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PHILOSOPHY AS/AND/OF LITERATURE*

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By displaying what is subjective, the work, in its whole presentation, reveals its purpose as existing *for* the subject, for the spectator and not on its own account. The spectator is, as it were, in it from the beginning, is counted in with it, and the work exists only for this point, i.e., for the individual apprehending it.

G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetik; Werke*, Vol. XV, p. 28. Translated as *Aesthetics Lectures on Fine Art*, by T.M. Knox (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 806.

Our discipline seems so singular a crossbreed of art and science that it is somewhat surprising that only lately has it seemed imperative to some that philosophy be viewed as literature: surprising and somewhat alarming. Of course so much has been enfranchised as literature in recent times that it would have been inevitable that literary theorists should have turned from the comic strip, the movie magazine, the disposable romance--from science fiction, pornography, and graffiti--to the texts of philosophy, this in virtue of a vastly widened conception of the text which enables us to apply the strategies of hermeneutical interpretation to bus tickets and baggage checks, want ads and weather reports, laundry lists and postage cancellations, savings certificates and address books, medical prescriptions, pastry recipes, olive oil cans and cognac labels--so why *not* meditations, examinations, and critiques? Admittedly this is not the exalted sense of literature we have in mind in speaking of philosophy as an art, but even if we retain the normative connotations of the term, there is something disturbing in the fact that this particular face of philosophy should have now become visible enough that we should have been enjoined to treat its texts as a particular literary genre. For after all the imperatives which have governed the transformation of philosophy into a profession have stressed our community with the sciences. Were a kind of semiotic egalitarianism to direct us to regard as so many texts the papers which regularly appear in the *Physical Review*, their literary dimension must seem deeply secondary, as ours has always seemed to us to be: so to treat it suddenly as primary has to be unsettling.

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Philosophy-as-literature carries implications in excess of the claim that philosophical texts have at times a degree of literary merit. We take a remote satisfaction that some of us--Strawson, Ryle, or Quine--let alone Santayana, Russell, and James--write distinguished prose, and we would all regard as astute a teacher of English who took pages from any of these as compositional paradigms. Still, our tendency is to regard style, save to the degree that it enhances perspicuity, as adventitious and superfluous to that for the sake of which we finally address these texts: as mere *Farbung*, to use Frege's dismissive term. So to rotate these texts in such a way that the secondary facets catch the light of intellectual concern puts what we regard as the primary facets in shadow: and to acquiesce in the concept of philosophy-as-literature just now seems tacitly to acquiesce in the view that the austere imperatives of philosophy-as-science have lost their energy. Considering what has been happening to texts when treated in recent times, our canon seems suddenly fragile, and it pains the heart to think of them enduring the frivolous sadism of the deconstructionist. But the perspective of philosophy-as-literature is an uncomfortable one for us to occupy, quite apart from these unedifying violations.

Consider the comparable perspective of the Bible-as-literature. Certainly it can be read as such, its poetry and narrative responded to as poetry and narrative, its images appreciated for their power and its moral representations as a kind of drama. But to treat it so is to put at an important distance the Bible considered as a body of revelations, of saving truths and ethical certitudes: a text of which a thinker like Philo could believe that everything in it and nothing outside of it is true. So some fundamental relationship to the book will have changed when it sustains transfer to the curriculum as "living literature." Of course some aspect of its style has from the beginning of its historical importance played a role in biblical epistemology. The language of the Koran is said so to transcend in its beauty the powers of human expressiveness as virtually to guarantee its own claim to have been dictated by an angel and to be, not even metaphorically, the word of God: so its style is taken to be the best evidence for its truth. Biblical writing, by contrast, was taken to be the record of human witnesses, and much of it was so offensive to literary taste that it had to be true: a second century apologist writes: "When I was giving my most earnest attention to discover the truth I happened to meet with certain barbaric writings... and I was led to put faith in these by the unpretending cast of the language." Origen, admitting the stylistic inferiority of Scripture by specific comparison with Plato, finds in this evidence that it is exactly the word of God, since if written by men it would be classier: its rudeness is a further weapon for confounding the wise. "However roughly, as regards mere authorship, my book should be got up," Poe has his fictional hero write in the arch forward to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, "its very uncouthness, if there were any would give it all the better chance of being received as truth." That plain prose has a better chance of being received true is a stylistic maxim not unknown in adopting a philosophical diction--think of Moore--but my point is only that there is a profound contrast between taking the Bible as literature and viewing it as the Word, and I would suspect disjoint classes of passages to become prominent depending on which view we take. The remaining music of the Bible must count as small compensation when the truth-claims made on its behalf are no longer felt to be compelling, and something like this contrast arises with philosophy-as-literature set against philosophy-as-truth. On the other hand it provides an occasion to reflect, as I shall briefly, on how philosophical truth

has been regarded if we approach philosophy for the moment as though it were a genre of literature: it enables us to see how we construed truth when we hadn't thought of ourselves as producing literature. And so we may reflect on the ways in which the dimensions of our professional being are connected.

