

# Philosophy and the representation of literary works in high school essays

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## Abstract

It is uncontroversial that philosophy amplifies the salience and scope of literary themes. However, it is less clear whether philosophy relates to the way in which literary texts ought to be represented in curriculum-based high school assessment tasks. These tasks mostly take the form of essays in which literary works must be viewed as complex, strongly patterned texts. Ideally, this results in essays in which an author's use of language reveals a sustained, multifaceted engagement with a particular set of authorial concerns. And yet, despite this focus, virtually all school curricula neglect the underlying genesis and nature of such complex patterns. In particular, how is it that authors generate them at all? It shall be a guiding claim that philosophy is well suited to explore this issue. Moreover, I shall argue that such an understanding can have positive practical outcomes for students, promote holistic pedagogy, and illuminate ways in which high school literary studies can better intersect with tertiary literary studies.

## Key words

essay writing, literary patterns, literature, philosophy, representation

## 1. Introduction

Philosophy and high school literary studies come together intuitively. There is, after all, a parallel between authorial concerns and philosophical concerns. For example, in reading *The Great Gatsby* one might find that Sartre's account of *bad faith* is a relevant interpretive tool. Certainly, Fitzgerald's critical perspective on Gatsby's desire to erase unappealing elements of his past echoes Sartre's critical perspective that—when we fall into bad faith—we deny past actions and situations that delineate inescapably factual contours of our identity (Sartre 1956). Equally, Gatsby's desire to transform idyllic elements of his past (with Daisy Buchanan) into a viable future, involves a mistaken substitution of his (past-oriented) 'facticity' for his (future-oriented) 'transcendence' (another aspect of Sartrean bad faith; see Martin 2002).

Philosophy, here, can deepen our conceptual grasp of important literary themes. It can also spotlight the extent to which fictional concerns map onto the human condition. Consequently, there is a case to be made that it could be both instructive and appropriate to refer to Sartre in a high-school analysis of *The Great Gatsby* (provided the philosophical reference is knowledgeably distilled for high school level consumption).

Of course, aspects of Sartrean bad faith can be applied to virtually any character in any text. However, the relationship between philosophy and literature just outlined can hold in less generic contexts too. For example, we could expect philosophy to yield similar benefits when applying Locke's account of the self in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (Burns 1994); Baudrillard's notion of simulacra in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (Wilcox 1991); Bentham's utilitarianism in Dickens' *Hard Times* (Arneson 1978); Nietzsche's ethics in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (Faro 2017); or Heidegger's treatment of death in Philip Roth's *Everyman* (Schermbucker 2015). Here, philosophers and authors arguably explore similar concepts in their respective mediums. It should be noted, too, that philosophy can also benefit from this intersection. Thus, as some have argued, literary refractions of philosophical ideas can enrich our understanding of these ideas considerably, particularly when it comes to ethics (see Nussbaum 1990; Raphael 1983).

However, it is less clear whether a broad philosophical understanding of literature is relevant at a high school level. For example, consider Foucault's (2003) notion that authors are social constructs rather than individuals; or Derrida's (1997) lengthy expositions on the inherent ambiguity and instability of literary meaning. Equally, consider the philosophy of fiction in the analytic tradition, with its emphasis on the truth value of fictional sentences (see Cohn 1999; Lewis 1978), the ontology of fictional characters (see Reicher 2010) and the degree to which authorial assertions involve pretence (see Searle 1975). It is not clear these topics have any real bearing on our understanding of particular works of fiction. Rather, they seem to pick out an abstract, metatextual epistemology that floats free of our primary engagement with literary texts. Consequently, it is easy enough to imagine a student who is ignorant of these concerns, and yet has a deep understanding of the literal, thematic, symbolic, stylistic, structural, aesthetic, sociohistorical and autobiographical dimensions of a literary text.

It is of course always *possible* to corral a standard engagement with a literary text into the above philosophical frameworks. But it is not going to be easy work, and, almost certainly, high school students will be sceptical. This is unfortunate. Both analytic and

continental schools of philosophy have a shared interest in the metatextual identity of literary texts. It would be nice if some of these foundational concerns could feed into high school students' primary engagement with literature. An understanding of literature, after all, cannot just amount to an understanding of a series of literary works, literary techniques and literary movements. Questions about the underlying nature of authorship, language, meaning, reading and literary belief seem—at the very least—relevant.

