

Literature and Perspective^{*}

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ABSTRACT: According to the neo-cognitivist account, literature's cognitive import has to do with understanding, conceptual reorganization, and the ability to change one's perspective. By examining in detail Kafka's *Metamorphosis* on the one hand and Carver's and Gallaghers' stories on the other, we will offer arguments in favor of the thesis that literature's specific cognitive value is essentially perspectival in nature.

KEYWORDS: literature, cognitive value, understanding, perspective, reality, opacity

ABSTRACT: Secondo l'approccio neocognitivistico, il valore cognitivo della letteratura riguarda la comprensione, la riorganizzazione concettuale e la capacità di cambiare prospettiva. Analizzando in dettaglio da un lato, *La metamorfosi* di Kafka e, dall'altro, i racconti di Carver e Gallagher, offriremo argomentazioni a sostegno della tesi secondo cui il valore cognitivo specifico della letteratura è essenzialmente di natura prospettica.

KEYWORDS: letteratura, valore cognitivo, comprensione, prospettiva, realtà, opacità

Introduction

This paper defends the idea that literature possesses cognitive value, specifically in its ability to represent multiple perspectives and points of view. The discussion begins with an overview of the debate on literature's cognitive value, emphasizing understanding rather than knowledge (e.g., justified true belief). Next, it examines the idea that understanding a literary text involves a normative dimension, particularly regarding elements inferred rather than explicitly stated.

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To further explore this normative dimension, it is hereby proposed a move that foregrounds perspectives and points of view. This approach is then illustrated through an analysis of two literary examples that narrate the same story from differing viewpoints. The paper concludes by contending that this aspect of literary experience holds substantial cognitive value: engaging with literature broadens and refines our perspectival concepts while allowing us to interpret motivations from perspectives distinct from our own.

1. *Does Literature Have a Cognitive Value?*

Whoever approaches a literary work is usually intent on grasping its meaning and understanding its content. Is it legitimate to believe that it is possible to derive knowledge¹ in the proper sense from such understanding? This is the question we shall attempt to answer.

According to Aristotle (*Poetics* IX, 1491b), literature has the distinctiveness of teaching what is general, probable, or even merely verisimilar, to enable human beings to understand each other, to regulate social life, and to get to know the emotions they have not yet experienced. In this, literature differs from history, which instead presents what has happened and is therefore based solely on facts.

The debate on the cognitive value of literary works concerns what *specifically*, if anything, literature can convey to us. That, in principle, we can learn something from literature is not something anyone has ever dreamed of questioning. When we read *War and Peace*, we undoubtedly learn more about Tolstoj's literary production, just as we learn something about the 1812 French invasion of Russia, about the common language of Russian aristocracy, and realism. However, this is not what the debate is about: it rather concerns the question of whether there is something only literature can convey to us and that we can therefore subsume under the category of "literary knowledge".

To the cognitivist position (in its various variants²) according to

¹ For a general overview on the debate concerning the cognitive value of literature, see P. Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell, Oxford 2009, pp. 220-254.

² From Aristotle's *Poetics* on there have been many defenses of cognitivism. Among them C. Wilson, *Literature and Knowledge*, «Philosophy» 58/26 (1983), pp. 489-496; M. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, Oxford University Press, New York 1990; J. Robinson *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005.

which literary works convey knowledge of a particular kind, skeptics have objected that one cannot speak, in such cases, of new knowledge³, at least not of propositional knowledge, and therefore that literary works cannot be said to have genuine cognitive value. According to the position of the anti-cognitivism, it goes without saying that whatever knowledge literature is supposed to convey must in some way conform to the practices of scientific research, which is regarded as a privileged point of reference, which is why any cognitive claims in the literary sphere are judged from the outset to be as ridiculous as they are unfounded.

Part of the problem lies in the very term “cognitive value” which is used to refer to the transmission of knowledge or the acquisition of true beliefs, which is why it is usually seen as having an epistemic value. However, supporters of the cognitivist position have rarely been precise in defining the concepts they use, starting with “knowledge” by which they have sometimes understood propositional knowledge (*knowing that*), sometimes knowledge as a skill (*knowing what*), and at other times still experiential knowledge (*knowing how*).

Some cognitivist proposals⁴ – to overcome the scientific criticism that there is only one kind of knowledge and that this has nothing to do with literature – have insisted on maintaining not that literature communicates new knowledge, but rather that it can trigger actions to intervene in the knowledge we already possess, thus giving us the possibility to clarify, advance, enrich and perhaps even question it. John Gibson suggests labeling this type of proposal “neo-cognitivist”⁵. These positions are generally quite convincing, especially because they refer to the form of understanding literature is supposed to stimulate to emphasize the difference from traditional knowledge (typical of science).

In line with the type of proposals just outlined, Catherine Z.

³ Very famous and provocative is the anti-cognitivist position defended by J. Stolnitz, *On the Cognitive Triviality of Art*, «The British Journal of Aesthetics» 32/3 (1992), pp. 191-200.

⁴ Among them C. Z. Elgin, *Understanding: Art and Science*, «Synthese» 95 (1993), pp. 13-68; N. Carroll, *Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding*, in J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 126-160; E. John, *Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context*, «The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism» 56 (1998), pp. 331-348; J. Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

⁵ J. Gibson, *Cognitivism and the Arts*, «Philosophy Compass» 3 (2008), pp. 573-589.

Elgin⁶ defends the idea that art and literature are important for the development of human understanding, where by “understanding” one should mean an epistemic dimension different from knowledge; firstly because it concerns certain topics or general issues (and not individual utterances), secondly because it is holistic (it concerns a whole that must be considered as such and hence does not admit of being subdivided into parts), and finally because, unlike knowledge, it implies a process that takes place in stages. In this sense, understanding should be seen as a cognitive faculty⁷ that includes the capacity to go in deep, invent and discover, distinguish and connect, clarify, test, accept, and reject.

