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The New Propositionalism

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It is not uncommon to find philosophers of literature pay at least lip-service to literary humanism. Much of our work in one way or another presupposes its truth, and this is perhaps what distinguishes our approach and sensibility most vividly from the work of our peers in literary studies, where humanism is considered something of a bad word.¹ Yet as much as the designation is used freely in our books and journals, there are few explicit attempts to define and defend it. The most widely-read attempt is Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen's *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (1994), and while contemporary philosophy of literature has made a minor industry of scrutinizing its various claims, it is striking how few have paid notice to its defence of literary humanism itself, which is the very thing that organizes the claims of that book into a theory of literature. But perhaps the best piece of evidence that the issue of literary humanism has yet to achieve status as a proper philosophical debate is that it has not a single dissenter or critic in the library of philosophy, at least not in the broadly analytic approach to literature with which we are concerned here (in literary studies the number nears astronomical). A position cannot be in good health if no one bothers to take issue with it. Literary humanism, once rightly understood, is hardly unexceptionable, and any defence of it requires one to make a number of claims that are bound to divide philosophers. Our goal in this essay is to sketch out the terms of a current conflict between two competing theories of literary humanism, with either of which one can take issue, and our hope is to make the matter appear important enough for others to be prompted to do so. Central to our discussion will be a

¹ Harrison (1991; 2015) has argued that humanism, properly understood, is in fact compatible with the theoretical commitments of much contemporary literary theory, and Gibson (2007) has shown that the senses of the term given in philosophical and literary debates are sufficiently unlike to drain the issue of any controversy.

critique of a recent attempt to correct what we have just lamented. It is Richard Gaskin's 2013 *Language, Truth, and Literature: A Defence of Humanism* (LTL henceforth).

1. Humanists, Propositionalists, and Wittgensteinians

Before beginning, we need to clarify what a "theory of literary humanism" is supposed to be a theory *of*. It is difficult to find accounts of literary humanism that are not already contaminated to some degree by the terms of some special theory erected with a view either to defending or discrediting it. Discarding those does, however, leave us with at least the following broad claims:

1. Literature offers its readers insights into the *human* situation of a kind that could not be obtained by other means (as Lamarque and Olsen put it, "a central defining feature of the institution of literature" is that "literature should have something interesting to say about human life," 278). It is *literary* humanism because it claims that the institution of literature provides us with a distinctive manner of making sense of the world and our place in it.
2. Literary criticism is an intellectually serious pursuit, which has as one of its objects the elucidation of the above insights. In doing so, literary works make available to critics and readers *cognitively* significant meanings: meanings that make some feature of reality an object of understanding (where "reality" is used in the pre-theoretical sense of a common world presumed to be real: the world readers inhabit but King Lear and Captain Ahab do not.)
3. Literature's humanistic value partly consists in a particular experience it offers readers, an experience presumed to be of *others*: other minds, other subjects, other predicaments, other cultures, even other ages. Given appropriate kinds of openness and intelligence on the part of the reader, literature invests us in a wider world of experience, feeling, thought, and value.

These three claims are not only contestable, but — at least in literature departments over the past half-century — variously and bitterly contested. All of them are at root different manners of ascribing *cognitive value* to literature: the capacity, in principle at least, to offer the reader something worth calling knowledge.²

²Humanists are divided on whether the concept of knowledge (and related notions, such as truth) will do the job of accurately capturing the highly distinctive manner in which literary

One common view among philosophers — we shall call it *propositionalism* — is that anything worth calling knowledge must be capable of being *stated*. The propositionalist's basic intuition is nicely captured in F. P. Ramsey's dismissive remark à propos of Wittgenstein's Tractarian claim that nonsense, despite "saying" nothing, could nevertheless "show" important things: "what we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either" (Ramsey 263, qtd. in Hacker 355). On this view, for any piece of knowledge there must exist some true proposition that exhaustively expresses its *content*. One way of thinking about the notion of propositional knowledge, at least as it has become relevant to literary aesthetics, is that it claims that the form of insight literature delivers arrives *already* discursively packaged. Note that the propositionalist is not committed to the mere claim that all knowledge can be *translated* into propositional form; it is the much stronger claim that when literature produces knowledge, it does so in virtue of *embodying* true propositions in a special way (about which more below).

Over against propositionalism we may set the view — call it, for convenience, *Wittgensteinianism* — that (i) there are kinds of knowledge that do not lend themselves to expression in propositional form *and* (ii) some such forms of knowledge are irreducibly *cultural* in nature. That knowledge is not always propositional in nature is hardly a radical claim; analytic philosophers have been arguing this at least since Russell proposed his theory of knowledge by acquaintance and Ryle his distinction between knowing *that* and knowing *how*. But the Wittgensteinian alternative we will advance interprets the notion of non-propositional knowledge in a particular way. For a Wittgensteinian, such forms of non-propositional knowledge are neither metaphysical nor "theoretical" in nature but consist rather in grasping the link between concepts, words, meanings — the items that convey what we take to be true of the world — and the cultural practices which give them a role to play in human life, indeed which give them content and a point. For the propositionalist, literature informs by directing the mind toward an abstract entity: a proposition. For the Wittgensteinian, it does so by presenting the mind with something fundamentally concrete and earthbound: forms of human experience and linguistic activity. The contrast will become much clearer

works traffic in insight. Nonetheless, a concern with whether literary works offer knowledge certainly animates debates on humanism, and it shall be our focus here. See Graham (1995), Carroll (1998), and Gibson (2007) for cognitivist defences of humanism which do not rely on a notion of knowledge.

as we proceed, but this is perhaps enough, by way of preliminaries, to establish propositionalism and Wittgensteinianism as discussable alternative positions.

But why should a humanist be concerned especially with Gaskin's *LTL*, as we shall be? Gaskin's book has two considerable virtues. The first is that it gets nearly perfectly the very general philosophical issues that are implicated in a defence of literary humanism, from an account of how language — in literature and generally — engages with reality, to the issues of realism, idealism, and the like that particular defences of humanism inevitably invite. The book's second virtue arises from the trenchantly propositionalist position it defends. Indeed, *LTL* is the *only* defence of literary humanism in the analytic tradition that argues for a propositionalist account of literature's cognitive value. As mentioned above, there are surprisingly few works in analytic aesthetics explicitly devoted to a defence of literary humanism. The contemporary debate begins in 1991 with Bernard Harrison's *Inconvenient Fictions* (1991), followed by Lamarque and Olsen's *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (1994), John Gibson's *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (2007), in 2013 Gaskin's *LTL*, and finally, in 2015, Bernard Harrison's *What Is Fiction For: Literary Humanism Restored*. Of these five books, four take approaches that can be broadly characterised as Wittgensteinian in character. They reject, from one standpoint or another, and for a variety of reasons, the idea that whatever is, or might be, of cognitive value in a work of literature could be exhaustively expressed in some finite set of propositions. The novelty of *LTL* in this context lies in its bold statement of a position that has very few takers.

