomprehending, comfortable platitudes voiced by those who do not think seriously about the facts, to feel resentment towards the voices in the novel that dismiss problems of poverty, and *to see himself as one of those who has spoken in this way*. The synthetic complex built here contains images our reader finds worthy of protest, a recognition that he himself has not protested similar things about which he has long known, and that his deafness to the need for protest has been the product of his casually endorsing a tradition that is both well-regarded and personally comfortable. If this is the pattern of his change of heart, then it is far less obvious that further evidence is needed, or what that evidence might be (Kitcher 2013, ms. p. 149).

There are many elements in this long quote that matter for us here. At the most general level, it is important to note this distinction, stated very clearly in Kitcher, between literary works serving as an incentive for further discovery and as illuminating some familiar aspect or viewing it in novel ways, thus bringing about a change in perspective. For one thing, Kitcher rightly notes that the choice is not either – or (i.e. it is not that a particular work x will only serve as incentive for further discovery and vice versa) but has to do with what the reader brings to the novel. To go back to the example of *The Middle Sex*, what the story tells about hermaphroditism can invite further discovery if a reader is completely unfamiliar with the phenomena, it can invite an attitude of acceptance and care in a reader who originally had prejudice or attitude of disgust or even hostility toward hermaphrodites or, if the reader is familiar with this phenomena, it can show, to borrow Kieran's phrase “different perspective on the same experience” (Kieran 2005, p. 119).

It is important to emphasize the importance of the claim that literary works can serve as incentives to further discovery, given that this is not usually a claim that literary cognitivist

is happy to accept. In fact, as we have seen, literary works are cognitively valuable only to the extent that this cognitive value is internal to the work. We have also seen that the analogy between cognitive value of literature and thought experiments was designed, at least partly, in order to ground this value to the internal cognitive sphere of a reader, rather than in any kind of process that would be external to the very process of reading. Kitcher's contribution to this discussion is valuable in that it acknowledges the value of the research that readers can conduct, inspired by what they read.

Such reasoning is in line with how I defined the epistemically responsible behaviour of a listener in the case of testimonial exchange. Before accepting the testimony, listener should search for evidence that speak in favour of the testimony he was delivered.

### **7.3. Kieran vs. Kitcher and the epistemic work of the perspective**

We have seen that both, Kieran and Kitcher, develop their views on the idea that literary work offers a perspective and that there are some cognitive benefits that can be thus obtained. Where they differ is on who is to decide which benefits will be delivered. While Kieran is concerned with showing it is the author who decides whether his work will describe, prescribe or challenge a perspective, Kitcher is concerned with how the reader responds to the perspective offered<sup>237</sup>. In that sense, we might see this debate as the one between s-testimony and h-testimony. I have argued at the beginning of this chapter against this aspect of Kieran's view and I will now pursue this further. However, there is one important sense in which Kieran is right: if we focus on the way he sees authors as fulfilling different functions with the perspectives, we can account for the claim that literature actively participates in the intellectual debates of the time, that is, that it is on a par with other knowledge seeking and generating practices. This distinction is the reason why it is important to recognize the dual nature of testimony and apply it to literary cognitivism. In writing literary works, authors are delivering testimony. Because in doing so they rely on their observation, intimate experience, personal convictions and research,

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<sup>237</sup> This does not mean however that Kieran does not appreciate the fact that art (literature) influences the way people think, feel and react to the world. Art offers us understanding, it offers us the ability to put oneself in, or recognize states representative of the relevant kind of experience. This kind of understanding cannot be cashed out in propositions only because it is a matter of experience that the artworks offers (see Kieran 2005, p- 116).

they can be seen as sincere and reliable. However, from the perspective of h-testimony, different kind of epistemic work is operative. Let us focus on that.

To summarize: Kieran and I agree that literature is cognitively valuable and that this value ranges from knowledge to understanding and insight. I think his distinction between artworks which illuminate the familiar and those which challenge us to think in new ways or prescribe understanding can very successfully be applied to cognitive potentialities of literature, particularly those pertaining to indirect humanism. Where we disagree is on who's to say what is the function of artwork, Kieran claims it's the author, I claim it's the reader, or more precisely, the impact that a work will eventually have on the reader. In this part I would like to explore a bit further the reasons for this disagreement and answer to Kieran's possible objections to my claims.