The understanding made possible by literary works thus consists of a conceptual reorganization specifically manifesting itself in readers’ ability to ask questions on various issues⁸, adopt new points of view, detect unexpected connections between things, and identify new categories to classify objects and events. Therefore, when we read, for instance, *À la recherche du temps perdu* by Marcel Proust or *Ulysses* by James Joyce, what is relevant is not so much that a particular content is conveyed, but rather that through those readings we are invited to ask ourselves questions, and perhaps even imagine possible answers. Hence the disorientation, troubles, perplexity, positive/negative evaluations, and possible resistance aroused in readers are fundamental elements within this understanding process. Moreover, talking about understanding also allows us to attach value to those opinions that are false, distorted views, or immoral attitudes⁹ that we may not share, and yet are invited to understand during the act of reading¹⁰. It also clarifies the workings of those advertisement and propaganda works that have no other purpose than to convince or

⁶ C. Z. Elgin, *From Knowledge to Understanding*, in S. Hetherington (ed.), *Epistemology Futures*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, pp. 100-215.

⁷ N. Goodman-C. Z. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1988, p. 161.

⁸ C. Z. Elgin, *Art in the Advancement of Understanding*, «American Philosophical Quarterly» 39 (2002), pp. 1-12.

⁹ C. Z. Elgin, *True Enough*, «Philosophical Issues» 14 (2005), pp. 113-131.

¹⁰ For the issues related to the so-called “imaginative resistance”, and in particular for a position distinguishing the cognitive level of understanding from the emotional/cognitive level of participation, see C. Barbero-A. Voltolini, *How One Cannot Imagine What One Could Imagine*, in F. Lavocat-A. James-A. Kubo (eds.), *Impossible fictions/Fictions impossibles*, «Fabula/Les colloques», <https://doi.org/10.58282/colloques.11235> [21.06.25].

persuade about something (independently of its real value). Finally, the idea that the experience of literary works leads to a form of understanding also explains why we read back certain works, and why re-reading can ensure further progress by prompting us to reason, to think, to revise our beliefs, to reflect, and to compare ourselves with others.

Despite the persuasiveness of this position, criticism was not long in coming. For instance, Peter Lamarque¹¹ questions *how specifically* this form of understanding manifests itself and whether we should conclude that those who are very familiar with literary works understand people and the world *better* than those who do not read. In other words, is there evidence to support the hypothesis that literature makes us *better people*¹²? It does not seem so (and one would have to agree on what can legitimately be considered as “evidence”). To complaints of this kind, one could trivially object that it is not possible, when it comes to our experience of literature, to have that kind of “evidence”¹³ Lamarque has in mind, while others have insisted¹⁴ that without elements that can be controlled, one cannot, in a proper sense, speak of progress, one can at most speak of the sense of satisfaction that such an activity arouses in appreciators.

It is not easy to imagine where the debate will lead, but it is worth trying to make a few brief remarks. It seems clear that the experience of literary works has important implications from a cognitive point of view and, although some question this by comparing it to mere entertainment, it is difficult to dispute and, above all, it does not seem that questioning possible literary knowledge with the scientific model in mind (as the only plausible model of knowledge) would be an interesting move. In science and art, the very notions of “truth” and “knowledge” have very different meanings, and those who approach them motivated by a desire for knowledge are usually well aware of this. In the present paper the aim is that of enforcing the neo-cog-

¹¹ P. Lamarque, *Learning from Literature*, «The Dalhousie Review» 77 (1997), pp. 7-21.

¹² Hence the provocative position defended by G. Currie, *Does Great Literature Make Us Better?*, that sparked the debate in *The New York Times* 01.06.23, <https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/01/does-great-literature-make-us-better/> [21.06.25].

¹³ S. E. Worth, *In Defense of Reading*, Rowman and Littlefield, London 2017, pp. 173-204.

¹⁴ G. Currie, *On Getting Out of the Armchair to Do Aesthetics*, in M. C. Haug (ed.), *Philosophical Methodology: The Armchair or the Laboratory?*, Routledge, New York 2013, pp. 435-450.

nitivist position by suggesting new arguments in favor of the idea that literature, thanks to its perspectival nature, does have a specific cognitive value consisting in its capacity to profoundly impact us and inspire personal transformation.

2. *Understanding as a Normative Dimension*

It is a rather shared belief that what we can understand from a given text must be placed in a normative dimension, i.e., that it is possible to identify a “right”, or “correct” reading, especially about what is not explicitly said and yet is integrated during reading. Just think about the rich philosophical-literary¹⁵ debate concerning what the protagonist of F. Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* is said to have turned into. Let us take the beginning of the story:

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his domelike brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes¹⁶.

¹⁵ On the philosophical debate dedicated to the kind of object that morning Gregor finds himself transformed into, see S. Friend, *The Great Beetle Debate: A Study in Imagining with Names*, «Philosophical Studies» 153/2 (2011), pp. 183-211. In particular, Friend contributes to the debate focusing on sentences such as «Gregor Samsa was turned into a cockroach» that pose the problem of how one can say something true (or false) concerning empty names, i.e. names that do not refer to something that exists. Friend suggests to interpret such sentences as accounts of *prescriptions to imagine* generated by works of fiction. In particular, she argues that one should interpret these sentences as specifying not *what* one should imagine, but *how* one should imagine.

¹⁶ F. Kafka, “The Metamorphosis”, *The Complete Stories*, New York, Schocken Books Inc., 1971, p. 89. It is also worth (in order to have the *purest* aesthetic experience) reading in the original version: «Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt. Er lag auf seinem panzerartig harten Rücken und sah, wenn er den Kopf ein wenig hob, seinen gewölbten, braunen, von bogenförmigen Versteifungen geteilten Bauch, auf dessen Höhe sich die Bettdecke, zum gänzlichen Niedergleiten bereit, kaum noch erhalten konnte. Seine vielen, im Vergleich zu seinem sonstigen

No one would dare question that Gregor finds himself transformed into an insect that morning, although this is not made explicit in the original text – Kafka uses the name «Ungeziefer», which means *parasite*. However, let us admit that Gregor wakes up that morning in his bed transformed into an insect. But

[...] what exactly is the “vermin” into which poor Gregor, the seedy commercial traveler, is so suddenly transformed? It obviously belongs to the branch of “jointed leggers” (Arthropoda), to which insects, and spiders and centipedes, and crustaceans belong. If the “numerous little legs” mentioned in the beginning mean more than six legs, then Gregor would not be an insect from a zoological point of view. But I suggest that a man awakening on his back and finding he has as many as six legs vibrating in the air might feel that six was sufficient to be called numerous. We shall therefore assume that Gregor has six legs, that he is an insect.

