

Book Reviews

LAMARQUE, PETER. *The Opacity of Narrative*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014, xv + 213 pp., £19.95 paper.

The ten essays of this volume—eight of which have been previously published but are here revised—address a myriad of interlocking themes in the philosophy of literature, among them: distinguishing fiction from nonfiction, the sources of literary value, truth in fiction, affective response, and narrative models of personal identity. Each of Lamarque's theoretical interventions in these areas can be profitably addressed alone, but taken together they offer a highly rewarding theoretical framework for understanding and evaluating literary narratives: a framework Lamarque calls *opacity*.

Opacity refers not to an essential feature of any kind of literary work but to a manner of reading literature characterized by an interest in the way its form, style, language, plot, and other literary devices function in the service of conveying its contents: how “textual nuances, implicit evaluations, narrator reliability, symbolic resonance, humor, irony, tone, allusions or figurative meanings in the textual content” give precise shape to the thoughts the content elicits (p. 149). Such opaque readings reflect how the events, characters, and states of affairs of a narrative are constituted by the manner in which they are represented, that is, how they are essentially connected to the descriptions used to characterize and refer to them. An experience of *transparent* reading, by contrast, is not constrained by the essentially perspectival dimensions of the elements comprising a story.

As used here, the opacity of narrative can be understood in relation to the imputation of opacity to many ordinary nonliterary contexts of predication wherein terms that refer to the same thing cannot be substituted for each other, *salva veritate*. Such opaque contexts often arise where the contents of propositional attitudes such as belief and desire are reported: for example, “Tom believes that Bob Dylan is an important musician” does not entail

“Tom believes that Robert Allen Zimmerman is an important musician” even if Dylan and Zimmerman are the same man. However, as Lamarque explains, the preservation at issue in literary fiction concerns not the truth of a proposition but the contents of a narrative. Literary opacity obtains “when substitutions of co-extensional terms are impermissible if the content of the narrative . . . is to be preserved” (p. 6). Note that the concept of content employed here is somewhat revisionary; it is more capacious than just the familiar notion of what a story represents—what in some views is identified with the set of propositions we are to solicit to imagine as true when engaging with the work. Rather, Lamarque's use of content productively accommodates not just the facts within a fictional world that are communicated but the modes of presentation through which those facts are conveyed.

In some places Lamarque defends this conception of literary content in ontological terms. In a discussion of the individuation of fictional characters, for example, he notes that “character identity is indissolubly linked to character description” (pp. 70–71), meaning not just that characters come into being only through being represented but that the nature of a character at a fine-grained level of discrimination is constituted by how that character is described, including what evaluative judgment a work expresses about that character. It is part of the very identity of the Veneerings in Dickens's “Our Mutual Friend” that they are the objects of the narrator's or narrative's mocking judgment. There is, for instance, no other potential perspective sanctioned by that story from which they might be shown to be kindly and decent.

That some literary content is essentially perspectival does not entail that any successful reference to it must evince or reproduce the content's perspectival dimensions. For example, we can use the expression “the legal proceeding at the center of *Bleak House*” to refer to, but not express the sense (in the pronunciation) of, “Jaryndice and Jaryndice.” Thus, there is a philosophical question of just how different can

different modes of presentation be, consistent with their respective literary contents being the same. Lamarque's answer is that "content identity is interest-relative," meaning that the answer to whether two narratives (say, a plot summary and the original text) have the same content is a function of the degree of specificity in the characterization of that content demanded by the questioner. However, as he emphasizes, if our interest in reading a work of literature is to garner the distinctive or paradigmatic values that literature affords, our access to the characters and events of the work must be inflected by their mode of presentation. If our interests are otherwise, say, simply to know what events transpire, the content we seek may be less mediated. In Lamarque's framework, any verbal representation can be read opaquely or transparently, yet some works (paradigmatically literary fictions) are designed to elicit an approach characterized by opacity and to furnish the concomitant literary values to which only that approach has access.

