

Pre-print copy of penultimate version of  
 McMahon, J. (2022). Beauty. In J. Frow (Ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Literary Theory* (1 ed., pp. 86-101). UK: Oxford University Press.

## Beauty

### Summary

Literary beauty was once understood as intertwining sensations and ideas, and thus as providing subjective and objective reasons for literary appreciation. However, as theory and philosophy developed, the inevitable claims and counterclaims led to the view that subjective experience was not a reliable guide to literary merit. Literary theory then replaced aesthetics as did philosophy's focus on literary truth. Along with the demise of the relevance of sensations, literary form also took a back seat. This suggested to some that either literature communicated truth like any other literal form of communication or it was a mere diversion: a springboard to harmless reverie or daydreaming. Neither response satisfactorily captured what was distinctive about literature: the love readers can have for literary texts and the edification or insight claimed of works within each culture's respective catalogue of classics. However, a concept of literary beauty has again become viable due to developments in theories of pleasure and imagination. If the defining aspect of literature is the imaginative engagement it occasions, and if this imagining is constrained by plausibility and endorsed as effective relative to our goals, ideals, and interests, then literature is not reduced to either mere fact or wish fulfillment. An account of literary beauty is available which defines literature accordingly and explains how subjective and objective reasons for appreciation intertwine to evoke pleasure and insight.

### Keywords

beauty, truth, imagination, pleasure, insight, Immanuel Kant, aesthetic reflective judgment, literature, philosophy, morality

### The Problem of Literary Beauty

It might be taken as a pre-theoretical and uncontroversial fact that the main reason for literary appreciation is the pleasurable subjective experience occasioned by literary works. However, this would seem on the face of it to reduce literature's value to its impact as a kind of stimulant. Moreover, an individual's pleasure, on any occasion, need not respond to objective features of the work; that is, it might be idiosyncratic. In contrast, communities of readers develop their justifications for experiencing pleasure by foregrounding certain works against which to judge any other work, by making comparisons and drawing interpretations. A reasonably stable set of such works could not be assembled based on the pleasurable affect enjoyed by individuals. This is where the problem of literary beauty begins.

Beauty is experienced as a pleasure even though its peculiar affective force suggests that its object is a complex of sensations and ideas. Nonetheless, when pleasure is dismissed as a literary value, so too is beauty, even though the opposite does not necessarily hold: one might find literary pleasure without beauty.<sup>i</sup> In any case, John Guillory rejects the link between pleasure and literary value. He proposes more objective grounds for literary value, such as innovation or clarity of expression.<sup>ii</sup> But if a more objective ground replaces the subjectivity of pleasure, literature would be valued only for features it shares with other forms of communication, rather than for what defines it as literature.

An account of literary value must address both the sensations and ideas occasioned by literature. A way of thinking about the relation between sensations and ideas which explains literature's peculiar affective force, is the problem of literary beauty.

The problem of literary beauty arises because sensations and ideas are treated as mutually exclusive. But what if they could be related in ever new and evolving ways, such that ways of foregrounding, selecting, and prioritizing aspects of experience could be renewed and in so doing, new ways of configuring, construing, and understanding experience could emerge? In other words, the sensations one experienced would depend on the ideas and concepts one held. Literature is fiction in the sense that it does not reveal new facts, but if literature is conceived as having an impact upon the relation between sensations and ideas, it might be said to provide new ways of experiencing and understanding. Approaching literature in this way accommodates a very broad conception of it, including pre-18th-century modes and various genres.<sup>iii</sup> In order to identify this defining aspect of literature as providing new ways to link sensations and ideas, the term "insight" is preferable to other terms like "cognitive content," because the latter too readily sets up false dichotomies between form and content. The revelatory aspect of insight, in the experience of clarity and disinterest it affirms, characterizes the pleasure of an experience of literary beauty.

In order to establish the link between sensations and ideas that will pave the way to a robust account of literary beauty, the pleasure of literary beauty must be conceived as a pleasure taken in a defining aspect of literature such as: pleasure in "imagining" where the outcome is "insight." Acquiring insight from imagining would seem to be a case of forming, based on fiction, something very close to beliefs. But acquiring beliefs about the world based on fiction would be unreliable. However, the concept of imagining might be qualified to address this concern. This brings us to "beauty" as formulated by Immanuel Kant. According to Kant's mature aesthetic theory, beauty involves the kind of imagining that has an impact upon a person's ideals and goals, though this impact is constrained by experience and thus plausibility. If Kant's nomenclature and somewhat dated metaphysical assumptions can be set aside, a Kantian conception of literary beauty, a conception that has both explanatory power and practical application, can be articulated by explaining and defending the following two claims: (a) the imagining occasioned by literature is constrained by plausibility—what readers consider possible given their own experience—and in this sense warrants recognition as an objective reason for evaluation; and (b) the perceived effectiveness of imagining relative to our ideals and goals is a pleasure which in turn motivates reflection and affects the intensity and quality of continued imagining. Pleasure is taken in imaginative engagement when it satisfies the effectiveness condition. This is when we call the work insightful. Insight involves new understanding rather than new facts. This is the pleasure of Literary Beauty, and it distinguishes literature from other forms of communication.

I will say something about formalism here, because no mention of Kant's aesthetics today escapes mistaken assumptions related to a formalism he purportedly espoused. But in fact, Kant did not hold that compositional elements alone were the object of aesthetic reflective judgment. Consider that formalism arose in 18th-century philosophical aesthetics to combat assumptions which pitched the sensuous against ideas. The intention was to answer philosophers who argued that only the result of direct explicit inference gave rise to knowledge (and the associated claim that anything that could be rationally known, could be argued for and stated as explicit propositions). Aesthetic form was identified to refute this. Aesthetic form was the vehicle by which ideas not amenable to direct explicit inference could be communicated. The guide to communication, the rational basis to the process, was not literalness but the experience of beauty. Now there is quite some mental architecture postulated to explain the possibility of this capacity, but we need not go into it now.

What is important to note is that 20th-century philosophical aesthetics and literary theory turned formalism into a theory that limited aesthetic value to the effect of compositional elements and made of it an easy foil to cognitive theories of art and literature. A comprehensive history of literary pleasure would set the record straight on this and instead explain 18th-century notions of formalism as a precursor to a theory of literary pleasure according to which that pleasure is taken in a relation between sensations and ideas. This involves a consideration of the origins of the theory of beauty which would address how aspects of experience not exhausted by literal language came to be associated with art in its various forms from the 18th century onward. Literary pleasure then, can be shown to be pleasure in imagining, when imagining is constrained by plausibility and satisfies the effectiveness condition, the latter linked to our ideals and goals. We will see that a robust account of literary pleasure relies on drawing upon certain aspects of Kant's aesthetic theory, namely, the way he relates pleasure and reflective judgment.