Next question: what insect? Commentators say cockroach, which of course does not make sense. A cockroach is an insect that is flat in shape with large legs, and Gregor is anything but flat: he is convex on both sides, belly and back, and his legs are small. He approaches a cockroach in only one respect: his coloration is brown. That is all. Apart from this he has a tremendous convex belly divided into segments and a hard rounded back suggestive of wing cases. In beetles these cases conceal flimsy little wings that can be expanded and then may carry the beetle for miles and miles in a blundering flight. Curiously enough, Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back. (This is a very nice observation on my part to be treasured all your lives. Some Gregors, some Joes and Janes, do not know that they have wings.) Further, he has strong mandibles. He uses these organs to turn the key in a lock while standing erect on his hind legs, on his third pair of legs (a strong little pair), and this gives us the length of his body, which is about three feet long. In the course of the story he gets gradually accustomed to using his new appendages – his feet, his feelers. This brown, convex, dog-sized beetle is very broad¹⁷.

The above commentary by Nabokov on Gregor Samsa’s transformation in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* is an excellent demonstration of how a deep understanding of zoology, coupled with literary insight,

Umfang kläglich dünnen Beine flimmerten ihm hilflos vor den Augen».

¹⁷ V. Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1980, pp. 347-348.

can enrich interpretation. But how is Nabokov able to provide that detailed and convincing explanation of Gregor's new form? First thanks to his zoological expertise: in fact, Nabokov was not only a celebrated writer and literature's professor, but also a skilled entomologist, particularly in lepidopterology, and this expertise allows him to approach Kafka's text with a precision that merges scientific classification and literary imagination, thus providing a grounded and vivid depiction of Gregor's transformation, which Kafka intentionally left ambiguous. Moreover, Nabokov's analysis doesn't stop at the physical description, he also draws a parallel between the biological characteristics of Gregor's insect form and the symbolic and thematic dimensions of Kafka's story, for instance noticing that Gregor likely possesses wings he does not know having is a profound metaphor for latent potential or unrealized capabilities. This resonates with Gregor's tragic arc, where his transformation and subsequent isolation prevent him from fulfilling any meaningful purpose in life. Hence Nabokov *enriches* Kafka's intentionally vague descriptions by constructing an imaginative yet biologically plausible depiction of Gregor's insect form: he provides specific dimensions (three feet in length), anatomical features (mandibles, segmented belly), and movement patterns. This reconstruction helps visualizing Gregor in a concrete way, emphasizing his grotesque and pitiful transformation. And Nabokov's final observation – that «some Gregors, some Joes and Janes, do not know that they have wings» – extends beyond zoology into a poignant reflection on human potential and self-awareness.

Then Kafka's description, on the one hand, deliberately leaves room for interpretive ambiguity by refraining from explicitly describing Gregor's form, whereas Nabokov's explanation, on the other, helps imagining from what is written down, namely that Gregor, stuck on his back looking at his convex belly, cannot be a cockroach (cockroaches are flat and do not stay stuck on their backs) but is more likely a beetle, a big beetle. Nabokov imagines, completing with his expertise, that kind of entity Kafka had only sketched. But as Roman Ingarden explains¹⁸, any *concretization* can never be identified with the incomplete object we find in the text, therefore despite Nabokov's assertory tone and the lepidoptery argument he advances, the insect

¹⁸ R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art. An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973, pp. 331-355.

Gregor finds himself transformed into that morning *is not* a beetle, or rather it is a beetle according to Nabokov's concretization, but it is not a beetle *tout court*. By the way, if Kafka has not specified which particular insect Gregor turned into, maybe it is because such a specification is not indispensable for understanding the story (although the fact that the beetle, unlike the cockroach, has wings does not seem to be an irrelevant point). In any case, it is plain how an understanding based on a more respectful concretization of the text may seem "more correct" than another one (if the author has remained vague as to the type of insect Gregor has turned into, and if he nevertheless attributes to it characteristics that are not compatible with being a cockroach, then perhaps it would be more correct to think it has transformed in something else).

One could at this point raise the following objection: even assuming that one can understand different things from a certain text (as long as they are compatible with the text itself), would it not be legitimate to assume that things could be different in the literary world? In other words, it may well be that the reader does not find particular elements in the text to understand which specific insect Gregor turned into, but one could assume that, *in the story*, Gregor turned into a *specific insect*. That would not be a good point, because that would imply accepting that Gregor has turned into a specific insect (say, a beetle) even though we, as readers, do not know that. And this is not something we would be willing to accept because the literary text is and remains *essentially opaque*, as Peter Lamarque has extensively explained¹⁹, even if one had decided to read it transparently. And opaque it had to remain for Kafka himself, who, not surprisingly, resolutely forbade his publisher from depicting on the cover the insect into which Gregor had been transformed. So although readers, following what Walton calls the "Reality Principle"²⁰, try to make transparent what is presented opaquely, Gregor will remain opaque. What, instead, is relevant for *understanding* that literary work? That Gregor has transformed himself into something that his relatives find revolting, which will cause them deep anguish they will be able to overcome only with his death.

In addition to this understanding, more "embedded" in the text, there is also another kind of understanding, more related to the

¹⁹ P. Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2014.

