

LITERATURE AND MORALITY

R. V. Young

In an age that offers *Breaking Bad* as an evening's casual entertainment, welcomes Lady Gaga to the White House as a moral consultant, and allows displays on the Internet that ought to be inconceivable among civilized men and women, the plays of Shakespeare would seem to be a paragon of moral edification.¹ Nevertheless, not every commentator of conservative or Christian disposition has bestowed unqualified praise on Shakespeare, especially as a moralist.

In the preface to his 1765 edition of *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, Samuel Johnson complains, "His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose." As Johnson continues, he specifies precisely the issue we must consider regarding the relation between literature (or the arts in general) and morality:

From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casu-

ally from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapproval of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong and at the close dismisses them without further care and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.²

Although "he that thinks reasonably must think morally," reasonable thought on the part of an author is insufficient: he must be *more careful to instruct than to please*, and must write with a—presumably explicit—"moral purpose."

Johnson thus argues that an accomplished work of literature may have a deleterious influence on the virtue of its readers, with the implication that literary excellence and moral rectitude are not merely distinct but wholly separate qualities. While few contemporary observers are as suspicious of Shakespeare as was Dr. Johnson, we are

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concerned about the effect of violent computer games, licentious music videos, and vulgar rap lyrics on our children. Many men and women regard the representational arts as they do food: what is exciting and appealing is probably morally dubious, just as tasty foods are usually fattening and raise our cholesterol and blood pressure. Of course many progressive, health-conscious individuals who would never dream of consuming trans fats think nothing of ingesting films and novels that leave all manner of accretions in their souls and lower their levels of moral sensitivity. If there is a clash between morals and aesthetic appeal, so much the worse for morals.

Most nutritionists will argue, to the contrary, that an educated palate will find fresh, healthful foods more appealing as well as more nourishing. The same argument can be made about literature, especially from a Christian perspective. If God created everything and created it good, then a just representation of His creation ought to be good. Moreover, if the True and the Beautiful count as transcendentals convertible with the Good, then it is anomalous for what is beautiful to be wicked. If we probe this paradox, we shall discover that the elements of great art are likewise the elements of goodness, that moral and aesthetic considerations, while distinct, are not altogether different, and that artistic excellence cannot be intrinsically contrary to virtue. Nevertheless, the clear distinction remains, and while the highest artistic achievements cannot be evil per se in their essence, literary fiction bears such a complex relation to the reality of human experience that the moral configuration of a play or a novel, as well as its effect on readers and audiences, may always be problematic. Our educational and cultural policies should take this tension into account.

Now while it is reasonable to judge that Aristotle has definitively refuted the attack on poetry in the *Republic*, it would be unwise to dismiss Plato's concerns out of hand. Socrates, you will recall, makes three principal accusations against literary representation. First, he says, it is merely representation, an imitation of an imitation—three removes from the ideal reality of which the phenomenal realm, in turn imitated by the poet, is itself merely a crude approximation. We begin in delusion by taking the shifting, ephemeral world that our senses apprehend for something substantial and reliable and then allow poems, paintings, and the like to plunge us more deeply into the shadows by preoccupying us with images that furnish only a partial, distorted picture of what is already an illusion (597A–598B).

Second, not only does poetic representation *by its very nature* lead us away from truth, but poets are given to repeating lies about gods, and heroes, and the actual nature of human life (380B–383C). Finally, because it is so much easier to imitate the effects of passion than the deliberation of reason in a man, poets and actors are drawn to what is lurid and sensational. Our word *aesthetic*, is, after all, derived from the Greek word *aistheta*, “things perceived by the senses, material things.” As a result, poetry tends to corrupt the character of even the better sort of men by leading them to indulge unruly emotion, unfettered by reason, as they see it portrayed in others (605C–606D).

If Plato's strictures on poetry seem a little extravagant, it may be because we have devised mimetic media that capture our sensations and passions far more effectively. He would doubtless smile triumphantly to see his “Myth of the Cave” realized in exact literal terms in the cinema, a large, darkened room where men and women sit with their backs to the light, engrossed in shadows cast

on the wall in front of them. Neil Postman says about television almost exactly what Plato says about poetry: it is an intrinsically flawed medium and leads us away from reality;³ and modern Platonist Allan Bloom offers this disquieting image that has resonated with many parents and educators: “A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy.”⁴ If we are to make Shakespeare and other great writers cultural monuments and a necessary part of education, we must take into account such worries. Is there too much sex and violence on television (or in computer games)? There is hardly anything else in Shakespearean drama—not to mention blasphemy and sedition, as puritans of Shakespeare’s own day maintained about the theatre.