Let's start by elaborating a bit more Kieran's position. He defends literary cognitivism in its strongest form (i.e. epistemological and aesthetic claims) and for that reason he has to show that cognitive dimension of literary works is inherently connected to and advances aesthetic value of a work, which he does very well. This however can only be achieved if artistic means are used in a way that allows cognitive potentialities to shine through, so to speak. Here is Kieran again: "If the artistic means utilised are poor, clumsy or impoverished, then a work has failed to realise the affective understanding we value in much great art. In such cases we are unlikely to care about or take much interest in whatever insight is implicit in our experience of the work" (Kieran 2005, p. 120).

Kieran is right in claiming this and although this thesis is not explicitly advocated for in this thesis, nothing I say contradicts it. However, the reason Kieran objects to poorly utilised artistic means is that, with such works,

the viewer is left to reflect on the nature and ramifications of their immediate response independently of the work. Such works are poor because we expect art not merely to prompt but to guide and deepen our responses. This is no different from recognizing that terrible novels can provoke interesting thoughts and responses though they remain terrible novels. Reading a Mills and Boon romance may occasion us to think about the nature of romantic love, its illusory nature, the possessiveness of desire and its all-encompassing nature. But the thoughts themselves are merely occasioned by the work rather than developed in any interesting way by our engagement with it (Kieran 2005, p. 122)

Kieran raises a very interesting point here, and that is the claim that terrible novels, even if capable of triggering some thoughts in their readers, cannot be attributed cognitive value because the 'cognitive workings' of a reader will not be developed by the novels. Is that a problem for literary cognitivist? Many would say that it is, for the following reason: if we are

to attribute cognitive value to a literature, then all cognitive benefits have to be traceable back to the work and provoked only by the work. Any conclusion that a reader reaches independently of the work cannot be attributed to literature. I have already rejected such a conclusion and we saw that Baccarini shares this intuition with me.

Kieran also accepts this:

What matters is whether the means of representation penetrate and shape our grasp of the thoughts and attitudes conveyed through the representation. Where they do so, our responses are intimately tied to the experience as shaped by engagement with the work. In which case the putative insights are internal to the works as art. Where this is not the case, they are extraneous (Kieran 2005, p. 123).

I want to point out two things here. First of all, to go back to terrible novels, i.e. bad literature. Part of my argument was the claim that a reader can recognize those novels which are not cognitively valuable; in these cases, the novels will simply have no cognitive impact on the reader. This can happen for variety of reasons, such as the shallowness and one-dimensionality of the way the novel presents its thematic level, the psychologically shallow and distorted presentation of characters which obviously deviates from ‘real world psychology’ and behaviour of people, due to the overtly oversimplified presentation, etc. In the fifth chapter, I argued that because of these aspects of the way the fictional world is constructed, readers will recognize that the author is unreliable.

However, if reading such novels occasions further thinking and readers in fact end up with few new beliefs, then I don’t think we should dismiss it as easily as Kieran does. From the standpoint we are interested in here, namely epistemology, this is certainly a valuable achievement. Kitcher pointed out that in some cases, literary works can function not as delivering new propositions and knowledge, but as prompting us to do our own research. In such cases, although the final cognitive gain is not ‘internal’ in the sense Kieran and other literary cognitivists insist on, there still is a cognitive gain. Notice that in everyday discussions, even formal lectures, we can come across a speaker who is not a good testifier. He might speak in a confused and unarticulated manner, he may present only half of the story or interpret things in a wrong manner. That however does not mean that the listener cannot conduct a research into the matter upon hearing the testimony<sup>238</sup>.

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<sup>238</sup> I am grateful to Snježana Prijić-Samaržija for this example.

Again, the analogy with testimony is helpful. I have claimed that our everyday testimonial practice is such that very rarely the beliefs we form on the basis of testimony are testimonially based; more often they are hybrids. If a friend of mine tells me about her visit to England, and describes what she saw there and how she was treated, I may come to believe I want to go to England. Yet nothing in her testimony says that I want to go to live there. The same is true with fictional testimony. Additional judgments are being made regarding reports and reflections and these are triggered by, but not determined by, the literary work.