²⁰ K. L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1990.

themes and tone of the work. For example, it is often argued that understanding Kafka's works means being clear about his classic themes such as alienation, social or family conflict, anguish, the inevitability of justice, the labyrinths of bureaucracy, resignation, and the crisis of the individual. In his stories, one is often confronted with a particular or problematic situation, a crisis, or difficulty of the protagonist that then gradually amplifies until it becomes intolerable and has unpredictable devastating consequences. Many of his works are often interpreted as allegories, because they refer to something other than what they say, although it is not always possible to understand specifically what. Well, an "underqualified reader" (that's the way he calls himself) of Kafka as David Foster Wallace – when he gave a lecture in March 1998 on the occasion of a new translation of *The Castle* published by Schocken Books – says that a great frustration of his has always been that he has not been able to get his students understanding that Kafka is quite comic, and is so because he manages to realize

Some kind of radical literalization of truths we tend to treat as metaphorical. I opine to them that some of our deepest and most profound collective intuitions seem to be expressible only as figures of speech, that's why we call these figures of speech "expressions". With respect to *The Metamorphosis*, then, I might invite students to consider what is really being expressed when we refer to someone as "creepy" or "gross" or say that somebody was forced to "eat shit" in his job. Or to reread *In the Penal Colony* in light of expressions like "tonguelashing" or "She sure tore me a new asshole" or the gnomic "By a certain age, everybody has the face he deserves". Or to approach *A Hunger Artist* in terms of tropes like "starved for attention" or "love-starved" or the double entendre in the term "self-denial", or even as innocent a factoid as that the etymological root of "anorexia" happens to be the Greek word for longing²¹.

Kafka would therefore be funny if one could read his opaque texts transparently, that is, if one considered what he wrote not metaphorically or allegorically, but as a lucid (at times hallucinated) vision of reality. «Das ist komisch»²², when something that seems absurd turns out to be real. By the time the reader realizes this, it is often too late. In general, it is always too late. Just as it is too late when the Artist

²¹ D. F. Wallace, *Laughing with Kafka*, «Log» 22 (2011), pp. 48-49.

²² Ivi, p. 50.

of Hunger realizes that his capacity to starve himself is limitless, but then people no longer look at him, they stop appreciating his art. And so, he explains that they do not have to admire his fasting: «Because I have to fast, I can't help it, [...] because I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else»²³.

These examples show how important the perspective we adopt towards specific literary works might change what we understand from them and the way we appreciate them. Perspective (both seen as a window into subjectivity and as an exploration of complex reality) may justify a specific interpretation (think about Nabokov's or Wallace's), enrich emotional resonance, foster cognitive engagement, and enhance aesthetic complexity of a work. By challenging readers to explore and evaluate different viewpoints²⁴, literature therefore not only deepens their understanding of the text but also broadens their grasp of human experience and the world.

3. *Literary Understanding as Perspective*

In everyday life we observe the world from a particular point of view: our own. Well, one of the great merits of literature (and it is no coincidence that some believe that this is where its fundamental experiential value lies²⁵), is that it allows us to change our point of observation, if not to be able to look at things and events through someone else's eyes²⁶. As Hilary Putnam has explained in detail, this is what happens

²³ F. Kafka, "A Hunger Artist", *The Complete Stories*, New York, Schocken Books Inc., 1971, p. 309.

²⁴ See M. Donnelly, *The Cognitive Value of Literary Perspectives*, «Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism» 77/1 (2019), pp. 11-22, to see how and why it is important for readers to engage with a literary work by temporarily setting aside their own perspective and adopting one that differs from their own, practicing in that way their ability of understanding others' motivations from different viewpoints.

²⁵ That is, in a form of experiential and not merely intellectual knowledge, because it is not a matter of acquiring new information or making inferences from something, but of "knowing" in the sense of "experiencing", "trying out" (cf. D. Walsh, *Literature and Knowledge*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 1969).

²⁶ On the capacity of literature, in particular of fiction, to stimulate people adopt a new perspective on human affairs which involves an active reordering of one's thoughts and leads to lasting changes in how one thinks, see E. Camp, *Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction*, «Philosophical Perspectives» 31/1 (2017), pp.

if I read Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night* I do not learn that love does not exist, that all human beings are hateful and hating (even if – and I am sure this is not the case – those propositions should be true). What I learn is to see the world as it looks to someone who is sure that hypothesis is correct. I see what plausibility that hypothesis has; what it would be like if it were true; how someone could possibly think that it is true. But all this is still not empirical knowledge. Yet it is not correct to say that it is not knowledge at all; for being aware of a new interpretation of the facts, however, repellent, of a construction that can – I now see – be put upon the facts, however perversely – is a kind of knowledge. It is knowledge of a possibility. It is *conceptual* knowledge. [...] Thinking of a hypothesis that one had not considered before is *conceptual* discovery; it is not empirical discovery, although it may result in empirical discovery if the hypothesis turns out to be correct. Yet the “knowledge of a possibility” that literature gives us should not be knowledge of a *mere* possibility. That the possibility Celine holds before us is a “mere” possibility is, after all, one of the reasons we do not rate Celine higher than we do as a novelist. So again the situation is complicated, there are both empirical and conceptual elements in the knowledge we gain from literature²⁷.

This passage highlights the unique epistemological contribution of literature²⁸, specifically its capacity to provide *conceptual knowledge* rather than empirical or strictly propositional knowledge.

Literature allows us to enter into a perspective, even if it is one we find repugnant, false, or extreme. In the case of Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*, the narrative does not teach us factual truths about love or human nature, instead, it shows us how the world appears to someone who believes in certain extreme propositions (e.g., the absence of love, the prevalence of hate). And this is not *empirical knowledge* – it is not about facts that can be verified or falsified – but rather *knowledge of a possibility*, a new way of looking at things and of

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²⁷ H. Putnam, *Literature, Science, and Reflection*, «New Literary History» 3, p. 488.

²⁸ On the importance of literature as having an epistemic dimension, see C. Z. Elgin, *True Enough*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2017. According to Elgin's view literature can advance understanding, and an interpretation of work can exemplify a particular feature of it, in the sense of focusing on that specific feature while downplaying others features, and thereby affords epistemic access to the work providing an understanding of it, from a particular perspective.

constructing meaning from the world. Moreover, the act of imaginatively inhabiting a perspective, even one we reject, expands our cognitive and emotional horizons by providing empathy (we gain insight into how someone else might genuinely believe in what we find false or abhorrent) and critical awareness (inviting us to examine the plausibility and emotional weight of a worldview we might otherwise dismiss outright). Even when we do not accept the propositions presented, the exercise of understanding how such a worldview might seem plausible contributes to our broader intellectual toolkit²⁹.

