Introduction: Difficulty, Ethical Teaching, and Yearning for Transformation in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Modernist Literature

Did he find the problem . . . of . . . possible social and moral redemption . . . easier of solution?

Of a different order of difficulty.

—James Joyce[1]

We understand by immersing ourselves and our intelligence in complexity . . . the complexity of life.

—J. M. Coetzee[2]

Are you a bad philosopher then, if what you write is hard to understand? If you were better you would make what is difficult easy to understand.—But who says that's possible?!

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

People nowadays think that scientists exist to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to give them pleasure. The idea *that these have something to teach them*—that does not occur to them.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein[3]

Resolute Modernism

A Different Order of Difficulty argues that reading modernist literature after Wittgenstein—that is, in light of his contemporaneous writing, and in the wake of recent scholarly thinking about his philosophy—allows for a deeper understanding of the interwoven commitments related to the concerns with difficulty, oblique ethical

instruction, and a yearning for transformation that I argue lie at the core of both Wittgenstein's philosophical method and literary modernism. These three central preoccupations, I claim, also go on to shape modernism's afterlife in contemporary fiction.

Wittgenstein's declaration that his work was "strictly philosophical and at the same time literary" has served as a generalized point of departure for a number of insightful and informative readings of his philosophy in a literary and cultural context since it first came to light.[4] And yet, in our work as literary critics or philosophers or both, we have in many ways only just begun to attend sufficiently to the rich relationship between Wittgenstein's thought and the modernist literature that epitomizes his era's predominant cultural movement. The current moment is a particularly exciting and timely one in which to engage in this ongoing comparative, interdisciplinary work. The years leading up to the centenary of the completion of the *Tractatus* in 1918 saw an unprecedented proliferation of new work on Wittgenstein and literature that builds on earlier foundational scholarship spanning the fields of philosophy, intellectual history, art history, and literary criticism.[5]

A Different Order of Difficulty seeks to feed a growing critical interest in Wittgenstein and literature in a study that alternately engages, challenges, and complements existing treatments of the connections between them. My intervention into the question of Wittgenstein's importance for literary studies here strives to overcome the disciplinary divides between philosophy and literature that often inhibit our grasp of this relationship and thus our understanding of the various ways in which Wittgenstein's philosophy is part of a larger intellectual and cultural movement.

In this book, I explore the relationship between Wittgenstein and modernist literature by focusing attentively on a set of intersecting and mutually illuminating formal, linguistic, ethical, and spiritual or existential concerns that Wittgenstein's philosophy shares with the modernist monuments of his literary contemporaries and the works of their late-century heirs. These concerns coalesce around the three salient modes of engagement I designated above—difficulty, ethical teaching, and transformative yearning. Attending closely to these three core commitments affords us new ways of understanding the reciprocal relevance of Wittgenstein's early philosophy and twentieth-century literature. I work to make these new ways of understanding available in this book through critical readings focused primarily on a set of key texts and fragments of literary high modernism and its afterlife—Franz Kafka's parable "Von den Gleichnissen" ("On Parables"), Virginia Woolf's *To the*

Lighthouse, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and J. M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus*—each examined within the interpretive framework of a study of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

My reading of the *Tractatus* in this book is itself informed by the expanding so-called resolute program of Wittgenstein interpretation elaborated by philosophers James Conant and Cora Diamond, who remain its leading proponents.[6] My aim is to make a literary-critical contribution to this interpretive program, one that sheds light on the relationship between Wittgenstein's philosophy and modernist literature by attending closely to Wittgenstein's own (decidedly modernist) commitments to difficulty, teaching, and transformation. These early commitments of Wittgenstein's are largely obscured in more traditional literary-critical and intellectual-historical treatments of his thinking, and thus too often ignored in comparative literary-critical studies of Wittgenstein based on these conventional accounts of his philosophy.

Finding new uses for Wittgenstein's thought in literary studies is this book's point of departure and the main focus of each of its five chapters. *A Different Order of Difficulty* examines the *Tractatus* along resolute lines in a series of sustained critical readings, each dedicated to a different writer, and all attentive to the points of philosophical and aesthetic kinship with each other and with Wittgenstein.[7] One of my central claims here is that understanding Wittgenstein's philosophical project in this way enables us to see how his philosophy, and recent scholarly work in ordinary language philosophy and ethics conducted in a Wittgensteinian spirit, has an unprecedented power to awaken literary critics and philosophers alike to the ways in which the literature and philosophy of the twentieth century and beyond are enlivened by the shared interrelated commitments at the center of this study.

Conventional interpretations of the *Tractatus*, or what Conant and Diamond refer to as "standard sorts of readings," broadly sketched, regard Wittgenstein's early book as one concerned with setting forth a series of substantive philosophical doctrines, each contributing to a metaphysical account of the relation between the form of language and the form of the world.[8] Such interpretations characteristically take at face value the constitutive propositions of the philosophical theory they suppose Wittgenstein to be advancing in the work. But readers who take the aphoristic propositions of the *Tractatus* at face value must confront a problem, namely that to do so is to fly in the face of Wittgenstein's abrupt assertion at the book's conclusion that these same sentences are in fact *einfach Unsinn*, simply nonsense.

Proponents of standard readings customarily try to handle this problem by claiming that readers of the book need not take its author's bizarre late-breaking declaration entirely literally. By pronouncing the sentences of the *Tractatus* nonsensical, they argue, Wittgenstein doesn't really mean that they are only truly meaningless strings of gibberish. Rather, they claim, these sentences are nonsensical only in a technical sense, or that they embody a more elevated sort of nonsense, able to convey to readers significant insights that will help them to grasp important aspects of the relationship between language and world that, in their view, Wittgenstein is keen to theorize in the *Tractatus*.

Resolute interpreters, on the other hand, reject this portrayal of Wittgenstein's project in the *Tractatus*. The text that standard readers endorse as a work of metaphysical doctrine resolute readers depict instead as a complex work composed in the service of its author's unswerving antitheoretical, antimetaphysical enterprise and dedication to disabusing readers of what he saw as their misdirected attraction to the kind of metaphysical thinking he enacts on the surface of the text. Firm in their convictions that Wittgenstein's shocking claim about his propositions' nonsensicality should be taken literally, resolute readers rebuff standard attempts to solve the difficulty of Wittgenstein's self-refuting announcement by inventing an illuminating, meaning-conveying sort of nonsense. They denounce the impulse to take such a logically specious step as indicative of a fundamental misunderstanding of the development of Wittgenstein's philosophical method and instructive aims.

My claim is that if we read the *Tractatus* resolutely, and against the background of the literature I examine here, Wittgenstein's early text emerges in singularly stark relief as a complex ethical-aesthetic puzzle of a distinctly modernist stripe. The book purports in name to be a logical-philosophical treatise—or so the title would seem to suggest. But as suitable as such a translation might seem, for Wittgenstein, it isn't an apt one at all. In the various exchanges that led to his settling on the current title, he ultimately rejected Russell's more modest alternative, "Philosophical Logic," in favor of the now familiar Latin title suggested by G. E. Moore, with its echo of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. "For although 'Tractatus logico-philosophicus' isn't *ideal*," he wrote to the book's first translator, C. K. Ogden (who worried that title would hardly reassure readers of the book's accessibility), "still it has something like the right meaning, whereas 'Philosophic logic' is wrong. In fact I don't know what it means! There is no such thing as philosophic logic. (Unless one says that as the whole book is nonsense the title might as well be nonsense too.)"[9]

Wittgenstein's comments to Ogden rule out our describing the *Tractatus* as a treatise on philosophical logic. They also speak to his understanding of his book as nonsensical, something he affirms officially in the second-to-last of its austere numbered entries. There he tells us that all the propositions that make up the book's content are simply nonsense. Understanding *him*, he says, means recognizing this. The *Tractatus* turns out not to be a straightforward theoretical tract after all, but a pseudodoctrine meant to be cast aside once it has served what its author claims is its "elucidatory" purpose: getting its readers to "see the world in the right way."[10]

What's more, Wittgenstein maintained that his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was really a book about *ethics*. To complicate things further, he insisted that although the *aim* of the *Tractatus* is an ethical one, the ethical "part" of the book—the only part he says truly matters—is the part that appears nowhere among its spare aphorisms but is instead something its author chose to remain silent about. Over the course of the book, Wittgenstein explicitly takes up "the mystical," value, and transcendence. He engages in brief first-person confessional disclosure; makes oracular-sounding pronouncements; describes sudden epiphanic insight; and addresses the "riddle of life" before culminating in the religious figure of a ladder in a gesture toward closure that remains as open-ended and mysterious as it is revelatory (TLP 6.4312, 6.52, 6.521).

Wittgenstein's own concession that the *Tractatus* would appear "strange," then, hardly comes as a surprise.[11] What *is* surprising is the idiosyncratic authorial method he uses in the book, the combination of various modes of difficulty he deploys in it, and the disjuncture between the dense project he *appears* to be engaged in—developing a metaphysical theory about how language relates to the world—and what he posits as the book's overall ethical aim: to lead readers toward an enlightened kind of self-understanding gained through an improved relationship to language and life.

The *Tractatus* works toward realizing that ethical aim first by challenging readers to recognize that the consciously wrought faux argument Wittgenstein presents in the body of the text amounts to nothing more than the nonsense he says it is. Recognizing this, in turn, means coming to see that trying to make sense of the philosophical "theory" he has constructed (with an eye to seducing readers into grappling with the particular kind of cognitive and intellectual difficulty it poses on the surface) offers only the *illusion* of philosophical practice as he conceives it. As readers, we must learn to turn our attention away from the task of trying to understand the *Tractatus*'s nonsensical propositions (there is, ipso

facto, no making sense of them) and focus instead on the question of how elaborating these propositions in the way he does serves the deeper and further-reaching philosophical and ethical aims of their wily author, utterer of nonsense and figurative language that he is. It is by responding to Wittgenstein's tacit call for readers to redirect our attention in this way that we can begin to discover on our own something he does not spell out for us straightforwardly in the body of the text: that his tactical move of setting up a mock doctrine with the nonsensical propositions of his "book of ethics" functions as a part of the instructive strategy he uses to prompt readers to shrug off the allure of metaphysics and engage instead in the clarificatory activity of the mind and spirit that he sees as the authentic task of philosophy.

As Wittgenstein sees it, participation in this philosophical activity entails a deep kind of work on the self, work toward overcoming one's linguistic and personal confusions through a transformative process of making the radical shift in ethical perspective one must make in order to regard philosophy, language, and the world with the sort of clarity he prompts his readers to strive for. The philosophical and poetic power of Wittgenstein's peculiar brand of ethical teaching in his strange hermetic book thus depends on his tactical use of difficulty, and on his conception of the extended way it stands to work on committed readers by leading us to face up to the rather different order of difficulty at issue in the text as a whole.

Therapy, Tactic, and Transfiguration

By reading Wittgenstein's book in this way, and in the context of a study of the literature of his time with attention to the interaction between these strategic and aspirational aspects of Wittgenstein's ethical pedagogy, I bring to the fore in this book the salient philosophical and aesthetic affinities between Wittgenstein and the modernist literature of the (long) twentieth century. Paying attention to each of the distinguishing features of Wittgenstein's method in the *Tractatus* allows us to regard Wittgenstein's esoteric book as a complex modernist puzzle as revolutionary in its experimental form, transformative ambitions, and dedication to everyday language's myriad possibilities as many of the "big" (and small) works we have come to see as exemplary of the twentieth-century literary canon.

A Different Order of Difficulty first examines Wittgenstein's thought with an eye to the philosopher's own formative literary sensibilities and distinctive, formally inventive writing style, and with a consider-

ation of how his deployment of the tactical pedagogical devices he uses in the *Tractatus* serves as a catalyst for the dialectical strategy (of a Kierkegaardian stripe) on which the method of his book turns, if understood resolutely.[12] In the chapters that follow, I examine the impact of each of these aesthetic concerns on Wittgenstein's philosophical thinking and on the development of the unusual mode of ethical instruction he adopts in his early work. I highlight the distinction between the alleged treatise and its author's conception of the book's overall ethical aim and transfigurative aspirations, accounting for the very different nature of the specific exertions required by each of these facets of the text. By paying attention to both, and to the complicated relationship between them, I work to bring to light features of the *Tractatus* that help us to recognize compelling connections between Wittgenstein's creative exploitation of the different orders of difficulty in that perplexing philosophical project, and his modernist literary contemporaries' own notorious experimentation with difficulties of various hues.