For a period roughly coeval with that in which philosophy attained professionalization, the canonical literary format has been the professional philosophy paper. Our practice as philosophers consists in reading and in writing such papers, in training our students to read and write them, in inviting others to come read us a paper, to which we respond by posing questions which in effect are editorial recommendations, typically incorporated and acknowledged in the first or last footnote of the paper, in which we are exempted from such errors and infelicities as may remain, and thanked for our helpful suggestions. The journals in which these papers finally are printed, whatever incidental features useful to the profession at large they may carry, are not otherwise terribly distinct from one another, any more than the papers themselves characteristically are: if, under the constraints of blind review, we black out name and institutional affiliation, there will be no internal evidence of authorial presence, but only a unit of pure philosophy, to the presentation of which the author will have sacrificed all identity. This implies a noble vision of ourselves as vehicles for the transmission of an utterly impersonal philosophical truth, and it implies a vision of philosophical reality as constituted of isolable, difficult but not finally intractable problems, which if not altogether soluble in fifteen pages more or less, can be brought closer to resolution in that many pages. The paper is then an impersonal report of limited results for a severely restricted readership, consisting of those who have some use for that result since they are engaged with the writers of the papers in a collaborative enterprise, building the edifice of philosophical knowledge. It is perfectly plain that the implied vision of philosophical reality, as well as of the form of life evolved to discover it and the form of literature in which it is suitable to represent it, are closely modelled on the view of reality, life, and literature which compose what Thomas Kuhn has instructed us to think of as normal science. Mastery of the literary form is the key to success in the form of life, bringing tenure and the kind of recognition which consists in being invited to read papers widely and perhaps the presidency of one or another division of the American Philosophical Association. These practical benefits aside, no one could conceivably be interested in participating in the form of life defined by the literary form in issue, were it not believed that this is the avenue to philosophical truth. It is less obviously a matter of agreement that philosophical truth is defined by this being believed to be the way to find it.

It is not my purpose here to criticize a form of life in which I, after all, participate, nor to criticize the format of speech and writing which, after all, reinforce the virtues of clarity, brevity, and competence in those compelled to use it. I only mean to emphasize that the concept of philosophical truth and the form of philosophical expression are internally enough related that we may want to recognize that when we turn to other forms we may also be turning to other conceptions of philosophical truth. Consider the way in which we address our predecessors, for example. A lot of what I have read on Plato reads much as though he to whom the whole of subsequent philosophy since is said to be so many footnotes, were in effect a footnote to himself, and being coached to get a paper accepted by *The Philosophical Review*. And a good bit of the writing on Descartes is by way of chivying his argumentation into notations we are certain he would have adopted had he lived to appreciate their

advantages, since it is now so clear where he went wrong. But in both cases it might at least have been asked whether what either writer is up to can that easily be separated from forms it may have seemed inevitable it be presented in, so that the dialogue or meditation flattened into conventional periodical prose might not in the process have lost something central to those ways of writing. The form in which the truth as they understood it must be grasped just might require a form of reading, hence a kind of relationship to those texts, altogether different from that appropriate to a paper, or to what we sometimes refer to as a "contribution." And this because something is intended to happen to the reader other than or in addition to being informed. It is after all not simply that the texts may lose something when flattened into papers: life may have lost something when philosophy is flattened out to the production and transmission of papers, noble as the correlative vision is. So addressing philosophy as literature is not meant to stultify the aspiration to philosophical truth so much as to propose a caveat against a reduced concept of reading, just because we realize that more is involved even in contemporary even analytical philosophy than merely stating the truth: to get at that kind of truth involves some kind of transformation of the audience, and the acquiescence in a certain form of initiation and life.

I cannot think of a field of writing as fertile as philosophy has been in generating forms of literary expression, for ours has been--to use a partial list I once attempted--a history of dialogues, lecture notes, fragments, poems, examinations, essays, aphorisms, meditations, discourses, hymns, critiques, letters, summae, encyclopedias, testaments, commentaries, investigations, tractatuses, *Vorlesungen*, *Aufbauen*, prolegomena, parerga, pensees, sermons, supplements, confessions, sententiae, inquiries, diaries, outlines, sketches, commonplace books, and, to be self-referential, addresses, and innumerable forms which have no generic identity or which themselves constitute distinct genres: Holzwege, Grammatologies, Unscientific Postscripts, Geneologies, Natural Histories, Phenomenologies, and whatever the *World as Will and Idea* may be or the posthumous corpus of Husserl, or the later writings of Derrida, and forgetting the standard sorts of literary forms, e.g., novels, plays, and the like, which philosophers have turned to when gifted those ways. One has to ask what cognitive significance is conveyed by the fact that the classic texts of China are typically composed of conversational bits, a question brought home vividly to me when a scholar I respect, complained that it is terribly hard to get any propositions out of Chuang Tzu: for this may be the beginning of an understanding of how that elusive sage is to be addressed, and what it means to read him. Responding to a review of *The Realm of Truth* by his amenuensis, Santayana wrote: "It is well that now you can take a holiday: which doesn't exclude the possibility of returning to them with freshness of judgement and apperception. Perhaps then you might no deprecate my purple passages, and might see, which is the historical fact, that they are not applied ornaments but natural growths and *realizations* of the thought moving previously in a limbo of verbal abstractions."