#### A Brief History of Literary Pleasure

At least since Pseudo-Longinus wrote a treatise on the sublime in literature, there have been various ways in which pleasure has been related to literary evaluation.<sup>iv</sup> This might be a pleasure in grand effect (Pseudo-Longinus, 1st century ce/ad), a pleasure in the sweetening of a sober message (John Dryden, 1631–1700), or the pleasure of having one's state furthered in the world (Wilhelm Dilthey, 1833–1911).<sup>v</sup> In contrast, a number of Victorian writers such as Matthew Arnold and George Eliot thought pleasure was anathema to the edification expected of literature.<sup>vi</sup> The counterattack to this Victorian view came in the 20th century from formalists like the New Critics such as Monroe Beardsley who, in spite of his view that the effect of a work was irrelevant to evaluation, argued that pleasure or "gratification" was a marker of objective reasons to value a work when evoked by the work's particular formal properties.<sup>vii</sup> But the relevant "formal properties" for Beardsley could arise from sensations as shaped or configured by ideas. Had more attention been paid to the cultural contingency of the way ideas shape the experience of sensations and in turn the form of images perceived in a work, formalism would never have been pitted against cognitive aesthetics. But alas, we must wait until much later in philosophical aesthetics to reach this juncture. In the meantime, Beardsley's attack was treated as a return to the kind of formalism mistakenly associated in the 20th century with Kant's aesthetic theory as if beauty were all about compositional elements or something equally anodyne.<sup>viii</sup> At this time, "aesthetics" came to be exclusively associated with pleasant sensations by literary theorists like F. R. Leavis for whom the "aesthetic" ignored literature's particular social and political contexts and meanings.<sup>ix</sup> The response by literary critics eventually saw a turn to analysis within political, ethical, and cultural paradigms. Philosophers such as Jerome Stolnitz shifted their attention to literary truth, which led to a focus on the epistemological content of literature. This had mixed results. Literature was found to convey trivial and banal propositions or in stark contrast was found, for instance by Michael Hurley, to provide evidence of the limitations of philosophical epistemologies.<sup>x</sup>

Of course, in tandem with all these attacks and counterattacks is a view held firm in the background of mainstream theory, informing appreciation if not literary and philosophical scholarship. This is the view that pleasure evoked by literature is not a pleasure in sensations isolated from ideas but a delight in finding expression given to one's ideals and interests. This view has a tradition among poets that goes back to William Wordsworth, and among philosophers, as we have seen, to Kant. Both Wordsworth and Kant refer to the object of this pleasure as beauty, but not beauty as caricatured by 20th-century notions of formalism (elements of composition) or eroticism (literature as mere stimulant).<sup>xi</sup> In the 21st century there has been a call to return to a Wordsworthian or Kantian notion of literary pleasure, on the grounds that without it, we lose a sense of what literature

is.<sup>xii</sup> In this article, Kant's mature aesthetic theory will be shown to provide the resources necessary to ground a notion of pleasure with which to understand and guide literary appreciation.

### Imagination and Insight

It has been argued that literature constitutes a unique way of knowing. It is a source of knowledge but not in the standard form to which traditional philosophical epistemology limits us.<sup>xiii</sup> Rather, the content is embodied or encoded in the work, and what is gained by engaging in the work may not be reduced to or translated into other kinds of encodings.<sup>xiv</sup> This is more standardly expressed as the inseparability of form and content. However, insight, by definition, is something we take away with us, and it can influence behavior. If literature can be insightful, it must be encoded in a way that can interface with the intentions that govern behavior, because "insight" refers to understanding relative to our ideals and goals. It is important to bear in mind that "insight" is not a matter of learning new facts from fiction, because that state of mind would be vulnerable to delusion.

In order to consider the possibility of literature's lasting impact without delusion, it is crucial to recognize that the engagement that characterizes literature is imagining. Of course, imagining is engaged by most perceptual and cognitive acts, but in order to identify the particular contribution literature makes to the life world, literature must be understood to be defined by the aim to engage imagining.<sup>xv</sup> That is, a defining feature of literature as opposed to other written forms of communication is its fictional status, in the sense that it engages imagining rather than prompting the direct adoption of facts. Normally, when we learn something new, we acquire a new belief. But if we base our beliefs on fictions, we are delusional.<sup>xvi</sup> We might be tempted to settle for "imaginative reverie" as a kind of harmless diversion. But this does not explain the experience of insight as an objective reason for appreciation. Maintaining that fiction and insight are compatible without collapsing appreciation into a subjective response can be achieved if we acknowledge the actual world constraints on imagining. Research in the relevant cognitive sciences has found that imagining is limited to the items stored in memory from one's background experiences, knowledge, and training; and unless the imagining prompted by a work fits with this store of items, the work will be found implausible and consequently resisted. This is the plausibility constraint on imagining.

### Imagining and Plausibility: Insight or Delusion?

Normally when words are used to advance a truth, we look for argument and evidence. But if there are literary truths, they are not advanced in this way. The "truth" obtained from literature is called "insight," to avoid equating the cognitive content of literature with a literal message. But to claim that literary knowledge is encoded in a unique fashion that cannot be separated from the experience of the work seems to belie the lasting impact of insight. If literary insight lasts and impacts upon behavior then it has been taken away from the work in some sense. It might be reasonably assumed that anything that impacts behavior is either a belief or attitude. But this raises the problem of the unreliability of our beliefs and the impressionability of our attitudes, if belief and attitude can be acquired from imagining based in fiction.

Amy Kind and Peter Kung argue that when used instructively, such as in problem-solving, imagination results in learning about the world. In this mode, imagination is anchored in reality and operates under certain constraints.<sup>xvii</sup> It is often supposed that imagining can also "fly completely free of reality," such as when it is engaged in daydreaming or fantasy; and as literature does not fit into a problem-solving model of engagement like scientific and legal reasoning, it is commonly associated with an unconstrained type of imaginative engagement.<sup>xviii</sup> If literature were an occasion for unconstrained imagining, then literary insight would be ungrounded and delusional.