Reading a set of perplexing texts of literary modernism and its afterlife alongside Wittgenstein's early work compels us to return to an examination of modernism's trademark difficulty with attention to the nuanced complexity of that enticing, absorbing, and often formidably exigent standout feature of twentieth-century literature. The comparative investigation of Wittgenstein's philosophy and modernist and neomodernist literature that I undertake here shows how the various texts I examine effectively thrust modernism's multivalent difficulty on us as a point of inquiry. The *Tractatus*, after all, is a difficult text. It looks difficult in the way we might imagine a logical-philosophical treatise should look. But the trick is that the real challenge of the book lies in the personally transformative work it demands of readers, work that begins only after we have figured out, with the help of Wittgenstein's carefully orchestrated authorial tactics, that the logical theory we first thought made the book hard going was really not its true difficulty at all. The work of self-transformation that the *Tractatus* demands of its readers poses a deeper and more indefinite sort of difficulty, and with far higher ethical stakes, than the more (apparently) straightforward intellectual challenge posed by his (apparent) logico-philosophical treatise.

In the excerpt from *Ulysses* that inspires the title of this book, Joyce's fictional hero, Leopold Bloom, draws an implicit distinction between the two broad classes of difficulty exemplified in these alternate aspects of the *Tractatus*. Within the first category fall the largely resolvable, contingent problems of scientific fact, which test our discernment at a cognitive or intellectual level. At issue in the second are the significant moral,

spiritual, and existential preoccupations whose quality of difficulty exceeds the intellectual challenges and calls for erudition associated with the first. In the passage, Bloom pointedly links concerns of this second type to a contemplation of the possibilities of "social and moral redemption," to the labor of coping with the nagging, unanswerable questions of meaning and being, and to a sustaining devotion to quests for solutions to such riddles of life that perseveres even in the recognition of their representative insolubility. The commitment to the thoughtful activity of questing that Joyce exemplifies in the meandering character of Bloom himself is one that remains steadfast in the face of a prevailing modern worry, even conviction, that such pursuits are but otiose exercises, the toil they require but a vanity of vanities. The conundrums that arise in the second category that Bloom delineates in the novel, he thinks, pose problems "of a different order of difficulty" (U, 699).

This different order of difficulty operates at the center of each of the texts I examine in this book. My claim here is that the project of bringing to literary studies the understanding of Wittgenstein made available by resolute readings, while simultaneously exploring the resonance of Wittgenstein's ideas and writing style with twentieth-century letters, puts us in a position to see how the *Tractatus* functions as a formally innovative aesthetic medium for its author's communication of his unorthodox brand of ethical teaching. Wittgenstein's idiosyncratic pedagogical approach involves conscripting readers into a course of indirect interpretive training designed to prime us to respond more fully to the demands of the "different order of difficulty" at stake in his book, a genre of difficulty that is also a central fixation of a body of twentieth-century literature rooted in high modernist modes of technical and philosophical experimentalism.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein doesn't move to resolve his readers' problems by giving us direct answers to our philosophical or moral questions. He imparts no definitive, decipherable lesson or message. He lays out no designated path toward the redemptive enlightenment coincident with "seeing the world in the right way," nor does he give us a specific picture of what things will look like from such a perspective. Wittgenstein offers no explanations of how to read his book, nor does he supply readers with a systematic theoretical program to follow in the quest for clarity he seeks to put in motion with it. What he does instead is to call on attentive readers to put our own moral imagination to the task of figuring out how to respond to the text's initial provocation by setting ourselves to the work of trying to rise to its strenuous demand that we go on to transform our ways of seeing, living, and using language. It is by

taking up this personal work at the book's prompting that readers come to engage with the ethical dimension Wittgenstein ascribes to it. We are to recognize, in the course of our efforts to grapple with the book's compressed nonsensical sentences, the need to throw them away when they have served their salutary purpose of prodding us toward the activity of achieving the kind of ethical clarity that will help us in our struggles with linguistic confusion, life's most perplexing questions, the search for elusive answers, and the longing for transformative understanding.

Wittgenstein's early pedagogical method depends on his use of a deliberate authorial strategy. He artfully deploys a provocative, tactical kind of difficulty at a formal level, demanding that readers first confront that difficulty if we are ultimately to rise to the occasion of the different order of difficulty at issue in the text. This significant difficulty resides in the challenge Wittgenstein levels at his readers to undertake the hard work of effecting a radical change in the attitude or spirit with which we look on the world, use language, and live our everyday lives. Soliciting readers' engagement in this difficult, transformative work with the aim of getting us to "see the world in the right way" is his ultimate ethical aim in his book. The *Tractatus* is thus a text whose instructive force lies in the formidable exegetical gauntlet it throws down for readers with the aim of engaging us in the therapeutic activity of clarification Wittgenstein saw as the true work of philosophy.

Reading the *Tractatus* this way, I argue here, not only changes our perception of the therapeutic method Wittgenstein uses even in this early formulation of an ongoing philosophical project; it opens up a new dimension for studies in Wittgenstein and literature. Taking this approach to Wittgenstein also helps to reshape our conception of the decisive creative forces that propelled the cultural spirit of his particular time and milieu, the same zeitgeist that animated the high-modernist literary texts it engendered. Reading the *Tractatus* along these lines provides compelling new understandings of its author, who famously remarked that "philosophy ought to be written as one would *write a poem*," by emphasizing the importance of the literary to his early formulation of a lifelong philosophical project and fostering a renewed appreciation of Wittgenstein as a decidedly modernist writer (CV, 24). Looking at Wittgenstein's first work from this perspective also helps us to recognize in the *Tractatus* a very different set of distinguishing features than the ones that become apparent when the book is scrutinized according to a more traditional construal of that spare text as a work of theory, untouched by authorial guile. By the lights of antimetaphysical readings of the *Tractatus*, a set of unanticipated (and underexamined) traits emerge to attest

to the thematic, formal, and tactical complexity of Wittgenstein's first work, guaranteeing its high-modernist bona fides.

Readers are first struck in this regard not only by Wittgenstein's treatment in the book of the problems of language and meaning that gripped the minds of so many early twentieth-century thinkers and writers, but also by the unusual experimental form in which he composes his puzzling book of ethics. Further experience of the text alerts us to an evident, though unaccustomed, brand of authorial cunning. Indeed, the task of finding our way to a better understanding of how the book works, and how it is meant to work on us, begins with a recognition of a principal tactical component of Wittgenstein's instructive method—the stunning disjuncture he strategically posits between the (nonsensical) logical-philosophical content he lays out explicitly for readers in the body of the text, and the transformative ethical ambition he envisions for the work as a whole.

Wittgenstein's way of communicating this ambition to his readers turns on his use of the Socratic-Kierkegaardian brand of irony that fuels his final self-destructive gesture vis-à-vis his own nonsensical propositions. These propositions serve as a kind of structural facade for the quest for clarity and authenticity he urges readers to take up on their own at his book's oblique behest. The solemnity with which Wittgenstein conveys his maieutical aspirations acts as an equipoise to the purposive authorial irony he employs as a catalyst to his reader's engagement with the text and the work toward radical change it solicits.

Further, Wittgenstein's concerted efforts simultaneously to employ and break with past conventions of philosophical thinking and writing, along with his manner of questioning the limitations of traditional genres of philosophical composition, show his work to be consistent with two of the basic features of modernism that Cavell points to in his discussion of the *Philosophical Investigations* as a modernist work.[13] The combined presence of these textual attributes, among others established consistently in dedicated studies of literary modernism, strengthens the case for regarding the *Tractatus* as a high-modernist work in its own right. Conversely, reading Wittgenstein resolutely also offers us new ways of understanding literary modernism and its legacy in contemporary fiction, for it calls on us to reexamine the mutually enlightening ways in which both twentieth-century literature and philosophy are enlivened by modernism's trademark affinity for textual difficulty, as well as by a less explored set of interrelated aspects I see as equally definitive: a fixation on existential questions and quests for significance; an attraction to varieties of spiritual and transcendent experience; and a yearning for profound transfigurative change.

Cavell was among the first to regard Wittgenstein as a modernist philosopher, focusing on the *Investigations*, rather than the *Tractatus*. If modernism is characterized by the stress put on the interpenetration of form and content, he argues, then the *Investigations*, whose form is internal to its instruction, should be considered a modernist work. The modernist text Cavell sees in the *Investigations* is a humanist one, generally forthright in its inquiry, dialogic and therapeutic in its communication, catholic in its ethos, its questions grounded in an everyday marked by a return to a post-Romantic investment in nature that informs his investigations of the complicated relations between grammar and the world, natural history, and forms of life.

The *Tractatus*, meanwhile, is a trickier text. It is an artfully orchestrated puzzle, one available only to readers attentive to its author's use of Socratic-Kierkegaardian irony. It is also a darker text, more informed by an acute cultural pessimism representative of what Charles Taylor points to as a resolutely Augustinian "world is fallen" movement characteristic of the avant-garde works of the early twentieth century.[14] Language itself comes into focus for the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* as an object of inquiry because (to allude to Heidegger's 1927 *Being and Time*) the world and nature have nothing to offer. The world has no value. Human nature is not the source of anything particularly good. Logic must take care of itself (TLP 5.473). The *Tractatus* is thus a text that holds to the fallenness and the mystery of the world. The transformative teaching Wittgenstein offers in the book announces itself in the quiet bombast of its magisterial prophetic tone. Wittgenstein's complex textual puzzle is one that works strategically to perplex readers in order ultimately to deliver us from the thrall of metaphysical confusion and nonsense (while simultaneously nurturing our experience of wonder and bewilderment in the face of mystery and upholding the significance of our nonsensical attempts to give expression to that experience). Evident in the *Tractatus* is Wittgenstein's Nietzschean investment in redemptive creative inspiration, and a dedication to careful aesthetic craft—put to the service of the book's ethical aim. In it, Wittgenstein also faces the pessimism of his age with a measure of hope that shows forth in his solemn commitment to the promise of its ultimate goal. In consideration of these combined defining aspects, I argue, the *Tractatus* is in general closer in its ethos to the works of Kafka, Woolf, and Coetzee than the *Investigations* is.

Wittgenstein shares with his literary modernist contemporaries a fixation on the problems of language that merges with a commitment to unconventional methods of ethical instruction and an enticement to the work of self-improvement. This commitment is rooted in a modernist

investment in a striving for a secular-spiritual kind of transformation. The preoccupation with transfigurative change that becomes such a pressing concern of aesthetic modernism shows forth in a number of ways in the works I examine here. Common to each is the close attention they pay to the power of human longing for creative moral, spiritual, and existential enlightenment. Each of these diverse texts offers its own unique treatment of the dual sense of bewilderment and possibility that drives their respective internal characters' or targeted readers' varied modes of engagement in quests for the kind of clarity and authenticity that can be achieved only through a radical shift in worldview. The change in ethically imaginative ways of seeing and being that is the goal of the quests these writers explore promises to bring a new quality and depth to our understanding of human experience, our existence as selves among others, and our attitude toward ordinary language and life.

As I have noted above, Wittgenstein saw philosophy not as a body of theory, but as an activity, one whose aim is to clarify. The work of clarification that he takes to be philosophy's main concern contrasts markedly with scientific pursuits of certainty that involve making new discoveries. For Wittgenstein, the aim of philosophy is not to *discover* anything at all. Its task instead is to get us to see clearly the world we already inhabit, the language we already master, and to reveal to us who we are and the possible shape of our continued authentic development. While the natural sciences are underwritten by a dedication to providing explanations of the physical world, the work of philosophy as Wittgenstein understands it doesn't consist in seeking out explanations or in mounting theories. The clarity that Wittgenstein asks us to strive for, and which is a driving concern for his literary contemporaries and their successors, is clarity that is shaped by its complex relationship with opacity and open-ended questions.

Each of the authors I examine here treats clarity not as something that comes to us completely, all at once as in a moment of conversion, but as something achievable only through an ongoing process of working through the confusions and difficulties of language and life. As these writers construe it, the improved understanding that clarity brings is something we stand to gain through the experience of reading challenging texts like theirs, deliberately written to be as opaque as life can sometimes be. And yet the clarity they are after is not a clarity that, once attained, will succeed in doing away with all forms of obscurity. Rather, it brings with it the recognition that some aspects of life—those that give rise to our most persistent existential questions—will remain as mysterious and unresolved as the questions themselves.

In their different explorations of the labor of working through confusion and obscurity in search of such clarity, the texts I deal with in this book are also willfully invested in effecting a kind of parallel shift in the outlook of their most dedicated and perceptive readers. By way of their internal portrayals of a yearning for improved clarity of vision, then, they also seek to perform the accompanying task of refining our interpretive capabilities to help us to become more attentive and perspicuous thinkers and readers.