It is arguable that the professional philosophical paper is an evolutionary product, emerging by natural selection from a wild profusion of forms darwinized into oblivion through maladaptation, stages in the advance of philosophy towards consciousness of its true identity, a rockier road than most. But it is equally arguable that philosophers with really new thoughts have simply had to invent new forms to convey them with, and that it may be possible that from the perspective of the standard format

no way into these other forms, hence no way into these systems or structures of thought can be found. This claim may be supported, perhaps, by the consideration that pretty much the only way in which literature of the non-philosophical kind has impinged upon philosophical awareness has been from the perspective of truth-or-falsity. The philosopher would cheerfully consign the entirety of fiction to the domain of falsehood but for the nagging concern that a difference is to be marked between sentences which miss the mark and sentences which have no mark to miss and are threatened in consequence of prevailing theories of meaning with meaninglessness. Some way must therefore be found for them to have meaning before they can be dismissed as false, and pretty much the entirety of the analytical--and I may as well add the phenomenological--corpus has been massively addressed to the question of fictive reference. Literature sets up obstacles to the passage of semantical theories which would go through a great deal more easily if literature did not exist. By assessing it against the concept of reference, literature derives what intellectual dignity philosophy can bestow, with the incidental benefit that if literature is merely a matter of relating words to the world, well, if philosophy is literature it is meaningful, providing it can only show how. And philosophy's way of relating literature to reality may make philosophy-as-literature one with philosophy-as-truth.

This is scarcely the place to tell the chilling tale of fictional reference, in part because it seems not to have reached an end, there being no accepted theory of how it works. But if there ever was an argument for philosophy as a kind of literature, it might be found in the extravagant ontological imagination of semantical theorists in proposing things for fictive terms to designate. Since *Don Quixote* is meaningful "Don Quixote" must refer--not, to be sure, to some specific addled Spaniard in La Mancha, but to Don Quixote himself, a subsistant entity, which *Don Quixote* can now be about in just the way it would if he were indeed an addled Spaniard in La Mancha. How such subsistant entities confer meaning, or at least how they explain the fact that we grasp it, was never particularly explained, causal transactions between the domain of subsistant entities and existent entities such as we being surely ruled out of question. This problem is aggravated when we purge the universe of fictive beings by waving a quinian wand which changes names into predicates, Don Quixote becoming the x that quixotizes all over the y that lamanchas. The prodigality complained of in manufacturing entities to order is evidently unnoticed when it comes to manufacturing predicates to order, and the change from *Gegestande* to *Gedanke* leaves the question of meaning and its being grasped about as dark as ever--nor is the matter especially mitigated when we allow *Don Quixote* to pick a possible world to be about, for the relationship of it to ours and finally to us remains as obscure as that between Don Quixote and us when he was a homeless wraith, an ontological ghost wandering in worlds undreamt of by poets. From this point of view Professor Goodman's elegant theory of secondary extensions is particularly welcome, first from the perspective of ontology, since secondary extensions are comprised of things we can put our hands on, like inscriptions, and secondly from the point of view of epistemology, since pictures play a prominent part in the secondary extension of a term and we in fact begin our adventures into literature with picture books. It does on the other hand throw an immense semantical burden on illustrated editions and the like; and tangles us in puzzles of its own since the set of pictures ostensibly of the same thing may look so little alike that we may have severe doubts as to what their subject would look like if it existed, while pictures of altogether different

subjects may look so alike that we could not tell them apart were they to be real. Whether we must ascend to tertiary extensions and beyond, and how these would solve our further problems, are matters not to be taken up here, for the question I want to raise is why, whichever of these theories is true, we, as readers, should have the slightest interest in *Don Quixote* if what it is about is an unactualized thin man in a region of being I would have no reason to know about save for the interventions of semantical theory: or if it were about the x that quixotizes (there being none) or a set of possible worlds other than my own, or primarily about nothing but secondarily about such things as a set of engravings by Gustav Dore?

I raise the question because literature, certainly in its greatest exemplars, seems to have something important to do with our lives, important enough that the study of it should form an essential part of our educational program, and this is utterly unexplained if its meaning is a matter of its reference, and its candidate referenda are as bizarre a menagerie of imaginabilia as the fancy of man has framed? And it may be that when we show the kind of connection there is, there will not be a problem of the sort to which semantical theory has been so elaborate a response. Well, it may be said, this might simply remove literature from the sphere of philosophical concern, a welcome enough removal but for the fact that it might remove philosophy itself from the domain of philosophical concern if philosophy itself is literature. And my insinuation has been that the sorts of things philosophy has laid down to connect literature to in order to give it meaning--Gegenstande, intensions, fictive worlds--are themselves as much in need of ontological redemption as the beings to whose rescue they were enlisted--Don Quixote, Mr. Pickwick, Gandolf the Grey. To believe we can save fiction by means of fiction is one of the endearing innocences of a discipline that takes pride in what it likes to think is its skeptical circumspection.

Semantical theory does the best it can in striving to connect literature to the world through what after all are the only kinds of connections it understands: reference, truth, instantiation, exemplification, satisfaction, and the like, and if this means distorting the universe in order that it can *receive* literary representations, well, this has never been reckoned a heavy price for philosophy to pay--has not been reckoned a price at all but a creative opportunity--and it remains to the credit of this enterprise that it at least believes *some* connection between literature and the world is required. In this it contrasts with literary theory as currently practiced, which impugns philosophical preoccupations with semantical ligatures as but a further instance of what one leading theoretician dismisses as The Referential Fallacy. Literature does not refer at all to reality, according to this view, but at best to other literature, and a concept of *intertextuality* is advanced according to which a literary work is to be understood, so far as referentiality facilitates understanding, only in terms of other words a given work refers to, so that no one equipped with less than the literary culture of the writer of a work up for interpretation can be certain of having understood the work at all. There is certainly something to this view if Northrop Frye is correct in claiming, of Blake's line "O Earth, O Earth return" that "though it contains only five words and only three different words"--five tokens and three types as we might more briskly say--"it contains also about seven direct allusions to the Bible." The author of The Referential Fallacy, whom I prefer for somewhat complex reasons to refer to simply as R--he after all speaks for his profession--assures us that "the poetic text is self-sufficient." But "If there is external reference, it is not to reality--far from it! Any such reference is to other texts." This extreme view merits

some examination if only for its vivid opposition to the standard philosophical view.

