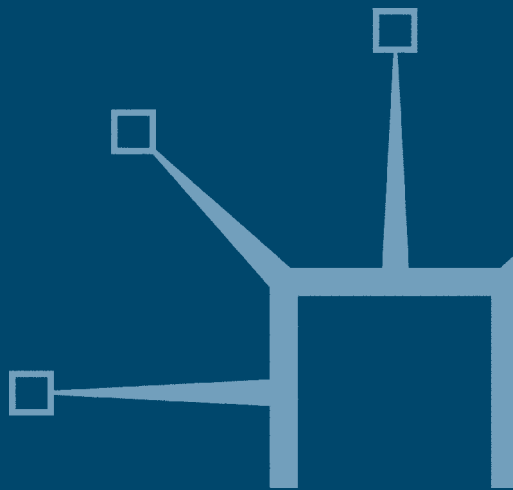


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Literature and Philosophy

A Guide to Contemporary Debates

Edited by
David Rudrum



Literature and Philosophy

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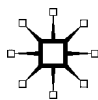
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*For Tracey,
at last*

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Introduction – Literature and Philosophy: The Contemporary Interface

David Rudrum

‘The separation of philosophy from literary studies has not worked to the benefit of either.’ An uncontentious statement, surely, and perhaps even a disarming or conciliatory one. Who, after all, would think that segregating literature from philosophy could do anything but delimit and restrict both? And yet, within its original context, this statement formed part of a controversy that would rage for many years. It is taken from the introduction to *Deconstruction and Criticism* (Hartman, p. ix), a manifesto heralding the arrival and ascendancy of deconstructive thought in America, which featured contributions from all the leading ‘Yale School’ critics (Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom), and from Jacques Derrida himself. Its publication marked the opening salvo in some of the most notorious debates in the so-called ‘theory wars’ of the 1980s.

Looking back, from the distance of a quarter of a century, what is striking about Hartman’s preface is the attempt he makes to tag deconstruction, and literary theory in general, onto a venerable tradition stemming from German Romanticism that thrives on the intersection between philosophy and literature.¹ ‘Without the pressure of philosophy on literary texts, or the reciprocal pressure of literary analysis on philosophical writing, each discipline becomes impoverished. If there is the danger of a confusion of realms, it is a danger worth experiencing’, he argues (Hartman, p. ix). It seems curious today that this move should have been so controversial, even allowing for the vociferous, bitter, and often eccentric climate of polemic surrounding the theory wars. Some critics feared that this harnessing of philosophy would bring a sterile abstraction and theoretism to the study of literature, destroying literature’s vitality. Others felt that the kind of philosophy that underpinned deconstruction was too destabilizing: it was both anti-foundational and antihumanist. Still others objected to what amounted to interdisciplinary posturing on the part of the deconstructionists: ‘Hartman

acts as if no one before him had ever connected the two disciplines', wrote one commentator (Dasenbrock, p. 4), whereas in fact, philosophy and literature have almost always been in close proximity to one another, from Plato and Aristotle through Voltaire and Rousseau to the Romantics and Existentialists.

At the time, however, Hartman's proposed deconstructive alliance between literary and philosophical studies initially failed to materialize. As literary theory emerged, evolved, and rose to dominance, many of its philosophical aspirations gave way to debating various different techniques, methods, and thematics of reading. Before long, the fascinating thought of philosophers as diverse as, say, Mikhail Bakhtin, J.L. Austin, and Jacques Derrida was being packaged as 'Bakhtinian theory', 'Speech Act theory', and 'deconstructive theory', each offering a particular angle on a particular set of literary themes, genres, or devices – interesting stuff, certainly, and richly productive in terms of literary analysis, but arguably tending to narrow down rather than draw out the philosophical significance of the ideas behind them. Further specializations, giving rise to feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and queer theory, transformed our sense of the classical canon, and politicized the nature of critical debate in many refreshing ways. Yet, with some exceptions – the importance of de Beauvoir, Cixous, Irigaray, and Butler in feminism, for instance, or the ongoing debates between African philosophy and post-colonialism – these theorists have tended to concentrate on 're-evaluating' or 'reclaiming' areas of traditional literary scholarship. They have done so with great success, yet this does not amount to the *rapprochement* between literature and philosophy that theory was supposed to inaugurate. All too often, the broader conceptual questions that literary theory had promised to tackle – philosophical issues about the nature of language, of reading, of ethics, or of the aesthetic – tended to fall through the cracks between the various competing schools of theory.