The answer to this dilemma has almost always been the harnessing of literature to the inculcation of virtue. Dr. Johnson is quite explicit about this in a famous essay in *The Rambler*: “It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature which are most proper for imitation: greater care is still required in representing life, which is so often discolored by passion or deformed by wickedness. If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account.”⁵ Given this criterion, it is not difficult to see why Shakespeare falls short of full probity, but it is hard to see how his artistic virtues can be separated from moral vices, any more than his characters can meet Johnson’s standard.

In the preface, Johnson praises Shakespeare as “above all writers, at least above all

modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life.”⁶ The reproof that follows in the preface, however, seems the inevitable result of this remarkable gift of representation; and the connection is explicit in the *Rambler* essay: “Many writers, for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight, and are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favor, we lose the abhorrence of their faults, because they do not hinder our pleasure, or, perhaps, regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit.”⁷ Shakespearean drama is “a faithful mirror of manners and life” precisely because he “so mingle[s] good and bad qualities” in his characters—such is, after all, the *nature* of *fallen* men and women.

Johnson, however, maintains that “in narratives where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue: of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate, but the highest and purest that humanity can reach.”⁸ The qualification is not very helpful: what is “the highest and purest” virtue of which we are capable? Plainly it must be high enough that readers are not at all dazzled by the attractions of vice:

The Roman tyrant was content to be hated, if he was but feared; and there are thousands of readers of romances willing to be wicked, if they may be allowed to be wits. It is therefore to be steadily inculcated that virtue is the highest proof of understanding, and the only solid basis of greatness; and that vice is the natural consequence of narrow

thoughts, that it begins in mistake, and ends in ignominy.⁹

In principle this judgment differs little from that of Socrates in the *Republic*, who was willing to allow “hymns to the gods and praises of good men” in his ideal commonwealth (607A). In both cases the moral valuation of poetry is determined by external, nonpoetic criteria rather than by norms generated within literary art itself. Mimesis or literary representation is at best indifferent, if not simply pernicious. It can only be redeemed by manipulation that heightens the contrast between virtue and vice. The “mirror” held up to nature should be the opposite of a passenger-side rearview mirror on an automobile: it should make objects look larger than they really are.

John Keats complains of such explicit didacticism in a letter written about half a century later: “We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us—and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one’s soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject.”¹⁰ Of course one can only imagine what Dr. Johnson would have made of the famous and obscure close of “Ode on a Grecian Urn”: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”¹¹ It is clear, however, that what for Johnson is a conundrum, for Keats is a glorious liberation: there is no tension between poetry and morals because poetry creates its own independent moral universe: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” What Keats celebrates is Plato’s nightmare: the abandonment of rational self-possession and personal integrity by subjecting oneself to the imitation of the passion of others.

In another letter, Keats praises Shakespeare for “*Negative Capability*, that is when man is

capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.”¹² “As to the poetical Character itself,” he adds in yet another letter, “it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen.”¹³ “Just so!” exclaims Plato—or Dr. Johnson—the poet is a man without character and destroys the character of his readers by immersing them in representations of what is seductively irrational. Literature must either be banned or rigorously controlled according to standards imposed upon it from without, lest it sweep away social order in a tide of romantic emotion.

In order to approach a resolution of such doubts regarding the moral soundness of literary art, it is important to establish a few distinctions among propositions that all too easily coalesce. There is, first, the distinction between the intrinsic moral worth of a work of literature and the effect it may have, which is likely to vary from reader to reader or, in the case of a dramatic presentation, from audience to audience. The effect upon the viewer, however, is a consideration discrete from the intrinsic status of a purported image of a pagan goddess. The system of ratings that prevails in the American film industry, as well as in television and electronic games, is an acknowledgment (perhaps dubious) of the differential effect of media representations on audiences of different ages. It is not so long ago, however, that some works of fiction—even works regarded by some critics as masterpieces, like Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*—were regarded as unsuitable for any and all readers. It may be difficult to predict the effect

of a given work on a particular individual. I once knew a lady who averred with an air of grievance that she could make no sense at all out of *Ulysses*, much less find the “good parts.”

