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Beyond Reading: What it Means to Encounter a Literary Work of Art

ANTONIA HEIGL
University of Graz, Graz, Austria

What does it mean to encounter a literary work of art? When we talk about them, we refer to literary works as characterizable entities. In a genuine encounter with a literary work, instead, our focus shifts to "what it is about": we bring to mind the intentional objects it invites us to direct our attention to, typically through reading. If what we encounter is a work of art, however, we are invited to do something beyond that even, namely to attune ourselves to disclose something more profound. Through shifting our focus from the individual to the typical and affectively responding to a work's characteristics, we disclose a qualitative character that presents itself as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes a specific kind of thing potentially experienced in the world. Our focus shifts from individual intentional objects, such as a character's view of her partner as standing in need of salvation, to the kinds of values and things manifested therein, such as the peculiar kind of ambiguity inhering a specific kind of commitment. To encounter a literary work of art, I conclude, means to follow the invitation to disclose value essentials, and thus to find a specific kind of truth.

Keywords: Literature; phenomenology of literature; phenomenology of art; Roman Ingarden; artistic truth.

1. *Introduction*

I argue that to encounter a literary work of art consists in an endeavor beyond reading, or, to keep it more broadly: that it consists in an endeavor even more complex than comprehending a fixed linguistic object (such as a fixed complex of sentences in the case of a novel). What I am concerned with throughout this paper might also be put as follows:

What does it mean to experience something not only as a text or even as a literary work, but as a literary work of *art*?

To answer this question, I choose a phenomenological approach as put forth by Edmund Husserl and his early students at the beginning of the 20th century (for a historic and systematic introduction to phenomenology, see Spiegelberg (1982)). The methodological starting point of the following analysis is the pre-reflective, first-personal experience of a literary work of art, or the encounter with a literary work of art, as I prefer to call it. The analysis focuses on the literary work of art *as it appears* in experience, and sets out to describe how it appears in pre-reflective experience from a subsequent reflective point of view. The aim is to pin down the essential features of this kind of experience, in other words, the "logic" inhering this peculiar encounter with the world.

What follows is especially indebted to Kraków born phenomenologist Roman Ingarden (1893–1970). I repeatedly refer to his seminal work *The Literary Work of Art*, which was first published in German (*Das literarische Kunstwerk*) in 1931, as well as to other of his writings. Furthermore, I point out parallels between Ingarden's approach and the analysis of literature by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen as put forth in their seminal work *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, which was first published in 1994. As we will see, there are important similarities to be found between these views, which are embedded in two different traditions of aesthetic theorizing, the continental and the analytic. While the two analyses resemble each other in many important respects regarding the literary work of art, they differ insofar as phenomenology focuses on the experiential dimension of our appreciation of art. It thus takes into account the predominantly affective nature of our proper engagement with literature. In combination with the differing conceptions of truth employed in these two approaches (understood either as a property of propositional content or of experience), this difference eventually yields, as we will see, opposing conclusions about the role of truth for literature.

I first distinguish between two possible ways to deal with a literary work. The first way to deal with it is to refer to a literary work as a bearer of properties, such as when we issue a judgment about it. The second way to deal with it is to "put it to use" as a mediating entity, as when we read it, thereby bringing to mind what it is about: we focus on the complex of intentional objects the work invites us to direct our attention to. At the same time—if we are affectively responsive to how the work directs our attention to these intentional objects—we disclose the literary work's aesthetically valuable qualities.

I then argue that insofar as the literary work we encounter is a work of art, we are invited to do something beyond that even: we are not only asked to bring to mind the intentional objects in the aesthetically valuable way determined by the work, but also to attune ourselves to disclose something more profound in virtue of the former. This

profound "insight," as we might call it, consists in an intuitive grasp of a qualitative character, whereby the latter presents itself to us as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes a specific kind of thing potentially experienced or engaged in in the world or a kind of thing we as human beings are otherwise deeply concerned with.[1] To encounter a literary work of art, I argue, means to successfully follow the invitation to disclose the value essentials of a specific kind of thing through reading in a way that is emotionally responsive to a text's characteristics. Along these lines, my analysis eventually opposes Lamarque and Olsen's famous "no truth" view of literary fiction, when I argue that to encounter a literary work of art means to seek out a specific kind of truth.

