Literary Studies, Knowledge and Social Justice in Education: A Capabilitarian Conception of Powerful Knowledge in School Subject English

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Abstract

This thesis is a contribution to the literature in three areas of educational theory: the Capabilities Approach, the concept of powerful knowledge and the purposes of literary study in schools. At its heart lies the question, why should students study literature in secondary school classrooms? What does it offer students that makes it a valuable and enduring part of their education? One recent and influential answer to these kinds of questions has been provided by the concept of powerful knowledge. School subjects should serve the purpose of inducting students into disciplinary bodies of knowledge derived, in general, from their university equivalents. To some this may seem like common-sense, perhaps even trivially true. Yet, within the community of educational researchers and scholars focused on English as a school subject, the idea is controversial. There is a concern that a focus on knowledge obscures something deeply important at the heart of the study of literary texts.

My approach to this dispute is ultimately irenic in nature. Taking a philosophical approach to key concepts involved in these discussions, I offer an account of powerful knowledge that recognises the insights of educational researchers from the wider English educational community. At the same time, I use the social realist foundations of powerful knowledge to reframe some of the core assumptions that have dogged attempts to capture what is distinctive about arts subjects. In doing this, I situate both literary studies and powerful knowledge within the Capabilities Approach. This helps reconcile what initially seem divergent intuitions about the nature and practice of school education. I argue that a capabilitarian account of the study of literature allows us to understand the important role of cultural understanding in students' education. At the same time, it takes seriously the importance of disciplinary knowledge, recognises the centrality of experience and imagination and gives an account of the wider importance of the study of literature for social justice.

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Chapter One: Literary Studies, School English and Knowledge: An Uneasy History

Overview of the thesis

This thesis is a contribution to the literature in three areas of educational theory: the Capabilities Approach, the concept of powerful knowledge and the purposes of literary study in schools. At its heart lies the question, why should students study literature in secondary school classrooms? What does it offer students that makes it a valuable and enduring part of their education? One recent and influential answer to these kinds of questions has been provided by the concept of powerful knowledge. School subjects should serve the purpose of inducting students into disciplinary bodies of knowledge derived, in general, from their university equivalents. To some this may seem like common-sense, perhaps even trivially true. Yet, within the community of educational researchers and scholars focused on English as a school subject, the idea is controversial. There is a concern that a focus on knowledge obscures something deeply important at the heart of the study of literary texts.

I offer an account of powerful knowledge that takes seriously the insights of educational researchers from the wider English educational community. At the same time, I use the social realist foundations of powerful knowledge to reframe some of the core assumptions that have dogged attempts to capture what is distinctive about the arts. In doing so, I situate both literary studies and powerful knowledge within the Capabilities Approach. This helps reconcile what initially seem divergent intuitions about the nature and practice of school education. I argue that a capabilitarian account of the study of literature allows us to understand the important role of cultural understanding in students' education. At the same time, it recognises the importance of disciplinary knowledge, accounts for the centrality of experience and imagination and gives an account of the wider importance of the study of literature for social justice.

In the remainder of this chapter, I look at the status of knowledge in the long history of literary studies in both universities and schools. I suggest three areas of tension between those that advocate for powerful disciplinary knowledge and those that work in English educational scholarship. In chapter two I give full account of powerful knowledge and add my own contribution to the theoretical basis of the concept. I do this through a philosophical account of power. In chapter three I explore the relationship between powerful knowledge and social justice. I argue that the concept requires a more thoroughgoing account of social justice and provide a range of novel arguments in favour of connecting it to the Capabilities Approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

From here, chapter four begins to develop what the power of literary studies might be. I explore the way that ideas around culture have animated the history of thinking about the place of literature in schools. I argue that a particular imagining of culture runs throughout this history. In chapter five I extend the discussion of culture to political philosophy. In doing this I consider and reject several prominent understandings of the place of culture in a theory of justice in favour of a cosmopolitan account. Doing this helps deepen my argument about the proper place of culture in the study of literature in schools. Chapter six then develops this new account of culture by explicitly exploring how literary studies cultivates various capabilities. In chapter seven I return to the dispute between powerful knowledge and literary studies. I argue that my capabilitiarian account of powerful literary studies dissolves the seeming impasse between the respective bodies of scholarship. Ultimately, this thesis offers several related contributions to educational theory. Firstly, it adds to the literature on the relationship between literary study, knowledge and culture. Secondly, it contributes to the theoretical underpinning of powerful knowledge. Thirdly, it offers a new understanding of the purposes literary study, rooted in the expansion of capabilities.

Powerful Knowledge and the Study of Literature: A Troubled Relationship

In recent years, a rift has surfaced within the domains of curriculum theory and English education (Doecke, 2017; Yates et al., 2019). Since the turn of the century, a body of academic scholarship in both curriculum theory and the sociology of education has sought to reimagine the purpose of schooling and, more specifically, school subjects (Moore & Young, 2001; Muller, 2009; Young & Muller, 2013). This work is, amongst other things, a reaction to the drift towards skills-based conceptions of educational purpose and seeks to place the secondary school curriculum on a more robust epistemological foundation (Young & Muller, 2010).

A central commitment of this 'social realist' approach is the notion that disciplinary knowledge produced in research communities is social, a product of human interests and activities at a particular time and place. Yet at the same time it is 'real' in so far as it is not reducible to 'knowers, their standpoints and interests' (Young, 2008, p. 3). Theorists in this field draw on the thought of Emile Durkheim and Basil Bernstein to develop a sociological account of knowledge. This provides an alternative to relativistic conceptions of knowledge such as postmodernism which tend to abandon the project of objective knowledge altogether. However, it also seeks to avoid an asocial epistemological positivism that neglects the social basis that underpins the production of knowledge. A result of this novel theoretical account of educational knowledge, is that school subjects are imagined as a site for recontextualising the powerful knowledge developed in university disciplines (Hordern, 2022; Muller, 2009).

This initially intellectual project has not been sequestered to the ivory towers of academia. Policy makers in England, and across many parts of the world, have taken up the invitation to foreground disciplinary knowledge as their organising curriculum principle (Hordern, 2021; McLean Davies et al., 2022). This prioritisation of knowledge has meant that a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum is now common parlance amongst schools, educators, and educational publications (Chapman, 2021). It is also enshrined within the National Curriculum which states, as part of its aims, that schools must provide students with the 'essential

knowledge that they need to be educated citizens' (DfE, 2014, p.4). We have, then, a general shift towards knowledge, both politically and intellectually.

Scholars and practitioners concerned with English education have been notably less sanguine about this 'knowledge-turn' (Eaglestone, 2020; Yandell, 2017). For these writers, a concern with 'knowledge-rich' or 'knowledge-led' curricula is stifling the creativity and personal responses students bring to the study of literary texts. Now, students are being fed a politically authorised, culturally biased version of English literature, rooted in the hegemonic dominance of conservative ideas about education and national identity. The knowledge-turn in curriculum studies, according to this critique, gives cover to these regressive impulses. A recent collection of writings intended to, in the editors' words, 'revive' subject English, considers the 'knowledge-turn' in educational discourse an authoritarian straight-jacket (Bennett et al., 2022). Under this view, 'knowledge' is a misleading concept because what comes out of the study of a literary text is not objective or universal but local, collaboratively constructed and often inextricable from its context of production. The upshot of this has been a relegation of what most English teachers take to be the main activity of the discipline – the experience of the text and the critical, collaborative interpretation of it.

This chapter explores the relationship between literary studies in university, English as a school subject and knowledge via a critical reading of the history and traditions of scholarship and research in English education (the school subject of English goes under several names, most commonly school subject English or just English. I will mainly refer to it as literary studies. I do this because my focus is on the study of literature. Literary studies also captures the disciplinary emphasis which is a running theme of the thesis. Lastly, the label English cuts against the cosmopolitan account I give in later chapters. I use English or school subject English when referring to scholars who explicitly refer to it as such). I begin by giving an overview of the historical tensions between notions of academic knowledge and literary studies at the university level. I argue that this provides the background for the subsequently fraught relationship between knowledge, curriculum studies and English in the

secondary school. This has been compounded by the very real fears of standards-based reforms and accountability measures that dominate the educational landscape for teachers in England and elsewhere.

In developing an account of the relationship between knowledge and English education, I identify three key areas of dissonance between the social realist concept of powerful knowledge and the English educational community. These can be expressed as a series of questions to which two seemingly different answers are given by the respective camps. Firstly, what is the relationship between student experience and educational knowledge? Those labouring under a concept of powerful knowledge often draw a sharp distinction between the two and see the latter as categorically distinct from the former. Secondly, what, in fact, is the relationship between the English curriculum in schools and its equivalent in universities? Again, powerful knowledge as an educational concept is predicated on the existence of a strong relationship between the school subject and its parent discipline in universities. Yet, such a relationship is controversial within English educational scholarship with many doubting such a relationship obtains. Thirdly, what are the implications of contested ideas about culture, identity and the project of nation building for the curriculum? Social Realist thinkers such as Young believe educational knowledge, conceived of as powerful, can escape the vagaries and contingencies of cultural identity and political power, reaching towards the universal (Young et al., 2014). Again, those invested in English education have much to say about this conception of knowledge.

In unpacking these tensions, I give an account of why the study of literature continues to have an ambivalent relationship with the concept of knowledge. This opens the path for the rest of this thesis which tries to reconcile the study of literature, powerful knowledge and social justice.

English, Knowledge and University Disciplines: The Search for Legitimacy

What explains the rise of English Literature as an academic discipline in universities? The origin story of literary study is itself a domain of heated discussion with many contested and competing accounts (Court, 1992; Eagleton, 2011; Widdowson, 2013). As my purpose involves the nature of school subjects and disciplines, I focus here on a particular version of the development of English Literature that highlights its relationship to both disciplinarity and knowledge. Doing this provides insight into the current controversies surrounding knowledge, the curriculum and literary studies outlined above.

Perhaps the most dominant historical analysis of the rise of English studies is that provided by various Marxist critics (Baldick, 1983; Eagleton, 2011). Critics in this tradition see the rise of English Literature as an ideological project that, variously, aims to use literature as a quasi-spiritual substitute for the waning influence of Christianity, a civilising force aimed at cleansing the uncouth and barbarous masses and a political tool to galvanise an English national identity. What is striking in all these accounts is the sense in which literary study, in its provenance, is an arm of social, political and cultural control. Whilst no doubt important, we might query whether the instantiation of English Literature as a university discipline can be fully explained by these wider socio-political imperatives.

The political needs of bolstering empire, creating national unity and developing mass education are no doubt a salient part of the history of all disciplines. However, these broader political imperatives do not necessarily map neatly onto the 'educational and institutional factors' (Atherton, 2005, p. 20) that also played a key role in the formation of the discipline English. On Atherton's account, the rise of English is bound up with anxiety about the growing professionalisation of the practice of literary criticism. Prior to the codifying of academic knowledge in university institutions in the late 19th century, what we call literary criticism was a far more public activity carried out by the "early Victorian 'man of letters' or 'sage'" (Atherton, 2005, p. 20).

The changing status of the critic, from public intellectual to professional academic at the forefront of knowledge production, led to a protracted and still ongoing reckoning around disciplinary foundations of literary study itself. Part of the reason for this is the way in which it needed to 'avoid charges of uselessness, as well as of frivolity' (p. 35). In a bid to shore up the status of English as rigorous academic discipline at the beginning of the twentieth century, many early degrees in universities outside of Oxford and Cambridge felt compelled to ape the disciplinary methods of scientific enquiry. This resulted in a preponderance of "factual knowledge rather than the process of judgement and analysis implied by the activity of 'literary criticism'" (p. 35). What we see here are the beginnings of a binary between knowledge about literature, cached out in terms of propositional facts, and the more responsive, personal act of making literary judgements which seems ineradicably tethered to subjective experience. The seeming gap between propositional knowledge and aesthetic, literary judgements helps explain, I suggest, much of the current curriculum dispute surrounding powerful knowledge and its usefulness for an English curriculum.

On Atherton's account, the development of university English was less a result of the desire to implement an ideological project on the masses, and more an internal dispute about whether the kinds of activities involved in literary criticism could be considered epistemologically credible alongside the natural sciences. This can be encapsulated by the tension between "students 'first-hand experiences of texts' rather than information, facts, and historical knowledge of texts" (Atherton, 2005, p. 35). Here we see echoes of the current context in which the accumulation of facts is finding its way back into the classroom. Yet, more than this, we also see the beginnings of the uneasy relationship between personal experience and judgement and a notion of scholarly objectivity. As Atherton puts it, referring to debates in English at the end of the nineteenth century, 'scholarship was leading to the codification of literary knowledge along historical and linguistic lines, criticism was concerned with an understanding that was much more personal and consequently much less tangible' (p. 94).

Perhaps, then, there is something in the history of English, even at the university level, that generates hostility towards any discourse focused solely on knowledge. In what follows I build out from these initial tensions to give an account of why the study of literature in schools is often seen as at odds with the concept of powerful knowledge. I offer three suggestions. Firstly, that there is an inherent tension in the role that student experience plays in the teaching of school subject English. Secondly, that English at the school level has a unique research programme and long history of thinking about its purpose that does not rely on a strong epistemological link to a university subject discipline. Thirdly, that ideas about culture, identity and power suffuse the study of literature and language in a way that makes it difficult to sustain the distinction, put forward by Young, between knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge (Muller & Young, 2019). I take each of these in turn.

Knowledge, Experience and Literary Studies

The concept of powerful knowledge appears to take an unambiguous stance regarding the relationship between student experience and knowledge. In fact, the central purpose of a school is:

> To enable all students to acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience. It is knowledge which many will not have access to at home, among their friends, or in the communities in which they live. As such, access to this knowledge is the right of all pupils as future citizens (Young et al., 2014, p. 10)

According to advocates, powerful knowledge is not distinctive because of its relationship to powerful groups, but rather because it is not reducible to our everyday experiences. Unlike everyday experience it has 'explanatory power and capacity for generalization' (Young, 2008, P. 90). This is a feature of powerful knowledge that common sense lacks. The production of knowledge in expert communities is part of what makes it objective, liberating and potentially an equalising force in a society marked by inequality.

Despite the social justice inflections of this argument, for many, the very nature of English as a school subject requires teachers to draw on and utilise the experiences students bring with them from their communities. Empirical work on teachers' beliefs teachers surrounding the purpose of English suggests a high premium is put on the 'experiential, aesthetic and affective, and that it should be an authentic experience for the student with some genuine personal significance' (Goodwyn, 2012, p. 213). These shibboleths of the profession come, in Goodwyn's view, from the influence of reader response theory (the broad movement in literary theory that emphasises the active role of the critic in constructing the meaning of a literary text) and the 'personal growth' movement in English teaching that stems from John Dixon's seminal 1967 *Growth Through English.* This view is reflected in the first national curriculum in England that claimed school English 'focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives' (DES, 1989, p. 60).

Under this view, English builds a relationship to language and literature which involves a more personal and situated approach. We ought not think of English as 'placed alongside other human knowledge' (Doecke, 2017, p. 238). Instead, literature allows us to 'to think about what it means to share experience through language by reading and responding to literary work' (p. 238). To defer to supposed experts would be to mistake the study of literature for an 'object of scientific analysis' which would tend to diminish "the value of human experience by privileging generalisations based on so-called 'facts', driving a wedge between thought and feeling" (p. 238). Here again we see the distinction between knowledge and personal engagement that has dogged English at the university level recast in the secondary school. What can the history of thinking about school subject English tell us about this relationship?

Sawyer and Mclean argue that the history of the subject has pitted experience against knowledge (Sawyer & McLean Davies, 2021). In encountering a text, we experience something that can't be reduced to the acquisition of knowledge; the act of criticism is itself a personal response and therefore experiential in nature. This suggests an inescapably subjective element to English that ought

not to be explained away or apologised for. Instead, it is an essential aspect of the subject and part of its distinctive identity. The implication is that talk of unequal access to knowledge in the home reinforces a deficit account of the child that misunderstands the way all experience counts equally when it comes to the meaning-making practices involved in literary study in schools. There is a question, then, about whether a concept of powerful knowledge is amenable to the response-dependent nature of literary study. For many in the English educational community, the answer is a resounding no (Anderson & Elms, 2022; Doecke, 2017).

The powerful knowledge advocated as the primary justification of the secondary school curriculum is, then, clearly at odds with at least one core tenet of English education. Namely, the crucial role of student experience in constructing meaning. This seeming void is exacerbated when we look at what role, if any, knowledge itself plays in school English. Many read Young as arguing for a kind of knowledge 'manifestly inadequate in terms of explaining what is distinctive, important or powerful about literature' (Yates et al, 2019, p. 58). In a biting attack on Young's notion of powerful knowledge, Robert Eaglestone argues that Young is committed to the kind of propositional knowledge appropriate for scientific enquiry but wholly inappropriate for literary study. As a result, the core elements of literary study in schools are lost. As Eaglestone argues, English is 'mandated to reach out to pleasure, to values and to the imagination' (Eaglestone, 2020, p. 12). Other scholars have similarly interpreted Young as trying to "locate 'knowledge' outside history" (Doecke, 2017, p. 233). The concern here is that in emphasising the need for school knowledge to transcend both student experience and the local context of production, social realists squeeze out the kind of normative and imaginative activities that go on in English classrooms.

One of the distinctive features of literary study that critics of powerful knowledge point to is the local, situated nature of literary understanding. Under this view two texts can't convey the same 'knowledge' in two different contexts because of the active participation of students in the co-creation of meaning and the inevitable difference between the contexts that provide the necessary

background for any literary reading to take place. Yandell and Brady make the point when exploring the differences between students' responses to Lord Capulet from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Yandell & Brady, 2016). For them, the fact that students in Palestine drew on different local, cultural contexts to arrive at their appraisal of Capulet's control of his daughter Juliet from students in a school in Essex is evidence that knowledge can't have objective or universal force in English. Rather the knowledge is co-created in a specific context; too much abstraction will miss the difference across classrooms and cultures.