There is also a distinction to be made between the moral character of the writer or artist, his intention, and the effect and nature of his work. Plato and Keats both see the artist as a man whose character dissolves under the pressure of his inspiration and in some measure leads his readers with him. But it must be borne in mind that any work of imaginative literature is a *fiction*: we cannot reasonably hold the author to strict account for what is literally said. This is obvious in drama. The essayist or orator who intones “This above all, to thine own self be true” (*Hamlet* 1.3.78) is quoting not “Shakespeare” but Polonius, who is hardly a reliable source of wisdom. And what is true of drama is also true of narrative fiction, even of lyrical verse: “But even a short lyric poem is dramatic,” write Wimsatt and Beardsley, “the response of a speaker (no matter how abstractly conceived) to a situation (no matter how universalized).”¹⁴

The result is that the meaning of a work of imaginative literature is not identical to the meaning of its literal verbal discourse. “As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods,” cries out the Earl of Gloucester in *King Lear*, “They kill us for their sport” (4.1.36–37). “The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices / Make instruments to plague us” (5.3.171–72), says his son Edgar later in the play, in effect contradicting his father. It would be a rash interpreter who tried to make either of these utterances the *meaning of the play*. What is more, literature is always saying things that, while not *true* in any factual sense, are still not lies. “Now, for the poet,” writes Sir Philip Sidney, “he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth.” Sidney continues, “What child is there, that coming

to a play and seeing ‘Thebes’ written in great letters upon an old door doth believe that it is Thebes?”¹⁵

In order to assess justly the moral status of literature, then, it is necessary to advert to the work itself, rather than to its author or audience. Wimsatt defines the issue clearly: “Neither the qualities of the author’s mind nor the effects of the poem upon a reader’s mind should be confused with the moral quality of the meaning expressed by the poem itself.”¹⁶ Wimsatt is convinced, like Dr. Johnson, that the distinction between moral and literary excellence is sufficiently firm that a first-rate work of literature—an artistic triumph—can be judged in itself immoral; that is, it is possible for a truly fine play or novel to be an intrinsically dishonest and hence a vicious depiction of reality. There are only two alternatives, Wimsatt argues: “Either (1) morals reaches over and claims poetry—not simply as superior to poetry but as defining poetry; or (2) poetry reaches over and claims to define morals.”¹⁷ The first of these alternatives is the extreme Platonic view: poetry has no value except insofar as it is expressly contrived to serve a particular moral end. The second sounds like Keats—Wimsatt mentions Matthew Arnold: traditional moral norms are an illusion; what we call “morality” is at best an ephemeral imaginative (or poetic) engagement with the exigencies of the situation in which we find ourselves now.

The second is a very attractive option for the contemporary world, which disposes of the issue, as Wimsatt observes, very quickly:

It is easy to see that a morality of this sort, determined by poetry, is not really a morality in the sense of a code, but a relative morality of almost indefinite diversity and flexibility—for such is poetry—and that hence what theorists of

this school mean in the end is that they do not subscribe to a code. For these we may say that in the large sense the problem discussed in this essay does not exist, since there is no distinction between, and hence no need of explaining the relation between poetry and morals.¹⁸

Wimsatt's careful account of the matter leaves us with a dilemma: either literature is an *essentially amoral* art, which must be curbed and shaped by external moral norms; or morality is *essentially relative*, generated by the arbitrary impulses of the imagination with no basis in a permanent order of human nature. It is not my purpose here to refute the latter proposition, because it renders not only our specific question about literature but life itself inconsequential. From the first perspective, however, Dr. Johnson and Wimsatt judge that an admirable artistic achievement—a “good” novel, for instance—may be morally “bad.” Johnson reproves Shakespeare for insufficient vigilance in shaping his plays according to moral standards, and Wimsatt offers *Antony and Cleopatra* as an example of an acknowledged dramatic masterpiece that is fundamentally immoral.

Wimsatt quotes Cleopatra's speech as she prepares to take her own life—“Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have / Immortal longings in me...” (5.2.280–81ff.)—and remarks upon the seductive wickedness that she embodies:

There is no escaping the fact that the poetic splendor of this play, and in particular of its concluding scenes, is something which exists in closest juncture with the acts of suicide and with the whole glorified story of passion. The poetic values are strictly dependent—if not upon the immorality as such—yet upon the immoral acts. Even though, or

rather because, the play pleads for certain evil choices, it presents these choices in all their mature interest and capacity to arouse human sympathy. The motives are wrong, but they are not base, silly, or degenerate. They are not lacking in the positive being of deep and complex human desire. It is not possible to despise Antony and Cleopatra.¹⁹

Like *The English Patient*, *Antony and Cleopatra* is a kind of anti-*Casablanca*: it suggests that personal desire is more important than patriotism, that self-sacrifice, even self-control, must not cause one to relinquish self-fulfillment. This rather glamorous tragedy would seem to be just what Dr. Johnson deprecated in Shakespeare's theatre: surely it can be said of Antony and Cleopatra that “we lose the abhorrence of their faults, because they do not hinder our pleasure or, perhaps, regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit.” Octavian and his sister Octavia are virtuous and honorable; they are also dull, and it is a rare playgoer who leaves the theatre resolved to emulate their stern Roman constancy.