Gaskin's book does an excellent job of revealing exactly what we must commit ourselves to if we are to be fully serious about enlisting the notion of a proposition to explain how literary works can bear meaning, come to represent features of reality, or yield non-trivial forms of knowledge. Our contention will be that these commitments are not worth making, and we will argue that propositions fail to provide the right currency for explaining any of this. A fault line will appear that distinguishes two basic ways of defending literary humanism, one propositionalist, one broadly Wittgensteinian. It is here that a conflict between two visions of literary humanism, either of which one might embrace or reject, will begin to appear.

2. Gaskin's "Linguistic Idealism"

An unusual and striking feature of Gaskin's work is its determination, with which the present authors largely sympathize, to relocate the problems of literary aesthetics on the philosophical map by placing them in the context of "high" analytic philosophy of language and logic, as it has developed since Frege and Russell. The function of the book is to advance in the idiom of that tradition a "metaphysical position concerning the relationship between language and the world" (ix). Gaskin is a metaphysician of the old school: a metaphysical *system builder*. "The present study," he tells us, "takes its place alongside my earlier books *Experience and the World's Own Language* and *The Unity of the Proposition*, in which I began on a defence of linguistic idealism, and is offered as a further (but still partial) adumbration of my favoured theory of the relation between language and the world" (ix). Systematic metaphysics works, classically, by offering us an account of the relationship between nature and the human mind of so general a character that the nature and scope of all subordinate modes of knowledge can be seen to follow necessarily from it. Appropriately enough, in just this way *LT* sets out to explain the nature of the insights to be derived from literature, not from an empirical examination of literature itself, nor for that matter of readerly experience, but by deduction from metaphysical first principles. Gaskin notes: "I conceive this book as being in the main a philosophical treatise. . . . The literary agenda is subordinate to the philosophical" (ix).

The path trodden by the early Russell and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* was of course equally "metaphysical" in this sense. Like these figures, Gaskin thinks that "the world is propositionally structured" (284), and this will turn out to be central to his defence of literary humanism. In an apparently Russellian vein, Gaskin claims that "the world . . . is an abstract entity composed of true and false propositions, which are themselves composed of concrete and abstract objects (including propositions, relations, and functions)" (18). But in Russell such claims have a staunchly Realist flavour. In Gaskin, on the contrary, they compose a version of Idealism. Gaskin's Idealism is, as he puts it, "linguistic, not mentalistic" (140). Its central claim is not that we lack access to a mind-independent world, but rather that we lack access to a language-independent one. "Language yields our *only* access to reality; or rather — since the figure of access cannot but surreptitiously imply, falsely, that there might be *other* modes of access to reality — we should say with the lin-

guistic idealist that the world is essentially *contained in*, or *precipitated by*, language" (285).

Gaskin does not attempt to offer in *LTL* a conclusive argument for linguistic idealism so construed. What he offers — and it is surely enough to permit serious discussion — is essentially a sketch of the main tenets of the position which locate it within a spectrum of views about the nature of language and world, together with an extended analysis of the implications of those tenets for literary aesthetics. Central to the resulting position is the claim that nothing is "beyond language's reach" (7) or, to put it another way, that "the world is essentially expressible in language" (14). This sets him volubly at odds with anybody guilty of repudiating the idea of "the world's own language," anyone, that is to say, including the present authors, who believes that there is a world exterior to language, to which we have language-independent access and which language exists to process partially into terms capable of being manipulated by the human mind.

It also sets him at odds with Frege, from whom he claims so much inspiration. And this is no light matter, since for its relevance to literary aesthetics Gaskin's view extensively depends on Frege's philosophy of language. Gaskin takes as read Frege's division of the notion of meaning between several "constitutive aspects, of which the most important are sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*)" (3). Frege introduces these terms in "On Sense and Reference." There he takes the reference (*Bedeutung*) of a sign to be, in the case of a name, "an object perceivable by the senses" (1966: 59) and in the case of a proposition, a truth-value; but he makes a sharp distinction between the "idea" we have of that object, which is a mental state, and in consequence may vary, and the sense (*Sinn*) of a sign, which is not "a part or mode of the individual mind" (59) but is the same for all speakers of the language. The sense of a sign is "the mode of presentation" of its reference (57). To grasp the sense of a sign is, in other words, to be directed to, or presented with, its reference. It has thus seemed evident to most readers, from these definitions, that Frege's position is fundamentally Realist, and in a way that would be rather remote from Gaskin's "linguistic idealism." The referents of signs, being "objects of sensation," are elements of a world external to language but given to us, nevertheless, in sensation. What belongs to *language*, so far as meaning is concerned, is sense (*Sinn*), and it is hence at the level of *Sinn*, and not, *pace* Gaskin, in the world itself, that, for Frege, propositional structures exist.

Gaskin's objection to Frege is that to locate propositional structures only at the level of sense is to allow oneself no way of explaining what relates the referents of names (objects) to those of predicates (concepts) *at the level of reality itself*. "[The] cost of locating propositional structures exclusively at the level of sense, as Frege did, is that the objects and concepts that he (correctly) conceived to inhabit the level of reference fall apart from one another as isolated things-in-themselves and concepts-in-themselves" (7). Gaskin's proposed solution to this problem is to relocate propositional structure at the level of Fregean reference — at the level of the world as we experience it. "Against Frege and McDowell, we should insist that the world is essentially propositionally structured, and is essentially the referent of language" (7). It is this move that will prove crucial for the application of Gaskin's linguistic idealism to questions of literary aesthetics.