Finally, Kieran's claim that authorial intentions determine whether the perspective offered is to be taken as challenging or prescribing might not work in cases when there is a time gap between authors and readers. Before I elaborate on that, let me just note that I am not claiming here that authorial intentions are not to be taken into consideration in the evaluation and to some extent in interpretation of a work. But when it comes to cognitive dimension of a work and cognitive benefits that a reader might get out it, authorial intention cannot determine how the reader will evaluate the work epistemically, that is, what he will get in the end. One example will be helpful here.

In the 1950s several British authors, such as poets Philip Larkin, Donald Davies and Thom Gunn and novelists Kingsley Amis, John Wain and Iris Murdoch were labelled as pertaining to 'The Movement'. In terms of their aesthetic principles, they were "dismissive of modernist obfuscation" which was seen in their "impatience with complexity, symbolism, and opacity" and their sensibility "rooted in the qualities of rationalism, realism and empiricism" (Head 2002, p. 50). In terms of what they wanted to achieve with their writings, Head claims: "Amis wanted to claw back whatever cultural powers resides in literature on behalf of the ordinary intelligent reader, and it is this kind of challenge which identified the Movement with a spirit of social transition. Movement writers thus appeared to ride a tide of class change" (Head 2002, p. 51). Though it remains unclear to what extent these authors, particularly Amis and Wain wanted to be critical of social reality or inspire changes, the fact remains they were often seen as criticizing the English society for being too conservative and not allowing true meritocracy. Wain himself stated that his novel was the result of "young man's dissatisfaction with 'the shape of English society'" (Head 2002, p. 52), but what the novel shows in the end is that one cannot escape the place one holds in that same society.

The reason why this is interesting for our purposes here is the following. One of the most famous novels from the Movement is Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* which is to a great extent

dealing with class and social change. The novel follows the main character, Jim Dixon, “the champion of ordinary provincialism” (Head 2002, p.51) who gets the girl he wants from higher social class and through the social connections of her uncle, a well paid job. So basically, Jim is removed from “his class, cultural, and geographical bases” (Head 2002, p.51). His success however is termed as provincial fairy-tale, because readers recognize that such a ‘success’ is rather unrealistic (and it is precisely that aspect that inspires anger characteristic of the School of Angry Young Men). Because of that, Head concludes,

What the novel demonstrates historically, beyond its identification of a new cultural mood and the glimpse of social change, is a tacit acknowledgment of the gradual nature of these changes. It also dramatizes the Movement’s impotence and incoherence, its inability to mount an effective challenge to existing institutions in terms it set for itself. (...) Writers like Amis and Wain identified with socialist agitation early in their careers (both Lumley and Dixon put forward socialist arguments), but never mounted a serious challenge to class distinction or privilege” (Head 2002, p. 51).<sup>239</sup>

So what we have here is a clash between author’s intentions and what he actually managed to achieve. However, it is not that the novel is epistemically completely inert, there are still valuable aspects, particularly philosophical, which are not tied to the social conditions<sup>240</sup>. Another lesson from this example is that we should see the descriptive, prescriptive and challenging functions as intersecting, rather than as one of those being exclusive. How much will the reader eventually get is not determined by the Movement’s ideology or aims. For some readers, it offers a descriptive perspective on the social circumstances of the particular time in particular English city. For some, it challenges the view(s) on social mobility.

Let us go back to the time gap argument I mentioned before. As I just demonstrated, with literary works which are primarily concerned with social circumstances of the time the work is written (like it is the case with Stowe or Amis), once these circumstances change, so will the reactions of the readers. If the authors set up to prescribe a certain perspective, like Stowe did, or generally to prescribe a certain kind of imaginative understanding like Kieran claims *The Potato Eaters* do, then certainly this prescribed perspective will at one point become outdated. Peasants live differently today than they did in van Gogh’s time, and the contemporary viewers cannot relate to Van Gogh’s painting in the same way his

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<sup>239</sup> Another important novel here is John Wain's *Hurry on Down*, which is also generally seen as lacking the power to cause any real challenge to the existing society. (see Head 52).