More than this, it is the central role of experience, specifically students' experience of reading the play, that is 'constitutive of the reading that is enacted in the classroom' (Yandell & Brady, 2016, p. 55). Elsewhere, Yandell quotes the Bullock report which suggests, ''What is known' must in fact be brought to life afresh within every 'knower' by his own efforts" (DES [Department of Education and Science], 1975, as cited in Yandell 2017, p. 589). Knowledge, then, doesn't reside inside the text, awaiting transition into individual minds. It must be constructed by the knowers themselves. For others, the study of literature is more a question of 'wisdom; enhanced attunement to certain registers of human experience; exposure to core national values or problems; sharper awareness of the capacities of language as a medium; or intense, transformative experiences' (Glazener, 2016, p. 5). The overwhelming consensus from the corpus of work on English education in Britain is that, if there is to be a concept of knowledge in English lessons, it will be 'organic, dynamic, protean and potentially vertiginously open-ended' (Bomford, 2019, p. 13).

A central argument coming from the social constructivist intellectual commitments of many English educationalists is that to claim a student knows something is to reify knowledge as a possession of an individual rather than part of a semiotic process rooted in society (Yandell, 2013). Yandell is one of many that fears a creeping, ideologically motivated, positivism within the knowledge-turn in education. Such a move attempts 'the reduction of complex acts and processes into numbers that fit neatly on a spreadsheet, the

transformation of the unfinalisable struggle for meaning into the mendacity of the easily-measurable' (Yandell, 2019, p. 435). The kind of knowledge that seeks to escape context is the kind of knowledge anathema to the richness of subject English. Outsourcing disciplinary authority to higher education disciplines and codifying the kinds of 'knowledge' students must encounter is simply to miss the point and do damage to the practices of English teachers in secondary school classrooms. The first deep point of difference, then, between those that advocate powerful knowledge and those immersed in thinking about the study of English in schools, is the role of experience and imagination in relation to a discourse about educational knowledge.

Disciplines and School Subject English

The second area of dispute is around the relationship between school subjects and university disciplines. For those convinced by the notion of powerful knowledge, the job of the school subject is to recontextualise this knowledge for young people; to effectively induct them as neophytes into the disciplinary mode of knowledge characteristic of the relevant field. Yet the problem with English, many argue, is that it doesn't neatly resemble the higher education subjects it could most plausibly be the recontextualiser of.

Yates et al make the point that school subject English has 'never been simply tightly tied to an associated university subject or disciplinary field in a way that parallels school science' (Yates et al., 2019, p. 57). In the Australian context, some argue that school English is a broader and more diverse entity that encompasses multimodal understandings of texts (Beavis, 2013). Related to this is the brute fact that 'English' in higher education has spawned a variety of different disciplines – communication studies, cultural studies, media studies etc (Yates et al, 2019). Not only is English different to the case of Physics, in which a certain amount of substantive knowledge is required to progress, it is different even from history which requires the 'disciplinary identity-formation of doing History' (Yates et al, 2019, p. 59).

At this point we might agree that a mindless celebration of facts, measurable outcomes and the effacement of student subjectivity are to be feared and resisted. Yet, does that require jettisoning a language of disciplines and knowledge altogether? The notion that a significant part of the study of English in schools involves taking up a disciplinary identity is one we should perhaps hold on to, especially in a climate in which arts and humanities face such austere hostility from many central governments around the world (Nussbaum, 2010). A fear of the denigration of human subjectivity, emotion and the social aspects of literary study is justified; a fear of knowledge and disciplines perhaps less so. Either way, English practitioners and scholars would do well to come to an account of the disciplinary status of English, especially given its precarious position. I take up the issues of subjects and disciplines more directly in chapter three.

Linked to this, in a revealing passage, Doecke and Mead hit on a key anxiety that haunts literary studies in both schools and universities. Namely, that, if we foreground academic knowledge as the crux of the curriculum then literary studies simply won't have a place there. For these authors, the social realist project of 'bringing the knowledge back in' (Young, 2008), 'systematically occludes the possibility of literary studies finding a place for itself as a legitimate field of inquiry alongside the other academic subjects' (Doecke and Mead, p. 225). This anxiety, as we've seen above, has been at the heart of controversies about literary studies since its inception in the late 19th century.

In response to these worries, English in the secondary school has developed a particularly strong sense of itself as a sui generis enterprise. A programme of research concerned specifically with the teaching of English in secondary schools is well established and plausibly uncoupled from English as university discipline (Hardcastle & Yandell, 2018). Therefore, one of the tensions with social realist accounts of knowledge is that the curriculum is likely to strip the profession of its autonomy in defining and taking ownership of 'the collective knowledge and experience embodied in their history as a profession, including their knowledge of how best to engage students in language and learning in school settings' (Doecke, 2017, p. 231). Powerful knowledge, then, threatens to

create a top down, homogenous curriculum that denigrates teacher agency and enforces a dystopian conformity on the profession.

A related worry is the very live danger of difference as deficit in relation to the natural heterogeneity we are likely to encounter in any healthy English curriculum (Anderson & Elms, 2022). Teachers in different contexts with differing intellectual resources ought to be allowed the flexibility and responsiveness to design their curriculum in accordance with their professional judgement. The rise of, for example, the Oak National Academy is indicative of a more general and worrying trend in which individual schools and department outsource their thinking about the curriculum to generic, off-the-shelf models (Yandell, 2020). Goodwyn is similarly concerned to preserve the freedoms of teachers to make autonomous decisions about the kinds of texts taught in classrooms, a freedom 'increasingly diminished' (Goodwyn, 2012, p. 215).

What we see here is resistance to the social realist notion of powerful disciplinary knowledge because of fears of legitimising an overly prescriptive approach to curriculum making that would constrict the ability of English teachers to devise the curriculum appropriate for their context. This critique is given added impetus by the idea that English in schools doesn't well resemble its university equivalents. We have then our second point of divergence, English educationalists tend to see school subject English as its own enterprise rather than the disciplinary subordinate of its university superior. McLean Davies et al point to empirical work showing a shift in the power balance that sees English practitioners in schools now influencing 'university curricula and the literary experiences made available to tertiary students' (McLean Davies et al., 2022, p. 104). If powerful knowledge is premised on the relationship operating in the other direction it won't do as a framework for thinking about subject English.

Culture, Nation and Knowledge: The Politics of Literary Knowledge

The last area of tension relates to the relationship between educational knowledge and broader issues to do with culture, nation and identity. Part of

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this turns on whether the concept of powerful knowledge is compatible with a project of social justice. Several scholars have raised doubts (Rudolph et al., 2018). One concern is that powerful knowledge is conceptually inattentive to the way in which all educational knowledge is often, perhaps inevitably, wreathed in hegemonic ideas about culture, nationhood, and a particular vision of the citizen. Any attempt at specifying the knowledge that literary study might confer to students is, therefore, liable to be simply a 'cultural arbitrary' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 8) in which the imposition of the values of dominant social elites is veiled under the guise of objective educational knowledge.

In contrast, a key starting point for much thinking in the social realist tradition is the idea that powerful knowledge can be separated from the political machinations of those that seek social control. This knowledge can, in principle at least, be shorn of the deformative effects of colonialism, imperialism, racism and other forms of prejudice that have blighted the project of knowledge production. We can, for example, distinguish between the explanatory power of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection and its misappropriation by the scientific racism of the nineteenth century. Such a neat distinction challenges the accounts of knowledge given by many postmodern, feminist and postcolonialist scholars who are often far less optimistic that we can ever disentangle the way educational knowledge is imbricated with power (Moore, 2009; Young, 2008). Young attempts such a distinction through the conceptual pair, knowledge of the powerful (the knowledge those in power have and wield as a tool for perpetuating existing inequality) and powerful knowledge. On Young's account, knowledge need not be a mere 'handmaiden to power' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 197) but, rather, possess its own power. Of course, if it is true that knowledge is a source of power in itself, then how such power is distributed also becomes a political question. It is just this question that the later Young took to be the urgent task of both sociologists of education and those in a position to influence the policy and practice of education.

However, in the case of English it is particularly difficult to separate the content of the curriculum from fraught discussions surrounding culture, identity, and

nationhood. English has been especially wrought by its historical role in cultivating a docile citizenry (Doecke, 2017). Since the turn of the century, global social movements, demographic changes, and increasing cultural diversity have led to febrile and often reactionary reforms to the English curriculum. This is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1921 Newbolt report, and long before, English has been intimately tied to ideas about national and cultural identity (Eagleton, 1996). Yates et al suggest English has "borne much of the weight of 'national' decisions about what is to be conveyed to students about their culture" (Yates et al., 2019, p. 53). Educational reforms to secondary English, ushered in by then education secretary Michael Gove, were premised, according to many commentators, on a nationalistic cultural conservatism that aimed to combine a discourse around cultural capital with a cultural heritage model of English Literature (Elliott, 2014). The cultural heritage model of English insists that the purpose of literary study is the transmission of an established canon of great works to those that wouldn't ordinarily have access to them.

Most practising English teachers do not subscribe to the current neo-Arnoldian view of English and its purpose (Goodwyn & Findlay, 1999). That this is an impoverished version of English, resistant to the more cosmopolitan reality of cultural production, has been pointed to by many commentators (Smith, 2019; Talbot, 2022). At its core, then, English has been a site for contestation around identity, culture, and nation. The canonical authors of Shakespeare, Dickens and the Romantic poets have been all too readily deployed as emissaries in a project of forging a narrowly conceived national identity within schools. In this sense we can see why many educators involved in English at all levels would be sceptical of a 'knowledge-turn' in education if it celebrates the uncritical veneration of a fixed literary canon.

One way to understand the debate surrounding the literary canon in schools is through the distinction between cultural experience and cultural knowledge. The former will be considered below in relation to Dixon's model of personal growth. The latter imagines that "culture equals tradition, embodying a set of values that are part of our 'national character' and as such are resistant to change" (Coles,

2013, p. 53). Such a transmission view of culture jars with the long traditions in English teaching that take for granted that students should see themselves as creators of culture rather than passive recipients (Beavis, 2013). This recognition of the ideological purposes to which English is put by the state has a long history in English teaching and scholarship (Goodson & Medway, 1990).

The idea of culture as a resource described in terms of 'capital' is one that English educationalists have been quick to reject (Anderson, 2015; Yandell, 2017). To avoid the property model of culture many have invoked the idea of cultural production and experience as something that better characterises the reading of literary texts in classrooms. Anderson makes this point when she suggests that reading in English is not well described in terms of 'producing powerful knowledge of powerful texts for individual pupils' (Anderson, 2015, p. 27). Instead, it is a social process in which cultural meanings are negotiated, not fixed. Tacit within this framing is the assumption that powerful knowledge is at odds with the act of cultural production and the 'development of individual subjectivities' (p. 27) that many English teachers and educationalists recognise as an essential part of the subject.

The cultural heritage view suffers, according to Dixon, because of its conception of culture as something static. Dixon advanced a conception of culture that was contested and, fundamentally, characterised by 'the interplay between his personal world and the world of the writer: the teacher of English must acknowledge both sides of the experience and know both of them intimately if he is to help the two into a fruitful relationship' (Dixon, 1967, as cited in Doecke and Mead 2018, p. 259). These two versions of culture, the Goveian view of high culture as an immovable pantheon of 'greats' to be venerated generation by generation, and the Dixonian vision of culture as something happening in real time and reflecting the students' world, reflect a difference in our understanding of culture that goes back to the 19th Century. It is useful to look at these two contrasting notions of culture as the distinction between them parallels the friction between cultural heritage and cultural experience. I return to this issue more systematically in chapter four and five.

Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah points out that there are two clear senses in which the word culture is typically invoked. These two conceptions he traces to two important figures in the late Victorian period, Matthew Arnold and Edward Burnett Tylor (Appiah, 2018). On the Arnoldian conception, culture cultivates the 'sweetness and light' (Arnold & Wilson, 1932, p. xvii) needed to lift the pall of everyday experience. Such a view has driven many conservatively minded governments to imagine literary studies in schools as a tool for transmitting a set of cultural values, rooted in knowledge of specific texts.

No wonder then, that progressively minded educators sought, throughout the 60s and 70s, an alternative to this vision. Perhaps unwittingly they arrive at a version of culture that much more resembles the anthropological gloss, first given by E B Tylor as, 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, 1913, p. 1). For those in the Tylorian tradition, culture encompasses the entire social world, not just the elite 'high culture' recommended by Arnold. Here again we see the way Young's ideas might be readily positioned on the Arnoldian side. It should be noted that this framing of Arnold is a heuristic through which to bring out current tensions. It is also the case that Arnold, like F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards, Raymond Williams and many others, played a pivotal role in the way English is still imagined in classrooms across the country. Yet, the crucial point here is that progressive versions of English often aim to democratise culture by bringing it down from the elysian fields of the high Victorian imagination.

The parody of the Arnoldian vision is a rank elitism; a canon that never changes or adds to itself, a stifling hostility to new interpretations, revisions and theoretical shifts in literary analysis and the academicising of a deficit culture that denigrates the life, home and community of the child. Yet, the parody can of course, work both ways. When I began teaching English in 2010, the KS3 English curriculum at my school included the reading of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and a unit on the film *School of Rock.* The argument in favour of such a curriculum would often be the purported 'relevance' of the material to *these* children. A potential consequence of using an anthropological

conception of culture as the rationale for the selection of texts is a balkanised educational system in which students are exposed to literature that does little more than reflect the cultural experiences they've already had.

The potential danger with the claim culture is everything and everywhere is that we lose a basis on which to make qualitative distinctions between texts. Literary merit becomes a tool of oppression under such a view. If this is true of texts, it is presumably true of interpretations of texts. There is no privileged place from which to judge a reading of a novel as more or less thoughtful and insightful. What we have then is the logical consequence of the Manichean options we have inherited when it comes to our understanding of culture. On the one hand a quasi-divine canon representing *our* best cultural achievements. Yet on the other, an anything goes approach in which texts are best selected to the extent they reflect the pre-existing experiences students are presumed to have had or mirror their putative membership of specific ethnic or cultural groups.

One striking feature of the above discussion is that those that want to distance English from a discussion about knowledge do not deny its crucial importance as school subject. All those involved in a serious way with school English see literary study as an integral component of a child's education. The scepticism about knowledge, I've suggested, is partly bound up with its provenance and the anxiety around becoming an established academic discipline. At the same time, the history of research surrounding school English and pedagogy has been sceptical about the idea of English as a discipline-specific domain of knowledge. Instead, English educationalists have been keen to guard the affective, emotional, and experiential, leading to a binary between academic knowledge and literary studies in English.

Added to this, is a historical concern that literary knowledge is often little more than the imparting of a culturally chauvinistic literary canon anathema to the cause of social justice. Instead, literary study in schools ought to be rooted in the meaning-making practices of English classrooms rather than the recontextualising of authorised bodies of knowledge. This thesis will try to accommodate the insight that literary study is social, contested, plural and

irreducible to a simplistic set of propositional axioms whilst nevertheless giving an account of literary knowledge commensurable with a social realist conception of the purpose of the curriculum. I will suggest that the capabilities approach offers the conceptual framing that can achieve this whilst also suffusing English with a robust grounding in social justice. In doing so I will aim to ease some of the binaries and polarisations that have arisen between the thinking of social realist curriculum theorists and English educationalists. Is disciplinary powerful knowledge at odds with the model of classrooms as sites of cultural production? Can we accommodate the importance of prioritising knowledge and capture the special place of student experience? Can a coherent account of powerful knowledge avoid the pitfalls of cultural conservatism? I will suggest that an affirmative argument can be given on all three fronts.

Chapter Two: Knowledge, Knowers and Power: Understanding the 'Power' of Powerful Knowledge

As the previous chapter argued, there exists a tension between educationalists and academics within the English community and those within the sociological paradigm of social realism. The latter advocate the notion that the school curriculum ought to be rooted in powerful knowledge whilst the former see this as at odds with ineradicable features of English in secondary schools such as the collaborative process of meaning-making and the centrality of local experience for literary engagement. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to provide an analysis of the concept of powerful knowledge by charting its origins, development and various iterations since its initial formulation fifteen years ago. I also attempt to contribute to some of the more recent theorising, thereby deepening the theoretical foundations of powerful knowledge itself.

In doing this, I will first explore the origins of the concept by looking at the intellectual traditions it was a reaction against. I then go on to chart its initial formulation as a sociological concept before exploring the ways it has evolved into its modern, somewhat fragmented, usage within various educational discourses. I then outline some of the prominent objections to the concept levelled by philosopher John White. In response I draw on Peter Morriss' philosophical work on power, thus far not included in any of the discussions of the concept, to provide a philosophical justification for the 'power' of powerful knowledge. I conclude that when we understand 'power' as an ability to effect certain ends, many of the concerns surrounding the concept can be allayed and, more importantly, a vision of what is powerful in disciplinary knowledge more fully realised.

This chapter can be seen as taking up an implicit call from Michael Young himself. Namely, to add an adequate concept of 'power' to go with the 'knowledge' of powerful knowledge. Young argues that he and his collaborators are clear on the socio-epistemological basis of the concept, namely, social realism. Yet, he concedes they do not yet have an adequate theory of power

(Guile et al., 2017, p. 326; Moore, 2009, 2013a). More recently, Young and Muller have made strides in developing such a theory (Muller & Young, 2019). This is important given that much of the debate around the concept hinges on varying conceptions of power and how we might best understand it in relation to educational knowledge. If we can develop a suitable account of power, we can also, I suggest, get closer to the link between social justice and powerful knowledge which is, at present, somewhat tacit in the various accounts of the concept.

Powerful knowledge: What's in a name?