Certain reviewers of *LTL* have lamented its linguistic idealism but remarked that its defence of literary humanism is separable from it (see Goldman 2014; McGregor 2016: 381–82). Perhaps, but it is not separable from the project of offering a metaphysics of the proposition, and one should ask whether Gaskin's "spooky idealist metaphysics" (Goldman) would be significantly less spooky if it were rendered realist, say by locating propositions in a mind-independent platonic realm? In other words, it is the metaphysics of the proposition, and not attendant issues of idealism or realism, that first runs up against our contemporary sensibilities, though this of course implies nothing about the soundness of Gaskin's theory. Here's the rub: when charged with this theoretical role, propositions must be given domicile somewhere, so the invocation of them for the cause of literary humanism most certainly does oblige one to do heady metaphysics. Gaskin is to be credited with showing us this, and philosophers of literature who causally invoke the notion of propositional knowledge would do well to keep his arguments in mind.

3. Linguistic Idealism and Literary Aesthetics

This sortie into the metaphysics of the proposition allows us to state fairly succinctly the central idea in Gaskin's theory of literary humanism. The idea is ingenious, though that is not to say correct. Consider Gaskin's claim that a literary work's

individual sentences do not, taken one by one, have the literary qualities or cognitive value of the text taken as a whole; it is perhaps less obvious,

but it is equally true, that when those sentences are put together to form a complete text and issued as a work in a particular historical and cultural context, distinctive literary qualities and distinctive cognitive value may emerge from the whole that do not attach to any of its parts. (*LTL* 71)

To see what is going on in this taut passage, consider how one might find in Frege's sense-reference distinction a new model for explaining the form-content relationship in literary works. If one accepts a sufficiently ample definition of "form" as ranging over relevant stylistic, narratological, and expressive devices, then it is not a leap to think of the form of a literary work as functioning, from the standpoint of meaning, as a Fregean mode of presentation: as describing how a literary work gives a unique *sense* to its content. And if one accepts a sufficiently narrow sense of "content" as ranging over, in the primary instance, forms of aboutness that *works* bear (such as thematic meaning), then it is not such a leap to think of a literary work *taken whole* as producing a meaning that is essentially expressible in propositional form, indeed that is in essence itself a kind of proposition. The form of a literary work is what crafts a particular and distinctive manner of expressing this proposition, thereby making its manner of articulating meaning properly literary in nature.

This is, in effect, Gaskin's idea. A literary work produces cognitively significant meaning by virtue of referring, at the level of work, to a discrete proposition whose sense is constituted by the work's manner of presenting it. Here it becomes clear why Gaskin's linguistic idealism is crucial to his defence of literary humanism. Since the propositions to which literary works refer effectively compose the fabric of our linguistically constructed reality, it follows that literary works, by virtue of referring to these propositions, by default refer to reality. If it is the case that the propositions that literary works at times refer to actually *compose* reality, then coming to understand a literary *work's* referent is to come to know something properly called a truth. Literary humanism, it appears, is vindicated.

Gaskin is happy to accept the consequence: this renders it difficult to distinguish the functions of literary language from those of philosophical or scientific language. "I. A. Richards thought that scientific language is referential, literary language emotive. This has been an influential view — it is essentially a legacy of Romanticism — but it is wrong. As we have seen, literary language is just as referential as scientific language: *all* language is referential" (290). It is essential in this respect to see that, for Gaskin, to say that language is "referential" does *not* mean that

language *refers beyond itself*, to something *non-linguistic*, to something, that is to say, *lacking linguistic properties*. The structure of the proposition is isomorphic with that of reality itself. Necessarily, then, *all* language, and not just scientific language or the productions of Coleridgean “fancy,” is occupied, conceptually speaking, with “fixities and definites” which it “receives ready made” from an already propositionally structured sensory experience. To put Gaskin’s point more simply, there can be no possibility of literature somehow showing us how to improve upon our present conceptual scheme — literature cannot generate *new* cognitively significant concepts at all — because, in order to demonstrate that the revised concepts offer a better match with nature, we would need to enjoy access to experience in a form not already conceptually ordered, and that, if Gaskin’s linguistic idealism is well-founded, is conceptually inconceivable.

It follows that there can be no cognitive function for literature other than the one it shares not merely with scientific language but with all language: the function, that is, of acquainting its readers with the truth of true propositions. There may well be, as we suggested earlier, non-propositional forms of cognition which permit a more liberal understanding of how literature relates to life. It is open to Gaskin in reply, however, to claim that those kinds of knowledge have nothing intrinsically to do with language, and hence can safely be left out of account when discussing literature.

4. Broad Objections

Obvious objections stand in the way of the idea that the job of imaginative literature is to state facts, or that the point of works is to express propositions, and much of Gaskin’s book is taken up with answering them. One of the most obvious is Plato’s: that the literary author neither possesses nor needs special knowledge, experience, or capacity, entitling him/her to *inform* his or her fellow men and women; because, unlike scientists, writers simply make their works up out of their own heads. Another is that, while fact-stating is clearly the business of the individual proposition, the defence of literary humanism requires that the work as a whole be shown to serve some cognitive function.

Gaskin’s strikingly weak answer to the first of these questions is best cited at length. It is that, when assessing the writer’s “credentials as a truth-teller” — in this case Mann in *Joseph and His Brothers* —

we do not need to look for the marks of a formal proof in Mann's text . . . before we allow ourselves to be impressed by his account of Mut-em-enet's frustrated passion. Mann does not *demonstrate*, in any formal sense, or *warrant*, by presenting evidence, the propositional content of his work . . . : these are not the kind of bases on which we believe what he asserts or advances, if we do believe it. Rather, we are inclined to accept his account of Mut-em-enet's love because, paradoxical as it initially sounds, the story nevertheless rings true, as we often put it. . . . The evidence for the truth of Mann's account might have been right under our noses, but we did not appreciate it until it was pointed out to us. (129–30)

It would be unkind to paraphrase this as “when reading literature we count as true what agrees with our preconceptions.” But it is hard to see how, in the absence of either demonstration or evidential warrant, Gaskin's answer to Plato's query could amount to more than that. And it is very easy to devise reductions of such a line of thought. For example, why should not someone impressed, say, by Veit Harlan's Nazi propaganda film *Jud Süß*, or the 1827 Wilhelm Hauff novel on which it was based, argue along similar lines that what those works have to tell us about the urgency of the Jewish Threat is true, because it “rings true,” or because the “evidence” for its truth had always been “under his nose” but had passed unnoticed until the film or the book awoke him to its presence? It is commonplace, after all, for those impressed by any piece of third-rate kitsch art to endeavour in terms such as these to pass off credulity as insight. To put the point generally, in the grand scheme of all things evidentiary and epistemic, “ringing true” is amongst the most impoverished criteria we have. As designating the grounds of cognitive acceptance, it cannot distinguish between how “the truth” rings in the ears of the wise and the blockheaded, at least not without introducing a *further* criterion, and at this point we suggest that one should abandon the notion altogether.

