

## **Report on the dissertation**

### **“Iris Murdoch and the Ancient Quarrel Why Literature is Not Philosophy”**

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## **Overview**

The dissertation by Lyra Ekström Lindbäck (hereafter referred to by initials: LEL), titled “Iris Murdoch and the Ancient Quarrel Why Literature is Not Philosophy” is an ambitious project combining extensive scholarship with the formulation of a poetics/aesthetic theory of the novel as art form, inspired by readings of Iris Murdoch and Immanuel Kant. This theoretical account is provided as an answer to why “philosophical novels”, according to Murdoch, tend to be both artistic and philosophical failures. It is also used as a starting point for an extensive critique of a broad range of authors of the so-called literary turn in philosophy, who have found in literature a useful complement to philosophical argument.

Chapter 1. gives an overview of “the ancient quarrel” between literature and philosophy, from its (probable) birth with Plato to contemporary discussion about “postcritique” and the contemporary practice of “artistic research”. LEL here displays broad learning, great fluency of expression and capacity to synthesize and tell a story. Thus, the chapter provides a promising opening to the work and is in its own right a valuable contribution to contemporary work on the relationship between philosophy and literature.

Chapter 2. “What is (not) a philosophical novel?” begins with Murdoch’s cautions against writing philosophical novels, and her misgivings about philosophical novels in general. Along these lines the chapter discusses instances of supposed philosophical novels. The discussions serve both to introduce LEL’s theme of aesthetic experience as “sensory illusion of sense” and to argue why some novels should not be read as philosophical. As inductive evidence toward the dissertation’s larger claim – that the practice of reading literature for philosophical insight is confused – they are however at most suggestive.

Chapter 3. The feel of Muddled Thinking: Conceptual Content in Literature delves into aesthetic theory. Following Kant’s third critique LEL’s articulates an account of what is distinctive to the novel

as art object and aesthetic object, and what makes it unsuitable for purposes of learning and edification.

Chapter 4. engages the topic of relating to literary characters, focusing on Stanley Cavell's reading of Othello. A central point pursued here is that literary characters are so dissimilar to real people that the engagement they engender does not easily translate to (ethical) engagement with real people.

Chapter 5 critically addresses the idea of tragedy as a literary form particularly amenable to philosophical insight, using among other things, Martha Nussbaum's work on tragedy as a point of discussion.

Chapter 6 again moves closer to Murdoch, exploring her dialogue with Plato on the dangers of art, to strengthen the case that art is not a place for learning or moral improvement (with certain focus on the latter).

LEL shows great talent for gathering materials, giving overviews, synthesizing, doing close readings. Her basic academic skills are clearly above average for the relevant career stage and the writing is generally clear, inventive, and pleasurable to read. As I see it, the work is ready to be defended as a dissertation for the doctoral degree.

The work is however compromised by certain conceptual unclarity and an unwillingness to take the points of departure and pursuits of the philosophers she criticizes seriously; features that seem in this case to be intertwined, and do not bring out the best of the capacities LEL displays in other aspects of the work. In the following I will mainly take up some critical points tracing these issues, which I hope will also be of help in tuning into and clarifying the nature and scope of the central overall claims made in the work. My remarks below contain some repetition of the same themes since I have sought to illuminate them in relation to different aspects of the work.

### **The aesthetic theory**

The outline of LEL's aesthetic theory or poetics is formulated in Chapter 3, and features there as a form of answer to why "philosophical novels" tend to be failures, according to Murdoch, as well as by LEL's own lights. I begin here because this theoretical account forms much of LEL's rationale for rejecting philosophical readings of literary works. While Murdoch is singled out as LEL's primary companion through the dissertation, the main companion in this part is Immanuel Kant. Most of the philosophical energy here is invested in carving out a distinctive interpretation of Kant's third critique that supports LEL's conception of art/aesthetics experience as a non-cognitive matter of sensuous

experience of “sensory illusion of sense” and “purposiveness without purpose”. On this account relating to a work of art as art is relating to it aesthetically, which again means taking it in as a sensuous whole. The account is defended against the cognitivist reading of Kant’s aesthetics presented by Angela Breitenbach, who considers the thinking engendered by an artwork a central part of its aesthetic whole.

I will not here take a stand on the accuracy of this account as a reading of Kant (or merits against other readings of Kant), but rather address it here as the formulation of LEL’s own Kant-inspired aesthetic theory which is systematically set to work to critique a very broad range of attributions of philosophical ideas, philosophically relevant insight, or more broadly “cognitive content”, to literature.

