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# IS THIS IT?

On Shiterature, Literature,  
and Iterature



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What is Literature? I propose that this question cannot be answered properly without taking into considerations two related phenomena, identified here for the first time: Shiterature and Iterature.<sup>1</sup>

The metabolism of culture produces an incessant stream of writing that is sometimes marketed as or even confused with literature and in which words, clichés, and text modules are forever reproduced and recombined in a simulation of original authorship. It veils the fact that we only hear voices from the storehouse of discourse hallucinating in a bottomless echo chamber. Let us give to it the technical term *shiterature*. Not because it smells bad or is uninteresting from an aesthetic point of view, which it invariably does and is, but because it is a symbol of the indispensable and circular digestion of production and consumption forming the humus of culture, the “shittiness of this temporal glory”, as Goethe had it.<sup>2</sup> Robots like ChatGPT are but an evolutionary stage in a development that has been going on for a long time. Shiterature is sampled from waste, and waste it is already at the time of its conception by whatever mind, hand or artificial intelligence. Its fecundity ensures that we inhabit the same world. There is no private literature. The field of literature is manured by shiterature. *Für die Katz*, in Robert Walser’s immortal phrase.<sup>3</sup>

For a deeper understanding of shiterature, think of Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of the concept of ‘labor’. It gives us a convenient contrast to the concept of literature. Using Arendt’s terminology, literature, in contrast to shiterature, belongs to the realm of ‘work’, of human artifice and the making of objects of relative durability. Literature withstands, at least for a period, natural corrosion. It lifts itself up from a logic of pure consumption by reflecting its own process of creation, which it also wishes its readers to reflect upon. When it uses words, clichés, and text modules, it does so consciously

and deliberately, at least that is what we have to assume. Where shiterature is the humus of culture, literature represents the interwoven world of the making, thinking, remaking, and rethinking of its very fabric, incorporating shiterature and related shit, here used as a neutral term and resonating with the (Harry G.) Frankfurt school of thought.<sup>4</sup>

The limitations of making are, as Arendt rightly pointed out, the categories of “means and end”.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, and notwithstanding the initial satisfaction about the return of ontological considerations in a discipline marred by decades of epistemology’s unfettered reign, I hesitate to take up the Sartrean baton.<sup>6</sup> Today more than ever, questions of the type ‘What is x?’ are followed, if not downright inspired by, questions of the type ‘What is x for?’. No degree of antimetaphysical lip service can counter our instincts of searching and, if necessary, constructing a *telos*. Sartre famously used his essay precisely to make an argument for literature’s political engagement as a deduction from its essence. He could achieve this only by way of a rhetorical manipulation (based on older figures of thought) that separated literature from poetry and defined the latter as the purely aesthetic play with words understood as mere material things (*choses*) in contrast to literary prose using words as signs (*signes*) and thus, potentially, as a kind of (political) action. However, even the question of what poetry was could be given a functional answer. By rejecting any obvious role, poetry simply served as an affirmation of existing society.

In many ways, we are in the middle of returning to that Sartrean moment, alas without the dialectics. Literature and literary studies are being rediscovered as an activist arena for signalling radical ambitions and moral virtues. It is beside the point whether or not this is happening as a result of shifting generational values or the vanishing influence of once dominating positions on the autonomy of art preserved in certain strands of poststructuralism (which in their time had also been a rebellion against fossilized versions of Sartre’s *littérature engagée*). The puzzling thing is rather that nobody seems puzzled about the contradiction between the urgency with which literature is put forward as an argument in activist contexts in the academy and the reality of literary midcult as a middle-class distraction: the notion that literature is what some listen to on their way to work or

while running in the park or, even worse, what teenagers are forced to study in class before they can return to YouTube.

It does not take a Sherlock Holmes, or any other real or literary detective for that matter, to conclude that the question of what literature is never was about ontology. Its character is, just as in the case of Sartre, normative rather than enumerative: What should literature be? And not only that. It is also critical and aesthetic, and – we will never be able to escape from it again – epistemological. Even if we resist the functionalist perspective, we have to admit that it cannot be answered by way of a naive identification of members of a set, but most likely presupposes a whole set of theories instead. The question is therefore: What is literature for whom? As literary scholars we have no choice but to address it from a professional point of view. Maybe we are the only ones left anyway who have the motivation and time to stay for an answer.