2. *Two possible ways to deal with a literary work*

To begin with, we can distinguish two possible ways to deal with a literary work. The first way to deal with it comes to the fore when we talk about literature. In doing so, we refer to the literary work as an entity in the world we can characterize and evaluate. We are thereby directed at the literary work as a bearer of properties. We might say things like:

a) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* is a novel published in 1974," or
b) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* deals with different kinds of personal commitment to someone else," or
c) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* shows the ambiguities of love," or
d) "Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* is captivating."

These four statements concern different aspects of one and the same entity: Statement a) concerns its classification (as a novel) within the artworld as well as its intersubjectively accessible fixation and subsequent distribution, b) concerns its directedness at something else as a mediating entity, c) addresses one of its possible achievements as a mediating entity, and d) one of its valuable qualities as a mediating entity "at work." Being sensitive to these differences is not irrelevant for what follows, but an analysis of the given statements is not my main concern here. Instead, it is important to highlight that we can deal with a literary work in another manner as well, in which we cease to refer to it primarily as a characterizable entity in the world. We can "bring to life" the directedness inhering it, which is described in statement b) and seek to experience a disclosure of the kind described in statement c).

In this second manner to deal with a literary work, our focus shifts

[1] The qualitative character art eventually confronts us with might also appear to us as characterizing a specific kind of thing that *cannot* be experienced in the strict sense of the word, but that is nevertheless of concern to us as human beings—just think of the afterlife as the subject matter of many religious works of art, for example.

towards "what the work is about": towards its individual characters, states of affairs, happenings, etc. That we can switch between these two manners to deal with a literary work is due to what Ingarden calls the "double sidedness" of "purely intentional objects" (Ingarden 1965: 211–219; 1972: 123–125) to which he counts the literary work: as such, it can appear both as an entity in its own right (this is its structural side, according to Ingarden), and as a content with characteristics of its own (its substantial side). This analysis is in line with the notion of a "dual viewpoint" elaborated on by Lamarque and Olsen in their theory of fiction. They distinguish between an "external" and an "internal perspective" towards fictional content (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 143–145). Through the external perspective, we are aware of the literary work's content as fictional. Regarding the broader context we are considering here, we can say that through the external perspective on a literary work's content (fictional or not), we are aware of it as an aspect of the literary work we deal with. Through the internal perspective on fictional content instead, as Lamarque and Olsen put it with reference to Kendall Walton, we find ourselves "'caught up' in fictional worlds" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 144). In the present context, we can say that we find ourselves "caught up" in what is represented in literature (fictional or not). Our external awareness of the literary work's content only figures in the background, then, while it is not completely silenced either. Our relation to literary works is shaped by this possibility to shift our focus: we can deal with them "from without" or "from within."

To deal with a literary work "from within" means to actualize it as a mediating entity: as an entity that has the purpose to direct our attention to something else and at the same time determines (schematically, to be sure) the way we are directed at that something (its "mode of presentation," to put it in the Fregean terminology employed by Lamarque and Olsen). As such, the literary work determines potential intentional objects, whereas the latter have to be understood in a sense that does not abstract from their being part of an intentional act: the literary work determines potential "objects-as-intended" (or "noema," to use the terminology of Ingarden's teacher Edmund Husserl). We can actualize them by intending them, thus through concrete intentional acts. If we abstract from this experiential dimension (these objects' being intended) and focus on the linguistic dimension, we can refer to them as "intensional objects" whose characteristics are dependent on the way they are described (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 43).

The reason we are in a position to actualize the complex of potential intentional objects determined by the literary work is because it inheres a fixed linguistic object, such as a complex of sentences printed in a book, which renders it intersubjectively accessible (Ingarden 1961: 290; 1997: 200). The printed text figures as a "regulatory signal," as Ingarden would put it, for our encounter with the literary work (Ingarden 1969: 3; 1972: 393). The actualization of the individual characters and

states of affairs of the literary work depends both on the fixed linguistic object and on our imaginative capabilities. In this sense, they are co-created by our imaginative acts. By contrast to other creations of imaginative acts (such as the pink elephant I just happen to imagine, for example), they do not appear to us as the sole creation of our concrete imaginative acts, though. They are, in a sense, "already there," and present themselves to us through the fixed linguistic object we comprehend. They appear as something others have access to as well through their own, concrete imaginative acts (their own "concretizations" of the literary work, as Ingarden would put it).