Powerful knowledge as applied to theorising about the curriculum and the purpose of schools, is a concept attributed initially to Wheelahan (Wheelahan, 2007). Yet is most associated with the work of Michael Young and Johann Muller (Muller & Young, 2019; Young & Muller, 2013). The original idea that knowledge in some sense 'has' power can be traced to Bernstein's work on pedagogy and knowledge structures (Bernstein, 2000). It most commonly refers to the properties of disciplinary knowledge that distinguish it from the common-sense knowledge of the community or home. This knowledge has been developed by specialist communities with discernible methods of enquiry and stable boundaries between them (Young & Muller, 2016). Access to this powerful knowledge allows students to go beyond their experience and 'envisage alternative and new possibilities' (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 245). The term continues to be discussed and debated, gaining an eclectic range of supporters amongst academics and subject specialists, especially in the areas of History and Geography (Chapman, 2021; Hall & Counsell, 2013; Hordern, 2022; Lambert, 2019; Maude, 2016).

The 'knowledge-turn' has been in part a response to the overfocus on skills and the world of work championed by, for example, the New Labour government. Such an approach to education missed the vital role of knowledge, disciplines, and subjects in providing deep and stable understandings of the world that simply can't be captured in terms of 'skills'. However, this initially progressive argument for subject-based education has, for many, been co-opted by a

strikingly conservative approach to pedagogy reminiscent of the Freirean 'banking model' (Freire, 1996; Hodgson & Harris, 2022; Lambert, 2011). As a result, there are, I suggest, two levels of tension concerning the term powerful knowledge. One debate is more internal to educational philosophy and sociology and concerns its usefulness as an academic concept. The other relates to the disparate ways the concept has been employed by educational policy makers and the wider teaching profession.

As a current school leader, I can attest to the encroachment of reductive pedagogies based on memorisation of 'facts' and the outsized influence of a particular approach to 'research' focused on large scale RTCs (randomised controlled trials). Such approaches are often justified by findings in cognitive science at the expense of the traditions and histories of school subjects and other intellectual epistemological frameworks (Hordern et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2019). This is, in my view, is contributing to a general denigration of the risky business of imaginative and creative engagement with literature and language in favour of a simplistic understanding of pedagogy and knowledge. All of this is of a piece with the general assault on the arts and humanities ushered in by the neoliberal pursuit of economic growth and the general marketisation of education (Nussbaum, 2010). Because of this, it is important to pin down exactly what a curriculum rooted in powerful knowledge would and would not look like.

Despite the frequent use of the term in a variety of fields and contexts, both Young and Muller have suggested that 'powerful knowledge' has the air of a catchphrase rather than a substantive socio-philosophical concept. The two words themselves are so loaded that we might wonder, as Young and Muller themselves do, whether they are 'too evocative, and open to too many diverse meanings' (Young and Muller, 2013, p. 230). Philosopher John White makes a similar point when he suggests the term is little more than a synonym for the knowledge taught in school subjects. It therefore leverages the emotive force of the term 'powerful' unjustifiably (White, 2019).

If White is correct, then we better rid ourselves of the term and focus on something more informative and conceptually meaningful as a driving force for the school curriculum. White suggests specialised knowledge would be a better fit (White, 2019). I argue that this would be a mistake and that the use of powerful knowledge is indeed apposite in describing the sorts of cognitive gains students make when given epistemic access to disciplinary knowledge in schools. To simply rely on a term like specialised knowledge misses the link between powerful knowledge, human capability and the broader project of developing flourishing societies (Deng, 2021). To see clearly why the concept is important, it is necessary to trace its origins and some of the intellectual and political currents to which it is, in part, a response.

The Retreat from Relativism: Origins and Background of Powerful Knowledge

An important starting point in trying to recapitulate the concept of powerful knowledge is distinguishing its social realist epistemological commitments from the social constructivism that it sets itself in opposition to. According to social realists, social constructivists commit themselves to the position that "how we think about the world, our experience, and any notion of 'how the world is', are not differentiated" (Young & Muller, 2007, p. 178). The consequence of this commitment is that all claims to objective knowledge are challengeable and, perhaps more troublingly, all such claims are ultimately arbitrary. There are different intellectual variants of this understanding of knowledge which are beyond the scope of this thesis to survey. However, they include various forms of culturalism, Romantic nationalism, Indigenous Knowledge movements, certain more radical strands of standpoint theory, and philosophical cultural relativism (Nussbaum, 1997; Rata, 2012; Williams, 2002). In the sociology of education, the constructivist argument runs that knowledge is constructed by cultures or groups and that there is, therefore, no meaningful distinction between 'social' knowledge and the disciplinary knowledge characteristic of the development of scientific knowledge (Rata, 2012).

Michael Young's first major work, *Knowledge and Control* (1972), argued that school subjects were, 'no more than the socio-historical constructs of a particular time' (Young 1971, p. 23). This is a view he later moderated under the influence of writers such as Rob Moore (Young, 2008). The concern was that using his earlier social constructivism as an intellectual underpinning of educational knowledge meant all schools could really be doing was imposing a 'cultural arbitrary' in which the whims of the ruling elites are imposed agonistically on the oppressed masses (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The only seeming antidote, given that all knowledge is socially constructed within cultures, would be the assertion of a hitherto undefined 'working class', 'feminist' or 'postcolonial' epistemology. We see echoes of this kind of thinking in the more recent work of influential thinkers such as the indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith who advocates an indigenous knowledge that makes room for 'our own perspectives and our own purpose' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 43) and sociologist Boaventura Dos Santos who imagines a revolutionary epistemology of the South that could challenge the hegemonic stranglehold of so-called western epistemological systems (De Sousa Santos & Meneses, 2019). If knowledge claims are merely the epiphenomenal outcrop of social arrangements and, given that these social arrangements encode the cultural predilections of the already powerful, any knowledge claim can be challenged and reimagined under different and more equitable social relations. The thought naturally follows that if we change the social relations, the nature of knowledge and truth could also change (Pillow & St. Pierre, 2000; Scott & Usher, 2010). It is perhaps unsurprising that the constructivist paradigm became associated with a political left that also wanted to challenge the stifling orthodoxy and cycle of privilege that seemed to determine educational success (Barrett & Rata, 2014; Moore, 2009).

In response, social realists might commend the revolutionary zeal of such approaches but hesitate at the reduction of knowledge to its context of production. In constructivism, we have an intellectual approach to education, knowledge, and the curriculum that imagines the disavowal of truth, objectivity and knowledge as tools for emancipatory politics. It could do this by embracing a postmodern position in which all truth claims were contingent. Equally, it could

associate itself with various 'voice discourses' in which truth claims were only evaluable in relation to the various standpoints of the knowers (Moore, 2009; Young, 2008). Such a position is embraced by those that sought to identify with subordinate groups and imagined, following broadly constructivist logic, that the positionality of the knower within the group generated a sui generis type of knowledge. To be on the right side of a political struggle would, then, involve deferring to the knowledge claims of marginalised groups rather than hubristic pronouncements about objective truth (Rata, 2012). Rejecting this, social realists instead embrace a critical realist ontology which comes to underpin both the objective and social basis of certain forms of knowledge (Moore, 2013b).

The above account of the intellectual trajectory of knowledge and the curriculum can be developed if we also recognise that much of the relativistic impulse in educational thinking was itself a reaction to, and self-conscious turn away from, behaviourism and positivism in the social sciences. In turn, concepts such as 'objective knowledge' became associated with an imperialistic authoritarianism anathema to social justice. This is what the 'New Sociology of Education', pioneered in the 1970s by Young and others, drew on in attempting to debunk the idea that school curricula provided neutral, objective knowledge (Young, 1972). The point here is that knowledge, within the sociology of education, has been conceived either as a device for political control by ruling elites or as a tool for political revolution by the oppressed. The social realist project aims to rehabilitate an understanding of educational knowledge that goes beyond the vested interests (be they left or right, revolutionary or conservative) of those that claim it (Young & Muller, 2013). The retreat from social constructivism in the sociology of education is therefore an attempted remedy to the evacuation of disciplinary expertise and specialised knowledge from thinking about the curriculum (Young and Muller, 2013).

Beyond Constructivism: Social Realism, Durkheim, Bernstein, and Vygotsky

What is the alternative to constructivism in the sociology of education and how might it solve some of the problems raised above? Emile Durkheim and Basil Bernstein are perhaps the two biggest influences on the social realist approach to knowledge (Moore, 2009; Young, 2008). Durkheim's distinction between the 'sacred' and 'profane' has provided one enduring pair of concepts (Durkheim et al., 2008). At its most basic level, the distinction refers to the separation of the practices of early religions – specifically totemic ones – from the everyday experience of the tribe or group. However, rather than seeing the religious as a realm of mere superstition or codified custom, Durkheim saw the preconditions for the distinction between specialised knowledge and the knowledge of practical experience and day-to-day life. This sacred/profane distinction becomes the prerequisite for intellectual and scientific knowledge that requires abstraction and generalisation.

Durkheim thus provides the social analysis of knowledge that explains how academic knowledge is generated and how it is categorically different from everyday knowledge and experience. As Young and Muller put it, this explains the distinction between 'the social basis for separating practical and everyday problems from the theoretical/intellectual/conceptual problems that historically became secularised to include science and other forms of intellectual activity' (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 234). Young, in particular, tethers the Durkheimian insight about differentiation and specialisation to Vygotsky's understanding of the distinction between everyday concepts and scientific (which is to say academic) ones. This builds on Bernstein's previously made connection between the two (see Moore, 2013a). Vygotsky becomes important in so far as he also saw a clear differentiation between everyday knowledge and the kinds of knowledge schools ought to be in the business of inculcating within students. He saw access to theoretical concepts associated with different disciplines as the goal, and the complex pedagogical relationships needed to achieve that goal as the job of teachers and educationalists more generally (Young and Muller, 2013; Young, 2008).

Where Durkheim provided a social account of objective knowledge, Bernstein sought to conceptualise the internal relations that explained how knowledge

domains are structured (Bernstein, 2000). Out of this comes the distinction between vertical and horizontal discourse. The latter, like Durkheim, relates to heavily contextualised knowledge of the community, experience and the everyday. Within the vertical discourse Bernstein draws a second distinction between hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures. The former relate to disciplines like the natural sciences in which knowledge builds in a cumulative way. Progression occurs via the subsumption of older knowledge by newer theories and observations that supplant the old because of their greater explanatory force (Moore & Muller, 2002). A horizontal knowledge structure is characterised not by 'subsumption' but by the 'addition of parallel theories, languages, or sets of concepts' (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 239). This description is more typical of the humanities and social sciences.

We can see why the social realist approach to understanding knowledge can lead to a bifurcation between knowledge and experience; the kind of knowledge the curriculum should valorise reaches beyond the 'profane' of the everyday and allows us to abstract from our own context to a more abstract kind of symbolic representation. We can also see, to be more precise, it is really a bifurcation between two different types of knowledge – the horizontal and vertical in Bernsteinian language and the sacred and profane in Durkheimian language. Returning to some of the concerns of English educationalists, we need to answer the question of whether literary study as practised in schools (and universities) tracks such a distinction or, as some argue, in the case of English such a distinction collapses. This is a central question taken up in the final chapter. Having given an account of what motivates some of the social realist thinking, I turn now to giving a positive account of the features of this hierarchical, disciplinary knowledge before identifying how it can be conceived as powerful.

From Social Realism to Powerful knowledge

Powerful knowledge has been given several clustered definitions, each of which have undergone scrutiny. My purpose here is to outline these various

definitional projects before evaluating its most recent incarnation. This will allow me to bring in philosophical work on power to help shore up the concept.

As we have seen, a social realist account of knowledge is a reaction against both positivism and constructivism. The positivist view suffers, according to the social realist project, because it starts from an asocial conception of knowledge insensitive to the communities of research which produce it; it is as if knowledge was derived from some platonic, pre-social, Archimedean point. The other version of knowledge, in many ways a reaction to this, is over-socialised in that it reduces all knowledge claims to the 'voice' of the knower and their cultural or social group. As such it vitiates any attempt at objectivity and truth. The result is a kind of relativism that renders knowledge as the arbitrary expression of knowers (and groups of knowers) rather than something that can transcend 'the traditions of its production' (Young, 2008, p. 26).

A social realist account recognises the social basis of knowledge whilst also accepting that some knowledge is powerful in so far as it allows for the kind of abstract thought that empowers us to think the unthinkable (Bernstein, 2000). As Young and Muller put it, "a *social realist* theory sees knowledge as involving sets of systematically related concepts and methods for their empirical exploration *and* the increasingly specialized and historically located communities of enquirers'" (Young & Muller, 2010, p. 14). Their first formulation suggested three features of powerful knowledge that are cumulative, each depending on the one(s) prior to it. The three features are:

- The distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful', and 'powerful knowledge'.
- The distinction between non-specialised knowledge and specialised knowledge.
- The distinction between specialised powerful knowledge and specialised less powerful knowledge. (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 233)

A brief elucidation of some of these ideas is necessary to explore how subsequent controversies surrounding them have arisen. Given the definition of knowledge outlined above, Young and others have been keen to distinguish between the knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge. The former concept refers to the knowledge of elite, powerful social groups, whereas the latter refers to the disciplinary knowledge produced in epistemic communities, like university departments, that offer our best attempts at finding truth about ourselves and the world (Young, 2008).

This is at odds with a sociological tradition that has focused largely on the way inequalities characteristic of the background society become amplified, reproduced, and exacerbated in educational settings. As such, many have seen schools as playing a conservative role in society by perpetuating the iniquitous status quo (Apple & Aasen, 2003). Social realism suggest that this is no doubt true and in dire need of redress, however we also need to recognise that powerful knowledge is part of a more etymologically conservative project; one that we ought to defend. The argument here is that there is a kind of conservatism that is ineradicable from the idea of education. Knowledge is conserved and transmitted as part of the division of cognitive labour that ensures the next generation do not need to rediscover knowledge ex-nihilo. The connotations of 'transmission' are unfortunately Gradgrindian yet reveal an important truth.

If we accept that there is a meaningful distinction between knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge, then researchers would do equally well to attend to the nature of the knowledge that we ought to conserve as well as to the inequalities that schools can perpetuate. In their most recent articulation of the concept, Young and Muller have further argued that knowledge of the powerful isn't really knowledge at all, or at least not in the sense they now understand it. Rather, it represents the way in which knowledge is wielded and hoarded by certain groups for reasons of maintaining power over others within an unjust social hierarchy. This kind of power, according to young and Muller, treats knowledge as a rivalrous good which pits those without it in zero-sum competition with those that have access to it (Muller & Young, 2019).

Specialised knowledge, the second criterion above, is the outcome of Durkheim, Vygotsky and Bernstein's insights into the nature of knowledge derived in certain kinds of disciplinary contexts. Young and Muller reframe Moore's criterion of specialised knowledge and suggest powerful knowledge is specified by its systematic revisability, emergence, realness and materiality/sociality (Moore, 2009; Young & Muller, 2013). It is therefore a version of hierarchical, vertical discourse in Bernsteinian language. Under this view, powerful knowledge becomes a pyramidic structure of increasingly abstract concepts which neophytes are to master on their way to competence within a specific domain. However, it soon became clear that this would not do as an explanation of the arts. Much of the push back against the work of Young and others resides in the extent to which powerful knowledge necessarily relies on this definition of specialised knowledge (Belas, 2022). Yet, recent work has sought to ease these tensions.

From Powerful Knowledge to the Power of Knowledge

Understanding powerful knowledge in the way outlined above rendered it useful as a description of mathematics, natural science and, arguably, some social science. However, it said little about the arts and humanities. Young and Muller have subsequently revised the concept of powerful knowledge with a specific focus on the concept of power (Muller & Young, 2019). The initial formulation was overly biased towards the 'hierarchical knowledge structures' that rely more on empirical verification, conceptual integration, and sequential progression. In a subject such as English Literature, it is far from clear that it is these features that mark it out as a conceptual field of enquiry. Instead, Young and Muller seek to keep hold of the distinction between knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge, as well as the primary importance of differentiation and specialisation. However, they now recognise that this was narrowly focused on the project of returning the concepts of truth and objectivity to the sociology of education. As such it ended up focusing on "power as a 'socio-epistemic property' of knowledge, rather than on power as potential or capacity for social actors to do something" (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 199).

To adequately deal with the disciplines in the arts and humanities, they now conceive of certain sorts of specialised knowledge as conferring power to those that have access to it. This is instead of thinking of powerful knowledge as referring to properties solely within the knowledge itself. Instead, as I argue below, the knowledge activates latent abilities within students. One way this distinction is made is by invoking a difference between *potestas* and *potentia* which Steven Lukes takes from Spinoza (Lukes, 2021). *Potentia* refers to 'power to', or the ability and capacity to do something; and potestas, roughly 'power over' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 202). The point here is to recognise that when we talk of the 'power' of powerful knowledge we are now talking about an ability to do something worth doing. The kinds of knowledge advocated as the guiding curriculum content for schools should therefore be thought of as a version of *potentia,* the cultivation of abilities.

Powerful knowledge is currently conceived by Young and Muller as referring, then, to at least three distinctive things. Firstly, of academic disciplines which 'produce specialised discourses that regulate and ensure reliability, revisability, and emergence' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 209). Secondly, the link between power and the school curriculum which 'provide signposts to the structure of the subject before adepts are empowered to generate new ideas' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 210). Thirdly, power as a generative capacity in which students can 'make new connections, gain new insights, generate new ideas' (Muller and Young, 2019, p. 210). All these Young and Muller now understand as being part of the development of sets of 'powers' to do certain things. It is important also to note that theorising around the concept is not an undertaking solely of scholars in the anglosphere. Much recent work has attempted to connect powerful knowledge to other educational traditions, for example didactics (Hudson et al., 2023; Vollmer, 2021).

In summary, powerful knowledge began as a way of referring to the kinds of knowledge that withstood the criterion that social realists placed upon it. It was therefore largely isolated to an internal dispute about the nature of knowledge in the sociology of knowledge and related fields of philosophy. As the term gained

traction amongst educationalists, it developed to become a potential curriculum principle that could guide schools with a clear answer to the question, what's the point of schools? The answer being to provide access to powerful knowledge. To fulfil this function adequately, the term had to expand its self-understanding to meet the disciplinary vagaries of the entire curriculum and not just those that aimed for empirical explanatory power. In developing this project, Young and Muller have tried to align powerful knowledge with the Spinozian notion of *potentia.* From here, I will point to a few criticisms of this move that have been raised before offering a philosophical account of why Young and Muller are right to reframe powerful knowledge as a power to do something.