Consider one of his examples, the last line of Wordsworth's poem *Written in March*, which goes: "Small clouds are sailing,/Blue skies prevailing,/The rain is over and done." This line, together with the title, might lead the reader to suppose that the poem refers to the end of winter and expresses the poet's gratitude that Spring has come at last--but this easy reading is, according to R, quite seriously and fallaciously wrong: it refers in fact to *The Song of Songs*, from which Wordsworth's line is taken verbatim, and is in fact a fragment of the Biblical line which begins "For lo! The winter is past..." Now it hardly can be doubted that Wordsworth knew *The Song of Songs*, and it is certain that literary scholarship, in explaining the sources of the poem, will refer to it as an ultimate source for the last line. Perhaps every line, or every phrase in a poem may be explained with reference to something in the literary culture of the writer. But not every literary effect necessarily *refers* to its causes, and there is a considerable difference between understanding a poem, which may require understanding its references when it makes them, and understanding the provenances of a poem, which is quite another matter: it is specialist knowledge, and likely incidental to understanding a poem.

Let me offer an illustration from another art, in part to make my argument more general, in part to confirm a claim about pictorial semantics. Raphael's beautiful *Madonna della sedia* is composed within a circular frame--a *tondo*--not, as Gombrich points out, because Raphael one day seized a handy barrelhead in order to paint up an innkeeper's daughter who charmed him, together with her pretty child, as *Madonna and Infant*, which is the tourguide's lovely explanation; but rather because, like many of his contemporaries, Raphael was excited by some recently exhibited drawings of Leonardo, among them some circular compositions. Every painter in the region would have known about those drawings, and hence the provenance of Raphael's painting, but for all that Raphael was not referring to the drawings which inspired him. By contrast, the American painter Benjamin West did a portrait of his wife and son in *tondo* form, her garment the garment of Raphael's *Madonna*, not as a copy of but in *reference to* Raphael's painting. It was an exceedingly pretentious reference, depicting his wife as *Madonna*, his child as the *Baby Jesus*, *his* painting as *The madonna della sedia*, and himself as Raphael. But to understand the painting is to understand those allusions, for he is representing his family *as* the Holy Pair *as* depicted by Raphael, and a very self-exalting metaphor is being transacted. (What a humiliation to have had this hopeful vision deaccessioned by the Reynolds' collection in exchange for a merely typical Thomas Cole!)

It was a triumph of art-historical scholarship to demonstrate the unmistakable use made by Manet of an arrangement of figures in an engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi in setting the figures in his *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*. This by no means excludes the possibility, or rather the fact, that Manet was representing friends of his, wits and demimondaines, enjoying an elegant outing. Of course it is a different painting depending upon whether he was referring to or merely using Raimondi's work. If he was referring to it, then his subject is *that* outing *as* a feast of the gods, which is the subject of the original engraving. Raimondi was the most famous engraver of his age (as well as a notorious forger), but in Manet's world he was doubtless too obscure for such an allusion to be made, by contrast perhaps with biblical references in Wordsworth's world: and probably obviousness is a condition of allusion as banality is a condition of validity in the enthymene. But even so Manet's use of that engraving

must be distinguished from a use made by the American painter, John Trumbell, in his famous portrait of General Washington with his horse, of a certain pre-existing form of horse-representation. Far from being the finely observed depiction of Washington's elegant steed, Washington's horse, as shown, is but one in a long historical sequence of similar horses which Leo Steinberg has traced back to a Roman cameo, and which probably could be traced even further. Still, it is Washington with his horse that is being referred to, and not any member of this series, each of which but conforms to a pattern. The pattern, which may be an example of what Gombrich speaks of as a *schema*, is a very satisfactory way of representing horses which are, as we know, very difficult to observe--until Muybridge nobody knew whether all four legs were altogether off the ground in gallop--and yields up a kind of representational *a priori* of a sort whose narrative and lyrical counterparts may be found in literature and, though this is not my topic, there may be profound similarities with scientific representations as well.

In all these cases and countless others, reference to the world works together with references to other art, when there are such references, to make a complex representation: so why should or must it be different in the case of Wordsworth? R writes thus: "The key word--*winter*--absent from Wordsworth, is the matrix penetrating every Spring detail in the poem... now perceived as the converse of an image that has been effaced, so that the poem is not a direct depiction of reality, but a negative version of a latent text on the opposite of Spring." This is the kind of hermeneutic contortion that earns interpreters of literature distinguished chairs in universities--the kind that argue, for example, that *Hamlet* is a negative version of a latent text about Fortinbras, the *true* hero of the play, perceived now as comedy rather than tragedy, since the hero is alive at the end, and making Shakespeare a clever fore-runner of Tom Stoppard. But my concern is not to argue with the interpretation but with the "so" to which R is not entitled: a proper interpretation would have to show why Wordsworth referred to the season through the medium of a biblical allusion if in fact it was an allusion and not a cliché of the sort that has simply entered language the way so much of *Hamlet* has that a student is said to have criticized it for being too full of clichés, though a pretty exciting story. And what of *The Song of Songs* itself, if poetry: is *it* about winter, or, to use the other option offered us, altogether self-contained?

