

TANGLED RELATION BETWEEN LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

A.V. Ramacharyulu

Department of English, ZPHS, S.Rayavaram
Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

Received: Oct. 2019 Accepted: Nov. 2019 Published: Dec. 2019

Abstract: The relation between philosophy and literature has been intimate since the two fields became distinct practices. Philosophers have used various literary forms in expressing their views: Parmenides and Lucretius wrote poems while Plato, Augustine, Berkeley and Hume used dialogues, and Montaigne and Emerson used the essay. Some philosophers, Nietzsche, for example, preferred literary expressions outright, where as some philosophers, such as Sartre and Simon de Beauvoir, gave their philosophical views a parallel, literary treatment in their novels and plays. What is the difference between literary philosophy, such as Nietzsche's prose works, and philosophical literature, such as Dostoyevsky's novels? One of the best ways to distinguish literary philosophy from philosophical literature is to refer to institutions or social practices. Roman Ingarden asserts in *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* that the differences between scientific works and literary works are irreconcilable. He speaks of scientific works and literary works but his argument may be used in making a distinction between philosophy and literature. However, 'philosophical literature' is also a complex term, for philosophy and literature interact in various ways. Mainly, here in this study of tangled relation between literature and philosophy, I can rely on Anthony Quinton's distinction between 'philosophy through literature' and 'philosophy in literature.'

Keywords: Scientific Knowledge, Literary Knowledge, Philosophy, Literature, Literary Treatment, Social Practices, Philosopher-Poets, Philosopher-Novelists.

Introduction: The question on the relation between literature and knowledge in philosophical aesthetics is perhaps the oldest. The quarrel between poets and philosophers, even for Plato and Socrates, 'ancient'. Philosophers' view the value of literature, whether literary works may provide knowledge of a significant kind, may be roughly divided into two categories: for and against, mostly against. Both views, unsurprisingly, got their fundamental formulations already in antiquity. Plato, on one side, saw poets as philosophers' competitors on the journey to truth. Plato's antagonistic view of poetry – notably expressed in the tenth book of *The Republic* concerned mainly the source of poets' knowledge. As Plato observed it, poets imitate actual world objects which he considered imperfect copies of ideas, and hence they do not depict the essential but only copy the accidental. Plato, furthermore, argued that the creative act in poetry was not a rational enterprise, but that poets compose their works under an irrational, divine inspiration. Aristotle, on the other side, considered poetry a cognitively valuable practice. A well-known passage in the *Poetics* of Aristotle states that poetry is a source of information concerning possibilities. According to Aristotle, 'the function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but to say the kind of thing that would happen. It means what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity. The difference between works of history and works of poetry is not syntactic but that 'the one says what has happened, the other is that what would happen, and

so for this reason Aristotle argues that ‘poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history’. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars.

In the recent centuries, the cognitive value and function of literature has been discussed in various philosophical traditions, such as existentialism, structuralism and post-structuralism. Recently, there has been a growing interest in the philosophy of literature and in analytic philosophy. It should be observed that several groups take part in discussion on literature and knowledge. However, knowledge covers a wild field in the human thought. Of the various relations between literature and philosophy, that is philosophical functions of, and philosophical approaches to literature, I intend to analyze ‘philosophy through literature.’

A Tangled Structure of Philosophy and Literature: Although complex in many ways, the relations between literature and philosophy have been intimate as the two fields became distinct practices. For instance, philosophers used various literary forms in expressing their points. Plato, Berkeley and Hume used dialogues while Parmenides and Lucretius wrote poems. Montaigne and Emerson used essays. Philosophers like Nietzsche preferred literary expression outright, whereas some philosophers like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir gave their philosophical views a parallel, literary treatment in their novels and plays. In the same way, literary authors have always made excursions into philosophy. It is observed that there is a considerable amount of works in the western literary canon in which philosophical views are put forward, entertained, suggested, or otherwise play a key role. Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Eco’s *Name of the Rose* and *The Island of the Day Before* are some well-known works in which philosophical views play a central role.

