Concept Work: A Philosophic Approach to Literature

Joseph Thomas Milburn (University of Sofia)

Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to establish 'Concept Work' as a distinct philosophic approach to literature and as a general function of philosophy. Philosophic literature is understood as those literary works which (1) establish, articulate, or elaborate concepts; (2) allow readers to create concepts through their engagement with the text; and (3) allow readers to develop their conceptual skills through this engagement. Both philosophy and philosophic literature 'work with concepts'; such concept work is meaningful as a form of conceptual self-therapy and for its own sake regardless of its external impact. The philosophic value of a literary text, and the subsequent literary expansion, is founded upon the linguistic mastery of working with concepts in relation to the text. Concepts are not limited to a single literary work and may be reworked in response to other texts or repossessed for other philosophic projects; the reader of literature, as a potential philosopher, may continuously exceed and extend the literary text through his concept work.

Keywords: Philosophy of Literature, Philosophic Literature, Concept, Fiction, Self-Therapy

1. Introduction

This essay introduces *Concept Work* as a distinct approach to the philosophy of literature. What exactly makes a literary text philosophic will be considered; three fundamental aspects of philosophic literature will be clarified. The particular philosophic activity of *working with concepts* will be explored with reference to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari amongst others; this will be developed in relation to conceptual knowledge in literature and the epistemic value of speculative fiction. Subsequently, *Concept Work* is established as conceptual self-therapy by providing a novel interpretation of the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Herbert Marcuse as well as a final literary example.

2. The Philosophic in Philosophic Literature: *The Concept*

Some literary works are clearly philosophic, particularly fiction which is written by philosophers. For instance, the novels of Sartre, Camus, Rand, Eco, Pirsig and so forth deal directly with philosophic themes; these themes typically relate to the writer's own philosophic project or, as with Sartre, seek to effect practical, historical action[1]. However, a vast amount of literature written by non-philosophers also explores philosophic themes; Kafka, Fowles, Orwell, Hesse, Vonnegut, and Murakami[2] amongst many others come to mind. Therefore, it could be argued that any literary work which touches upon philosophic themes can be considered philosophic; yet this would include almost all literature as almost all literature is concerned to a varying extent with the human condition (of which philosophic themes form an unavoidable part). Some philosophic works are even presented in the literary mode such as Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883)[3] or Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (1843)[4] which raises the question of whether such works are to be approached as primarily philosophic or as works of fiction. Additionally, if we follow Barthes' approach[5], a text may not be explicitly or intention-

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[1] Literature is understood by Sartre to be a manifestation of human freedom and solidarity. The literary work reveals the actual world to those who operate within it as a reality which in some way requires transformation; the writer, through his text, calls for practical involvement and change. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* trans. B Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1950).

[2] The philosophical relevance of Haruki Murakami's fiction is of particular interest to the author. A special issue dealing with this topic is to be published in May 2022: Joseph Thomas Milburn and Piotr Pietrzak (Eds.), [Special Issue] "The Work of Haruki Murakami", *In Statu Nascendi: Journal of Political Philosophy and International Relations*, Vol. 5.1, 2022.

[3] *Zarathustra*, however, is not a traditional piece of literature as it presents a number of inspired images and philosophic ideas through an unusual blend of prose, poetry, and gospel.

[4] Kierkegaard famously makes use of pseudonyms, the epistolary form, and other literary devices; the stylistic choices are central components of his philosophic project.

[5] Barthes argues against any emphasis placed on the writer's intent as the principal guide to meaning. He maintains that the *author* is a contemporary phenomenon; a product of a society which prizes the individual above all else. The absence of the writer is filled instead by the emergence of innumerable

ally philosophic, but may be considered philosophic depending on the interpretation of the readers. I will argue, in contrast, that there is something in particular which makes a work philosophic and which separates it from aesthetic or conventional literature; that is, the *concept and working with concepts*. It must be said that what I am positing does not *take away* from literature; a work which is not *philosophic* by my upcoming definition is not in any way inferior to one which is philosophic; so too a work of fiction is primarily understood as a work of literature, the philosophic aspect offering new involvement with that work; although I propose an approach to the philosophy of literature which relates back to and reveals a general function of philosophy itself, this is not intended as a limitation or a subordination of the literary text to philosophic activity, but as a philosophic activity of literary (and conceptual) *expansion*.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in *What is Philosophy?* (1991), state that "philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts"[6]. It is the creation and usage of *concepts* that distinguishes a particular philosophic activity.[7] Examples of philosophic concepts include the following: Plato's forms, Aristotle's substance, Descartes' cogito, Kant's categorical imperative, Hegel's verkehrte Welt, Nietzsche's Übermensch, Sartre's bad faith, and Baudrillard's hyperreality; further, concepts established in other fields can also be understood as an extension of philosophic activity; for instance, Saussure's sign and Freud's unconscious[8]. A fundamental aspect of philosophy is *thinking*

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readers. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Image-Music-Text,* trans. S Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).

6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 2.

7 *Subversion* may constitute another philosophic activity; the extent to which this dimension of philosophy relates to the creation or *use* of concepts requires greater attention.

8 The term *concept* itself can be examined further; Mamardashvili and Gungov, drawing on Marx, consider concepts such as commodity value or even the unconscious to be instances of converted forms (*verwandelte Form*) or *real semblance*; in this sense, concepts are inextricably linked to social relations; rather than a reduction or a substitution (akin to hyperreality, for example), that which is absent or *void* within reality (both actual and theoretical systems) is *converted* or reworked into a new relation which stands in for this *lost connection*; recognising that these *representations* are deceptive, transi-

through concepts. I would argue, then, that concepts are the domain of philosophy. In a similar way to Sartre's approach to literature, and against Barthes', Deleuze and Guattari maintain that the *creator's signature* is essential to the creation of concepts; this is comparable to the supposed unity of the writer in which the work, or concept here, cannot be separated from the originator. Deleuze and Guattari write that "the philosopher is the concept's friend; he is potentiality of the concept" in the sense that he may actualise the concept through his competence[9]; therefore, philosophy not only works with concepts as formations, inventions, discoveries, or products but as the process in which concepts are formed in relation to the philosopher himself as a situated, historical individual and in relation to other pre-existing, historical concepts. Philosophy is an *involvement* with concepts in order to create *original* and *relevant* concepts; according to Deleuze and Guattari, the onus of concept creation lies with the philosopher and not with the readers of philosophic works.