Yearning for clarity and personally transformative change runs through each of my central texts. Whether (and how) we, as readers with our own parallel senses of longing, are able fully to respond to the communicative gestures of these texts in a way that truly allows them actively to hone our capacities to read well and live well (in order, that is, to bring their ethical aims to fruition in our own lives and the other lives we touch), however, is not something they can ensure in and of themselves. Written into each of these texts is the idea that reading them with the kind of moral attention that can make us "finely aware and richly responsible," in Nussbaum's words—attention that will help us to recognize what the work they want us to do might entail, and imagine what that work will look like on the landscape of our individual lives—is something that each of us must do for ourselves.[15]

The Tractatus*, Common Experience, and Moral Perfectionism*

Wittgenstein's own understanding of the transformative ethical aim in the *Tractatus* merits some further consideration here.[16] In that book, Wittgenstein seeks to engage readers in a philosophical activity of clarification that is centrally focused on an ongoing work on the self (and one's attitude toward language and life). Just above, I described this activity as "the work of self-improvement," to which Wittgenstein was dedicated, along with a number of other modernist writers. To be sure, such a description might well suggest that Wittgenstein's approach to this kind of work bears (unfortunate) similarities to current neoliberal ideas about the ethics of entrepreneurial self, or to commercialized notions of "self-actualization" and "self-care." That Wittgenstein's moral perfectionism in the *Tractatus* does not serve such consumerist ends, however, should already be rather obvious (Beth Blum's persuasive recent accounts of the relationship between modernism's fixation on self-improvement and the concomitant rise of the popular self-help narrative and success manual notwithstanding).[17]

Less obvious, perhaps, is the fact that for Wittgenstein, work on the self is not the work of self-absorption. First, Wittgenstein's chosen method of ethical teaching, therapeutic even in his early text, demonstrates that his conception of the work on the self that goes hand in hand with achieving the transformation toward which his book tends is not an exclusively individual concern. Wittgenstein's instructive effort to guide readers in making a change in outlook that will bring clarity to our lives and use of language demands the concerted ethical work of striving to understand the linguistic and personal struggles of *others*. And, to make a point to which I will return in subsequent chapters, the work of understanding another person entails a Cavellian form of acknowledgment and a responsiveness to her particular confusions. This, in turn, depends on what Diamond describes as the activity of imaginatively "entering in" to the other person's way of seeing things.[18] Wittgenstein's way of acknowledging his readers and treating their attraction to nonsense with understanding is to enter imaginatively into their illusion and then respond to it by adopting his own kind of self-aware nonsense and then communicating it back to them. In order to understand the *Tractatus*, then, readers must responsively try to understand its author, as he says at proposition 6.45, by entering imaginatively into his own (purposefully employed) nonsensical expression. Despite its alienating esotericism, then, the *Tractatus* does foster in its community of readers a form of communicative exchange and desire to work toward mutual understanding.

Whether the work on the self that the *Tractatus* demands will have the valuable consequence of generating a wider common experience of clarity and the well-lived life is another story. To begin with, as I said just above, the *Tractatus* is a deliberately arcane work. As such, if it solicits the understanding of its readers (as it quite explicitly does), it also manages to push some away and to isolate others. And in the way that difficult parables do, the *Tractatus* makes its most robust, overt, and arguably even elitist appeal to the "one person" who will read it with understanding. The common experience of the *Tractatus*, considered at the most mundane, workaday level, is the contingent common experience created by its arduous interpretive demands. And given its difficulty, if the book has been the occasion of a gathering together of a community of ambitious (or exhausted) scholars, it has surely sequestered and defeated far more.

I would argue that Wittgenstein shares Cavell's basic commitment to seeing the work of self-transformation and self-realization as a pursuit that is not intrinsically individualist or elitist. That said, and as I show in chapters 2 and 5, the deliberately puzzling, sometimes alienating, para-

bolic mode of instruction Wittgenstein uses in the *Tractatus* nonetheless prompts us, by its very form and method, to question whether this early text really functions to elicit transformative engagement from *all* readers, or whether a sort of elitism subsists at its core.

To speak on a more serious level to the question whether the work on the self with which the *Tractatus* is concerned can have an extended effect on common experience, I would first say this: The *Tractatus* is not only an arcane book, it is also an idiosyncratic one. And the work on the self (of "seeing the world in the right way") that Wittgenstein leaves his community of readers to continue beyond the final pages of his book will undoubtedly take equally idiosyncratic shapes, to equally idiosyncratic effects. One consequence of Wittgenstein's abiding distrust of theory and eschewal of explanations and easy answers is that the *Tractatus* does not give us a rigidly ordered body of rules, nor a template to which our work on the self must conform. It offers us no set of directives we must follow to the letter. Nor does it give us a recipe for how to "see the world in the right way." He doesn't even tell us what the right way to see the world *is*. He tells us only that if we work to understand *him* (and what he is trying to get us to recognize with the help of his strange book), we will. What Wittgenstein gives us in the *Tractatus*, as he says, is a method. The ongoing ethically imaginative work of figuring out what seeing the world in the right way might possibly come to, might eventually be, is something he leaves up to us.

Seeing the work on the self that Wittgenstein demands in the *Tractatus* in this way, it becomes easier to understand how the transformative activity at stake in the book is unlikely to rouse legions to cohere in a common experience of (working together toward achieving) ethical transfiguration. Wittgenstein's philosophy is certainly revolutionary; but the radically new ways of thinking he puts forward in his work do not foment communal revolution conceived along familiar lines. The work of self-transformation so central to Wittgenstein's first book is neither automatically nor easily enacted on a grand scale.[19]

It's not that Wittgenstein doesn't feel the attraction of such a communal outlook. Important aspects of his thinking about the transformative ethical work at the heart of the *Tractatus*, after all, evolved under the influence of figures like Tolstoy, whose own transformative quest for the meaning of life and the best way to live it led him finally to find, in his embrace of Christianity, acetic morality, and the Russian peasant community, the attitude of ethical clarity that resolved his questions and granted him peace. There is nothing in Wittgenstein's early thinking that would rule out, a priori, then, the possibility that leading his readers to

make a radical change in outlook might have extended effects on their wider social community. Wittgenstein's project in the *Investigations* lends itself more readily to a more grounded, democratic goal of achieving social justice. But that effect is not his primary aim in the *Tractatus*.

In many ways, Wittgenstein's ethical work of "self-improvement" is best understood as exemplifying a method engaged with a dimension of moral life and thought (rather than any competing ethical theory) that Cavell calls "moral perfectionism." Cavell describes perfectionism's concerns variously across his writing, and especially in his most comprehensive treatment of the issue in his 1988 Carus Lectures. Cavell's own brand of moral perfectionism (informed by the later Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Emerson, Thoreau, and others) entails facing with courage the struggle to "come to see [oneself] and hence the possibilities of [our] world, in a transformed light," to work toward "self-knowledge," "becoming intelligible to oneself," "being true to oneself," "being lost to oneself," and "finding one's way" in the course of becoming the person one is. His moral perfectionism is concerned with the enduring reverberations of the fundamental Socratic question of how one should live, and with "what used to be called the state of one's soul, a dimension that places tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility or necessity of transforming oneself and of one's society." For Cavell, as for Wittgenstein, there is no reaching a perfect state of the soul, only endless steps toward reaching what Emerson calls an "unattained but attainable self."[20] Wittgenstein's moral perfectionism in the *Tractatus*, like Cavell's, works toward achieving self-understanding and the realization of inherent potential of the self through education and transformative work whose aim is not the perfected state of the self, but the journey toward a more authentic self.

Moral Perfectionism and Unbearable Conflict

On the subject of Wittgenstein's own engagement with the continuing need for change and readjustment in the ongoing ethical work of striving for authenticity, it is worth pausing briefly to consider the shift in method and conception of the workings of ordinary language that marks the evolution of his thinking from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, something I will return to in chapter 4.

In pursuit of improved clarity and authenticity in his own thinking and writing as his philosophical work developed, Wittgenstein continued to struggle to be "true to himself" by working to overcome the grip of his own attraction to (and self-imposition of) illusory metaphysical

ideals, and to fine-tune his views about how philosophy works to clear up our confusions about language and the myriad ways in which it enables us to express our experience of life in the world.

He completed his ambitious *Tractatus* with the conviction that it was, as Diamond describes it, a work "marvelously . . . fully achieved."[21] For in it he had reached, or so he thought at the time, a satisfactory resolution of the philosophical problems he was confronting. And yet the criticism of his early thought that he offers in the metaphilosophical passages of the *Investigations* (PI §§ 89–133) shows that he had gradually come to see his first work as deeply flawed, marked by what he called an "unbearable conflict" at its core (PI § 107).[22] Wittgenstein was to remain throughout his lifetime committed to his early conception of philosophy as an activity of elucidation, rather than as a theoretical tool for making new discoveries. But the remarks Wittgenstein makes in those sections of the *Investigations* speak to his recognition over time that his most entrenched view in the *Tractatus*—that there is an essential logical order that lies hidden beneath the surface of the varied expressions of our actual ordinary language—had been for him something akin to what Heinrich Hertz describes in his *Principles of Mechanics* (a book that he first read as a teenager and that would continue to influence him throughout his career) as a "confused wish" that gives rise to confused questions and what Hertz calls "painful contradictions."[23] Diamond figures Wittgenstein's confused wish in terms of its development into a "*shaping timeless principle*, a kind of injunction for his thinking . . . *unopposed* and indeed, in his thought, *unopposable*."[24] But the notion that there is a crystalline ideal order to language that we can *discover* with the help of philosophical analysis is an idea that is fatally at odds with the contrast Wittgenstein insisted on between the activities of philosophy and science, and his commitment to the idea that the practice of philosophy entails work of clarification of our existing language and life, rather than that of imposing requirements, summing up, or uncovering.

If we follow Diamond's recent suggestions about Wittgenstein's own dawning sense of the intolerable contradiction at the heart of the *Tractatus*, the result of what she describes as "his own imposition of a kind of myth on his thinking," we see that the moral perfectionism at issue in his early work is something that also extends to its author's own process of "coming to self-conscious awareness of the unconscious structuring of [his] life" in a way that accounts for the radical changes he made in his therapeutic philosophical method over time.[25]

Wittgenstein's self-conscious realization that a "*false necessity* . . . had shaped his thought" was an ethically transformative one, in a Tractarian

sense.[26] It offers us a single concrete philosophical example of the kind of step the *Tractatus* suggests a person can take in order to revise his way of thinking in his ongoing quest to see things "in the right way" in Wittgenstein's sense. For he recognized that in his philosophical thinking at the time he wrote the *Tractatus*, he had been—in the language of the *Investigations*—bewitched, held captive by a picture of his own making (PI §115). To appeal to one of the phrases Cavell uses to describe moral perfectionism as he understands it, Wittgenstein came eventually to see that he had been, in a way, "lost to himself," needing to find a new approach in his pursuit of greater authenticity. Finally, in the psychoanalytic terms Jonathan Lear uses to describe a case that provides Diamond with an illuminating comparison, Wittgenstein recognized a need to work through and resist his own attractions to dogmatism and to reshape his life going forward in an effort to bring about a radical psychic change that would yield a clearer understanding of language and world that would translate into his philosophical work.[27] In the ongoing development of his thinking, as Diamond describes it, Wittgenstein strives consciously to "*own* [his] past philosophy in a new way."[28] Indeed, attending consistently to the voices of temptation that he works to overcome and that harken back to his earlier ways of thinking is part of the characteristic form of his later philosophy.[29]

Secular, Spiritual, Surface, and Depth

The overarching attraction to spiritual or transcendent experience in the work of the authors I examine in the following chapters makes it clear that even in the literature or philosophy of each of these avowedly agnostic or atheistic writers, secular modernity does not correlate to wholesale Weberian disenchantment.[30] The philosophical and literary projects of this book's central authors are all, to cite Joyce's portmanteau, "theologicophilolological" (U, 205). Their respective works feature a distinctive combination of the theological with the philosophical and the logical in their treatment of the struggles associated with a human striving to inhabit the space between the extremes of a concrete everyday on the one hand and a yearning for transcendence on the other.