We should, however, at least consider the possibility that the apparent immorality of *Antony and Cleopatra* is actually a defect in the cultural formation of modern audiences. Wimsatt himself in a note quotes Dryden's preface to *All for Love*, his adaptation of Shakespeare's original:²⁰ “I doubt not but the same motive has prevailed with all of us in this attempt: I mean the excellency of the moral. For the chief persons represented were famous patterns of unlawful love; and their end was accordingly unfortunate.”²¹ Wimsatt finds Dryden's adaptation less provocative than Shakespeare's: “The victimized Octavia is a pallid and remote figure, never (as in Dryden's version) made to appear as a rival motive to the Egyptian seductions.”²²

But Dryden himself worries that this is an artistic fault *because it was already difficult to build sympathy for the illicit lovers*: “for the crimes of love which they both committed were not occasioned by any necessity, or fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary; since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power.” Hence he worries that he has spoiled the tragic effect by excessively diminishing the moral standing of the tragic hero and heroine by bringing Octavia into Alexandria:

I had not enough considered that the compassion she moved to herself and children was destructive to that which I reserved for Antony and Cleopatra; whose mutual love, being founded upon vice, must lessen the favour of the audience to them when virtue and innocence were oppressed by it.²³

Dryden is writing during the Restoration, an era notable for sexual license, at least among the denizens of the Royal Court; nevertheless, he takes it for granted that Antony and Cleopatra are negative exempla for whom sympathy must be shored up in order to attain full tragic effect.

We must not be too quick to assume that Dryden is insincere or naïve, refusing or failing to see an affirmation by Shakespeare of “unlawful love,” which is obvious to us. It is just as likely that the naïveté—or insincerity—is ours: modern readers are, after all, the heirs of a romanticism that found Satan in *Paradise Lost* morally superior to God because he was more glamorous and exciting. It may be that the level of sensual stimulation in the modern world is such that what was quite apparently excess passion to Shakespeare as well as to Dryden seems to us merely an imaginative way “to question the primacy of empire.”²⁴

The difficulty of determining the precise moral valuation of a work of literature need not drive us to despair or to relativism (two names for the same condition, perhaps?). The same difficulty attends determination of meaning, but this does not make interpretation an altogether arbitrary affair, or one wholly determined by the “ideological hegemony” of a particular time or place. Much of the confusion about literary interpretation today arises from equivocal uses of the word *interpretation*. Theorists who insist that meaning is hopelessly subjective or relative, that discourse is an endless “play of signifiers” that never arrives at the “signified,” routinely advert to perennially changing interpretations and valuations of Shakespeare or Milton or Donne. But an argument over the import or significance of a literary work is of a different order than a dispute over its basic or literal meaning, and the latter can easily be resolved. We need only consider the process of translation: scholars will argue endlessly over the ultimate meaning of, say, *Don Quixote*, but we can distinguish between accurate and inaccurate translations.²⁵

Argument about the moral essence of a work is not this latter kind of dispute; the morality of a play or novel is a matter of its ultimate significance not its literal meaning. For this reason, our assessments, while not matters of demonstration, are not, therefore, wholly arbitrary. Wimsatt himself makes the point toward the close of his essay “Poetry and Morals”:

Perhaps...the greatest poems for the Christian will never be that kind, the great though immoral, which it has been our labor to describe. *Antony and Cleopatra* will not be so great as *King Lear*. The testimony of the critical tradition would seem to confirm this. The greatest poetry

will be morally right, even though perhaps obscurely so, in groping confusions of will and knowledge—as *Oedipus the King* foreshadows *Lear*.²⁶

This passage is especially revealing because it establishes *King Lear* as the paradigm of both the “greatest poetry” and the “morally right” work of literature. It is unlikely that Dr. Johnson would have agreed, since he professed to prefer the revision of the play by Nahum Tate with a “happy ending,” which dominated the English stage for a century and a half. “I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia’s death,” Johnson famously writes, “that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.”²⁷ But Shakespeare and Wimsatt, along with most modern critics, are surely right in judging that manipulative poetic justice is compatible neither with the highest art nor with the highest morality. Surely Cordelia is a more convincing embodiment of justice and charity because she goes to her death with no reward but virtue and no assurance even that her enemies will be punished.