More than a catchy phrase? The philosophical grounds of powerful knowledge

There has been a range of criticism of the concept of powerful knowledge. These include its inability to enact social justice (Zipin et al, 2015), a suggestion it valorises a western-centric notion of knowledge, ill-attuned to the enduring legacy of colonialism (Rudolph et al., 2018), that the theory rests on unsustainable conceptual and epistemological premises (White, 2018, 2019), and that its focus on knowledge developed in disciplinary communities misses the distinctive purpose of education in the arts (Eaglestone, 2020; Yandell & Brady, 2016). I will take up the relationship to social justice in chapter three. Here, I want to focus on the criticisms of the coherence of the term itself, a criticism most prominently raised by philosopher John White. In doing so, I accept his general point that any account of the value of disciplinary knowledge must have a justification beyond itself i.e., it must have a political and normative justification at its base. Given this, I then want to offer a philosophical defence of the recent conception of powerful knowledge offered by Young and Muller by drawing on the work of Peter Morriss. Morriss has given one of the most sustained philosophical accounts of the concept of power to date and, I argue, helps clarify the importance of the concept (Morriss, 1987).

One area of tension between White and Young is a perennial question in the philosophy of education about the purpose of schools. White favours the view that schools should be rooted in aims and values and the curriculum should play the role of promoting these wider political and ethical goals (White, 2004). Young, at least in some writing, is much more sceptical about linking the purpose of the curriculum to specified wider social and political goals. Instead schools are in the business of providing access to certain kinds of knowledge (Young, 2014; Young et al., 2014). I take this to be an unnecessary bifurcation of the purpose and nature of schooling as I will argue below.

White has offered several criticisms of the concept of powerful knowledge (White, 2018, 2019). The thrust of all of these being that the term is freighted with emotive weight that, in effect, legitimises a traditionalist curriculum. In fact, argues White, when we look for what is 'powerful' in powerful knowledge, we find little of substance. Initially this criticism focused on the claim that the notion implied a 'sui generis systems of interrelated concepts' (White, 2018, p. 326). White points to the study of literature in schools and argues that students 'rarely if ever get to grips with aestheticians' concepts' (White, 2018, p. 328) such as form and aesthetic value. He goes on to suggest that the 'novelists, dramatists, and poets they read use every day, non-technical' concepts (White, 2018, p. 328).

Further to this, he argues that the study of literature isn't really a question of knowledge, rather, it is 'aesthetic experience of various kinds' (White, 2018, p. 328). This is slightly confusing as only a few sentences earlier White seems to claim students of literature in schools do not grapple with the nature of 'aesthetic experience'. I take him to mean that students studying literature primarily engage with the text for its experiential value, the sheer pleasure of the thing, rather than the analytical reading typical of literary theorists, critics and aestheticians. I do not, even under this somewhat generous reading, find this claim convincing. In brief, it is an empirical matter whether students *do* in fact learn about concepts such as form and aesthetic experience (as a longstanding English teacher and former Head of Department, in my view they certainly do). Secondly, even if it was the case that they don't, it is a further

question whether this is desirable. Arguing for a curriculum informed by powerful knowledge is a future directed project as outlined in Young and Muller's three futures paper (Young & Muller, 2010). It is not intended as a description of the status quo. It is unusual, then, that a philosopher no doubt aware of Hume's is/ought distinction would end up conflating the two (Hume et al., 2000).

White also takes issue with the recent reformulation of powerful knowledge as a version of *potentia.* Recall that Young and Muller argue that *potentia* 'extends horizons, it imagines new futures … involves the capacity to achieve something of value' (Muller & Young, 2019, pp. 201-202). White points out that this is an unjustified embellishment of the meaning of *potentia* which in fact just means 'the power or capacity to do something' (White, 2019, p. 432). He goes on to argue that there are plenty of powers in this sense that it would be bizarre to call powerful – drinking a glass of water, winking, tying my shoelaces. These are all version of *potentia* but it would seem excessive to call them 'powerful'. Young and Muller's proposal to recast the 'powerful' of powerful knowledge as *potentia* is unsuccessful because the term is too encompassing and therefore uninformative.

Anticipating a potential response from Young and Muller, White appears to recognise that we might then just be specific about what is powerful within each disciplinary form of knowledge. Young and Muller attempt this by suggesting that academic subjects develop the capacity to generate new ideas (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 210). However, White remains unimpressed by this attempt at glossing disciplinary knowledge as powerful. He claims that someone 'mildly paranoic may be able to spin out all sorts of new ideas about the enemies surrounding him, extend his horizons in the process, imagine new futures' (White, 2019, p. 433). New ideas in themselves could be pernicious, harmful and anti-educational just as much as they can be of great benefit. What White misses with this criticism, though, is that Young and Muller add more than just the generation of new ideas in their definition. Namely, that the generation of ideas is specific to the 'deep structure of their subject' and therefore leads to developing the:

quality of their discernment and judgement; in their appreciation of the range and reach of the substantive and conceptual fields of the subject; and in their appreciation that the substantive detail they have learnt is only part of what the hinterland of the subject has to offer (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 210)

Paranoid delusions would therefore not be admitted into this. It is still nevertheless true that we still might ask why immersion in conceptual fields of subjects is so important, but the claim that any random cognitive power is what Young and Muller advocate seems a misrepresentation of their argument.

White ends with a criticism of Young and Muller's claim that invoking *potentia* implies 'achieving something of value' (White, 2019, p. 432). Here, White points out that I can have the power to do malevolent things to others. I can 'kill my pet cat for fun or…domineer over others' (White, 2019, p. 432). Importantly, White uses Lukes' own supposition that power-over others (*potestia)* is also a subset of *potentia.* Again, White's sustained critique aims to show that in moving towards a concept of power as 'power-to' we are left with very little of substance. We still have the potential for 'power-over' others, for the banal or arbitrary power to do trivial tasks such as scroll through the television or imagine bizarre and pointless ideas. Perhaps rune reading allows us such 'power', yet Young and Muller are clearly not considering that as 'powerful' in the relevant sense. In what follows I want to draw on a philosophical analysis of power to help address some of these concerns and help salvage the concept of powerful knowledge form White's critique.

Power Reimagined: Peter Morriss on Power as Ability

What is power's most basic use in English and how might this bear on the discussion from White above? Let us remember that what motivated the project of social realism was the desire to escape the collapse of all talk about knowledge into simply talk of power. Such a tendency is not uncommon in the sociology of education. It has been a mainstay of the post-Bordieuan approach

to education that analyses schools as sites of the reproduction of background social inequalities. In what follows I offer some arguments in response to the call from Michael Young to develop a theory of power that could exist productively alongside the theory of knowledge hitherto developed by social realists (Guile et al., 2017).

That such a theory will need to move away from some of the traditional sociological accounts of power is unsurprising if we consider the concerns of those that have influenced the trajectory of sociological thinking in the sphere of education – Bourdieu, Foucault, Marx – to name three of the most influential. As a result, a cursory Google search of 'power and sociology' returns 'pluralist', 'elite', 'ruling class', theories of power, all of which have either a tacit or explicit understanding that power is relational and involves domination i.e. it is 'power-over' others. This version of power is, however, not our basic one. A compelling analysis of the term power reveals that power is best conceived as 'power-to'. The philosopher that has argued this most lucidly and rigorously is Peter Morriss in his landmark work on the subject (Morriss, 1987). Morriss' work has not been referred to in the literature on powerful knowledge but, I suggest, offers some useful concepts and clarifications that might help develop the theory of power Young and Muller argue for.

One aspect of Young and Muller's use of Lukes' work on power that they do not draw attention to is that it has been influenced by Morriss' work on the concept. It was Morriss who first recognised that power-to is 'more basic' than power-over and, most importantly, that the latter is not reducible to the former (Morriss, 2002, p. *xiv).* Morris begins his account of why we might distinguish between power-to and power-over by comparing the words power and influence. He does this noting that many interested in providing an analysis of power in the social world collapse the two together. Morriss endeavours to show why they are analytically distinct and why there are 'good conceptual reasons for this' (Morriss, 2002, p. 8). One of the central distinctions revealed by Morriss is that 'power' 'always refers to a capacity to do things, whilst 'influence' sometimes (and typically) does not' (Morriss, 2002, p. 12). Influence is a 'specific form of affecting' (Morriss, 2002, p. 11). Thus, Morriss concludes that power is best

understood as 'an ability, capacity or dispositional property' (Morriss, 2002, p. 13).

One way to make this explicit is by looking at the verbs both words typically take. To influence is to *affect* something whereas power is concerned with *effecting.* As Morriss notes, 'to affect something is to alter it or impinge on it in some way…to effect something is to bring about or accomplish it' (Morriss, 2002, p. 29). This entails that to affect someone or something is not necessarily an exercise of power, whereas to effect (or accomplish) something is. Compare, 'the divorce affected him emotionally for many years' to 'the divorce effected his recovery from depression'. This explains why power-over others is misleading if it is taken as the primary use of power. Power-over is when a power to do something also affects someone or some group. As such it is not an essential component of power but rather a specific example of it. It is surely the case that we have many things we can *effect* that do not have *affecting* as part of their conceptual structure. To say I have the power to write this chapter is to say I can effect a desired outcome. It would be strange to couch this in terms of power-over others. If my aim is to reduce the reader to tears of boredom, we might talk of it having a power-over the reader, but this would surely be a rare and unusual usage.

Morriss then moves to considering power as a dispositional property. Dispositional properties are the 'relatively enduring capacities of objects' (Morriss, 2002, p. 14). This is different to events themselves. A seed is disposed to flourish into a plant whether it actually does or does not flourish. A sugar lump, to take Morriss' example, is soluble whether or not it is in fact dissolving at any particular time and will remain soluble even if it never encounters a liquid. If we consider powers as dispositional capacities to do something intended, then we recognise that whether a person is in fact doing that thing is not essential in analysing their powers. To conflate the exercise of a power – dissolving in water, blooming into a rose – with the disposition to do so, is what Morriss describes as the exercise fallacy. Morriss points out that social scientists have been apt to commit this fallacy as they look for ways to quantify and measure power. Yet, it remains the fact that if power is a

disposition, it is, by definition, separate to its exercise. To sum up the account given thus far, power as a concept is to be contrasted with ideas such as influence, control, and domination. These latter forms of 'power-over' are not the primary way in which we ought to understand power. Instead, we should follow Morriss in recognising that power-to is the basic form of the concept. Power-to is about *effecting* certain outcomes rather than *affecting* others.

Powerful Knowledge Revisited

In spelling out these distinctions we can now return to powerful knowledge and some of the concerns about its grounding as a concept useful for thinking about educational knowledge. We can agree with White there are a range of powers that we might not confer the modifier 'powerful' to. Therefore, relying on the very broad notion of *potentia* is unilluminating. However, the crucial point is that the knowledge prescribed in a school curriculum confers power by cultivating dispositions within students. Different subjects will foster different sorts of powers whilst at times overlapping; mathematical abilities might transfer across the natural sciences, sensitivity to musical inflection and intonation might serve us in both music and dance. However, once learnt, they become the kinds of dispositions Morriss' work on power helps to elucidate.

The other key import of Morriss' work is that it helps further refine one of the key motivators for the project of powerful knowledge in the first place. Namely, that there is a distinction between the knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge. Young and Muller do not explore power as a dispositional concept, however doing so helps clarify the conceptual justification of the dyad. Young and Muller realise that knowledge of the powerful isn't really knowledge, instead it refers to 'its use or origins, and the interests of those originators or users' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 198). Yet, we can now go further and suggest it therefore isn't really power either; rather it is the exercise of power-over. To consider it power would be to commit the exercise fallacy as outlined above.

Instead, knowledge of the powerful might better be thought of as domination, itself a subset of power-over. The way in which elite groups use knowledge to

shore up positions of domination, and keep those without access to it subordinate is, under my analysis, doubly distinct from the concept of powerful knowledge. The 'powerful' of powerful knowledge refers to a disposition to be able to do certain things as the result of having access to disciplinary knowledge. Whereas knowledge of the powerful is a description of a specific exercise of domination and, therefore, not a true power in the relevant sense. Getting clearer on this conceptual distinction helps shed light on why the concept of powerful knowledge is important.

In knowledge of the powerful, the relevant sense of 'powerful' is the initial one given by Lukes i.e. it is perhaps better expressed as knowledge of the dominant – this is less catchy but more accurate. As both Lukes and Morriss now agree, talk of power in the social sciences is really talk of domination (Morriss, 2006). Moreover, we ought to be careful as well to remember that the power-over concept is also distinguishable from domination. A teacher, an example given by Lukes, is in a power-over relationship vis-à-vis their students but not (necessarily) one of domination – that is if they are a good teacher rather than a tyrannical or vindictive one. The point is that domination involves demeaning or exploiting someone. Suffice it to say, the concept Young is concerned with in developing the notion of the knowledge of the powerful is now quite distant from the concept of power. It is this distance that explains the gulf between powerful knowledge and knowledge of the powerful. Morriss makes a similar point when arguing that Lukes isn't actually talking about power; he is talking about domination as it is enacted which is distinct from power. Power is an ability or a capacity. Lukes' central question is 'How do the powerful secure the compliance ... of those they dominate?' (Morriss, 2006). This is not a question about potestas (which is the capacity to dominate). It is a concern with actually existing domination which is the exercise of a capacity rather than the capacity itself. This is analogous to Young's knowledge of the powerful where 'powerful' refers to those that do in fact exercise domination over others.

Where we might now agree with White is that we still have a relatively thin sense of precisely what sorts of powers are being cultivated by the study of subjects such as Mathematics, History, French, Music, and English Literature.

But the aim, for those with expertise in various subject areas, is surely then to make this explicit to themselves and their students. In doing this they bring the powers of their disciplines to the forefront of their practice. This necessitates a discussion about why the powers of knowledge, promoted by school subjects, are valuable for individuals and society. Here, White seems to agree that this is a project worth pursuing when he says of Young and Muller's project, 'they need to go further than the definition they propose. We are still no further forward in discovering what makes the subject knowledge in which Young and his colleagues are interested powerful knowledge' (White, 2019, p. 433).

It is my view that Young and Muller, as curriculum theorists, are working at a level of abstraction above being able to give a detailed answer to this question. It is up to subject specialists, practitioners, and disciplinary communities to wrestle with this issue. No doubt it will be more contested in some domains than others, but this should not vitiate an attempt to provide such an account. Furthermore, the concept of power we have hit upon needs to be tethered to a political and normative account of its purpose. This is something I think White would agree with. He has himself put forward an account of education linked to aims and values (White, 2004).

Young and his collaborators have not been particularly full-throated in explaining why the cultivation of powerful knowledge is so important for society. However, as I suggest above, this isn't obviously their remit. Rather we need both a conception of justice applicable to education and then an account of how the various domains of potential powerful knowledge do or do not reach towards that aim.

Social realism aimed to escape both crass positivism and reductive relativism about knowledge. In doing so it gives a social account of knowledge which recognises the centrality of specialisation, differentiation, and objectivity. This gives certain forms of knowledge explanatory reach beyond the local and particular and towards the universal. Powerful knowledge as a concept contributes to describing this project within the context of schooling.

However, in articulating the concept, its authors struggled to give an account applicable to many arts and humanities subjects. This is because of Young and Muller's initial, tacit reliance on hierarchical and vertically structured disciplines as the paradigm case of powerful knowledge. In response they moved towards understanding the 'power' of powerful knowledge as a capacity or power of the person rather than as a property of the knowledge itself. They did this using Steven Lukes' work on the concept of power.

I have suggested, responding to some of White's criticisms, that using Peter Morriss' work on power can further enrich the concept, especially regarding the distinction between knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge. This leaves the door open for curriculum makers, teachers, and subject specialists to articulate the 'power' their disciplines cultivate. Some of this work is already taking place, for example in the Geocapabilities project (Lambert et al., 2015; Uhlenwinkel et al., 2017). Such a project is surely more vital than ever in an era of increasing de-professionalisation, centralisation, and instrumentalism and could provide succour to those aiming to defend the importance of subject based schooling whilst reaching towards greater social justice. What also comes from my account of power is a notion that shares much with that of a capability. Developing this connection is the business of the next chapter.

Chapter Three: From Powerful Knowledge to Capabilities: Social Realism, Social Justice, and the Capabilities Approach

As we have seen, the social realist project of providing a theoretical account of 'powerful knowledge' entails the rejection of variants of epistemological relativism as well as the technocratic, skills-based understanding of education associated with human capital approaches (Muller & Young, 2019). However, despite an unashamed attachment to truth, objectivity and the importance of disciplinary knowledge, advocates appear more ambivalent when engaging with normative questions. Many claim that access to powerful knowledge is a requirement of social justice, however, the substantive account of social justice invoked remains nascent at best. The concern of this chapter is to provide a normative theoretical framework within which to place the social realist project and its commitment to the primacy of disciplinary knowledge. To do this, I turn to the Capabilities Approach, arguing that the affinities between the two are more than superficial. In fact, both approaches are responses to similar problems and, therefore, end up sharing intellectual commitments that very naturally bring them together.

In making this argument, I first outline the trajectory of the concept of powerful knowledge and the tense reception it has received from some social justice scholarship. I then outline the Capabilities Approach and its uptake in educational scholarship, arguing it provides a response to some of these concerns. From here I develop the connection between the two educational paradigms focusing on four areas of affinity. The first is the conceptual similarity between the 'power' of powerful knowledge and Nussbaum's account of a capability. The second is their concern with the reduction of education to technical-instrumentalism, human capital, and other economically driven imperatives. The third is a respective commitment to the link between knowledge, human agency, and freedom. The fourth, a mutual rejection of relativism and embrace of a nuanced universalism.