Against the background of Wittgenstein's engagement with difficulty and complex ethical pedagogy in the *Tractatus*, I explore in the first chapters of this book writing by Kafka, Woolf, and Joyce, three chief figures of the high-modernist canon. In the final chapter, I turn to recent fiction by Coetzee, a living author writing in current dialogue both with Wittgenstein and with his modernist literary precursors. Thus, although

A Different Order of Difficulty is focused primarily on recasting the significance of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* for studies in literary modernism (and vice versa), and thus on expanding the New Modernist canon horizontally from within by means of the comparatist interdisciplinarity of this study, its reach nonetheless extends beyond those parameters in two ways.[31]

First of all, I conduct my discussion of Wittgenstein's deployment of difficulty and commitment to an ethically instructive aim in the *Tractatus* with an eye to the continuity of these concerns in his later writing, despite the shift in philosophical and pedagogical method that distinguishes his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* from his early work. Second, by addressing Coetzee's work in the concluding chapter, my study moves beyond the temporal limits of literary modernism, traditionally construed, to touch on important ways in which Wittgenstein's thinking also sheds light on works of transnational contemporary fiction that represent what David James has called "modernist futures" because of their continued efforts to grapple stylistically, intertextually, and philosophically with the crises of language, identity, and faith so characteristic of the realistic spirit of the novels of thinking of the long twentieth century.[32]

A Different Order of Difficulty also departs substantially from two dominant trends in modernist studies today, namely (1) cultural studies and (2) the demand for formalism that underpins readings of modernist texts from New Criticism through deconstruction and other forms of poststructuralism. With his strident antitheoretical position and commitment to *looking* and *seeing*, Wittgenstein, is quite organically "postcritical," in the sense articulated by Rita Felski and others in recent influential work.[33] My own examination of twentieth-century literature in terms of Wittgenstein's focus on everyday language and life, and on the therapeutic and transformative ethical instruction that characterizes his philosophy, is thus framed by the ideas of a foundational figure of a tradition of ordinary language philosophy that naturally circumvents the logic of demystifying critique. In that regard, *A Different Order of Difficulty* implicitly coincides with an emerging body of scholarship dedicated to finding and developing compelling alternatives to modes of critique driven by a prevailing poststructural commitment to the hermeneutics of suspicion.[34]

I should add, however, that the ideas of the same framing figure I have just cast as a kind of postcritical philosopher *avant la lettre* also inform my departure in this book from certain postcritical approaches—those that advocate "surface reading," and others whose efforts to

render the valuable service of freeing literary studies from the prolonged dominance of suspicious or symptomatic reading entail a suppression, if you will, of the critical impulse to attend to a text's depth, as well as its surface (not to mention the vital interaction between them that is so crucial to puzzle texts like the *Tractatus*).[35] The past decade or so has seen the long-overdue flourishing of postcritical thinking that has evolved since the 1960s in a series of attempts by literary critics to cure critique of the obsession, nurtured under the sway of suspicious hermeneutics, with plumbing the depths of the textual unconscious to expose the hidden, deep-seated agendas lurking there. But such curative challenges to the limits of critique prove misdirected and overzealous as long the remedy they prescribe derives solely from an overly reductive, critically limiting conception of what depth can *be* (i.e., other than a mere site for hermeneutic excavation and unveiling), or how its underlying presence in a text can *function* (i.e., by contributing complexity and significance to the experience of reading, rather than just raising our interpretive hackles and soliciting our participation in an enterprise of shrewd interrogation). Postcritical approaches that call, in one way or another, for relegating to the critical scrapheap *all* types of textual depth and *all* modes of interpretive engagement, it seems to me, risk throwing the baby out with the proverbial bathwater.[36]

Wittgenstein would later reject the idea he shared with Russell in his early philosophy—that the underlying realities of language are not visible on the surface, and that it is up to us to plumb the depths of what lies beneath actual language to get to its hidden logical essence. But as he makes clear in the 1946 remark that serves as the third of the three epigraphs with which this book begins, he is a philosopher given to expressing his ideas about the difficulty of life, philosophy, and the search for new ways of thinking and seeing in terms of both surface and depth. Wittgenstein of course famously remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* that "everything is open to view," and that "what is hidden . . . is of no interest to us" (PI §126). Toril Moi makes Wittgenstein's claim that "nothing is hidden" a ready motto for her own postcritical work of bringing ordinary language philosophy to bear on literary studies. But for the purposes of my own project of bringing Wittgenstein to the study of twentieth-century literature here, it is also important to note that in his philosophical thinking and teaching, he was equally invested in significant kinds of depth (and its textual uses).[37]

I would argue further here that Wittgenstein's conception of the *Tractatus*, and of how it functions at the different levels of instruction he puts into play within it, does not stand in the sort of truly stark conflict

with his later claim about everything being open to view that would suggest that we should neglect his consistent attentiveness to depth in favor of his commitment to openness and clarity. Wittgenstein composed the *Tractatus* to lead readers to clarity through obscurity, and his teaching in it depends on both. He saw the ethical aim of his early book not so much as *hidden* in it as something that becomes available only to those readers who, recognizing the text as a deliberately layered one, turn their attention to what lies beneath its surface.

In remarks Wittgenstein makes over the course of his lifelong philosophical investigations about the issues that most occupied him—logic, grammar, thoughts, questions, the "problems of life," "problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language," as well as religious ritual, humor, and literary form—he frequently refers to these important concerns as being rooted in, or having the character of, *depth* (CV, 42, 62, 53; PI, §111).[38] Wittgenstein contrasts surface difficulty with the difficulty that requires us to dive deep down in order to get hold of them (CV, 48). He distinguishes "depth grammar" from that of a "surface" variety (PI, § 644), He claims that "the problems of life are insoluble on the surface and can only be solved in depth" (CV, 74).

I have argued here that the *Tractatus* can be read as a consciously crafted puzzle. As such, I have been concerned to show, it operates, quite by design (as puzzles do, and must), both on a surface dimension (on which we find the apparent metaphysical theory), and on a dimension of depth (in which resides in the book's unspoken ethical aim of leading readers to the clarity with which to overcome our reliance on such theories and see the world in the right way). To read only the surface of the text, ignoring completely its unspoken ethical "point," and deeper enigmatic aspects (aspects we intuit only through attention to Wittgenstein's ironic stance regarding his pseudopropositions) is to miss out on the transformative illumination the book promises (because we have neglected the tactical interplay between surface and depth on which the author depends in his aim of bringing this illumination about). Taken only at face value, the *Tractatus* does not reveal itself to be a book with very different stakes than we first thought it had and thus does not become for us the wholly different book than we first thought we were reading.[39]

On a superficial reading, the *Tractatus* is legible not as a book with an "ethical" pursuit, but as the presentation of a metaphysical doctrine. But the metaphysical doctrine that represents the book's content is precisely what Wittgenstein asks us to overcome, along with our need for the book's nonsensical propositions (expendable, we are told, once they have served their purpose of elucidating something to us readers).

Wittgenstein does not spell out for us overtly just how the disposable nonsensical theory that unfolds on the text's surface could ever manage to shed light on what he is trying to do (or make us do) with the text as a whole. To figure that out, readers must look at how Wittgenstein's "treatise" works at deeper level. Doing so, we gain a very different and richer experience of the text. Wittgenstein's method in the *Tractatus*, in its trickiest strategic aspects, relies on surface appearance and deeper complexity alike. This method depends on readers' ability not only to recognize both of the book's dimensions as distinct, but also to grasp the relationship between them. Unless readers come to appreciate the vital interaction of the different demands of the book—superficial *and* deep—Wittgenstein's Tractarian method will not work on readers in the way he designed it to do.

Acknowledging Wittgenstein's embrace of both depth and surface helps us to see that the (proto-)postcritical work in which his philosophy engages us does more than represent a satisfying alternative to the hermeneutics of suspicion. Wittgenstein's balanced attention to both dimensions also serves to temper some of the manifesto fervor that drives some proponents of postcritical work to cast depth itself into suspicion. As Moi shows in her recent work, drawing on Wittgenstein's philosophy in the study of literature has the potential to expand, rather than contract, the limits of interpretive possibility. But he also reminds us by his own example that the work of postcriticism, construed broadly enough to include him, need not be conducted at the expense of depth.

A Study of Coincidence

To be clear, *A Different Order of Difficulty* does not posit a direct intellectual-historical link between Wittgenstein and the literary writers that I explore here. My treatment of the relationship between Wittgenstein and twentieth-century literature in this book does not represent what one might call a "study of influence." As I show in chapter 2, Wittgenstein had only the briefest taste of Kafka's writing and found it not to his liking.[40] The only connection between Wittgenstein and Joyce was their mutual admiration for Tolstoy's "How Much Land Does a Man Need?," which Wittgenstein declared his favorite, and Joyce pronounced "the greatest story that the literature of the world knows."[41] To be sure, Woolf did occasionally cross paths with Wittgenstein in Cambridge and Bloomsbury circles and knew of his reputation from common acquaintances like Russell, Keynes, and others. But, as I show in chapter 3, although Ann Banfield and Jaakko Hintikka are both correct to

argue that the impact of the *Tractatus* in Cambridge philosophy also reverberated in Bloomsbury, where it surely transformed the discourse of Woolf's cultural milieu, her links to Wittgenstein remained ever remote, and their mutual regard one of benign indifference.[42]

Rejecting the designation of "influence study" is thus hardly a feat, given the absence of any thriving personal or intellectual exchange between Wittgenstein and the literary figures I examine in this book. The living exception to this rule is of course Coetzee, whose fiction I discuss in the concluding chapter 5. Coetzee is uniquely positioned among the writers whose work I explore "after Wittgenstein," as the subtitle of this book indicates, to regard, from a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century standpoint, the philosopher whom Coetzee's eponymous character Elizabeth Costello calls the "Viennese Destroyer."[43] Coetzee, whose fiction I read here, as I do that of Kafka, Woolf, and Joyce, in relation to Wittgenstein's thinking, is thus unique among the four fiction writers I deal with here in being historically situated quite literally, "after Wittgenstein." Coetzee came of age in a generation in which Wittgenstein was no longer the emblem of a new philosophical epoch, ushering in the "linguistic turn" that his works helped to set in motion, but an established entity of twentieth-century philosophy, whose body of work has long been the subject of research, scholarly debate, and controversy.

Coetzee himself undoubtedly gained familiarity with Wittgenstein's philosophy in his capacity as a linguist and academic. And although he remained on the whole quiet about Wittgensteinian themes in his writing before 2003, in his later fiction, especially in his 2013 novel *The Childhood of Jesus*, Coetzee takes a more discernible Wittgensteinian turn. The etiology of this shift can be attributed in part to Coetzee's collaborative involvement with philosophers Jonathan Lear, Robert Pippin, and Raimond Gaita. But Coetzee's more overt interest in Wittgenstein in recent years is most productively understood in relation to the work of a number of resolute Wittgensteinian philosophers (and others largely sympathetic with the moral thinking developed within that program) who have responded to the strong attraction Coetzee's later fiction has exerted on their own thinking in a set of publications that not only have gone on to exert their own influence on subsequent philosophical work in literature and moral thought, but have, arguably, helped to make the shape of Wittgenstein's thinking more visible on Coetzee's radar. Most influential of these publications is Cora Diamond's essay "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," to which I turn in my discussion of Virginia Woolf in chapter 3.[44]

Wittgenstein has also proved a figure of persisting fascination for a range of musicians, poets, playwrights, and fiction writers who draw on his thinking in their own work. Coetzee's later work secures him a prominent place in this last group, among such writers as Ingeborg Bachmann, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, W. G. Sebald, Ricardo Piglia, and David Foster Wallace. The collective work of these authors attests to the varied ways in which Wittgenstein's thinking and writing has informed their own.[45]

As I have said, my decision to examine the work of my chosen constellation of fiction writers together in relation to Wittgenstein is not based on any sustained interaction they had with the philosopher or his ideas, nor certainly he with theirs. The conventional designation for the opposite of an influence study, while it might seem a bit too predictable to serve as a worthy alternative, and a bit too imprecise to be entirely apposite, does nonetheless offer a useful way to begin to describe the nature of the comparative project in which I am engaged in this book. For in a most general, primary sense, *A Different Order of Difficulty* does indeed entail a study of coincidence. In it, I attend to the remarkable points of concurrence of Wittgensteinian thinking and the thematic motifs and formal concerns of literary modernism exemplified in my central authors' diverse treatments of them. Rather than account for this concurrence by positing any strictly causal relation between these entities, or by grounding my analysis primarily in biography or intellectual history, I explore a representative set of the shared philosophical and literary affinities that make this concurrence show forth. I show that recognizing the connections among the philosophical, formal, and pedagogical investments common to Wittgenstein and his literary contemporaries and their inheritors allows us to see their respective works as pointedly devoted to modes of ethical instruction that seeks, through the deployment of various, mutually dependent orders of difficulty, to bring about a kind of transfigurative change in their readers. Attending to the transformative pedagogical aspects of these works generates a wealth of interpretive possibilities for comparative studies in Wittgenstein and literature, however contingent the word "coincidence" might also suggest the connections between them to be.

