

## Modern Epistemopathies

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### Etymopathy

Like the word ‘scientist’, put into play at the British Association for the Advancement of Science in the early 1830s, ‘epistemology’ is a thoroughly modern word. It was proposed in the *English Review* in 1847 as a translation of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, according to its author’s explanation ‘after the analogy of *technology*’ (Jean Paul’ 1847, 296). It is a curious reflection that, although one would surely have to say that the entire project of Greek philosophy was epistemological in the sense that it was concerned with how secure and reliable knowledge was to be separated from mere doxa, the attempt to turn knowing on to the conditions and possibility of knowing itself seems to be something that had to wait until the nineteenth century to be named, if not exactly to be known.

There were a few near misses and half-chances. In a treatise completed around 1688 though not published until 1731, Ralph Cudworth gives us ‘epistemonical’, meaning something like capable of being known. Having affirmed that ‘the Entity of all Theoretical Truth is nothing else but Clear Intelligibility, and whatever is Clearly Conceived, is an Entity and a Truth’ (Cudworth 1731, 272), so that falsehoods have no positive existence at all, he assures his reader that ‘[n]o Man ever was or can be deceived in taking that for an Epistenomical Truth which he clearly and distinctly apprehends, but only in Assenting to Things not clearly apprehended by him’ (Cudworth 1731, 272). ‘Epistenomy’, signifying the law of knowledge, the nonexistent notion from which the nonce-term epistemonical would derive, might perhaps have caught on, but in the event never found any more takers.

The *epistemo-* root also appears in the form of allegorical names, most famously and definingly that of Epistemon in Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, who embodies the powers of learning (and who loses his head in a battle, but has it sewn back on). James I casts his *Daemonologie* (1597) in the form of a debate between Philomath (the lover or seeker of learning) and Epistemon (the knower) and Thomas Heywood invents an Epistemus in 1609 (Heywood 1609, 288). Guy Miege’s *Dictionary of Barbarous French*, an adaptation of Cotgrave’s dictionary, defines an ‘epistemon’ as a teacher (Miege 1679, sig. M2<sup>v</sup>).

Just as there seemed to be no word for what a lot of people had been up to for a long time before the arrival of the word epistemology, so there has seemed to me to be no word for what has also been a strongly pervasive phenomenon, namely the production and development of complex states of feeling in relation to knowledge. Epistemopathy, the uncomely term I mean to employ for this, must be broader and fuzzier in its application than epistemology, precisely because it does not aim at exact knowledge

as such, but rather at the spectrum of feeling exacted by the idea, the ambition and even, we must often feel constrained to say, the fantasy of knowledge, whether exact or not. So it must encompass, not just questions of what can be known for sure and how, but the investments in all the accessory and executive functions of knowing, for example, enquiring, discovering, arguing, reasoning, teaching and learning. Epistemopathy's concern, in short, is with the concern with knowledge. All men by nature want to know, Aristotle writes in the opening words of the *Metaphysics*. Epistemopathy has a care for that wanting to know, or the wanting that relates to knowing, along with the passions incident to it and its absence – because ignorance too, is no mere omission, or remission of knowledge, but itself a kind of mission, or even, as Lacan observes, a passion (Lacan 1998, 121).

The epistemological motive may be thought of as intrinsic to modern philosophy, in the sense that the *Know Thyself* of Delphi become the injunction to *Know Thy Knowing* that impels the enquiries of Descartes and Kant. There might be thought to be something essentially or tendentially modern about the exercise of epistemology, in that it must always represent a kind of fold or fissure within accepted understandings, as knowledge turns away from the known world to investigate its own conditions of possibility. But we must also say that there is an epistemopathic payload within every epistemology, an excited impulse, for instance, to strive for a kind of self-realisation and self-government in knowledge. Peter Sloterdijk has made the arresting claim that there has never really been any religion, understood in its own terms, since all forms of the religious doctrine and devotion are better understood as ascetological or anthropotechnic projects of self-formation and -transformation (Sloterdijk 2013 83-106). We might similarly surmise that the function of the more metaphysical kind of theological thinking that has kept the universities busy for centuries has been to allow for the excited and sustained elaboration, at once untrammelled by experiment or experience yet subject to ferociously austere internal logical constraints, of a kind of artificial intelligence or epistemotechnic, a thinking in thin air. Theology, the elaboration of knowledge-systems concerning inexistent objects and relations of fantastic complexity (literally fantastic, in the sense that they permit the development of a fantasy of complexity itself), is an epistemology that, in the absence of anything but imaginary objects, and in its joyously earnest capacity to multiply those objects and their relations without limit, is unalloyed epistemopathy.