In a famous letter to his mistress, Louise Collet, Flaubert lays out his own ideal as an artist: "What I should like to write is a book about nothing, a book dependent upon nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends upon nothing external for its support: a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be invisible, if such a thing is possible." Flaubert's astronomy is appalling, and if R is right he could not have failed of his purpose, all literature, just so far as it is literature, being about nothing. Or at best about other literature, work holding work in referential orbit, to give Flaubert a happier physical metaphor, but basically untethered to reality. The question is what considerations recommend the guaranteed irrelevancy of literature to life?

"In everyday language," the author of *The Referential Fallacy* writes, "words seem to refer vertically, each to the reality it seems to render, like the labels on a barrelhead, each a semantic unit. While in literature the unit of meaning is the text itself. The reciprocal effects of its words on one another, as members of a finite

network, replaces the vertical semantical relationship with a lateral one, forged along the written line, tending to cancel the dictionary meanings of the words."

Now I want to applaud the concept of a text as a network of reciprocal effects. Not original with R, of course, it has entered our world from European sources, making an immense impact upon literary theorists while leaving philosophy so far untouched. I feel that were the concept of the text to become as central in analytical philosophy as the sentence has been since Frege gave it primacy, or as the term has been since Aristotle, a vast world for philosophical research will have opened up. For the concept of the text is considerably wider than literary texts alone. It applies to musical compositions and to architectural structures, artforms whose referentiality has been in occasional question, and to personalities, whole lives in the biographical sense of the term, families, villages, cultures, things for which the question of referentiality has hardly been raised at all. And the expression "a network of reciprocal effects" will come to be exchanged for a class of relationships as various as and perhaps as important as those which bind sentences into arguments, and which have been so massively explored in contemporary philosophical thought. Even so, it is altogether compatible with being united through a network of reciprocal effects that a literary work should refer, as it were extratextually, though the reference may be complicated as much by intra as by intertextual references. The *Prelude* and *Finale* of *Middlemarch* refer reciprocally, as well as to the novel they frame, and both refer or allude to Saint Theresa, herself not a text save in so wide a sense as to make R's theory timid and disappointing. They refer to her to provide a metaphor for Dorothea Brooks--Miss Brooks as erotic ascetic perhaps--proving that her character has remained constant through two marriages, and saying finally something deep about the narrow space there after all is for being different from what we are.

But this goes well beyond what philosophers have wanted to say in supposing *Middlemarch* refers, say to a world of its own or to some fleshless subsistent woman, Dorothea Brooks. And it goes well beyond what R will allow, who leaves us with the same question philosophical discussions of fictional reference did, namely why should we be interested in *Middlemarch*? Why, since not ourselves literary scholars, should we concern ourselves with these intricate networks of reciprocal effects? "Because they are there" was not even a good reason for climbing mountains, but I am struck by the fact that philosophers seem only to understand vertical and literary theorists, if R is right, only horizontal references. On this co-ordinate scheme it is difficult to locate literature in the plane of human concern at all. Clearly we need a z-coordinate, must open a dimension of reference neither vertical nor horizontal reference quite reveal, if we are to get an answer. In what remains of this paper, that is what I want to begin to do.

"The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse," Aristotle writes, helpfully as always. "You might put the work of Herodotus into verse and it would still be a species of history." Though he neglects the reverse possibility, I take Aristotle to mean that one ought to be unable to tell by mere examination of a text whether it is poetry or something else, which gives my own question an immediate philosophical structure. The form of a philosophical question is given--I would venture to say always but lack an immediate proof--when indiscriminable pairs with nevertheless distinct ontological locations may be found or imagined found, and we then must make plain in what the difference consists or could consist. The classical case is matching dream experience with waking experience

in such a way that, as Descartes required, nothing internal to either mode of experience will serve as differentiating criterion. So whatever internal criterion we in fact, and, as it happens, pre-analytically employ, will be irrelevant to the solution of the problem, e.g., that dreams are vague and incoherent: for dreams may be imagined, and possibly had, which are as like waking experience as we require to void the criterion. So the difference must come in at right angles to the plane of what we experience, and philosophy here consists in saying what it can be. Kant discovers the same thing in moral theory, since he imagines it possible that a set of actions should perfectly conform to principle, and yet have no moral worth, since that requires a different relationship to those principles than mere conformity, and outward observation cannot settle the matter. And Adeimantus furnishes the stunning example which generates the *Republic*, of a perfectly just man whose behavior is indiscriminable from that of a man perfectly unjust: the example requires that justice be orthogonal to conduct, and entails as uniquely possible the kind of theory Plato gives us. Other examples like ready to hand. The present state of the world is compatible with the world being any age at all, including five minutes old, and nothing on the surface of the world will arbitrate without begging the question. A mere bodily movement and a basic action might appear exactly alike, just as what we take to be an expression of a feeling may be but a kind of rictus. Nothing open to observation discriminates a pair of connected events, to use Hume's distinction, from a pair merely conjoined. And in my own investigations into the philosophy of art, I have benefited immensely from Duchamp's discovery that nothing the eye can reveal will arbitrate the difference between a work of art and a mere real thing which resembles it in every outward particular. So any proposed distinction based upon perceptual differences, even in the visual arts, will have proved, as with the linnaean system in botany, to be artificial, however useful in practice. Duchamp consigned all past theories to oblivion by proving that the problem was philosophical. And here is Aristototele, telling us that the difference between poetry and history does not lie on the surfaces of texts, and that distinguishing them is not an ordinary matter of classification but a philosophical matter of explanation.