Bringing to mind "what a literary work is about" typically happens through *reading*: through comprehending the linguistic object it consists of (such as a complex of sentences) in virtue of finding it spatiotemporally manifested in printed characters on paper, for example. But it might also happen through *hearing a recital* of it: through comprehending the linguistic object in virtue of finding it spatiotemporally manifested in speech.

In our engagement with a literary work, we are implicitly aware that the fixed linguistic object in question is intended to serve the actualization of potential intentional objects: the literary work appears to us as an invitation to bring to mind individual characters, states of affairs, etc. in the way it determines.[2] This relates to what Lamarque and Olsen call, with reference to H. P. Grice's theory of meaning, a "Gricean intention," which is characterized by its being rational instead of only causal (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 45, 359): In the present context, we can say that the intention inhering the literary work, namely to make us bring to mind individual characters and the like, is rational, because its recognition gives us reason to do so, and makes us do so *for that reason*.

To be sure, the individual characters, states of affairs, and happenings we bring to mind might appear to us as existing only within the world of the literary work, and not independently of it. We then refer to them as fictional. Their "nature and very existence are dependent logically on the descriptions in some originating fictive utterance" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 88). On the other hand, we might take the individual characters, states of affairs, and happenings we bring to mind as actually existing or having existed in the past independently of the literary work. We then refer to them as real persons, states of affairs, and happenings, but within the process of engaging with the literary work we are nevertheless directed at them in the way determined by the work. We refer to them "*under certain aspects*," as Lamarque and Olsen put it (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 81).

[2] In this regard, Ingarden distinguishes between "free" creative acts, whose intentional objects come into being and cease to exist together with them, and creative acts who tend to "preserve" their intentional objects in an intersubjectively accessible ontic foundation (Ingarden 1965: 204–205).

To illustrate our engagement with a literary work, let us consider a single passage from Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. In the book, the psychotherapist Blaise Gavender discloses in a letter to his wife Harriet that he has a long-lasting affair and a son with a woman called Emily McHugh. The following passage describes Harriet's view of the situation after she has read his letter and learned about his affair:

> *He* was what mattered, and in this mattering she could almost forget about Emily McHugh. It was **as if Blaise had suffered some disaster**, had been maimed or disfigured or subjected to some awful menace, and **only Harriet's thoughts, only her unremitting attention, could save him**. She thought of him blankly and with absolute love and suffered her prisoner's pain hardly knowing what it was. (Murdoch 1976: 146 , all emphases in bold are mine)

In a genuine encounter with the literary work, we actualize it as a mediating entity: we bring to mind "what the work is about." In this case, we bring to mind Harriet's view of the situation, which is schematically determined by the fixed linguistic object (the complex of sentences) we comprehend. To Harriet, it is primarily Blaise who matters, which is why "she could almost forget about Emily McHugh." The situation appears to Harriet "as if Blaise had suffered some disaster." Instead of thinking of Blaise as someone who deceived her and caused her suffering, Harriet primarily thinks of him as someone who was struck by fate, and she thinks of him "with absolute love."

Insofar as we actualize the literary work as a mediating entity, the complex of sentences determines what we are directed at and how we are directed at it. To begin with, we here bring to mind Harriet's individual view of the situation, and we bring it to mind *as benevolent*. But additionally, we are told that Harriet thinks of Blaise as someone "only her unremitting attention could save." He not only appears to her as someone who is in need of salvation—but as someone whom her thoughts alone can save. These moments in the text allow us to bring to mind Harriet's view not only as benevolent but as somehow *self-aggrandizing* at the same time. In our engagement with a literary work, we follow the invitation to grasp, as Lamarque and Olsen put it, "the sense of the sentences uttered; [and construct] an imaginative supplementation of that sense" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 77). The literary work determines what we are directed at through our imaginative act (a particular viewpoint, for example) and how we are directed at it (as being concerned with Blaise; as benevolent and self-aggrandizing at the same time).