Putnam's notion of "knowledge of a possibility" is crucial. And the *literary hypothesis* is one richly explored through the text's imaginative and emotional depth. Céline's bleak worldview does not describe a universal truth, but it feels disturbingly plausible within the confines of the novel. It is this *plausibility* – the sense of "what if this were true?" – that makes the knowledge gained from literature so powerful, helping us see *how* the world might be constructed differently, even if those constructions are grim or perverse.

Putnam also introduces an aesthetic dimension to his analysis: Céline's work presents a "mere possibility", and this means that the value of literary knowledge depends on the depth and scope of the perspectives it opens up. Literature therefore does not compete with science or philosophy in offering empirical truths. Instead, it excels in its capacity to explore human experience, alternative frameworks of meaning, and the emotional and conceptual consequences of various worldviews. The interplay between conceptual discovery and empirical insight underscores literature's unique position as both a reflective and generative force in human understanding. Putnam's analysis suggests that literature's value lies in its ability to illuminate possibilities, expand our interpretive capacities, and provide insight into how others might construct meaning. While this knowledge may not always align with empirical truths, it enriches our understanding of the human condition by offering conceptual discoveries that challenge, provoke, and sometimes transform our ways of seeing the world. As already Aristotle argued in his *Poetics* (1451b), thanks to literature, we can come in touch with "things that might happen".

And how many points of view can we have on a given scene³⁰?

²⁹ The suggestion from C. Barbero, A. Voltolini, *op. cit.*, is that this phenomenon could be better understood by distinguishing propositional from participative imagination.

³⁰ W. Huemer, in his *Fictional Narrative and the Other's Perspective*, «Croatian Journal

An *internal point of view*, if we are part of that scene, and one or more *external points of view* if we try to distance ourselves to understand it³¹. Acquiring an internal and objective point of view to be able to know what a character is thinking is an absolute privilege: consider that, even concerning ourselves, far from what Descartes believed, this goal is constantly missed³². We often do not know what we think, or how we think about what we think, and too often we are not even aware of where we are. And this happens because, trivially, that activity that in theory sees us engaged in every morning, in front of the mirror, we never do it seriously, but always paying attention to (and thus distracted by) insignificant details, terrified, unknowingly, of seeing ourselves for what we are. Literature can therefore also be seen as an opportunity to look at and study ourselves from the inside.

Of course, not all literary works suggest introspection, in fact

of Philosophy» 22/2 (2022), pp. 161-179, convincingly argues, against anti-cognitivism and on a similar line as the one defended in this paper, that works of fiction enhance our understanding by inviting us to imaginatively engage with the perspectives of others (whereby “perspective” is meant both the subjective point of view through which something is experienced, and a representational method or technique). On the fundamental role of perspective see also I. Binini-W. Huemer-D. Molinari, *A Game of Perspectives: On the Role of Imagination in Thought Experiments*, 90 (2024), pp. 1865-1889, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-023-00784-2> [21.06.25], maintaining that both thought experiments and fictions are uniquely suited to expressing specific theoretical perspectives through imaginative engagement.

³¹ Although literature was at first largely ignored by psychology researchers, today several studies on this area show how literature offers models and simulations of the social world through abstraction, simplification and synthesis. Literary works seem to be able to initiate, among other things, a deep and immersive simulative experience of social interactions. Engaging in the simulative experiences triggered by literature thus seems to have the advantage of facilitating understanding others and increasing our capacity for empathy and social inference. For a study of the psychology of literature in general and for this point in particular, see K. Oatley, *Such Stuff as Dreams. The Psychology of Fiction*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2011, pp. 155-175.

³² Descartes famously considered the subject to be transparent to itself and believed that the mind’s awareness of its contents was able to produce knowledge endowed with a particular kind of certainty (as opposed to knowledge of the physical world). However, phenomena such as self-deception and self-delusion show how access to the inner world consists, to a large extent, of access to an imaginary dimension. Where Descartes saw something given and transparent to himself, in reality there seems to be something constructed that allows subjects to describe (in part) and justify essentially unconscious mental processes. For the phenomena of self-deception and self-delusion that go against the transparency of the subject to itself see P. Pedrini, *Autoinganno*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2013.

there are many kinds of literature. And even speaking about “literature” as a uniform collection of works would be misleading. If one wishes to consider the question of what literature is, one could answer in the wake of Morris Weitz³³ who, following Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*³⁴ says that trying to define art is like trying to define games: a battle lost at the start³⁵. It is not possible to say what falls under the category of “literature” and what does not, at most one can find similarities between works, within a certain genre, in a particular historical period, and for a certain audience. One could try to understand how literary language works, for example, in managing to describe a scene, a character, or an ordinary evening. Or one could show what authors sometimes do when they take readers by the hand bringing them somewhere, perhaps to show them a scene, a character, or an ordinary evening. The first thing is what Raymond Carver³⁶ does in *Cathedral*, the second is what Tess Gallagher³⁷ does in *Rain Flooding Your Campfire*.

But there is more than this. Because the story written by Carver is the story about his wife Tess and a blind friend who had visited them once. Sometimes this also happens, that writers borrow stories from others and just tell them. That was the case with *Cathedral*: Carver wrote it before Gallagher because at the time she was teaching and did not have enough time. Then she too wrote her story which became *Rain Flooding Your Campfire*³⁸.

4. Points of View

How many points of view are there in a story? According to Kendall Walton³⁹, readers usually assume a double point of view to the story

³³ M. Weitz, *The Role of Theory in Aesthetics*, «The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism» 15/1 (1956), pp. 27-35.

³⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford 1953.

³⁵ On the importance of avoiding unnecessary reductionism, see P. Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, cit., pp. 25-27.

³⁶ R. Carver, *Cathedral*, «The Atlantic Monthly» (September 1981), pp. 23-29.

³⁷ T. Gallagher, *Rain Flooding Your Campfire*, in *At the Owl Woman Saloon*, Scribner, New York 1997, pp. 159-175.

³⁸ As Gallagher in an interview for *The Atlantic* 10.07.1997, <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/factfict/gallaghe.htm> [21.06.25].