It is indeed not at all difficult to imagine two quite sustained pieces of writing which belong to relevantly distinct genres, without there being so much difference as a semi-colon. I once imagined a pair of indiscriminable texts, one a novel, one a piece of history. My colleague Stern, suppose, comes across an archive containing the papers of a Polish noblewoman of the last century, who died characteristically in a convent. Incredibly, she was the mistress of Talleyrand, of Metternich, of the young Garibaldi, of Jeremy Bentham, Eugene Delacroix, of Frederic Chopin, Czar Nicholas of Russia, thought the great loves of her life were George Sand and the nubile Sarah Bernhardt. Published by Viking, it wins the Pulitzer prize in history in the same year as a novel with exactly the same name wins it in literature--*Maria Mazurka, Mistress to Genius*--written by Erica Jong, who was inspired to invent a heroine who dies appropriately in a convent, but who in her time had been the mistress of Talleyrand, Metternich, the younger Garibaldi, of Jeremy Bentham, Eugene Delacroix, of Frederic Chopin, Czar Nicholas of Russia, thought the great loves of her life were George Sand and the nubile Sarah Bernhardt. Jong's novel, unfortunately, is too improbable, has too many characters, sprawls all over the place, as Jong is wont to do these days--and it bears critical comparison with Stern's marvelous book which manages to keep track of all its characters, is tightly regimented given

the diversity of materials, and contains not a fact in excess. So Jong's book, to the despair of the author and Random House, is soon remaindered, and for \$2.98 you can get a lot of pages which cannot be told apart from Stern's book, on special at \$19.99 through the History Book Club--though none of Stern's readers would be caught dead reading a mere novel. Stern's book, of course, refers vertically, while Jong's, being a novel, is a network of reciprocal effects, and self-sustained or nearly so, characterized only by horizontal reference. I realize I am slipping out of philosophy into literature: but the point is that whatever is to mark the difference must survive examples such as these.

Aristotle's famous suggestion, of course, is that "poetry is something more philosophical and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singular." It is plain that this difference is not registered grammatically or syntactically, if the example just constructed is possible, and in the aristotelian spirit. So there must be a way in which Jong's book, for all its failings is universal, and in which Stern's book, splendid as it is as historiography, remains for just that reason singular--about that specific woman in just those steamy liaisons. On the other hand, there must be some way in which Jong's book, if universal and hence more philosophical than Stern's, is not quite so philosophical as philosophy itself is--otherwise the problem of construing philosophy as a form of literature would be solved at the cost of so widening philosophy, since nothing could be more philosophical than it, as to compass whatever Aristotle would consider poetry. In whatever way philosophy is to be literature, if it is to be literature at all, it must respect whatever differences there may be with literature which is not philosophy, however necessarily philosophical it has to be in order to be distinguished from mere history.

My own view is that philosophy wants to be more than universal: it wants necessity as well: truth for all the worlds that are possible. In this respect it contrasts with history, or for that matter with science, concerned with the truths of just this particular, uniquely actual world, and happy if it can achieve that much. My contention here has been that philosophical semantics renders literature true of possible worlds, to lapse into vernacular, in such a way that it would be history for any of them if actual instead of ours. As *Gulliver's Travels* would just be anthropology for a world in which there were Lilliputians instead of Melanesians. This, I am afraid, is very close to Aristotle's own view, history dealing, according to him, with the thing that has been while poetry with "a kind of thing that might be," and that sounds too much like being true of a possible world to be comfortable with as an analysis. I nevertheless believe there is a kind of universality to literature worth considering, different from this, and I shall now try to say what it is in my own way, recognizing that if philosophy is also literature, it might have to be universal and possibly even necessary in two kinds of ways.

The thought I want to advance is that literature is not universal in the sense of being about every possible world insofar as possible, as philosophy in its nonliterary dimension aspires to be, nor about what may happen to be the case in just this particular world, as history, taken in this respect as exemplificatory science, aspires to be, but rather about each reader who experiences it. It is not, of course, about its readers as a book about reading is, which happens incidentally to be about its readers just as a subclass of its subject, but rather in the way in which, though you will look for

him in vain, Benjamin West's pretentious family portrait is about him. He does not show himself in the manner of Velasquez in *Las Meninas*, but still, the painting is about Benjamin West *as Raphael as painter of the Holy Family*, through an allusive and metaphoric identification: he informs the work as a kind of *dieu caché*. Well, I want to say that a literary work is about its readers in this metaphoric and allusive way, in an exact mirror image of the way West's painting is about him: in Hegel's wonderful thought, the work exists for the spectator and not on its own account: it exists, as he says, only for the individual apprehending it, so that the apprehension completes the work and gives it final substance. The difficult claim I am making can be put somewhat formally as follows: the usual analysis of universality is that $(x)Fx$ is via the mechanisms of natural deduction equivalent to a conjunction of all the values on x , true in the event each is F . The universality of literary reference is only that it is about each individual that reads the text at the moment that individual reads it, and it contains an implied indexical: each work is about the "I" that reads the text, identifying himself not with the implied reader for whom the implied narrator writes, but with the actual subject of the text in such a way that each work becomes a metaphor for each reader: perhaps the same metaphor for each.