Above, I mentioned in passing that the complex of sentences through which we bring to mind the intentional objects of the literary work—Harriet's view, in this case—determines what we are directed at and how we are directed at it only *schematically*. This assumption is reminiscent of Ingarden's analysis of the literary work of art as a schema whose "stratum of represented objects," as he calls it, involves both determinate aspects as well as spots of indeterminacy (Ingarden

1972: §38). It also fits nicely with something at the heart of Lamarque and Olsen's analysis, who speak of the "incompleteness" of fictional characters (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 146).

Again, our exemplary passage from *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* can help to illustrate this feature of literature. The passage involves several determinate aspects of Harriet's view of the situation, among them the ones already mentioned: the complex of sentences determines that it is primarily Blaise who matters, and that Emily McHugh is almost forgotten. In Harriet's view, the situation appears "as if Blaise had suffered some disaster." Blaise is thought of "with absolute love" and as someone only Harriet's own "unremitting attention could save." In a genuine engagement with a literary work, we are asked to take into account such determinate aspects in order to successfully bring to mind what the work invites us to direct our attention to. But any literary work involves indeterminacies, too. What remains indeterminate in the exemplary passage, for example, is *how* Harriet thinks of Emily McHugh. The complex of sentences determines that Harriet "could almost forget about Emily McHugh"—that Emily hardly appears in her view of the situation at all, since Harriet focuses on Blaise. But it remains indeterminate whether, insofar as Harriet *is*—at least implicitly—aware of Emily as Blaise's long-lasting affair, she is aware of her as a vague threat, a victim, a sinner, or an enemy, for example.

In bringing to mind Harriet's view of the situation, we can "fill" this spot of indeterminacy in accordance with the text's determinacies. Taking into account the characteristics of Harriet's character, situation, and worldview we got to know so far, it might be reasonable to consider Harriet to be implicitly aware of Emily as a vague threat. By contrast, it might be unreasonable, according to the work's determinate aspects, to consider Harriet to be aware of Emily as another victim, for example. But to be sure, there is a scope of variability within which we can fill in indeterminacies, thus there might be more than one legitimate fill-in for an indeterminate aspect. While I might consider Harriet to be implicitly aware of Emily as a vague threat, my friend might consider her to be implicitly aware of Emily as a sinner, without us having reason to deny the legitimacy of the other one's actualization of Harriet's view.

An actualization of a work's intentional objects is legitimate only insofar as it takes into account the determinate aspects of the literary work as manifested in the fixed linguistic object.[3] By genuinely engaging with the literary work, we actualize some potential aspects that are not determined by the work but only potentially present, given what *is* determined. We have to actualize those aspects "licensed by the narrative," to use Lamarque and Olsen's phrase (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 81).

[3] This is reminiscent of Ingarden's conditions of legitimacy of the aesthetic object, see Ingarden (1969: 22–24).

Furthermore, insofar as the fixed linguistic object we encounter is a literary work, and not a text of another sort (such as, for example, a user manual, a memo, or a shopping list), we reasonably expect to find qualities of a certain sort in the course of our engagement with it. A literary work is intended (by its author) and reasonably expected (by its readers) to possess aesthetically valuable qualities, in other words, to possess qualities that intrinsically attract or fascinate us as they figure within our engagement with something else (a fixed linguistic object, in this case).

I will not attempt to give a conclusive characterization of the aesthetic here. But since the aesthetic nature of literature can be questioned (see, e.g., Peter Kivy's (2011) prominent characterization of narrative literature as non-aesthetic) a short clarification is in order. Reflection on our encounters with literary works shows, I believe, that insofar as something presents itself to us as literature (and not as a user manual, a memo, or a shopping list, for example) it provides us with what is often referred to as "aesthetic pleasure." I will say more about the affective nature of our encounters with literary works shortly. Right now it suffices to stress that the focal point of aesthetic pleasure is not logically limited to certain kinds of qualities but can encompass sonic, formal, and emotional characteristics of a text just as well as intellectual and moral characteristics of the characters and states of affairs it invites us to direct our attention to.

Whether literature is as aesthetic as other art forms or not is nothing to be decided in abstraction from how we experience a text as a literary work. Like a certain word sound, an emotional upheaval, or a narrative structure can in principle attract or fascinate us in its own right, so can a fictional character's wittiness or ambiguity. Insofar as its word sounds might not be the focal point of the aesthetic pleasure a prose text provides, it can be considered *less sensuous* in character than, say, a piece of absolute music. But this alone, I argue, does not render literature a *less aesthetic* art form.