Yet there's the rub. Literary scholars who turn to theory for help, discover, to their dismay, that it has left the building. The often-claimed end of theory is in truth the end of the chequered relationship between theory and literary studies. In my post-Covid travels through Europe, I have noticed a worrying trend. It is one thing to be theoretically aware of the 'end of theory', but quite another to witness the missing bookshelves in bookstores that once boasted a huge selection of theory titles in the literature sections. These titles can now typically be found in rows after rows of philosophy books that are not in the least representative of the analytical asceticism of contemporary philosophy departments, but also in the sections for cultural studies, social studies, gender studies, anthropology and so on.

This feels a little like Nietzsche realising what the death of God really meant. The implicit or explicit reflection and theory of literature is a condition of possibility for our disciplines. Without it, both literature and literary studies become mere projections for ideologies (they are always a space for ideological projections, but not necessarily to the exclusion of other elements). Without professional theoretical and philosophical critique, literature regresses to representations of tribal or other special interests that are the complete opposite of the universalizing and transformative powers to which it owes its central place in culture and education. If we choose to throw literature to the

anti-intellectual vultures of ideological spokespersons or the so-called common readers with their sound feelings as a main guideline, to tiktokers, conspiracy theorists, and phoneys, it vanishes in the vast abyss of shiterature, leaving a void to be filled by something else.

What happened? Or to pose this as a very Germanic-Hegelian and slightly misty-eyed question: What *was* literary theory? Its historicization is already in full bloom, but books on the topic seem to pass over one crucial enigma. Why did literary studies give up on theory so easily? Might this even give us a clue about the ontology of literature? When literary theory first came to prominence, it promised the ability to reflect upon and thus qualify and modify the practices we engage in uncritically or mindlessly. Some kind of medium for the reflection of critical practices would therefore seem indispensable once we have woken from our dogmatic slumber. Literary theory also quickly became part of the Kuhnian normal science of literary studies because of obvious or presumed pedagogical advantages. We could teach theory instead of suggesting the time-consuming path of reading, reading, and reading again, of studying historical and intellectual contexts, visiting archives and libraries or of learning languages.

However, as praxeological studies have shown, literary theory has in reality often been employed as a fig leaf to embellish practices that actually predated their adoption. The emergence of the kind of retrospective reflection that praxeology represents, presupposes that, despite all critical sophistication, we were and are still doing something we were not or are not fully aware of until its belated analysis – in the sense of a Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*. This serves as a reminder that literary studies, just as many other disciplines, manage just fine without theory.

Now the problem is this: Theory also manages just fine without literature. Of the approaches we traditionally subsume under ‘theory’, only a fraction were originally, essentially or necessarily interested in or dependent on literary works of art. Literature departments became theory’s host for other, more contingent reasons – with a cultural-imperialist bias. Hermeneutics, Marxism, the Frankfurt School, Deconstruction etc., planted at the centre of philosophy departments in many countries, were pushed out or marginalised in the Anglo-sphere by the powerful branches of analytical philosophy (in the UK,

after the demise of British Hegelianism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these schools had hardly existed anyway). The history of philosophy often remained the last reservation for broader traditions of thought.

This led to interesting intellectual academic migration patterns (so integral to intellectual history since Abelard). When so-called continental philosophy needed a new home, it was welcomed by literature departments, not exactly with open arms, but at least they provided a safe haven for exiled thinkers. This was the birth of Theory with a capital T. It was reimported in new versions to its countries of origin. As a field, however, it grew restless in the arms of its at times plump cohabitant philology and, like another Humbert Humbert, started to lust for ever new virgin territory to corrupt. Out of its voracious appetite grew the culture of the ‘turns’ in the 1990s. Finally, and with the mainstream success of cultural studies, media studies, gender studies etc., Theory had the chance to cut the ties to its former hosts and to get rid of philology and literature altogether, leaving the near-empty shell of the old departments behind like a butterfly, or, depending on where you stand, a moth, abandons its outworn cocoon.