It could even be argued that at times, theory was actually something that came between literature and philosophy, rather than bringing them together. Those that claim this will typically point to the 1977 confrontation between Jacques Derrida and John Searle over the legacy of J.L. Austin.² Derrida used deconstructive theory to question some of the assumptions underpinning Austin's philosophy of communication; Searle, its leading advocate at the time, wrote a reply that dismissed many of Derrida's points out of hand; Derrida replied to Searle by playfully deconstructing Searle's every move. It seems, in retrospect, that neither Derrida nor Searle had an adequate grasp of the tradition they were attacking, and that both were basically talking at cross purposes.³ But in practical terms, the damage had been done: the debate polarized many Anglo-American philosophers, with their predominantly analytic outlook, against new trends in Continental thought, on the assumption that Continental philosophy entailed an ultimately illogical, nonsensical view of language.⁴ In the aftermath of this exchange,

most philosophy departments barred their doors to deconstructionists, and a symptomatic division in the Anglo-American academy became evident: (analytic) Philosophy and (empirical) Literary Criticism remained distinct, unrelated disciplines.

However, the philosophy department's loss was to be the literature department's gain. New directions in literary theory and in Continental philosophy had a great deal more in common with each other – not least their struggle to secure academic acceptance – as became evident during the advent of deconstructive literary criticism and the ensuing theory wars. In other words, the gulf that opened up between Anglo-American and Continental philosophy during the Searle/Derrida affair forced the latter into an alliance with literary theory. Only two years after the controversy of 1977, the Yale School manifesto of 1979 was proclaiming Derrida's work to be a 'new dawn' in literary criticism (Hartman, p. ix), and the theory wars were about to begin in earnest.

By the 1980s, then, the deconstructionists had largely been aligned with the project of literary theory rather than philosophy. This pattern would repeat itself throughout the reception of many more 'Continental' thinkers, including Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze, and Levinas. That this constituted an enrichment of literary studies rather than an impoverishment (let alone a threat) is something I take here as self-evident. However, the full richness of any potential interaction between literature and philosophy was all too often compromised by the tendency to dilute challenging, radical philosophical ideas and concepts into 'theories', which could then be applied to texts to produce 'readings' of them, most of which readings illuminated the theory behind them as much as they did the text itself. In other words, the parameters of traditional literary theory might not have been the best place to develop a fully-fledged relationship between literary and philosophical studies, for these parameters can confine both disciplines by reducing them to neat theories, or to sets of theoretical terms. This is not in any way to downplay the achievements of literary theory in bringing together two highly complex bodies of scholarship, nor to disparage its impressive interdisciplinary achievements. Many literary theories have built sophisticated networks of bridges that span the divide between literature and philosophy, but the traffic that flows across these bridges tends to be regulated. To speak metaphorically, these border crossings work as patrolled checkpoints where texts and ideas can receive an entry clearance, but first they must be stamped as 'theory', and thereby subjected to certain import and export restrictions.

The project of literary theory, however, has not gone unchallenged. Throughout the 1980s, on both sides of the Atlantic, a steady stream of books and collections appeared which challenged and polemicized with the problematic status of the theoretical project. Titles like *Against Theory*, *The Resistance to Theory*, *The Limits of Theory*, and *The Failure of Theory*⁵ paradoxically became focal points for theoretical discussion and formulation. In the

1990s, though, a rather different accentuation emerged with books entitled *After Theory* (two of these), *Reading After Theory*, *Life After Theory*, *Post Theory*, and so on⁶ – the implication being that theory itself was no longer something problematic, controversial, or threatening, nor something that needed challenging, but something that had actually come to an end.

Of course, this much-vaunted ‘end of theory’ has been the source of a further torrent of theorizing about the end of theory. What might such an end of theory mean? Clearly the end of theory does not mean the end of theoretical thought – more people are writing about figures from Adorno to Žižek than ever before, and certainly more theories that theorize the end of theory are being mooted than ever before. Indeed, it has even been argued that the end of literary theory is coterminous with the triumph of literary theory, insofar as theory is no longer separable nor distinguishable from the mainstream of literary studies. Yet whatever, if anything, the end of theory means – and there is not room to explore that fully here – there are good indications that it marks the beginnings of a promising new period in the often stormy relations between literature and philosophy.⁷

Over the past decade or so, literary theory, traditionally the ally of Continental philosophy, has come in for far more sophisticated scrutiny and scepticism than greeted its arrival during the theory wars. But the response to this has been an encouraging turn to the philosophical thought that underpinned so much of recent literary theory in the first place: Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Adorno, for example, are now widely debated by literary critics. Simultaneously, many philosophers have begun to pay attention to the intricacy of philosophical discourse, and to approach philosophical texts with a sophisticated awareness of their textuality – they have, in short, recognized the importance of ideas and methods associated with literary criticism.