A text such as a user manual, by contrast, is not as such supposed to possess qualities that intrinsically attract or fascinate us. Instead, it is supposed to instruct us to perform a certain sequence of actions. Of course, we might find aesthetically valuable qualities in a user manual too, but that we do so is nothing we reasonably expect from our engagement with it, whereas it is something we reasonably expect from our engagement with a literary work. "The literary stance," according to Lamarque and Olsen, "is defined by the expectation of […] a certain type of value, i.e. literary aesthetic value, in the text in question" (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 256).

In contrast to Lamarque and Olsen, phenomenological analysis takes into account the experiential dimension of finding aesthetic value in a literary work, namely its predominantly affective nature. In this vein, I suggest that our engagement with a literary work differs from

our engagement with a user manual in that the latter is not supposed to please or fascinate us in any way but only to successfully instruct us. Our engagement with a literary work, instead, is supposed to be pleasing or fascinating, in other words: affectively engaging. In this regard, Ingarden speaks of the "preliminary emotion" (Ursprungsemotion) that "opens the proper process of aesthetic experience," (Ingarden 1961: 296) starting with our being struck by an object's quality and eventually culminating in an emotional response to the whole work's aesthetic value (Ingarden 1961, 1997: §24).

The emotional response Ingarden is talking about is not a contingent feature of properly engaging with a literary work—it is essential to it. In this sense, to take "an affective attitude" is not, as Lamarque and Olsen (2002: 103–105) introduce it, merely to be considered an effect the thought of what the literary work directs our attention to might or might not have on us (just like the thought of Harriet's view might cause a feeling of fascination in us). As a phenomenologist, Ingarden is not concerned with *contingent* connections between thoughts and feelings while reading. Instead, he considers emotion a *necessary* mental activity in order for a text to present itself within experience as a literary work. In this sense, being attracted or fascinated by the text's and eventually its intentional objects' characteristics (by how Harriet's view is like, for example), is crucial to properly engage with the text as a literary work.

Only through our affective engagement with the literary work's characteristics can we discover its aesthetically valuable qualities. We can find those, most basically, in the complex of word sounds grounding the linguistic object (we might feel, for example, the solemnity of a text's melody or the vitality of its rhythm). But aesthetic value is not only to be found within a work's sound. Furthermore, we might find aesthetically valuable qualities in the combination and choice of words (such as the clarity or passion of a certain expression). Or we might find aesthetically valuable qualities in one or more of the individual intentional objects we actualize through the work (such as the wittiness of an action, or the ambiguity of a fictional character's view).

We reasonably expect the literary work to direct our attention to something else in an aesthetically valuable way—through a combination of sounds and words, or through individual intentional objects whose characteristics intrinsically attract or fascinate us.

3. *What the literary work discloses insofar it is a work of art*

Insofar as the literary work we encounter is a work of art, bringing to mind the intentional objects it schematically determines in an aesthetically valuable way is not yet the end of the story. There are numerous kinds of works that both successfully invite us to bring to mind a

complex of intentional objects and that do so through a combination of sounds, words and individual intentional objects that possess aesthetically valuable qualities, but which are not thereby works of art: just think of well written memoirs, philosophy essays, or history books. A literary work of art is intended (by its author) and reasonably expected (by its readers) not only to disclose a complex of individual intentional objects in an aesthetically valuable way but to disclose something more profound (a "humanly interesting content," as Lamarque and Olsen would put it) *in virtue* of the former.

In our encounter with a literary work of art, I argue, various aesthetically valuable qualities together form a new polyphonic qualitative character—a specific kind of value.[4] This qualitative character (the tragedy, bliss or ambiguity we find in a work, for example) inheres not only certain parts of the literary work (such as its sound, its choice of words or individual intentional objects) but the work as a whole. It inheres, to use Ingarden's terminology, all of the work's strata.[5] It encompasses the intrinsically attractive or fascinating characteristics of the melodies and rhythms, of the words, and of the intentional objects we are confronted with. Furthermore, the qualitative character we eventually disclose is of a more profound attraction or fascination than singular aesthetically valuable qualities. It presents itself to us as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes not merely an individual complex of sounds, words, or intentional objects, but something of general concern—something typical.[6]