Shell-shocked, literature departments have had to re-invent themselves like deserted husbands or wives (gender it after your own preference). We, the deserted ones, are currently experimenting with the following alternatives: We throw ourselves into the arms of the sciences or digital humanities, but we cut a pathetic figure; the sciences have not exactly been waiting for us. We turn back to philology, yet it is all but extinct and will take a long time to reanimate (unless we take the quicker and thornier road of discovering the theoretical potential of philology itself in order to overcome the old divide). The few dinosaurs still able to do so concentrate on our presumed core subjects, on editing classics, studying metrics, writing literary histories, translating and commenting, composing handbooks, readers, and anthologies. All very worthy, but none of it seems to grant us the appeal we had when we were still married to Theory. We also, and this is quickly becoming mainstream, desperately claim that we have so much to bring to the table for solving society’s problems that it seems strange why nobody is queuing up on campus. As problem solvers, though, at least if we want to get our hands on external funding, we have to keep quiet about our past infatuation with Theory and content ourselves

with providing topics and illustrations, Sokal'd into submission.<sup>7</sup> Some of us, as mentioned above, get enraged and become activists.

There also remains, of course, the tried-and-tested method of reality denial, in this case the denial of abandonment. We can become Theory-theorists instead, going all-in circle jerk mode, and, on the way, losing sight of literature altogether. You can take theory out of a discipline, but you cannot take the discipline out of theory. This kind of theory, at least in its own understanding, finally seems to have realised the Marxian dream of reconciling theory and practice by *doing theory* (rather than, say, thinking about or with literature by way of theory). While doing theory seems well equipped to becoming the theoretical equivalent of shiterature, *doing* originally meant creating, performing, bringing to the fore. It was antimetaphysical and antirealist at one and the same time, as the maximum provocation of a presumed scientific normativity still stuck in a mindset of yore. The world and its phenomena were the results of the epistemological order of things and cultural practices. Doing was distinguished from metaphysical antirealism by accepting the reality outside of the subject, but only because it denied the reality of this subject itself, which was the volatile result of various forms of doing, too.

By doing *doing*, many realised that they could easily do the doing without the reading, that is, without the arduous task of studying subtle literary texts or historical genres that resisted theoretical reduction anyway. Add to that the recent re-enchantment with things, pure and simple. This nostalgia for metaphysical realism, for real 'stuff' was augmented by the lure of external funding for more science-oriented approaches. A compromise was soon at hand, let us call it antimetaphysical realism (or speculative realism, or new materialism), combining the best, or, again depending where you stand, the worst of both worlds.<sup>8</sup> Yet still we need to decide whether we primarily do things or whether we are primarily interested in things regardless of our doing – or whether we should indeed, a new concept I came across recently, be “thinging”, apparently a dialectical process describing the performative aspects of observing and engaging with things, including perhaps, to go back to Sartre, words as material things.

Evidently, if thinging becomes the thing, the question of what literature is, or might be, excludes a number of possible answers. We

can scream and sulk as much as we want; theory, as once we knew her, will not come back to literature even when it formally still has an address in the annex, at least for the time being. For deeper thought and meaning, I can turn to the philosophy shelves. When I find out that academic philosophy does not really cater for me, why should I return to literature if it just provides illustrations for broader and more basic ‘humanities’ questions designed to solve ‘grand challenges’, tools for identity political propaganda, a medium for climate lamento, or the raw material for dry-as-dust narratologists? Speaking of which: narratology works just as well in other formats that have a broader demographic appeal anyway. Why read novels, poetry or drama when there are well-made TV series that give us all the fictional worlds we never knew we needed? The question, therefore, of what literature is, turns into the question of why we should even care about it.

This is the moment to introduce the final category mentioned in the beginning, namely *iterature*. It will help to explain why many people indeed do care, against all odds. This is also the moment to shift the focus from production and creation to reception and action. It will take some preparation; admittedly *iterature* is less intuitive and self-evident than *shiterature*.