Much recent work has addressed itself towards the growing relationship between the areas of literature and philosophy, constituting one of the most innovative of contemporary cross-disciplinary interactions for both fields.⁸ Interest comes from both directions, making this a well-rounded interdisciplinary encounter. There is even some evidence that this developing *rapprochement* is being reflected in the structure of the university. At the pedagogical level, the current tendency in higher education to merge academic departments now means that literature and philosophy are sometimes being taught and studied in the same department. Doubtless this owes as much to economic necessity as to the intellectual *rapprochement* between the two, but it is nevertheless instructive that within the university, philosophy is now often located alongside literature as opposed to, say, science, mathematics, theology, social science, or politics. The basis for this realignment is borne out by some of the most productive contemporary scholarship and research in both disciplines.

A growing sense has emerged within contemporary literary studies that traditional critical theories should begin to engage more fully with issues

such as ethics, identity, pragmatism, or aesthetic truth. These issues are traditionally located within the provenance of philosophy. Accordingly, a 'post-theoretical' generation of critics is turning increasingly to the philosophical and aesthetic thought that engendered literary theory in the first place. For example, it is now at least as common to find younger academics (and their students) working on Heidegger or Nietzsche than on Paul de Man, and probably more common to find them working on Adorno or Benjamin than working on Terry Eagleton. A case in point here would be the debates around the 'New Aestheticism', in which Continental thought on the nature of the aesthetic has been taken up and reused by Simon Malpas and others to re-evaluate the significance of this traditional philosophical category.⁹

Simultaneously, Anglo-American philosophy departments – dominated for so long by the analytic tradition – have gradually begun to open their doors to the Continental thought that informed literary theory. Thinkers such as Derrida, Adorno, and Levinas are now being read and accepted far more widely by the anglophone philosophical community. This development has compelled many philosophers to reconsider the stance that philosophy has taken towards literature, and to re-examine the ground it shares with contemporary literary theory. Some have followed the example of Stanley Cavell in using readings of literature to exemplify and refine points about language, aesthetics, and so on. Others, following Jonathan Rée's lead, have taken up the challenge of reading philosophy itself as literature.¹⁰

If literary theory once acted as a bridge to facilitate traffic between philosophical and literary studies, then its task has been successfully achieved, perhaps to the point of rendering such a bridge redundant. In the intervening period between the arrival of theory and the so-called 'end' of it, traditional boundaries have gradually been broken down, and interdisciplinary thought has grown instead. It is therefore, at last, a timely moment to stage a full-scale face-to-face encounter between literary and philosophical studies, one that is not obliged to make the traditional detour through critical theory. To literary critics who have raised questions about the end of theory and what should succeed it, the reciprocally informative relationships between literature and philosophy offer a plausible answer.

Such is the background and genesis of the lively set of debates encapsulated in this book. What follows is divided into six parts. The first half of the book explores encounters between literature and the three principal schools of Western philosophy, with each of the first three parts dedicated to the relationship between literature and, respectively, French, Anglo-American, and German philosophy. In the second half of the book, Part IV ('Literature and Philosophy: The Question of Ethics'), Part V ('Reading Philosophy as Literature'), and Part VI ('Approaching the End') explore more specific issues. Each of these parts contains essays from a variety of philosophical backgrounds, with a view to showing how different philosophies interact with literature over similar issues, thereby charting a breadth of approaches

to the subject, and encapsulating the diversity of the literature/philosophy interface. Part IV examines how the question of ethics is explored at the intersection of philosophy and literature; Part V engages in various aspects of reading philosophy as literature; and, by way of a conclusion, Part VI debates the notion of the end of art and its implications for literature.