Our second objection is that saving humanism requires something of cognitive significance to be taking place at the level of the work as a whole. Gaskin's propositionalism obliges him to treat the literary work-as-a-whole as a kind of proposition, the content of which can usefully be expressed as a paraphrase. The usual objection to this idea is a variation on the form Cleanth Brooks initially gave it in *The Well Wrought Urn*, in the famous discussion of the heresy of paraphrase: “A true poem is a simulacrum of reality . . . an experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience” (173). The thought implied here is that the “experience” of reading a work of litera-

ture is tied indissolubly to the words of the text. A paraphrase, consisting as it does of different, and far fewer, words than the text, cannot communicate that experience, and so cannot communicate, either, any cognitive gain — of whatever nature — that the latter may offer to the reader.³

Gaskin has, in effect, two answers to this objection: one empirical and literary-critical, and one metaphysical and *a priori*. The first occupies large parts of the book and consists in an attempt to show, through extended critical discussion of literary works, that Brooks was mistaken and Goethe, who “thought that the best poetry survives translation into prose,” correct (125). In these extensive, rich, and trenchantly polemical discussions, Gaskin frequently shows himself as an accomplished practical critic. Whether his often penetrating insights are wholly consistent with the metaphysical theory of meaning they are supposed to illustrate is a question that must be left to the reader to decide.

Gaskin’s second line of response to Brooks-type objections depends on two claims fundamental to his metaphysical stance. The first is that Frege’s categories of sense, reference, and tone essentially exhaust the concept of meaning. The second, central to his linguistic idealism, is that while it is the case, as Frege thought, that the referents of predicates, or concept-expressions, are “universal, abstract, publicly available objects of linguistic understanding” (5) the reference of a declarative sentence is not, as Frege thought, a truth-value. On the contrary, such sentences refer “to entities that are in some suitable way propositionally structured” (6). Add to this, as a (not wholly) suppressed premise, something along the lines of Ramsey’s conviction that the only way in which discourse can advance knowledge is by saying something capable of being true or false, and one has grasped the essence of Gaskin’s *a priori* defence of paraphrase, despite decades of philosophers of art and literary critics warning against precisely such a picture of literary meaning. If a work of literature offers anything worth calling knowledge, it can only be because the work as a whole says something, in which case it possesses a reference to some constituent of reality “in some suitable way propositionally structured.” And in that case it *necessarily* must be possible in principle for that reference to be shared by some other collection of sentences, which will thereby constitute a paraphrase of the work, and one which will, moreover, be adequate, or final, in the sense that it correctly elucidates the reference of the work: what it says.

³Ernie Lepore (2009) and Peter Lamarque (2009) have recently revived interest in the so-called heresy of poetic paraphrase.

The value of paraphrase for Gaskin, then, lies in the fact that while a paraphrase “does not and cannot duplicate the *way in which* the work says what it says, a paraphrase can help us to see *what* a work of the favoured kind is saying” (83). To make this point, Gaskin once again needs the support of Frege’s distinction between sense and reference. On his view the relationship between work and paraphrase is precisely that they differ in sense but coincide in reference. Like “the evening star” and “the morning star,” the examples in terms of which Frege introduced the distinction, the two collections of sentences “present” the same referent, but present it in different ways. “[W]e should think of some . . . works of literature as having a reference, taken as wholes, and any work that, taken as a whole, has a referent we should conceive of as presenting its referential content by means of a particular sense, sense being, as we have noted . . . , mode of presentation. . . . A paraphrase of a work I take to be a set of declarative sentences that jointly share the same reference as the paraphrased work, but differ from it in sense” (Gaskin 68).

Gaskin thus needs the Fregean notion of sense. But, given the changes he has made to Frege’s account of reference, has he still a right to it? “Of those aspects of meaning that have a cognitive significance, namely sense and reference,” he says, “the more important, in Frege’s view as in mine, is reference, because it is the only one that engages, quite generally, with the truth-conditions of sentences, and it is in the ability of a sentence to be true and false that the fundamental connection between language and the world is set up” (4). This is surely contestable, both as an account of Frege, and as an account of the relationship of a declarative sentence to its truth-conditions. Michael Dummett, for instance, argued long ago that reference, for Frege, far from being the only aspect of meaning that engages with the truth-conditions of sentences, “is not an aspect of meaning” at all! Dummett’s reasoning is worth quoting in full:

If reference were an ingredient of meaning, then indeed the reference of a word would exhaust — or determine — its sense, since nothing more would need to be known about its meaning to fix the truth-value of any sentence in which it occurred (to make allowance for opaque contexts, we ought to say, “in which it occurred as having its ordinary reference”). There would then genuinely be no room for a notion of sense to be squeezed in between reference and tone. But reference is *not* an ingredient in meaning, and so sense can still be explained as constituting that part of the meaning of a word or expression which needs to be grasped in order to decide the truth-values of sentences containing it; and this means: that part of its meaning which determines its reference. (91)

What Gaskin's adjustment to Frege's philosophy of language does, in effect, is to relocate the functions of the theory as a theory of *understanding* from sense to reference. "We appeal to the idea of reference," as he puts it, "in order to model *what* an understander has to think about in order to count as understanding a linguistic expression; the notion of sense is then adduced in order to model *how* the understander thinks about that referent" (5). But if one knows *what* a linguistic expression picks out, one knows, as Dummett rightly observes, all that one need to know in order to fix the truth-value (subject to Dummett's *caveat*) of any sentence where it occurs; in which case no theoretical task remains for sense to perform, and the meaning of "how" in Gaskin's sentence just cited becomes, to say the least, obscure. Applying the point to Gaskin's theory of literary meaning, if one understands a work of literature in the straightforward sense that one understands its component sentences and how they articulate with one another, then one grasps its reference, grasping which one knows all that one need to know in order to say whether it conveys a truth and which truth it conveys; at which point paraphrase becomes irrelevant, since there is simply no theoretical work left for it to do.⁴