There are books and texts that, for various reasons, we seem to want to read more than once. On an individual level, this could count as the elevation of *shiterature* to the status of *literature*. *Literature* can, from this perspective, be defined as what we read at least twice of our own volition. The best reading is just as productive and creative as writing; it is by no means a simple passive absorption. Every reading changes both text and reader. If I read a book a second time, I am not the same person anymore, be it only for the fact that I am now the person who already knows this book and has decided to go back to it. The same is true for the book itself. It has now become a book read twice by the same person. Naturally, even *shiterature* can be read multiple times. But reading *shiterature* by definition stays at the level of consumption. Reading *literature*, by contrast, works according to the logic of work and therefore entails an art of reading. Artful reading is making rather than consuming, a making that transforms the read artefact as well as the readers.

Literature in that sense contains something that Stanley Cavell has



called “unfinished business”.<sup>9</sup> It represents issues that have stayed with us, it triggers intellectual, emotional, and imaginative responses that we cannot put to the side easily, but are almost forced to return to in order to work with, on, and through them. This is also true for professional readers such as critics or scholars. The formidable apparatus they bring to reading demands a kind of pay-off, to stay with Cavell’s metaphor. Every professional reading or scholarly examination of one book rather than another represents a huge intellectual and affective advance payment or investment which cannot be settled by other books or ‘media’, or be explained away by theory. Literature tells us to remake our lives. *Tua res agitur*. We can tell literature from shiterature by the impact it leaves on our reading and our impulse to re-read, but also by the impact our reading leaves on the text, the desire to edit or re-edit it being perhaps its most radical expression.

Consider Marx’ famous 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach, which used to adorn (and still adorns, I believe) the grand staircase in the main building of the world’s first modern research university in Berlin. It proclaims (in my translation): “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; yet the point is to change it.” This is a false dichotomy. The interpretation is already the change (which does not exclude the possibility of other kinds of change). Literature is the remaking of the world, and our remaking of this remaking – the interpretation of an interpretation – is what changes us and our world.

A possible charge of reactionary aestheticism or outdated idealism becomes groundless once we realise that the insistence on the subjective experience of literature in philosophical terms, but also right down to the experience of the empirical individual reader, is not the opposite of its social character, but its precondition. Our rethinking, reimagining, and reinterpreting of the world and ourselves concern the factors that make up the socially conditioned cornerstones of our existence: our beliefs and ethical norms, our ideas and conceptual understanding, our relationships and social ties inside and outside of our community, our aesthetic sense, our sense of purpose. Just as the ‘I’ is unthinkable without the ‘You’ and the ‘We’, the reverse is also true, and the subjective is only the expression of human plurality and distinctness without which we could not speak about the human at all.

This is why Arendt argues that humans can sustain life without labor or work, but not without action, understood as the activities that are dependent on the ability of speech and its social embedding.

When Sartre, long after *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*, returned to Flaubert, he had to eat his words (they are material things after all!) and accept that the initial division into literary words as either *choses* or *signes* was not tenable. In Flaubert's case they are of course both, as in all literature worth reading repeatedly. Likewise, for Arendt, action is not the opposite of labor or work, but simply one of the three main dimensions in which the 'human condition' unfolds. The chapter on action in her book bears a motto by the great Danish novelist and story-teller Karen Blixen according to which all "sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them."<sup>10</sup> Stories are the symbol of the web of our social relations. With friends and family, with therapists or sometimes even just colleagues (you know who you are!), we share stories that are told and retold, listened to and repeated time and again. They do not need to be works of art, but works of art that use language as its medium and material (by no means restricted to story-telling of course) play an important part for the social relations of whole communities, including linguistic communities, nations, and societies. At a foundational level, these are quite literally *made of* words. Literature is language art because the words it uses are both things and action, defining the human life world.