It will be clear that I am already using the word epistemopathy in two different ways, to refer both to the forms of feeling at work in knowledge and the formal investigation of them – epistemopathology, as it might be, but, on second thoughts, had perhaps better not, given the negative charge carried by the word pathological. The kind of feeling suggested by derivations from Greek *pathos* is often morbid (*neuropath*, *osteopath*, *homeopath*), though there is a fork in the path of the word *psychopath*. Up to 1884, the word, which was equivalent to *psychopathist*, designated one who studied or treated disorders of the mind. In 1885, the *Pall Mall Gazette* used the word *psychopath* to mean, not the student of mental disorder, but the subject of that study, quoting a Russian psychiatrist, Balinsky, on the '[t]he psychopath ... a type which has only recently come under the notice of medical science' ('Occasional Notes' 1885, 3). Balinsky was defending a murderess named Semenova who had confessed to the murder of a child named Sarah Becker. In fact the first appearance of the word used

in this new way was a week earlier, in a poem about the case entitled 'A Merry Medico' which appeared in *Punch* on 17<sup>th</sup> January:

The Doctor framed a new defence,  
There never was a lamer;  
For why? – She was a “Psychopath,”  
And therefore you can't blame her! ...

To gain their end they'll put to death  
Their nearest blood relation;  
So never stop a Psychopath  
From following his vocation! ('Merry Medico' 1885)

### **The Mattering of Knowledge**

What governs modern thought and feeling regarding knowledge is not the concern with truth, and the effort to purify it of error and prejudice, slowly escorting pathos toward logos, but something like the opposite, in the growing suspicion that knowledge is not easily to be purged of the will-to-knowledge. The notion of thinking as a kind of psychopathology moves through the work of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Freud, but is articulated most emphatically in Nietzsche's conception of the will-to-knowledge as a will-to-power. For Nietzsche, knowledge exists in order to Nietzsche calls for '*a merely empirical epistemology*', in which there is 'neither "intellect", nor reason,, nor thought, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth' (Nietzsche 2017, 286). For Nietzsche knowledge is power, not in the uplifting sense that knowledge gives you the freedom to do things that you would otherwise be powerless to do, or to release yourself from chains that you had not realised had you in bondage, but in the sense that knowledge has as its object 'not "to know", but to schematize, to impose as much regularity and form upon chaos as our practical needs require' (Nietzsche 2017, 299). The most urgent and incessant need for any organism is to create regularity:

The development of "reason" is nothing but a process of arrangement and invention which generates similarity and equality, the same process which every sense impression undergoes. No pre-existing "idea" is at work here, but rather utilitarian considerations which dictate that things are predictable and manageable for us only when we see them rendered approximate and equal. (Nietzsche 2017, 299)

On such a view abstract knowledge is always a fantasy, since the entire work of knowing is to be understood as the fulfilment of desire and fantasy. It is Darwinian in its mixture of ardent striving and the coldness of simple utility, and reads abstraction as the precipitate of a kind of striving for persistence in being. Knowledge is nature red in pen and ink. At the same time, it is itself an abstraction, because that striving is outcome rather than formative impulse, being just the sort of thing that there would have to be in order for there to be something rather than nothing, sameness rather than constant differentiation.

And yet (but perhaps we do not know yet if it is an 'and yet'), the modern period is characterised by a vast formalisation and autonomisation of knowledge, in the forms

of expertise and information. The coming of electronic forms of information technology is only the most recent stage of this. We may say that modern epistemopathy is concerned with the negotiation of the growing gap between personal knowledge, the knowledge embodied in subjects who know their knowing (or think they do) as consciousness, and the various forms of artificial intelligence, or knowledge that need not know itself. It is the gap between knowledge as existed, and *exopistemology*. In one sense, it is the tension between the *-pathic* and the *-logical*, the feeling of knowing, and knowing without feeling, even if, at the same time, this tension is the agitant ague of epistemopathy itself.

So epistemopathy does not mean a kind of feeling-knowledge, a knowledge pulsing and palpitant with affect (partly because all knowledge is of this kind). Rather it is knowledge-feeling, the feelings we build and sustain about knowledge. Epistemopathy is the *matteing of knowledge*, rather than the mere matter of its facts. This can of course be turned into philosophical knowledge, in the utilitarian tradition that runs from Hume's declaration that 'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them' (Hume 1985, 462), through to the claims for the utility of reason in James and, with any luck, beyond. William James writes that 'For a thing to be valid ... is the same as to make itself valid. When the whole universe seems only to be making itself valid and to be still incomplete (else why its ceaseless changing?) why, of all things, should knowing be exempt? Why should it not be making itself valid like everything else?' (James 1909, 120), a formulation which certainly sounds close to my idea of the matteing of knowledge.

It might be that I should refer to this prospect and perspective as a phenomenology of knowledge and have done with it. It is indeed striking how little work there has been even within the phenomenological tradition of philosophy on questions of knowledge. It appears to be very hard to keep an enquiry into the phenomenology of knowledge from becoming an enquiry into phenomenological kinds of knowledge, in which knowledge gets a pinfall on phenomenology rather than the reverse. Where most philosophers worry and wonder about what kinds of claim phenomenology might have to be knowledge (Spader 1995), or what phenomenology can contribute towards knowledge, the idea behind epistemopathic enquiry would be to bracket both of those questions.