Ultimately, by drawing together these two conceptually rich approaches to the aims and purposes of education, I hope to open a space for theorising about capabilities and powerful knowledge that can resolve some of the problems in both. For powerful knowledge, the Capabilities Approach allows a more concrete explication of why access to disciplinary bodies of knowledge is of value to both individuals and society. On the side of the Capabilities Approach, engaging with the concept of powerful knowledge can help give a rationale for how educational knowledge fosters certain centrally important capabilities.

Powerful Knowledge and Social Justice

If we look to two of the names most associated with the movement to root the school curriculum in Powerful knowledge, Young and Wheelahan, we see a stated concern for social justice. Wheelahan argues that students lacking access to disciplinary knowledge, perhaps instead put onto vocational pathways early on in their academic life, are being denied something to which they have a claim as citizens. In Wheelahan's view, what they are owed is access to the 'structuring principles of disciplinary knowledge' (Wheelahan, 2007, p. 24). Access to this knowledge is important because, following both Durkheim and Bernstein, it forms the precondition for the existence of society (639). Disciplinary knowledge is a central way society allows individuals to partake in collective representations that reach beyond the immediate, practical, and experiential towards the abstract and symbolic. To be locked out of this realm of knowledge is to be denied something ineradicably human and centrally important to participation in society.

It is worth noting, here, a difference between 'disciplines' and 'subjects'. A variety of different positions can be taken on this issue (see Stengel, 1997 for a discussion). Those seeking more wholesale reform of education often emphasise what Stengel calls the 'discontinuity' between academic disciplines and school subjects. Here, the latter are driven by aims and values extrinsic to acquiring disciplinary knowledge. This might include prioritising activities 'related to life skills, vocational preparation, reproductive activity, moral commitments' (Stengel, 1997, p. 594). In contrast, Winch argues that

disciplines pursue 'the acquisition, preservation, and evaluation of knowledge' in a 'systematic way, usually within an institutional framework' (Winch, 2023, p. 150).

Subjects, on Winch's account, are dependent on disciplines but not identical to them. School subjects, 'are best seen as activities that promote acquaintance and even engagement with their associated discipline' (151). School subjects therefore act as sites for the recontextualization of disciplinary practices (Bernstein, 2000). School subjects have the job of presenting material in a way that maximises the possibility of comprehension by the student; recontextualization is the process by which disciplinary knowledge is reframed by teachers as subject knowledge. Students can be disadvantaged, then, both because of a lack of disciplinary knowledge within the curriculum and by poorly recontextualised knowledge within the subject. In a sense, the discontinuity account favours normative and ethical justifications of schooling whereas accounts such as Winch's foreground the importance of academic knowledge. In exploring the philosophical connections between the Capabilities Approach and the concept of powerful knowledge, I aim to contribute to the bridging of such a gap.

When a student receives an education devoid of access to disciplinary knowledge, social realists in favour of powerful knowledge argue that something owed has not been given. We could, however, make this claim about all sorts of things and get no further towards a conception of justice that has systematic normative force. We may believe people are owed religious freedom yet ground this within liberal, conservative or socialist theoretical paradigms. The distinction between pointing to a disadvantage and providing a theory of justice is an important one. Is the denial of powerful knowledge best understood as a concern on utilitarian, libertarian, or contractarian grounds? Or some other approach entirely? As it stands Wheelahan's account does not tell us.

Turning to Young, the link between social justice and powerful knowledge is ostensibly driven by a concern with inequality. The reproduction of working-class underperformance motivated the initial project of the New Sociology of

Education and inspired the desire to undermine the hidden assumptions of the curriculum (Young 1972). The argument here was that the knowledge of the curriculum itself was the driver of educational disparities because it stealthily encoded the mores of the middles class as objective, rational and superior rendering the culture of the working class as an aberrant 'other'.

Young's position regarding the nature of disciplinary knowledge has now changed whilst a stated commitment to addressing inequality has not. Now, for Young, it is not the knowledge that is the problem, rather unequal access to it (Young 2008). This argument has echoes of Gramsci's concerns about the thin educational gruel afforded to the proletariat (Gramsci et al., 1971). A weak and watered-down curriculum that ignores the boundaries and internal logic characteristic of academic disciplines. Like Young, Gramsci was concerned with the instrumentalism that flows from a vocationalist turn in the school curriculum. That said, beyond claiming powerful knowledge as an entitlement for all in a successful democracy, the link between powerful knowledge and social justice remains undertheorised. Young and Muller, at times, link the approach to a rights discourse, 'If we accept the fundamental human rights principle that human beings should be treated equally, it follows that any curriculum should be based on an entitlement to this knowledge' (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 231). At best, claims to equality are necessary components of any credible theory of justice, but not sufficient. Amartya Sen makes the point that most thinking about justice values equality of something, the problem comes when specifying this more closely: equality of resources? Of individual liberty? Of outcomes? (Sen, 1992). It is at this level of specificity that a more substantive account of justice needs to enter the picture. As I have suggested, the work of social realists is yet to provide this and, as I will argue, the Capabilities Approach can be invoked to fill this lacuna.

One argument against the social realist project is that the focus on the objectivity of disciplinary knowledge is that it implies that this knowledge is somehow 'ethics-free' (Zipin et al 2015, 17). The concern here is that social realists want to separate knowledge from specifically ethical concerns, suggesting that the former is extricable from the latter. In making this argument,

Zipin et al argue that the evacuation of the ethical is 'necessary to guarantee that compellingly powerful logic, from a high-minded plane beyond actual human activity' (22). The kind of objectivity social realists seek is therefore predicated on the idea that knowledge exists in an almost platonic realm, uncontaminated by the knowledge of the everyday and the community. Understandable though this critique is given the dearth of engagement with theories of social justice from social realist scholars, I will suggest that this is not in fact the move that needs to be made by those that use a social realist framework. Rather, such a conception of knowledge in fact implies an ethical commitment to social justice, one rooted in the expansion of capabilities.

Others critique the way that the educational discourse surrounding powerful knowledge foregrounds the 'shine' at the expense of the 'shadow' (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 24). Here the focus is on the way that colonialism is not isolated to territory, resources, and political systems. There is an epistemic legacy to the history of Western domination that means that disciplinary knowledge is 'implicated by these colonial and racial violences' (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 24). In bifurcating the notions of knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge, these critics argue, we end up rarefying disciplinary knowledge and separating it from the history of violence that is in fact inextricable from it. Instead, we need to keep power and knowledge more tightly indexed to explain the continuing dominance of, for example, white, Western men within most curricula in schools and universities.

The following exploration of how social realist accounts of powerful knowledge can be brought within the umbrella of the Capabilities Approach offers an attempt to respond to some of the above critiques whilst also enriching both theoretical paradigms. Doing so is important for the trajectory of the thesis overall because I will ultimately claim that disciplinary knowledge found in the study of literature is best understood as the cultivation of certain capabilities valuable for human flourishing. Seen this way, several of the seeming tensions between powerful knowledge and literary study dissolve.

The Capabilities Approach

The Capabilities Approach is both a normative theoretical approach to social justice and a way of conceptualising human development. It was pioneered by Amartya Sen in the 1970s and developed significantly by Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; Sen, 2001). The guiding question of the approach asks: what is 'each person able to do or to be?' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 18). To answer this question is to give an account of the real opportunities members of society have available to them. This is distinct from functionings which denote the actual achievement of various capabilities. For example, two people might have the capability for play but only one indulge in it whilst the other foregoes the opportunity in order to study or work. Under the Capabilities Approach, both have the capability whilst only one converts it into a functioning. To focus on capabilities rather than functioning is to prioritise what a person could do or be if they wanted, rather than what they in fact do achieve with their various capabilities. It is thus rooted in notions of freedom, agency and opportunity rather than resources or the satisfaction of preferences (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2017b). The capabilities available to members of society, therefore, becomes the evaluative space within which we may judge policies and practices.

In developing this account of the affinity between the two approaches I will mainly draw on the work of Martha Nussbaum. This is for two reasons. Firstly, Sen's version of the approach is rooted, initially at least, in the desire to develop more accurate and far-reaching assessments of human well-being than the various Utilitarian and Welfarist approaches that dominated thinking in development Economics. Nussbaum is more concerned with using the approach as a 'normative political project aimed at providing the philosophical underpinning for basic political principles' (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 112). Nussbaum describes her approach as a 'partial theory of justice' in the sense that it demands a minimum threshold of capabilities that social and political arrangements must meet to be considered at least partially just. The aim of this thesis is ultimately to provide a philosophically compelling account of why literary study is an entitlement of students as a matter of social justice. This chapter therefore fleshes out the nascent political justification of the powerful

knowledge programme whilst also adding theoretical insights to the existing literature on education and capabilities. This provide the overarching framework of political justice within which literary study can be incorporated.

Secondly, Nussbaum specifies a list of central capabilities that provides the minimal threshold that ought to be an entitlement of all members of society. A substantive list of this sort is not uncontroversial (see (Robeyns, 2017a). However, in a later chapter, I will argue that working with a specified list gives us a useful starting point for considering the way the powers of literary study can be articulated. Nussbaum also roots much of her educational and philosophical thinking within the arts and therefore offers a way of thinking about the power of knowledge that extends some of the insights from the social realists beyond the empirical sciences (Nussbaum, 1997; Nussbaum, 2006; Nussbaum, 2010). In developing this account, I am suggesting that access to powerful knowledge becomes a matter of social justice to the extent that it describes the educational space of capabilities formation. Doing so helps deliver the nascent political justification to the powerful knowledge programme whilst also adding a theoretical richness to the existing literature on education and capabilities.

Nussbaum distinguishes three fundamental types of capability: basic, internal, and combined. Basic capabilities are the 'innate faculties of the person that make later developments and training possible' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 24). Internal capabilities are the characteristics of a person including, for example, 'personality traits, their intellectual and emotional capacities, states of bodily fitness and health' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21). These are not innate but rather forged through training and habituation 'in interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political environment' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21). Combined capabilities can be considered internal capabilities plus the 'political, social and economic environment' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21). This is an important distinction because a society might be adept at developing certain internal capabilities - for example, the ability to deliberate and argue about political matters. Yet, there may in fact be no opportunity to use this capability because

of a climate hostile to public reasoning and debate. The members of this society might therefore do well on internal capabilities but not combined ones.

Education and the Capabilities Approach

Whilst the capabilities literature is to some extent dominated by the figures of Nussbaum and Sen, there is a flourishing literature specifically concerned with its application to the field of education (Lopez-Fogues & Cin, 2018; Peppin Vaughan, 2016; Robeyns, 2006; Unterhalter, 2003, 2013; Vaughan & Walker, 2012; Walker, 2006a, 2006b, 2019; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007; Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to outline all the various streams and tributaries of this work, the below is a summary of some of the key themes that recur focusing on those that bear on the current discussion.

Capabilities theorists concerned with education often make the claim that education can serve as a tool for the well-being of individuals and society at large (Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015). Such a view typically involves a conception of 'flourishing' which has its roots in the ancient Greek concept of Eudaimonia and most famously propounded by Aristotle in *The Nichomachean Ethics* (Aristotle & Crisp, 2014). Under this conception of human flourishing, we can't rely on subjective well-being, community cohesion, or economic growth as the barometers of educational success. Robeyns suggests that when we use the Capabilities Approach to do normative philosophical work, we are arguing for a conception of the aims that 'morally sound policies should pursue' (Robeyns, 2017b, p. 34). Scholars and educators can use the framework for 'conceptual work' in which education itself is reframed as 'the expansion of a capability' that might 'have normative implications, for example related to the curriculum design' (Robeyns, 2017b, p. 33). There is, then, a direct connection between the Capabilities Approach and how we think about the purpose and justification of the curriculum.

Framing the curriculum this way moves us away from other dominant approaches that conceive of education as developing human capital, to take one common understanding of the purpose of education. The notion that

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education should be conceived as developing human capital has its roots in the late 1940s and 50s (Teixeira, 2014). Early exponents included Theodore Shultz but it was majorly developed by the work of Chicago economist Gary Becker (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Becker defined human capital as 'activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people' (Becker, 1964, p. 11). The approach sees education as effectively an investment in the future productivity of the worker. By focusing on how individuals can be economically empowered by education, the approach made great progress in moving away from 'discourses that only focused on technical progress and macro-economic development' (Robeyns, 2006, p. 72). However, there remain problems with such an approach that I take up later in this chapter.

Ultimately, the Capabilities Approach reimagines education as a space for the expansion of the capability set of students so that they can lead flourishing lives and, therefore, forge successful societies. This focus on values and aims is what draws many towards the approach and gives it normative force in promoting educational justice.

Powerful Knowledge as Educational Capability

The Capabilities Approach is set at a level of generality that allows it to be enhanced by engagement with other theoretical approaches. Such approaches can help in developing a 'rich account of power that is supported by research in anthropology, sociology and other social sciences' (Robeyns, 2017b, p. 193). In the field of education, the work of the social realists provides just such a theory in so far as it describes both the sociological basis of disciplinary knowledge and offers an account of how this knowledge might itself be powerful. In exploring the relationship between the Capabilities Approach and education, Unterhalter and Walker also make the argument that there needs to be an engagement with power and the various ways it might be distributed, theorised and imagined within the space of education (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). The concept of power outlined by Young and Muller and developed in the previous chapter with the insights of Morriss' work on power, provides this. My

contention is that the Capabilities Approach can act as the overarching normative framework within which the concept of powerful knowledge can sit in the domain of education. Put another way, the interdisciplinary nature of the approach means that it has the potential to form the 'nexus connecting existing disciplinary frameworks' (Robeyns, 2017b, p. 214).

As outlined in chapter two, Young and Muller have developed their understanding of powerful knowledge to better reflect the range of subjects within the curriculum. In its initial formulation, the concept appeared to valorise propositional knowledge embedded within networks of increasingly complex conceptual hierarchies. Knowledge framed this way seems at odds with what happens in the arts. Their reformulation focused on the distinction between knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge. The latter is characterised by forming the 'power-to' do certain things and the former 'power-over' others. Recall that one of the critiques of White is that this still leaves disciplinary knowledge under-justified given that we can have the power to do any number of banal or even malicious things. I accept this criticism but suggest the problem is not with the idea that disciplinary knowledge is powerful but that it needs to be tethered to a more substantive conception of the kinds of powers that we might have reason to promote amongst both individuals and society

How, therefore, do we determine the value of these various powers? If the power to make the judgements of a literary critic, to reason like a chemist or conceptualise space like a Geographer are valuable, there is clearly a need to specify what sort of value they have for those that possess them. As such, there is an inescapably normative and political dimension to selecting what kinds of knowledge should be a part of the curriculum. In understanding what the 'powers' of various disciplines and school subjects are, then, we begin to give an account of how they promote centrally important capabilities.

Power and Capability in Nussbaum and Young

There is an obvious connection between what Nussbaum means by a capability and what the more recent turn by Young and Muller mean by power. Under the

account I gave in chapter two power is best understood as a disposition or capacity (Morriss, 1987). To say that it is a disposition means that it is an enduring state of the person and their ability to do certain things under certain circumstances. Capabilities share this feature to the extent they can be defined as the real opportunities for beings and doings (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2017b; Stewart, 2001). They are distinct, therefore, from mere preferences. Both concepts are ultimately interested in expanding the ability of individuals to do things they have reason to value.

Returning to Nussbaum's notion of combined capabilities, we see that capabilities are much like stable dispositions in so far as they require both the internal capabilities to do X (for example, the cognitive ability to read) as well as the external conditions that could make that ability meaningful (such as books and a culture that values and provides opportunities to read). Interestingly, in a reissued version of his work on power, Morriss refers to the Capabilities Approach as a logical extension of his ideas in the political domain. Morriss in fact suggests that talk of 'powers' would 'better suit Sen's purposes' because it is the 'more natural' usage of the word (Morriss, 1987, p. xxiii). Further, Morriss' distinction between 'ability' and 'ableness' tracks directly Nussbaum's distinction between internal and combined capabilities. An ability is 'a property of the person, not of the environment' (Morriss, 1987, p. 80). Whereas an ableness requires the external conditions to allow the meaningful exercise of the ability. Morriss gives the example of the masticatory ability of the poor versus their ableness to eat food. The latter requires ample availability of food. The idea that the 'power' of powerful knowledge should be conceived of as 'power-to' renders it very similar to the concept of a capability. We have now a clear conceptual unity between the 'power' of powerful knowledge and a combined capability given by Nussbaum.

The Rejection of Instrumentalism and Incommensurability in Young and Nussbaum

There are good reasons, then, to think that the social realists and the capabilitarians are working with a very similar concept in their respective approaches. In this section I suggest that this connection is not only conceptual but also deeply rooted in the kinds of theoretical approaches they reject. Establishing this further develops the space for a connection between the two theories.

One area in which this connection is pronounced, is their respective commitment to the incommensurability of certain domains of human activity. To say that two or more things are incommensurable is to claim there is simply no single scale on which to place or evaluate them. Nussbaum is a at pains to underscore the importance of the incommensurability of certain aspects of human well-being. For her, the central capabilities cannot 'without distortion be reduced to a single numerical scale' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 19). This is to say that no amount of the opportunity for play and creativity can be offset against the capability for, say, religious freedom. These two capabilities are not tradeable against one another which is why they all need to be ensured as a matter of justice. Capabilities theorists are therefore committed to the notion of value pluralism. The notion that human beings value a diverse array of capabilities to be and do a multifarious range of things is central to the approach (Robeyns, 2017a; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

This has direct parallels with the focus on the distinctiveness of disciplinary knowledge found in social realist scholarship and the concept of powerful knowledge. Returning to the idea that different domains of knowledge are characterised by different knowledge structures (Mackenzie, 1998), we also see a commitment to the distinctiveness of different approaches to areas of human activity. At the same time, both social realists and capabilities scholars share a resistance to the tendency in policy making to look for generic metrics with which to measure educational success (Counsell, 2011; Young, 2008). An emphasis on decontextualised thinking skills neglects the way that thinking academically takes place within different domains that are irreducible to one another. Epistemological differences are elided if we imagine the curriculum as a site for the cultivation of nonspecific competencies. In response, social

realists argue, we need to see the curriculum as drawing students into a relationship with distinctive domains of knowledge and, like the different capabilities people may value, they can't be reduced to one another or measured along a single scale.