³⁹ K. Walton, *How Remote Are Fictional Worlds from the Real World?*, «The Journal of

by positioning themselves both inside and outside what is being told. According to him, readers participate in those *games of make-believe*⁴⁰ literary works consist of, and admire the creation of the literary world (made through descriptions of places, events, and characters). Walton, however, does not dwell much on the notion of “point of view” or “stance”, which is instead the focus of the reflections of Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen, who specifically reflect on the distinction between what they call “fictive stance” and “literary stance” adopted by readers towards literary works⁴¹. Lamarque and Olsen consider the distinction between the two points of view extremely important for our understanding of literary works. The *fictional stance* thus has to do with imagining the content of the work, while the *literary stance* concerns the recognition and appreciation of the work’s aesthetic value.

When we experience literary works, we imagine the content of the work (adopting *the fictional stance*) presented from a certain point of view, with a certain tone and register, we project ourselves into the work and get to know the characters as if they were real people: Anna Karénina as a woman who is a victim of society and surrenders to passions, Rodion Raskòl’nikov as the law student who murders an old usurer and finds himself torn apart by guilt, Albertine Simonet as the woman with whom the Narrator falls madly in love and of whom he is so jealous that he takes her prisoner. This happens when the point of view we adopt requires us to imagine the content of the work. If, on the other hand, we take the *literary stance*, we recognize them as non-real characters created respectively by Lev Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Marcel Proust to reflect on the hypocrisy of the upper classes, on the fact that salvation is possible through suffering, or on the idea that tormented love can never find peace, not even through death, as it is always haunted by ghosts.

When we read, we usually adopt both points of view, and it often

Aesthetics and Art Criticism» 37/1 (1978), pp. 11-23, p. 21.

⁴⁰ K. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, cit.

⁴¹ Alongside the distinction between *fictive* and *literary stance*, P. Lamarque and S. H. Olsen (*Truth, Fiction, and Literature. A Philosophical Perspective*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994) also introduce the distinction between *internal* and *external perspective* with respect to the content of fiction, where the internal perspective has to do with immersion and imaginative involvement with the work, while the external perspective concerns the confrontation between the fictional content and reality (in particular with regard to questions of truth and reference).

happens that we switch from one to the other without realizing it. Yet, the distinction is of fundamental importance for our understanding of the literary work. Indeed, the different perspectives govern the criteria we apply when evaluating characters: from an *internal point of view*, literary characters may be charming, annoying, bad, or stupid, just like real people, while from a *literary point of view*, they may have properties such as being stereotypical, symbolizing the meaninglessness of existence, reflecting human irrationality and so on. Regarding the question of point of view, one might find it useful to distinguish fiction and reality by arguing, in line with Lamarque and Olsen, that if we adopt an internal perspective, we are immersed in the story, whereas if we adopt an external point of view, we are interested in understanding how much reality has been *imported* into literature and whether it is important to know this for properly understanding and interpreting the work. According to Derek Matravers⁴² that distinction is not so relevant, because literary works, both fictional and nonfictional, stimulate our imagination, and we do not need to know whether a narrative is fiction or not to understand, interpret, comment, and appreciate it. This seems exactly to be the case in the story told both by Carver and by Gallagher, where what is important is not to know whether what is narrated happened, but the specific way in which it is told.

First point of view. Cathedral is a short story in which, as in many of Carver's works, (almost) nothing happens. It is about a man visiting a couple, having dinner together, and then watching TV. All the things seem to have happened before or are about to happen. Facts do not seem to be important. Actually, at times one does not even understand what should be considered as important. A remarkable feature of Carver's literary work is that he manages to do with words something that is usually very difficult to achieve: photographs, and snapshots. Like Polaroids taken at random of a certain scene. But not the studied, artistical ones, that want to say or show something, the ones that need a certain light and a particular angle to come out well. No. These are like those photographs from a celebratory, let's say, album we would choose to leave out.

What this tale is about is written by Carver in the first line: «This blind man, an old friend of my wife's, he was on his way to spend the

⁴² D. Matravers, *Fiction and Narrative*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, ch. 4, 5, and 6.

night»⁴³. The main character has to take in a blind man who is a friend of his wife. One whom he does not know. Carver says “blind”, without using an alternative term that might perhaps look more respectful of that man’s condition. Carver calls a spade a spade, without mincing words. If one cannot see, one is *blind*. Not “devoid of sight”, simply “blind”. More than that, Carver also reports in all their privateness and, in some ways, unacceptability, the thoughts of the protagonist towards the blind. For blind people, to those who see, are frightening. They do not see, but we see them. They hear us, however, and perceive many things about us that perhaps we are unable to notice. Maybe it is exactly for this reason that they frighten us because we do not know what we are with them and for them. Usually, by others, we are seen, but the blind man *hears us without seeing us*.

Carver’s narrative allows us access to something that is usually precluded to us in reality: another person’s mind. We know what the protagonist is thinking, and what is going through his mind. Monika Fludernik⁴⁴ insists a lot on this aspect, namely that literature provides readers with the possibility of having those experiences that, in principle, they could not have in reality. Literature allows access to different ways of conceiving the world, providing in some cases a real epistemological lesson in subjectivism, skepticism, or relativism. In *Cathedral*, we know what the protagonist is thinking – he is the only character whose head we can get inside – we don’t know what his wife is thinking (although from some of her glances at her husband, we get some idea), nor what is going on in the mind of Robert, the blind man. Instead, we know *exactly* what is in his head, it is *as if* we were him. We know his thoughts. And what thoughts are they? They are like the thoughts of a child, spontaneous, unfiltered, full of naivety and tenderness.

I wasn’t enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies. In the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed. Sometimes they were led by seeing-eye dogs. A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to⁴⁵.

⁴³ R. Carver, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴⁴ M. Fludernik, *Natural Narratology and Cognitive Parameters*, in D. Herman (ed.), *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Science*, CSLI, Stanford 2003, pp. 243-267.

⁴⁵ R. Carver, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

The blind man, when working with his wife many years before, had asked her permission to touch her face on the last day of work. Yes, because he needed to get a sense of her physically as well, and the only way to do this was by touch or smell. For the sighted, touch and smell are very intimate senses to engage, for the blind, on the other hand, they are, along with hearing and taste, the only way to get to know. While they are waiting for him, the protagonist tells his wife that maybe he could take the blind to the Bowling, just to do something. And she gets angry. The point is that with a blind man, you don't know what to do. But when he is reminded of the blind's recently dead wife, he thinks what a difficult life that woman must have had: he never saw her and she could never recognize herself in his eyes.