However, one of the reasons I am inhibited from calling this a phenomenology of knowledge is to avoid confusion with the very different thing that is signalled by Ernst Cassirer's use of the phrase as the title of the third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which was subtitled *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis* (1929). Cassirer makes it clear in his preface that his phenomenology is not that of Husserl but that of Hegel, such that

[i]n speaking of a phenomenology of knowledge I am using the word "phenomenology" not in its modern sense but with its fundamental signification as established and systematically grounded by Hegel. For Hegel, phenomenology became the basis of all philosophical knowledge, since he insisted that philosophical knowledge must encompass the totality of cultural forms and since in his view this totality can be made visible only in the

transitions from one form to another. The truth is the whole — yet this whole cannot be presented all at once but must be unfolded progressively by thought in its own autonomous movement and rhythm. It is this unfolding which constitutes the being and the essence of science. The element of thought, in which science is and lives, is consequently fulfilled and made intelligible only through the movement of its becoming. (Cassirer 1957, xiv)

So, for Cassirer, the phenomenology of knowledge does not refer to reflection on the consciousness and experience of knowledge — the feeling of knowing — but the process whereby knowledge moves historically through various different contingent modes and manifestations to completeness. Such an ambition might in fact provide an occasion for a phenomenology of knowledge in the sense in which I conceive it — the ‘modern’ sense of the word from which Cassirer distinguishes his own, for the story of the self-magnifying historical adventure of thought is one of the strongest of the fantasies driving both philosophy and history.

Knowing is tangled up in truth. You can only know something if it is true. It makes no sense to say that I know that Paris is situated at the North Pole. It turns out, a little surprisingly and somewhat concerningly, that this relation is reversible. All true things must be, if not necessarily known, then certainly knowable — *epistemological* in Cudworth’s still stillborn locution. Many have wanted to believe in ineffable truths, truths too subtle or splendid to be available to human knowledge, but this must be mere word-magic. This is concerning because it seems to make truths dependent on and even accessory to the ability for them to be known, that is, apprehended in the ways we recognise as knowing, where we would probably prefer things to be the other way round.

Epistemological uncertainty of the kind proposed by Nietzsche, James, Wittgenstein and Dewey implies that epistemology must not only take account of epistemopathy but also move closer to it. But epistemopathy need not be promoted into or cashed out as a kind of epistemology, since it ought to be seen as itself in the reckoning with all forms of thinking and knowing, whether philosophical or not. There can be no fully epistemopathic knowledge, since the pathos of knowing is always present in it, and would need in its turn to be accounted for. Epistemopathy is not a knowing, though it is inseparable from knowing, and resistant to being something simply known precisely because of this inseparability. Epistemopathy is, if you must, applied epistemology, epistemology brought to bear on the world and, more particularly for my present purposes, the world bearing down on epistemology.

### **Knowing Literature**

So, if a manner of human comportment like that of literary writing were thought of as the epistemopathic how of the epistemological what, would this imply that literature can do no more than render the tone and taste of knowing, and so is limited to being a kind of epistemic colouring-in? This would be true only if there were a toneless, zero-degree mode of knowing that could exist apart from our epistemopathic intrications, and we must take leave to doubt whether there could be. Anything that we know that

we know involves some perspective on that knowing, some sense in which it matters to us.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a formative perplexity certainly seems to arise as to the kind of knowledge that might be embodied in literature. For much of the nineteenth century, the relation between literature and knowledge continued to be thought of as a natural and self-evident one. The correspondence still seems quite casually to be assumed in the titles of any number of nineteenth-century works: Samuel Bailey's *Questions in Political Economy, Politics, Morals, Metaphysics, Polite Literature and other branches of knowledge* (1823), for example, or *The New London Magazine* which began publication in 1837, with the subtitle *A Melange of Literature, Science, the Fine Arts, and General Knowledge*. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was starting no longer to be obvious that arranging words rhythmically and making up stories should be thought to be part of the universe of learning or the store of human knowledge. It would become important for the study of literature, not only to be put on some kind of respectable academic footing if it was going to be taught in universities, but also for some kind of argument to be made out for the sort of knowledge that literary writing might represent.

One of the most influential reformulations of the noetic claims of literature is in the work of I.A. Richards. In *Science and Poetry* (1926), Richards asserts influentially that '[m]isunderstanding and underestimation of poetry is mainly due to overestimation of the thought in it... It is never what a poem *says* which matters, but what it *is*' (Richards 1926, 25). And what a poem, or indeed any literary artefact is, for Richards, is an 'extraordinarily intricate concourse of impulses', and the words which are employed 'as a means of ordering, controlling and consolidating the whole experience' (Richards 1926, 26). This understanding of the work performed by literary writing is made necessary by the decline of what Richards calls the 'Magical View' of the world, along with the huge and accelerating growth in 'genuine knowledge' (Richards 1926, 52), that is, exact and certain scientific knowledge. This knowledge, so abundant and self-evidently powerful, also dissolves man's supposition that 'his feelings, his attitudes, and his conduct spring from his knowledge. That as far as it could it would be wise for him to organize himself in this way, with knowledge as the foundation on which should rest feeling, attitude, and behaviour' (Richards 1926, 51). What literature can supply instead is a knowledge built on what Richards calls the 'pseudo-statement' (Richards 1926, 56), defined as 'a form of words which is justified entirely by its effecting in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes', as opposed to a statement, which 'is justified by its truth, *i.e.* its correspondence, in a highly technical sense, with that to which it points' (Richards 1926, 59). Literature is part of the way out of the contemporary impasse that arises from the knowledge that merely factual knowledge will not essentially do for many purposes:

The remedy, since there is no prospect of our gaining adequate knowledge, and since indeed it is fairly clear that genuine knowledge cannot serve us here and can only increase our practical control of Nature, is to cut our pseudo-statements free from belief, and yet retain them, in this released state, as the main instruments by which we order our attitudes to one another and to the world. (Richards 1926, 61)

Richards's view that literature provides a kind of as-if knowledge, a performative and experimental cognitive play-space, along with his sense that the organisation of feeling is an important component in this, is perhaps not too far from what I am calling epistemopathy. But Richards is not only more confident than I am about being able to separate the claims of literary pseudo-knowledge from exact knowledge, but is also much more sanguine – desperately, even deliriously so – about the saving or redeeming possibilities of such knowledge. In my view, the operations of what we might call epistemofantasia, the reinvestment of Richards's Magical View of the world in the fusion of magical and scientific thinking, are much more widely diffused, and certainly not concentrated in literature or art.

During the period in which Richards was forming these arguments, literature begins its own complex negotiation with the question of knowledge, which sometimes seems to involve the framing of epistemological claims or ambitions different from those projected by Richards. Ann Banfield, for example, makes no bones about her argument that the work of Virginia Woolf was bound up with the theories of knowledge developed in Cambridge and London by Russell, Whitehead and Moore. The form of the kitchen table which stands as Lily Briscoe's image of Mr Ramsay's philosophy 'is interposed between Woolf's woman-artist and the philosopher, placing the problem of knowledge at the center of Woolf's art' (Banfield 2000, 49). For Banfield, Woolf's work, while not being epistemology itself, is certainly a modulation of it and animated throughout by epistemological problems.

Brian McHale has also pointed to the prominence of epistemological questions in modernist fiction, this in contrast to what he sees as the ontological concerns of postmodernist fiction. While remaining grateful for his powerful insight, I propose to give it a diagonal sort of wrench, by focusing not on the epistemological arguments that are to be found in the works of many modernist writers, but on the force of the feeling provoked by the idea of knowledge. For Brian McHale, 'epistemology' in fact means the drama of doubt, or the epistemification of experience. The keynote modernist questions, he reminds us, are

What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? (McHale 1987, 9)

McHale finds in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* the typical form of 'the epistemological genre *par excellence*' (McHale 1987, 9), that is, the detective story, a novel which abounds in

epistemological themes as the accessibility and circulation of knowledge, the different structuring imposed on the "same" knowledge by different minds, and the problem of "unknowability" or the limits of knowledge. And it foregrounds these themes through the use of characteristically modernist (epistemological) devices: the multiplication and juxtaposition of perspectives, the focalization of all the evidence through a single "center of consciousness" (the character Quentin), virtuoso variants on interior monologue (especially in the case of

Miss Rosa), and so on. Finally, in a typically modernist move, Absalom transfers the epistemological difficulties of its characters to its readers; its strategies of “impeded form” (dislocated chronology, withheld or indirectly-presented information, difficult “mind-styles,” and so on) simulate for the reader the very same problems of accessibility, reliability, and limitation of knowledge that plague Quentin and Shreve. (McHale 1987, 9-10)

We might hover a moment over McHale’s cool affirmation that the detective story is the ‘epistemological genre *par excellence*’ (McHale 1987, 9). For the statement is egregiously false, if what is meant by the detective story is ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, or *Murder on the Orient Express*. Detective fiction is certainly modern, but surely only becomes modernist when it is deflected, displaced, or deranged entirely, as in Gertrude Stein’s *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*, a book whose arch subtitle *A Murder Mystery*, makes sure we never for a moment dream of taking it for one. As Stein herself put it in her 1937 essay ‘Why I Like Detective Stories’, in her usual maundering faux-simpleton fashion

it was such a good detective story but nobody did any detecting except just conversation so after all it was not a detective story so finally I concluded that even although Edgar Wallace does almost write detective stories without anybody really doing any detecting on the whole a detective story has to have if it has not a detective it has to have an ending and my detective story did not have any. (Stein 1974, 148-9)

Stein’s book gives the opportunity to explore the sense of richly tingling disappointment that comes from a set-up that seems to provoke some of the kinds of recognition that go with the detective along with the invitation to acknowledge, with a melancholy veined with just-as-I-thought superiority, that the values of the detective story are at once indispensable and wholly unreliable in the modern world. Modernist detection is not concerned with the theory of knowledge so much as with what Michael Wood has called ‘the taste of knowledge’ (2009). So the question asked in a modern epistemopathy would not be, what can we truly know? but what can our idea of knowledge be made to do, and what has knowledge to do with us?