In this paper I shall present one way in which a link between these kinds of philosophical concerns and high school literary studies can be forged. To do this, I shall show that high school assessment tasks have universal features that require students to represent texts in a particular way. I shall claim, too, that although this issue receives no attention in school curricula, for both students and teachers it can have a direct, academically consequential link to assessment, learning and understanding.

## **2. Essay-based representations of literary texts**

It is uncontroversial that high school literature students write essays in which whole literary works must be analysed by referring to relevant themes or concepts. The importance and universality of this task is reflected in global assessment standards. Thus, in final exam papers across the world, such essay-tasks either form the constitutive basis of literature exams or else make frequent appearances (alongside other question types). Although it falls beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed meta-analysis of these papers, Table 1 provides an overview of this trend.

**Table 1:** Overview of assessment based literature essay questions in international high school curricula.

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>International Baccalaureate (IB)</b>                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Subject</i>                                                                      | English Language & Literature                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Country</i>                                                                      | International                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Year</i>                                                                         | 2019                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Question</i>                                                                     | There is no love without suffering. Discuss the extent to which the two works you have studied support this view.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Advanced Placement (AP)</b>                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Subject</i>                                                                      | English Literature and Composition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>Country</i>                                                                      | United States and Canada                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>Year</i>                                                                         | 2022                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Question</i>                                                                     | Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which a character responds to a hierarchy in some significant way. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how that character's response to the hierarchy contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. |
| <b>International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) (Cambridge)</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Subject</i>                                                                      | Literature in English                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Country</i>                                                                      | International                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Year</i>                                                                         | 2022                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Question</i>                                                                     | Discuss the exploration of crime and its punishment in <i>The Changeling</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Higher School Certificate (HSC)</b>                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Subject</i>                                                                      | English Standard                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <i>Country</i>                                                                      | Australia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <i>Year</i>                                                                         | 2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Question</i>                                                                     | How do the connections between ideas, form and language inform your understanding of the significance of your prescribed text?                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>National Senior Certificate (NSC)</b>                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Subject</i>                                                                      | English Home Language                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Country</i>                                                                      | South Africa                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>Year</i>                                                                         | 2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Question</i>                                                                     | The Principle of Aestheticism contributes significantly to the degradation of Dorian Gray's soul. Critically discuss the extent to which you agree with this statement.                                                                                                                            |

While only some questions place an explicit emphasis upon literary techniques, virtually all literature syllabi have the implicit expectation that students incorporate appropriate terminology into their analysis. The idea here is that students should not just echo the content and concepts of literary works. Rather, they should also display knowledge about the specific ways in which authors actively shape language to generate meaning and effect. So, for example, an essay about how justice is explored in a literary work might (at points) explore an author's use of symbolism, dialogue and metaphoric imagery to elaborate upon the particular ways in which the theme of justice is explored.

A point which is rarely (if ever) made is that this universal assessment task is deeply representational. Specifically, to write their essays, students must convert a narrative, play or poem into a series of analytic associations or 'patterns' that reveal an author's multifaceted engagement with a topic. This, in turn, reveals the way in which seemingly disparate elements of a text encode related concerns. To make these claims more concrete, consider the following example, in which the literary critic and philosopher, Terry Eagleton, analyses the opening lines of *Macbeth*:

1st witch: When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or  
in rain?

2nd witch: When the hurly-burly's done, When the battle's lost and  
won.

3rd witch: That will be ere the set of sun.

1st witch: Where the place?

2nd witch: Upon the heath.

3rd witch: There to meet with Macbeth.

1st witch: I come, Graymalkin.

2nd witch: Paddock calls.

3rd witch: Anon!

All: Fair is foul, and foul is fair, Hover through the fog and filthy  
air.