Given the intended dramatic implications of this theoretical account to any academic discussion at the borderlands of philosophy and literature, relatively little is done in this chapter to make this conception of aesthetic experience/beauty/art convincing to a reader who is not already in agreement with the direction of LEL’s account. Much of the argument has the form of “Kant says”. Rival views of Kant’s conception are reviewed, but not rival conceptions of aesthetics beyond that. Some efforts are made to show how this picture fits with Murdoch’s conception too. Yet, since the aim is a systematic contribution, the reader is left to wish for more substantial arguments for why this is a good account of aesthetic experience, and why it would form a more useful basis for a general theory of art/literature than account that allows literature “as art” a broader range of functions (including philosophical and “cognitive” ones).

There is furthermore a certain wavering in the scope of LEL’s ambition. At times she is careful to point out that she is concerned with features that literature has “as art” (which are non-cognitive), while allowing for other uses of literature beyond that. Thus the issue would be one about the nature of *art as art*. But a very large part of the dissertation seems concerned with showing that authors using literature for philosophical purposes are confused, not just in *their notion of “art”*, but in their notion of what *works of literature can do*.

### **Some tricky conceptual issues**

#### *Aesthetically and “as art”*

LEL uses “aesthetically” and “as art” as equivalents when applied to art objects. Considering something as art is considering it aesthetically. This is in line with her own theoretical account where aesthetic judgment is *the* form of judgment we use for art objects, at least if we consider them *as art*

objects. “An artwork, such as a literary text, is an object which can be approached in many different ways. It is perfectly possible to make use of a novel for historical, philosophical, sociological, psychological and many other purposes. Indeed, doing so might be very fruitful and illuminating. My quarrel in this dissertation lies only with these approaches to the extent to which someone claims that this is tantamount to understanding it aesthetically, as a work of art.” (LEL p. 127)

The problem however is that this conflation of “as art” and “aesthetically” is not shared by a majority of the people LEL criticizes. Most authors writing at the intersection of philosophy and literature would grant that there are other ways of approaching an art object *as art* than by considering it *aesthetically*. Writing a philosophical analysis of a novel or attributing philosophical content to it, philosophers and critics are standardly very aware of what kind of object they are dealing with: a fictional work of creative art that functions under different conditions of form, relation to authorship etc. than a philosophical texts. They are also well aware that they are dealing with an object that is standardly assessed in aesthetic terms. This does not, however (as most of the would agree), imply that the only way to address it (*as art*) is aesthetic. A whole host of other types of considerations may come to play, many of which contribute to the overall aesthetic assessment of the work, but are not as such aesthetic (either on LELs account or on the authors own account). Commentary on the political implications of a novel, the realism of its characters, the moral significance of some emotions it evokes, a philosophical argument traceable in the text, or the accuracy of its portrayal of a historical epoch, may all fit under the broad umbrella of considering the work “as art” although they are not primarily instances of aesthetic judgment. (Such readings do not mistake the work for a work political writing, therapy, philosophy, or history, but can rather be seen as taping into some of the affordances of cultural repertoires of reading and responding to literature.)

Yet, LEL more or less considers authors who do not treat aesthetically and “as art” in the same way as she does as simply confused: an approach which seems to cut off conversation prematurely.

### *Philosophy, knowledge, cognitive content, edification, learning*

When articulating the thing that literature does NOT, in her view, provide, LEL moves freely between quite disparate things. Literature does not provide a range of epistemic things such as knowledge, philosophical insight, “cognitive content”. Furthermore, in case of moral philosophy, it does not provide “edification”. Surely all of these things are part of the repertoire that different philosophers have argued that we may gain from literature, and many have believed that literature provides all of these in one form or the other. LEL seems however to lump them all together in a wholesale rejection of something like “cognitive content” in, or learning from, literature. While consonant with

her theoretical approach, as well as her explicit commitment to speaking in general terms, this is not ideally helpful for sorting out and taking seriously the distinctive claims made by authors writing at the intersection of philosophy and literature.