<sup>240</sup> See Lamarque and Olsen 1994, pp405-434.

contemporaries could. The same is true for Stowe or Amis' works. What the contemporary readers get out of Stowe might involve facts about conditions of living, brutal treatment of the slaves, philosophical concerns regarding the identity, but certainly we cannot approach the novel in the same way Stowe's contemporaries did<sup>241</sup>. For modern readers, the novel can serve as historical document about time and place specific social conditions.

Examples from science fiction can make this claim even stronger. Today, when using parts and organs from the body of deceased people is a common procedure in our medical practice, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is no longer as shocking and thought provoking as it was when it was written. While one of the original questions Shelley set out to explore was the search for vital principle, scientist today know there is no such thing, and are, unlike Shelley, capable of explaining why that is so. In addition, Shelley was in her work interested in the emotion of sympathy and her work can be read as a contribution to the philosophical and psychological discussion on sympathy<sup>242</sup>. Yet this is another aspect of the story that modern readers are not likely to recognize. But that doesn't mean that all that the novel offers in terms of cognitive values is lost. Ethical and bioethical concerns are still the back bone of the novel, the only difference is, while in Shelley's times this was a fun though experiment, today it is the harsh reality.

So, just to summarize my position here. Lamarque and Olsen advance a similar argument about the time gap, but in a different context. They are concerned with showing what turns novels into literary masterpieces and in doing that, use the example of how the novels show and portray social circumstances specific of the time the novel was written. I think their

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<sup>241</sup> Lamarque and Olsen advance a similar arguemnt regarding Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man*, claiming that „'The History Man' theme simply does not seem of sufficient existential or moral interest to develop a poetic vision of lasting value. Th eidea od 'The History Man' is of interest only in the context of the student revolt of the 1960s. The consequence is that Bradbury's book, though still readable, seems dated, the satire too violent and cruel, and the pessimism verging on the neurotic“ (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, p. 428. See also their comment on 'Condition-of-England novels and the comparison between Elizabeth Gaskell and Dickens (pp. 428-429).

<sup>242</sup> McLarren Caldwell (2004) offers an illuminating overview of the theoreis of sympathy developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly those developed by (or influenced by theories of) John Locke and David Hume; see particularly pp. 29-45. In analyzing various aspects of the novel Caldwell shows how Shelley participated in these discussions. In this example again we see the caim made in the previosu chapter, about authors active participation in the ongoing scientific debates. In this context however, the example shows that this particular aspect of the novel is something that might go unnoticed by the readers.



analysis answers the question of why some works are literary masterpieces while others are not.

Their analysis also shows (though they wouldn't argue for this), or at least makes it plausible to claim that cognitive dimension is not separable from the great literary works, that is, that part of what makes them great is precisely the way they enable people to learn and get knowledge. I accept this, but with the addition that even works of lesser artistic/aesthetic/literary value can still be seen and evaluated as cognitively valuable.

#### **7.4. The problem of hypotheses**

The argument that literature is a source of hypotheses came up several times in our discussion so far. According to the most usual reading of this argument, inspired by Putnam, anti-cognitivists argue that, due to the lack of evidence or arguments that would support whatever theses works put forward, these can at best be seen as hypotheses about the real world and cannot be accepted as justified without further testing that would support them. This testing is done by projecting hypothesis into the real world – if it passes the test, it can be accommodated within one's system of belief and eventually even be attributed a cognitive value (as Novitz claimed). We have seen that this is a problem for those who want to ground literary value in the cognitive value, because this testing process is not internal to the practice of reading. That was the reason why Davies developed the analogy with thought experiments.

On a more cognitivism-friendly reading, it might be claimed that literary works offer hypotheses about how we might approach our world and how we might make sense of our experience. This was my answer to Stolnitz's argument about the normative power of the truth extracted from literature. For example, what a reader might get out of *Othello* is a hypothesis, a suggestion or implication, about the general inability to ever know whether or not we can trust others, even when they are close to us. This hypothesis does not have the cognitive power that true belief has, but, as Kvanvig shows, it does have an epistemic value. Here I want to further explore how to account for this value. If we can show, and I believe we can, that hypotheses are epistemically important for our cognitive economy, then not only will the cognitivist-friendly reading of the hypotheses-argument gain additional support against Stolnitz, but also the anti-cognitivists reading will lose its force.