Questions seek for certainty and clear distinctions, but the witches confound all assured truths. They garble definitions and turn polarities on their head. Hence 'fair is foul, and foul is fair'. Or take the phrase

‘hurly-burly’, which means any boisterous form of activity. ‘Hurly’ sounds like ‘burly’ but is not the same, so the term contains an interplay of difference and identity. And this reflects the Unholy Trinity of the witches themselves. The same is true of ‘When the battle’s lost and won’. This presumably means ‘lost by one army and won by the other’, but there may also be a hint that when it comes to such military adventures, winning is really losing. What victory is there in hacking thousands of enemy soldiers to death? [...] Lost and won are opposites, but the ‘and’ between them (technically known as a copula) puts them on the same level, thus making them sound the same; so that once again we have a confusion of identity and otherness. It is as though we are forced to hold in our heads the contradiction that a thing can be both itself and something else. (Eagleton 2013, pp. 15–16)

Eagleton’s example does not reflect a Literary Pattern which high school students typically detect (though some might). It is rather an exemplar that focuses our attention on the normative goal that students are aiming at when writing their essays.<sup>1</sup> This, in turn, reveals the types of standards and expectations teachers guide their students towards. Most importantly, though, in drawing our attention to the intricate, sustained linkages between Shakespeare’s word choice and concepts linked to confusion and ambiguity, Eagleton accentuates the standout feature of Literary Patterns: their complexity. In this respect, after reading Eagleton’s analysis, readers can appreciate the extent to which virtually all Shakespeare’s authorial choices can become conceptually interconnected in light of an encoded theme. Further, as Eagleton notes, concepts related to misleading questions and confusion run through the work as a whole (2013, p. 15). As such, the Literary Pattern established in this passage forms part of a larger, even more complex pattern (which may, in turn, relate to innumerable other Literary Patterns in the text).

Even though this complexity features so conspicuously in high school students’ essay-based engagement with literary texts, its nature and origin receive no attention in

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<sup>1</sup> Crucially, Eagleton’s analysis maps onto what high school assessors look for in the *body paragraphs* of a literature essay. In these body paragraphs, specific evidence must be marshalled to substantiate the validity of a general answer to an essay question (usually provided in the essay’s introduction). Eagleton’s analysis does *not* provide an example of how a whole essay ought to be structured. However, insofar as it is the body paragraphs of an essay—in particular—which determine the underlying quality of an essay, Eagleton’s analysis provides a good measure of the representational skills which are most important for high school literature essay writing.

school syllabi. In particular, how did Shakespeare generate such complex webs of conceptual associations? Whereas students of biology can be introduced to a principle—for example, natural selection—that accounts for the complex design that plays such a constitutive role in the biological phenomena they study, students of literature are comparatively in the dark.

This lacuna in literary studies is worrying; common sense pedagogy dictates that students should understand the nature of what they are representing. Moreover, Eagleton's structuralist analysis does not seem superfluous to understanding the task of essay writing in the same way that the philosophy of fiction seems superfluous to the understanding of a literary text. If I only learn how to trace a pre-existing pattern and do not understand how the pattern was created in the first place, both my understanding of the pattern and arguably my ability to trace it will be negatively impacted. A philosophical investigation of Literary Patterns might, then, be integral to the practical reality of high school literary studies. This is an attractive outcome: it provides a potential way to connect the 'deep' metatextual concerns in the philosophy of literature with an assessment-based activity that is central to high school literary studies.

### **3. A philosophical perspective on authorial agency**

In this section, I shall set out a way in which philosophy can be used to explore this issue. Moreover, I shall make the case that this exploration has all the hallmarks of a standard philosophical investigation in analytic philosophy. In particular,

1. The phenomenon under investigation will be shown to have a paradoxical nature
2. Distinct solutions to the paradox will be formulated
3. Some solutions will combine into further hybrid-compatibilist solutions
4. Some solutions will cast doubt on the legitimacy of the problem itself.

Regarding 1, it has been noted (correctly) that analytic philosophy 'restrict[s] the scope of problems and transform[s] them into puzzles' (Levy 2003, p. 292). This transformation is frequently catalysed by focusing on the most constitutively paradoxical aspect of a phenomenon. For example, in the philosophy of mind, consciousness is analysed in terms of a perceived incompatibility between mental states and brain states. This incompatibility takes the form of a paradox, as it seems

intuitively obvious that mentality should reduce to brain states, and yet, upon reflection, it appears that it cannot (see Chalmers 1996).