Much modern criticism and theory has followed Richards in trying to find in literature a distinctive and defining relation to questions of knowledge. Ronald E. Martin makes out a tradition of American writing that is pledged in various ways to the destruction of knowledge, motivated by ‘the deep conviction that the principal obstacles to real understanding of experiential reality were the culture’s certified knowledge and the habits and techniques by which that knowledge was customarily produced’ (Martin 1991, xi). Though it becomes ever more unclear quite what he believes this ‘certified knowledge’ to be, it is plain that Martin sees literature and art as constituting a kind of alternative knowledge, closer to the intensity and ephemerality of ‘experience’, which is characterised most of all by its alleged unknowability (though there seems to be no difficulty in knowing that).

Increasingly, it is not enough for there to be theory of literature: literature has itself to know, and to know its own mode of knowing. Literature is nowadays often seen as a reservoir of ways of embodied or contingent reasoning, which ‘can accommodate the



ideas of indeterminacy, imperfection and approximation more readily than disciplines such as the law or theology, where arriving at a final judgement or an affirmation of faith are critical', making possible an 'ethically-aware epistemic labour' (Batsaki, Mukherji and Schramm 2012, 2).

In her book *Literature and Knowledge* of 1969, Dorothy Walsh comes close to, but does not quite embrace the belief that literature is itself a kind of knowing. Her questions are rather 'What kind of knowledge, if any, does literary art afford?' (Walsh 1969, 3) and the claim towards which she edges is that 'Literature (considered to be such and such) can properly be said to have some intimate engagement with knowledge (considered to be such and such)' (Walsh 1969, 13). Her conclusion, which seems strongly congruent with Richards's arguments, is that the kind of knowing that literature provides is not propositional, or conceptual, but 'knowledge in the form of realization: the realization of what anything might come to as a form of lived experience' (Walsh 1969, 136). So here literature provokes, or leads towards knowledge, a claim that does not seem in principle bizarre or overstrained. In his book *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge*, Michael Wood raises the stakes considerably, by asking, insistently, if also curiously evasively, the question in the form: 'what does literature know?' Here is one of the ways in which he frames the question:

To frame it rather schematically, thinking of Proust and asthma, say, we could ask, not what Proust knew about the condition or what doctors know now or knew in Proust's time, but what *A la recherche du temps perdu* knows about asthma – what it knows and perhaps will not tell us directly, or what it knows that only novels know, or only this novel knows. (Wood 2005, 8)

Wood recognises that this is prosopopoetic, that 'the novel is not a person and can't know anything, only novelists and readers can' (Wood 2005, 8-9), but nevertheless wants to keep the question in play. The as-if idea of this kind of projected pseudo-knowledge is one of the most distinctive forms of the epistemopathic impulse, in that it projects the feeling of knowledge into the text which is the object of knowledge – the feeling of knowledge in two senses, our feeling for it, and our feeling that it might itself have the feeling of knowledge.

A similar move is made by Peter Swirski in his book *Of Literature and Knowledge*, which follows Zola and other writers in seeing literary fiction as generating the same kind of nonfictional knowledge as thought experiments. Stories, he writes, 'are adaptive tools to help us navigate more efficiently – or more colourfully, imaginatively, and memorably, which deep down still comes down to more efficiently – our time on earth' (Swirski 2007, 6). This enables Swirski to give an affirmative answer to the question 'Can literature be an effective instrument of inquiry?', and to proclaim 'that literature is a form of knowledge or, what amounts to the same thing, that it can generate knowledge while coursing [6-7] through the minds of its creators and/or consumers' (Swirski 2007, 6-7). There is in fact a very large gap between the idea that literature can generate knowledge and the idea that it is in itself a form of knowledge; it is the gap between the advice 'it is dangerous to insert your fingers into an electrical socket' and the experience of doing so, though they both might lead to the same kind of avoidance of the finger-sticking activity in future. The latter can doubtless generate the knowledge articulated in the former, but they are very far from being identical.

Being knowledge and provoking it are substantially different. It is perfectly reasonable to suggest that literature, like countless other things, might have something to teach us. But turning literature into a kind of knowing shows the work of attribution that is a central part of the force of epistemopathy.