When asked to explain what exactly philosophy is, many individuals might say that it relates to contemplation, reflection, or the communication of ideas. Yet Deleuze and Guattari maintain that this is not the case as such activity is not unique to philosophy: "contemplation, reflection, and communication are not disciplines but machines for constituting Universals in every discipline"[10]; Philosophy, on the other hand, may create concepts through contemplation, and may create concepts *for* contemplation; in other words, a philosopher may establish a new philosophic concept which in some way evokes, incorporates, utilises, articulates, or extends the activity of contemplation. Concepts are of course connected to language as they can be expressed orally or within written text; Deleuze and Guattari state that there is a specific philosophic taste or style that is central to the presentation of concepts; how-

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tory, yet necessary is an essential part of one's truly objective thought and action in the world. Merab Mamardashvili, "Converted Forms. On the Need for Irrational Expressions", *Statis* Vol. 5, No. 2, 2017, pp. 204-217 (originally published in Polish in 1972); Alexander Gungov, 2013, "Real Semblance Flourishing in Post-Consumerist Society", *Sofia Philosophical Review* Vol. VII, No. 2, 2013, pp. 95-110.

9 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 5.

10 Ibid., p. 9.

ever, this may not be entirely true; for instance, a more literary style or a piece of fiction can also, arguably, manifest a concept and provide conceptual elaboration. The *genre* of philosophy (one imagines the complex articulation found in analytical works) may in fact be fairly malleable, as long as the work deals with concepts in the way that is being discussed.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the concept is a "multiplicity"[11]; it is composed of multiple components and responds to particular theoretical or historical problems. For example, a philosopher is necessarily influenced by other philosophers and their concepts, and by the historical concerns, events or thoughts of his day and the lessons retrieved from the past. It would be quite remarkable for a philosopher to create ground-breaking, original concepts without having any prior knowledge of Plato or Aristotle; however, this is also due in part to the particular language of philosophy which assumes familiarity with established concepts; certain words have niche meanings as with other academic fields. Deleuze and Guattari propose that a concept must be *named*; it must be expressed as a specific entity or linguistic unit; yet if a concept is elaborated through the literary mode, then perhaps it need not be limited by the sophisticated, or at worst inaccessible, language of philosophy. In its response to certain problematics, the new concept revises or replaces previous concepts:

> First, every concept relates back to other concepts, not only in its history but in its becoming or its present connections. Every concept has components that may, in turn, be grasped as concepts […] Concepts, therefore, extend to infinity and, being created, are never created from nothing. Second, what is distinctive about the concept is that it renders components inseparable within itself.[12]

The concept is made of distinct components but is nevertheless internally consistent and cannot be broken down into separate parts. For example, Levinas' concept of the *Other* incorporates the *Face* but is not reducible to the *Face*; the *Face* is an essential component of the *Other* and yet is an independent concept in its own right (with its own components, some of which may also be internally consistent concepts).[13]

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[11] Ibid., p. 13.
[12] Ibid., p. 16.
[13] For further insight into or *work* on this concept: Maria Dimitrova, *Sociality*

There is, then, a kind of *cohesion* which holds the concept together; according to Deleuze and Guattari, it is better imagined as a "centre of vibration" or resonation in which concepts do not absolutely cohere but are non-corresponding "fragmentary totalities" which are held together:

> … only along diverging lines. Even bridges from one concept to another are still junctions, or detours, which do not define any discursive whole. They are moveable bridges.[14]

The philosopher, then, is the one who moves the bridges (or at least notices and articulates the movement); the philosopher connects or configures the components in such a way that manifests the concept even if the components are not directly aligned; it is argued elsewhere by Deleuze and Guattari that, once manifest, the concept is self-referential or that it is actually self-positing in the first place; however, I would argue that it is the activity of the philosopher which is the primary constitutive factor. Philosophy, as *working with concepts*, is also *working with divergence*; the philosopher is a mediator and an expert facilitator who, through conceptual activity (or, as described by Deleuze and Guattari, a *perpetual digression*) can form a path through the moveable bridges. It is the individual who works with disparate ideas and conflicting ways of thinking in an attempt to bring something original, convincingly thought out, and independent to light.

It seems, then, that readers of philosophic works are directly presented with unequivocal concepts; creating concepts is the job of philosophers and readers merely follow along (or attempt to) with the conceptual work; they may support or be confused by it, they may seek further conceptual connections or search for inconsistencies, they may continue the work of the philosopher or utilise components for their own conceptual creations. If philosophic work is understood as direct conceptual competence and communication, then perhaps philosophic literature offers an indirect path; readers may be able to engage more ac-

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and Justice: Toward Social Phenomenology (Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2016); Maria Dimitrova (Ed.), *In Levinas' Trace* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011); Diane Perpich, "Figurative Language and the Face in Levinas's Philosophy", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2005, pp. 103-121.

[14] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 22.

tively with concepts; forming their own connections and reaching conclusions which may differ from the originator's intention. Deleuze and Guattari clearly privilege the originator's position to the extent that the concept belongs to him; there is no dialectic relationship with the readers in the way that Sartre approaches literature. It could be argued that while a literary text is *open*, the philosophic text is *complete*; that is, its concepts are expressed sufficiently without the requirement for or appeal to an audience for mutual articulation. For example, it could be said that an individual does not exceed a philosophic text in the same way as they might a literary text; through reading Plato I do not imagine that I have gone further than Plato's thought; rather, the philosopher seems to be in *possession* of the concepts articulated in his work; whether the reader can work with these concepts is a matter of internalisation, rejection, or subsequent reformulation in the sense that the creation of the concept is not a shared process, but is instead constituted by a series of individuals working on their own conceptual projects which may or may not resonate momentarily before diverging once again.