In my view, Literary Patterns are similarly paradoxical. On the one hand, given their complexity, they appear to be exquisitely designed; it is therefore obvious that they cannot be mere byproducts of the writing process. On the other hand, it appears equally obvious that literary authors are primarily in the business of either writing *narratives* (in the case of prose/drama) or describing phenomena (in the case of poetry). Within these modes of expression, events, characters, feelings, experiences and thoughts take center stage in a powerfully aesthetic and dramatic manner. Ideas and 'themes' may organically emerge from authors engaging in this pursuit, but they surely cannot be what structure or drive it. However, if this is the case, Literary Patterns must counterintuitively derive from a more primary authorial pursuit. But it has already been noted that Literary Patterns have all the hallmarks of meticulous design. It seems, then, we have encountered the horns of a dilemma.

The first solution to this puzzle asks us to revise our starting assumptions about literary works. While we may assume that works of literature are primarily narratives or descriptions of experience, it might actually be the case that they are (only) *ostensibly* narratological and experiential. On this view, literary authors might use characters and events instrumentally as devices to weave complex syntactic and conceptual patterns. Importantly, authors need not be self-reflectively aware of this in the act of writing itself. Rather, it could implicitly shape their writing due to background beliefs and commitments. In this respect, it is worth considering a long tradition in which literary authors—in diaries, statements and interviews—appear deeply concerned with both the shaping of language and a seemingly philosophical desire to understand the nature of human existence. Call this the 'instrumental solution'.

The second solution requires us to rethink common assumptions about authorial agency. In this respect, it might be that Literary Patterns are intrinsic to narratives and poetry. Certainly, from an ethnographic perspective, our most ancient stories and poems can be analysed as rich conceptual mosaics (Lyle 2006; Serracino Inglott 1965). To the best of our awareness, then, literary forms of expression have *always* structured authorial agency in a complex manner. This view harmonises with the Platonic notion that writers do not individually create works through drawing upon their own capacities but rather channel 'the muse' (Greene 1918). Thus, through letting their thinking and writing be structured by the particular demands of a narrative or poem,

literary authors may generate Literary Patterns as a matter of fact (in the same way as typing on a keyboard implicitly generates complex patterns of information processing in a computer). Writers of poetry and prose who do not achieve these patterns may simply fail (in some way or another) to harmonise their efforts with these latent structures. If one thinks of 'pulp fiction', for instance, one could argue that its non-literary status stems from an allegiance to the derivative tropes of particular genres rather than to the archetypal faultlines that structure poetry and prose in a primitive sense. It is perhaps no accident, then, that canonical works of literature (see Bloom 1994) *primarily* concern themselves with existential primitives (death, love, free-will, loss, etc.). Given the extent to which these types of concerns are hard baked into human nature and the human condition (see Pinker 2003), they might represent the primary content that originally slotted into our archetypal narrative structures. An allegiance to these concerns could, then, increase the chances that modern literary authors can exploit these structures. Call this the 'structuralist' solution'.

The third solution is a synthesis of the prior solutions; it claims that Literary Patterns may be generated by instrumental and structurally guided authorial tendencies. Literary authors may therefore (consciously or unconsciously) oscillate between the two in a push-pull manner. This view has plausibility since narratives (in particular) are composed of many heterogeneous parts. Given the context-specific nature of each part, some parts may present themselves as being more susceptible to one approach than another. To take one example, literary authors may gravitate more towards the instrumental approach in narrative phases in which characters mentally introspect and there is a greater 'opportunity' for a text's underlying concerns to be directly and naturally articulated. Thus, in Macbeth's final soliloquy, Shakespeare was perhaps presented with an opportunity to instrumentally 'use' Macbeth to weave together multiple themes in the play in a compact tapestry. Certainly, if we keep in mind Eagleton's (2013) claim that this soliloquy reveals the way in which "human existence ... looks vital and positive ... but is really a kind of nullity ... "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"', we find a link with the overall way in which the witches' opening remarks invite us to 'hold in our heads the contradiction that a thing can be both itself and something else' (p. 16). Call this the 'synthetic solution'.