A very influential theory of imagining in fiction suggests that we entertain fictional truths which are “prescriptions to imagine” and which lead to the reader being caught up in a fictional world. The most influential proponent of this view is Kendall Walton, who argues that to engage in imagining is to engage in “games of make-believe.”<sup>xix</sup> For Walton, this kind of imagining keeps us in the fictional world. In this way, he avoids the problem of delusion. When we are distanced from the work through “ornamentation” (formal properties), we are prompted to reflect upon the actual-world significance of our imaginative engagement. Fictions which carry us along without prompting distance and thus reflection, are fictions from which we do not import any insight back into the actual world. When a work is under-distanced, Walton argues, we are simply caught up in a make-believe which evokes quasi-emotions (i.e., motivationally inert emotions) in response to fictional truths, in a fictional world.<sup>xx</sup>

Walton thinks reflection is prompted by how a work is formed or styled, and in this way literary form is given significance, as is knowledge of the relevant traditions which augment engagement with literary form. But he does not treat reflection as a component of the imagining engaged by fiction. Rather, Walton treats reflection as something that happens as a consequence of imagining under the right conditions. While this is an ingenious way of weaving together the various components of our engagement with fiction, while avoiding the delusion or unreliability objection, it underplays the basis of our motivation to imagine. In order to motivate imagining, the fiction must gain traction with our beliefs and worldviews. Walton makes a weak concession to the interaction between imagining and actual experience, but he fails to see the full implications, which include the fact that imagining interacts with our experience, memory, and background knowledge.<sup>xxi</sup> Imagining involves a constant looping backward and forward between the fiction and our lives beyond the fiction. The emotions we feel when reading literature are real, rather than, as Walton puts it, motivationally inert quasi-emotions. Furthermore, they are part of a complex of emotions: the emotion of enjoying a good fiction may be accompanied by the emotion evoked by an incident in the actual world to which a fiction refers.<sup>xxii</sup>

Imagining in fiction involves a continual interaction with real-world constraints; reflection is part of imagining: it enriches and motivates it. This is most obvious where emotions and feelings are concerned. For example, when we are required to link feelings and objects in entirely new ways, such as finding something funny or surprising that would not be funny or surprising in the actual world, our subjectivity becomes disengaged and imagining is thwarted. This is an example of the plausibility constraint on imagining. A literary work may ask us to entertain weird and wacky facts, but unless our subjectivities are hooked into the protagonist’s goals and feelings, and unless these reflect a psychology which we find coherent and plausible, our attention will flag, even in science fiction or in ancient myths. However, because imagining as engaged by literature is not like hypothesizing in scientific and legal reasoning, and because that imagining is not unconstrained, it is not clear on what basis we might claim to learn anything new from imagining, unless we are deluded.<sup>xxiii</sup> This takes us to theories of imagining according to which imagining impinges on belief. This in turn raises a new problem: the problem of rhetoric and manipulation.

#### Imagining and Attitude: Critical Reflection or Rhetoric?

The main outlines of imagining in fiction are stipulated by the author, the text, or the community of readers, but it is the actual-world inferences that are generated that hook our subjectivity into the fiction.<sup>xxiv</sup> That is, for every proposition posited in fiction, imagining automatically generates inferences based on one’s background experiences, knowledge, and training. When a work is experienced as insightful, the imaginings prompted by it are felt to be significantly interwoven with our critical reflections. They contribute to the way beliefs are linked and the psychological salience

they subsequently hold for us. In other words, imaginings impact upon what one notices, what one foregrounds, and how one prioritizes one's beliefs; as such, imaginings impact upon the meaning and significance one ascribes to subsequent experience. This means that we can acquire insight or understanding from art or fiction without acquiring new beliefs and therefore without delusion. But the question arises concerning the degree to which one is aware of the attitudes one adopts as a result of engaging imaginatively with literature.

Imagining has a lasting impact on us when it engages our subjectivity. When this is the case, imagining can affect the salient schemata in memory, that is, the items we associate together, such that being alerted to one item conjures the others within the schema. For example, living in a war-torn area might lead to a certain ethnicity being grouped with negative events and feelings such that it only takes one element of the group to be drawn to one's attention, like the sound of an explosion, to bring to mind the other components of the group, including fear of that particular ethnicity. This is a similar effect to "priming." But of particular relevance to the impact of literature is research reported by Tamar Gendler, according to which priming is effective whether it results from imagining, or from actual-world experience.<sup>xxv</sup> The only caveat is that for this to be the case, imagining must engage a subjective response. As a consequence of this priming effect, imagining can influence subsequent interpretations, descriptions of what we see, and the threshold at which we consider evidence adequate for belief.<sup>xxvi</sup> According to Jonathan Weinberg, the effects of imagining are different from the effects of believing the same contents.<sup>xxvii</sup> But the difference between imagining and belief is not in motivation per se, but in what we are motivated to do. One might not escape from the library when imagining oneself as the protagonist fleeing from a tiger, but one's fear of tigers or fear generally might be more salient as a result. Another mediating factor to bear in mind is the result of research reported by Peter Langland-Hassan that the quality of the imagining will vary between individuals, not only due to differences in background experience and knowledge but also in the degree to which a critical reflection is entwined throughout the imagining.<sup>xxviii</sup> Literature engages us more thoughtfully than mere rhetoric to the degree that our goals, ideals, and interests interweave throughout and motivate our imaginings.

There are various shared paradigms, assumptions, and attitudes on which our responses to literature rest. Consider the speech on sleep by William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

-the innocent sleep,

Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,

The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,

Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,

Chief nourisher in life's feast. (II, ii)<sup>xxix</sup>

Richard Moran refers to this passage to demonstrate the inseparability of form and content. He suggests the passage evokes associations of innocence and death, and routines of eating, bathing, sleeping, and mending, with their associated emotional responses. He asks us to contrast this with: "I could really use a rest."<sup>xxx</sup> But Moran also hints that the real problem is not whether content can be extracted from form, but whether once this question is answered in the negative, literature becomes a tool of coercion and manipulation. Kant thought not, when he distinguished between poetry and the best speeches of skilled orators. Beautiful speeches, Kant thought, use rhetoric which involves moving people "like machines" by "using the weakness of people for one's own purposes (however well intentioned)." The audiences of such speeches thus reach a judgment that in "calm

reflection” would “lose all weight for them.” Poetry, on the other hand, according to Kant, affords pure enjoyment. And given the fact that he had characterized the pleasure of beauty as something we take in an object, rather than a sensation merely given to us, this enjoyment afforded by poetry engages us as agents rather than machines.xxxi

In responding to Macbeth’s words, we are not moved like machines, that is, mindlessly manipulated (as by propaganda), because the effect is to prompt the very kind of reflection which counters coercion and manipulation. The line between poetry and rhetoric is fine but drawn where a critical reflection is engaged: reflection which engages intentions rather than aimless reverie.