What is at stake here is the sum of the re-readings. If the re-reading of literature leads to changes in both readers and the read, ontological questions are almost unanswerable because of its dynamic nature. Any possible answer would already be obsolete at the moment of utterance. The frame of understanding, norms, language, aesthetics etcetera that is set in motion keeps changing. Hence, when we change individually, or when communities change, this frame changes, too, and it changes us in different ways. This explains why we are so eager for people we care about to read what has left an impression on us – social animals that we are, we want them to inhabit the same world, to migrate into and share our experiences and newfound categories. We also want others to read repeatedly what we have read repeatedly ourselves. The sum of re-readings on a scale that takes it qualitatively

beyond the individual immersion and defies time and space, could be called, with an ever so slight nod to Derrida, iteration.<sup>11</sup>

Iterature, as the corresponding category, would be the kind of literature whose radiance easily crosses linguistic, national, cultural, social, and other borders because of the mysterious affordance of certain literary works of art to speak to people iteratively regardless of the contingent shittiness of their own temporal glory, to iterate Goethe's melancholic insight cited above. Affordance in the Gibsonian sense refers to the inherent qualities of an object or an environment that allow us to perceive and act in certain ways or even suggest modes of possible actions relative to goals, capabilities, and experiences.<sup>12</sup> Iterature is not simply a product of our interpretation or of communities of reception; it can emerge anywhere and anytime. It is the living counterproof to all varieties of constructivism. We do not yet know how this affordance works: why some texts offer themselves much more readily and durably than others to be read over and over again without revealing their secrets, or why some iterature stubbornly resists translation (or demands regular new attempts of renditioning into other languages).

All we know is that iterature transcends art and becomes action. This, incidentally, I believe to be the motivation behind the Nobel Prize for Literature. What its founder really wanted, without having a word for it, was a prize for iterature. It was never and could never be a prize for the best works of art. In this light, the 'idealistic direction' (*idealisk rigtning*) envisioned by Alfred Nobel's testament, is the intuitive insight that literary works are only truly safe from being devoured by the metabolic maelstrom through their iterary qualities – which are 'idealistic' precisely because they ensure their emancipation from the empirical (and imperialistic) empire of shit.<sup>13</sup>

The history of the Nobel Prize – ever since the very first award, where Tolstoi was snubbed in favour of Prudhomme – also demonstrates, albeit involuntarily, the impossibility of proclaiming iterature at will. A canon, whether in its most reactionary and authoritarian version (think statues of poor innocent Pushkin in occupied Ukraine) is just as far removed from iterature as the radically decolonized curriculum from a minor Liberal Arts college. Iterature takes time to evolve; it cannot simply be made and unmade at will by anybody. It

is the sum – actually more than the sum – of all the iterative readings, thought processes, emotions, and imaginary explorations it allowed to happen. Both canon and counter-canon, on the other hand, are symbols of archaic forms of wishful magical thinking to stop the world or force our picture of it on future generations without giving them the chance to come to the same or to different conclusions.

No wonder we have become accustomed to endless debates about the canon – literature is action, it fosters these debates. Nations, communities, tribes have continually defined or contested the canon because we know intuitively its value for the kind of world we inhabit. Simply handing out a reading list from whatever political or ideological angle, however, means cutting short the possibility of discovering new literature. New admissions happen only by way of iteration. We have to do the reading, the thinking, and the debating, individually and together. And just as shiterature is the precondition for literature, literature is the foundation of iterature.

Against the idealism of the Nobel Prize, therefore, I would defend the tangibility and thingness of literary language and the made work as offering affordances for the kind of iterative reading, thinking, and debating that one day might turn some literary works of art into literary works of action. For literature is the thing that does not lose its thingness when it is treated as a subject – and which remains a subject even when we objectify it. Thinking with and about literature, we relearn to do the heavy lifting ourselves by acting on its affordances. Not by doing this or that with this or that theory, but by putting literature back into theory if we cannot put theory back into literary studies. Reading literature, slowly, intensely, meticulously, and thinkingly, is the doing we should do. At a time when everyone wants to be published, but nobody wants to read anymore, reading is the thinging of thinking that makes literature possible as the kind of text that cannot be captured conceptually or propositionally, but only by way of other texts. Literary studies do not solve problems but discover and create problems by way of an iterative approach to unfinished business. Literary reading is the critical art of separating the wheat from the chaff, the shit from the it.