Lamarque's emphasis on opacity offers an important corrective to philosophical analyses that assume that a literary account of fiction can be readily captured in standard accounts of truth in fiction (e.g., the propositions a fiction asks us to imagine as true). For, generally, our access to what is true in a work of fiction, although furnished through the means by which those fictional states of affairs are represented, does not direct our attention to those means. By contrast, those means are among the objects of our interest in the work qua literature. We understand not just what the Veneerings are like, but we recognize their place within a social scheme, situated among others who reject their values: "They are not just people but elements in an artistic design" (p. 71). So the truth-in-fiction approach can explain the occurrence of some event within a story with reference only to a represented or presumed cause. But an approach defined by our interest in the fiction as literature may explain (from a standpoint external to the fictional world) the occurrence of that event by reference to its function in the work, for example, how it contributes to the shape of the plot or the development of the story's theme.

It is a *prima facie* normative claim that opacity captures what it is to read and experience a work from a literary point of view. The claim identifies a source of literary value, and posits a proper engagement with a literary work as an experience shaped by that source. It is unclear, however, that in identifying one significant ground of literary value, Lamarque has demonstrated a constraint on *any* approach to literature as literature. Why does "reading for the plot" betoken any less of an interest in literature qua literature than treating it opaquely? In "Chapter Six: Wittgenstein, Literature and

the Idea of a Practice," Lamarque defends his view through a plausible demonstration that the opacity framework makes the best sense of the implicit presuppositions and protocols governing the ways parties to the practice of literature—such as authors, critics, and readers—enact their roles. This appeal to a practice-based conception of literature distinguishes his account from essentialist theories of literature or literary value, for the principles that structure a practice are conventions that can change over time and place. However, this approach does make salient that his account is less an empirical description of the practice of literature than a rational reconstruction and idealization. Let me note that Lamarque adroitly engages with alternative idealizations propounded by many other narrative theorists and productively draws on work by those outside of Anglo-American philosophy, such as Roland Barthes and Hayden White. And his refined use of a wide range of literary criticism gives his account a substance that enhances its credibility.

That truth is an insignificant source of artistic value in the practice of literature is a pillar of Lamarque and Stein Olsen's earlier *Truth, Fiction and Literature*. In that treatment, and here in "Chapter 7: Literature and Truth," Lamarque readily acknowledges many of the ways in which it is persuasive to speak of truth or true beliefs being imparted by literary fictions (citing of pedestrian facts, plots that "ring true," explicit and derived propositions, knowledge of what it is like to stand in someone's shoes, and so on). Yet he denies that yielding truth is a source of literary value even if it might be valuable in itself. This is largely because he denies that literature essentially aims at truth, and thus that it is appropriately evaluated as literature for its truth. A rejoinder is that it is consistent with literary fiction being a practice that is not constitutively truth seeking that many individual instances of literary fiction are designed to impart truths and that they succeed or fail in a *pro tanto* fashion as literature depending on how well they do in that respect. However, Lamarque has an alternative, if less sweeping, argument at his disposal against the truth of a work as redounding to its literary value: judgments of the truth of a work tend to be made of propositions that are extracted or derived from a fiction and assessed as putative representations of the real world. But that is to evaluate such content only transparently, that is, not as an instance of genuinely literary content and thus not as something the truth of which can count for or against literary value. By contrast, in "Chapter 8: Thought, Opacity and the Values of Literature" Lamarque offers case studies that illustrate a kind of experience that is cognitively rewarding yet not in virtue of its capacity to convey some kind of truth. There he describes how narrative content lodges in the mind "under the very

perspectives that inform the content itself," that is, in a densely opaque form (p. 166). As we prescind from the propositional content conveyed by a transparent reading and attend to the content accessible only through reading opaquely, we undergo experiences whose intrinsic value lies not solely in what propositions we imagine but in the manner in which we imagine them. One of the many merits of this book, a volume that anyone interested in the philosophy of literature must contend with, is this strong defense of a conception of literary fiction in which its distinctive values and experiences are made plain.