A related concern of both approaches is a resistance to the instrumentalising of various domains of human life. The Capabilities Approach can be seen as, in part, a response to the dominance of generic measures of human development such as GNP and GDP (Nussbaum, 2011). The problem with these crude economic indicators is that it is impossible to make reliable inferences from GNP per capita to many of the central elements of human well-being that intuitively guide judgements about how well a society is faring. Nussbaum cites the 'success' of South Africa on GDP measures versus the demonstrable injustices within society itself (Nussbaum, 2011). Sen pioneered several studies that similarly illustrated the ways societies might have superior health or educational outcomes despite lower GDPs (Sen, 1992).

Applied to education, the critique of economistic models extends to the human capital approach. As mentioned earlier, a focus on human capital continues to see education as an arm of economic development but focuses on what individuals can do rather than aggregative measures. Education's value, under this view, is measured by the extent it 'allows workers to be more productive, thereby being able to earn a higher wage' (Robeyns, 2006, p. 72). Disciplinary knowledge therefore finds its purpose in promoting the skills and competencies valued by the demands of the economy. The study of English, Maths and Music relies on their role in promoting the earnings and productivity of the individual. Such an understanding of education struggles to deal with the dimensions of education that cannot be reduced to metrics of productivity, growth, and income. It therefore instrumentalises educational knowledge, imagining it as in service to economic aims. The problem with relying on the homo-economicus model of human behaviour is that it obscures a range of other motivations that influence human behaviour (Osmani, 2019; Robeyns, 2006). Underpinning the aims of education with a reductive account of its value can't do justice to the variety of reasons students may have to pursue educational knowledge.

In this critique we see a direct parallel with the work of several social realist scholars. One thoroughgoing critique of the same problem has been given by Young and Muller in their three futures paper (Young & Muller, 2010). Here, they suggest that the 'technical-instrumentalism' associated with human capital approaches is inevitably deficient as a justification for the school curriculum because it ignores the 'irreducible differentiatedness of knowledge' (Young & Muller, 2010, p. 15). They dub the move towards a boundaryless curriculum rooted in the ever-shifting labour market as 'Future 2'. This is to contrast it to a 'Future 1' conception of the curriculum in which knowledge is a fixed object impressed agonistically upon students. The former involves an overly socialised understanding of knowledge and the latter an undersocialised one. Instead, a 'Future 3' curriculum would recognise the objective and emergent nature of educational knowledge whilst understanding its social origins rooted in disciplinary communities.

Whilst this account of the three futures of education provides much by way of insight into where education goes wrong, it is still not sufficiently detailed an account to explain what, as a matter of a justice, the purpose of education is. The Capabilities Approach provides this theoretical framework in so far as it emphasises the real opportunities people have to pursue valuable functionings. Capabilities are of intrinsic value for anyone regardless of what their specific projects and plans are. If access to disciplinary knowledge can be seen as promoting capabilities, we have a justification for it that can provide a compelling account of the purpose of education. At the same time, bringing in the work of social realist scholars allows us to give a richer, more specific account of the role of disciplinary knowledge in fostering educational capabilities.

The point to labour here is not that economic growth or preparation for economic activity is unimportant. It is rather to say that they should be secondary and subsidiary to wider goals related to human flourishing (Nussbaum, 2010; Walker, 2012). This is the gap that the social realist position, with its emphasis on disciplinary knowledge, has often been reticent to engage

with. However, given both the capabilitarian and social realist focus on resisting technical-instrumentalist paradigms of educational value, it is surprising that this is the case.

In Nussbaum's formulation, educational knowledge should not see economic acquisitiveness or employability as ends-in-themselves because the ten capabilities in her list depict a version of a life worthy of human dignity in thicker and more detailed terms. For example, Nussbaum suggests the practical reason and affiliation are the two central capabilities, playing an 'architectonic' role within her version of the approach (Nussbaum, 2000). This is important because it immediately allows us to ask what kinds of disciplinary knowledge contribute to these capabilities. I take up such a project in the final chapter. The key point here is that powerful knowledge needs to be connected to aims, values and purpose in a theorised way if it is to be a matter of justice that students acquire it. As Melanie Walker argues, we need, 'not only a curriculum of knowledge and skills but also the difference between simply having knowledge and skills and having the commitment and values to use these to the benefit of others as well as oneself' (Walker, 2012, p. 459).

Knowledge, Freedom, and Agency as Educational Goals in Young and Nussbaum

As discussed above, much attention has been paid to the distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful and powerful knowledge'. I argue in this section that a similar distinction exists within the capabilities literature that further forges links between the two approaches. Educationalists that emphasise how mainstream education reflects the 'knowledge of the powerful' tend to conceive of education through a more historical, sociological, or anthropological lens (Moore, 2009). They see education as a key tool in the proliferation of unequal outcomes between groups, mainly along the lines of class, gender and race (Maton & Moore, 2010). The social realist project aims to focus on the emancipatory potential of powerful knowledge itself and argues that we can meaningfully separate these two projects.

In investigating how the Capabilities Approach might relate to education, Walker and Unterhalter recognise a similar bifurcation of purpose in educational scholarship. They identify a set of scholars who focus on "how schools reproduce inequalities and social injustices through 'maldistribution and silencing" (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007, p. 7) and a second group who 'analyze aspects of the transformative space of schooling even if it is imperfectly realized' (7). My contention is that we can identify a link between education, agency and freedom running through both approaches to education that put them in a shared philosophical space.

In developing an account of education as basic capability, Lorella Terzi points to both conceptual and empirical work that demonstrates the role of education in fostering agency and control over one's life (Terzi, 2007). Education acts as the precondition for a range of other functionings as well as being inherently important for well-being. In the words of Wolff and De-Shalitt, it is a 'fertile functioning' (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). Despite this emphasis on the foundational importance of education for capabilities, Terzi's account slips into a somewhat generic account of educational purpose in stipulating a list of competencies that might form the space of a Capabilities Approach to education. These include literacy, numeracy, science, and technology, as well as learning dispositions such as being able to concentrate. Resisting the conflation of general competencies with disciplinary knowledge is what the social realist account can provide with its emphasis on the distinctiveness of disciplinary knowledge. The danger with a Capabilities Approach is that it slips into a vague and underspecified account of things we might like students to be able to do without a theoretically rich account of educational knowledge. To do this is to miss the special role that school subjects play in allowing access to, and acquaintance with, disciplinary knowledge. In bringing the two together we can avoid being forced into binary choice between the 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' accounts of the relationship between school subjects and academic disciplines mentioned above. Instead, acquainting students with disciplinary bodies of knowledge through school subjects promotes ethical and political aims. Again, we see both approaches able to enhance aspects of their respective theoretical approaches.

The link between knowledge and agency or freedom is present in much of the social realist literature. For example, Rata draws a link between democratic participation and disciplinary knowledge (Rata, 2012). Similarly, Young points to the role of knowledge in allowing us to move beyond our experience (Young, 2014). Much of this has its roots in the influence of Basi Bernstein. In his work we can see a connection to the Capabilities Approach. A central, recurring focus for Bernstein's project is the relationship between knowledge, its distribution, and the way this perpetuates inequality. As Mclean et al argue, the inequalities in education that Bernstein points to are 'constraints on what people can do and be' (McLean et al., 2013), language reminiscent of the Capabilities Approach itself. The upshot is that disciplinary knowledge is inherently moored to inequality in so far as it is unequally available to members of society. This therefore impacts the real capabilities individuals have available to them.

Mclean et al go further in exploring the Bernsteinean understanding of knowledge in arguing that access to powerful knowledge is essential for the development of capabilities, specifically Nussbaum's central capability of 'sense, imagination and thought' (McLean et al., 2013, p. 34). Again, this direct connection can be extended to the work of Young, Muller and others to the extent that access to powerful knowledge is itself generative of powers within individuals. As argued above, these powers can be seen as capabilities. Access to disciplinary knowledge 'bestows confidence, a sense of place in society and the means to participate in it' (McLean et al., 2013, p. 35). What we see in both the social realist account of knowledge and Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach is a concern with how access to education promotes freedom through capability expansion. Bernstein and the social realists give the relevant weight to the role of access to powerful knowledge in cultivating this freedom, which is missing from the capabilities literature and, by the same token, the capabilities literature fleshes out the social justice imperative implicit in the social realist account but, as yet, not fully developed.

The relationship between knowledge and freedom has also been drawn by Paul Ashwin. Ashwin makes the crucial point that any account of the importance of

access to disciplinary knowledge must recognise that knowledge, in this sense, is more than a set of propositional facts. Rather, it is 'the way of seeing the world that is offered by this body of knowledge which is critical' (Ashwin, 2020, p. 67). Facts are to a large extent inert if disconnected from their disciplinary systems of reference and inference (Derry, 2017). It is in immersing and inducting students into unfamiliar but powerful ways of seeing the world that they expand their freedom, and on my account, their capabilities to act in and on the world.

Ashwin's concept of 'structured bodies of knowledge' is helpful in rebutting the critique that powerful knowledge is merely reverence for authority and gatekeepers. Rather, these bodies of knowledge are fluid and changing but bound together through an 'interrelated structure of knowledge that has been built in their discipline or professional area' (Ashwin, 2020, p. 68). Disciplines have boundaries but these aren't carved in epistemological stone, rather they share a 'family resemblance' in the Wittgensteinian sense (Trowler, 2014). At the same time students need not be passive receptacles for knowledge, rather they can be empowered to make their own imprint on the palimpsests of knowledge (McArthur, 2012). It is this strong link between education and knowledge, on the one hand, and freedom and agency on the other, that bring the Capabilities Approach and the social realist account of knowledge together productively.

A New Universalism in Both Approaches

The final area of correspondence between the Capabilities Approach and social realism lies in their mutual concern around the relativism present within theories of human development and educational theory respectively. Both argue for a return to a version of universalism as an antidote to this. However, this is not the crass universalism that has been subject to withering critiques by generations of feminist and postcolonial scholars. Instead, both emphasise a kind of objectivity and universalism that recognises the importance of the social. Rather than fully recapitulate the arguments given by social realists in this regard I will identify the core features of this approach and then explore how

this aligns with Nussbaum's development of the Capabilities Approach, suggesting that their mutual concerns provide yet further impetus for bringing the two bodies of scholarship together.

Much of the intellectual project underlying the concept of powerful knowledge can be seen as the desire to give an alternative account of educational knowledge to that given by cultural reproduction theorists (Muller, 2023). This sociological tradition often denies any separation between knowledge and the interests of the powerful. Similarly, much postmodern scholarship within the sociology of education repudiates the possibility of objectivity and, instead, emphasises situatedness and subjectivity. Put together, the impact on educational theorising within the sociology of education has been to valorise various 'voice discourses' in which the curriculum ought to be framed around the interests of the knower rather than the knowledge itself (Young, 2008). Instead, the notion of powerful knowledge sees knowledge as having its own power. This is because of its differentiation and specialisation, winnowed over time, in disciplinary communities. Through this it becomes 'real' in the sense of being emergent from those disciplinary communities but not reducible to them. It is in this sense that the knowledge is objective. At the same time, this means the constructivist model of knowledge that somehow sees knowledge as latent within the student, is challenged (Moore, 2013b). Instead, knowledge is a social activity that students can be inducted into. Crucially, then, powerful knowledge can't be reduced to group identity and cultural traditions.

Walker, in defending epistemic capabilities as central to socially just education, echoes the concerns of social realists scholars in being sceptical of an 'experience-and-identity-based epistemology whereby we can speak only of our own histories and perspectives' (Walker, 2019, p. 224). Here we see the same concern for shared knowledge, social in origin, but not reducible to the knower and their interests and experiences. Walker herself draws on Young's work in recognising that if the educational space is to genuinely foster capabilities, rather than entrench cultural biases, it needs a concept of powerful knowledge that 'equips children and young people with conceptual languages to understand and interpret the world in ways which move them beyond daily

experiences' (Walker, 2019, p. 227). In a sense Walker's tentative engagement with social realist scholars is unsurprising, if we are interested in education as a space for the cultivation of capabilities then we must have a view on what knowledge in the curriculum moves students beyond the local and parochial. To focus on the latter would be to balkanise educational knowledge into identity groups, thereby abandoning the commitment to equality of capabilities.

Martha Nussbaum, in her work developing a novel account of the Capabilities Approach as a partial theory of justice, makes a similar set of arguments about the danger of relativism in relation to principles of justice. For her, the relativistic tendency within some social justice scholarship ought to be challenged and replaced with something robust enough to enable comparisons across societies. When addressing the justification for her Capabilities Approach, Nussbaum is alive to the idea that we might be better off with a 'plurality of different though related frameworks' rather than the universality espoused by her approach (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 40). One concern of critics of universalism of any kind is that we may end up imposing 'alien colonial ideas' (39) or 'faddishly aping a western political agenda' (37). Such critiques ought to be taken seriously. In response, Nussbaum gives us several reasons to be sceptical that a sensitivity to cultural difference need entail evacuating the universalist baby from the social justice bathwater.

Firstly, Nussbaum notes a tendency for those that emphasise cultural difference over universality to end up seeking as central, practices that are in fact fringe and extreme. The reason we can't defer to cultural norms as the barometer of knowledge, educationally or ethically, is because those norms are gatekept in large part by religious and cultural leaders against 'a backdrop of women's almost total economic and political disempowerment' (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 42). Equally, and perhaps more importantly, the argument from culture fails to recognise the traditions of resistance and struggle within cultures that can be supported and emboldened by the embrace of a universalistic framework. To demand that values be sequestered into neat cultural packages would be to abandon insurgent progressive challenges to the status quo. As Nussbaum puts it, sometimes, "it is the uncritical veneration of the past that is more

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'foreign', the voice of protest that is more 'indigenous' or 'authentic" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 46). The East/West bifurcation demands a collective identity among implausibly heterogenous collections of ideas, cultures, and customs. This mirrors the concern of Young, Moore and others that a curriculum that seeks to simply reflect the culture of a particular group is bound not just to be epistemically shallow, but further entrench inequality. It freezes cultures and identities in place using the curriculum as its justification and, therefore, represents an ironically conservative understanding of education. Against Nussabaum's arguments, critics might point to an argument from paternalism, suggesting that we ought not dictate to people what constitutes a flourishing human life. To do so effaces their dignity as autonomous controllers of their own destiny. Nussbaum responds that this is compatible with the Capabilities Approach and its emphasis on universality. The criticism itself assumes at least one universal value, namely the desire for non-domination. Nussbaum's own list of ten central human capabilities is imagined as acting at a relatively highly level of generality such that it can be instantiated in different contexts sensitive to local differences.

It is therefore within the Rawlsian notion of an 'overlapping consensus' in which 'people from many different traditions, with many different fuller conceptions of the good, can agree on, as the necessary basis for pursuing their good life' (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 40). It is, Nussbaum argues, philosophically spurious to assert that the elements on the list are particularly western. To do so risks the pernicious claim that a concern with freedom of choice, agency and autonomy are mere quirks of a particular western world view. Whilst attractive to some, such a view finds little empirical support outside of those who wish to stifle such virtues amongst their population (Sen, 1997). A further response is that the list is itself 'open-ended and nonexhaustive' (p. 47). It has been derived from considerable cross-cultural dialogue and debate. What Nussbaum holds onto is that the genesis and provenance of a theory or idea simply does not determine its veracity, usefulness, or potential scope. A similar point is made by Young in pointing out that such a view commits the genetic fallacy in conflating an idea's origins with its content; this is a fallacy of irrelevance committed by those critics

of approaches to ethics, knowledge and justice that aim to speak beyond their cultural origins (Young, 2008).

Nussbaum's powerful rebuke to variants of cultural and epistemological relativism shares much with the social realist concerns about the status of knowledge within the curriculum. What then is Nussbaum's justification for focusing on capabilities? The central point is that we need to consider the individual and the capability to function as the primary unit of evaluation. This is as opposed to the group, clan, tribe, or sect. This 'ethical individualism', as Robeyns describes it, is distinct from any metaphysical claim requiring individuals to be divorced from the deep ties of the community (Robeyns, 2017a). Instead it simply observes that, because we each have only one life to live, we ought to focus on what each individual is actually able to do and to be (Nussbaum, 2011). In her early work developing the approach, Nussbaum draws heavily on both Marx and Aristotle in putting forward a concept of nondetached objectivity to elucidate the notion of a capability. This entails that we do not look at human lives from an 'alien point of view, outside of the conditions and experience of those lives — as if we were discovering some sort of value-neutral scientific fact about ourselves' (Nussbaum 1987, 38).

Notice here the similarities with the social realist emphasis on a social conception of objectivity - which is to say an escape from relativism that doesn't entail positivism. By objective, Nussbaum argues we do not 'take each group or culture's word for it' (38) on matters of valuable human capabilities and functionings. Cultures can cultivate human flourishing in myriad ways but can also blight functioning when a deferent attitude to custom and dogma prevail. Nussbaum therefore seeks to find an objective framework for human flourishing from within human life rather than external to it. She notes, 'the collapse of metaphysical realism is taken to entail not only the collapse of essentialism about the human being but a retreat into an extreme relativism' (Nussbaum, 1993, p. 52)

This sentiment is remarkably close to the concern of social realists such as Moore, Young and Muller in that understanding something as 'social' does not

entail it is arbitrary, subjective or without robust and defensible foundations. Nussbaum is critical of the way in which a denial of objectivity leads to the evaluation of normative practices as merely 'a matter of power' in which truth derives 'from one's contingent social position' (Nussbaum 1987, 209). The parallel with Young's notion of knowledge of the powerful is obvious. In both cases, the retreat from objectivity gives us no firm ground from which to make substantive claims about justice and knowledge respectively.