The fourth solution is an eliminativist one. It claims that there is no problem since there are no Literary Patterns. Rather, in much the same way as our cognitive mechanisms are primed to detect agency in animate geometric objects (see Campbell et al. 2006), the task of literary criticism primes us to see large ideas configured by

complex word patterns (i.e. Literary Patterns). Literary Patterns are therefore mental constructs rather than actual properties of texts. One way to motivate this stance is to reject the idea that writing is a seamless transubstantiation of mental authorial intentions into words, such that words thud down onto the page, heavily laden with predetermined meaning. Instead, in more of an 'existence precedes essence view', writers may only read intentionality and meaning into their work *after* it is written down. On this view, even for authors, literature does not have any fixed meaning until it is read into the text. Crosman (2014) captures this idea nicely:

Do authors make meaning? Yes, of course they do, in exactly the same way that we all make meaning: as interpreters, as readers. Because we have all been taught to believe in Imperial Truth we have imagined the process of writing as antithetical to the process of reading: the writer, in contact with the wordless realm of Truth, somehow embodies his ineffable vision of reality in words and sends it to the reader, who (if all goes well) removes the "meaning" from its verbal envelope. I suggest that this accords rather badly with our own experience as writers. As a writer I begin with a jumble of purposes, ideas, and words that can only be examined by the activity of putting them on paper and reading them off. The physical acts of pushing my pencil over the paper, and of casting my eye over the markings thus made, may be called by different names, but in practice they are inseparable. The very act of writing includes reading. (pp. 162–163)

Given that language emerges in an ambiguous way that is not fully constrained by the designs of the author, it is unsurprising that close readings of literary texts can also reveal infinite possible meanings, each entailing complex patterns of their own (see Crosman 2014). Call this 'the eliminativist solution'.

The fifth (and final) solution disavows any homogenising, monolithic interpretation of Literary Patterns. Instead, it advocates an empirical approach in which claims are settled on the basis of reliable evidence, on a case-by-case basis. This evidence may take the form of relevant author testimonies, or, when these are unavailable, close readings of texts that provide a semantic, biographical or sociohistorical rationale for a particular interpretation of a Literary Pattern. As with the other solutions, there are motivating factors for such an approach. For one thing, literary authors and literary works are tremendously diverse. Charles Bukowski (along with his works and 20th century sociohistorical context) contrasts strikingly with, say, Jane Austen (along with

her works and early 19th century sociohistorical context). There is also good reason to think that testimonial evidence, in particular, can be used to settle theoretical issues with Literary Patterns. For example, consider the following reflections of Don DeLillo (1993) on his approach to writing:

But before everything, there's language. Before history and politics, there's language. And it's language, the sheer pleasure of making it and bending it and seeing it form on the page and hearing it whistle in my head—this is the thing that makes my work go. (p. 107)

Based on this testimonial evidence, we perhaps have good reason to think that DeLillo's Literary Patterns fall into the instrumental category: clearly, a concern with the self-conscious shaping of language powerfully determines his approach to writing. In contrast, if we wish to analyse Literary Patterns in a Beat poet who has not commented on his writing process, knowledge about the importance of organic spontaneity (a hallmark of the Beat movement) might allow us to reasonably infer that the poet's Literary Patterns fall into the structuralist category (via a particularly Platonic route). At least in these kinds of contexts, then, it seems that an evidence-based approach is viable. Call this 'the empirical solution'.

These positions are not intended to showcase fully developed theories that will satisfy professional philosophers. Rather, they are conceptual 'springboards' that can allow high school students to philosophically engage with Literary Patterns. Moreover, this engagement can take a form which resembles standard philosophical engagements. In this respect, all five solutions map onto the generic philosophical stances outlined in (1) to (4). Thus, while my basic treatment of Literary Patterns conforms to (1) and (2), the 'synthetic solution' maps onto (3) and both the 'eliminativist' and 'empirical' solutions conform to (4).

With each position, my presentations have necessarily been abstract and conceptual. For this reason, they would almost certainly need to be adapted to ensure suitability for high school students. This presents certain challenges, though not insurmountable ones. If we consider that Heidegger's philosophy can be turned into humorous and reader-friendly cartoon panels (see Lemay & Pitts 2005) and 10-year-olds can be helped to co-author a peer-reviewed science paper (see Blackawton et al. 2011) there is no reason to think that concepts and processes typically associated with academic discourse cannot filter into high school classrooms.

With these caveats in place, I will now consider ways in which a philosophical understanding of Literary Patterns can be harnessed to writing activities that can improve high school students' essay writing. In addition, I will also examine the broad pedagogic virtues of this approach.

#### **4. Practical applications and pedagogic virtues**

The five solutions outlined in the previous section can not only be understood and evaluated theoretically, they can also be explored practically and phenomenologically by students. It is this part of the learning process, in particular, that can improve students' ability to represent Literary Patterns in assessment-based essays.