The consequences are shouting us in the face. Do not hand me a canon or counter-canon but convince me, infect me, and inspire me

with your literary and itery readings. We will never know literature or iterature from the fact that it appears on an assignment or because a theory tells me so. I need to see it for myself, in conversation with others. Literary scholars and critics have traditionally been garbage separators: we have to sift through a lot of shit to find *it*. Arguably, it seems far easier to identify shit. Its basic operation is deictic and exclamative: This is shit! And in between, mediating between shit and it, is literature as the art based on labor that would be action. We need people with enough time, expertise, sensibility, and imagination to go through and find the it in the shit by way of lit. Preferably, they should come from various backgrounds and dispositions, but they should also be curious about discovering common ground.

Unfortunately, specialisation and the rise of theory have led to an atomization of literary studies, whose three main subdivisions have not yet been identified and therefore continually create confusion. Let us call them shiterary, literary, and itery studies (or, respectively, shiterary, literary, and itery criticism). Expecting shiterature to meet literary demands makes no sense. But neither is using literary analysis on shiterature.<sup>14</sup> Since shiterature, literature, and iterature depend on each other, however, we are in no position to categorically exclude the one or the other from our own contingent and unavoidably limited perspective. Today's shit may be tomorrow's it, and vice versa. Take literary sociology as an example. In reality, large parts of it would have to be classified as shiterary sociology, dealing almost exclusively with production and consumption. Conversely, literary sociology oriented towards finding out how, say, the Nobel Prize functions, would belong to literary and/or itery sociology.<sup>15</sup> This pluralism is not a problem. It makes literary studies on the whole more exciting, but only if a certain balance is kept. Too much iterature leads to the danger of stiffening, too much shiterature is, well, too much shit.

Too much literature, on the other hand, craves too much time for reading that nobody has, if ever we had it.<sup>16</sup> Digital tools cannot do the reading for us. Who would not rather read books than constantly feed insatiable machines with metadata, taggings, and instructions? Interestingly, despite its name, iterature does not seem to reside in the world of IT (as a dear colleague wittily observed). Rather, the infor-

mation technology of the internet and its display devices has enabled not so much a novel way of reading as a huge scribbling pad in fifty shades of shit.<sup>17</sup> As it is, every author still wants to be in print since a book is not just the manifestation of the kind of material durability that distinguishes literature and iterature from shiterature, but because it allows for “scenes of reading”<sup>18</sup> most conducive to deep and iterative reflection. In the near future, printing might become one of shiterature’s means of disguising itself as literature. For is it not entirely probable that we are already in the middle of a technological differentiation where shiterature is most at home in the Net, electronic fanfiction, low quality paperbacks and E-Books, while good quality print and audio books are reserved for ambitious literature and iterature?<sup>19</sup>

With few exceptions, we no longer have the kind of theory that helps us answer this kind of question creatively and surprisingly. “What is to be done?” (Lenin) If Theory will not come back to literature and if philosophy will not pick up the ball, it is up to us shiterary, literary, and iterary scholars and critics to (re-)discover the theoretical and philosophical potential of literary works of art themselves, as something that I would like to call *thinking with texts* (in contrast to thinking with concepts or propositions).<sup>20</sup> In analogy to ordinary language philosophy, we need a literary language philosophy that does not subsume literature under new forms of general and abstract inquiries but is premised on the fact that literature always already contains its own ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, anthropology, political norms, religion, history, and indeed science and logic. It would be naturally at home in the ever-more deserted departments dedicated to reading books for no apparent practical use. It would be a safeguard to the danger that Theory succumbed to at the point of its greatest success, namely of becoming a pseudo-philosophy – and a vanguard of those dissident readers unwilling to surrender to the apparent inevitability of our *zeitgeist*. It would at one and the same time be in touch with philosophical and literary traditions and with the urgent questions of today, which it would itself be in a position to define. It would treat literature as the prime source of formed and dynamic ideas, situated in cultural, material, social, historical, aesthetic, political, and gender-related contexts that bring the fuzziness,

ambiguity, and linguistic creativity – and thus the richness – to thinking, feeling, and imagining that we are in dire need of. That way, lit could be the shit again. That would be it.