Works by Kafka, Woolf, and Joyce, the first three literary figures I focus on here, have of course long been recognized as definitive of the high-modernist cultural moment they inhabited along with Wittgenstein. The works by Coetzee that I examine here exemplify the millennial "novels of thinking," shaped by the continuing influence of the narrative themes, allusive intertextuality, ethical concerns, and formal techniques endemic

to a philosophical and literary modernism it continues to elaborate and transform in its wake.[46] My justification for making these disparate figures cohere by reading them in conjunction with one another, and each in relation to Wittgenstein, does not derive from the uncontroversial fact of their shared canonicity. Looking comparatively at this particular set of representative modernist figures is instructive, for the relative absence of any other productive links between them induces us to focus our attention on their different modes of experimenting with form and idea, authorial aim and readerly engagement, and thus on the significant points of convergence of their commitments to difficulty, teaching, and transformation. This, in turn, leads us toward a new conception of these three commitments as the crucial driving concerns of modernism viewed in its broader interdisciplinary and temporal context.

Modernism and Its Difficulties

I begin my exploration of the three concerns of difficulty, oblique ethical instruction, and a yearning for transformation that Wittgenstein shares with the literary writers I examine here with a focus on the difficulty in which I take each of these other common concerns to be rooted. Looking at the different uses of difficulty at play in the *Tractatus* leads us to attend in more perspicuous ways to the notorious obsession with (and strategic deployment of) different modes of textual and existential difficulty that took hold of the cultural productions of the age in which Wittgenstein wrote.

T. S. Eliot, William Empson, and George Steiner all sang the praises of modernist difficulty. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, and Helen Gardner all offer comprehensive analyses of modern poetry in terms of its complexity.[47] The proliferation of critical writing attesting to early scholarly excitement about the difficulty endemic to modernism would generate so much discussion in modernist studies that it ultimately had the loosely paradoxical effect of making talk about the difficulty of modernist texts into something simplistic, even trite—the stuff of entries in glossaries of modernist topics and keywords. Indeed, as Leonard Diepeveen notes, to say that modernism is commonly seen as difficult seems almost "beyond argument" to anyone "with some knowledge of twentieth-century high culture."[48]

Nonetheless, a handful of critics, Diepeveen among them, have in recent years turned their attention toward a reconsideration of difficulty as a powerful social and aesthetic force in the formation of modernism. In *The Difficulties of Modernism*, Diepeveen looks at how modernism

first began to solidify as a recognized object of academic study around the pronouncement of difficulty as modern poetry's central characteristic. It was by means of the reception and assertion of the distinguishing difficulty of modernist literature that modernism was first "accomplished," brought to "completion" as an artistic happening that was no longer in flux, but was established as a matter of record.[49]

As Michael Levenson notes, the difficulty of modernist texts created a need for a rhetorically effective doctrine of structure, order, and form that critics could use to explain and justify a growing body of work.[50] Difficulty conferred legitimacy on a set of texts thus deemed "great art" by thinkers like Theodor Adorno. Adorno argued that art that challenges us to really look and see the world around us *must be difficult*. Art that is too familiar or accessible is too easily consumed. Because it does not make us uncomfortable, it does not make us think about the complexity and ambiguity that characterizes real life.[51]

Another critic who famously declared that modern poetry had to be difficult in order to respond adequately to the complexity of the modern world is, of course, T. S. Eliot. In his frequently quoted comment on difficulty in twentieth-century Anglo-American literary culture, Eliot epigrammatically observes:

> We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language to his meaning.[52]

As John Guillory and Craig S. Abbott have each argued, Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, and the New Critics not only recognized the strain of difficulty that characterized so many modern works; they valorized it as an integral part of a formalist agenda of revaluing literature and poetry.[53] Under the New Critics, modernist difficulty was made into a pedagogical concept to be deployed in the creation of a twentieth-century canon that would insure the cultural capital of modernist works. Guillory writes:

> Let us first of all acknowledge that for the New Critics the language of poetry, and of literature in general, was intrinsically *difficult*. This was not a difficulty which could be removed by

> the glossing of sources, or by recourse to information about the author's life or beliefs, it was a difficulty which did not disappear in the process of interpretation so much as it was confirmed. One may go further than this and say that difficulty itself was positively valued in New Critical practice, that it was a form of cultural capital, just by virtue of imparting to cultural objects a certain kind of *rarity*, the very difficulty of apprehending them.[54]

The New Critics made difficulty into a benchmark of literary value, sophistication, and erudition to which they could appeal in their appraisal of the select set of literary and poetic works on which they sought to confer canonical status. Challenging poetic works by figures like Eliot, Pound, and Stevens, for example, were distinguished not so much from poetry dedicated to the simplicity that would seem to represent difficulty's more obvious opposite, but from "popular" verse deemed more accessible to mass audiences, and thus a less worthy object of academic study. From the very inception of critical studies in literary modernism, then, the New Critics' mandarin esteem for difficulty made it all too easy to equate scholarly efforts to pay attention to this salient, multifarious feature of modernist texts with an outlook of reactionary elitism. Their zeal in designating the highly variable quality of "difficulty" as an emblematic feature of literary modernism has made touting difficulty's importance into something of a critical truism at best, and tantamount to defending an outmoded highbrow polemic at worst.

But what Guillory says about what the New Critics originally recognized about the difficulty of high-modernist texts still certainly holds true for any reader who finds herself wrestling with the most perplexing examples of modernist poetry or fiction. For such works *do* often resist our attempts to resolve our confusion in the face of their difficulty by appeal to the glossing of sources, or through recourse to information available to us about a given author's life or beliefs. In *Ulysses*, Joyce self-reflexively calls attention to the plight of the reader who tries to resolve the "difficult problems in imaginary or real life" by appeal to "the literature of instruction" in just this way. In the novel, Bloom (himself a character whose wanderings are charted in a notoriously, self-consciously challenging modernist tome), searches for solutions to difficult problems posed in difficult literature only to find that certain strains of difficulty are impervious to resolution by such means. What Bloom discovers is something that readers of difficult modernist works know all too well. For "in spite of careful and repeated reading of certain . . . passages, aided by a glossary," Bloom derives only "imperfect conviction from

the text, the answers not bearing on all points" (U, 677). What's more, among the many "difficult problems in imaginary or real life" that we encounter in our reading, there are some that seem to elude answers on *all* points. Such difficulties seem simply unresolvable (or, at the very least, to defy immediate solution). Alternately, as I show in an exploration of Wittgenstein's, Joyce's, and Diamond's various treatments of riddles in chapter 4, bringing such difficulties to resolution may ultimately depend on our ability as readers imaginatively to expand our notions of what can count as resolution in the first place, before we can recognize a solution when we see it, or invent a suitable one when we cannot.

Guillory's comment from that same passage above—that one of the aspects of modernist poetry that first caught the attention of the New Critics was that it entailed "a difficulty which did not disappear in the process of interpretation so much as it was confirmed"—also calls to mind the example of Kafka's writing, and Coetzee's (often Kafka-inflected) fiction. For as I show in my discussion of Kafka's parable in relation to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and "Lecture on Ethics" in chapter 2, and in my discussion of the difficulty of Kafka's parable in relation to Coetzee's enigmatic, parabolic *Childhood of Jesus* in chapter 5, the crux of Guillory's observation in that passage also serves as a point of departure for much early commentary on Kafka's work, Theodor Adorno's and Walter Benjamin's in particular.[55]

Both philosophers, among the earliest of Kafka's critical admirers, focus closely on how the peculiar difficulty of Kafka's writing pushes readers to the very limits of understanding while refusing us the comfort of explanation. Kafka solicits interpretation in every sentence, they each announce, while at the same time strenuously defying it. And even now, equipped with all the historicizing critical studies accumulated over the course of the past seventy-odd years, readers and critics continue to give voice to their sense that the difficulty at stake in Kafka's works remains ever intact, confirmed by our very failure to resolve it entirely with any combination of outside assistance and our own wits. But this same experience of struggle and failure that Kafka's difficult writing and active defiance of definitive interpretation gives rise to in readers also attests to the enduring power of the unique kind of teaching and interpretive training that Kafka has to offer. Equally inconclusive are the questions about the meaning of life that resound throughout Woolf's novels. Woolf's fascination with irresolvable, existential questions of what Bloom calls "a different order of difficulty" flourished in her writing under the influence of the same "Great Russians" who influenced Wittgenstein while he was writing the *Tractatus*.

Fourfold Difficulty

As George Steiner notes in his classic essay on the topic, "On Difficulty," when we describe a text as being difficult, we may mean a number of very different things.[56] Faced with trying to account for the functions and effects of the complex character of twentieth-century aesthetic forms, our critical practice requires some classification of different sorts of difficulty. Steiner offers a typology of four principal modes of difficulty that characterize modern poetry and literature: contingent, modal, tactical, and ontological. His taxonomy offers a helpful delineation of the different orders of difficulty at issue in the works of Wittgenstein, Kafka, Woolf, Joyce, and Coetzee that I examine in the chapters below.

Contingent difficulties are posed by the unfamiliar words and allusions readers encounter in modernist literature and poetics marked by a shift toward a new demand of literacy that requires the "archival gathering" necessary to understand the "museum-catalogue" of such works as Eliot's *Waste Land*, Pound's *Cantos*, or Joyce's encyclopedic *Ulysses* (OD, 26). Faced with unaccustomed vocabularies and obscure references, readers of such texts turn to dictionaries, concordances, or encyclopedias for clarification. We resolve these lexical forms of difficulty rather easily by looking them up.

As Joyce's Leopold Bloom attests, however, in his comment in "Ithaca" about appealing to "literature of instruction" to aid us in our task of reading difficult literature, the work of resolving contingent difficulty with the help of glossaries and compendiums can nonetheless leave readers with a lingering sense of having "derived imperfect conviction from the text" (U, 677) Modal difficulties occur when a text still seems opaque to us even after we have looked up all there is to look up and have rendered its lexical-grammatical components as clear as we can make them. We confront modal difficulties when the art work before us articulates a stance toward human conditions that we find somehow alien, or when we feel we are not a part of the audience for which it seems destined.

Of Steiner's four types of difficulty, it is the last two, tactical and ontological, that are my main concern in this study. Before moving on to an overview of the ontological difficulty that is closest to the "different order of difficulty" at the center of this book, I offer a preliminary account of tactical difficulty, in the various modes in which it manifests itself as a central component of the five primary texts that are my focus in the succeeding chapters.

Tactical Difficulty

Tactical difficulties are created by design; they result from an author's *deliberate* moves to deal in obscurity. Writers use difficulty strategically in a number of formal contexts in order to achieve various results. In the chapters below, I examine tactical difficulty in three main aspects. Most simply, such difficulty arises in the context of the formal and narrative experimentation characteristic of modernist innovation. Second, tactical uses of difficulty offer a means of baffling readers in instructive contexts—whether by endowing a set of works with cultural capital, and thereby luring readers to institutional academic study, or engaging readers instead in the creative interpretive work demanded by the kind of ethical teaching offered in parables and other extended parabolic works that operate in deliberate perplexity more generally. Third, this purposive use of obscurity serves to generate a more attentive and responsive communicative relationship between reader and text.

First of all, then, a text's difficulty can result, whether by accident or design, from a writer's calculated efforts to reinvigorate the language and form of his or her art, or to transform an existing instrument of thought or logical system through formal or linguistic experimentation directed at rising to a Poundian epochal challenge to "make it new." Think of the odyssey of different styles Joyce invites us to navigate anew in each of the episodes of *Ulysses*, for example (of which the alienating catechism of "Ithaca" is but one); or of the initially bewildering narrative compression of time and the syntactic innovation that characterize the overlapping fragments of free indirect discourse that Woolf uses so artfully in her novels to prompt readers to enter imaginatively and intimately into other minds; or, finally, of Wittgenstein's efforts in the *Tractatus* to lead readers to an authentic practice of philosophy (and way of living in the world) by acting as a kind of trickster or, in Steiner's words, "logical terrorist." With his aphoristic work of consciously deployed nonsensical propositions, Wittgenstein seeks to confer on his readers a new perspective of clarity by exploding from within the "soiled organon" of the illusory philosophical systems to which they are attracted (OD, 34).

In the second aspect with which I am concerned here, tactical difficulty functions to baffle the unsolicited reader, at least temporarily, and can also serve to beckon to a select coterie of elite readers—or indeed to the ordinary readers intent on accumulating the knowledge and sophistication required to attain the highbrow cultural literacy that will grant them entry into such an in-group. As Guillory and others have argued, the celebration of tactical forms of difficulty that function to exclude in

this way has contributed to canon formation and justified the creation of attendant courses of academic study established to teach that canon to the uninitiated.