Unless the imaginings prompted by a literary work are experienced as plausible, the work will not engage us. When the work does engage us, it does so by virtue of an imagining which impinges on belief and consequently on behavior. Moreover, the plausibility constraint also lays the ground for a further condition of literary insight. This is the condition of effectiveness, which involves taking pleasure in reflection (anathema to manipulation and propaganda). In order to introduce this condition, a brief historical survey of beauty theory is in order.

#### The Modern Origins of Beauty Theory

If the imagining prompted by a literary work fails to make a claim on our way of understanding the relevant theme or on our orientation to related matters in the actual world, we would not call it insightful, even if the relevant details provided by the work were plausible. To find a work insightful requires more than plausibility. It must not only engage us subjectively but also be felt to increase our understanding. And because this is achieved through imagining, it only occurs if we endorse the prospective insight.

This issue was covered in the traditional theory of beauty as a matter of experience outrunning our communicative capacities. Ever since Rene Descartes dismissed as obscure and confused, and so not worthy of philosophical attention, experience that could not be articulated as explicit propositions, philosophers have attempted to identify a clear formulation for aspects of experience not exhausted by literal language but nonetheless communicable.xxxii Aesthetic form was the vehicle by which this excess of experience could be made meaningful and communicated to others. In this way, the artist or creative writer provided the means by which aspects of experience could be understood anew, but only when the audience or readers were subjectively engaged and endorsed the new conception. The endorsement came in an experience of beauty. To understand this endorsement, so as not to confuse it with the rhetorical purposes of the orator, a consideration of the origins of the aesthetic category is useful.

The aesthetic as a category was originally introduced into philosophy in the 18th century to mark out an aspect of perceptual experience. Alexander Baumgarten defended the rationality of beauty by arguing that the reason beauty was difficult to describe or establish conclusively, was that the experience reflected a relation between subject and object; thus it was a perception that incorporated a fact about the world and a subjective response to that fact.xxxiii Nonetheless, Baumgarten argued that we perceived beauty rather than ascribed it, and as such, he thought he could establish the grounds for defending the existence of beauty in certain objects in a conclusive and universal way.

Kant rejected Baumgarten’s conjecture that aesthetic perception could ground final verdicts on beauty. Kant adjusted the terms of reference, most notably by construing the relevant operation as a reflective judgment rather than a perception. This aesthetic reflective judgment is the central concept in his mature aesthetic theory.

By construing our experience of beauty as a reflective judgment, Kant distinguished beauty from a mere given like a simple sensation, but also from something we would consider a final verdict. However, because beauty cannot be defended with direct explicit inferences in Kant's conception of beauty, the onus fell upon Kant to show that reflective judgments can be more than idiosyncratic daydreams. In response to this challenge, Kant postulated a different kind of judgment altogether. This is a judgment of feeling and so, according to the nomenclature of Kant's time, it is non-cognitive.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Yet for Kant, the experience of beauty involves ascribing ideas to the beautiful object, and this implicated imagining.

According to Kant, the experience of beauty also reveals aspects of our humanity and, particularly, our impulse to communicate deeply felt experiences. Kant writes that "being able to communicate one's state of mind . . . carries a pleasure with it, [which] could easily be established . . . from the natural tendency of human beings to sociability."<sup>xxxv</sup> But experiences like beauty challenge the limits of language because they evoke ideas "in an unbounded way"<sup>xxxvi</sup> which "no language fully attains or can make intelligible."<sup>xxxvii</sup> Nonetheless, we engage in various artistic pursuits designed to communicate these "aesthetic ideas," and what grounds their communicative capacity is a dialogical form of judgment. This is an aesthetic reflective judgment grounded in what Kant called the *Sensus Communis*: the ability to judge in a way which takes into consideration the way others would judge.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

This means there is no conclusive way to establish whether such a judgment is correct, even when the calibration of feelings and terms between interlocutors feels like the basis of a universal agreement. As Kant himself conjectured, it may well be a demand of reason that agreement on such matters is possible. In other words, the *Sensus Communis* (some kind of common ground) is an ideal which guides these interactions.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Kant argued that art is beautiful when its purpose is that the pleasure that accompanies the representations is a kind of cognition (as opposed to a sensation)<sup>xl</sup>; furthermore, he concluded that beauty just was an expression of aesthetic ideas. Aesthetic reflective judgment may not rely on proofs, but it is nonetheless what would be considered, in contemporary terms, a cognitive judgment, to distinguish it from a mere sensation or affect.

When it is assumed that the "aesthetic" refers to something about appealing sensations, this is the most minimal sense of the "aesthetic." Beyond this we have the expression of what Kant calls "aesthetic ideas": the ideas of our deeply felt imaginings. But for the expression of such ideas to be insightful, and thus beautiful, requires not only plausibility but something more which implicates understanding and associated behavior: that is, affective force in our reflection.

#### Pleasure and Insight: Affective Force and Reflection

Many authors have characterized literature as providing new ways to recognize or grasp experience such that our experience is deepened, enriched, or extended. Such characterizations are only successful when they avoid the cognitive triviality objection. That is, literary insight cannot be like learning a new fact, because when one attempts a paraphrase, the insight of a literary work is reduced to the banal or trivial.<sup>xli</sup> Vulnerability to this objection is typically avoided by envisaging the inseparability of form and content, but this threatens the agency of the reader. The objection here is that unless we can articulate the message of a work through paraphrase, it may be that we are simply internalizing unexamined attitudes for which we cannot be held responsible (such as the methods employed by advertising or propaganda).