If philosophy is *working with concepts* in the way that has been considered, then philosophic literature is literature which *works with and is involved with concepts*. Therefore, the first aspect of philosophic literature is that such works establish, articulate, or elaborate concepts; for instance, Camus' *The Stranger* (1942) provides an affective example, or a literary presentation, of his Absurdist philosophy and the key concepts relating to this position. However, philosophic literature need not necessarily create *original* concepts in order to be deemed philosophic; rather, philosophic literature can deal with pre-existing philosophic concepts, explore concepts further through an imagined application and extend concepts through emotive or contextual engagement. Additionally, concepts in philosophic literature need not necessarily be signed by the author or named as distinct linguistic entities; Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), for example, may manifest various philosophic concepts in the mind of the reader. This leads us to the second aspect of philosophic literature which is that the concepts may be created by the reader through engagement with the text; that is, the concept in philosophic literature does not absolutely belong to the writer; whilst of course the writer may point his readers in a certain direction and may present certain topics or describe certain events, ultimately his readership will approach the literary text with their own conceptual knowledge, experi-

ence, inclinations and competencies; the reader has the potential to create new concepts in relation to the literary text; further, the literary text may continuously provide concepts in accordance with the conceptual engagement of readers[15]; philosophers themselves may include features of literary texts as components of their own conceptual thought (one might think of the frequent reference to Kafka in philosophic works).[16]

Eileen John, in "Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context" (1998) makes much the same point when she writes that "our response to a work of fiction can involve the pursuit of conceptual knowledge, where that pursuit is one form of philosophical activity".[17] In other words, literature is philosophic when it leads to a philosophic response on the part of the reader; importantly, the literary text usually works or deals with concepts in the first place in order to provide material which will engender this kind of conceptual engagement.[18] Therefore, the reader is a potential philosopher; to read in

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[15] It could be argued that this is what distinguishes the philosophic value from the literary value of a text; the themes of a literary work are in a sense more fixed than its potential for ongoing conceptual expansion or for purposes beyond the limits of the text itself.

[16] Interpretation or *use* of literary texts frequently becomes part of one's philosophic project. Zizek, for instance, confronts Levinas' ethics through Kafka's literary texts. Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Richard, "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence", *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Deleuze and Guattari analyse Kafka's oeuvre whilst simultaneously establishing the concept of *major* and *minor* literature. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986).

[17] Eileen John, "Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56.4, 1998, pp. 331-348, 331.

[18] Verene proposes that philosophy may reveal what literature is (as a philosophy of literature) through assuming a transcendental standpoint towards it; further, philosophy is understood as a form of literature. Verene examines four ways of understanding the relationship between philosophy and literature. The third of which most resembles typical concept work: "… we may connect philosophy to a work of literature by searching out philosophical ideas that happen to reside 'in' it … a work of literature is regarded as a source of ideas of philosophical interest: the divine, the self, and the world".

such a way is to be involved with conceptual interpretation, formulation, expansion, or even just appreciation. It could be argued, in contrast, that philosophic literature is not *really* philosophical for two reasons; firstly, being presented with concepts in a literary work does not lead to acceptance of them in the same way as the proofs or reasoning presented in traditional philosophic works; secondly, if the engagement remains on a personal level then it does not realise any concrete response which may develop or be of use to the greater philosophic project; that is, philosophic literature does not increase philosophic knowledge[19]. However, if a particular type of philosophic knowledge is understood as conceptual knowledge or conceptual work, then perhaps philosophic literature may indeed provide an increase; it may reveal the concept through the literary narrative or through embodiment and it may also offer insight into *how* to work with the concept. It is the *use* of the concept which is a particularly relevant part of philosophy for philosophic literature; whilst the reader may not necessarily accept concepts presented in literary works, they nevertheless actively encounter them; whether they are accepted does not depend on following steps of logical thought, for instance, but depends on a more personal, emotive involvement which I would not say is *inferior* to the traditional philosophic approach. Further, the *personal is positive*: if a concept cannot be understood on a personal level and used in an individual's particular setting, then the sophisticated reasoning of philosophy is for nought. Additionally, reading philosophic literature and engaging with concepts contained within it, and of our own augmentation, results in other concrete responses; the conceptual engagement itself is significant as a form of philosophic activity and as the development of philosophic or conceptual skill. John's statement concerning philosophic literature is apt considering this:

> I see the reader as generating the interesting conceptual results,

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Literature is understood as *conceptual material*; literature is a source or space of concept work. D. P. Verene, *The Philosophy of Literature*: *Four Studies* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), pp. 2-3.

[19] This, as well as the general perspective that philosophical theories of literature (such as Verene's) subordinate literature to philosophy, is discussed further in: Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

> whereas in other accounts the author or text generally receives the credit for *presenting* the reader with a new conception. The reader is left to adopt or not adopt this conception. [...] But this model [...] does not do justice to cases in which the work of fiction presents the reader primarily with a conceptual question or problem, and leaves the reader to figure out a resolution [...] [I present] a model on which the reader is instead challenged to use concepts aptly and reflectively puts the reader's conceptual commitments directly in question. Readers are not just observing a conceptual scheme at work, but are trying to use theirs well.[20]

Working with the concepts found in philosophic literature, then, directly affects how one operates in the world. Engagement with concepts, which is arguably much more accessible in a literary rather than traditionally philosophic form, generates conceptual practice which may lead to concrete change. Yet I would argue that external transformation is subordinate to conceptual transformation on an individual level; the philosophic activity which is possible through literary engagement is meaningful for its own sake. One might consider whether thinking about the meaning of a novel is less significant than thinking about real-world application (medical ethics, for example); however, John makes the illuminating point that "the conceptual competence called for in response to a work of fiction [is] continuous with our ordinary conceptual competence"[21]; that is, concepts are not limited to the texts in which they are revealed; they necessarily apply to external circumstances; therefore, the skills developed through conceptual engagement are relevant in all contexts whether they were acquired in response to a situation expressed in a literary work (say, a science fiction novel about hyperintelligent animals), a philosophic text (the work of Peter Singer on personhood in great apes[22]), or one's own direct experience (witnessing poor treatment of the animals in a zoo and advocating against it). There is no superior or primary realm of application. The third aspect of philosophic literature does not necessarily relate to its content but to the conceptual skills

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[20] John, *Reading Fiction*, p. 333.

[21] Ibid., p. 342.