When the blind man arrives, he is amazed («a beard on a blind man! Too much, I say»). He is a blind man without a cane and without black glasses, but with a beard, quite different from what he imagined. The blind man touches things, tries to orient himself in space, and smokes. The narrator had read that blind people do not smoke because they cannot see the smoke they exhale, but this one, Robert, smokes one cigarette after another. And when it's dinner time and they sit down at the table and eat – or rather, binge, devouring everything on the table –, the blind man is very good at locating the food on the plate, he cuts the meat and eats potatoes and green beans.

After dinner, the protagonist does what he always does, i.e., he turns the television on. His wife glares at him and, to get over her embarrassment at her husband's disrespectful gesture asks the blind man if he has a television at home, to which Robert replies that actually, he has two, one in color and one in black and white, but that he always instinctively turns on the color one. Unbelievable.

Then the wife goes upstairs to put on her dressing gown and the two men left in the living room think about having another drink and a joint. The wife after a while goes downstairs, sits with them, takes two puffs on the joint, and then falls asleep. Or rather, collapses. And then there is the description of that splendid, intimate scene, of the dressing gown first closed by the husband and then reopened, because he is the only one admiring that spectacle. Then he might as well enjoy the show.

I wished my wife hadn't pooped out. Her head lay across the back of the sofa, her mouth open. She'd turned so that the robe

had slipped away from her legs, exposing a juicy thigh. I reached to draw her robe back over her, and it was then that I glanced at the blind man. What the hell! I flipped the robe open again⁴⁶.

Robert and the protagonist watch a documentary on television about the Church, Middle Ages, and cathedrals. There are Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Italian cathedrals. He asks the blind man if he knows what a cathedral is. Robert answers that he knows that it is something that takes many men and many years to be built, as said on television. But then the blind man asks him to describe one to him because he really couldn't get a clear idea. But how do you describe a cathedral to someone who has never seen one and does not know what it is? He tries. He tells Robert that they are very tall, that they point straight to heaven, that they have angels or devils, ladies or knights carved on the façade, it depends, then he tells him that they are massive and made of stone and that men built them to be closer to God. But then, when asked by Robert if he believes in God, he tells him that no, he does not, he does not believe in anything, and that for him cathedrals are things you see on television late at night. At that point the blind man asks him to get a pen and paper and if they can try drawing one together. He gets some ballpoint pens and a paper bag from the supermarket and they try, Robert's hand on top of his, to draw one. They go on for a while, one hand on top of the other. Then his wife wakes up and asks them what they are doing. He does not answer, Robert says they are drawing a cathedral. Then the blind man asks him something crazy: to continue drawing, but with his eyes closed. And finally, he tells him to reopen his eyes to see what the drawing of the cathedral looks like. And the protagonist replies: «My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything. "It's something," I said»⁴⁷.

Second point of view. Gallagher's story begins by specifying that the point of view from the previous account has changed and that now the way things happened will be told. The perspective here is a way of presenting things, of offering a version of certain facts. And there is a "rough", approximate, made-up version, and then there is a true and accurate version, which is this.

⁴⁶ R. Carver, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 29.

Mr. G.'s story, the patched-up version I'm about to set straight, starts with a blind man arriving at my house. But the real story begins with my working ten-hour days with Norman Roth, a blind man who hired me because he liked my voice⁴⁸.

The blind friend's name, we learn, is Norman, and she had met him when they worked together in the Research and Development section of the Seattle Police Department (later, when their work at the Department was over, the two had kept in touch by exchanging tapes and a few phone calls).

Norman is a chain smoker. Here, unlike in Carver's text, there are everyone's names, except for the narrator's: Ernest is the husband, Gallivan the colleague who is a writer (and who wrote this story before her, changing things up a bit), and then precisely Norman, the blind man. Gallagher gives on the second page the reasons for the title (in the other story Carver does not explain it, but we do not feel the need because we understand it with the ending of the story): "rain flooding your campfire" was the sentence she and Norman used to say to each other when things went wrong and they wanted to take courage. Of Mr. G.'s tale she says that she is sorry for the things he was not able to tell and that are important.

So, first of all, how did the blind man arrive? He arrived the wrong day, i.e., one day earlier than he was supposed to arrive, and since she and her husband had been invited to G.'s for dinner that evening, they brought Norman along.

Gallagher continually insists on the comparison with the other tale that was not accurate and contained wrong details:

Mr. G.'s story begins as we get out of the car at my house and I help Norman up the steps. The narrator sees his wife (that's me!) gripping the arm of the blind man, guiding him toward the house. Here he is, catching a view of the wife in a moment of intimacy with a blind man⁴⁹.

She presents some synesthesia used by Norman («it's so dark in here I can't *feel* where I am going»)⁵⁰, before clarifying what the main problem is when dealing with a blind person, the fact that the other

⁴⁸ T. Gallagher, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 164.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

person cannot see us and that we, because of this, feel as we would never want to feel, i.e. invisible. The point, however, is that for them we are, invisible.

After drinking a couple of Bloody Marys, she, Norman, and Ernest go to Gallivan's for dinner, where he welcomes them with kindness. During dinner, when Norman says he no longer works for his Management Enterprise since his wife has gone, G. asks him candidly, «Gone?»⁵¹, and then they continue eating. After a while, Norman gets up and says he has to go to the restroom and once there he starts sobbing. Then the evening goes on quietly, they finish eating and she says she wants to go home because there is an interesting TV program she wants to watch. They leave, Gallivan with them – because that TV program, as it happens, also interests him but his television is broken. In the car Gallivan tells Norman that he would like to hear him talk about his dreams: is it true that the dreams of blind persons are also different? That they perceive, in their dreams, certain things before certain others? Smells or tastes before certain textures, say? Once at home, they start watching television. There is a program about missiles and nuclear power. As absurd as it may seem for a blind man to sit in front of the television, this is what Norman does that night. Then she falls asleep and when she wakes up she finds the three men bent over the coffee table intent on doing something. Asked what they are doing they reply: «Helping him see a missile – [...] We cut out one of paper»⁵². Then she goes up to the room, and after a while, her husband follows her. Gallivan goes into the garden with Norman and moves his arms to point out the constellations to him – a blind man who wants to see the stars (this is an important difference between his version and Mr. G.'s: here the constellations are explained to a blind man, there we have a sighted man who «experiences blindness through his blind visitor»⁵³). Then Gallivan leaves, and Norman remains alone in the garden. She wakes up after a while, naked and hot, and goes to him.