King Lear is also a more Christian play because—not in spite of—the grimness of its tragic close. After all, Christ “came not to bring peace but a sword” (Matt. 10:34) and requires His disciple to “deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24): justice is not promised us in this life—indeed we are warned not to expect it.²⁸ *King Lear* is good, therefore, because it is according to literary standards true and beautiful, terms that St. Thomas Aquinas treats as transcendentals convertible with being and goodness. To be sure, he does not use the term *transcendental*,²⁹ and explicitly disagrees with Aristotle in regarding truth as in some sense residing in things, rather than only in the intellect. In this vision of

truth and beauty, although St. Thomas says little about the arts, he lays the groundwork for an understanding of the morality of literature. “Just as the good is convertible with being,” the Angelic Doctor maintains, “so also is the true. But further, just as the good confers upon being the additional notion of the desirable, so also the true adds a relation to the intellect.”³⁰ Similarly, “the beautiful is the same as the good, differing only in reason. For since the good is *what all things desire*, it is part of the idea of the good that the appetite be in it placated: but it belongs to the idea of the beautiful that in seeing or grasping it the appetite be placated.”³¹ As it is explained by Etienne Gilson, “The beautiful is a variety of the good. It is the particular kind of good to be experienced, by a knowing power, in the very act of knowing an object eminently fit to be known. The beautiful is to knowledge what the good is to desire.”³²

The apparent compatibility of artistic eminence and moral defect in a work of literature is explained by considering literary excellence in the light of these transcendentals. What is *good* in drama or fiction is grasped under the aspect of knowledge and perception; that is, as *truth* and *beauty*. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a good tragedy because it offers a just representation of human experience: Shakespeare does not manipulate either the characters or events that he portrays in order to fit them into a preconceived ideological framework. Keats certainly was right about our distaste for “poetry that has a palpable design on us.”

On the other hand, *Antony and Cleopatra* is less powerful than *King Lear* because its moral range is narrower: the latter provides a more profound and comprehensive vision of the human condition. But surely not because Shakespeare sat down with the intention of writing a more edifying play. This, I think, is

where Johnson gets it altogether wrong. The playwright or novelist—even the satirist—who takes pen in hand with the intention of edifying his audience or proving a point is likely to fail both artistically and morally. “The artistic *habitus*,” writes Jacques Maritain, “is intent only on the work to be made.”³³ Flannery O’Connor provides a nice statement of the distinction between two different kinds of attention to a literary work:

The business of protecting souls from dangerous literature belongs properly to the Church. All fiction, even when it satisfies the requirements of art, will not turn out to be suitable for everyone’s consumption, and if in some instance, the Church sees fit to forbid the faithful to read a work without permission, the author, if he is a Catholic, will be thankful that the Church is willing to perform this service for him. It means that he can limit himself to the demands of art.³⁴

One may doubt how grateful most authors—Catholic or not—would be if the Church were still performing “this service”; nevertheless, the principle stands. Literature can be dangerous, and great literature—even very great literature—can be especially dangerous, not in spite of its truth and beauty, the aspects of the good offered by art, but precisely because its very powerful rendering of the experience of the world cannot be grasped by every understanding. A reader who comes away from *King Lear* convinced by Gloucester’s anguished cry about flies and gods and wanton boys will have taken evil away from what is essentially good. As T.S. Eliot reminds us, “human kind / Cannot bear very much reality.”³⁵ Perhaps we should regard works of literature as we do weapons: they are very dangerous in the wrong hands, but civilization cannot be preserved without them. Literature should be included in our social and educational institutions with such cautions in mind. †