[22] For instance: Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (Eds.), *The Great Ape Project: Equality beyond Humanity* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994).

that it potentializes; philosophic literature allows for the development of the conceptual competency of the reader; that is, a knowledge of how to use concepts or of how concept's *work*.

John argues further that literature may actually be a *better* vehicle of the concept than traditional philosophy; it is maintained that some concepts can only be revealed within a story or narrative mode; therefore, philosophy proper may require imaginative or symbolic techniques in order to articulate certain concepts. Perhaps philosophic discourse can benefit from literary presentation. We have seen that some philosophers have carried out such projects, yet it remains an underutilised approach. A key area of philosophy which is literary is the *thought experiment*. Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz examine this in greater detail in their article "The Epistemic Value of Speculative Fiction" (2015)[23]; they claim that thought experiments and speculative fiction "rely on similar cognitive mechanisms" such as considering future or hypothetical possibilities[24]; further, speculative fiction is imagined as a kind of developed thought experiment which "[draws] readers emotionally into a story and reduces the need for cognitive closure. As a result, speculative fiction allows for a richer exploration of philosophical positions than is possible through ordinary philosophical thought experiments".[25] According to De Smedt and De Cruz, the *epistemic* value of speculative fiction is that it transports readers into the story in a more immersive way; therefore, philosophic positions (or concepts), can be more directly worked with and experienced.

Of course, philosophy is not only composed of thought experiments and thought experiments may not be applicable to all philosophic concepts; yet a number of seminal thought experiments are central points of inquiry. This raises the question of whether a more literary account of Nagel's bat or Parfitt's teletransportation would better reveal or

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[23] Speculative fiction is not necessarily 'unreal'; rather, it can be understood as encompassing those literary works which deal with alternative or *other* fictive worlds as in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz, "The Epistemic Value of Speculative Fiction", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 39:1, 2015, pp. 58-77.

[24] Ibid., p. 59.

[25] Ibid.

communicate concepts relating to personal identity.[26] Another interesting point raised is the necessity for cognitive closure which, arguably, stems from the typical form of philosophic writing as journal articles; that is, in a short space of text the philosopher is pressured to establish conclusions to deeply complex topics; De Smedt and De Cruz state that fiction would allow greater freedom and space to deal with the concepts involved; it would also be more cognitively *open* in the sense that has been considered above. Whether thought experiments are conceptually valuable because of their brevity or whether they would be improved with the extra details, context, and the irrelevancies of fiction need not be debated; rather, it is clear that both approaches can be philosophically valid. It is likely more a question of style; however, it remains to be seen whether some philosophers possess the literary skill (or desire) to extend their thought experiments to the size of a novel.

De Smedt and De Cruz emphasise the importance of empathy for conceptual engagement as "cognition is situated, and comprises embedded, embodied, enacted, and extended forms of thinking."[27] It is maintained that concepts can be applied more concretely, and the individual may participate more personally or creatively with them, if the background scenarios are developed in the same way as they are in speculative fiction; yet it is difficult to imagine how a literary treatment of Gettier's justified true belief scenarios[28], for example, would add anything conceptually essential. Perhaps the main character's seemingly justified belief could have some kind of disastrous consequences in the story.

Finally, I agree with De Smedt and De Cruz's conclusion that "by

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[26] The question here is whether the literary dimensions of these thought experiments are to be expanded for philosophic purposes. Perhaps Kafka's *Metamorphosis* could be reworked into "What is it like to be an insect?". Parfitt's *teletransporter* was clearly influenced by science fiction ideas; arguably, similar thought experiments on personal identity are evident in recent science fiction films about *clones* (*Moon* 2009; *Oblivion* 2013). Thomas Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4, 1974, pp. 435-450; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[27] De Smedt and De Cruz, *Epistemic Value*, p. 64.

[28] Edmund L. Gettier, "Is justified true belief knowledge?" *Analysis* 23, 1963, pp. 121-123.

expanding their philosophical work outside of the confines of academic journals or books […] philosophers can expand their conceptual toolkit"[29]; and not only philosophers, but writers and readers too can take part in meaningful philosophic activity through working with concepts in literature. Developing a thought experiment into a piece of literature is only one example of where the function of philosophy and literature seem to meet; a significant part of literature (and a distinguishing feature of philosophy) is its treatment of concepts; recognising this element of literature expands both literary and philosophic involvement with literary texts. To summarise, philosophic literature is that which establishes, articulates, or elaborates concepts; concepts may be created by readers through engagement with the literary text; and philosophic literature allows readers to develop their conceptual skills. I would argue that the recognition that literature can also work with concepts is significant as it opens the possibility for philosophers, writers, and readers to become primarily involved with such texts on a conceptual level; literature may be approached as an auxiliary to a specific philosophic activity. This philosophic activity will be termed *Concept Work* and will be defined in the next section.

3. *Concept Work:* Philosophy of Literature as Conceptual Self-Therapy

It is argued by Dale Jacquette (2014)[30] that Wittgenstein's later work amounts to an *anti-philosophical therapy*. The notion that philosophy has therapeutic value is apparent in key philosophic concerns such as the quest for the *good life*, *meaning*, or *self-understanding.*[31] There is also the growing movement of philosophic counselling and existential psychotherapy[32]. Yet the term *therapy* seems to imply that there is some-

[29] De Smedt and De Cruz, *Epistemic Value*, p. 66.

[30] Dale Jacquette, "Later Wittgenstein's Anti-Philosophical Therapy", *Philosophy* 89:2, 2014, pp. 251-272.

[31] *Eudaimonia* or the *Self*, for instance.

[32] Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). Also, see Medard Boss' therapeutic conception of *Daseinsanalysis*: Medard Boss, *Psychoanalysis & Daseinsanalysis*, trans. Ludwig B. Lefebre (New York: Basic Books, 1963). Finally, Roger Brooke's post-Jungian development of *Daseinsanalysis* as a phenomenological analytic psychology: Roger

thing that needs to be healed or there is a deficiency which requires treatment; certain readings of Wittgenstein may, in fact, lead to the claim that philosophers themselves require therapy; that is, philosophic concerns constitute a *conceptual illness*. As Jacquette states: "Wittgenstein maintains that philosophical reflection as such is itself or is a sign or symptom of an intellectual conceptual syndrome that requires a general therapy to free thinkers from engaging in philosophy of any sort and at any level whatsoever"[33]. This raises the question of whether those individuals who explore philosophic positions, who read and argue about issues of ontology, epistemology, and ethics, are actually entrapping themselves in a quagmire of confusion and disquiet; in other words, does practising philosophy do more harm than good?