To avoid triviality on the one hand and mere mindless reverie or manipulation on the other, we can shift our focus to the degree to which conceptual renewal is involved. According to Ezra Pound, for many people, what can be thought is limited to the concepts, tropes, and metaphors in general use within their communities. However, for those who “know what thought is like,” as opposed to “the thoughts that have been already thought out by others,” there must be aspects of experience for which there are “needs beyond the existing categories of language,” just as “a painter must have pigments or shades more numerous than the existing names of the colors.”<sup>xlii</sup>

Moira Gatens gives a fine-tuned description of how the writer engages the reader’s imagining to extend the meaning one might ascribe to experience:

The ideal associations, characteristic of the artistic imagination, construct representations with the force to trigger recollection, engage emotion and provide fresh insight into the subtle interconnections between self, others and the world. The ideality of the vision does not concern the idealization of what is but rather the revelation of nonapparent but nevertheless real connections and actual relations in the world that escape casual observation.<sup>xliii</sup>

In Gatens’s analysis of the work of George Eliot, for example, she demonstrates that Eliot’s imagining of characters and events “creates new combinations from a store of patient and meticulous empirical observations that are imbued with affective force.” In this way, Gatens argues that art invites us to look again at the familiar, but with attention and care. An artistic representation, for Eliot, is always a matter of re-visioning: attending to what is thought to be ordinary, uneventful, or mundane, in order to appreciate the extraordinary intricacy of human relationships, or the long chain of causes that link the past to the present.<sup>xliv</sup>

The affective force to which Gatens refers is a crucial part of the experience of insight in literature but only when associated, as she points out, with the critical reflection of “looking again,” “re-visioning,” “attention and care.” The impact of imagining on subsequent behavior when considered rational is conditioned on this relation between affective force and reflection. A work cannot be said to be insightful unless it has the capacity to impact upon behavior, thus the role of affective force; but it cannot be said to be rational without agency, so it elicits a critical reflective judgment rather than a sensation.

If imagining is the vehicle of literary insight, it might be more apt to think of the relevant encoding in terms of images rather than propositions. This leads to another aspect of insight which again implicates Kant’s notion of the *Sensus Communis*. While literature can be said to provide images of various kinds, nonetheless their significance cannot be fixed across diverse communities. A literary trope for one group might be the expression of a cultural bias for another. Furthermore, we construct images in response to ellipses in the novel. The details of the images we carry away from a Charles Dickens novel, for example, depend not only on the text but on our experience, knowledge, and training. Affective force, plausibility, and reflection are all involved, but whether and how they manifest depends on the resources of the reader. This raises a key feature of literary insight. We recognize and endorse a literary purpose in the work when it resonates with our actual-world concerns. We acquire the images from a Dickens novel, presented, uncovered, or constructed by us, and those images can stay with us in terms of the way they orient us to relevant aspects of the world.<sup>xlv</sup> The fictional episodes open up the fictional world to us, as Peter Lamarque argues,<sup>xlvi</sup> but they only hook our subjectivity if those worlds both are plausible and engage our actual-world concerns. The latter constitutes an “effectiveness condition.”

Pleasure and Effectiveness

Many literary critics and philosophers have written on the importance of familiarity with the relevant literary traditions for achieving the intended kind of engagement.<sup>xlvii</sup> This has been argued conclusively elsewhere and is not specifically the focus here. Rather, actual-world goals and ideals explain the effectiveness of the images provided by literature. To enter a community of readers is to increase one's capacity to understand and communicate fine-grained feelings, impressions, and orientations within that community. We saw earlier that imaginative resistance arises to various forms of implausibility such as factual error, bad judgment, unlikely psychologies, and contexts which require of us subjective responses we would not have in the actual world. An additional cause of imaginative resistance is a rejection on normative grounds of the images that a work indirectly endorses, enjoys, or celebrates.

A skilled writer can present a dystopian landscape in such a way that readers are not expected to endorse the landscape presented, and instead confirms the alternative in their imagining, all the more affective as it is constructed in imagining rather than merely presented by the author. In such cases, in being repelled by an image, a reader might endorse the work. It is crucial for the account presented here, that beauty in the Kantian tradition not be interpreted as demanding feel-good, mindless, or "sugary" fictions. The process depends not so much on what is presented but on the attitude toward what is presented that is revealed in various ways through the work. The process is complex because it interrelates human psychology and ever-evolving cultural practices, social constraints, and moral considerations.

A condition of insight is that the images which embody it relate to our ideals and goals. This condition does not take us back to Matthew Arnold's idea of the "higher authority" of literature, as if it were a "kind of secular substitute for revealed religion."<sup>xlviii</sup> Rather, the effectiveness condition reflects the fact that while models of ways to live are internalized through our interactions with our communities, what literature inspires must be found plausible on moral grounds, in addition to empirical grounds relative to those models.<sup>xlix</sup>

In practice it may be difficult, if indeed it is possible, to entirely separate these kinds of images from those which flatter our prejudices and inspire the imagining of wish fulfillment pertinent to the particular demography in which we find ourselves. Nonetheless, we understand the distinction, and it is the pleasure evoked by the critical reflective engagement in literature that characterizes literary beauty even if only as an ideal.

#### Pleasure in Imagining, and Literary Beauty

There are three elements of literary reception relevant to understanding literary beauty as an objective reason for appreciation: the effectiveness condition as an addition to the plausibility constraint; the moral character of the effectiveness condition; and the peculiar pleasure of this effect of imagining through literature. As such, pleasure in part defines literature. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen express this latter point succinctly when they say that the pleasure of literature is not a contingent consequence of engaging with literature but a condition of it.<sup>i</sup> By this, Lamarque and Olsen are not advocating a return to Roland Barthes's notion of the seductive text.<sup>ii</sup> Nonetheless, they argue that pleasure lies at the very heart of how we engage with literature, directing our awareness, holding us in certain states, and facilitating imaginative engagement. It is not a contingent effect, nor in service to manipulation, coercion, or propaganda. This tight nexus between pleasure and the imaginative engagement that defines the literary work was also understood by Wordsworth. He expressed this in his concern that if ever he lost his capacity for literary pleasure, he would have ipso facto lost the ability to write poetry.<sup>iii</sup>

Pleasure as a defining feature of literature should not be interpreted as reducing the value of literature to pleasure in compositional features (a 20th-century conception of formalism) or to reducing literature to a mere stimulant (sometimes discussed as literature's eroticism). The pleasure of literature is not an isolated sensation but is accompanied by considerable background knowledge and experience. Literature involves the occasion for insight, and pleasure is the guide. As Lamarque and Olsen write,

A key feature of the pleasure that literature affords is the demands it makes on the imagination. It is through the imaginative reconstruction of a work's content that readers come to see what value or interest the work holds. . . . Only through the imagination can a reader grasp the connectedness of a work's elements around its core themes. In this lies the pleasure of literature and also, through reflection on universal themes, its edification.<sup>liii</sup>

While reflection on universal themes need not be treated as separate from imagining or disengaged from pleasure, because pleasure facilitates such reflection and in turn guides further imagining, the passage quoted does nicely capture the demanding aspect of literary pleasure. That is, literary pleasure is not simply a given, like the pleasure of a cool breeze on a hot night, but rather a pleasure actively taken. It requires imagining, the quality of which depends on one's background knowledge, experience, and training.