In a genuine encounter with a literary work of art, I argue, our focus shifts from the individual to the typical: it shifts from the individual sounds, words, and intentional objects to the specific kind of thing manifested in the former and directly presenting itself to us through the qualitative character (the specific kind of value) disclosed. This means that the specific kind of thing and the specific kind of value we find appear to us as necessarily correlated. The value we find does not only figure as an intrinsically attractive or fascinating way to

[4] Ingarden compares this formation of various qualities into a new qualitative whole with how several tones form a single chord (Ingarden 1961: 305–307; 1969: 6; 1997: 231–234).

[5] In *The Literary Work of Art* Ingarden elaborates thoroughly on the multiple strata of the literary work of art. He distinguishes between the strata of word sounds, meaning units, represented objects, and schematized aspects. While my elaborations in the preceding part of the paper touched upon what it means to find aesthetic value in the former three, the formation of a new polyphonic qualitative character just introduced eventually amounts, in my view, to find aesthetic value in the latter, namely to emotionally respond to how the literary work represents its intentional objects (to the characteristics of a work's "schematized aspects," to use Ingarden's term). This means to cherish the literary work of art "at work" as a mediating entity.

[6] The view that art discloses something beyond the individual has its roots already in Aristotle's view on poetry: He contrasts poetry, which he considers to strive for the universal, to history, which he takes to deal with particular events instead (*Poet.*1451a38–1451b10).

disclose a complex of individual intentional objects but as an intuitive way for something typical, namely a specific kind of thing, to appear. Works of art, in this sense, enable an insight into what Ingarden calls "qualitative essences," into how specific kinds of things essentially are (Ingarden 1961: 299). They allow us to affectively grasp a qualitative character of general relevance, in other words, the value essentials of a specific kind of thing potentially experienced or engaged in the world or a kind of thing we as human beings are otherwise deeply concerned with—they allow us to disclose a "theme," to use a term central to Lamarque and Olsen's analysis of literature.

In contrast to Lamarque and Olsen, phenomenological analysis takes into account the predominantly affective nature of our identification of a work's theme. Instead of merely allowing us to intellectually recognize it, we reasonably expect the literary work of art to enable us to "feel" what it is about, to eventually experience a particular qualitative character as the value essentials of a specific kind of thing. This predominantly affective process necessarily *involves* but is irreducible to intellectual and imaginative activities on our part, namely comprehending a fixed linguistic object and bringing to mind the intentional objects inhering it.

To be sure, there is no other way for us to disclose the value essentials of a specific kind of thing than through a concretization thereof. We can only gain insight into a value or a kind of thing *in concreto*, either through an actual manifestation of it in the here and now or through a "purely intentional" (or imaginative) manifestation of it, as in the case of literature. In this regard, Íngrid Vendrell Ferran (2023) argues that literature can provide an "imaginative acquaintance" with values—a kind of non-inferential knowledge "in which we do not directly experience a thing but rather experientially imagine it" (Vendrell Ferran 2023: 379). To be sure, what is experientially imagined through literature are individual (dis)valuable objects (such as Harriet's ambiguous perspective on Blaise). Regarding values as such, which we find manifested in the former, I would go further than Vendrell Ferran and claim: Imagining an individual object can, insofar as we are affectively responsive to its characteristics, provide *direct* (instead of only imaginative) acquaintance with the value inhering it—not *in abstracto*, to be sure, but in its concretization as a qualitative character (as a particular "value nuance" or in a new "value constellation," as Vendrell Ferran might put it). Even though imagining an individual object can only yield imaginative acquaintance with that object, it is nevertheless apt to yield direct acquaintance with the specific kind of value inhering it (such as the specific kind of benevolence, or the specific constellation in which benevolence is linked to self-aggrandizement). It can yield such direct acquaintance insofar as we emotionally respond to the imagined object's characteristics. In my view, there applies here what Ingarden says about metaphysical qualities being revealed in the literary work

of art: they appear as qualitatively fully determined as they would appear if they were actually realized. In this regard, they do not differ from their manifestations in real situations (Ingarden 1972: 314). The specific kind of value and the specific kind of thing we eventually disclose through a literary work of art are not *realized* in it, but they are nevertheless *fully concretized* through our actualization of the literary work of art as a mediating entity.