Jacquette explores Wittgenstein's perspective in order to understand whether the conceptual illness is psychological or semantic, and whether it is the philosopher who is sick or philosophy itself. Wittgenstein writes: "As I do philosophy, its entire task is to shape expression in such a way that certain disquietudes disappear"[34]; it seems that Wittgenstein believes that a particular type of philosophy increases disquiet which requires a different kind of philosophy (as therapy) to resolve the confusion. It would perhaps be extreme to relate philosophic confusion to a psychological problem; many philosophers are successful, productive, and *normal* functioning individuals. Here, it is not maintained that the *therapeutic value* of this dimension of philosophy is the attainment of a *normalcy* understood as an adjustment to society in the way that Marcuse describes[35] [36]. As mentioned above, philosophy has been mean-

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Brooke, *Jung and Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[33] Jacquette, *Anti-Philosophical Therapy*, p. 253.

[34] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript: TS213*, trans. eds. CG Luckhardt and MAE Aue (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 421.

[35] Concept work is not promoted as a *one-dimensional* philosophic activity or performance which helps individuals identify with and submit to the needs of an administered, prescribed public sphere. In contrast, concept work is promoted as a potential therapy *from* this state of affairs in which the criticality and autonomy of individual usage of concepts may be understood as an authentic (multi-dimensional) self-activity. This is against the operational or functional view of concepts. *Normal* is not a "harmless negation" of the status quo, nor a reconcilable, academic habit of thought from within the pre-

ingfully utilised within therapeutic approaches and, anecdotally, many individuals who engage with philosophy find that it is a psychologically

vailing system (p. 16); yet neither is it an activity of practical protest. That is, no prior function of the concept as therapeutic, creative, or political is asserted prior to concept work and neither is concept work limited to or dependent on such functions. Concept work, as a distinct philosophic activity and approach to literature, offers "the chance of preserving and protecting the right, the need to think and speak in terms other than those of common usage – terms which are meaningful, rational, and valid precisely because they are other terms" (p. 183). Such *other terms* may be found in (also applied or generated in response to) literary works, particularly speculative fiction as a domain in which alternative worlds can be experienced, imagined, subverted, and critiqued. Marcuse concludes: "The philosophic universe thus continues to contain 'ghosts,' 'fictions,' and 'illusions' which may be more rational than their denial insomuch as they are concepts that recognize the limits and the deceptions of the prevailing rationality" (p. 191). A *therapeutic* philosophy, Marcuse argues, is one of *clarification* which "… frees thought from its enslavement by the established universe of discourse and behaviour, elucidates the negativity of the Establishment, and projects its alternatives … [philosophy and philosophic fiction shows] reality as that which it really is, and to show that which this reality prevents from being" (p. 203); also, perhaps, to show oneself and one's own Being; the irrational (a more fitting term may be the *speculative*) "becomes the home of the really rational – of the ideas which may 'promote the art of life'" and, finally, "if the established society manages all normal conversation, validating or invalidating it in accordance with social requirements; then the values alien to these requirements may have no other medium of communication than the abnormal one of fiction" (p. 251). Concept work, as a philosophy of literature, may be therapeutic because it recognizes, makes use of, and at best clarifies this abnormality of normalcy. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[36] Marcuse's approach can be compared with *converted forms* or *real semblance* as it recognises the deception of concepts: "By virtue of their reference to this historical totality, cognitive concepts transcend all operational context, but their transcendence is empirical because it renders the facts recognizable as that which they really are. The 'excess' of meaning over and above the operational concept illuminates the limited and even deceptive form in which the facts are allowed to be experienced" (Ibid., p. 108). In both cases, concepts constitute an inextricable lens or augmentation of the human experience.

beneficial activity. For many, a life of philosophic inquiry is not a life wasted. Jacquette concludes, then, that the conceptual illness or the cause of disquietude is the deficient use of language:

> We are referring instead to the abuses of rule-governed language game philosophical grammars resulting in what must be the meaningless formulation of philosophical concepts, definitions, distinctions, propositions, and especially arguments modelled on the proof of structures of mathematics and verification criteria in the natural sciences.[37]

This highlights a central concern in philosophy: the endless proliferation of concepts and the continued development of unnecessary jargon. Although philosophy deals with the fundamental questions of existence, it remains inaccessible and unintelligible to the vast amount of people. Even highly erudite individuals frequently become disillusioned with the convoluted nature of the field. Whether or not philosophy is intrinsically difficult to understand is arguable[38], yet needlessly elaborate language use does not help the situation. Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical therapy is understood by Jacquette to "be directed at what all philosophical anxieties have in common", that is, philosophic language which "goes on holiday away from its pragmatic meaning conditions"[39]. I stated earlier that it is the creation and usage of concepts (in language) that distinguishes philosophic activity; so how can this be reconciled with the idea that a large part of contemporary philosophy is unpragmatic and constitutes deficient thinking? Is working with concepts meaningful or meaningless? For Wittgenstein, conceptual illness and disquiet is caused when philosophic grammars (or we could say, the expressed conceptual frameworks in philosophic texts) become "detached from pragmatic rule-governed language games"[40]; in other

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[37] Jacquette, *Anti-Philosophical Therapy*, p. 254.

[38] Marcuse states, "an irreducible difference exists between the universe of everyday thinking and language on the one side, and that of philosophic thinking and language on the other" (*One-Dimensional Man*, p. 183); further, the "exactness and clarity in philosophy cannot be attained within the universe of ordinary discourse", p. 184.

[39] Jacquette, *Anti-Philosophical Therapy*, p. 260.