Literary critic Frank Kermode represents the demanding aspect of literary pleasure in terms of narrative elements that tax our peace of mind. He describes the characteristic response as pleasure mixed with dismay.<sup>liv</sup> This would seem to be the Wordsworthian idea that life's consolation is to be found in the balance between sorrow and joy rather than in pure joy.<sup>lv</sup> As such, the literary critic Geoffrey Hartman argues that the kind of response that Kermode has in mind is captured by the sublime. Hartman characterizes the sublime, in the tradition of Edmund Burke and Kant, as emanating from "objects of reflection that threaten reflection."<sup>lvi</sup> For Kant, objects monumental in size or power overwhelm our senses, and this is experienced as contra-purposive for our perception and thus disquieting. Yet this very state was thought by Kant to prompt ideas that would counter the feeling of contra-purposiveness, to such an extent as to produce feelings of elevation over nature. Therefore, an initial feeling of powerlessness or physical restriction is converted to a heightened pleasure which has intimations of humanity's superiority over nature: our peculiar humanity (our agency as evidenced in reason and morality) triumphs over the dumb force of nature.

Both Burke and Kant had nature in mind, although Kant did mention the pyramids and St. Peter's in Rome in this context.<sup>lvii</sup> To find the sublime linked to literature we need to go back to the earliest known writings on the sublime by Pseudo-Longinus<sup>lviii</sup> or to turn to Jean-Francois Lyotard, who, more recently, equates the effect of the sublime with the pain of the unsayable giving way to the pleasure of literary solutions.<sup>lix</sup> Hartman favors this way of thinking about literary pleasure in order to avoid treating it as a mere sensation or "humiliation in bondage"<sup>lx</sup> (or for that matter, 20th-century formalism).<sup>lxi</sup> He thinks that the pleasure of the sublime avoids these implications because it involves our intellect, or in the Kantian sense, our agency. But, of course, for Kant, so does the pleasure of beauty. The modern history of the sublime since the 18th century is characterized by an attempt to show how human cognition transcends the bonds of literalness and of being defined by physical facts beyond our control. It is as if the DNA we inherit interacts with the environment into which we are put, producing all the thoughts and actions of which we are capable. With the sublime, philosophers rejected this reductive conception of humanity by explaining how we could orient ourselves to the world in freedom.

The problem which arises when we equate the pleasure of literature with this kind of dramatically elevated pleasure and its contra-purposive (pain) and alleviating (relief) structure, is that it is too narrow to capture the pleasure of satire, comedy, and domestic narratives.<sup>lxii</sup> Consider, for example, domestic dramas which can reorganize our mental landscape on a fine scale, not by overwhelming us with size, power, or their analog the unsayable, but with subtle maneuvers and surprising but apt revelations. The pleasure of Jane Austen's work is deeply literary yet not captured by the sublime.<sup>lxiii</sup>

A less contentious way of distinguishing between pleasures than by how they feel or are structured is based on performativity: what kind of activity they facilitate. The activity Kant had in mind for beauty was activity motivated by feeling the opposite to alienation, and for the sublime, activity motivated by feeling capable of self-determination. Both are accompanied by pleasure and for our purposes characterize the pleasure that brings one into and sustains one's interest, holds one's attention, directs one's focus, and prompts imagining and reflection that guide one through a literary work. This is a "facilitating pleasure," according to Mohan Matthen.<sup>lxiv</sup> It is as deep and as complex as the objects that prompt it, and its character reflects those objects.

If we understand literary pleasure as a type of "facilitating" pleasure, we can explain how the objects of pleasure can change and vary between cultures and subcultures, and over time within a society. A facilitating pleasure is driven by performance and all the complex understandings and interests this can involve. It is not an irreducible aspect of experience, as would be a "relief pleasure," that is, the kind of pleasure one feels once relieved from pain or want. So the fact that works of literature can come in and out of fashion, and new works can lead to a reshuffling of how earlier works are perceived and experienced, is not incompatible with positing pleasure as a crucial aspect of literary reception when we understand it as a facilitating pleasure. As Carey Perloff succinctly concludes, "pleasure in relation to a work of art is directly proportional to the creative activity it awakens in the viewer or the reader."<sup>lxv</sup> We can include, as a condition of that creative activity, the plausibility and effectiveness conditions on imagining. The kind of pleasure which fuels imagining unthwarted by imaginative resistance, and deepened by the effectiveness condition, is the kind of pleasure that constitutes an objective reason for evaluation.

To conclude, the pleasure which is worthy of defining literature is a pleasure identified by Kant as the pleasure of aesthetic reflective judgment. Such a pleasure might be a joy primed by sorrow, depending on its particular object. But in each case, it will be experienced in virtue of the imagining prompted by the work when it incorporates critical reflection.<sup>lxvi</sup> Imagining, pleasure, and a sociable (communicable) orientation to the world are all elements in Kant's account. These elements, when envisaged within contemporary theory and philosophy, suggest that literary pleasure identifies a particular way of engaging with objects. Pleasure is taken in new ways of engaging understanding, feeling, and attitudes, but all in the context of a shared space of feeling and knowing, with full acknowledgement that only a certain class of object rewards such engagement, and some objects in that class more than others. This is literary pleasure in the tradition of Kant's conception of the pleasure of aesthetic reflective judgment. An account of literary beauty conceived within this tradition can explain how subjective and objective reasons for evaluation intertwine and make possible the conditions needed for certain literary works to become classics within a particular tradition, and also for it to be possible for them to lose this status and be replaced by other works due to changing cultural norms, without sacrificing the objective nature of reasons for evaluation.

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the research funding provided by the Australian Research Council Grant: DP150103143.