To illustrate these claims about literature, let us consider again Iris Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*.[7] To make us see Harriet's view in an aesthetically valuable manner alone is not what makes Iris Murdoch's work appear to us as a work of art. As a work of art, the novel is intended and reasonably expected to disclose something more profound in virtue of the former. It is intended and expected to disclose a qualitative character of general relevance, in other words, a specific kind of value that characterizes a specific kind of thing potentially experienced or engaged in in the world or a kind of thing we as human beings are otherwise deeply concerned with. The sound of the words in which we get to know Harriet's view, the words used to describe her view, and the way she views and thinks of Blaise together determine the qualitative character we eventually disclose: this particular affiliation of benevolence and self-aggrandizement, this particular qualitative ambiguity. What we disclose, to be sure, is the ambiguity not only of Harriet's individual view, but the ambiguity of a specific kind of personal commitment to someone else, which we find manifested in Harriet's individual view. This particular affiliation of benevolence and self-aggrandizement presents itself as of general relevance insofar as it characterizes a specific kind of thing we as human beings can potentially engage in. The novel enables us to disclose the value essentials of a specific kind of personal commitment to someone else that human beings are capable of. It enables us to take note of it by allowing us to feel what it essentially is like.

Obviously, this particular insight into value essentials is not to be identified with a propositional truth that could be translated or issued in another manner. There is an irreconcilable difference between a judgment like

> The benevolence of a specific kind of personal commitment to someone else, through which we view the other as most important and, at the same time, as suffering and dependent on our attention for their salvation, comes along with a specific kind of self-aggrandizement

and the intuitive grasp of the specific ambiguity that characterizes the specific kind of commitment in question. Ingarden, too, stresses that

[7] I am aware, of course, that my selective treatment of the novel, which uses one tiny part as a representative of the whole, does not do justice to the work as a whole. What the novel potentially discloses to us cannot be captured by taking into account only one of its passages. Still, I think that the extract referred to can help to illustrate the essential structures at work in the kind of disclosure we reasonably expect from a work of art.

the insight gained through a literary work of art cannot be captured in purely conceptual terms (Ingarden 1972: 325). Even though we might come to reach a true judgment about the value of personal commitment (about how a specific kind of personal commitment is like) thanks to our encounter with Iris Murdoch's novel, enabling a true judgment is not the main purpose, and not the main benefit, of the novel as a literary work of art. To gain a propositional truth plays no essential role for our engagement with a literary work of art. The knowledge we reasonably seek to find through literary works of art (and works of art in general, to be sure) is non-discursive. This is why the "truths" disclosed by different works of art cannot contradict each other, be confirmed or refuted, or form a body of knowledge like the statements of science, history, and theology. That they cannot do so presents no good reason to think, as Stolnitz (2019: 292–293) does, that art is cognitively trivial. Instead, this fact only illuminates the specific nature of their cognitive benefit, which can be compared to the one gained by the color scientist Mary in Frank Jackson's (1982) famous thought experiment: the cognitive benefit of experiencing something—colors, in Mary's case, value essentials in the case of art—"in the flesh." Along these lines, it can be argued that there are truths peculiar to art, even though art naturally deals, as Stolnitz (2019: 293) highlights in his argument against such truths, with all kinds of extra-artistic fields of interest that are already (or to-be) examined through the scientific research of specialists. A literary work of art like Murdoch's *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* can yield a truth about a specific kind of personal commitment that, say, psychological research cannot and is not supposed to yield. The peculiarity of "artistic truths" does not lie in their concern for things only art could be concerned with or that art could examine best. Instead, it lies in their peculiar non-discursive, *aesthetic* nature, which renders them disclosable in processes dominated by *feeling* instead of the intellect. Art illuminates the world in a manner that history, science, and research do not, namely through yielding direct acquaintance with value essentials. The literary work of art enables, as Ingarden puts it, "*an intuitive intercourse with qualitative essences*" (Ingarden 1961: 299). Such an "intuitive intercourse" is a non-discursive kind of knowledge, an experience of truth that Husserl calls "Evidenz" in his famous *Logical Investigations*. Truth, in this sense, is understood as the self-givenness of something in experience, a direct acquaintance with something, and only derivatively as the relation of correspondence between a statement and reality.