5. Further Requirements for Literary Humanism

We suggested earlier that a robust literary humanism requires, *inter alia*, (1) not merely that literature offer cognitive gains of some sort, but that it offer cognitive gains of a kind that could not be readily obtained from other, non-literary sources; (2) that it generates cognitively significant meanings; and (3) that it opens us up to others: minds, ages, or outlooks alien to our own. Two more — there are doubtless others — that one might add as *expectations*, if not requirements, of a humanist theory are: (4) that literature be capable, to some non-negligible degree, of bring-

⁴ What has gone wrong in Gaskin's thinking here is, we suspect, a failure to realize that Frege's account of meaning offers not merely a Realist ontology, which clearly distinguishes between concepts and mental states, or "ideas," but also a theory of linguistic understanding, which ties the latter to the ability to fix truth-values. The false step occurs at the top of p. 5, at which point Gaskin proposes to reinterpret Frege in accordance with "what medieval philosophers called 'significatio.'" This turns Frege, in effect, into a would-be contributor to the medieval ontological debate concerning the reality of universals, leaving the chips of his theory of linguistic understanding to fall where they may.

ing about a change of outlook in readers, for example by acculturating, disillusioning, or in other ways liberating or edifying them; and (5) that it be capable, as an institutional practice, of applying those powers to the renovation of culture or society in ways which allow it to take on a broad social significance.

Gaskin's account responds poorly to (1), well to (2), and not at all to (3), (4) and (5). In respect to (1), Gaskin does have a way to acknowledge the humanist's demand that literature's manner of engaging with reality be distinctive, since literary works, in virtue of their form, can at least bestow a unique *sense* upon, in effect, the world as a literary work presents it. But on his model, cognitive value comes in at the level of reference, not sense, and thus there ultimately is nothing distinctive about the manner in which literary works can become bearers of cognitive value. They produce knowledge just as any practice of epistemic significance does: by referring to true propositions. What makes literature's manner of *presenting* reality distinctly literary has nothing to do with its claim to cognitive value. This is the price one pays for emptying the notion of *Sinn* of the cognitive significance Frege had originally attached to it.

In respect to (3), Gaskin's vision of things leaves it constitutionally unclear why the entirely paraphrasable insights to be gleaned from literature could not equally well be gleaned from other sources, since, if he is right, they are in no way indissolubly linked to the particular words of the works whose "referents" they constitute. And while in a sense Gaskin's account meets requirement (3) since it allows a work to "mean the same thing" — in the sense of locating the same "referent" — for a twenty-first century reader as it did, say, for a sixteenth-century one, this thinly metaphysical way of meeting it misses what most of the readers and critics who have asserted it have meant by it. They did not mean by it merely that to read Jane Austen, say, is to encounter *the very same propositionally structured complex of Universals that once happened to occupy Jane Austen's mind*. They meant, rather, that to read Jane Austen is to encounter *Jane Austen's mind*. Intuitively speaking, to encounter another mind is to encounter, through conversation or debate, a consciousness which structures experience, or reality, in a manner that, consistent and coherent though it is, differs from one's own way of doing so. But for a linguistic idealist of Gaskin's type there is no way — at least no way capable of being represented in language — in which one mind could conceivably "structure experience differently" from another. The only reality to which language allows us access has, on his account, the structure that it has: and *that* is the same for every speaker! For related reasons there

can be, for the linguistic idealist, no way of making sense, either, of the idea (4 and, indirectly, 5) that literature, as an institutional practice, could function as a source of cultural reform or renovation, since for that it would be necessary to confront ingrained conceptual structures with viable alternatives; and for the linguistic idealist there can be no such thing.

Gaskin's poetics, in short, fails to be even anti-Romantic: it is *pre-Romantic*, defending a vision of literature that was *au courant* until roughly 10 minutes before Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. It exhibits strong affinities with the Classical poetics which Johnson, in *Rasselas*, put into the mouth of the poet Imlac: "The business of a poet . . . is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances . . . he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same" (ch. 10). Similarly, for Gaskin the main function of literature is not to permit us to criticize or transcend our customary ways of construing reality but rather to remind us of eternal verities presented in terms that cannot be transcended, since they are written into the fabric of the only reality to which language allows us access. "[L]ack of universality is lack of truth: it is lack of truth that is sufficiently deep or general; to say that a proposition is only locally true is to say that it is not true simpliciter" (128).

6. Wittgenstein, Frege, and Realism

Gaskin's propositionalist account of literary humanism stands opposed to the work of a multitude of contemporary writers in the field — Stanley Cavell, Richard Eldridge (2008), Tzachi Zamir (2007), Eileen John (1998), Cora Diamond (1983), Alice Crary (2007), David Schalkwyk (2004), Martha Nussbaum (1990), Rafe McGreggor (2016), both the present authors, and a host of others — who allow literature a much greater role in promoting change of outlook and cultural renovation because, ultimately, they envisage a greater role for human spontaneity and creativity in *constituting* the conceptual structures and systems of meaning in the light of which we negotiate our human world. Many of these expressly associate their work with Wittgenstein's dictum that to give the meaning of an expression is to explain its role in the conduct of a practice.

It is, however, not all that easy to arrange a decisive confrontation between that fundamental doctrine of Wittgenstein and one, like Gaskin's,

with, at least in appearance, far deeper roots in philosophical tradition, including that of analytic philosophy. Not easy, perhaps — but not impossible either! The reason for the difficulty is that, ever since the arrival of the *Philosophical Investigations* on the scene in the early 1950s and the brief flowering of “Wittgensteinianism” which followed it, doubts have lingered over the motivation of Wittgenstein’s notion of “language games” (*Sprachspiele*). Why should it be necessary to introduce human practices in order to explain the meaning of a word? Why should it not be sufficient simply to indicate the reference of a term or proposition to some element of experience or reality — possibly even the propositionally structured elements postulated by Gaskin’s Linguistic Idealism?

The widespread belief that no answers are to be found to these questions rests partly on the conviction that Wittgenstein’s later work is anti-Fregean (or post-Fregean) in character. On this view, the idea that linguistic meaning is a function of “language games” was in essence an arbitrary innovation of Wittgenstein’s, that neither has nor was meant to have any bearing on the rival Fregean account of meaning that has formed the basis for most subsequent developments in analytic philosophy of language — to which, therefore, the account of meaning to be found in the later Wittgenstein has, for many minds in the field, retained the status of an intellectually disconnected alternative.