### *Experiencing art, discussing art*

A further issue that could be more clearly worked out is that between “experiencing art” and discussing or thinking about art. All discursive communication about art requires turning immediate (sensuous) experience into words, a step which LEL considers with great suspicion. But it seems like some verbalizations of the experience of art are according to her more acceptable than others: those emphasizing muddling, complexity, unclarity, sensual responsiveness (which supposedly are closer to the “experience” of the work). These are also pictured as more in line with the experience of “ordinary readers”. However, contemplating the possibility that “learning form” and analysis also belong to the “ordinary” repertoire of many “ordinary” readers, the priority given to certain verbalizations of art (as more consistent with the nature of art) seems potentially more problematic than LEL would acknowledge, and more a product of her distinctive theoretical account than of some obvious fact about art.

### **Engaging discursive opponents**

LEL shows great capacity for reading authors closely, but her use of this capacity is used selectively and sometimes tendentiously. It is one of the more striking facts about this dissertation that it criticizes a position that no one holds explicitly, but that according to LEL, many hold in spite of themselves.

“In this dissertation, I argue for why literature is not philosophy. This may strike some as a battle against a straw man. After all, I have not a single named opponent who claims that literature is philosophy.” “What I seek to counter with my thesis is not a specific argument, but the pervasive spirit that literature would only have something to benefit from epithets like ‘philosophical’ or ‘doing philosophy.’” (LEL p. 11)

Along these lines, anyone who finds philosophically interesting ideas, potential philosophical intentions, argumentative structures or even “cognitive content” pointing towards any philosophical conversation is rendered suspect and mostly also found guilty of an undue conflation of *the distinction* between literature and philosophy.

The normative frame for detecting confused philosophical uses of literature is premised on LEL's distinctive notion of what is applicable to art as art, which constitutes the core of LEL's Kantian-inspired aesthetic theory/poetics.

However, the relative narrowness of LEL's conception of what it means to approach art *as art* seems to create a throughgoing obstacle for considering, in the dissertation, the various aims of different authors of the "literary turn" who consider literature *as an artform* philosophically relevant. In absence of such deeper engagement with their own various aims, even fine-grained readings of opponents conclude in a dismissal, which in the end mainly is based on the fact that they do not share the aesthetic theory/theory of art/poetics LEL has laid out.

A few core examples of this below. It can be noted that these examples do not do justice to the details of LEL's criticism, but focus on the dismissal of the authors attributions of philosophical/cognitive content to literature.

#### **Critique of Forsberg:**

Forsberg, who generally agrees with LEL's conviction that Murdoch's novels should not be read as expressions of her philosophy, traces a complex Kierkegaardian construct in Murdoch's novel *The Black Prince*.

LEL takes issue with this reading in chapter 2 because it 1) projects philosophically relevant content and structure to the novel, and 2) in the process does not foreground the readers aesthetic engagement with the "sensuous muddle" portrayed, e.g. in the narrator's experience of falling in love. Instead, Forsberg argues that the novel has a design which is apt to undermine the readers ready engagement with the narrator, in ways that resemble (and implicitly refer to) Kierkegaard's indirect method of communication.

As she writes: "his interpretation of *The Black Prince* ... entails a detachment from the sensory, experiential character of the story, and attempts to see through its illusion of sense" (p. 80) The ensuing philosophical reading fails in her view by not staying with the work as a sensuous whole and delving instead into analysis. "That kind of placing and sorting out requires a specific kind of approach which seeks to go beyond the novel's sensory illusion of sense" (LEL, p. 88)

She takes particular issue with how he claims that this is in line with taking the work seriously as an artwork:

“saying that the artwork independently does what is in fact dependent on an interpretation is a problematic move. In order to have this statement of Bradley’s do the philosophical work he wants to see in it, Forsberg must detach the conceptual relations from their sensuous muddle, thereby isolating and changing them. And this is not what he claims to be doing. On the contrary, it is very important for Forsberg to stress that the novel does this completely independently; that he is simply ‘letting literature have its say.’” (LEL, p. 81)

Given Murdoch’s hesitations about writing “philosophical novels” one may indeed suspect that the novel is a kind of “mock” Kierkegaardian indirect communication, in the sense that we do not know if Murdoch wants (in spite of herself) to argue some points “indirectly” communicated, or just play with the form for literary purposes. But reading the novel as an indirect communication (perhaps even as doing its work despite the author’s intention) is not as such reading it as something other than art, because such indirect communications, with maieutic purposes, are quite possible within the art of the novel. It may detract from its aesthetic value according to some, but does not make it into something other than a novel.