This chapter has made the case that powerful knowledge, with its roots in the social realist conception of knowledge, can be enriched and enhanced when brought within the theoretical paradigm of the Capabilities Approach. Whilst some literature has connected the two approaches, thus far there has been no sustained and systematic attempt to bring them together. At the same time, the burgeoning literature exploring the relationship between the Capabilities Approach and education can be similarly enhanced by the notion of powerful knowledge.

I've suggested there are four distinctive areas of affinity between the two approaches that make this case compelling. Firstly, the recent theorising around the 'power' of powerful knowledge is very close to the idea of a capability. In fact, under Morriss' view of power, they are conceptually indistinguishable. Secondly, both approaches reject the move towards both technical-instrumentalist and human capital approaches to education. Such views abandon the distinctive and incommensurable nature of much of human activity, including the knowledge of the school curriculum. Thirdly, I suggested that both approaches share a deep and nontrivial commitment to freedom and agency. Lastly, I've explored their respective commitments to a nuanced version of universalism that remains sensitive to the importance of the social.

The crucial point for education, is that we can't simply assume that the dissemination of powerful knowledge is sufficient for treating individuals as ends in themselves with an interest in living lives by their own lights. To ensure this we need to argue why they might have such an interest. It is the Capabilities Approach, and in particular Nussbaum's account, that offers such

an argument. However, equally, it is also the case that Nussbaum's case for the Capabilities Approach can be enriched by a more explicit engagement with the role of disciplinary knowledge, recontextualised by school subjects, in fostering the kind of agency that can promote the development of capabilities.

Having developed this account, the remaining chapters of this thesis will make the case for literary study as an integral part of a curriculum rooted in the capabilitarian conception of powerful knowledge outlined in this chapter. In doing this, I seek to ease the tensions I traced within the history and traditions of English teaching revealed in chapter one and, in so doing, give a philosophically robust account of the importance of literary study for all rooted in social justice.

Chapter Four: Subjects of Literature: Culture, Civilisation and Power

My aim so far has been threefold. In chapter one, to give an account of the tension between the curriculum thinking ushered in by the notion of powerful knowledge, now prevalent in schools across England, and some of the key principles held by many in the English educational community. In chapter two, to develop this looking closely at the concept of powerful knowledge, engaging with its history in social realist sociology of education and contributing to some of the recent theorising around the concept by providing a philosophical analysis of power. This sets important groundwork for my ultimate argument about the purpose and importance of literary study. In chapter three I made the argument that those promoting powerful knowledge as a central part of the curriculum lack sufficient normative justification for the widespread adoption of the concept. They therefore require a theory of educational justice to ground its central importance as an entitlement of all students. To do this I used the Capabilities Approach, outlining a series of conceptual affinities between the two paradigms of thinking which enhance both approaches. What we are left with, then, is a capabilitiarian account of powerful knowledge.

If I am right that the value of powerful knowledge lies in its ability to foster capabilities, and these capabilities can be cultivated within school subjects related to academic disciplines, a range of other questions arise. What kinds of capabilities might literary study in schools promote? What do the kinds of activities literary scholars and critics engage in do for students' capability set that could justify their central position in the curriculum? If we can give a compelling answer to these questions, it will help dissolve many of the disputes outlined in the first chapter and that formed the original puzzles of this thesis.

Capabilities, Powerful Knowledge and School Subjects

The influence of the return to disciplinary knowledge in the secondary school curriculum has provoked some attempts to articulate what the powers of

particular disciplines are (Maude, 2016; Mizzi, 2023; Puustinen & Khawaja, 2021). There is also a burgeoning literature combining the Capabilities Approach with the concept of powerful knowledge in school subject theorising, thus far limited to the field of Geography education. David Lambert has pioneered the GeoCapabilities initiative which seeks to connect the disciplinary knowledge of Geography with the insights of the Capabilities Approach to answer similar questions to those that concern me in the case of English (Lambert et al., 2015). Lambert sees the potential for the Capabilities Approach to 'contribute to the development of a framework for communicating the aims and purposes of geography in schools internationally' (Lambert et al., 2015, p. 723). Part of the need to look for such a framework is the disparate views on the nature of Geography as a school subject. As suggested in chapter one, school English is in a very similar situation. There are a variety of academic disciplines and undergraduate degrees that plausibly lead to a career as an English teacher, and perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, a broad range of conceptions of its fundamental purpose. As we have seen, this heterogeneity is part of what educationalists working within English education are concerned to preserve and see powerful knowledge as potentially undermining.

Similarly, there has been increasing interest in the general connection between the Capabilities Approach and the concept of powerful knowledge within curriculum theory (Deng, 2020, 2021). The suggestion here, similar to my own, is that the social realist emphasis on the power of disciplinary knowledge is in need of a broader framework of justification that can provide some normative bite. We can't keep the curriculum solely bound to the acquiring of disciplinary knowledge; we need also to reflect on how and whether this knowledge meets further educational ends. The Capabilities Approach, with its emphasis on allowing people to do and be the things they have reason to value, offers this.

There is to date no work, however, connecting literary studies to this theoretical literature. In this chapter I show that the concept of culture plays an essential role in the self-understanding of literary studies in schools. The power of literary studies is, therefore, in some important sense related to culture. I argue that, despite very different political and philosophical aims, the major movements in

thinking about English education have always been premised on an unstable notion of culture. This notion has a history which I trace genealogically to the Enlightenment and its reaction.

I begin by giving an account of the role culture plays in the genesis of English as a school subject. I then explore the echoes of this in the current understanding of culture in the UK educational context, focusing particularly on the influence of E. D. Hirsch. I then examine the account of culture at work in the progressive, post-war development in English education. Having looked at the concept in the context of school subject English, I then trace the philosophical history of culture revealing two distinct understandings that help inform current debates. Lastly, I apply this back to literary study in schools today, suggesting the understanding of culture we have inherited can't do the work needed for a coherent account of the power of literary studies.

Literary Studies and the Question of Culture

In this section I focus on the conception of culture that has dominated thinking around the study of literature in schools. This is the view that culture represents the special contribution of the nation to the great works of art. It assumes a connection between the ethno-national identity of the artist and the burgeoning identity of the students. It therefore seeks to actively acculturate the student into this identity. The school subject of English is intimately bound up with this notion of culture (Eagleton, 2008; Elliott, 2014; Yandell, 2017). The first government declaration of the nature and purpose of English as a school subject, the Newbolt report, suggests that a national culture can unite social classes and it is the study of English literature that ought to be the preeminent sphere within which this takes place (BoE, 1921). Throughout the document, there is frequent reference to *our* national culture and its inextricable relation to the study of an English literary heritage (Doecke & Mead, 2018; Green, 2021; Talbot, 2022). As such, since its inception, the study of literature has had an intimate link to the wider public political culture; a guardian involved in the maintenance of the spiritual and cultural health of society and its members.

The above account of culture and its relationship to literary studies rests on two claims. Firstly, the notion that culture is best understood as excellence in the arts. It is therefore a version of what we might call 'high-culture'. Secondly, high culture takes its place within the curriculum because it creates and sustains a national identity and cultivates the 'sweetness and light' that will both civilise the masses and guard against the crass cultural denigration associated with mass industrialisation (Arnold, 1869, p. vii). The curricular consequences of this high-cultural vision are that the works of Shakespeare, Byron and Dickens do more than exemplify linguistic ingenuity, narrative novelty and insight into the lives of individuals and society. Instead, the study of such authors is intimately linked to the persistence, renewal and regeneration of society itself.

Benedict Anderson (2016), in his influential account of the development of nationalism 'Imagined Communities', argues that nations create themselves through acts of imagination by those that identify with it. This is sustained through widespread symbolic practices that governments have become adept at upholding. One of these is literature itself. Anderson shows how the popularisation and dissemination of, for example, the nineteenth century Victorian novel, helped bolster the imagined community of the English nation through its depiction of familiar landscapes, characters and social contexts (Anderson, 2016). This allowed identification with something recognisably 'English' whilst at the same time operating at a level of abstractness that allowed the reader to place themselves in the fold of the characters themselves.

The general rise of literacy and the imaginative emotional engagement afforded by fiction therefore provided the groundwork for the modern nation-state. Anderson's influential contribution to theorising the nation as an 'imagined community' helps bring out the tension in thinking about the nation state. On the one hand, the philosophically liberal conception of the state as a procedural sorting house for rights and obligations that apply to citizens. On the other, the nation as ethno-cultural entity, in which a thicker cultural homogeneity binds the community together. As we will see, this tension runs throughout the story of English as a school subject.

Literature and Culture Today: The Conservative Conception of Culture in English

The notion that the English curriculum serves the purpose of acculturation to an English literary heritage is, as I've suggested, nothing new. Yet, it has been revived by the current National Curriculum introduced in 2014. It begins by stating, as one of its aims, the cultural development of students (DfE, 2014). The study of literature is described as having a 'key role' in pupils' 'chance to develop culturally' (DfE, 2014, p. 2). A government report on cultural education and England suggests that 'learning about our culture…is vital to developing our identity' (DfE, 2012, p. 2). It is safe to say, then, that the notion that literature somehow affords access to culture is a central tenet justifying its place within the curriculum, both now and historically.

Today the nationalistic cultural purpose has been repackaged as a tool for social justice under the influence of the work of E. D. Hirsch and his concept of 'cultural literacy' (Hirsch et al., 1988). Despite being initially developed to address a perceived crisis in American rates of basic literacy, Hirsch's ideas gained traction amongst conservative policy makers and provided a rationale for large swathes of curriculum reform (Yandell, 2017). This was made clear by Nick Gibb MP, former Minister for Schools, in his lecture on the influence of Hirsch on conservative educational thinking (Gibb, 2015). We might see the invocation of Hirsch as an attempt to resolve some the paradoxes inherent in modern neoliberal and conservative conceptions of both education and society. On the one hand, conservative political philosophy often seeks increased capital acquisition. This necessarily requires prioritising technology, innovation and the 'skills' required for the emerging world of work. Yet, on the other hand, there is a desire to rebuild an imagined past by preserving a culture threatened by the very same forces (Jones, 2019). Hirsch has been a useful intellectual resource in resolving this dissonance in that he can be read as premising a thriving economic nation on widespread cultural familiarity and affinity; a combination of national, cultural homogeneity and economic prosperity.

The central claim made by Hirsch is that to be culturally literate is to possess the 'shared background knowledge to be able to communicate effectively with everyone else' (Hirsch et al., 1988, p. 32). It in fact lies between the everyday knowledge picked up in the home and the specialised knowledge of the academic discipline. It is vital, according to Hirsch, because those that lack it become disenfranchised from the mainstream community and therefore can't partake in democratic, civil society. Education, as a result, becomes centrally concerned with teaching 'the ways of one's own community' (Hirsch et al., 1988, p. 38). Here we see a communitarian assumption about the stability and coherence of a national community. Hirsch takes it as read that a unified cultural community is a precondition of a successful nation state. This view accords with the lineage of English education traced above from Arnold, though Newbolt to Gove. It helps explain, therefore, why he has been a useful intellectual resource for resolving the dissonance in conservatism mentioned above. I offer a sustained critique of this in chapter five.

This transatlantic borrowing of Hirsch's work has come under withering criticism from scholars of English education (Eaglestone, 2020; Hodgson & Harris, 2022; Mansworth, 2016; Yandell, 2017). The criticisms are both political and epistemological. Politically, the concern is that 'cultural literacy' simply restates the Arnoldian conception of an elite high culture that can be used to separate the already privileged from their uncouth social subordinates. It also becomes assimilated with related fears about the decline of British identity resulting from increased migration. Here, schools become tacit enforcers of how students conceive of their allegiances and identities (Osler, 2011). Hirsch's emphasis on a common and shared culture is readily employable by those that fear new and changing cultural identities in school classrooms (Keddie, 2014). This Hirschian inspired approach to culture attaches the cultural education students receive to a vision of nation building in which the dissemination of culture serves the purpose of sustaining a national cultural identity (Hodgson & Harris, 2022). Yet, as I've suggested above, this project is premised on the notion that stable and fixed cultural identity for a nation such a Britain is both possible and desirable.

On the epistemological side, Hirsch's emphasis on knowing the 'right' cultural facts distorts the activity of literary study into a by-rote, didactic affair, quite distant from its fundamental meaning-making purpose. The result in the classroom is laundry lists of author names and dates, potted historical facts about the time of a texts production, and the memorising of abstruse literary terminology unmoored from any meaningful context (Eaglestone, 2020). This rings entirely true with my experience as a teacher of English since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 2014. However, the problem, I will suggest, is not that access to culture, and a focus on powerful disciplinary knowledge, have become central rationales for the curriculum. Rather it is that knowledge, nation, and culture have been conflated. This conflation was there at the time of the Newbolt report and persists through the current Hirschian educational landscape. Challenging this picture will help to untangle many of the confusions in the often-polarised debate and reveal why literary study ought to be conceived of as promoting capabilities rather than either fostering allegiance or promoting recognition. First, I turn to an alternative tradition of thinking about culture in English that sought to challenge the traditionalist account.

Culture as Resistance: The backlash to Literature as National Acculturation

Whilst debates around the position of culture in the literature curriculum are undergoing a revival, many of the themes are not new. Those critical of the Hirschian influence on current government policy can trace a recent history of thinking about the purpose of literature in schools back to debates in the second half of the twentieth century.

The decades after the Second World Ward saw the growth of the tripartite system of secondary education leading to the comprehensive school system (Gorard, 2015). Shifting gender roles, the decline of British imperialism, and changing ethnic demography combined with a desire by many for a new, less hierarchical society and educational system. The curriculum of independent and grammar schools was deemed unfit for a society now orientated towards

educating all, rather than the narrow social elite (Lowe, 2012). This in turn had a seismic impact on English as taught in schools (Goodson and Medway 1990). Instead of the reverential attitude to literature, influenced by F. R. Leavis and associated with the Cambridge school, there grew a countervailing, bottom-up reimagining of the subject variously dubbed 'Growth English', 'The London School', or 'English as Language' (Gibbons, 2017).

This approach sought to bring English in schools down from the ivory towers of cloistered Oxbridge colleges and root it in the lived experiences of students from a diverse range of backgrounds (Goodson and Medway 1990). Gibbons describes this new version of English as prioritising students' own experience and language, the relevance of English to their lives, and the disavowal of formal literary tools of analysis in favour of personal response (Gibbons, 2017). This version of school English was in tension with the traditional 'Cambridge School' which, according to some, saw literature as an 'escape from the dreadful prison of experience in a degenerate age' (Bousted, 2002, p. 187).

The existence of two distinct paradigms, occupying entirely different educational spaces, has been questioned (Green, 2004; Marshall, 2000). That said, there is an important distinction in how the notion of culture is understood in these respective movements. For those more sympathetic to the Cambridge school, literature is a life raft keeping students above the murky waters of mass consumer cultural forms. For the London school, culture was nothing more than the rich tapestry of everyday experience and, as such, saw 'lived experience as a force to be celebrated' (Bousted, 2002, p. 187). Importantly, it was this London version of English that rose to prominence as the dominant model of English education in the latter half of the twentieth century amongst large swathes of English teachers. One of its central thoughts was that English is best theorised and researched by the communities of practitioners rooted in their local contexts rather than in deference to university academics or policy makers (Yandell, 2019).

This crystalised in the Dartmouth conference of 1966, in which academics and educationalists in both Britain and North America convened to discuss the

purpose and methods of the study of literature in schools. One outcome was a distinction between an American model which focused on texts and knowledge, and the newly conceived British model more concerned with the meaning-making processes that take place in the classroom (Harris, 1991; Smith, 2019). This in turn led to the seminal 'Growth Through English' by John Dixon which in many ways set the agenda for so-called London English for years to come (Dixon 1967). Central to Dixon's argument was that a cultural heritage model of English doesn't do justice to the ways in which students can generate insight and meaning through authentic and personal responses to texts. These insights prioritise experience as a tool of literary engagement, rather than exclude it as simplistic, novice or ignorant.

Empirical research suggests the growth model of English outlined above encapsulates how the majority of English teachers feel about their subject (Goodwyn, 2012). It recognises that literary study is a discipline rooted in the sociable act of dialogue and discussion rather than ascending fixed structures of pre-prescribed tiers of knowledge (McLean Davies et al., 2022). The focus on the way in which language and experience inflect our reading of a text has implications for the pedagogical nature of the subject, more suited to discussion, exploration, and creativity than memorisation and recitation. Yet, at the heart of this growing consensus around a personal growth model was a troubled relationship to how we imagine the cultural identity of students and what implications this has for the curriculum. According to Gibbons, the growth model of English, which initially sort to give an intellectual account of how students learnt in English, also encompassed a 'form of progressive politics that formed an umbrella for growth English' (Gibbons, 2017, p. 31). The point to note here is that in escaping the overtly nation-building project of early models of English education, there was a rival political conception of the purposes of literary study in schools at work.

Into the 70s and 80s, in English as for much intellectual life in Britain, issues of gender, race and ethnicity came to rival issues of class in progressive circles (Turner, 2003). The development of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies represented the intellectual hub of much of this work. Many interested in

progressive approaches to literary study in schools drew influence from the development of cultural studies, with writers such as Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams becoming lodestars for the alternative to the high-minded Victorianism of the traditional understanding of literature and culture. As Gibbons argues, 'English was a political subject in the way it was framed by progressive thinkers, and as such it reflected the evolving politics of gender, race and class' (Gibbons, 2017, p. 42). Alongside the emphasis on personal growth and the resistance to imposed readings of texts, there came a concomitant drive to use the English curriculum as a tool for social justice. Women, ethnic minorities and working classes voices were embraced by this new understanding of English as it sought to distance itself ever further from the conception of culture as medicinal tonic for the uncultured masses.