Over the past couple of decades, however, the reality of that presumed disconnection has been extensively questioned, not least by one of the authors of the present essay.⁵ The fact that Gaskin explicitly traces the origins of *Language, Truth, and Literature* to his review of “Bernard Harrison’s tantalizing but frustrating *Inconvenient Fictions*” (x), which appeared in 1991, makes it odd that he makes no reference to more than two decades of subsequent, and directly relevant, published work on the part of an author who so tantalized and frustrated him. Happily, the omission can be easily and briefly rectified.

The idea that in the years following the publication of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein lost interest in “Frege’s great works” (2–3) conflicts, *inter alia*, with the following passage from Part I of the *Philosophical Grammar*, itself significantly entitled *The Proposition and its Sense*:

84. The role of a sentence in the calculus is its sense.

⁵ See, *inter alia*, Harrison 1996 and 1999, and Patricia Hanna and Bernard Harrison 2004, *passim*. For recent essays on Harrison’s body of work, all of which explore themes discussed here, see Hanna 2014.

A method of measurement — of length, for example — has exactly the same relation to the correctness of a statement of length as the sense of a sentence has to its truth or falsehood. (Wittgenstein 1974: 130)

There is no reason not to read *sense* here as the Fregean term. For Frege, as Dummett puts it, in the passage cited above, sense is “that part of the meaning of a word or expression which needs to be grasped in order to decide the truth-values of sentences containing it.” Why should it not be possible, as many philosophers have supposed, for the *sense* — in that sense — of an expression N to be established simply by associating N with some set of natural conditions? That is the possibility Wittgenstein considers at *Philosophical Investigations* I.28 — whether one can “ostensively define a proper name, the name of a material, a numeral, the name of a point of the compass, and so on” (2001: 11–12). His answer is that one cannot, since what one might call the “logical function” of the term supposedly defined has not yet been established.

The definition of the number two, “That is called ‘two’” — pointing to two nuts — is perfectly exact. — But how can two be defined like that? The person one gives the definition to doesn’t know what one wants to call “two”; he will suppose that “two” is the name given to *this* group of nuts! — He *may* suppose this; but perhaps he does not. He might make the opposite mistake; when I want to assign a name to this group of nuts, he might understand it as a numeral. And he might equally well take the name of a person, of which I give an ostensive definition, as that of a colour, of a race, or even of a point of the compass. That is to say: an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case. (2001: 12)

The translation of Wittgenstein’s *hinweisende Definition* (roughly, “definition by indication”) as “ostensive definition,” given the prior history of that expression in English-speaking philosophy, has led most English-speaking readers to suppose that Wittgenstein is here speaking exclusively of the attempt to define *names*. It is clear from the first sentence of the passage, however, that what he is in fact discussing is the question of what needs to be grasped in order to fix the truth-conditions of a proposition; here, one of the form “That is called ‘N.’” In Fregean terms, that is to say, he is raising the question of what needs to be grasped in order to grasp the sense (*Sinn*) of a declarative sentence. His point is that the sense of a proposition cannot be made clear by indicating circumstances in which the proposition comes out true, since any such indication is open to misinterpretation. Clearly, if we were to attempt to remedy the problem by additionally indicating circumstances in which

the proposition comes out false, parallel arguments lead to the same conclusion. Grasping this nettle of Wittgenstein's leads inexorably to the conclusion that knowledge of meaning is a form of empirical knowledge, which in turn leads to the "meaning skepticism" represented by familiar doctrines of indeterminacy of meaning, "radical interpretation," and so on.

There is, however, a Wittgensteinian alternative to grasping this particular nettle. There would be no room for the kinds of misunderstanding Wittgenstein canvasses above, if the learner could somehow be brought to see that what follows from the denial of "this is called 'two'" is not that this is a *different group of nuts* from the group originally indicated but that it is a group formed of a *different number of nuts*. What is needed, in short, is some means of *intrinsically* connecting the elucidation of truth-conditions with that of falsity conditions; of connecting them in such a way, that is, that grasping the one *amounts to* grasping the other. But that is precisely what is achieved by explaining how a sentence such as "This is four inches long" (S) fits into a "method" (or technique, or system) of measurement. What needs to be explained is the device of comparing a large object with a smaller one by noting how many end-over-end iterations of the smaller one are required to span the larger. Having explained that device, and its practical utility, we explain that a smaller object used conventionally in the way is called a "modulus of measurement," and the number of its iterations required to span a large object O is the "length" of O. It is now automatically clear *both* what is relevant to the truth of S — that four iterations of the modulus specified by the expression "inch" are required to span the object designated by "this," *and* what is relevant to its falsity, namely that some different number of iterations should be required.

This, we take it, is the point of the typically telegraphic observation of Wittgenstein's that opens *Philosophical Grammar* 84 — that a "method of measurement has exactly the same relationship to the correctness of a statement of length as the sense of a sentence has to its truth or falsehood," and that, hence, "the role of a statement in the calculus is its sense." Rereading Wittgenstein's supposed argument against "ostensive definition" in the above way re-inserts his later work in the mainstream of analytic philosophy of language by providing, finally, a clear motivation for Wittgenstein's talk of "language games." The object of introducing that notion is, in effect, to further elucidate Frege's notion of *Sinn*. It does so in a way that addresses several issues, currently much discussed, that have concerned us in this essay, in particular that of reconciling hu-

man “spontaneity” in the devising of concepts with the “answerability to the world” of the statements we compose by means of them. If Wittgenstein is right, the language game is the key to both sides of the problem. Conceptual “spontaneity” is displayed in the invention of social practices, practices that are themselves entirely naturalistically conceived, as at one and the same time the inventions, and the embodiment of the life of, specific, historically bounded human communities. But “answerability to the world” is also explained by the fact that it is through the manner in which the functions and terms of operation of a practice relate it to a real, experienced world that it is enabled to fix the truth-conditions of the sentences whose meaning (in the sense of *Sinn*, and through *Sinn*, *Bedeutung*) it governs.