One influential and often cited response to this problem comes from Peter Kivy, who defends what he calls a *theory of literary plausibility*. As most cognitivists, Kivy wants to link

cognitive value to aesthetic value; we will not deal with that here but will proceed to see his theory on the cognitive value of literature based on the premise that literary works give us hypotheses.

Drawing on the work of William James' "The Will to Believe", Kivy takes over his analysis of live and dead hypotheses. The difference is in that live hypotheses are recognized by the audience as worthy of further consideration and thought, while dead are recognized as of no interest and probably untrue:

A live hypothesis is one that appears to the person who contemplates it as at least a viable candidate for belief, even though he or she might not presently believe it. A dead hypothesis, on the other hand, is one that has no such appeal at all, but is taken to be not a possible option, that is to say, not possibly true<sup>243</sup>.

Another important aspect of live hypothesis is the content; put roughly, the content has to 'matter to us', in the sense that hypothesis concerns matters of "deep and abiding significance" (Kivy 2006, p. 103). Another aspect of live hypothesis is that its significance is relative to the readers and the 'liveness' itself can change over time, due to the "passage of time, the advancement of learning"(Kivy 2006, p.103), and I would add, various social, political, scientific, culturological, ideological etc. changes. This is the reason why above I emphasized that 'when' the work was written matters deeply: hypothesis about totalitarian political system which has control over every single aspect of one's life, emotions, actions and interactions that underlies Orwell's *1984* was certainly seen as more real option in Orwell's time than it is seen today. Reader's attitudes towards it change accordingly. Notice that the reason we value some works more than others, at least in the sense that we feel they have more to offer, can also be explained in terms of liveness and significance of hypotheses they put forward: general scepticism underlying *Othello*, particularly scepticism having to do with inability to know our own motives or to trust those who should be closest to us is a problem people face on a day to day basis; hence, what *Othello* offers, the questions it raises, are unlikely to stop being of interest to us.

The idea that Kivy develops here goes back to our claim that literature – in its mimetic and humanistic aspects – deals with questions which matter to us. These are the questions that

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<sup>243</sup> I take this from Kivy (1996, p. 102), who took it from James ("The Will to Believe", *Essays in Pragmatism*, 1951, p. 89).

frame our own experience and dealings with other people and also questions which admit of no easy answers. Therefore, the contribution of literature – even if only hypothetical – surely matters to how we eventually come to answer these questions. James Young (2001) claimed that artworks, including literature, offers possible interpretations of reality and saw this to be parallel to the cognitive functioning of scientific hypotheses.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter my main concern was exploring in more details the way that literary works can ‘operate’ upon the reader’s cognitive economy. The underlying assumption was that such a process extends beyond readers’ acquiring propositional knowledge; recall that even in the case of Kieran’s descriptive perspective, we insisted on the effect of illumination. Now, most of the literary anti-cognitivists would object to the points I’ve made here. Even if there are some kinds of achievements involved here, it takes an extra step to show that these are indeed cognitive achievements. In addition, the evaluation of the author’s reliability when it comes to reflections isn’t measured by the same standards that are operant for reliability at the subject level. Due to this, we have to extend our analogy with testimony to include hybrid forms of testimonial beliefs, which can be interpreted as abandoning the way that epistemologists have been thinking about testimony. Finally, if this is the form of literary cognitivism I’m defending, then it might seem that I’ve moved beyond the level of discussion initiated by anti-cognitivists, who still see the debate in terms of pro-truth vs. no-truth debate and in terms of the relationship between aesthetic and epistemological thesis of aesthetic (literary) cognitivism. My real opponents, in that case, are not aestheticians, but epistemologists who reject the plurality view.