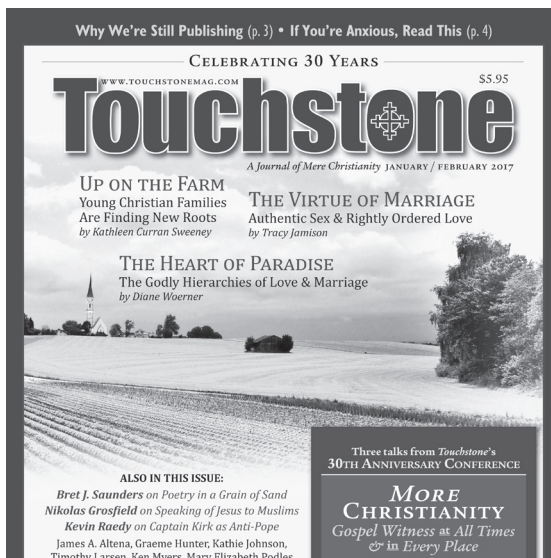
- 1 See Amanda Anderson and Jane S. Shaw, “To Be or Not To Be: Shakespeare in the English Department,” Pope Center Study on Shakespeare (October, 2007), which takes to task universities and colleges in the Raleigh, NC, area that lack a Shakespeare requirement for English majors.
- 2 *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt Jr. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 33.
- 3 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).
- 4 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 75.
- 5 *The Rambler*, No. 4 (March 31, 1750), in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Brady and W. K. Wimsatt Jr. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 157.
- 6 Samuel Johnson, *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, 25. See *Hamlet* 3.3: “the purpose of playing . . . was and is, to hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.”
- 7 *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 158.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 158–59.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 10 John Keats, “To John Hamilton Reynolds,” February 3, 1818, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams et al., 5th ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1986), 2.864.
- 11 John Keats, *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 283.
- 12 John Keats, “To George and Thomas Keats,” 21, 27, December 1817, *Norton Anthology*, 863.
- 13 “To Richard Woodhouse,” *ibid.*, 868.
- 14 W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 5.
- 15 *Sidney’s “The Defence of Poesy” and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 34.
- 16 W. K. Wimsatt Jr., “Poetry and Morals,” in *Verbal Icon*, 87.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 88.
- 18 *Ibid.* “Poetry and Morals” was first published in 1948 before the postmodernist deluge. At that point Wimsatt did not have to worry about the moral implications of, for example, cultural materialism, suggested by a chapter title from Alan Sinfield, *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 53–67: “How to Read *The Merchant of Venice Without Being Heterosexual*.” I am prescinding from such immoral moralism in this essay, since dealing with it would lead us too far astray from my present purpose. In any case, I have dealt with such matters at length, most notably in *At War with the Word: Literary Theory and Liberal Education* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999).

- 19 Ibid., 97.
 20 Ibid., 95–95, 284n6. He also quotes modern defenses of the play by Croce and S. L. Bethel only to dismiss them.
 21 John Dryden, “Preface to All for Love,” in *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, ed. George Watson (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1962), 1.222.
 22 Wimsatt, “Poetry and Morals,” 96–97.
 23 Dryden, “Preface to All for Love,” 1.222.
 24 Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 214.
 25 For more detail, see R. V. Young, *At War with the Word*, 128–29.
 26 Wimsatt, “Poetry and Morals,” 100.
 27 Johnson, *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, 98.
 28 This is elaborated by R. V. Young, “Hope and Despair in *King Lear*: The Gospel and the Crisis of Natural Law,” in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, ed. Jeffrey Kahan (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 253–57.
 29 Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (1963; rpt. Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 111n1, ascribes the first use of the term to Suarez.
 30 *Summa Theologiae* 1.16.3: “sicut bonum convertitur cum ente, ita et verum. Sed tamen, sicut bonum addit rationem appetibilis supra ens, ita et verum comparationem ad intellectum.”
 31 *Summa Theologiae* 1–2.27.1.3: “pulchrum est idem bono, sola ratione differens. Cum enim bonum sit quod omnia appetunt, de ratione boni est quod in eo quietetur appetitus: sed ad rationem pulchri pertinet quod in eius aspectu seu conglitione quietetur appetitus.”
 32 Etienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* (1960; rpt. New York: Mentor-Omega, 1963), 176. I am very much indebted to this book, 149–78, for my discussion of the transcendentals. See also Owens, 111–27, and Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962), 23–37.
 33 Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, 70. Of course Maritain goes on to say, *ibidem*, “But for the man working, the work-to-be-made enters—itsself—into the line of morality, and on this ground it is only a means. If the artist took the end of his art or the beauty of the work for the ultimate end of his operation and therefore for beatitude, he would be but an idolater.”
 34 Flannery O’Connor, “The Church and the Fiction Writer,” in *Collected Works*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Library of America, 1988), 810.
 35 T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton” 1, in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), 4.

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