The world, however, from the standpoint of a later Wittgenstein thus reinterpreted, is not conceptually, and hence *a fortiori* not linguistically, structured. The concepts of *length* and *modulus*, for instance, are creatures of the device of linear measurement, and do not pre-exist its invention. Prior to its invention what presents itself to sight and physical manipulation, as it does to an animal, or a pre-linguistic infant, is an environment containing physical objects of varying size, whose extent we are unable, as yet, to map onto any numerically specifiable notion of dimension. The world we encounter in experience, *pace* Gaskin, is in other words speechless. It is only by bestowing senses upon words, by giving them a role in humanly devised practices that reach out to experienced reality, not in terms of *concepts* but in terms of *manipulation* (including, for instance, the kinds of manipulation that enter into the construction of a geometrical figure, or the institution of counting⁶), that we succeed in giving a voice to the world: bestowing upon it the power to address us, not in its *own* language, for it has none of its own, but in ours.

7. Sense, Practice, and Literature

Back now to the issues concerning propositionalism, Wittgensteinianism and literary humanism from which we started out. If the later Wittgenstein’s talk of “language-games” represents not a rejection of the entire Fregean deliverance but an attempt to reconstruct the Fregean notion of sense as what must be grasped concerning a linguistic item if one is to

⁶ For an excellent discussion of the relationship of counting to the concept of number, see Goddard.

be in a position to locate the truth conditions, and hence the truth-values, of propositions in which it plays a part, then one can see why, for Wittgenstein, knowledge of meaning cashes out, not in terms of further propositions (Rylean *knowledge-that*), but rather in a grasp of how to operate practices (Rylean *knowledge-how*): why for him it “is not certain propositions striking us as immediately as true”, but rather “our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game” (Wittgenstein 1969: 20).

Where does that leave literature? It certainly leaves the literary work as in one sense a complex of propositions, namely those conveyed by the individual sentences of which it consists. But is the meaning of the work as a whole, as Gaskin supposes, also to be construed as a (paraphrasable) *proposition*? Does a work, taken as a whole, *say something*, in much the same sense, if not in quite the same manner, as one of its component sentences? Common sense, in one of its moods, says no: only a sentence can *say something*, or for that matter mean something, certainly in a semantic sense. “A poem,” said Archibald MacLeish in “Ars Poetica,” “should not mean / But be.” But is there anything of cognitive moment to be offered by a poem or a novel that contents itself with simply “being”: telling its story or saying its piece and leaving it at that?

If Wittgenstein is right, then the answer to that may very possibly be Yes. The sentences of a story or poem, whatever they tell us about the “world” of the fiction or the poem, may indeed communicate no information concerning the real, extra-fictional, extra-poetic world, except in marginal ways incidental to their literary purpose. But since we understand them as we read, we necessarily attach sense to them. To do that is, if Wittgenstein is right, to call to mind the practices in which they find the roles that, in the first instance, confer sense upon them. And very often the practices involved are ones central to the constitution of the culture, the “human world,” as F. R. Leavis liked to put it, of our own age, or that of another age or part of the world. The novel or poem may, in effect, set such practices, as it were, in motion, in imagined contexts, in ways that may show them in a new light.

8. Saying and Showing

How might that suggestion work out, in terms of the reader’s encounter with actual works? What does reading *achieve*, what does it *amount to*, once we stop asking ourselves, as readers, what the work-as-a-whole *means*, what it *says*? What difference does it make to reading, if it comes

down to it, whether we embrace propositionalism or the opposed ideas, Wittgensteinian at least in origin, recommended here?

Consider, for example, Yeats's 1919 poem "A Prayer for my Daughter." The final stanza contains a well-formed statement that in a different context might figure not as poetry at all but as a prose aphorism; and that certainly might, from a propositionalist standpoint, be taken to paraphrase the "meaning" of the poem as a whole: in Gaskin's terms, *what* the poem says as distinct from the *way in which* it says it:

How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?

"Custom," "ceremony," "innocence," and "beauty," it might be argued, are all of them English words whose meaning (at least in one sense of "meaning") we all know perfectly well. Might someone who thinks like Gaskin be right, then, to regard the sentence (S) that they here compose as sharing "the same reference as" the poem as a whole, but differing from it "in sense"? And in that case might the propositionalist also be right to contend that any claim to cognitive value on the part of Yeats's poem must turn on the question whether the proposition "presented by" (S) is in fact *true*; whether, that is to say, the proposition that (according to Gaskin) constitutes its *reference* (allowing Gaskin's reinterpretation of Frege, its Fregean *Bedeutung*) is among those that go to compose the fabric of Reality.

From a Wittgensteinian standpoint, the point at which this story takes the wrong turning is the opening one. The sense of "meaning" in which every reader "knows the meaning" of common English words (the "dictionary" sense) is one which prescind from connotation, nuance, implication, tone: from all that mass of supplementary significances that words acquire, from the moment of their introduction into the language, from the contexts of human practice in which they come to figure, and the roles they come to play in those contexts. At that basic level, we explain "the meaning of" an expression when we explain the reasons why we need such a term: the role assigned to it in (say) English and so in the form of life (*Lebensform*) that possesses this language. On that level, the four words have little or nothing to do with one another. "Custom" is the name we give to any practice or response collectively recognized as appropriate to given circumstances; "ceremony" any order of procedure understood to bestow dignity. "Beauty" is whatever anyone feels to be intrinsically rewarding to the mere perception of a thing; "innocence" the absence either of moral guilt or of the kind of desires that lead one into danger of it.

The trouble with attempting to view those two lines of Yeats's poem as composing a potential prose aphorism, let alone as one that might serve to paraphrase the "meaning" of the poem in which they occur (in Gaskin's terms, to *present* in a different way from the poem as a whole the "proposition" which stands as the reference [*Bedeutung*] presented by the work as a whole) is, in other words, that in such roles, where our only guide must be the "dictionary meaning," they collapse into enigma. Far from its being clear what they (and thus the poem that we have taken them in some sense to paraphrase) "say," the purport of the "proposition" they compose becomes as opaque as that of Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

It appears, in short, that their purport needs to be sought in the poem to which they belong, rather than that of the poem in them. But to take that route we need not only to start over, but to start at a somewhat higher level, which takes into account the ways in which the history of the political, cultural, and literary uses we make of words ends, as one might put it, by rubbing off on them. On that level, the pairs "custom"/"ceremony" and "beauty"/"innocence" can easily appear as, to all intents and purposes, contraries; intrinsic opposites, to be conjoined only at the cost of oxymoron. A long history of usage, beginning (for the sake of locating a beginning) with Rousseau and continuing through much of the Romantic Movement, has taught many of us to think as a matter of course that what is "born of" custom and ceremony is not beauty and innocence but rather vanity and elegant deformity. Along with that has tended to go the thought that a recovery of beauty and innocence can only come by way of kinds of radical political renovation that must uproot all or most of what has been respected as customary, along with all or most of the ceremonies that have served to dignify it.