I felt completely unconcerned that I was naked, as if I were somehow still dreaming and protected by the blindness of the world to dreams. It was one of those crossover moments where

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 168.

⁵² Ivi, p. 172.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

life overflows, yet somehow keeps its shape. Norman let go of the tree and said, "That you?" "Yes," I said. Then I slipped my hand under his elbow and, as if the entire world were watching and not watching, I guided our beautiful dark heads through a maze of stars, into my sleeping house⁵⁴.

Carver's and Gallagher's are two different versions of the same story. It is the same story presented from two different perspectives. His and hers. What to think? Does it make sense to ask which, of the two, is the "real" or "correct" story? Maybe not, given the inherent opacity of the literary text. To explain possible deviations from reality, one could resort to what some call either *poetic license*⁵⁵ or *suspension of disbelief*⁵⁶, to give reasons for the fact that literary imagination can be more or less rigid, admitting various kinds of deviations and inconsistencies in the narration of events. For, with narratives such as these, we are not dissatisfied or annoyed, but rather somewhat intrigued by the differences in how the story went.

As a corollary to literary opacity, it would be opportune to recall, echoing what Roland Barthes emphasized in an essay whose title is *Le discours de l'histoire*⁵⁷, that even those texts that are supposed to report reality objectively, without anchoring/referring to a specific author, are the result of a specific imaginative work carried out by an author (evidently) victim of a *referential illusion* because even where the "effect of the real"⁵⁸ (thanks to which we understand how some of the details that authors include in their novels may play a central role in the narrative structure by the very fact of *constituting* the real because they guarantee the existence of a real-world to which the fragments we find in the novels would bear witness) seems to give itself as direct and binding, it does not prevent the author's expressive freedom from being realized.

Here comes the perception of difficulty – how does a blind man get an idea of what a cathedral or a missile is if he has never seen one – becomes an opportunity to dwell on detail, to leave a little evidence

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 175.

⁵⁵ H. Deutsch, *Fiction and Fabrication*, «Philosophical Studies» 57 (1985), pp. 201-211.

⁵⁶ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, in *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge*, Random House, New York 1819/1951.

⁵⁷ R. Barthes, *Le discours de l'histoire*, «Studies in Semiotics/Recherches Sémiotiques» (1967), pp. 65-75.

⁵⁸ R. Barthes, *L'effet de réel*, «Communications» 11 (1968), pp. 84-89.

of the world, and achieve the *reality effect*: how do you know what something looks like if you cannot see it? If you have never seen it? You tip its edges, resting your hand on that of the person drawing.

But then again, even if we manage to get an idea, we will never come to know enough. The blind man knows it and we all know it as well. Reality is not something that can be encapsulated in a drawing or a verbal description, however accurate. Besides, who knows if Carver and Gallagher's stories describe something that happened? But above all: is it important to know that, to appreciate them? And despite the various claims to have literature as referring to reality (or pieces of reality), it is also well true that the power of literature lies in *creating*, with words, something that was not there before (perhaps giving the reader the illusion that the writer is describing something that exists just out there). Even when telling parts of the world and life, one uses certain linguistic means of expression, a particular point of view, an order of presentation of events, and a certain way of describing the protagonists. All this is the result of the writer's pen (or keyboard). That is why, even when dealing with literature describing reality, one cannot avoid the multiplicity of points of view, ambiguous endings, and accounts that do not add up. When we read a newspaper article, if we are not persuaded by what is written or if we have the impression that some accounts are inaccurate, we look elsewhere for more information to fill in the gaps in the text. When dealing with literary texts, on the other hand, we may be intrigued by the inconclusiveness of certain accounts, the unsaid, repetitions, a truncated scene, a wrong metaphor, or rambling punctuation. Because then, if there are things in literature that are unsaid, that we do not understand, or that do not persuade us, it may well be that we are fine with that.

Who knows whether it was missiles or cathedrals that the blind man tried to imagine in his drawing that night? Perhaps we prefer imagining they were cathedrals, severe and sky-high. Like a prayer of spires, towers, and arches reaching where men cannot reach. And maybe we prefer that because we have seen enough missiles in the last few years.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to contend that literature holds cognitive

value through its ability to represent multiple perspectives. The articulation of perspectives as presented by literary works becomes a cognitive achievement because it contributes to deepening understanding, advancing knowledge, and fostering intellectual and emotional engagement.

Perspectives always reveal something previously hidden, overlooked, or misunderstood; therefore, they do not merely restate the obvious or reinforce existing prejudices, but instead provide new insights or reframe existing knowledge in an illuminating way.

Perspectives are able to integrate different viewpoints and thus have greater cognitive value showing the ability to synthesize complexity and embracing multiple dimensions without oversimplifying.

Perspectives are always strictly connected to the context and are often original, thus breaking new ground by departing from convention or reimagining established ideas.

Cognitive achievement then arises because these new perspectives have transformative potential: they change the way we see the world, think about ourselves, or act. Of course, perspectives might as well be shallow, incoherent, dogmatic, or self-serving; in that case they also contribute meaningfully to human understanding, but in a negative way, displaying how things can be diluted, distorted, or deteriorated.

In conclusion, the representation of different perspectives characterizes as a specific cognitive trait of literary works. By borrowing Vladimir Nabokov's words, «this constant shift of the viewpoint conveys a more varied knowledge, fresh vivid glimpses from this or that side. If you have ever tried to stand and bend your head so as to look back between your knees, with your face turned upside down, you will see the world in a totally different light»⁵⁹. Achieving this requires originality, aptness, transformative potential, and engagement with other views, qualities that ensure we go beyond mere literature's semantic level to make a step toward a deeper form of understanding.

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⁵⁹ V. Nabokov, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