What is the difference between literary philosophy, such as Nietzsche’s prose works and philosophical literature, such as Dostoyevsky’s novels? One way to distinguish philosophy from literature is to refer to institutions and social practices. Roman Ingarden asserts in *The Cognition of the Literary work of Art* that the differences between scientific and literary knowledge are irreconcilable. Ingarden speaks of scientific works and literary works but his argument may be using making a distinction between literature and philosophy. Ingarden sees it in a way that scientific and literary works are understood in fundamentally different ways. He feels that scientific works are intended by their authors to transmit the result of a scientific investigation whereas literary works of art are intended to embody aesthetic values. Ingarden also considers it a mistake to approach literary works of art as if they were ‘disguised philosophical systems.’ He feels that literary works perform other social functions in some cases than the aesthetic or are used in the performance of such functions. It adds nothing to their character of being works of art, nor does it save them as works of art if they embody no aesthetic values in their concretization.

Arthur C. Danto, in his famous essay “Philosophy as/and/of Literature” (1984), discusses historical and contemporary relations between literature and philosophy. He notes that in expressing philosophical views, philosophers’ devices have varied from poem to lecture note. He also says that as the concept of ‘philosophical truth’ and the form of ‘philosophical expression’ are internally closely related and the forms of philosophical expression vary, it implies that there are several conceptions of philosophical truth. Danto, however, says that the notion on the multiplicity of philosophical devices is historical. As per his opinion, in the age of professional philosophy, there is only one kind of philosophical truth: the institutions of

philosophy and literature have grown apart, and literary philosophy is no more possible. For him, works are not meant to be read but to be responded in a certain way.

The institutional theories of literature generally maintain that the literature and philosophy are different institutions or social practices which govern the actions and products of the agents acting within the institutions. Furthermore, the theories maintain that works of literature and works of philosophy are produced with different aims in the agent's mind and in accordance with different conventions. As per institutional theories, the task of literary author is to produce an aesthetically valuable work, and this seen to be in conflict with the acquisition of factual knowledge.

Although institutional theories illustrate differences between literature and philosophy, a strict institutional distinction between the two fields is problematic. The institutions change over time and vary between cultures, and, moreover, institutions also overlap, and different social practices can be conjoined. In some occasions the borders between different practices are very difficult to draw. For example, Georges Bataille's works can hardly be distinguished into works of literature and works of philosophy. Moreover, once acting within an institution is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for one to produce works traditionally associated with the institution. For example, works that are not primarily intended as works of philosophy and not written in accordance with philosophical conventions may still be of high philosophical value. As far as the institutional view is concerned, the value or novelty of ideas expressed in a work has also been stressed as a factor that whether or not a work belongs to a given institution. In fact, a literary author who only applies or systematizes philosophical thought may not be considered a philosopher, but a philosophically oriented writer. It is thus claimed that from a philosophical point of view, Lucretius only gave a literary form to Epicurean philosophy, Danto just exemplified Thomas Aquinas' philosophy, and Borges merely applied philosophical paradoxes instead of producing philosophy. The references to the value of a work are also however highly problematic, for example, for providing new information is not a necessary condition for a work to be philosophy. For example, I venture to say studies in the history of philosophy are works of philosophy, even when they do not express novelistic thoughts, but clarify a philosopher's view or argue for a given interpretation. A distinction between works of philosophy and philosophical works might be established here. Bataille's Foucault's work should perhaps be considered philosophical works rather than works of philosophy. In an argumentative manner, the distinction between works of philosophy and philosophical works could also be applied to fictional literature. Even though not primarily to intended to express philosophical views, literary works may also have philosophical merit.