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MATRAVERS, DEREK. *Fiction and Narrative*. Oxford University Press, 2014, vii + 157 pp., \$55.00 cloth.

This book is a total game changer for anyone who works in the philosophy of fiction, aesthetics, and narrative. For decades, specifically since 1990 when Kendall Walton published *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, most, if not all, philosophical argument about fiction and fictionality began with the distinction that is at the heart of Walton's argument: that the primary way of distinguishing between fiction and nonfiction has to do with a direct relationship that each of them has with imagination and belief, respectively. Dozens of philosophers have taken up this view and it has become a standard distinction in conversations of the multitude of ways we account for our engagements with, understanding of, and assessment of the concept of fiction. Matravers wants to turn this starting point on its head and argues that this foundational association of imagination with fiction and belief with nonfiction (what he calls the consensus view) is flawed, and leads us into making other flawed accounts of our understanding of fiction. Those he generally attributes the consensus view to include Noël Carroll, Gregory Currie, Ian Ravenscroft, Susan Feagin, Peter McCormic, Aaron Meskin and Jonathan Weinberg, Roger Scruton, Kendall Walton, Sarah Worth, and Robert Yanal (p. 24). This particular list is generated by Timothy Schroeder and Carl Matheson (Timothy Schroeder and Carl Matheson, "Imagination and Emotion," in *The Architecture of the Imagination* [Oxford University Press, 2006]) and has to do specifically with the consensus on the nature of the imagination (p. 24). But Matravers agrees that the consensus concerning the imagination and the consensus about the necessary relationship between the imagination and fiction include the same list of people and dozens of others as well. The fact is, the

bulk of the work on fiction that has been written in the latter half of the twentieth century all takes on this assumption that fiction and imagination are necessarily linked. Despite the fact that many of these individuals might deny their role in that list, I think that the consensus view itself is based on accurate empirical assessment of the literature concerning fiction and imagination. Matravers says that "the consensus view holds that what goes on in reading non-fiction differs from what goes on in reading fiction and that the difference is to do with the difference between belief and imagination. I shall argue that, taken on its own terms, the consensus view is wrong about this difference" (p. 24). He says subsequently that "the consensus view's own definition of the imagination establishes no particular link to fiction" (p. 25). This is the foundation of the entire reframing of the debate that Matravers makes. He argues that an entire generation of philosophy has been misled by this problematic starting point. In the end, he says "the imagination cannot bear the weight that has been placed on it by contemporary philosophers of fiction, and that a consequence of this is that what are usually taken to be problems with fiction are actually problems to do with narrative. In this sense, I hope that my 'debunking make-believe' will have the salutary effect of closing down the blind alleys, and getting us back on the road" (p. 157). I take Matravers to be hugely successful at getting us back on a road that makes more practical sense in accounting for the various ways in which we engage with narrative generally and not just fiction and nonfiction.

Matravers's central argument is that both fiction and nonfiction share the essential element of narration, which allows readers to comprehend narrative structure similarly. Matravers spends a good bit of time assessing Walton's view of the link between fiction and the imagination. In fact, the entire first chapter of the book is called "Walton on Fiction." He gives what I take to be a fair explanation of Walton's account as well as those who follow. He also nicely articulates the ways in which this distinction is the linchpin for so many subsequent theories of fiction and the inevitable puzzles that follow. But Matravers argues repeatedly that fiction may incite the use and engagement of the imagination, but there is just no *necessary* link, and there certainly is not a prohibition to exclude the possibility that nonfiction could not also engage the imagination as well. Matravers outlines what he calls the "engagement criterion," which basically says that something is fictional if it engages our imagination as "only the imagination can account for facts concerning our engagement with fiction" (p. 16). He argues that this criterion is simply too narrow and that "the range of representations that mandate us to imagine the propositions