When primed up into its prophetic Sunday-best in the form of Poetry, literature can sometimes be made the vehicle for more visionary or politically urgent forms of knowledge. Jerome J. McGann argues for, or at any rate, urgently urges a special kind of ‘cognitive dynamic played out through poetic discourse’, in the capacity of poetry to negate the ‘untruth’ of a world of ‘getting and spending and false utility’ (McGann 1989, 131). The entirely unexceptionable wish that poetry might have some part to play in the work of making things better is tuned up into the claim that unrealisable desire in itself constitutes, not knowledge of a new thing, but that characteristically contemporary formation, a new kind of knowledge built around desire, in the characteristically reversible form of the desire of knowledge and desire as knowledge:

We move toward a literature of knowledge along the trajectory of a desire to change what we believe to be wrong, [133-4] to repair what we see is broken, and to redeem what we know has been lost. Through poetry we learn how we cannot succeed in any of these quests, and how, on that very account, we are called upon to maintain them, and “not to yield” to their repeated, illusory achievement. (McGann 1989, 133-4)

This idea that poetry represents a kind of truth-function through its ‘principle of incommensurability’, such that ‘with respect to truth, experience always outruns conception’ (McGann 1989, 7) may be seen as a singing example of epistemopathy, maybe even of a markedly psychopathological kind, in its drive to make knowledge mean and be something urgently desired, or perhaps something that it is felt ought to be urgently desired. Such compounding of knowledge and desire is one of the most impelling forms of epistemopathy.

Derek Attridge offers a rather more circumspect evaluation of the anthropomorphic claim that literary texts may be able to know or think on their own account. I am glad to acknowledge that he anticipates me in his suggestion that literary texts can be seen as performances of ideas of knowing, or as inducements to them:

Knowing works of art – or works that we are inclined to call “knowing,” or to which we find ourselves tempted to ascribe the capacity to think or to know – may be relatively few. But every work of art, coming into being as a performed event, engages with our epistemological desires. We act out our knowing, our wanting to know, our wanting to know what it is like to know or not to know. (Attridge 2009, 33)

If modernist epistemology is concerned ever more with the contingency or embodiedness of knowing, and with the feeling of knowing as an ineradicable constituent of knowledge, then literary treatments of knowledge seem to concern themselves with the contest between literary knowing and the new modes of information into which knowledge has increasingly passed. In the world of information, knowledge is unknown, or nonknown, in the sense that, though it may pass through or come to rest in particular agents, it is not owned, originated or

exhausted by them. Knowledge, which can be both noun and gerund, both that which is known, and the knowing of it, indeed has the status of Michel Serres's quasi-object, oscillating between the condition of passive and active, the known lighting up the knower, and vice versa (Serres 1982, 227).

Bearing out this oscillation, literary knowledge signifies two distinct things: knowledge of literature, and all the ways in which it is gathered and disseminated, and the intrinsic kind of knowledge that literature might seem to offer, imply or possess. In the first case, literature is the object of knowing, in the second it is the subject of it. Robin Valenza (2009) offers some thoughtful reflections on the different ways in which the text of *Clarissa* is made the object of knowledge, both through the kind of 'index-learning' that establishes a link between eighteenth-century projects like Johnson's Dictionary and contemporary database searching, and through contemporary protocols of reading for maximal ambivalence. In fact, the two come together in something like Peter de Bolla's Architectures of Knowledge project, which uses complex collocation analysis to establish a way of disclosing the structure of eighteenth-century concepts, which function as a kind of conceptual dreamwork, or a kind of virtual intellection (de Bolla 2013).

If concepts can be thought about as mental entities, as held within the internal cognitive processes that human beings engage in, then they can also be thought about as cultural entities. By this I mean that concepts can be understood as inhabiting the common unshareable space of culture. (de Bolla 2013, 14)

Literary critics are used to the idea that literary texts might constitute a kind of knowing through their very forms of unconsciousness: de Bolla's perspective makes the imaginary subject of knowing not a text but an entire corpus and the culture of which it is a witness. This uses the database-traversing powers of artificial intelligence to create the sense of the artificial intelligence of the eighteenth century itself.

There are of course many different things we can mean by knowing. The point of epistemology is to take care of distinguishing these usages, often in order to set many of them aside as unsuitable for philosophical attention – knowing that and knowing how, knowing as having familiarity with, knowing as understanding, knowing as experiencing, knowing as having information about. The aim in part of epistemopathy (in the sense here of epistemopathic investigation rather than epistemopathic occurrences), is to be able to register the compacts, confusions and conspiracies between the different ways in which we might feel we know, and ways we might feel about how and what we know. For the epistemologist, gossip and *idée fixe* have their coat-pegs a great distance away from those of religious conviction or experimental data: in the affect-space of epistemopathy they may find themselves jostled in absurd or disturbing proximity. The effect of being surrounded by so many different media of information and experience, along with the institutional modes of knowing and making known they seem to encode, is to multiply both the ways in which we feel we may feel we know things and the occasions of this miscibility. Rather than offering a distinctive and alternative literary mode of knowing, glowing with the glamour or pathos of resistance (one of the things we pretend we know about literary texts is that they are always in resistance), literary texts may be a venue, albeit neither invariantly nor uniquely, for these convergences and maladjustments. Epistemopathy in modern

literature expresses itself in the effort to negotiate between the realms of knowledge (embodied in knowing agents) and information (processed in media and machineries). The mediating object is sometimes the literary work itself, which may seem to partake of both the action of thinking and the condition of the database.