The tactical use of difficulty to bewilder the layperson while appealing to an elect readership is also a central feature of a very different mode of instruction that, as I have already indicated, is central to my study here: the parable. As I show in my discussion of Kafka and Wittgenstein in chapter 2, these miniature stories convey moral or spiritual teaching via simple illustrations, with the ostensible aim of making their point more readily understood by readers or hearers. But the simplicity of the genre is deceptive; parables function not to make interpretation easy for us, but often quite the contrary. To understand what a parable aims to teach us, we must perform the challenging creative work of bridging the gap between the figurative language of the telling and the view of reality it strives to illuminate through its teaching. Unlike some allegories can do, however, parables do not resolve into a single fixed message or clearly legible moral lesson applicable to corresponding real-life situations but can generate a proliferation of meanings. The point of parables is to engage readers in exegetical struggles that sharpen our critical faculties, making us more adept readers and thinkers, and possibly even fuller moral beings. For the ultimate aim of parabolic instruction is to get us to the point where we can go on to incorporate the imaginative skills acquired through our interpretive engagement with the parable form into the way we live our lives and communicate with others.

In *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Frank Kermode poses a crucial question about the availability to readers of the kind of moral instruction offered in parables. His question offers implicit guidance in my literary and philosophical investigations throughout *A Different Order of Difficulty*, and particularly in my reading of Kafka's, Wittgenstein's, and Coetzee's texts, each of which I argue works to challenge readers in a broadly parabolic way. The question is essentially this: do the Christian parables (and the wider genre of literary parables, Kafka's among them, for which Jesus's instructive mode in the Gospels serves as a model) strive to be accessible to all readers seeking a deeper understanding? Or, alternately, does their opacity function tactically to exclude all but an elect few among them?[57]

The question whether parabolic texts are destined for a select readership and work principally to impede the access of the unsolicited reader resonates in my reading of Kafka's inconclusive metaparable and in my discussion of Wittgenstein's and Coetzee's more extended parabolic works, and the method of ethical and religious instruction they epitomize.

In each of their instructively provocative works, these three writers share a particularly strong belief in the ethical and spiritual valence of literature and an equally strong commitment to the transformative possibilities of tactically difficult texts.

Wittgenstein's "book of ethics" functions parabolically in its own use of tactical difficulty to bring readers to the enlightenment of "seeing the world in the right way"—at least the readers who, as he says, will take "pleasure" in the book, and read it "with understanding" (TLP, p. 27). But are we then to attribute to Wittgenstein a spirit of pedagogical generosity, and ascribe to his text a potentially universal availability? Some things Wittgenstein says suggest that in spite of its daunting complexity, the *Tractatus* is a democratic book, written to appeal to the general reader's capacity of understanding. And yet, he opens his preface with the proviso that the book "will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it—or similar thoughts," thereby leaving open the possibility that the book's difficulty serves to draw insiders still further in, while restricting the access of the uninitiated (TLP, p. 27).

Wittgenstein's opening gambit in the *Tractatus* thus reaffirms the ambiguity Kermode identifies in his question about the general accessibility of the scriptural parables he considers, along with Kafka's latter-day riffs on parables uttered within that biblical tradition. The question also lingers in my treatment of the parabolic teaching at issue in Coetzee's enigmatic *Childhood of Jesus*. I return to this guiding question in my discussion of Coetzee's fiction at the end of chapter 5 (and the book itself), where I consider whether we should understand challenging parabolic works like these as composed with the aim of reaching *anyone* truly committed to seeking understanding (or the saving Word, literary or religious), or whether the teaching they have to offer stems instead from a commitment to remaining exclusive of all but the few already endowed with a certain baseline receptiveness to it.

In the third aspect I explore in this book, tactical difficulty operates to block or delay the interpretive process in a way that can deepen and intensify the experience of reading. By maneuvering readers into a state of perplexity that slows our apprehension, authors who deliberately deploy difficulty effectively compel committed readers to reflect more thoughtfully on the text at hand, and to pay meticulous attention to the particular textual features that give rise to our confusion. Attending to these features can offer guidance that galvanizes our resumed textual investigations. By imposing on readers both bewilderment and the delay

in understanding needed properly to work through that bewilderment, writers who deploy difficulty in this way are better able to engage readers in the ongoing task of creatively grappling with our own sense of puzzlement with the aim of reaching the ultimate insights the text has to offer.

Wittgenstein's own tactical maneuvers in the *Tractatus* (his creation of a so-called treatise, made up of nonsense sentences that function ironically as a part of an instructive method meant to serve the consistently earnest ethical aim of promoting a radical change in his reader's outlook) are calculated, like the tactical difficulty my other central authors use in their own texts, to lead readers toward transformative understanding by imposing on us the delay in interpretation that gives us time to focus on the questions our perplexity gives rise to, and which go on to offer important guidance in our ongoing investigations.

The tactical use of difficulty that finds creative expression in Wittgenstein's self-proclaimed "strange" *Tractatus* is part of willed effort on his part to use a carefully wrought aesthetic work to reach his readers at a deep, ethical level. His method of doing so involves engaging us, step by step, up his proverbial ladder in a dialectical exchange in which he first uses Socratic-Kierkegaardian irony to subvert our misplaced allegiance to theory by tricking us into recognizing our confused attraction to nonsense. Once he has led his readers to such clarity, the text that got us there has served its purpose. Readers are to relinquish the book and set ourselves to the ongoing transformative work on the self only we can do. The difficult work toward which Wittgenstein seeks to guide us in the *Tractatus*, however, and which we must continue even once we have responded to the dialectical strategy he uses in the text, exceeds the merely tactical. It comes closer to the broad class of difficulty Steiner calls "ontological." The *Tractatus*, and each of the literary texts I examine alongside it in this book, are centrally occupied with this order of difficulty along with the others.

A Different Order of Difficulty

The three classes of difficulty I have examined so far are, ultimately, resolvable. But difficulties of the fourth category, ontological, cannot simply be looked up. They cannot be resolved by readjustment of sensibility, and do not result from intentional techniques of creative uncertainty. Ontological difficulty confronts us with unanswerable questions about the nature of human language, meaning, and significance, and the ultimate purpose of the being and the work of art. This category of difficulty

becomes a desideratum in the turn to obscurity in the early twentieth century and continues to thrive at the center of contemporary literature like Coetzee's, elaborated in conscious relation to the ideas and formal concerns of his precursors.

Modernism's attraction to such difficulty arises in part from a cultural desire to break with the authority of traditionalism, and also from a sense of the inauthentic situation of humankind in a climate of an eroded relation to language. It manifests itself in the homeward turn to the oldest of questions and quests for answers featured so prominently in the Ithacan catechism at the heart of the *Nostos* of Joyce's modern Odyssey. It also shows forth in the questions of meaning and existence that plague Tolstoy during the life crisis he describes in his *Confession*, and in Wittgenstein's own meditations on these same questions under Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's sway. Questions about the meaning of life also sound on relentlessly and inconclusively throughout Woolf's novelistic works, themselves written under what she calls "the Russian influence."[58] Questions of this sort also fuel the quest for self-transformation and a "new life" that both determines the form and propels the narrative of Coetzee's *Childhood of Jesus*. The formal inconclusiveness of Kafka's "On Parables" and its meditation on the meaning of poetics in everyday life emphatically performs the irresolvable nature of problems of ontological difficulty. In his concern in the *Tractatus* with the "problem of life" and the quest for its solution, Wittgenstein joins the literary writers I examine in this book in his engagement with this type of difficulty (TLP, 6.521).

Discussions of philosophical and literary struggles with questions of the meaning of life as a particularly twentieth-century fixation most readily calls to the popular imagination the later French existentialism of Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus that emerged under the influence of Heidegger (whose thinking was informed by writing by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky).[59] By looking instead at Wittgenstein (whose early thinking, like Heidegger's, was differently shaped by these same figures), *A Different Order of Difficulty* offers an alternate approach to understanding modernism's peculiar attraction to these age-old concerns of existence. My attention to the fixation in the twentieth century and beyond on existential questions and quests for meaningful answers speaks to the extent to which both Wittgenstein's philosophy and the work of my central literary authors are rooted in existential ideas that are deeply related to, yet elaborated outside of, an established existentialist tradition.

Modernism's attraction to this class of difficulty emerges in a discursive convergence of early twentieth-century philosophers and writers

responding to the fragility and complexity of modern life and the cataclysm of war with an urgent attention to obscurity that brings them back to the very oldest of riddles and questions of existence. This attraction to difficulty shows forth as an obsession with the transformative power of puzzles and enigmas, and the hard work of figuring out meaningful solutions. The problems that Leopold Bloom designates as posing "a different order of difficulty," as I have shown, exceed the multiple intellectual challenges or calls for erudition the self-consciously crafted "Big Works" of high modernism also notoriously entail. At stake within them is a search for answers to the elusive problems of existence: the meaning of life (and the quest for how best to live it), as we have seen, but also the problems of the self and other minds; the possibility of redemptive change; the contrast between how things are in the world and their significance from the point of view of the "higher," for example. Enduring existential problems like these, which have driven humanistic inquiry since the Enlightenment, become an especially pressing concern in the fiction and philosophy of the early twentieth century. Exploring the ways in which these difficulties are handled in the work of Wittgenstein, Kafka, Woolf, and Joyce is my task in chapters 1–4 of this book.

In chapter 1, "Wittgenstein's Puzzle: The Transformative Ethics of the *Tractatus*," I offer an account of to the key aspects of the "resolute" program of Wittgenstein interpretation I have adumbrated in this introduction. I also examine Wittgenstein's 1921–22 work in relation to the different philosophical and cultural contexts out of which it arose. I turn in the chapter to Wittgenstein's claim in the *Tractatus* that "ethics and aesthetics are one" (TLP, 6.421), relating that claim to his more general views about the ethically instructive capacity of certain works of literature. I account for the impact of these views on the unique aesthetic form of the book, and the relationship of Wittgenstein's stylistic craft to his teaching method in the book and conception of its transformative ethical aim. I go on to consider the literary character of Wittgenstein's philosophical writing, returning to a remark of his that I cited briefly at the beginning of this introduction: that "philosophy ought really to be written only as one would *write a poem*" (or perhaps rather that "philosophy should really only be *poeted* [*Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur* dichten]"). Wittgenstein makes it clear that his commitment to this view was hardly a weak one, for as he avers, it effectively "[sums] up [his] attitude to philosophy" (CV, 24). At the end of the chapter, I take up the question of how Wittgenstein's aesthetic commitments and ethical aspirations in the *Tractatus* contribute to the book's engagement (and ours) with the different orders of difficulty at issue within it. I explore how

these commitments inform Wittgenstein's reliance on number of different orders of difficulty in his chosen way of leading his readers to clarity by way of obscurity. Wittgenstein's embrace of opacity and obscurity in the *Tractatus*, I suggest, speaks to the connection between his work and Kafka's.

In my second chapter, "The Everyday's Fabulous Beyond: Nonsense, Parable, and the Ethics of the Literary in Kafka and Wittgenstein," I continue my exploration of the uses of obscurity in the oblique modes of teaching offered in Wittgenstein's and Kafka's different modernist texts, turning to a discussion of the resonances between Kafka's brand of parabolic teaching (exemplified in his metaparable "On Parables") and the parabolic aspects of Wittgenstein's own method of ethical instruction in the *Tractatus*. The chapter addresses the rigorous exegetical demands of Kafka's and Wittgenstein's respective texts. Both require readers to take up the combined cognitive and affective work necessary (though not sufficient) to the task of trying to figure out what they would have us recognize and come to understand about (modern) life via our engagement with the indirect teaching and training conveyed in their philosophical-poetic texts. The point of these works is not to deliver knowledge or certainty. In their authors' attempts to lead readers to change their ways of seeing, speaking, both texts remain deliberately open-ended, unresolved, and fraught with ambiguity.

In the context of a reading of Kafka's parable, I examine Wittgenstein's commitment in the *Tractatus* and informal 1929 "Lecture on Ethics" to the view that "ethics and aesthetics are one" (TLP, 6.421), and that ethics includes "the most essential part of what is generally called Aesthetics."[60] I explore that commitment in terms of its connection with another view Wittgenstein held in these early texts: that ethical sentences are nonsensical by their very nature, and that all our attempts to give expression to our ethical or religious experience of the world will necessarily result in nonsense (LE, 36–44). Like the "ethical" sentences we use to give voice to our experience of the joy and difficulty of life, metaphorical figures, seen from a Tractarian perspective, amount to expressions of nonsense. Yet Wittgenstein's desire to disabuse his readers of an attachment to metaphysical nonsense does not keep him from valuing figurative language any more than he does the human tendency to come out with nonsense when it comes to expressing our ethical experience of life. I argue in the chapter for the potential significance and literary-critical uses of these facets of Wittgenstein's ethical teaching for literary studies. Reading the *Tractatus* and "On Parables" together sheds important light on the intimate relationship among both authors' various

uses of nonsense, obscurity, and figurative language. It works to clarify how Kafka's and Wittgenstein's different ways of embracing obscurity, nonsense, and their textually instructive uses hang together with their keen shared interest in the communicative power of poetic and figurative language—the kind we find not just in "high literature," but in the figurations that animate jokes, parables, stories, and ordinary turns of phrase. If these are sometimes dark, they are no less illuminating for it.