To facilitate this, teachers could design creative writing exercises in which students are given the opportunity to use certain solutions as axiomatic writing techniques. For example, students could experience what it is like to write narratives or poems with an explicitly instrumentalist, structuralist or synthetic agenda. They could then be given the opportunity to reflect on the phenomenality of each process, and, as importantly, to analyse their own writing (as well as the writings of their peers) to determine which approach (if any) generates the most interesting and complex Literary Patterns. This process could also shed some light on the 'eliminativist solution', as students could well find (phenomenologically) that the Literary Patterns in their writing are not determined by their intentions but rather by posterior interpretations that generate multiple meanings.

Regarding the 'empirical solution', there is potential too. High school literary syllabi do not (typically) place much emphasis on how writers view their own writing process. Research projects structured around an exploration of diaries, interviews and articles could therefore enable students to evaluate which solution, if any, best accounts for a particular author's Literary Patterns. This would result in a thoroughly metacognitive endeavor in which students would write about the nature of writing by considering what writers think about their own writing. As with the previous extension exercises, such activities would therefore tap into the considerable benefits associated with school-level metacognition (see Hacker et al. 2009).

Since exam-oriented writing tasks can easily turn into a series of drills, templates and formulae it is pedagogically attractive to think of ways in which these standard procedures can be counterbalanced by activities which draw upon creative writing and metacognition. Through its use of philosophy, the approach I have outlined ticks these boxes. In doing this, it also arguably better enables students to comprehend,

internalise and personalise a key component of their essays, something which could conceivably improve academic performance.

It is also worth noting that literature syllabi typically externalise works of literature. For high school students, literature is something that is read in books, discussed, written about; it is not something that students create or explicitly relate to their own innermost experiences. And yet, despite the way in which literature is implicitly distanced from them, students are implored (by teachers) to open themselves to literature, derive aesthetic satisfaction from it and identify with literary texts in a deep, quasi-mystical sense. The approach I have outlined can potentially ease this tension. If it is indeed true that Literary Patterns are central to works of literature, the theories and extension activities presented in this paper could help students learn how to *write* literature (in the 'canonical' sense discussed before). While student literature will of course not be as sophisticated as full-blown adult literature, it might count as literature nevertheless. Moreover, through learning how to self-consciously write literature, students may ultimately forge a closer and more enduring relationship with the literary texts they study.

Finally, if high school literary syllabi did clear a space for the study of Literary Patterns, they would perhaps better harmonise with tertiary-level literary studies. For better or worse, a theory-oriented approach to the study of literature has come to predominate in university English departments (see Bloom 1994; Eagleton 2013). A high school focus on Literary Patterns could therefore better prepare students for this way of reading texts. Indeed, given the overlap between i) Foucault's account of the author and the structuralist solution, and ii) Derrida's view of literary meaning and the eliminativist solution, high school students who enter tertiary literature programs might find it easier to absorb and critique the poststructuralist ethos that permeates much literary theory. On a methodological level, the analytic framing of Literary Patterns developed in this paper might also help students to structure their engagement with this theory in a more rigorous and systematic way. Somewhat ambitiously, this, in turn, might allow for some much-needed cross-pollination between analytic philosophy and a range of continental philosophies that have become deeply rooted in tertiary-level literary studies.

## 5. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have presented *one* way in which we can get philosophy to play a meaningful role in high school literature classrooms. In my view, however, Literary Patterns may alert us to a cluster of issues that are ripe for high school level

philosophical analysis. In particular, through making us adopt an *authorial perspective* on literary texts, Literary Patterns pose philosophical questions about the origin and nature of literary content that naturally links up with the writing process itself. This paper has used philosophy to articulate and answer at least *some* of these questions. However, given the complex nature of literary authorship, many other viable perspectives on Literary Patterns can no doubt be given. Consequently, there are potentially many other ways in which a student-based awareness of Literary Patterns can benefit essay-based academic writing at a high school level.

Seen in this light, there are encouraging signs that philosophy can enrich high school literary studies in many novel and exciting ways. Given the well-documented benefits of philosophy in schools (see Hand & Winstanley 2009), educationalists arguably have a rationale for seeking as many innovative ways as possible to filter these benefits into specific school subjects. Given the natural kinship between literary authors and philosophers, there is surely no better place to start this project than the study of literature.

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