Each of these six parts is introduced with a brief expository essay, which maps out the field under discussion, describing the major aspects of the literature/philosophy dialogue in the area in question. These introductory essays chart the origins and consequences of this dialogue, as well as pointing towards important new developments in both literary and philosophical scholarship. They are intended not only to introduce the key philosophical movements and thinkers to literature students, but also to provide something of a bibliographical essay for those who wish to read further in any of these areas. It should be emphasized that this aspect of the introductory essays is just that – introductory. They are aimed at undergraduate students rather than advanced students or researchers, and are by no means comprehensive or exhaustive.

Finally, the book as a whole is an attempt to represent the burgeoning field of ‘literature and philosophy’ at its most diverse. It does not attempt to offer nor to advance any particular philosophy of literature, nor to philosophize any particular aspect or body of literature, nor to dragoon philosophy into the service of literary criticism or *vice versa*. Its aim is to appeal to philosophers and literary critics or theorists of every stamp and shade of opinion, without privileging either discipline (or any of their countless sub-disciplines) over the other, and to provide a guide to the vast spectrum of thought involved in the contemporary debates between literature and philosophy.

Notes

1. The best recent discussion of this tradition is Bowie (1997).
2. For the essence of this debate, see Derrida (1988). The consequences of what eventually became a heated controversy are explored by Dasenbrock (1989).
3. See Dasenbrock, and also Stanley Cavell’s ‘What Did Derrida Want of Austin?’ and ‘Seminar on “What Did Derrida Want of Austin?”’, in his *Philosophical Passages*.
4. For an interesting re-evaluation of this position, see Wheeler.
5. As can be seen from these titles, challenges to theory came from a variety of different perspectives. Respectively, W.J.T. Mitchell (1985) debates a pragmatist approach; Paul de Man (1986) is the classic deconstructive engagement with it; Thomas M. Kavanagh’s collection (1989) contains a broad spectrum of opinion on the subject, while Patrick Parrinder’s position (1987) is basically a Marxist polemic. For an interesting discussion of the various rejections of theory, see Robert Eaglestone’s engagement with the issue (1997).
6. Once again, the sheer breadth of opinion on this subject can be gauged from the distance between the authors of the two books entitled *After Theory* – Thomas Docherty (1996), an avowed post-Marxist, and Terry Eagleton (2003), the Marxist

stalwart. The contributors to *Life After Theory* (2003) are no less diverse, ranging between Jacques Derrida, Frank Kermode, Toril Moi, and Christopher Norris. Finally, the distance between the theorists theorizing the end of theory in McQuillan *et al.*'s collection *Post-Theory* (1999), and Valentine Cunningham's approach to the same problem in his *Reading After Theory* (2002), is just as great.

7. To clarify: I am not trying to claim here that the dialogue between literature and philosophy has only opened up in recent times. After all, the respected journal *Philosophy and Literature* was established as far back as 1976, and is still going strong (this volume includes a contribution from its co-editor, Garry Hagberg). Furthermore, throughout the 1980s there appeared numerous collections of interesting interdisciplinary work, such as Griffiths (1984), Cascardi (1987), and Dasenbrock (1989). Nor is my point that, to hijack a phrase from Barthes, the birth of a literature/philosophy dialogue must be at the cost of the death of literary theory; on the contrary, debates around literary theory continue to be productive, fruitful, and important. Rather, the idea of the end of theory – the rumours of which may well yet turn out to be largely unsubstantiated – has created the perfect conditions for philosophers, critics, and theorists to re-examine how their disciplines meet and interact.
8. See, amongst many other more specialized accounts, the following general orientations: Zima (1999), New (1999), Skilleås (2001), and John and Lopes (2004). Andrew Benjamin's *Philosophy's Literature* (2001) can be singled out as a particularly stimulating interdisciplinary engagement by a master of both fields.
9. See Joughin and Malpas (2003).
10. See Rée (1987).

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Part I

Encounters with Literature in French Philosophy

Introduction

Literature and philosophy have been particularly close neighbours in the French academy, and in French culture in general. Their proximity dates back at least to the 1930s and 1940s, when Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Albert Camus (1913–60), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) epitomized this *entente cordiale*. All three enjoyed success both as novelists and as philosophers, to the extent that dubbing their works as either ‘philosophy’ or ‘literature’ is, at best, making an arbitrary distinction, and registering assumptions about clear-cut disciplinary boundaries that their works do not share. Sartre’s essays on literature, for example, seem particularly resistant to this kind of academic pigeonholing. See his *‘What is Literature?’ and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