## Noter

- 1 For ease of reading, I will not use capital letters for the remainder of this essay, but they should be kept in mind.
- 2 Johann Wolfgang Goethe in a letter from Weimar to his friend Johann Heinrich Merck, January 22, 1776 (my translation), hämtad 2024-05-09, <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Goethe,+Johann+Wolfgang/Briefe/1776>
- 3 Robert Walser, “Für die Katz”, i *Das Gesamtwerk*, Jochen Greven red. (Genf/Hamburg: Kossodo, [1928/29] 1966–75), vol. 10, 432–34.
- 4 Rainald Goetz also comes to mind: Rainald Goetz, *Abfall für alle. Roman eines Jahres* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1999).
- 5 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 143.
- 6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, [1948] 1972).
- 7 Alan Sokal, *Beyond the Hoax: Science, Philosophy and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 8 Cf. recently Benjamin Boysen/Jesper Lundsryd Rasmussen eds., *Against New Materialisms* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).
- 9 Stanley Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love. A Reading of ‘King Lear’”, in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 267–353, 313.
- 10 Arendt, *The Human condition*, 175. The quote can be found in an interview with Bent Mohn in *The New York Times Book Review* from November 3, 1957, Section T, p. 284. In the interview, Karen Blixen uses one of her *noms de plume* (Isak Dinesen).
- 11 Jacques Derrida, “Signature événement context”, in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1972), 365–393.
- 12 James J. Gibson, “The Theory of Affordances”, i *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing. Toward an Ecological Psychology*, Robert Shaw, John Bransford reds. (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum: 1977), 67–82.
- 13 <https://www.nobelprize.org/alfred-nobel/alfred-nobels-testamente>.
- 14 Used to comic effect already in Frederick C. Crews, *The Pooh Perplex. A Freshman Casebook* (New York: Dutton, 1963), although it could be argued that this book contributed to the making of a classic in the field of children’s literature (A.A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh*).
- 15 A promising example would be Jørgen Sneis and Carlos Spoerhase, “The Nobel Roll of Honor: Comparing literatures and compiling lists of Nobel laureates in the early twentieth century”, *Orbis Litterarum* 78:3 (2023), 147–66.
- 16 Cf. Christina Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2018).
- 17 It is not a work I wish to undertake myself, but I can see the utility of a literary equivalent to the Bristol Stool Form Scale, which allows more precise conversa-

tions about faeces between doctors and patients. In medicine, instruments like this “scaffold memory and facilitate situated cognition” (Sarah Bro Pedersen, *The Cognitive Ecology of Human Errors in Emergency Medicine – an interactivity-based approach*. Dissertation. Centre for Human Interactivity. (University of Southern Denmark, 2015)). In literary studies, they might assist in the fundamental process of cultural garbage separation.

- 18 Cf. Irina Hron, Jadwiga Kita-Huber and Sanna Schulte eds., *Leseszenen. Poetologie – Geschichte – Medialität* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2020).
- 19 For a brilliant early observation of the complex interaction between literature and the internet as the medium of shiterature and thus the potential of the net to turn the it into shit, see Charles Lock, “Enter the Title: Books, Catalogues and Title Pages”, in *The Book Out of Bounds: Essays Presented to Lars Ole Sauerberg*, Claus Schatz-Jakobsen, Peter Simonsen and Tom Pettit eds., (Odense: Institut for Kulturvidenskaber, 2015), 113–26. Cf. also the chapter: “Digitale Gnosis und Apotheose der Schrift: eine Spekulation” in Christian Benne, *Die Erfindung des Manuskripts. Zur Theorie und Geschichte literarischer Gegenständlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015), 633–656.
- 20 Cf. Christian Benne, Christine Abbt, *Mit Texten denken. Eine Literatur-Philosophie* (Wien: Passagen, 2021).