Nevertheless, it is my intuition that these are cognitive achievements and that Kvanving and Riggs have given a plausible epistemic grounding for them. As a responsible and reflective cognizers, we should aim to know as much as we can about things that matter. Literature not only deals with the questions that matter, but does so in a manner that enables us to think better about them and to develop more sensitive repertoire for appreciating them. Literary works ask us to consider options we did not think relevant or did not recognize as possible – because of that, we might have missed something important in our experience of the world. This is the mistake Emma did when she married Charles without being aware of the importance of partners’ characters compatibility. Literary works show that things might be different than it seems – that might save us the pain of learning the lesson in Othello’s way. In

some cases, literary works will make us wonder about the values we place on different aspects of life or connections we make with people – think of King Lear’s reckless rejection of Cordelia’s affections. All of these lessons can be extracted from literature if one is open to look for them.

## 8. CONCLUSION

There are two questions that I want to focus on in this concluding part. The first one concerns contrasting more precisely my position with other literary cognitivists, the second one has to do with the strength of anti-cognitivist position, given my modification of cognitivism. Finally, I want to say a word or two about the possible objections to my theory.

I said at the beginning that my approach to the problem of the cognitive value of literature differs from the one taken by other literary cognitivists (such as Gibson or Graham) primarily because I take the epistemological standpoint. Therefore, I was under no obligation to give an account of the connection between cognitive dimension and literary value. In that sense, my theory is closer to theories developed by Davies and Novitz. My approach also resembles theirs in that we recognize several different kinds of cognitive gains available in literature. Given that my theory recognizes this plurality, I take it they provide a good background to my claims. I argued that, unless this plurality is recognized, neither cognitivism nor anti-cognitivism can be properly developed. Literary cognitivists are wrong when they insist on just one possible cognitive gain. Walsh and Nussbaum, for example, seriously undermine the importance and extent of factual knowledge we get from literature. The same can be said in reference to those who wanted to reduce literature to the source of hypotheses. On the other hand, Gibson, who insisted on the connection between literature and the real world, got into trouble when he wanted to defend the ‘acknowledging’ aspect of literature without embracing indirect humanism.

Literary anti-cognitivists make the same mistake. At the most general level, they do not take into consideration ‘the big’ picture. Stolnitz and Plato wanted to diminish the overall cognitive benefits of literature due to the occasional mistakes or contradictions found in particular works, ignoring the fact that science is not immune to these either. In addition, they completely disregarded the possibility of reliable authors or of the audience’s ability to differentiate between reliable and non-reliable authors. By focusing too much on the contrast between literature and science, they both failed to acknowledge the uniqueness of literature’s approach. To repeat, I do not think that in speaking about cognitive dimension of literature we have to contrast it with science. If however one opts to do that, than a much more critical analysis is demanded, which neither Stolnitz nor Plato did in their approaches.

In the sense in which Olsen and Lamarque can be considered anti-cognitivists, my issue with them revolves around the cognitive status of indirect humanism. They claim that there is no sense in which impacts of literature such as ‘broadening horizons’ or ‘illumination’ or ‘understanding’ can be brought in connection to cognitive states such as knowledge or processes such as learning. This is one of the most controversial issues in this debate. I hope that I managed to show that these can be considered cognitive achievements and that, even if they fall short of knowledge, they are still important for the cognitive economy of cognizers. The epistemological theories developed by Riggs and Kvanvig are important first step towards providing an epistemological niche for these values and consequently, silencing these kinds of anti-cognitivists’ objections.

This issue raises a further question regarding the epistemology that is in the background of cognitivist vs. anti-cognitivist debate. All literary anti-cognitivists rely upon monistic epistemology according to which only truth and knowledge matter. Once this is paired with the additional demand that cognitive dimension contribute to literary value, literature becomes vulnerable to triviality objection and to such ridiculous consequences as the one according to which one mistaken factual description diminishes the overall value, not only of the individual work containing the mistake but of literature as a practice generally.

I argued that my approach helps evade this line of argumentation. By focusing only on cognitive dimension and by recognizing the wider epistemological framework that serves as a background to the discussion, we can successfully answer anti-cognitivist’s challenges. Additional step can then be taken to show how cognitive dimension is connected to the overall literary/aesthetic/artistic value. Once we are given the explanation for the wrong account of syphilis found in Ibsen, for example, we can go on evaluating his artistic accomplishment without having to discard it on the grounds of factual mistake.