In one way or another, each of the succeeding chapters of *A Different Order of Difficulty* continues the work of grappling with the central question Kafka puts before us in his short, late work: how do literature and the humanities guide us in the perplexity of existence and the struggles of life in the face of the apparent gap between the everyday real and the always unattainable yet still longed-for "higher"?

Chapter 3, "Woolf, Diamond, and the Difficulty of Reality," attends to the abiding modernist obsession with the question of life's meaning that shows forth especially vividly in Woolf's writing in the expressions of a longing for painfully out-of-reach answers to the perennial existential questions "why?" that pervade the godless ordinary world of her novels. The chapter focuses specifically on Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, for it is in that elegiac novel that these preoccupations arise with greatest urgency. Woolf's fixation on question, quest, and the yearning for a revised understanding of life in the novel offers a way of coping with the specific category of "different-order" difficulty that Diamond calls "the difficulty of reality" and describes as the experience of an ordinary sublime so astonishing that it resists our very cognitive powers.[61] Diamond's account of this weighty order of difficulty creates a new philosophical context in which also to understand Woolf's treatment of the difficulties of life in her writing. Reading Woolf with reference to Diamond shows us how matters that lie at the heart of Woolf's novelistic form intersect with the Wittgensteinian and Cavellian preoccupations that inform Diamond's own thinking about literature and moral philosophy. Making connections among Wittgenstein's, Diamond's, and Woolf's different treatments of these issues brings into clearer focus the philosophical sympathies that attest to the mutual significance of each of their particular brands of modernism.

In chapter 4, "Wittgenstein, Joyce, and the Vanishing Problem of Life," I examine how Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the "Ithaca" episode of Joyce's *Ulysses* both explore problems of "a different order of difficulty" through the guise of the more routinely difficult "propositions of natural science" (TLP, 6.53). Both texts are structured in a catalogue of questions and ordered assertions that gives the appearance of progressing

toward a conclusion that the author ultimately withholds. Both rely on pseudoscientific precision in their treatments of moral and existential matters; make similarly performative use of dogmatic, didactic tones; and echo the language of scripture alongside that of science and logic. Joyce and Wittgenstein challenge readers to work to understand their respective authorial (and deauthorizing) strategies and the relationship of their distinct faux doctrines to the literary, ethical, and philosophical aims of their works. Significantly, both the *Tractatus* and "Ithaca" gesture at a grounded, secular kind of transfiguration, characterized by what Wittgenstein describes as the "vanishing" of one's problems that goes along with "seeing the world in the right way" (6.521, 6.54). I argue in the chapter that in Leopold Bloom, Joyce creates a modern literary exemplar of a person who has come to see the world rightly in just this way. He adopts a creatively willed attitude of reflective peace and resolution that grants him temporary rest from the onslaught of questions with which he is confronted in the "impersonal catechism" that provides "Ithaca" with its form. Bloom's ethical perspective is one I liken to the outlook Wittgenstein calls "happy," and which he says makes the world "become quite another" (TLP, 6.43). In the *Tractatus*, I argue, Wittgenstein aims to steer his readers toward a sort of secular-spiritual transfiguration similar to the one Bloom achieves in "Ithaca." The transformative impulse of Wittgenstein's early work is in many ways galvanized by his reading of Tolstoy, but it also coincides with Nietzsche's conception of authentic redemption as a secular, post-Christian form of transfiguration.

Joyce's move away from an interest in epiphany in his early work to a depiction of Bloom's protracted, counter-epiphanic transfiguration by the end of *Ulysses* runs parallel to the transition that occurs between Wittgenstein's early and later work in the philosophical method with which he approaches the search for clarity. Looking at these two works together gives us new purchase for understanding both the continuity of Wittgenstein's philosophy (from early to late) and also the change he makes from the method of the *Tractatus* to that of the *Investigations*.

My discussion of Wittgenstein's conception of a "happy" attitude toward the world and of the transfigurative, yet inconclusive, end to Bloom's meandering quest and Wittgenstein's clarificatory philosophical activity anticipates my discussion in chapter 5, "A New Life Is a New Life: Teaching and Transformation in Coetzee's *Childhood of Jesus*." That chapter deals with Coetzee's depiction in his enigmatic, highly intertextual novel of a very different (and equally inconclusive) quest for a "new life," and critical assessment of the "happy" as an ideal goal for the work of ethical self-transformation. This concluding chapter, a point

of synthesis of many of the book's overarching concerns, examines Coetzee's treatment of an unrelenting longing for new ways of seeing, and living, and being at home in language and the world. In it, I argue that in *The Childhood of Jesus*, Coetzee draws on the form of the parable, and also on Wittgenstein's thought and instructive method, in his own attempt to use his own suggestive parabolic text to train us therapeutically to be more attentive readers and ethical thinkers.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1934), 699. Henceforth cited parenthetically as U.

2. J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 108.

3. These remarks, made in 1948 and 1940, respectively, appear in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, with Heikki. Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 76, 36. Henceforth cited parenthetically as CV.

4. "Die Arbeit ist streng philosophisch und zugleich literarisch." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, ed. G. H. von Wright (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1969), 33; Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Letters to Ludwig von Ficker," ed. Allan Janik, trans. Bruce Gilette, in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. C. G. Luckhardt (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 94–95.

5. The spate of books on Wittgenstein and literary studies published since 2015 alone includes Michael LeMahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé, eds., *Wittgenstein and Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); and Anat Matar, ed., *Understanding Wittgenstein* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); along with the following monographs: Cora Diamond, *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going on to Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Robert Chodat, *The Matter of High Words: Naturalism, Normativity,*

and the Postwar Sage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Henry W. Pickford, *Thinking with Tolstoy and Wittgenstein: Expression, Emotion and Art* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016); Marjorie Perloff, *Edge of Irony: Modernism in the Shadow of the Habsburg Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Charles Altieri, *Reckoning with the Imagination: Wittgenstein and the Aesthetics of Literary Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Rebecca Schuman, *Wittgenstein and Kafka* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015); Ben Ware, *The Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the "Tractatus" and Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); André Furlani, *Beckett after Wittgenstein* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015); and Megan Quigley, *Modernist Fiction and Vagueness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), which includes a chapter triangulating Wittgenstein, Ogden, and Joyce.

6. The way of reading the *Tractatus* that has come to be known as "resolute" is best understood, as Conant, Diamond, and others have suggested, as a general program capacious enough to accommodate the development of a variety of emerging interpretations elaborated in conformity to the three interrelated basic features (all concerned with how the *Tractatus* ought *not* to be read) that suffice to make a reading "resolute." A reading is resolute if it is committed to recognizing (1) that the book rejects a substantial conception of nonsense; (2) that the nonsensical propositions of the *Tractatus* do not convey ethical insights; and (3) that just as the book does not advance a theory of meaning, neither does coming to understand it depend on any other theory. See James Conant and Cora Diamond, "On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely," in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, ed. Max Kolbel and Bernhard Weiss (London: Routledge, 2004), 46–99; James Conant, "Wittgenstein's Later Criticism of the *Tractatus*," in *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and His Works*, ed. Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä (Frankfurt am Main: Ontos Verlag, 2006); and Rupert Read and Robert Deans, "Nothing Is Shown: A 'Resolute' Response to Mounce, Emiliani, Koethe and Vilhauer," in *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no. 3 (2003): 239–68. For a comprehensive overview of the varieties of resolute readings, from "Girondin" to "Jacobin" and beyond, as well as of the specific disputes resolute readings have engendered among Wittgenstein commentators, see Silver Bronzo, "The Resolute Reading and Its Critics: An Introduction to the Literature," *Wittgenstein-Studien* 3 (2012): 45–80.

7. In his book-length presentation of Diamond's and Conant's arguments in *Dialectic of the Ladder*, Ben Ware offers a helpful account of the resolute program for literary scholars and a useful summary of current debates in Wittgenstein studies. Although Ware's examination of the *Tractatus* in the cultural context of modernism and modernity does in its final pages gesture "*towards* a literary use of Wittgenstein" (as the subtitle of his final chapter promises) by turning briefly to Kafka's "der Bau," Ware generally appeals to Wittgenstein's ideas in order "to inform our thinking about modernism" in a broader cultural sense (119).

8. James Conant and Cora Diamond, "Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: A Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan," in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, ed. Max Kolbel and Bernhard Weiss (London: Routledge, 2004), 49.

9. Ray Monk, *The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 206.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), 6.54.; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.54. Henceforth cited parenthetically as TLP, followed by proposition number (or page number from the Pears-McGuiness 1961 edition for passages from Russell's introduction or Wittgenstein's preface).

11. Wittgenstein, *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, 35; Wittgenstein, "Letters to Ludwig von Ficker," 94–95.

12. James Conant describes the reading of the *Tractatus* that he urges along with Diamond as a "dialectical" one, in the spirit of Kierkegaard. See James Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*," in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Erich H. Reck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 374–462; and Cora Diamond, "Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*," in her *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 179–204.

13. Stanley Cavell, "Introductory Note to 'The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself,'" in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, ed. John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (London: Routledge, 2004), 19; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009). Henceforth cited parenthetically as PI, followed by section number.

14. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 272.

15. See Martha Nussbaum, "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Moral Attention and the Task of Literature," *Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 10 (1985): 516–29.

16. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for the press for urging me to consider this issue.

17. See Beth Blum, "Modernism's Anti-advice," *Modernism/modernity* 24, no. 1 (2017): 117–39; and Beth Blum, "The Self-Help Hermeneutic: Its Global Histories and Literary Future," *PMLA* 133, no. 5:1099–117.

18. See Cora Diamond, "Ethics and Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 157. Henceforth cited parenthetically as "Ethics and Imagination."

19. Citing Cavell's brand of moral perfectionism, Ben Ware points to a problem with Wittgenstein's own, namely, that it is underpinned by a notion of "'magical voluntarism'—the view that one can transform one's outlook, and indeed one's life, through the sheer force of individual will." In answer to Foucault's analogous question why everyone's life cannot become a work of art, Ware writes, "the lives of most people are constrained in innumerable ways—by a lack of access to productive resources; by the demand that they sell their labour power in order to survive; and by the general hollowing-out of everyday social and political life. The problem is not, therefore, as Cavell suggests, that individuals *choose* to guard themselves against the kinds of intellectual and aesthetic awakenings which perfectionism entails, but rather that '(re)claiming one's

voice,' 'becoming intelligible to oneself,' and changing what Foucault calls one's 'style of life' would, for the majority, necessarily entail a wholesale change in *political and economic reality*: a transvaluation of the everyday neoliberal values which condemn so many to a life which does not live." Ben Ware, *Modernism, Ethics and the Political Imagination: Living Wrong Life Rightly* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 75.

20. Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxxi, 1, 3, 21, 62; and Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of a Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 13, 17, 42. Cavell's views on moral perfectionism coincide in important ways with those Foucault elaborates in his discussions of the care of the self in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality*, something Cavell acknowledges in *Cities of Words*, 11. See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). On the relation between Foucault's and Cavell's different formulations of ethical perfectionism, see Arnold I. Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. G. Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 123–48; and Arnold I. Davidson and Frédéric Gros, eds., *Foucault, Wittgenstein: de possibles rencontres* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2011).

21. Cora Diamond, "Wittgenstein's 'Unbearable Conflict'" (paper presented at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting, New York, January 10, 2019), 2.

22. Diamond begins her paper with a reflection on the puzzling verb tense with which Wittgenstein expresses his sense of an intolerable conflict at the center of his philosophy. At §107 of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes: "The more closely we examine actual language, the greater becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not something I had *discovered*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is in danger of becoming vacuous.—We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!"