In any case, uncovering the clues that contribute to a reading in terms of an indirect communication is very much an act of philosophically informed literary criticism. These clues are also elements of the novel’s composition and the overall impression the novel (as a composition) might make on a reader who observes them. Thus, one wonders why they could not be part of the aesthetic experience of the work *if aesthetic is not primarily seen in the light of LEL’s definition*. It should be plain that the experience of a work is more than the immediate sensuous immersion in the work: it changes on a second reading, or when discussing the work with friends, etc.

LEL writes: “this kind of philosophical, conceptual responsiveness is not, in my opinion, what it means to let ‘literature have its say.’” (p. 88) She here seeks support from Kant and Hegel (on aesthetic judgment), in a kind of appeal to authority that supposedly corroborates her criticism. But what would be needed here are, again, substantial, systematic arguments for why reading for idea content is a bad idea (apart from the fact that it does not fit with a distinctive idea of aesthetic judgment).

### **Critique of Cavell**

LEL’s criticism of Cavell on the topic of literary character’s centers around his thinking about theatre as a place for (learning) acknowledgment of the reality of other people. The gist of her argument seems to be that since fictional characters are not other people (and cannot look back at us), we cannot learn anything about engaging with real people from engaging with fictional characters: thus

another avenue of learning from literature/art is cut off. "Fictional characters cannot expose us to ourselves in the eyes of another: an ineradicable part of the human condition." (p. 172)

"The fixed separateness and identificatory merging of perceptions in the theatre is not equivalent to meeting the gaze of another person in life. He seems to daydream that it should be. Thus, Cavell's theatrical fantasy of completed acknowledgement paves the way for an artistic evasion of the problem of sceptical doubt, especially concerning other minds." (p. 170)

Thus, in LEL's view, Cavell is laboring under a category mistake. "Cavell does not seem to recognise that the theatre in itself gives him the illusion of having the ability to look at life from the outside and grasp it as a story." (p. 172)

To this someone like Cavell might reply that telling and listening to fictive stories, as well as narrativizing lived experience, form a fundamental part of our modes of relating to the world and have pervasive roles in shaping our relations as well as our sense of self. Mistaking aspects of fiction for aspects reality is a recognizable problem but using it as an excuse to attempt to exclude fiction from our repertoire of tools for understanding other people (and social situations and human relations) is a clear case of throwing out the baby with bathwater. (Children can learn about relations by playing with dolls: this does not mean a conflation of dolls and people. The difference between dolls and people does not make playing with dolls dangerous, or make the insights gained fundamentally confused, etc.)

### **Attributions of idea content to the work**

Many authors of the literary turn (including Forsberg and Cavell) emphasize the independence of the completed "work" from its author and attribute the ideas they discuss to the "work itself". This is a way of underling the distinctiveness of artworks and the possibility of finding things of philosophical interest that were not intended or thought through by the author. It is also a way of distinguishing works of art from philosophical treatises precisely by not attribution the views found to the author. However, this practice raises LEL's objection because the materialization of these philosophical contents seems to require the critical commentary itself as a complement to the texts: the content, then, cannot be "in the novel". The argument goes something like this: If they were really in the novel, the commentary would not be warranted. If the commentary is needed, the ideas are not really in the novel, which should be read in terms of its aesthetic qualities instead of some projected idea contents.



The discussion on this topic seems designed to create an aura of mysteriousness around the quite common practice of reading novels for philosophical idea content. (Can these features really be there *in the novel*, if they require a philosopher to show them to us?) It seems furthermore that this criticism (as LEL is aware) would hit, not just philosophical attributions, but all attributions of idea content or (even) design to a novel. In protecting the integrity of the art object against philosophers, LEL thus ends up severely circumscribing the range of meaningful activities around literature. (Then we should be conducting discussions on what kinds of literary criticism are “permissible”.) I wonder if this is really necessary.

### **Critique of Nussbaum**

LEL’s criticism of Nussbaum, found in her chapter on tragedy, revolves around the supposed paradox of “clarified muddle.” While expressing sympathy with Nussbaum’s claims about vulnerability and value, LEL objects to the idea that an analytic discussion of the genre of tragedy (or distinct tragedies) could provide a meaningful path to them.