A metaphor, of course, in part because it is literally false that I am Achilles, or Leopold Blome, or Anna or Oedipus of King Lear or Hyacinth Robinson or Stretherr or Lady Glencora: or a man hounded by an abstract bureaucracy because of an unspecified or suspected accusation, or the sexual slave O, or the raft-rider responsible to a moral being an unspeakable nation refuses to countenance as a man, or the obsessive narrator of the violence of my ancestors which is my own violence since their story is in the end my story, or one who stands to Jay Gatsby as Jay Gatz stood to the same dream as mine of "love, accomplishment, beauty, elegance, wealth" (which is a list I just found in a marvelous story by Gail Godwin.) It is literature when, for each reader I, I is the subject of the story. The work finds its subject only when read.

Because of this immediacy of identification, it is natural to think, as theorists from Hamlet upwards have done, of literature as a kind of mirror, not simply in the sense of rendering up an external reality, but as giving me to myself for each self peering into it, showing each of us something inaccessible without mirrors, namely that each has an external aspect and what that external aspect is. Each work of literature shows in this sense an aspect we would not know were ours without benefit of that mirror: each discovers--in the eighteenth century meaning of the term--an unguessed dimension of the self. It is a mirror less in passively returning an image than in transforming the self-consciousness of the reader who in virtue of identifying with the image recognizes what he is. Literature is in this sense transfigurative, and in a way which cuts across the distinction between fiction and truth. There are metaphors for every life in Herodotus and Gibbon.

The great paradigm for such transfiguration must be Don Quixote, Cervantes having to be credited not only with the invention of the novel but with discovering the perversion of its philosophy. Quixote is transformed, through reading romances, into an errant knight while his world is transformed into one of knightly opportunities, wenches turning into virgins and innkeepers into kings, nags into steeds and windmills into monsters. Yet it is a perversion of the relationship between reader and romance because Quixote's own sense of his identity was so antecedently weak that he failed to retain it through the transformation, and his own sense of reality was so weak that he lost his grip on the difference between literature and life. Or

he read poetry as though it were history, so not philosophical but particular. He would be like those who, through reading Descartes, seriously come to believe that "they are kings while they are paupers, that they are clothed in gold and purple while they are naked; or imagine that their head is made of clay or that they are gourds, or that their bodies are glass." Or that there is an Evil Genius, or that there is no world or that the belief in material objects is misguided. These are failures to distinguish philosophy from life, whose counterpart in Cervantes induces an illusion so powerful that the distinction is lost: which may be a formula for happiness--living in an illusion--making *Don Quixote* genuinely comic.

I have encountered the tragic obverse of this, where one's sense of self is strong but one's sense of reality has become desperate through literature having thrown a bitter discrepancy into the relationship between the two. I knew a lady who discovered the truth from Proust's novel that she really was the Dutchess of Guermantes, as unavailing, in her case, unfortunately, as the Prince's knowledge of who he really is, when a spell has nevertheless required that he live in the investitures of a frog. *Her* land was Combray and the Faubourg St. Germain, an air of wit and exquisite behavior and perfect taste--not the Upper West Side, falling plaster, children with colds, a distracted husband, never enough money and nobody who understood. Her moments of happiness came when reality on occasion agreed to cooperate with metaphor, when she could coincide with an alien grace, too ephemeral alas, leaving her with the dishes to clear and the bills to pay and a terrible exhaustion. Unlike Quixote, her illusions never were strong enough to swamp reality, only in a sense to poison it; and while she maintained that her greatest happiness consisted in reading Proust, in truth he only caused her anguish.

I should like to place the theorist R alongside these two readers of fiction, one of whom happens to be in fiction as well, since R himself could be a fictional being and "The Referential Fallacy" a fiction within a fiction, both of them created by me. In fact both the theorist and article are real. R is a man of great pride and passion, who has lived through times of extremity and has known, as much as anyone I know has known, the defining tribulations of the full human life. Surely he cannot have been drawn to literature simply to be a reader of literature through literature to literature, unless, like the professor in Mann's *Disorder and Early Sorrow*, he meant to draw a circle in order to exclude life. If it were a piece of literature, "The Referential Fallacy" would offer a metaphor of extreme dislocation, putting life as a whole beyond the range of reference, displaying an existence lived out in an infinite windowless library, where book sends us to book in a network of reciprocal relationships the reader can inhabit like a spiker. Imagine that it had been written by Borges, whose life is almost like that, and include in *Ficciones!* But it in fact is by R and it gives us a misanalysis rather than a metaphor, it refers vertically to readers whose relationship to texts it gets wrong, rather than to the reader of the text whose life it metaphorically depicts. If this address were art, it would be a mirror only for R, who seeing his own image reflected back, might find his consciousness entrapped and mend his thought.

R's text, which I have sought to view once as literature and once as science, illustrates, since it is about reading, the two ways in which a text might refer to readers, and with these two modes of reference in mind, we may return to the *philosophy* as literature, not by way of treating philosophical texts as literature, which would be merely a conceit if they were not that, as R's text is not that, but by way rather of

displaying one of the ways in which philosophy really does relate to life. *One* of the ways. There is a celebrated deconstructionist text which holds that philosophy must be treated as a genre of literature because it is ineluctably metaphoric, when in fact it only becomes interestingly metaphoric when it is first decided to treat it as literature, and that text begs just the question it has been taken by its enthusiasts to have settled. Metaphors have in common with texts as such that they do not necessarily wear their metaphoricity on their surfaces, and what looks like an image may really be a structural hypothesis as to how a reality we heretofore lack words for is to be understood. One mark of metaphors is their ineliminability, a feature which makes them para-intensional if not fully intensional. But in philosophical as in scientific writing, what looks like a metaphor in the beginning ends as a fact, and it may be eliminated in favor of a technical term, as Locke begins with the natural light—with “the candle within us”—and ends with the technical term *intuition*. So what appear to be metaphors, what have been taken by deconstructionists to be metaphors, belong to philosophy as science, rather than to philosophy as literature.