The underlying mechanism of knowledge acquisition (and acquisition of other cognitively valuable states) through literature, I claim, is testimony. If literary work is approached as testimony, taken in the broad sense so as to include tellings generally and hybrid forms of testimonially based beliefs, then with the additional distinction between s-testimony and h-testimony, we can ground the reliability of author and explain the acquisition of knowledge on the part of the reader. No other theory of literary cognitivism can accomplish all of these. For example, on Davies' account, it is only if the author is reliable that we can get some factual and affective knowledge. But he does not provide us with any account that should

show what the reliability of the author consists in, or how is a reader to evaluate it. On Novitz's account, one has to first derive the relevant hypotheses from the work and then apply them into the world to see if they pass the test. Such an approach is epistemically valuable in that it recognizes the need to test what we are told rather than to accept things blindly. However, this approach seriously undermines the value that hypotheses have for the way we think about the world.

Once it is understood that the problems that anti-cognitivists raise fall within the domain of the epistemology of testimony, we can more successfully answer to them. On the one hand, we know which demands an author has to fulfil in order to be taken as reliable; and in chapter six I argued that many authors indeed satisfy these demands. On the other hand, we also know what epistemic work is demanded from the reader. I argued that there are various discriminatory capacities that readers have at their disposal to evaluate the reliability of the author. Knowledge of the conventions governing literary practice, knowledge of the genre conventions, ability to discriminate between reliable and non-reliable authors, all of these enable readers to form a judgment concerning the epistemic strength of a given work. Finally, on my view, readers can search for independent sources to confirm what they read or to find additional information regarding it.

The most pressing objection to my position is the claim that what I am proposing simply is not part of the literary practice. Readers read for fun or for pleasure and in pursuit of aesthetic satisfaction they do not have to engage with epistemic demands of evaluating the reliability of the author. In one sense, that might be true. But it seems to me that such a process is not something extra that readers do; serious, reflective readers who have at least some rudimentary knowledge of and experience with the literary practice and who acknowledge the humanistic aspect of literature will pay attention to what the author is saying. In that sense, they can distinguish reliable from unreliable authors and they can appreciate the overall cognitive value that literature as a practice has.

A second objection to my theory might be formulated on the basis that my account is too encompassing. Literature is cognitively valuable but certainly not in the sense I'm presenting it here. There are factual descriptions we can get, sometimes we can get an insight into emotional, psychological and moral dilemmas, some literary works might even advance understanding, but to claim that we get all of that is just too much. As a reply to this, I'd again

have to make a distinction between cognitive value of individual works and cognitive value of literature as a practice. Not all works are rich in factual descriptions, not all works are good (epistemically) in the sense that they provide understanding, and not every time that we read something, do we feel intellectually challenged to consider a different perspective, world view or opinion. Yet, nevertheless, all of these are available through various works, and I would claim that the best among these can in fact accomplish all of that.

Take for example *Madam Bovary*. At the factual level, we are given a detailed portrayal of French countryside and big cities, Flaubert shows us how aristocracy and rural people lived, patterns of relationships that were considered appropriate, he describes the medical practice of his time and he gives us occasional glimpses into the clothes, leisure activities and entertainment that were in vogue in those days. On the thematic level, we are invited to contemplate the nature of love and fidelity, the importance of partners' compatibility, the allurements of adultery and the tragedy of not being able to find self fulfilment and purpose. We are shown how and why people make mistakes they do, how they use and manipulate others, how they deceive themselves, how they come to acknowledge their mistakes and failures, and how sometimes they do not see any other solution but suicide. Readers can come to realize that sometimes passion overcomes reason and they can see how this happens. This can in turn influence the way they think about motives people have for doing things they do, even when these are detrimental for one's well being. By thinking about Emma's mistakes, readers can be brought to better understand the difference between love and passion, particularly when the agent herself confuses the two and acts on the faulty assumptions about each of these. Perhaps they can come to know all these through some other means. But once they are engaged with Flaubert's masterpiece, this is what he is saying. And it is up to a reader to see how much of what he has to offer will be found worthy of reflection.