“The best and most valuable things are not invulnerable. Neither is reason purified of emotions the best kind of reason. These fundamental theses are sympathetic, even beautiful. My issue lies not with them, but with how Nussbaum interprets the genre of tragedy as a philosophical clarification of them. In her reading, tragedy functions as a clear presentation of the ambiguous and indeterminate aspects of our moral life.” (p. 197-198)

LEL reads this as an expression of Nussbaum’s (supposed) obsession with control, which ruins her readings of tragedy which LEL in other respects considers “good pieces of literary criticism”, conscious of the risks of intrusive interpretation. Thus, Nussbaum’s “commitment to explanation applies another standard to poetry than that of aesthetic form. Instead of purposiveness without a purpose, and the inexplicable composition of a manifold into a unity, Nussbaum is looking for what a tragedy is doing and why.” (p. 200) This, for LEL, implies not treating the work as a work of art, since “no matter how careful the explanation of the “what it is doing and why” of a tragedy is: what we have in front of us is no longer the artwork, but a clarified philosophical argument.” (p. 201)

Again, we have the now familiar restrictive notion of what can be done with a work of art “as art”. We also have the idea that we cannot really learn or gain philosophically relevant insight from art because this would require an explanatory reading which turns the artwork into an argument. But what LEL displays as a criticism of Nussbaum is entirely in line with Nussbaum’s own conception of what she is doing: the philosophically clarificatory reading is necessary in order to show how

tragedy's "doings" are related to the philosophical issues at hand. She is also quite explicit about the aim of her work: to contribute to philosophical discussions with insights that have been underrepresented there, but that she finds (on her reading) well represented in tragedy. To bring out this aspect of tragedy, she finds it important to provide readings that are sensitive to its literary qualities, thus in that sense to address it "as art" rather than as a philosophical treatise.

LEL seems intent on catching Nussbaum in the act of doing something illicit or confused, but captures her only in the act of doing what she intended: contributing to philosophy by reading tragedy. The main point of contention seems to be, in the end, the question of what it means to treat art "as art".

### **LEL as a reader of Murdoch**

Summing up chapter 2, LEL writes:

"I have intended to give a preliminary feel for the distinction between literature and philosophy. Murdoch's insistence on this distinction has been introduced: not just as a novelist's squirmy attempt to divert the interpretations of her own work, but as the well-grounded claim of an aesthetic thinker wishing to safeguard the integrity of two different practices which are only rarely mutually enforcing." (p. 122)

Murdoch indeed argues that good "philosophical novels" are rare, but the authors of the literary turn do not generally rely on such novels. They rather draw upon a broad range of images, scenes, characters, stories, perspectives, relations, situations, etc., presented in a great variety of kinds of novels, and elaborate on these to develop philosophical points. It is not clear from Murdoch's writings that she would be hostile to this practice.

Murdoch too makes philosophical points by means of literature: One of these is a memorable discussion in MGM on a passage in Henry James' *The Golden Bowl*, describing a moment when Maggie finally comes to own knowledge that she has had but has disowned for too long. The passage describes in metaphorical terms her slowly approaching the "ivory tower" of her disowned knowledge. Murdoch clearly indicates here that literature is an important complement to philosophy on important philosophical matters such as this (the nature of consciousness). She does not say that there is a philosophical theory in the novel, but she certainly attributes philosophically and morally relevant "cognitive content" to it.

As LEL well displays, Murdoch is suspicious of purposively philosophical novels because they tend to become bad novels and are rarely the most adequate formulation of the philosophical ideas

presented. She does not intend her own novels to be read as expressions of her philosophy, because they are not constructed for that purpose. That is not her poetics, and she thinks her philosophical ideas are better expressed in philosophical prose. She often thinks novelists good in spite of their philosophical views rather than thanks to them (e.g. Tolstoy). Yet, unlike LEL Murdoch does not represent a principled rejection of “cognitive content” in, or attributions of such content to, literature. Her approach to the matter is relaxed and empirical, imposing no barriers on people engagement with literature as art (apart for the recommendation of not looking for her philosophical views in their novels). Heeding to these aspects of her work, it is easy to see that she might have objections to Cavell’s, Forsberg’s or Nussbaum’s treatment of distinctive literary works, but that her objections would not hinge on some general rejection of “cognitive content” in, or “learning from”, literature.