[40] Ibid.

words, confusion arises when philosophic language is incorrectly used in discourse and lacks meaningful application. Therefore, it is not necessarily the concepts that are the problem but the way in which they are dealt with. Jacquette concludes:

> We stop philosophy when everyone permanently stops trying to do philosophy. We stop trying to do philosophy, in turn, when we bring key philosophical concept terms back from holiday, as Wittgenstein advises, and consider them exclusively with respect to the pragmatic point and purpose rule-governed work they are expected to perform within a language game that is an integral part of the larger non-linguistic practical activities of a community of language users that instantiate a form of life.[41]

In this sense, the *cure* for philosophy and philosophers is to analyse philosophic language; conceptual issues are resolved when individuals stop philosophising and are prevented from creating additional intellectual disquiet. For instance, a philosopher wrestling with a seemingly insurmountable philosophic problem—say the adequate justification of knowledge—can only be relieved of his dysfunctional, obsessional behaviour through the step-by-step process of dismantling the conceptual issue as an instance of misguided language use. I would not say that this interpretation of Wittgenstein's position is entirely *anti-philosophical*. The proper work of philosophy, it could be said, is to ground philosophic inquiry: to re-establish its purpose as a practical, meaningful (and communal) activity[42]. I will argue that *working with*

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[41] Ibid., p. 270.

[42] Marcuse is particularly critical of Wittgenstein's philosophic project which he maintains is emblematic of operational concept use as well as one-dimensional society: "The redefinition of thought which helps to coordinate mental operations with those in social reality aims at a therapy. Thought is on the level with reality when it is cured from transgression beyond a conceptual framework which is either purely axiomatic (logic, mathematics) or coextensive with the established universe of discourse and behaviour. Thus, linguistic analysis claims to cure thought from confusing metaphysical notions – from 'ghosts' of a less mature and less scientific past which still haunt the mind although they neither designate nor explain. The emphasis is on the *therapeutic* function of philosophical analysis – correction of abnormal be-

concepts in this way as a response to literature, whilst being mindful of the language that is employed within the activity, is of therapeutic value[43]. Whilst it is true that a large portion of philosophy is disassociated from non-linguistic practical concerns, I believe that *unpragmatic* philosophy may still be meaningful on a personal and networked level; that is, philosophic communities and philosophic *forms of life* are not limited to purely pragmatic activities.[44] Whilst there are certainly issues with the language of some philosophy, the underlying conceptual work found in the philosophy of literature is purposeful in itself. I do not believe that philosophic activity comes to an *end* any more than we would say that music comes to an end. Philosophic questions need not necessarily have a final answer; conceptual activity has no culminating point any more than aesthetic expression. Increased conceptual activity does not necessarily increase intellectual disquiet depending on whether the conceptual activity is meaningful or meaningless; this distinction depends on two operators: the philosopher himself and his philosophic community or network.

Philosophy of literature can be understood as conceptual and linguistic mastery; any application is secondary to this activity. Conceptual activity in relation to the literary text is an end itself. To say that such

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haviour in thought and speech, removal of obscurities, illusions, and oddities …" (*One-Dimensional Man*, p. 174). It is argued that Wittgenstein's approach constitutes a repressive reduction of thought, a closure of new experience, and a denial of any ambiguity, obscurity, or speculation in thought or in the world. Such abnormality, in contrast, is central to concept work and philosophic literature.

[43] See footnote 36.

[44] Concept work, for instance, as a philosophic approach to literature, can be understood as an *abnormal discourse*. Rorty bases his distinction between normal and abnormal discourse on the distinction made by Kuhn between normal and revolutionary science; revolutionary science and abnormal discourse deal with *incommensurability* (there is a link here with Marcuse's call for *other terms* and the *irrational home of rationality*); such approaches elude classification, standardisation, and explanation. Importantly, the argumentation of abnormal discourse is not confined by any necessity to correspond directly to reality; further connections can be made, then, to speculative fiction. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

philosophy has no external utility is not anti-philosophic; the point is that even without communal application, this type of philosophy is meaningful. Instead of aesthetic labour or enjoyment, philosophic activity amounts to conceptual labour and enjoyment. There might very well be external application of philosophic concepts, particularly to topical or historic events (animal personhood, medical ethics, artificial intelligence, and so forth) but such application is a secondary action; their primary value relates to their creation and elaboration by the philosopher. Therefore, this philosophic activity can be understood as a *conceptual self-therapy*; yet this need not be in response to conceptual or psychological illness. An individual can practise philosophy without anxiety. Philosophy may relate to psychological issues, but only to the extent that an individual establishes these connections themselves in accordance with the concepts explicated in their activity. Wittgenstein's concern with the linguistic problems of philosophy is widely held; however, on an individual basis, working through such confusion (perhaps inadvertently adding to the quagmire) can be purposeful; even bad philosophy may be considered meaningful if it develops the individuals conceptual and linguistic competence or skills. Philosophy need not be a response to lack, deficiency, or external circumstance: it can be imagined as a digression without end, a personal project of value which may or may not be of use to others. If you have ever sat down to write a philosophic essay, you can imagine your papers strewn across the desk, perhaps the pile ordered in some meaningful fashion known only to yourself; it becomes apparent that philosophy is a conceptual and fundamentally textual activity which is disassociated from the practical sphere. Jacquette maintains:

> If philosophy as a genuine language game is understood as something like other games intended merely for amusement, if that is philosophy's point and purpose, then the point and purpose philosophy has taken itself to have would immediately evaporate, and it would be impossible to find serious enthusiastic philosophy language game players for whom the stakes were nothing more elevated than an otherwise pointless pastime.[45]

[45] Jacquette, *Anti-Philosophical Therapy*, p. 256.

I would argue that this notion, that philosophy is inherently more important or more serious than other activities, is unfounded. For example, when one attends a contemporary philosophy conference, the result or subsequent meaning of the activity may not seem any more profound than attending any other academic event. One indeed may be a meaningful fly fisher contingent upon the extent of one's participation with the activity; one may centre one's life around it, utilise it for one's own gain or purpose, and connect with others concerning it. A fly fisher, waking early in the morning and wading into the river to cast his rod, would surely state that his pastime had meaning. The difference between fly fishing and philosophy or literature is that the textual nature of the activities allows for linguistic communication; philosophy, for instance, can articulate its own activity (conceptual operation) and engagement. It can thus convey its meaning in its own terms: *philosophy and literature can speak of themselves*.