If the existentialism of Camus and Sartre is sometimes thought of as dominating post-war French thought, it did so only superficially. Equally interesting, and ultimately more influential on contemporary literary studies, are the much bleaker writings of their contemporaries Georges Bataille (1897–1962) and Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003). Like Camus and Sartre, Bataille and Blanchot also wrote in both literary and philosophical genres, but once again it would be hard to draw a neat line separating their writings into ‘literature’ and ‘philosophy’. Unlike Camus and Sartre, whose existentialism offered an essentially humanist vision of individual freedom and responsibility, Bataille’s and Blanchot’s writings are considerably less upbeat. Bataille, briefly associated with the surrealist movement, probed the limits of both literary and philosophical boundaries by exploring pornography, violence, and excrement (see *The Bataille Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson [Oxford: Blackwell, 1997] and *Georges Bataille: Core Cultural Theorist* by Paul Hegarty [London: Sage, 2000]). Blanchot’s writings valorize literature for its anti-philosophical qualities. The literary, for Blanchot, is a space of extreme otherness, an interrogative challenge to traditional philosophical categories and to our understandings of, for instance, the nature of

death or of the human subject (see *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction and Literary Essays* [Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1999]). Good discussions include *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* by Leslie Hill (London: Routledge, 1997) and *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1996). Blanchot's work was influenced by that of his friend and colleague Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95), a philosopher whose emphasis on the ethics of otherness, and especially on the irreducible alterity of the other, has assumed a formative influence on debates about the ethics of literature and literary criticism. See Part IV for a fuller discussion.

There were several other successors to the existentialist tradition of French thought. Like Bataille and Blanchot, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) found himself increasingly suspicious of Sartre's emphasis on individuality and liberty. His solution was to return to the phenomenological thought of Husserl and Heidegger from which existentialism had originated (see Part III). Merleau-Ponty's writings on the importance of the body and his rethinking of the phenomenology of interpretation and perception are coming to be appreciated as an important source for much contemporary critical thought on these subjects. Another return to phenomenology is evident in the thought of Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), who revisited the questions of time and selfhood, and developed Husserl's and Heidegger's suggestion that the two notions are interrelated. Ricoeur's conclusion – that narrative is one of the fundamental forms of understanding, and that identities are constructed through narrative – has shaped a great deal of subsequent thought in both literary theory and philosophy (see his vast three-volume study *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–88]).

Ultimately, however, the single most influential movement that succeeded Sartrean existentialism was structuralism, which came to dominate virtually all aspects of the humanities, from anthropology to psychology and from linguistics to film studies. Literary criticism was by no means exempt from its influence, which was particularly strong in the fields of narrative form and poetics. The structuralist analysis of narrative came to be known as narratology, and besides being a particularly sophisticated and ambitious application of structuralist methodology, it also drew on the philosophy of Ricoeur in exploring the extent to which narrative underwrites a vast range of forms of thought – such as the structures of philosophical systems, or of subjectivity itself – as much as it does literary texts. Good representatives of structuralist narratology include Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (trans. Jane E. Lewin. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), Tzvetan Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose* (trans. Richard Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), and the early works of Roland Barthes (1915–80). Strictly speaking, structuralism was not a philosophical movement: its origins lay in linguistics and communication theory. Nevertheless, its conceptual rigour and interdisciplinary methodology bear favourable comparison with those of many approaches derived from philosophy.

Both phenomenology and structuralism were crucial influences on what has arguably been the single most important current of thought in bridging the literature/philosophy divide – deconstruction. Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), whose views on language are developed in attentive readings of both literary and philosophical texts, has done more than anyone else to call the division between these two disciplines into question. His emphasis on aporia and paradox, his unearthing the traces of residual or potential alternative meanings, and his diagnosis of *différance* – the apparently endless deferrals and differentiations inherent in signification – have clear and fruitful applications to literary study. Furthermore, by championing writing (as opposed to speech), and by approaching philosophy as a body of texts requiring scrupulously close reading (as opposed to a body of abstract thought), Derridean deconstruction introduced a new ‘textualism’ into traditional philosophy. Deconstructive criticism, which soon spread to America and the ‘Yale school’, embraced Derrida’s vision of undecidability, indeterminacy, and free play with the text. Its exponents, for instance Paul de Man (1919–83), deconstructed the works of philosophers such as Nietzsche or Rousseau as well as established works of literature. Rarely uncontroversial, deconstruction was one of the formative influences on contemporary literary theory, and simultaneously the *bête noire* of both traditional criticism and traditional philosophy during the so-called ‘theory wars’ of the 1980s. Since then, however, Derrida’s work has continued to develop and to interrogate itself. His later works discuss themes related to ethics, responsibility, forgiveness, morals, politics, and religion. For a discussion of these, see Herman Rapaport, *Later Derrida: Reading the Recent Work* (London: Routledge, 2003).