A third objection to my position might be issued on the grounds that I instrumentalize literature and disregard its ability to offer an aesthetic satisfaction independently of its ability to influence us cognitively. Though I see how such a criticism can be motivated, particularly by those who cherish literature in the way Lamarque and Olsen do, I do not think my approach should (or does) rip literature off of its literary value. Lamarque repeatedly claimed that acknowledging literature's value is incompatible (or at least is not coincidental) with evaluating literature's cognitive dimension. However, my intuition is that the two are firmly



connected and even though I wasn't aiming at showing how that is, a lot of what I say shows that acknowledgment cannot be accomplished independently of the evaluation of cognitive dimension.

What I have showed is that even in cases when we should evaluate cognitive dimension with less than the best grades, like in Ibsen's example, this does not have to take away from literary value. I have also showed that in many cases, such as realism, artistic aims and epistemic aims of reliability coincide, and I have explained how, in cases such as science fiction, artistic means can be at the service of pursuing cognitive aims that the author sets for himself. At least one of the challenges that Stanislaw Lem set out to explore in the *Futurological Congress* was the idea of government-orchestrated reality that is constructed and artificially created and maintained by the widespread use of drugs. Lem here analyzes such notions as epistemic paternalism and questions the extent to which government is allowed to deceive citizens in order to maintain the status quo. These are epistemically important questions, questions that matter to us because of the way they shape our lives. As epistemically responsible cognizers, we have to ask these questions. And these questions also constitute the backbone of Lem's novel to the extent that all of his subsequent motifs, techniques and developments within the plot are at the service of answering them. Acknowledging novel's literary value therefore cannot be separated from what Lem makes us wonder and from how he raises these questions.

To conclude: literature is primarily concerned with people, with our experience and our lives, with who we are and how we live. Therefore, whatever it has to say should matter and should be heard, thought about and taken into consideration. Literature's way of being cognitive is as unique as it is irreplaceable. I hope that I managed to show that in this dissertation.

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## Curriculum vitae

Iris Vidmar was born in Rijeka, where she finished high school and in 2006 she obtained her MA in Philosophy and English language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. She worked first as a high school teacher of English language (Opatija Gymnasium). In 2007 she enrolled at the PhD programme Philosophy and Contemporaneity at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, and became a teacher assistant. She held seminars at courses at undergraduate programmes (Epistemology, Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Kant, Bioethics and Gender Studies, Philosophy of Sexuality, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Art, Philosophy of Literature) and performed various other activities related to teaching and research (ECTS coordinator, technical editor of the *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy*). In 2013 she defended her PhD thesis. During her research, she was a team member of the project “Normativity in the theory of cognition and ethics”.

Iris Vidmar has participated at more than twenty philosophical conferences, national and international, where she presented her papers. Her research interests include epistemology – with special dedication to the testimony, disagreement and epistemic aims – and aesthetics – particularly theories of values, issues of creation, interpretation and evaluation of art and comparative aesthetics. Her main field of research is philosophy of literature, with the special focus on literary cognitivism and the problem of disagreeing interpretations of individual literary artworks. She has published papers and review articles on these issues. Iris Vidmar has also been part of the several organization committees and is the course director of the Philosophy of Art conference held annually at the Inter University Centre Dubrovnik. She is a member of Croatian Society for Analytic Philosophy, Croatian Philosophical Society and European Society for Aesthetics. She regularly publishes translations of the philosophical texts from English to Croatian.

List of publications:

(i) Scientific papers:

- Vidmar I. (forthcoming, 2013), “Thought Experiments, Hypotheses and the Cognitive Dimension of Literary Fiction”, *Synthesis Philosophica*
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(ii) Review Articles:

- Peter Swirski, *American Utopia and Social Engineering in Literature, Social Thought, and Political History* (2011, Routledge) (forthcoming in *Synthesis Philosophica*)
- Garry L. Hagberg and Walter Jost (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, Wiley-Blackwell 2010 (forthcoming in *Croatian Journal of Philosophy*)
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