23. Heinrich Hertz, *The Principles of Mechanics*, trans. D. E. Jones and J. T. Walley (New York: Dover, 1993), 7–8. For excellent discussions of Hertz's impact on Wittgenstein's conception of the activity of philosophy, see John Preston, "Wittgenstein, Hertz, and Boltzmann," in *A Companion to Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2017), 110–24; and Michael Kremer, "Russell's Merit," in Wittgenstein's *Early Philosophy*, ed. José Luís Zalabardo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 195–241. Both Preston and Kremer draw attention to the connections we can see in the following paragraph from Hertz and Wittgenstein's method:

> With the terms "velocity" and "gold" we connect a large number of relations to other terms; and between all these relations we find no contradictions which offend us. We are therefore satisfied and ask no further questions. But we have accumu-

> lated around the terms "force" and "electricity" more relations than can be completely reconciled amongst themselves. We have an obscure feeling of this and want to have things cleared up. Our confused wish finds expression in the confused question as to the nature of force and electricity. But the answer which we want is not really an answer to this question. It is not by finding out more and fresh relations and connections that it can be answered; but by removing the contradictions existing between those already known, and thus perhaps by reducing their number. When these painful contradictions are removed, the question as to the nature of force will not have been answered; but our minds, no longer vexed, will cease to ask illegitimate questions.

Hertz, like Frege, emphasized how confusion and equivocation create philosophical puzzlement. What comes out in Hertz's paragraph is the significance of "clarification" as the central kind of response to philosophical problems, where clarification does not solve the problems but makes them cease to appear to be problems. Preston also draws attention to the connection between Hertz's passage and Wittgenstein's remark in the Big Typescript that "As I do philosophy, its entire task is to shape expression in such a way that certain worries disappear (Hertz)." (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, ed. and trans. C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximillian A. E. Aue [Oxford: Blackwell, 2013], 421)

24. Diamond, "Wittgenstein's 'Unbearable Conflict,'" 8.

25. Diamond, "Wittgenstein's 'Unbearable Conflict,'" 15–16.

26. Diamond, "Wittgenstein's 'Unbearable Conflict,'" 12.

27. See Jonathan Lear, "Wisdom Won from Illness," in *Wisdom Won from Illness: Essays in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 11–29.

28. Diamond, "Wittgenstein's 'Unbearable Conflict,'" 15.

29. Michael Kremer examines how Wittgenstein's criticism of his earlier thinking works on this formal level in the *Investigations* in his response to Diamond's paper (presented at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting, New York, January 10, 2019), 14.

30. Secular modernism's seemingly inconsistent fascination with the religious or spiritual has been the focus of a number of recent scholarly treatments of the role of religion in modernist literature. For notable examples, see Steve Pinkerton, *Blasphemous Modernism: The 20th-Century Word Made Flesh* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Matthew Mutter, *Restless Secularism: Modernism and the Religious Inheritance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); Paul North, *The Yield: Kafka's Atheological Reformation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015); John Bramble, *Modernism and the Occult* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Suzanne Hobson, *Angels of Modernism: Religion, Culture, Aesthetics 1910–1960* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity*

(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, *The Re-enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Gregory Erickson, *The Absence of God in Modernist Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Robert Weldon Whalen, *Sacred Spring: God and the Birth of Modernism in Fin de Siècle Vienna* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007). The topic of Wittgenstein and religion, first examined by Norman Malcolm and Peter Winch in Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, ed. Peter Winch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), has also been the subject of successful recent volumes. See especially Mikel Burley, ed., *Wittgenstein, Religion, and Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); D. Z. Phillips and Mario von der Ruhr, eds., *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

31. See Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008): 737–48.

32. See David James, *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

33. See Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). See also "Feminist Investigations and Other Essays," special issue, *New Literary History* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2015); Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski, eds., *Critique and Postcritique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); and earlier writing by Sontag, Ricoeur, Sedgwick, Latour, and others.

34. Wittgenstein's philosophy also provides a valuable model for broad work in "weak theory" in the sense that Lisi Schoenbach argues that Pragmatism does: "precisely because it makes such an exhaustive case for ethics . . . operating in the absence of a strong theory." Lisi Schoenbach, "Modernism Has Always Been Weak," "Responses to the Special Issue on Weak Theory," *Modernism/modernity Print Plus*, vol. 4, cycle 2 (2019). https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/responses-special-issue-weak-theory-part-iv. See also Paul K. Saint-Amour's introduction to the special issue on weak theory, "Weak Theory, Weak Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 25, no. 3 (2018): 437–59.

35. Two such postcritical readings are to be found in Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21; Toril Moi, *The Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); and Toril Moi, "'Nothing Is Hidden': From Confusion to Clarity; or, Wittgenstein on Critique," in *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 31–49. In many ways, the practice of "surface reading" advocated by Best and Marcus offers an appealing alternative to symptomatic readings. But it rests too heavily on the false premise that all depth is suspicious and therefore a distraction from better uses of our critical attention. Depth is also a casualty of Toril Moi's articulation of a postcritical alternative to the idea that suspicion is the only attitude for serious literary critics. Moi challenges the understanding of a text as "a thing or object with

surface and depth," a picture she thinks holds captive surface readers and suspicious hermeneuts alike (Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary*, 177). The solution she offers in the course of making a persuasive case for the importance of ordinary language philosophy to literary studies is to reject the surface/depth distinction entirely.

36. I am grateful to Joshua Landy for pressing me to take up these issues in the context of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. See his "In Praise of Depth; or, How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Hidden," *New Literary History*, forthcoming.

37. Moi invokes Wittgenstein's remark not to indicate that everything we read is self-evident, or to suggest that the search for clarity in which he seeks to engage us entails a rejection of difficulty or obscurity. What she wants to show is that the central claim of Wittgenstein's philosophy—that the meaning of a word lies in its *use* in the context in which it is uttered—opens up possibilities for reading practices that remain unavailable to us as long as we adhere to a post-Saussurean model of the split sign. The idea that a sign has two parts—a formal, material part on the visible surface (the signifier), and a hidden part that is its meaning (the signified)—provides a foundation for the hermeneutics of suspicion because it calls on readers to build "the idea of the hidden into their very idea of language." Any attempt to establish meaning according to this theory, Moi emphasizes, "will per definition become a hunt for the hidden" (*Revolution of the Ordinary*, 180). In contrast, Wittgenstein's view that "meaning is use" (see PI §43, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language") delivers us from an entrenchment in suspicious hermeneutics and the metaphysics of the hidden. It allows us to see utterances (and bodies of utterances in the form of novels, plays, poems, etc.) not as objects with surface and depth, but as complex actions and expressions that place claims on us as readers. It allows us to pursue meaning as something one *does* or *says* rather than as something hidden and accessible only through the excavation of critique.

38. See also Wittgenstein's remarks on the "deep and sinister" aspects of apparently trivial rituals of sacrifice in *Remarks on Frazer's "Golden Bough,"* in *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 146.

39. Landy addresses the problem of what readers stand to miss by striving to attend to the surface of a text in an effort to read it "on its own terms," in cases (like Wittgenstein's in the *Tractatus*) in which the very terms set by the text require coincident attention to depths hidden in it by the author's design, by turning to a parallel example offered by Lanier Anderson: Jane Austen's use of free indirect discourse in *Pride and Prejudice*. To understand the way her project is meant to work, readers must see how the sentences function differently on the surface than on a deeper level the text also asks us to intuit. As Landy writes, "there's a more illuminating way to read the Austen sentence, and there's a less illuminating way to read the Austen sentence. The less illuminating way is to take it at face value; the more illuminating way is to see behind its subtle trickery and realize that Austen is setting a trap for us. I see no reason not to call the less illuminating reading a *superficial* reading" (Landy, "In Praise of Depth," 1). The

deeper dimensions of Austen's texts aren't there because she made a mistake, or left traces of her own unconscious ideology for hermeneuts to detect and reveal. They are nonobvious effects of the surface narrative that Austen puts there on purpose, to help her do one of the things she wants to do in the text: shape her readers' capabilities and sharpen their ability to judge and suspend judgment.

40. Monk, *The Duty of Genius*, 498.

41. See George R. Clay, "Tolstoy in the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 209.

42. Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9; Jaakko Hintikka, "Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38 (Fall 1979–80): 13.

43. J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 188.

44. Cora Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in Stanley Cavell et al., *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 43–90.

45. For late twentieth-century fiction involving Wittgenstein, see especially Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971); Ingeborg Bachmann, *Das dreißgste Jahr* (München: Piper, 1961); Thomas Bernhard, *Wittgensteins Neffe: Eine Freundschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982); Ricardo Piglia, *Respiración artificial* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1980); David Markson, *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 1988); W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2001); and David Foster Wallace, *The Broom of the System* (New York: Penguin, 1987). For theatrical, film, and radio pieces, see Terry Eagleton's screenplay for Derek Jarman's film, *Wittgenstein* (London: BFI, 1993); Tom Stoppard, *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (New York: Samuel French, 1979); and Ingeborg Bachmann, *Der Gute Gott von Manhattan* (München: Piper Verlag, 1976). See also the works Marjorie Perloff points to as examples of the growing body of Wittgensteiniana that includes Terry Eagleton, *Saints and Scholars* (London: Verso, 1987); Guy Davenport, "The Aeroplanes at Brescia," *Hudson Review* 22, no. 4 (1969): 567–85; and Peter Handke, *Kaspar* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968). Wittgenstein's impact on contemporary fiction is also explored in Martin Klebes, *Wittgenstein's Novels* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Stephen Mulhall, "Quartet: Wallace's Wittgenstein, Moran's Amis," in *The Self and Its Shadows: A Book of Essays on Individuality as Negation in Philosophy and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 283–321; and Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

46. The description of Coetzee's works as "novels of thinking" is Martin Puchner's. See his "J. M. Coetzee's Novels of Thinking," *Raritan* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 1–12.

47. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (New York: Haskell, [1927] 1969); I. A. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1924); F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin

Books, 1932); Helen Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949). See Rachel Potter, *Modernist Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 2.

48. Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), x. Laura Frost discusses modernist difficulty in her study of pleasure in *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

49. Diepeveen, *Difficulties of Modernism*, ix.

50. Michael Levenson, *The Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 218.

51. Theodor W. Adorno, "Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 39. Robert Scholes points out that modernism, with its emphasis on the connection between greatness and difficulty, has pushed the role of pleasure in modernist difficulty to the margins. See his *Paradoxy of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), xiii.

52. T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich and Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1975), 65. First published in *Times Literary Supplement*, October 20, 1921, 669–70. See also *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), 151; and Diepeveen, *Difficulties of Modernism*, xiii.

53. Craig S. Abbott, "Modern American Poetry: Anthologies, Classrooms and Canons," *College Literature* 17 (1990): 209–21.

54. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 168.

55. See Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 111–40; and Theodor Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 243–71.

56. George Steiner, "On Difficulty," in *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 19, 47. Henceforth cited parenthetically as OD. See also William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1966). In her *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Eleanor Cook explores enigma as a basic literary category in which interest spiked sharply in the early twentieth century. Cook constructs a taxonomy of five sorts of enigmas (Pauline, Sphinxine, cyclic, random, and Sybilline) that serves as a companion piece to Steiner's.

57. See Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). Joshua Landy also probes this issue in his *How to Do Things with Fictions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

58. Virginia Woolf, "Modern Novels," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, *1919–1924*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 35.

59. Though the influence of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky on the development of Heidegger's thinking is well known, the great debt he owes

Tolstoy for the latter's narrative depiction of authenticity and inauthenticity is something he acknowledges only in a single footnote in *Being and Time*, but which nonetheless helped to shape his thinking as it did Wittgenstein's. Tolstoy is thus a pivotal figure of influence in twentieth-century philosophy, since his writing helped give rise to existential thinking on the one hand, and ordinary language philosophy on the other. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962), 298, 254. For a treatment of Tolstoy's influence on Heidegger, see William Irwin, "Death by Inauthenticity: Heidegger's Debt to Ivan Il'ich's Fall," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 25 (2013): 15–21.

60. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Occasions, 1912–1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 38. Henceforth cited parenthetically as LE.

61. Diamond, "Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," 55.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, with Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 77. Henceforth cited parenthetically as CV.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge, 1932–1935: From the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret MacDonald*, ed. Alice Ambrose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 97.

3. Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 25.

4. Ray Monk, *The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 137. Henceforth cited as DG.

5. Hermine Wittgenstein, "My Brother Ludwig," in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 3.

6. Marjorie Perloff attends closely to the question of Wittgenstein's desire to become a different person in her coda, "Becoming a 'Different' Person: Wittgenstein's 'Gospels,'" in Marjorie Perloff, *Edge of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 153–70; and in her "'To Become a Different Person': Wittgenstein, Christianity, and the Modernist Ethos," in *Wittgenstein and Modernism*, ed. Michael LeMahieu and Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 41–56.

7. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, ed. B. F. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 117.

8. "I am not a religious man, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view." M. O'C. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 79.

9. A point of agreement among James Conant, Michael Kremer, and Kevin Cahill (who discuss the ethical aim of the *Tractatus* in terms of Kierkegaard, Augustine, and Heidegger, respectively) is that Wittgenstein strives indirectly to foster virtues vis-à-vis our use of language by bringing us to see that we are re-