Yeats's poem upends, overturns, that way of thinking. It seeks a revolution, not a referent. It does so by means of what it is proper to term its "argument." But the "argument" of a poem does not work in the manner of that of a philosophical treatise — or at least not of Gaskin's kind of philosophical treatise. It is constituted not in terms of the methods of discursive reasoning, but in terms of what Wittgenstein, oddly enough, took to be a main method of his kind of philosophizing: the method of "assembling reminders." Stanza by stanza the poem reminds the reader of — what many readers, at least, know already, even if lack of a voice powerful enough to out-speak competing ones has driven it out of their heads — how little beauty and innocence have to do with violent political renovation, or for that matter with the kinds of vaunting ceremony-

enshrined magnificence that it sets itself to overthrow, and how much they have to do with the small customs and ceremonies that go to make up the fabric of a rooted and happy life of casual daily concerns. The polarities of the poem are made concretely apprehensible in its imagery. On the one hand there is storm, natural and human. The former,

The haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic

mutates into the human storm, that of

the future years . . .
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

The human storm, for the purposes of the poem, takes the form of a combat between arrogance and hatred:

For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.

The arrogance is that of those who, like a too-beautiful woman,

Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never finds a friend.

Hatred is the province of, among others, the political revolutionary who, guided by the solemnly empty categories of the abstract intellect, also loses his — or her — way:

Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of empty wind.

At the opposite pole of the structure of image and concept offered by the poem stands the goodness of life as understood by "quiet natures" to whom hatred and arrogance are equally foreign, and to whom, therefore, the world has the capacity to appear as a horn of plenty. Such a soul has recovered, Yeats tells us, a "radical innocence" capable of rooting itself in the small customs and ceremonies of its daily life like a laurel tree (laurels can root in very hard, poor soil) from whose branches no storm can tear the singing bird:

If there's no hatred in a mind
 Assault and battery of the wind
 Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

Hence, in the closing stanza ("hence" here, signalling, as it frequently does, the conclusion of an argument, is not misapplied), the words "custom" and "ceremony" are redefined, not in terms of the long history of usage we mentioned earlier, but in terms of the concepts and polarities established by the poem itself:

How but in custom and in ceremony
 Are innocence and beauty born?
 Ceremony's a name for the rich horn
 And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

It seems, therefore, that Yeats has, in this poem, done nothing that could be construed in the propositionalist's terms as "saying something." He has not presented the reader with a *proposition*: with something that might be true or false. His concerns have reached further back: beyond, or before, the issue of truth or falsity, to the prior question of the content and interrelationships of the concepts in terms of which a given age — ours, for example — is prone to formulate the propositions that, it imagines, might or must be true of the human world its members inhabit. Yeats is labouring upon linguistic bedrock, that is, the manner in which words work in his culture. The business of Yeats in this poem — as of any serious poet in any poem — is not with truth but with meaning. Of course, if Gaskin and those analytic philosophers who think like him were right, and Reality itself dictated the terms in which it is to be described, poets could do no such thing, since Reality would already have done their work for them. But for that to be the case, Reality would have to speak a language of its own. And (*pace* Gaskin) it does no such thing. It speaks to us only because we give it voice. And we do so by means which are always open to criticism and revision, by poets among others.

The same processes of conceptual revision, argued through what Wittgenstein called "assembling reminders," equally form an important part of the literary business of prose writers as well. Thus, for instance, Dickens's *Hard Times* sheds an unfamiliar light on the processes of fact-gathering and utilitarian moral reasoning central to a certain Victorian conception of social improvement, as Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* does on the structures of religion, learning, and social class that define both the aspirations of its characters and the kinds of disillusion and ruin that overtake them. Neither novel has anything to *say* about these mat-

ters, or indeed about anything outside the ambit of the imagined worlds of Coketown or Christminster. But in what each *says* concerning the imagined world of the novel, it *shows*, to apply the term of Wittgenstein's that Ramsey found so slippery, much concerning the web of practices which on the one hand give sense to the linguistic expressions which animate its component sentences, and on the other hand serve to structure and give meaning to the real human world outside the fiction. These novelistic or poetic *showings* are not *sayings* (Sidney was right, after all, that "the poet nothing affirmeth"). Agreed, they may offer the literary critic much work for *sayings* of his own. But the function of *those* sayings is not, from a Wittgensteinian standpoint, to *paraphrase*, or otherwise to repeat, *things already said* by the work of literature, but merely to reflect on the implications of what, merely, and mutely, by setting words against one another in richly imagined contexts, it may appear, to this or that reader, to have *shown*.

If this is so, one can see that a proposition offers the entirely wrong image of the nature of the object of cognitive attention in literary experience. What the reader has before her is a *narrative*: a story that brings to view characteristic and exceptional forms of human experience, comportment, and relationship. This is, in effect, just what a literary work *does*, and thus the Wittgensteinian, unlike the propositionalist, makes crucial to humanism a feature of literature all readers can readily agree is present in a literary work and central to literary appreciation and criticism. In a sense Gaskin is right that all we have before us is *language*. But if we are right, literary language does not culminate in something statement-like, and certainly not in an abstract linking of subject and predicate, such as Gaskin's propositions. Literary language culminates in a certain arrangement of words so as to make a certain arrangement of human activity visible. The Wittgensteinian adds to this a story of language that shows the extent to which a cultural practice such as literature is in a privileged position to reveal to us the structure of those sense-bestowing practices in virtue of which we make the world meaningful to us. This is what literature, as a distinct practice, is especially well suited to explore and expose. Our point is that the humanist need only insist that this is all we need to account for literature's capacity to disclose something properly called *real* and so properly called an object of understanding, of cognition.

Here, then, are the two competing visions, mentioned earlier, of the content of literary humanism. Our endeavour has been to lay out the issues dividing them in a way clear and compelling enough to lead others

to take up the task of deciding between them. We acknowledge that more could be said here about the details of a Wittgensteinian defence of literary humanism. But as we said above, all defences of literary humanism in analytic literary aesthetics, save Gaskin's, have been broadly Wittgensteinian in approach. In short, the Wittgensteinian approach to literary humanism has already been elaborated, and what we hope to have done here is to show that Gaskin's bold defence of propositionalism should not shake one's confidence in it.

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