In this vein, I object to Lamarque and Olsen's famous "no truth" view of literary fiction, according to which the truth yielded by a literary work of art plays no central role in its appreciation. To be sure, my opposition rather concerns their notion of truth, which they take into account solely as a property of propositional content (Lamarque and Olsen 2002: 8). If we apply a broader understanding of truth and take it

into account as a property of experience, namely as the direct acquaintance with something "in the flesh," the truth inhering literary works of art (the direct acquaintance with a qualitative character of general relevance) indeed constitutes our genuine appreciation for them.

This is not to say, however, that we necessarily learn from a literary work of art or that it inevitably changes us for the better. Literature might lead to misunderstandings and cognitive deficits. These misunderstandings can both concern facts (I might come to think, after reading Murdoch's novel, that all married women consider their husbands dependent) or kinds of things (I might come to think that personal commitments to other people are necessarily dishonest). Accordingly, literature might have bad practical effects on our behavior or our empathetic skills. Indeed, I agree with Gregory Currie (2020) that whether fiction (and non-fiction, for that matter) induces learning processes, confers discursive or practical forms of knowledge, or trains empathetic and emotional skills is a contingent matter.

However, the fact that our encounters with literary works of art might cause us to believe something false or might change us for the worse is compatible with the claim that our encounters with literary works of art provide the specific kind of cognitive benefit described above. Whilst learning from literature is a contingent matter, the direct acquaintance with a qualitative character of general relevance is part of what it means to encounter a literary work of art. The claim that we learn from literary works of art has to be differentiated from the claim put forth in this essay: insofar as we experience a text as a literary work of art (and not merely categorize it as such), we eventually experience the self-givenness of a qualitative character of general relevance, and thus a specific kind of truth.[8] Literary works of art might at times corrupt our beliefs about where and when such a qualitative character is actually realized. But the possibility of a certain cognitive disadvantage does not undermine the peculiar cognitive benefit a literary work possesses as a work of art.

4. *Roundup and conclusion*

In the preceding analysis, I distinguished two possible ways to deal with a literary work: The first way to deal with it is to refer to the literary work as a bearer of properties—as an entity in the world we can characterize and evaluate. The second way to deal with a literary work is to engage with it as a mediating entity in virtue of reading or otherwise comprehending the fixed linguistic object it consists of.

[8] The two claims can also be differentiated regarding the possible evidence for them. The claim that we learn from literary works of art can only be (dis-)proven by facts. The claim that insofar as we experience a text as a literary work of art we find a qualitative character of general relevance emerging through it can only be (dis-)proven by the logic inhering the facts (the facts, in this case, being our encounters with literary works of art).

To engage with a literary work in this second way means to bring to mind the complex of individual characters, states of affairs and happenings it invites us to direct our attention to. Thereby, we actualize the potential intentional objects inhering the fixed linguistic object by taking into account the work's determinate aspects as manifested in the fixed linguistic object and, at the same time, filling in some of its indeterminacies in accordance with its determinate aspects. In the course of this engagement, we can—if we are affectively responsive to them—disclose the literary work's aesthetic qualities, meaning qualities that are intrinsically attractive or fascinating.

I then argued that insofar as a literary work is a work of art, we are invited to do something beyond that even: we are not only asked to bring to mind the intentional objects in the aesthetically valuable way determined by the work, but also to attune ourselves to disclose something more profound in virtue of the former. In a genuine encounter with a literary work of art, the various aesthetically valuable qualities together form a new polyphonic qualitative character (a specific kind of value) through which something of general concern presents itself to us. Insofar as we experience a literary work as a work of art, our focus shifts from the individual to the typical: it shifts from the individual sounds, words, and intentional objects to the specific kind of thing manifested in the former, and presenting itself to us through the specific kind of value disclosed in our affective engagement with the work's characteristics. I conclude, therefore, that to encounter a literary work of art means to successfully follow the invitation to disclose a qualitative character of general relevance—the value essentials of a specific kind of thing, in other words—in virtue of comprehending a fixed linguistic object, typically through reading, and affectively responding to its characteristics. Such an encounter eventually culminates in a direct acquaintance with something, in other words: in truth.[9]

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