LEL uses, as we have seen, distinctive readings of Kant’s aesthetics and Murdoch’s discussion of the nature of literature to refute authors who use literature for moral philosophical purposes. But neither Kant nor Murdoch helps to form an edge against such thinker’s work in quite the way LEL intends. Kant’s aesthetic theory does not legislate on permissible uses of art, and it is not clear that Murdoch would judge the practices of the literary turn problematic due to the nature of art as art. She thinks that authors tend to produce bad art when they give priority to arguing some point, but she would hardly object to giving a reading of what one finds in some novel as a contribution to moral philosophical conversation. And nowhere would she say that this kind of use is not engaging the work “as art”. To the contrary, it is exactly by being art, and by being good (non-reductive) art that many works of art contribute something to our understanding that cannot be contributed by philosophy or science or the like alone.

LEL states that “Murdoch is very clear that art does not help us deliberate concerning improvement.” (p. 222) What may be clear is that Murdoch does not think that literature (art) should be edifying. She also thinks that it can easily be corrupting. Thus, it offers us no shortcuts to moral improvement. But she also emphasizes that it “does many things” and engender “many kinds of relations” to it:

“Literature interests us on different levels in different fashions. It is full of tricks and magic and deliberate mystification. Literature entertains, it does many things, and philosophy does one thing.” (Murdoch 1997 (interview with Magee))

“We have so many kinds of relation to a work of art. A literary work is an extremely heterogeneous object which demands an open-minded heterogeneous response. (...) A good critic is a relaxed polymath.” (Murdoch 1997)

Yet, rather than appreciating the critic as polymath, LEL seems to argue that literature (as art) does one thing, interests us in one way: as an object of aesthetic enjoyment/judgment.

### **What is she afraid of?**

Murdoch famously wrote that it is always instructive to ask of a philosopher what they are afraid of. This is useful for current purposes as well. LEL seems afraid that literature is somehow contaminated or reduced by projects of or demands for philosophical or other “cognitive content”. There is at the heart of her an account of literature’s pure state, and an uncontaminated experience of it, which are lost in a multitude of philosophical readings. This could be read as an echo of previous literary critical worries, that philosopher’s readings – in supposed contrast to literary critical readings – reduce a work to its philosophical potentials and thus fail to do justice to the work as a whole. But since LEL’s rejection of cognitive content/knowledge/philosophy in literature hits much of literary criticism as well, it cannot easily be filed with those critics, who mainly object to philosophical readings. It is at its heart an aestheticist account of literature that will stand at odds with large parts of contemporary literary critics too (many of whom would (in agreement, I think) with Murdoch) maintain that literature is educational, a place of learning and insight).

This protectionist stance to literature comes forth in the program formulation I quoted above she notes that: “What I seek to counter with my thesis is not a specific argument, but the pervasive spirit that literature would only have something to benefit from epithets like ‘philosophical’ or ‘doing philosophy.’” (LEL p. 11) And further on “but is it not more likely that something could get lost on both sides by blurring the lines between the practices?” (LEL, p. 117)

For the most-part of the philosophers discussing literature for philosophical purposes the question of whether they are *benefiting literature* is hardly central. They enter their discussions because they think they will *benefit philosophy* by bringing in or bringing up stuff that is routinely neglected or distorted in standard philosophical discussions. While many have views on (how to avoid) simplistic and unsophisticated ways of using literature, philosophers in this discussion do not generally share the sense that literature (or our experience of it) could be *damaged* by philosophical readings. Indeed, this sense of damage or loss, which forms part of LEL’s exposition, is quite hard to understand for most philosophers, as well as (I believe) most ordinary readers.

### **What is philosophy?**

In her urge to protect literature from the distorting influence of philosophical readings LEL seems to suggest that philosophy too would be best pursued in an uncontaminated manner, free from supposedly confused forays into literature and other art forms. But this is a picture that philosophers criticized by LEL generally tend to reject. They would to the contrary suggest that academic philosophical thinking has been damaged by too narrow concerns with its own textual tradition: Since philosophy is about life, it needs instead to grasp life and stand in communication with a range of other human approaches to life, including literature. The risk involved in this for philosophy seem negligible: Few philosophers today would think philosophy so fragile that it could not sustain consideration of other forms of writing without losing e.g. conceptual rigor, precision of argument, or other things thought of as distinctively philosophical. Looking at the matter from the point of view of philosophical work could help LEL to negotiate the space between her own position and that of her opponents in a more helpful way.

### **Poetics rather than general theory of literature**

The approach of this dissertation seems to be born out of a desire to articulate a distinctive poetics of literary authorship. On the way it is, however, turned into a general aesthetic theory, which is then used to reject a broad range of readings and uses of literature. I would like to ask, in conclusion, if this large-scale rejection is really a necessary implication of the poetics.