#### Links to Digital Materials

\*The Junkyard: A Scholarly Blog devoted to the Study of Imagination[#<https://junkyardofthemind.com/>]\*, moderated by Amy Kind

A complete copy of: \*Jennifer A. McMahon[#<https://philpapers.org/s/Jennifer A. McMahon>]\*, “\*Towards a Unified Theory of Beauty[#<https://philpapers.org/go.pl?id=MCMTAU&proxyId=&u=https%3A%2F%2Fphilpapers.org%2Farchive%2FMCMTAU.pdf>]\*,” \*Literature & Aesthetics[#<https://philpapers.org/asearch.pl?pub=1690>]\* 9 (1999): 7–27, on University of Sydney Open Journal On-line.

Oxford Bibliographies Online: \*Beauty[#<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396577/obo-9780195396577-0038.xml>]\*

\*The Australasian Philosophical Review 1: 1 (2017) The Pleasure of Art[#<https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rapr20/1/1?nav=tocList>]\*

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “\*aesthetic Judgment[#<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-judgment/>]\*” by Nick Zangwell

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “\*beauty[#<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/>]\*” by Crispin Sartwell

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “\*imagination[#<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/imagination/>]\*” by Shen-yi Liao and Tamar Gendler

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: “\*pleasure[#<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pleasure/>]\*” by Leonard D. Katz

An Introduction to some of the puzzles addressed by Philosophy of Literature: \*Philosophy Talk—Philosophy of Literature[#<https://www.philosophytalk.org/shows/philosophy-and-literature>]\*

#### Further Reading

Gatens, Moira. “The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot.” *Philosophy and Literature* 33, no. 1 (2009): 73–90.

Gendler, Tamar Szabó. “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 2 (2000): 55–81.

Matthen, Mohan. “New Prospects for Aesthetic Hedonism.” In *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment: Pleasure, Reflection and Accountability*, edited by Jennifer A. McMahon, 13–33. New York: Routledge, 2018.

McMahon, Jennifer A. “Towards a Unified Theory of Beauty.” *Literature & Aesthetics* 9 (1999).

McMahon, Jennifer A. “Imagination.” In *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment: Pleasure, Reflection and Accountability*, edited by Jennifer A. McMahon, 66–87. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Moran, Richard. "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination." *The Philosophical Review* 103, no. 1 (1994): 75–106.

Strawson, P. F. "Social Morality and Individual Ideal" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/S003181910005779X>]\*. *Philosophy* 36, no. 136 (1961): 1–17.

Jennifer A. McMahon

## Notes

---

i For a characterization of literary pleasure without beauty, see Peter Lamarque, "Aesthetics and Literature: A Problematic Relation?" *Philosophical Studies* 135, no. 1 (2007): 27–40, 30; and for reading as a sensuous pleasure see Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

ii John Guillory, "It Must Be Abstract," in Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon*, ed. Robert Alter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 65–75.

iii Cf. Catherine Gallagher's view that fiction as defined by imaginative engagement originated in England in the 18th century. See "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 336–363. And cf. Jonathan Culler's view that the lyric is not a case of fiction in his *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). However, in contrast, the argument here entails that the notion of fiction can be distinguished from fact without thereby rendering fictions motivationally inert or cognitively empty.

iv Longinus, "On the Sublime," in Aristotle Horace Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T. S. Dorsch (New York: Penguin Books, 1965).

v See John Dryden, "Heads of an Answer to Rhymer," in *The Works of John Dryden, Vol. 17: Prose 1668–1691: An Essay of Dramatick Poesie and Shorter Works* [<http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780520018143.book.1/actrade-9780520018143-book-1>]\*, ed. Samuel Holt Monk, A. E. Wallace Maurer, and Vinton A. Dearing (Stanford: University of California Press, 1971), 192. And, also, Wilhelm Dilthey and Frederic Jameson, "The Rise of Hermeneutics," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1972): 229–244.

vi For example, Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry," in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, Vol. IX: English Literature and Irish Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 161–188, 162. And George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," in *The Essays of George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 266–299, 270.

vii See Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Aesthetic Point of View," in *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 15–34, sections 3–4. See also Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), ch. 5, on the formal qualities of literature.

---

viii See Lamarque equating Kantian beauty, pleasure, and the “anodyne” in “Aesthetics and Literature,” 30.

ix See F. R. Leavis’s response to Michael Tanner in F. R. Leavis, “Mutually Necessary,” in *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher*, ed. G. Singh (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), 186–208.

x See Jerome Stolnitz, “On the Cognitive Triviality of Art,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32 (1992): 191–200, 191–192. When the cognitive content of literature is conceived as separable from literary form, the result is triviality. Cf. M. W. Rowe, “Literature, Knowledge, and the Aesthetic Attitude,” *Ratio* 22 (2009): 375–397; Michael Hurley, “How Philosophers Trivialize Art: Bleak House, Oedipus Rex, ‘Leda and the Swan,’” *Philosophy and Literature*, 33, no. 1 (2009): 107–125. Hurley argues that the inseparability of form and content in literary knowledge reveals the limitations of philosophical epistemologies.

xi See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (hereafter CJ), trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). References to the CJ provide the volume number followed by page numbers. This is prefixed by “AK” for Akademie, which refers to the Prussian Academy edition of Kant’s complete works. Volume 5 includes the CJ. See also William Wordsworth, Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Selected Poems*, ed. J. O. Hayden (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 438–443.

xii As key examples, see Frank Kermode, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon*, ed. Robert Alter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, “The Philosophy of Literature: Pleasure Restored,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aesthetics*, ed. Peter Kivy (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 195–214.

xiii Hurley, “How Philosophers Trivialize Art.”

xiv See Rowe, “Literature, Knowledge,” 391, where he discusses the poets Wordsworth and Blake. See also F. R. Leavis. “Literary Criticism and Philosophy,” in his *The Common Pursuit* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), 211–222. See also Hurley, “How Philosophers Trivialize Art.”

xv This view does not commit one to any particular position on intentionalism. For actual intentionalism, see Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 127–142; for hypothetical intentionalism and some forms of anti-intentionalism, see Jerrold Levinson, “Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look,” in *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. G. Iseminger (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 221–256; or adopting the term “author” as a function see Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (New York: Routledge, 2011), 527–539. For reader-response theory, see Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Modern Literary Theory*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 185–188.

xvi See Andy Egan, “Imagination, Delusion, and Self-Deception,” in *Delusion and Self-Deception: Affective and Motivational Influences on Belief Formation*, ed. Tim Bayne and Jordi Fernandez (New York: Psychology Press, T&F, 2010), 263–280; and Alan Leslie, “Pretense and Representation: The Origins of ‘Theory of Mind,’” *Psychological Review* 94, no. 4 (1987): 412–426. Leslie called belief based on imagining alone, “representational abuse,” p. 414.

xvii Amy Kind and Peter Kung, “Introduction: The Puzzle of Imaginative Use,” in *Knowledge Through Imagination*, ed. Amy Kind and Peter Kung (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–37; and see Peter Langland-Hassan, “On Choosing What to Imagine,” in *Knowledge Through Imagination*, ed. Kind and Kung, 61–84.