### **Whiffs and Glimpses: In the Cage**

Like a number of other critics, Derek Attridge turns to Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* for an image of the performance of such processes of knowing, arguing that James's 'syntactic labyrinth ... enacts the condition of knowing, or not being able to know, just how much Maisie knows' (Attridge 2009, 26). But it is in the story 'In the Cage', written close in time to *What Maisie Knew* and grouped with it by James in Volume 11 of the New York edition of his works, that the interaction between embodied and abstract ways of knowing is most explicitly laid out. In the preface to the volume, James observed that '[t]he range of wonderment attributed in our tale to the young woman employed at Cocker's differs little in essence from the speculative thread on which the pearls of Maisie's experience, in this same volume – pearls of so strange an iridescence – are mostly strung' (James 1908, xx). 'In the Cage' has tended to engage critics interested in the relations between literature and the emerging media of the late nineteenth century (Pollard 2001; Menke 2004; Hutchison 2013), but the story might also be read in terms of the relation it follows out between these occasions and cadences of knowing. The story of a telegraphic clerk working in a local post office in Mayfair and fantasising about the lives of those whose messages she transmits, sets epistemic desire against the busily plethoric but unthinking noesis of communication networks. Its analysis of the workings of knowledge-fantasy is also of course a reflection on the relations between literary knowledge and the new forms of artificial intelligence which it opposes and for which it strives to compensate even while being nested within it. James offers us a rather cheap and obvious correlative for the unnamed narrator's reflections in the fiction she interleaves with her telegraphic fantasies: 'there was often half an hour during which she could pull out a bit of work or a book – a book from the place where she borrowed novels, very greasy, in fine print and all about fine folks, at a ha'penny a day' (James 1908, 271). But the narrator also indulges a kind of technobovaryism, her fantasies mediated, not through railway-station romance, but through the cryptic telegrams she decodes as thrillingly intimate knowledge.

The story insists throughout on the many modes of knowing, and quasi- and pseudo-knowing. There are 160 occurrences of the word 'know' and its variants, 'knowing', 'knowledge', 'known', 'knew'. Knowing and ignorance interlock together, as the telegraphist realises that Lady Bradeen 'had n't a notion of her' (James 1908, 424):

the perception of her visitor's blankness actually helped this extraordinary little person, the next instant, to take refuge in a reflexion that could be as proud as it liked. "How little she knows, how little she knows!" the girl cried to herself; for what did that show after all but that Captain Everard's telegraphic confidant was Captain Everard's charming secret? Our young friend's perusal of her ladyship's telegram was literally prolonged by a momentary daze: what swam

between her and the words, making her see them as through rippled shallow sun-shot water, was the great, the perpetual flood of “How much *I* know – how much *I* know!” (James 1908, 424-5)

In fact, James seems to intimate to us that there is plenty that the telegraphist does not know: perhaps, as Ralf Norrman has suggested ‘[t]he girl who exults in her knowledge really knows nothing at all’ (Norrman 1977, 427) The scene concerns the transmission of a telegram on which everything will hinge: ‘ “Miss Dolman. Parade Lodge, Parade Terrace, Dover. Let him instantly know right one, Hotel de France, Ostend. Make it seven nine four nine six one. Wire me alternative Burfield’s” ’ (James 1908, 425). We never discover what this code means. It seems that the telegraphist’s nested sense of interlocked knowing and unknowing itself interlocks with the fact that James himself does not seem to need to know what the secret code in the telegram actually signifies, just as, when asked by his friend André Raffalovitch what Captain Everard’s offence had been ‘swore that he did not know, he would rather not know’ (Nowell-Smith 1947, 122). In fact, it signifies not a specific piece of knowledge, but the abstract form of something supposed to be known, the objective correlative of Lacan’s ‘*sujet supposé savoir*’. Knowledge is here the feint or *eidōs* of knowledge, the desire for it the engine of everything that occurs.