Therefore, one's personal philosophy (their *concept work*) can be extended through reaching others. Concepts can be engaged with by readers of a philosophic text, or employed in response to a literary text, which may inform their own philosophy (*their* concept work); engagement may also deepen the original text with new conceptual layers or paths (development, criticism, inspiration, and so forth). A *conceptual network* or community may be established; concepts originating from the philosopher or writer, transmitted through texts, are taken up, modified, and amplified by conceptual workers. It could be argued that philosophy does not go anywhere; central philosophic issues (even those dating back to the pre-Socratics) remain open to debate. Here the discourse itself, the connections, divergences, collaboration, and continued creation of original positions is meaningful as a conceptual activity. This brings us back to philosophic literature; both philosophy and literature *work with concepts* and readers of philosophy and literature can move beyond the text; their own personal concept work can utilise and variously elaborate the concepts that they encounter. Yet what distinguishes my account of the philosophy of literature is that the personal and networked concept work is understood as a *mutually independent* process. Philosophy of literature, and by extension philosophic literature itself, is meaningful on an individual basis as a form of conceptual self-therapy; the activity of writing and the writer's personal work with concepts is of value without the necessity for an audience. Secondly, working with

concepts in response to a text as well as within a conceptual network of workers (as a kind of group-therapy) is of value; the activity of a reader is meaningful in a way which is not absolutely contingent upon the authority of the originator. Working with the concepts found in a literary text may of course be enriched by a knowledge of the intention, history, or cultural background of the writer, but the text itself is sufficient[46]: an ignorance of some external fact does not necessarily limit the value of one's concept work in relation to the text.

The *text* connects the writer and reader, but the writer and reader participate in separate concept work; of course, there may be convergence, but not necessarily so. Philosophic literature, as working with concepts either as a writer or reader, is fundamentally a linguistic activity. Whilst a writer may seek to effect practical change through their work (and may do so), the philosophic value of a text does not depend on this; rather, the philosophic value of a literary text is founded upon the linguistic mastery of working with concepts. There is philosophic meaning in the activity of writing (as a personal project which creates, clarifies, and elaborates concepts) and in reading (as the development of conceptual skill or the further articulation of concepts through networked activity). I maintain that the philosophic value of writing a text (either literary or philosophic proper) is frequently overlooked (in reader-response theory, for instance[47]) as philosophically meaningful in itself; yet such self-therapy is an area largely detached from how we engage with texts. The writer's experience of writing has no definitive bearing on one's involvement with a text and exploration of this largely depends upon the writer's own admission[48].

A final point to make, in response to Wittgenstein's position, is that perhaps the literary form can overcome some of the linguistic difficulty which he believes that philosophy perpetuates. Further, as both philosophy and literature allow for the possibility of concept work, phi-

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[46] Much would be learnt from the language and content of the text; this example merely points to the fact that the readers are central operators in establishing such connections.

[47] As opposed to a *writer-production* theory.

[48] For instance, Haruki Murakami's memoir on marathon running and the creative process: Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running*, trans. Philip Gabriel (New York: Vintage, 2009).

losophers may choose to express their notions in a more literary style which would be far more accessible for the vast amount of people; equally, there may arise a more literary style of response to philosophic notions. Although the philosophic value of a text is not entirely predicated on its intelligibility for others, writers of philosophy typically have an audience in mind and want to share their work. Responses to the concepts expressed in a text (as individual readers or as participants in a network of shared meaning) have the potential to *deepen* the work or *exceed* it (also, to lessen, diminish, or fail to meet it). Philosophy of literature, as an endless digression, is an endless opportunity for new and diverse concept work; approaching literature philosophically, both personally and collectively, is a meaningful, therapeutic activity regardless of its external impact. Philosophy and literature are significant human activities; there is significance for all individuals (world-leading or amateur, obsessed or merely interested) who involve themselves with concepts in their own novel ways.

Philosophic literature may be understood as *conceptual material*; certain literature is a source or space of concept work and thus philosophy. Importantly, the concepts do not only reside *in* the text; the readers are central operators in the process of conceptual expansion as they bring their own competencies, experience, knowledge, and potential connections to the work. Regarding the above point, if an individual comes across or thinks of a concept in relation to a literary text, it is unlikely that they would then create a novel around this concept in order to explore it further. It is more likely that individuals would connect concepts to other pre-existing concepts or incorporate it into their personal conceptual project. They might also link concepts to their own experience in the world which may remain unarticulated. Further, original concepts may be established which are expressed in a variety of forms (reflective journals, academic essays, film scripts, song lyrics).

In any case, concepts are not limited to a single text and may be reworked in response to other texts; the reader continually *exceeds* the text. Finally, the dialectic between works of philosophy and literature is certainly valid concept work as concepts apparent in both may be mutually articulated[49]. I would add that the defining feature of philosophic

[49] This corresponds to Verene's fourth approach to literature in which he places works of philosophy and literature in a dialectical partnership in order to un-

literature, as the meeting-place of philosophy and literature, is *working with concepts*. Philosophic literature allows writers and readers to establish, articulate, or elaborate concepts; for example, philosophic concepts may be extended through an *imagined* application and through emotive or contextual engagement. Concept work, as revealed, stimulated by, and applied to philosophic literature, is a meaningful, therapeutic activity in itself as conceptual and linguistic mastery.

I will include a brief example here to further demonstrate concept work as a philosophic approach to literature. *Ready Player Two* (2020) is a science fiction novel written by Ernest Cline[50]; it is the sequel to the hugely popular *Ready Player One* (2011)[51] which was adapted into a film of the same name (2018), directed by Steven Spielberg. The novels take place in a dystopian future where the primary mode of entertainment is a virtual reality universe called the OASIS which acts as both a massively multiplayer online role-playing game as well as an alternative society for users; in *Ready Player One*, users access the OASIS by wearing an electronic visor and haptic gloves; in *Ready Player Two*, the main character receives a revolutionary piece of technology from the creator of the system, a *brain-computer-interface headset*, which allows the user to directly experience the OASIS through a kind of synaptic stimulation which simulates neural and bodily responses:

> The device had a segmented central spine that appeared to stretch from a wearer's forehead to the nape of their neck, with a row of ten C-shaped metal bands attached to it. Each band was comprised of jointed, retractable segments, and each segment had a row of circular sensor pads on its underside. This made the whole sensor array adjustable, so that it could fit around heads of all shapes and sizes. A long fibre-optic cable stretched from the base of the headset, with a standard OASIS console plug at the end of it. "The device you now hold in your hands is an OASIS Neural Interface, or

earth new insight into shared themes; in his work, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) is paired with Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (1494) as "companions in the larger project of humanistic thought" (*Philosophy of Literature*, p. 3).