---

xviii This is the way imagining in fiction is understood in Amy Kind, “Imagining Under Constraints,” in *Knowledge Through Imagination*, ed. Kind and Kung, 145–159, 158. See also Kind and Kung, “Introduction,” in *Knowledge Through Imagination*, ed. Kind and Kung, 1–37: 1, 13, 15–16, 23. They argue that imagination is either treated as instructive or alternatively transcendental (flying free from reality). In treating imagination as engaged by fiction as the latter, they would rule out the possibility of acquiring insight from literature.

xix Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 274.

xx Imagining as engaged by fiction is usually treated as motivationally inert and quarantined from belief. The worry is that if imagining is used to motivate action, it is not quarantined from belief, and this would place us in the realm of delusion.

xxi Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 21.

xxii See Derek Matravers, “Why We Should Give Up on the Imagination,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2010): 190–199.

xxiii For a discussion of this point, see Jennifer A. McMahon, “Imagination,” in *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment: Pleasure, Reflection, and Accountability*, ed. Jennifer A. McMahon (New York: Routledge, 2018), 66–87, 71.

xxiv See note 16 on various forms of intentionalism and anti-intentionalism.

xxv Tamar Szabó Gendler, “Imaginative Contagion,” *Metaphilosophy*, 37, no. 2 (2006): 183–203.

xxvi See also Tamar Szabó Gendler, “Imaginative Resistance Revisited,” in *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretence, Possibility, and Fiction*, ed. Shaun Nichols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 149–173; and Susanna Schellenberg, “Belief and Desire in Imagination and Immersion,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 110, no. 9 (2013): 497–517. These accounts draw upon research in cognitive science to explain the interface between imagining, concepts, and action. An historical precursor might be Ivor A. Richards who thought we acquired from literature a particular kind of attitude which was “indispensable to a fully developed life,” in Ivor A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1955), 282.

xxvii For a further discussion of this point, see Jonathan Weinberg, “Configuring the Cognitive Imagination,” in *New Waves in Aesthetics*, ed. K. Stock and K. Thomson-Jones (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 203–223, 217.

xxviii Langland-Hassan, “Choosing What to Imagine,” 63.

xxix William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: The New American Library, 1963), 62–63.

xxx Richard Moran, “The Expression of Feeling in Imagination,” *The Philosophical Review* 103, no. 1 (1994): 75–106, 85.

xxxi On aesthetic pleasure, see AK 5: 210, §5. On Kant’s distinction between poetry and rhetoric, see AK 5: 327, 328 fn, §53.

xxxii See Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Leibniz’s response



---

to Descartes in Frederick C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31–44.

xxxiii See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry* (1735), trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).

xxxiv CJ AK 5: 228, §15.

xxxv CJ AK 5: 218, §9.

xxxvi CJ AK 5: 315, §49.

xxxvii CJ AK 5: 314, §49; and AK 5: 320, §51. For an account of aesthetic ideas in contemporary terms, see Jennifer A. McMahon, *Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

xxxviii CJ AK: 5: 293, §40

xxxix CJ AK: 5: 240, §22.

xl CJ AK: 5: 305, §44.

xli See note 10 for Stolnitz's triviality objection.

xlii Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 87–88. Discussed in Hurley, "How Philosophers Trivialize Art," 115.

xliii Moira Gatens, "Compelling Fictions: Spinoza and George Eliot on Imagination and Belief," *European Journal of Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2012): 74–90, 83.

xliv Gatens, "Compelling Fictions," 83.

xlv This is explained in terms of dispositions we acquire through imagining in Schellenberg, "Belief and Desire," 515–517.

xlvi See Lamarque, "Aesthetics and Literature."

xlvii See T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 19 (1982): 36–42.

xlviii Quoted from Alter, "Introduction," in Kermode, *Pleasure and Change*, 6.

xlix On moral ideals as images see P. F. Strawson, "Social Morality and Individual Ideal," *Philosophy* 36, no. 136 (1961): 1–17. For a related discussion, see Garrett Cullity, "Objectivity and Shared Experience: Art and Morality," in *Social Aesthetics and Moral Judgment* (2018): 103–120, 114–115.

l Lamarque and Olsen, "Philosophy of Literature," 201.

li Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*.

lii Wordsworth, *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, 438–443.

liii Lamarque and Olsen, "The Philosophy of Literature," 207.

liv Kermode, *Pleasure and Change*.

lv For a related discussion, see Jennifer A. McMahon, *Art and Ethics in a Material World: Kant's Pragmatist Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 135–139.

---

lvi Geoffrey Hartman in his commentary “The Passing of the Canon,” in Kermode, *Pleasure and Change*, 59.

lvii CJ AK 5: 252, §26.

lviii Longinus, “On the Sublime.”

lix See Jean-Francois Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-garde,” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (New York: Routledge, 2011), 586–595.

lx Hartman, “Passing of the Canon,” in Kermode, *Pleasure and Change*, 62.

lxi For the distinction between standard formalism and Kantian formalism, see Jennifer A. McMahon, “Immediate Judgment and Non-Cognitive Ideas: The Pervasive and Persistent in the Misreading of Kant’s Aesthetic Formalism,” in *The Palgrave Kant Handbook*, ed. Matthew Altman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 425–446.

lxii See Alter, in Kermode, *Pleasure and Change*, 9.

lxiii Kant’s conception of beauty is a broad category which explains the possibility of change in the way our senses and concepts interface. For a contemporary suggestion on how our senses and concepts currently interface, see Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

lxiv For a complete account of “facilitating” pleasure see Mohan Matthen’s distinction between “relief” pleasures and “facilitating” pleasures in Mohan Matthen, “The Pleasure of Art,” *Australasian Philosophical Review* 1, no. 1 (March 2017): 6–28.

lxv Carey Perloff, Artistic Director of the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, gives an excellent account of the influence of artists, actors and writers on the changing face of the canon, in Kermode, *Pleasure and Change*, 76–81, 79.

lxvi CJ AK 5: 351–354, §59.