
Lacking the expected subtlety and feigned humility of most academic texts, Gaskin’s *Language, Truth and Literature* enters the fray of literary criticism with a decidedly aggressive flourish.

For those seeking an introduction to literary humanism, this book will not enlighten you - quite the contrary. Those unfamiliar with the discourse will find this book, at best, baffling and, at worst, intellectually crushing. Gaskin stands as champion for this much maligned theory by brandishing his incisive intellectualism and ferociously slaying all theorists who lay in his path, namely: anti-humanists, deconstructionists, reader response theorists, structuralists and, particularly, post-structuralists. In truth, he sets on dismantling Foucault and Derrida with aplomb. Should you feel the least inclination to support any of the theories Gaskin argues against, be prepared for his tone and manner to dismiss your beliefs arrogantly and without remorse. He argues cogently, though, at times, with a maddening intellectual superiority that may leave some readers rankled.

The book’s Preface gives, perhaps, the best illustration of Gaskin’s forceful, dogmatic style. He rails vehemently against the commercial politicisation of renowned learning institutions, eschewing the ‘current regime of time-wasting, demoralising and intellectually spurious comparative assessment exercises’ (p. xii) and the ‘vacuous political agendas’ (p. xiv) of university management, supporting instead a ‘freedom to explore the highways and byways of the discipline...without feeling [myself] under the compulsion to reach hasty conclusions and rush into print with them’ (p. xii). This is an interesting point, considering Gaskin seems to operate quite comfortably within the pro-publishing paradigm, having published two books (including this text) and four other academic publications in 2013 alone. His position is understandable though, considering that he is, at heart, an academic philosopher, skilled in the art of omphaloskepsis.

In Gaskin’s deep engagement with the philosophical the book finds its tension. Gaskin argues on behalf and in defense of literary humanism not from a position of practice but from a position of philosophical intent. He engages in wholesale slaughter of popular critical literary theory not for the purpose of offering a better alternative but purely because logic dictates that he can. He cuts his opponents down at the knees with the force of his logic alone, decapitating them in later chapters with superbly articulated textual examples drawn from deep within the annals of English literature. It is worth noting here that this book stands alongside two earlier works *Experience and the World's Own Language* and *The Unity Proposition*, both of which expound on Gaskin’s pet topic: linguistic idealism.

Indeed, this book begins with an airy discussion on linguistic idealism that establishes a tenuous link to the purported core subject matter of literary humanism;
whether this discussion is truly relevant to Gaskin’s defense of literary humanism remains for the reader to interpret, although it could be argued that some of the semantic distinctions Gaskin makes in these chapters have little bearing on the cogency of his main argument. He uses the early chapters to summarise and re-iterate his theory on linguistic idealism, namely that ‘the thing exists by virtue of the fact that it is capable of being referred to by the word’ (p. 13). According to Gaskin’s theory, the world and objects within it can only exist if they are capable of being referred to by language. In Gaskin’s view, the world exists as an ‘internal accusative of language’ (p. 14). He goes on to make further semantic distinctions between the terms text and work (p. 28-32), factual and factualist (p. 38), amongst others, paying perfunctory reference to the necessity of these distinctions within the context of defending literary humanism.

Indeed, Gaskin himself views Language, Truth and Literature not as a work for literary theorists but one for philosophers. This book is just one battle in his ongoing crusade to prove the truth of his theory on linguistic idealism. This explains why, periodically, the gaze drifts from literary humanism back to linguistic idealism like a besotted lover.

Despite its grounding in the philosophical tradition, Language, Truth and Literature may find a place within the hearts and minds of literary theorists too, as it argues strenuously for the cognitive value of literature, passionately and sometimes playfully engaging the reader in a heady debate on the philosophy of truth in a literary context. It asks and investigates whether literature offers a truthful representation and reflection of the human experience; it posits, in the most humanist tradition, that authorial intent and historical context must be primary considerations when critically interpreting a text.

This book is an academic’s philosophical treatise - a tour de force in the power of its argument - but leaves something to be desired in its comprehensibility to those of even postgraduate level understanding. Woe betide the undergraduate or armchair philosopher who unwittingly stumbles across this book; however, those with a moderate knowledge of linguistics, epistemology, the full canon of critical literary theory and a soupcon of philosophical understanding may find this book not only conceptually intriguing but constructively entertaining.

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