Although 'philosophical literature' is also a complex term, philosophy and literature interact in various ways. I shall rely on Anthony Quinton's distinction between 'philosophy through literature' and 'philosophy in literature.' 'Philosophy through literature' means 'the use of imaginative literary forms as devices of exposition, for the more effective communication of philosophical conceptions that have already been worked out.' Literary works, in this category, are subordinated to the function and purpose of philosophical argument, and the focus is on the way by which an imaginatively realized fictive situation can throw light on a philosophical problem. 'Philosophy in literature' means 'a more indirect kind of expression in imaginative literature of ideas or beliefs of a philosophical character.' The 'philosophical content' of the work, in this category, is latent and it is 'to be discerned by a process of interpretation that goes beyond a straightforward reading.' Furthermore, in philosophy in literature the philosophical theme of the work is an inevitable part of its aesthetic value. Though arbitrary

and problematic, this distinction will prove helpful in discussing the philosophical themes and themes in literature. Notably, Quinton also remarks that philosophy in literature and especially philosophy through literature are vague, intertwining groups. To exemplify this, Quinton divides literary authors into three groups: 'couturiers', 'philosopher-novelists' and philosopher-poets, and 'philosophical novelists' and 'philosophical novels.' 'Couturiers' are 'the most docile and subservient of producers of philosophy through literature.' For Quinton, a couturier is an 'imaginatively literary expositor of a pre-existing philosophical system', a novelist or poet who is not a philosopher and who gives 'an articulated system of ideas' a 'formally attractive literary expression.'

As far as Quinton's opinion, 'philosopher-poets' and 'philosopher-novelists' means 'imaginative writers who are all writing poetry or fiction in consciously close connection to a body of philosophical ideas which they accept with understanding and in many cases, have worked out themselves.' Furthermore, 'philosopher-poets' and 'philosopher-novelists' are 'notable imaginative writers who are at the same time serious philosophical producers.' Dante, Milton, Rousseau, Coleridge, Tolstoy and Sartre are examples of 'philosopher-poets' and 'philosopher-novelists.' For Quinton, 'philosophical poets' and 'philosophical novelists' are 'writers who are substantive philosophers but who nevertheless see their poetry and fiction as embodying philosophical ideas which they accept. In Quinton's view, what distinguishes philosophical poets and philosophical novelists from philosopher-poets and philosopher-novelists is that even though philosophical poets and philosophical novelists 'have fairly coherent general opinions about matters of human interests about the right way to live, the nature of true happiness, the proper response to the great problems of life and so on', they do not have a system of thought that has traditionally been considered a philosophy. Virgil, Shakespeare, Richardson, Wordsworth, Tennyson etc. are examples of philosophical poets and novelists. I can use the terms *philosophy in literature* and *philosophy through literature* in another sense in order to illustrate the difference between philosophical themes literary works have and philosophical views literary works put forward. I mean philosophy through literature is literary works that convey explicit or implicit philosophical points whether already worked or not. Hence, it is clear that literature and philosophy are tangled.

As far as social context of literature and philosophy is concerned in a practical point of view, both literature and philosophy are forms of 'social consciousness and constructions of language.' Their relationship is the fact that both literature and philosophy are social phenomena. They are social not just in the general sense of being produced by people who make up the society; rather they are social in mainly two ways: both literature and philosophy are born out of human experiences of an individual or groups and they often treat very abstract matters that arise from a reflective pondering on the phenomena of life. They are products of culture, and are social in another expression. In fact, both of them are produced for the intellectual and practical needs of the society. Moreover, it is lucid that both disciplines focus on the same object which can be constructed as the human being in the various aspects of his experience. They reflect the quest for the better understanding and tackling the problems of human existence. Thus, literature must necessarily be engaged as well as philosophy. Philosophy develops concepts and clarifies them, while literature engages these words to communicate ideas, figures and moral principles and to enlarge realities. Both philosophy and literature mirror the society together with the society's development and state. In fact, philosophy of an era tells of the nature of the age while the literature of an epoch tells of the problems and realities of that period, and hence, they both reflect the beliefs of human being

about realities. It is to be noted that great literature is often deeply philosophical and great philosophy is often great literature.

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