[50] Ernest Cline, *Ready Player Two* (New York: Random House, 2020).

[51] Ernest Cline, *Ready Player One* (New York: Random House, 2011).

> ONI … It is the world's first fully functional noninvasive brain-computer interface. It allows an OASIS user to see, hear, smell, taste, and feel their avatar's virtual environment, via signals transmitted directly into their cerebral cortex. The headset's sensor array also monitors and interprets its wearer's brain activity, allowing them to control their OASIS avatar just as they do their physical body – simply by thinking about it. … "That's just for starters," … "An ONI headset can also be used to record its wearer's experiences in the real world. All sensory input received by their brain is digitized and stored as a .oni file on an external data file attached to their headset. Once that file is uploaded to the OASIS, the entire experience can be played back and reexperienced by the person who recorded it, or by any other ONI user with whom they choose to share the file" … "In other words, the ONI allows you to relive moments of other people's lives. To see the world through their eyes, hear it through their ears, smell it through their nose, taste it with their tongue, and feel it through their skin" … "The ONI is the most powerful communication tool humans have ever invented. And I think it's also the last one we will ever need to invent".[52]

This is an intriguing idea which could provide the material for significant concept work. Cline considers some implications such as its addictiveness; the economic situation of users buying and selling recorded experiences; the development of entertainment as becoming the actor, the musician or celebrity, instead of the passive audience; the enlargement of experience without negative consequences (drug use, for instance); and improving (or making more bearable) the lives of impoverished people, which ultimately leads to an increased empathy for others and other ways of living. Yet *Ready Player Two* is not a work of philosophy. The idea of the brain-computer-interface headset is not fully explored or elaborated as a concept. An articulated, sustained concept related to the idea is not explicitly established within the text (with bearing on personal identity, being-in-the-world and so on); rather, it is more of a plot device which is implemented for story-telling purposes. For example, the main character mentions that it has become fashionable for mothers to record their experience of giving birth so that in the future children can experience what

[52] Ernest Cline, *Ready Player Two*, pp. 328-352.

it feels like to *give birth to themselves*. To take this further, one could even record their experience of death. This particular novel's purpose is to be enjoyed by readers, most probably adapted into a film in the near-future, rather than providing a profound, contextualised, and embodied account of how virtual reality may affect human relations.

However, Cline's work can be meaningfully approached philosophically; particularly as a thought experiment or a repository of images which points to concepts. For instance, the concept that an individual could directly experience the sensations of another. The detail of the novel's description of the device allows readers to imagine it and its effects more clearly, perhaps even to imagine it as a piece of technology which may soon be invented[53]. The central point here is the epistemic value of speculative fiction: the reader engages with and *thinks about* the idea as an entity in the (imagined) world. The difference between an idea and a *concept* is found when the idea has been *worked on*; it has been singled out, separated, held up, shaped, articulated, and applied. Further, the concept may require a *term* if it is to be communicated and referred to; for instance, *the brain-computer-interface headset*. Concepts can be connected to other pre-existing concepts such as Baudrillard's *hyperreality* or a virtual *Lebenswelt.* One might ask, how does this differ from ordinary literary analysis? *Concept Work*, as a philosophy of literature, differs as it primarily approaches the concept as distinguished from the textual material; the concept (or analysis of an author's language, symbols, characters and so forth) is not employed in order to explain or clarify the meaning of the work; in contrast, the work is understood as a vehicle for the concept. The concept may illuminate the text in some way, but this orientation is to be reversed; fundamentally, the text illuminates the concept, and the text imparts only one instance of the concept. The text is *an example of the concept*. As discussed above, this is not intended to subordinate the literary work to the concepts expressed or found therein, instead it is just one approach that recognises literature's conceptual activity. Additionally, literary analysis may itself be considered valid concept work if such approaches work with concepts in the way that has been discussed.

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[53] For instance: "Zuckerberg wants Facebook to become online 'metaverse'" 23/07/2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57942909 [last accessed 04/04/2022].

4. Conclusion

Firstly, concepts discerned in a literary text can be connected to other relevant concepts. Secondly, literary texts can be used in order to create original concepts. In both cases, the literary text is emphasised as material for one's own conceptual project. This is far removed from attempting to establish the *meaning* of a text through concepts, or from relying on the author's intentions and personality[54]. For the authors of primary philosophic and literary texts, the concept work is essentially found in the act of writing. It seems to me that the author's socio-historical background is less relevant to the reader's imaginal engagement with the concepts than traditional literary analysis leads one to believe. Working with concepts is an act of (philosophic) *possession*; the writer is in possession of his concepts when they are expressed in his textual work, and the reader takes possession of the concept through his response (as independent concept work). Thus, the concept is continually *repossessed* and *reworked*. I have taken possession of the brain-computer-interface headset and I can put it to work for my own conceptual purposes. This *putting to work* is a general function of philosophy and the distinguishing feature of concept work as a philosophic approach to literature.

Philosophy and philosophic literature *work with and are involved with concepts*. Philosophic literature establishes, articulates, or elaborates concepts. Readers may create concepts through their engagement with literary texts; readers may also develop their conceptual competency through this involvement with philosophic literature. *Concept Work,* as philosophy of literature, is meaningful as a form of conceptual self-therapy; the philosophic value of a literary text is founded upon the linguistic mastery of working with concepts in relation to it. Importantly, such work is meaningful for its own sake. Finally, in opposition to traditional literary analysis, the literary text provides an instance of the concept which may be worked upon and into diverse or even abnormal philosophic projects.

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[54] Regarding Murakami, for example, secondary literature typically focuses on either the writer's life (*mythology*, it could be said) or uses philosophic concepts to help explain the literary texts. Therefore, the texts are deepened but not extended. Jay Rubin, *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words*, London: Vintage, 2005. Matthew Carl Strecher, *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).