The reception of Derrida’s ideas has opened the gates to a great deal of commerce between French philosophy and literary studies since the 1970s. The historical approach of Michel Foucault (1926–84), the vision of post-modernism set out by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924–98), the notion of the disappearance of reality gnomically prophesied by Jean Baudrillard (1929–), and the stress on difference and desire in the rhizomatic thought of Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) have all made substantial and lasting impressions on the shape of literary theory and criticism. Indeed, it might seem as if French philosophy has been the mainstay of critical theory in recent times. This is not, however, because of any one overarching method or particularly incisive technique it has brought to the reading of literary texts. On the contrary, a variety of different emphases, nuances, and opinions abound, without any clear methodological consensus, and there is so little unity of approach that some might argue the very term ‘French philosophy’ suggests a coherent, canonical movement that is not borne out in actual practice. However, the ensuing breadth of outlook and diversity of approach has been one of the great strengths of French philosophy, and arguably the principal reason for the extent of its success in influencing so many aspects of literary studies. The most interesting and challenging of the many phases in the

development of literary theory have been intimately wedded to developments in French thought over the past generation or so. More recently, the philosophies of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Alain Badiou, and Jean-Luc Nancy have been mooted by some literary theorists as successors to this tradition.

The essays in this section chart the impact of various currents of French thought on the reading of literature. Anthony Larson opens the collection by considering some of the practical implications of the relationship between literature and philosophy in a world that appears to have ever less time and space for both. Taking F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic *The Great Gatsby* as an object lesson, he shows how Deleuze's work helps develop our understanding of this dynamic relationship. Derval Tubridy's essay provides an extensive survey of the broad diversity involved in French philosophy by comparing how a wide range of thinkers in this tradition have read the works of Samuel Beckett. The spectrum of opinion that arises in respect to this controversial writer conveys a good sense of the variety of perspectives that French thought has brought to bear on literature in recent times.

David Rudrum

1

First Lessons: Gilles Deleuze and the Concept of Literature

Anthony Larson

For students of literature – beginners or old hands – the obligatory detour through theory and philosophy has always been dangerous. This is not simply because of the importance that Continental thought and philosophy have assumed in the past forty years in literary studies; generations of readers had to maneuver through the philosophical influences of aesthetic theory, for example, before the arrival of Derrida and the philosophical tradition he represented. It is, rather, the negotiation between disciplines that makes this passage difficult. Tied to the beginner's question of why such a move through another discipline rather than one's own is the more practical one: how can philosophy say something about literature and vice versa? How can one tradition, with its concepts, problems and history possibly help us understand another? Framing the question in these terms – in terms of the question 'How?' – is a practical move. Such a manner of approaching the question might cause more than one reader to grimace, since, after all, from the point of view of the education world, practical questions seem always to be the best way to put an end to studies in literature and philosophy. So often, the practical question of students echoes that of their parents (who pay the bill for such practically minded students' education) and administrators: How can something as quaint as literature and philosophy be of any use to us today? How can we use literature and philosophy today when everything seems to point away from such disciplines and towards the means–end relationship of business? The danger in such an approach towards the question of philosophy and literature is one of the question itself putting an end to any possible further discussion. This would be misleading and an error.

From the very beginning of his work, with his study of the constitution of the subject in the work of Hume, to his last published essay on the consequences of situating thought on the plane of immanence, the work of Gilles Deleuze was always placed within a practical framework. For Deleuze, the work of philosophy was that of the creation of a concept – a concept that

responded to a particular problem's set of questions. In this sense, philosophy endlessly asked the practical question 'How?' – How can we understand a particular problem through the creation of a concept or, to render the Nietzschean undertones of such an approach more explicit, 'Given a proposition, what is the mode of existence of s/he who pronounces it, what mode of existence must one have in order to be capable of pronouncing it?' (Deleuze, 2003, p. 188).¹ One of the places in which Deleuze exercised this particular form of practical philosophy was in literature itself and he was the author of book-length studies of Proust, Kafka, and Sacher-Masoch. However it is Deleuze's preoccupation with Anglo-American literature that perhaps best responds to our question of philosophy and literature and their practical use. As is well known, a chapter of his conversations with Claire Parnet in *Dialogues* is entitled 'On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature', and the majority of authors treated in his last collection of texts dealing with literature (*Critique et clinique*) are Anglo-American.