There is a view abroad, credited to Nietzsche, that in metaphor we have the growing edge of language, assimilating by its means the unknown to the known, where the latter must originally have been metaphor now grown cold and desiccated and taken for fact. It is difficult to understand how, on its own view, this process got started, but I think it must be appreciated as a transvaluational and necessarily paradoxical view, like saying that the first shall be last or that the meek shall inherit the earth, giving poetry the place science has presumed was its own. But it is a view lent credibility by the fact that structural hypotheses look enough like metaphors to be taken for metaphors by theorists resolved to view an activity like philosophy as largely if not altogether metaphorical. It is my own thought that philosophical texts are kept alive as metaphors when they have long since stopped seeming plausible as structural hypotheses, a tribute to their vivacity and power, their status as literature being a consolation prize for failing to be true. But this is to overlook the way in which philosophy just functions as literature does, not in the sense of extravagant verbal artifacts, but as engaging with readers in search of that sort of universality I have supposed to characterize literary reference: as being about the reader at the moment of reading through the process of reading. We read them as literature in this sense because, in Hegel’s stunning thought, they exist for the reader who is “in them from the beginning.” The texts require the act of reading in order to be complete, and it as readers of a certain type that philosophical texts address us all. The wild variety of philosophical texts implies a correspondingly wild variety of possible kinds of readers, and hence of theories of what we are in the dimension of the reading. And each such text finds a kind of ontological proof of its claims through the fact that it can be read in the way it requires.

The most conspicuous example of such a text is obliged to be the *Meditations*, where the reader is forced to co-mediate with the writer, and to discover in the act of co-meditation his philosophical identity: he must be the kind of individual the text requires if he can read it, and the text must be true if it can be read. He finds himself there since he was in it from the beginning. How astonishing I find it that precisely those who insist that philosophy is merely a genre of literature offer readings of Descartes so external that the possibility of their being universal in the way literature demands is excluded from the outset. To treat philosophical texts after the manner of Derrida, simply as networks of reciprocal relationships, is precisely

to put them at a distance from its readers so intraversable as to make it impossible that they be about us in the way literature requires, if my conjecture is correct. They become simply artifacts made of words, with no references save internal ones or incidental external ones. And reading them becomes external, as though they had nothing to do with us, were merely there, intricately wrought composites of logical lacework, puzzling and pretty and pointless. The history of philosophy is then like a museum of costumes we forget were meant to be worn.

The variety of philosophical texts, then, subtend a variety of philosophical anthropologies, and though each text is about the reader of it and so is a piece of literature by that criterion, it does not offer a metaphor but a truth internally related to the reading of it. Even now when textual innovativeness has abated in philosophy and all texts are pretty much alike, so much so that the address to the reader has thinned almost to nothingness, the reader in the act of reading exercises some control over what the text says, since what the text says must be compatible with its being read. A text, thus, which set out to prove the impossibility of reading would have a paradox of sorts on its hands. Less flagrantly, there are texts in philosophy, current reading among us, which if true would entail their own logical illegibility. And it is inconceivable that philosophers would have fallen into such incoherences if they had not, as it were, forgotten that their texts, in addition to being representations of a kind of reality, were things to be *read*. We pay a price for forgetting this in the current style of writing, since it enables us to depict worlds in which readers cannot fit. The propensity to overlook the reader goes hand in hand with the propensity to leave beings of the sort readers exemplify outside the world the text describes. Contemporary philosophies of mind, language, humanity may be striking examples of an oversight which is encouraged by a view of philosophical writing which makes the reader ontologically weightless: like some disembodied professional conscience. Science, often and perhaps typically, can get away with this, largely because, even when about its readers, is not about them as readers, and so lacks the internal connection philosophical texts demand, being about their readers *as* readers. So philosophy is literature in that among its truth conditions are those connected with being read and reading those texts is supposed then to reveal us for what we are in virtue of our reading. Really to reveal us, however, not metaphorically, which is why, I think, I cannot finally acquiesce in the thought that philosophy is literature. It continues to aim at truth, but when false, seriously false, it is often also so fascinatingly false as to retain a kind of perpetual vitality as a metaphor. It is this which makes our history so impossible to relinquish, since the power is always there, and the texts engage us when we read them vitally as readers whose philosophical portraits materialize about us as we enter that place that awaited us from the beginning.

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A few years ago, the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point secured funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to bring together a philosopher and a novelist to discuss publicly the relationships between philosophy and literature. By a coincidence too flagrant to be allowed in fiction, the novelist chosen was my boyhood friend, Herbert Gold, and it always gives me a malicious pleasure to think

that that not especially humane bureaucracy should have reunited us from opposite corners of the nation to catch up on our lives in this unlikely locus. In any case, the present paper grew out of a brief scribbled presentation for that occasion, though the central idea had been with me for a while. A much expanded version was presented to the cadets of West Point who had invited me to address them on the topic of philosophy and art, and that same version was delivered later that year to the College at Charleston at the invitation of its philosophy department. I am grateful to the Charleston philosophers, most particularly to Marty Perlmutter and Hugh Wilder, for the stimulation of their criticisms. The final version, printed here, was read by David Carrier and Richard Kuhns, on both of whom I can count, always, for criticism untempered by our friendship.