James’s narrative encourages us to experience this sensation not so much as Michael Wood’s ‘taste of knowledge’ but in fact as something much more like an odour. It stands for the oppressive, elbowy proximity of the real, untransfigured by fantasy, as in the first memorable evocation of ‘a shop, pervaded not a little, in winter, by the poison of perpetual gas, and at all times by the presence of hams, cheese, dried fish, soap, varnish, paraffin and other solids and fluids that she came to know perfectly by their smells without consenting to know by their names’ (James 1908, 367-8), along with her mother ‘smelling much of the time of whiskey’ (James 1908, 370), and the ‘brown fog’ and ‘acid smoke’ of Mrs Jordan’s Maida Vale parlour. This kind of odour is invasive and claustrophobic: ‘Where she was was where Mr. Buckton’s elbow could freely enter her right side and the counterclerk’s breathing – he had something the matter with his nose – pervade her left ear’ (James 1908, 396). But the olfactory also stands for and for the evanescence of that which can pass through the bars of her cage, the ‘whiffs and glimpses’ of escape (James 1908, 386), including the ‘whiff of Alpine meadows and Scotch moors’ (James 1908, 428) and ‘the sun and the breeze and the sea-smell’ of her seaside holiday (James 1908, 453). We are told that ‘[t]he nose of this observer was brushed by the bouquet, yet she could never really pluck even a daisy’ (James 1908, 386). When the telegraphist considers the prospect of joining Mrs Jordan in her flower-arranging business, the forensic and the imaginative are conjoined, as she wonders whether ‘to follow some such scent’ (James 1908, 396). Odour is at once unmistakable and indeterminate, registered as the kind of thing that ‘floated to her through the bars of the cage’ (James 1908, 377). The telegraphist’s curiosity is ‘a mute effusion’ (James 1908, 377). Lady Bradeen’s presence, and the epistemic opportunities she affords, are like ‘a dropped fragrance, a mere quick breath, but which in fact pervaded and lingered’ (James 1908, 378). The telegraphist’s projections of the various melodramatic scenes between Everard and Cissy come to her ‘in the waft that she blew through and left behind her, the influence that, as I have said, lingered’ (James 1908, 379). It is no surprise that Mrs Jordan’s way of gaining

familiar knowledge of wealthy households is through the flower-arranging business she builds up, which becomes continuous with the etherial information systems that run through the story. and so apt to register the pervasive feeling of knowledge, the perfumed pathos of what you know perfectly without consenting to know it by its name. Odour is identifying yet often itself unidentifiable. The telegraphist who does not consent to name is herself unnamed. It is as though James were floating the idea of a bizarre intercourse of noses and gnosis.

James's preface to the story catches this metaphorical gust:

The postal-telegraph office in general, and above all the small local office of one's immediate neighbourhood, scene of the transaction of so much of one's daily business, haunt of one's needs and one's duties, of one's labours and one's patiences, almost of one's rewards and one's disappointments, one's joys and one's sorrows, had ever had, to my sense, so much of London to give out, so much of its huge perpetual story to tell, that any momentary wait there seemed to take place in a strong social draught, the stiffest possible breeze of the human comedy. (James 1908, xviii)

'In the Cage' lays a wholly unintended trap for the contemporary academic reader, who labours under the requirement that they must display certain kinds of knowingness, whether that be biographical, historical-contextual, or, most usual, sociopoetic. A literary text is a text that can be an object of knowable knowingness. The academic reader's conviction that they are in the know, and just the kind of know that is required of them, is a weird copy of the dreams of romantic escape in which, we give ourselves leave to be quite sure, the narrator's reading must imprison her. If she has read too many ha'penny romances, we have read too many reader-flattering *Madame Bovarys*, the story of a soft-headed girl being led astray by the 'old story' of romantic fantasy being itself by now an old story, James's phrase being repeated twice by the telegraphist (James 1908, xviii, 395, 483). Encouraged by James's reassurance in his preface that the story in fact explains itself, beyond the need for preface or explication – 'the second in order of these fictions speaks for itself, I think, so frankly as scarcely to suffer further expatiation' (James 1908 xviii), '[t]he composition before us tells in fact clearly enough, it seems to me, the story of its growth' (James 1908, xx) – a reassurance which we are therefore self-congratulatingly certain we must discount, we are lured into and duped by our knowingness. James wonders whether his own daydreams about the daydreaming telegraphist might not in fact convict him of a sort of phantasmagoric act of simultaneous projection and capture, as he appropriates in the telegraphist his own appropriative appetites: 'To criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one's own' (James 1908, xix). We are benignly trapped in the fantasy of being in the know about the narrator's fantasy of knowledge, along with James's fantasy of the form that his heroine's fantasy of being in the know might take. This is not a lesson in epistemology – the demonstration that we can never know for sure – but the making out of a charged field of epistemopathic needs and impulses, and a demonstration that we can never obviate the feeling of knowledge, a knowledge that can only come about in subjunctive, surrogate or delegated form, in which it is never clear who is the bearer of the imputed knowledge.

Human beings may identify themselves as definitionally knowing, or sapient beings, but though we may powerfully understand ourselves in terms of what we know, including what we know of ourselves, we can never be continuous or consubstantial with that knowledge, and very little of what we think we know can be regarded as intrinsic. Knowledge is one of our necessary accessories. We cannot be without knowledge, but can never simply or wholly be what we know. I have not always known the things I believe I know now, and it is a racing certainty that I will not always know them. We can say that, borrowing a phrase from the Ted Hughes poem 'Wodwo', our being and our knowing have begun to coincide very queerly. If there has always been a relation to worry out between ourselves and our, and others' knowledge, that coincidence has become queerer than ever in the modern world, in which we can be confident that there is more knowledge than ever before, and yet for that very reason, we must be less sure than ever before of who knows it and how an for how long. Under such circumstances, our relations to what we call 'our' knowledge will continue to become more intricately and obliquely mediated, by dream, desire, anxiety, disdain, delight, imagination and magic.

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