At first glance, such a declaration regarding Anglo-American literature's superiority seems surprising. For if it is a certain open-ended, deterritorialized or schizophrenic writing that Deleuze is seeking then there are doubtless other traditions that produce the same style of writing (Proust and Kafka, for example, as well as the very rich and splendid Russian tradition). This however would be to misread Deleuze's use of the term 'Anglo-American literature', for he is not discussing a literary tradition in terms of literary history but in terms of a concept. For Deleuze, literature achieves a certain greatness when it exceeds closed, psychological, or personal narratives and opens itself up onto the endless conditions of its creation (what he calls the 'stuttering' of language). Literature which responds to this condition achieves the form of a concept since it responds to the problem of its own creation and in this sense the term 'Anglo-American literature' is no longer personal or historical but impersonal and conceptual.

If we think of literature in such conceptual and practical terms, then we are brought back to our original question concerning the interaction between philosophy and literature, for a conceptual reading of literature would teach us as much about philosophy as about literature and how we can use each of them today. And it is just this pedagogical aspect of the two disciplines which interests readers of this collection and gives this article its title. When speaking of philosophy and its relation to the concept, Deleuze and Félix Guattari underline the supremely pedagogical role of the concept:

If the three ages of the concept are that of the encyclopedia, pedagogy and professional training, only the second can prevent us from falling from the heights of the first into the absolute disaster of the third – an absolute disaster for thought whatever the given social benefits from the point of view of universal capitalism'. (Deleuze and Guattari, p. 17)

The hypothetical means–ends questions posed at the beginning of this article clearly belong to this third age of the concept but it will be my goal in the next few pages to take Deleuze at his word and apply a pedagogical reading of the concept of literature, to offer a practical lesson concerning literature and philosophy. To do so, I propose to make the task even more overtly practical and to treat a text often read and mis-read by beginning students of literature: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. By orienting what follows in such pedagogical and practical terms, I hope not only to be able to shed light on the particularly Deleuzian response to the question of philosophy and literature but also to be able to open literary texts up to some very practical and philosophical consequences.

The choice of Fitzgerald's text as an example is not by chance. He is often mentioned in Deleuze's texts on literature, most specifically the autobiographical essay on writing and alcoholism, *The Crack-Up*. When reading that text, it is not hard to see what attracted Deleuze since the piece opens with a discussion of how the small, almost molecular changes (in opposition to what Fitzgerald calls the 'big sudden blows') that occur in life are the greatest and most powerful changes. In addition, life is characterized there as an endlessly repeating process of 'breaking-down'. Yet this text is an essay and not part of Fitzgerald's collection of fiction. Following his definition of philosophy as the practical creation of concepts, Deleuze identifies one of the most important features of literature as its capacity to turn language into something else – to trace a language within language as a becoming-other of the major language. Quoting Proust, Deleuze declares, '[. . .] literature offers two aspects, to the extent that it operates a decomposition or destruction of the mother tongue, but also the invention of a new language in language, through the creation of a syntax' (Deleuze, 1993, p. 16). *The Great Gatsby* as a creation of fiction not only offers the occasion to examine the double movement of destruction/creation operated on language by the writer, but also, perhaps more importantly, presents a double appearance which serves as a key to our practically inspired Deleuzian investigation. This double appearance is evident from the very first pages of the novel and even from the title. When faced with the book for the first time, many readers are confronted by the odd declaration made by the narrator, Nick Carraway, concerning his previous year's experience with Gatsby: '[. . .] I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn' (Fitzgerald, p. 8). Why, students ask, does Nick give such a contradictory description of Gatsby? Why is he 'great' if the narrator, opening the novel and looking back on his previous summer, already qualifies him as receiving his 'unaffected scorn'? This mystery only deepens as the reader advances in the novel, coming to the increasingly evident truth that Gatsby is a con man, a liar, and small-time gangster. As most critics of the novel have noted, this contradiction/tension is at the heart of the novel and is its driving force.²