What we have then, is a cleavage in thinking about the place of English in general, and literature specifically, within the curriculum. On the one hand, the tradition of culture as hostile to the masses' a rarefied object of refined human wisdom that students ought to appreciate if they are to take up their place as civilised and productive members of their culture. However, this veneration of a historically sacred canon meant that the curriculum was perceived by more progressive educationalists as utterly divorced from the lives of those that diverged from a middle class, white, male standard. On the other hand, a grassroots movement beginning in the 60s aimed to centre the experiences of students themselves and their responses to a range of texts, not just literary. The study of popular culture, music, film, media came to prominence as did a diversifying of literary texts with authors chosen to better reflect the multicultural nature of British society. This notion of culture sought to do at least two things differently. Firstly, expand the domain of culture to the more egalitarian mediums such as mass media. Secondly to resist a nationalistic conception of culture in favour of recognising society as composed of a diversity of different cultures, all worthy of respect and recognition (Hardcastle, 2016). The current debates around knowledge in the English curriculum often see the work of both Hirsch and Young as part of a reaction against the more egalitarian and diversified curriculum in favour of a return to the neo-traditionalism of the Arnoldian version of culture outlined above.

Ultimately, I will argue that, notwithstanding the political differences between the above accounts of the purposes of literature in schools, there is a similarity in how the very concept of culture is conceived. Namely that individuals are possessors of a discernible culture and that an education in literary studies ought to recognise this culture as an essential part of its purpose. It is this similarity that I suggest needs to be rethought. In the next section I turn to the concept of culture itself. The history of the concept and its use is instructive in understanding what is at stake in these debates and forms a bridge to an engagement with issues of justice central to modern political philosophy which I take up in the next chapter.

The Two faces of Culture: preserve of the elite or whole way of life?

Raymond Williams describes culture as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams, 1985, p. 62). With this in mind, it must be recognised that no account of culture can address all the manifest ways in which the word is used and invoked. Here I focus on how the concept has interacted with conceptions of the individual and their relationship to wider society and the implications this has for education. I do this because this thesis is concerned with social justice in general, and with the nature of culture in literary studies in particular.

Culture, like all concepts, has a history. Whilst contested, there are important and established features that bear on the discussion above. Etymologically culture has its roots in the Latin word *colere,* referring to tending or cultivating. It therefore has an agricultural origin that stretches back to Roman civilisation (Benhabib, 2002). During the eighteenth and nineteenth century two distinct conceptions of culture developed that map onto distinctive French and German traditions (Kuper, 1999). In the French tradition, culture is a culmination of the Enlightenment project's promotion of reason. It is universal, available to all and becomes associated with the notion of civilisation. Such a view implies a sense of progress over time and is, almost by definition, a challenge to the authority of tradition, dogma and received wisdom. This notion of civilisation led to a

countervailing concept embodied in the German notion of *Kultur*. Under this view, Kultur is a defence of tradition and associated with 'spiritual values over materialism; for the arts and crafts against technology' (Kuper, 1999, p. 6). In the German lineage, culture represents the spiritual and moral centre of society rather than social transformation through the march of reason and rationality.

The conflict between civilisation and kultur developed into an ever-hardening binary (Botz-Bornstein, 2012). Reason, science and technology lay on one side; tradition, obligation, and the cultivation of the emotions on the other. The opposition ends up with two contrasting visions of society: one a universalist civilisation in which common humanity underpins social arrangements, and the other an organic unity of a community, with their own distinctive spirit reflected in language, customs and people (Benhabib, 2002). The latter, German Romantic sense of culture has roots in Hegel and finds its clearest expression in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder (Benhabib, 2002; Eagleton, 2016; Parens, 1994). Herder's understanding of culture is conceived very much within the realm of the nation (Evrigenis & Pellerin, 2004). For Herder, individuals are constituted by cultures, conceived as organic and harmonious wholes. Different ways of life in concrete communities give rise to different codes, customs, symbols and traditions. It is by immersion in the way of life of one's distinctive culture that the collective flourishing of society is achieved (Church, 2015). The culture of each nation reflects the spirit (*Geist)* of the people, and this distinctive culture can't be assimilated to others or abstracted out to universal principles unmoored from the local and contextual.

This philosophical dispute was given new impetus at the end of the nineteenth century by the rise of anthropology. Often dubbed the first anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor gave the now ubiquitous definition of culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, 1913, p. 1). The Tylorian notion of culture encompasses society from top to bottom. As such it is in tension with notions of high-culture that we saw associated with the traditionalist conservative understanding of literature in education. For Tylor, and the anthropological tradition he inspired, culture isn't

well understood as the veneration of great art alone. Instead, it refers to the specific form of life of a society that gets its distinctiveness from everyday practices, customs and habits as well as from artistic achievement. It is, therefore, more aligned with the Germanic notion of Kultur.

Culture and English identity

In the English eighteenth and nineteenth century the distinction between the German Kultur and the French civilisation was similarly in tension. Here, culture develops as a kind of spiritual immanence in resistance to mechanistic consumerism (Jenks, 2005). Later, in the twentieth century, Raymond Williams traces the meaning of culture in England to the Romantic backlash against the industrial revolution (Williams, 1961). Again, we see echoes of the debate on mainland Europe in which culture is associated with the poetic, the imaginative and the emotional, whereas civilisation denoted the mechanical, scientific and soulless. The notion of civilisational progress associated with modernity is conceived as incompatible with the cultivation of true humanity.

One consequence of this is a persistent elitism associated with the notion of culture. Figures from the Romantic tradition through to the Victorian era, such as Coleridge and Carlyle, impugned civilisation for eroding the value of culture and encouraged as a response a 'specialised, preservation group' aimed at providing a bulwark against the rise of mass civilisation (Jenks, 2005, p. 20). This is not to suggest that these thinkers did not want their version of culture extended to all in society. Rather, there was a fear that class stratification and industrialisation had led to a social fabric unfit for the cultivation of the human spirit. Matthew Arnold, following Romantic poets like Coleridge, saw industrialised society as a great threat to the culture that provided the bedrock of an enlightened society. Arnold is now quoted in the current English National Curriculum, perhaps a signal of the current educational allegiance to culture as opposed to the anarchy of mass civilisation. For Arnold, the problem of industrialised society lay in its tendency to prioritise technology, industry and scientific advance over the purifying qualities of culture. The Arnoldian concept

of culture is unapologetically a high cultural one. It is in the great works of art and literature that the human spirit is nourished and developed.

Education becomes central for Arnold because it is the potential domain in which culture could be revived against the forces of the new industrial order. It can be 'transmitted throughout the educational system, and expressed most powerfully in the arts' (Kuper, 1999, p. 9). It is for this reason that Arnold dedicated the majority of his life to 'establishing a new system of general education' (Jenks, 2005, p. 24). This concern with education as a buffer against the enemies of high-culture returns in many of the most influential figures in twentieth century English intellectual life. Figures such as T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis saw literature and its close analysis as serving a specifically political role in the shaping and direction of a national culture (Eagleton, 2022). These critics forged the close reading techniques that still dominate much of the literary analysis that goes on in schools today (Choo, 2017).

Ultimately, the development of the term culture diverges into two central visions, the Tylorian and the Arnoldian (Appiah, 2018). Under the Tylorian and Herderian conception, culture is best understood as the 'whole way of life' of a distinctive group. It encompasses all of the items of anthropological study, from language, cuisine and dress to art, literature and music. Crucially, this understanding of the term posits a plurality of mutually incompatible cultures that provide the precondition for the realisation of human life. Politically, this results in the Romantic Nationalism of the eighteenth century and becomes the taproot of a kind of Burkean conservatism that prises the 'little platoon' as the primary unit of justice (Burke et al., 2003). It also has implications for how we think about identity. If the transmission of culture is what forges our individual identities, then there is a direct link between education, identity and the nation. Going back to the neo-traditional account of the place of literature in the curriculum, we see how this conception of culture becomes influential. The study of literary texts brings us into the Tylorian organic whole and readies us for membership in our community. On the Arnoldian account, culture relates more directly to the high-arts. The great works of literature act as buttress

against the barbarism of industrialisation, mechanisation and global consumer capitalism.

Culture and Conceptions of Literature in Schools

What the two understanding of culture share is a sense that culture plays a central role in the development of both individuals and society. Both accounts lead to an ethic of preservation in which identity is bound up with communal association and belonging. It therefore becomes an area that the state and its educational institutions intervene with. More than this, culture is what animates human activity and is in opposition to the stultifying effects of mass civilisation. It is the universal, the rational, the utilitarian, the technocratic that threatens culture and it is from that that it must be protected (Kuper, 1999).

We can start to see how this history of the concept of culture illuminates the traditions of thinking about the place of literature in schools outlined in the opening sections. Philosophically conservative traditions amplify the importance of the nation as the primary carrier of culture. From the Newbolt report to the current National Curriculum, we see the idea that students ought to develop an affection and affinity with *our* cultural heritage. It is no surprise then that the work of an academic such as Hirsch has been invoked in this project with his emphasis on the acquiring of 'cultural literacy'. This approach has its roots in the Herderian tradition but fuses it with the Arnoldian one. That is to say, a canon of great literature is venerated not only for its supposed aesthetic or artistic merit, but instead because of its role in preserving the imagined community.

At the same time, the countervailing London English sought to wrest this more nationalistic understanding of culture from dominance by celebrating the diversity of cultures within the nation. Under this view, the culture of one's ethnic origins becomes salient and is reflected in the nature of texts studied and the pedagogy used in the classroom (Hardcastle & Yandell, 2018). The culture of the working class is also to be included rather than maligned as aberrant. More than this, London English sought to associate culture not with something

absent from the student but rather as the experience of the students themselves (Hardcastle, 2013, 2016; Yandell, 2014). We see here the natural affinity between this approach to understanding the purposes of English and the 'voice discourses' Young and others are sceptical of. If English education is about recognising and bringing forth cultural experience of different groups, then the classroom becomes a site for these various voices to play out. There is a sense in which this approach is clearly both ethical and, as I argue in the final chapter, important to a powerful vision of literary study. Yet, it can slip into its own kind of essentialism.

The turn in London English towards the recognition of marginalised cultures is resurgent once more amongst progressively minded educationalists. Here, again, the critique of the conservative educational reforms to the English curriculum takes the form of pointing to the fact of cultural diversity (Choudhury, 2007; Hippisley, 2024; Hodgson & Harris, 2022; Shah, 2013). In that these reforms excavate a narrative of literary heritage which is largely white and male, this critique is apt as far as it goes. At the same time, embedded within such critiques is a tacit acceptance of at least some of the terrain staked out by the culturally conservative agenda. Namely that culture is somehow synonymous with race, religion and ethnicity. Such an assumption can be seen in Hodgson and Harris when they describe how the current attempt to impose a monocultural British identity entails the erasure of multicultural citizens of modern society. Yet, in the next sentence they attach this to the 'increasing number of black and Asian migrants from the former empire' (Hodgson & Harris, 2022, p. 393). Part of my critique of the general way in which 'culture' is invoked when thinking about political justice and literary studies rests on a scepticism of the conflation of race and culture. It isn't difficult for me to call to mind Asian and black students whose cultural affiliations do not neatly map onto the postcolonial lineage their racial identity might suggest.

To be sure this is not to deny that race and culture coincide and interact. Rather, it is to resist the impulse that race is a reliable barometer for an individual's sense of their own cultural identity. Turvey et al (2012) reveal this tension in their discussion of Muslim identity in London classrooms. Here, they

make the claim 'we never practise one culture because we are all influenced by both our background and a range of life experiences' (Turvey et al., 2012, p. 39). Yet at the same time, we find the assertion, 'the culture of Islam is very much rooted in a sense of reality' (Turvey et al., 2012, p. 6). There is, therefore, a paradox in the progressive response to nationalistic conceptions of culture. On the one hand a recognition that culture can't be boiled down to one discrete identity shared by all the members of the group. Yet on the other, a claim that asserts a cultural norm that apparently covers the nearly two billion global Muslims.

The language of culture encourages this in its current form because it also often treats culture as synonymous with identity. In Turvey et al we see culture and identity placed next to each other throughout the article. Yet surely these concepts are importantly different. It is uncontroversial that everyone has an identity or, to be precise, a range of different identities. What is more dubious is that these intersecting identities relate to a specific and definable culture. This is important because educational policy and educators themselves need to have a way of deciding what kinds of cultural experiences students have. If the best corrective to the Hirschian, neoconservative model of culture is to mirror the same assumptions, we risk ending up with a similar reification of culture as organically unified identity. Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, this need not be the route we embrace.

I've suggested that the countervailing understandings of culture and the curriculum, from the neo-traditionalism of Goveism to the progressive response, appear to be starkly at odds, and of course in many ways they are. Not least because the former imagines culture as something to refine experience whereas the latter sees culture as constituted by it. Yet, they hold in common a debt to a view of culture as in some sense a property or possession of the individual. The English identity of the conservative tradition or the plurality of cultural identities of the progressive response.

Chapter Five: The Political Place of Culture: Community, Identity and Agency

Thus far, my exploration of where the power of literary study in schools might lie has focused on the notion of culture and how it has been imagined within English teaching and the history of ideas more generally. Culture has been conceived of as an ineradicable feature of one's identity. The literature students study in schools is, *mutatis mutandum*, a powerful part of that culture. As such, it becomes a matter of educational justice that students are given access, through literary texts, to *their* culture.

Understanding the relationship between one's cultural identity and what they are owed educationally therefore becomes a political and philosophical question as much as it is an educational one. It is important to look at the notion of culture in philosophical terms to relate it to the capabilitiarian account of powerful knowledge I advocate. If part of the 'power' of literary study relates to culture, we need to examine how this might be so. In what follows I chart how understandings of culture have played out in debates in political philosophy over the last several decades. I argue that a range of influential political philosophies see the recognition and preservation of culture as an important part of social justice. However, like the concept invoked in the context of English education, these accounts lead to conclusions that hinder rather than promote a compelling conception of educational justice.

Communitarianism: Whose Culture is it Anyway?

The controversies explored in the previous chapter contain philosophical assumptions around the demands of culture within the political domain. The claim that individuals inhabit a particular culture essential for society's preservation animates these debates. At the same time, culture has become an important site for theorising about social justice, particularly given the increasing diversity resulting from shifting demographic patterns across much of

the world. Understanding the implications of these arguments will help illuminate how we might better think about literary study in schools.

Communitarianism ultimately has its source as a philosophical critique of liberalism. In particular, the Rawlsian approach which seeks to derive principles of justice by denuding the individual of their highly specific identity. For Rawls, we are to place ourselves under a 'veil of ignorance' from which to reason about the principles of justice (Rawls, 1971). This philosophical heuristic is intended to achieve fairness by removing bias and partisanship. If we did not know anything about where we might be placed in society, what would be the rational and fair set of social arrangements? Rawls concludes with two central principles of justice. Firstly, a scheme of equal liberties for all and secondly that social and economic inequalities can only be justified if they work to the greatest benefit for the most disadvantaged members of society (Rawls, 1971).

In response, the communitarian seeks to emphasises the centrality of the community and culture in providing the context within which any reasoning about justice can take place. It therefore sets itself in opposition to the universalising abstractions of liberal political philosophy and trumpets the richness of identity that can only be understood within the cultures and communities it finds itself (Mulhall & Swift, 1996). Whilst not a unified intellectual movement as such, the philosophers most associated with communitarianism include Michael Sandel (Sandel, 1984, 1998), Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1985, 1989), and Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 2013). It is important to state that the label communitarian is controversial. The philosophers mentioned here would disagree on much and perhaps not recognise themselves as belonging to a single intellectual school as such (Knight, 2005). At the same time, there are some notable exceptions amongst modern communitarian writers who embrace the label (Etzioni, 2014). My purpose here is to identify a common approach to understanding culture that runs through thinkers often labelled communitarian and to bring out the implications for education.

At least three key divergences from the liberal tradition can be found within the communitarian one. Firstly, an emphasis on particularity over universalism. Secondly, a rejection of the conception of the self supposedly endorsed by liberals. Thirdly, a valorising of the community as a counterbalance to the liberal focus on individuals (Bell, 2023). The first claim asserts that there is little value in starting an enquiry into justice from abstract philosophical principles. This is because moral and political judgements are conditioned by the interpretive framework of the community from which those judgements are made (Taylor, 1985; Young et al., 2011). According to communitarians, the liberal makes the error of mistaking culturally specific norms for universal principles. Michael Walzer can be seen as a prominent exemplar of just this criticism. For Walzer, 'every substantive account of justice is a local account' (Walzer, 1983, p. 314). It is therefore rooted in the 'distinct understandings…of a shared way of life' (Walzer, 1983, 314). Shared ways of life are differentiated from each other within cultures and there is no privileged standpoint from which to judge other cultures or bring them to a standard of justice located outside of themselves.

The second concern of communitarians is the self and how it is constituted. Typically, communitarians want to emphasise that our selves are structured by the prevailing cultural background. Therefore, any theory of justice needs to take account of this background rather than abstract away from it. It is in doing the latter that the liberal tradition misunderstands the fundamental nature of the self (Sandel, 1998; Taylor, 1989). The idea that the liberal tradition valorises an unencumbered self, created *ex-nihilo* by the freewheeling choices of the subject, divorced from any set of situated values, has now been accepted by many as a caricature of the liberal claim (Bell, 2022). Nevertheless, communitarians maintain that, even with a qualified and nuanced account of the self, liberal theories of justice tend to place normative and political salience on the self as a chooser of their most valued ends (Sandel, 1998).

Taylor (1989) suggests that such a view of the self is a mistake in so far as we are already implicated and embedded within modes of life that encode culturally specific values and, therefore, obligations. It isn't up to us to decide, *ab initio*, our own values. These are provided to us by our background culture and, as

such, the self is constituted by its ends rather than existing prior to them. This leads to the communitarian commitment that the cultural environment we find ourselves in places extraneous demands on our loyalties and, as such, generates duties of affiliation. We do not flightily choose our version of the good life as if choosing from a menu of options. Human beings, these critics argue, are 'integrally related to the communities of culture and language that they create, maintain and sustain' (Mulhall & Swift, 1996, p. 162). Here we see a conception of culture very much influenced by the traditions that stems from Hegel and Herder, on the philosophical side, and Tylor, from the anthropological. It also echoes the Arnoldian vision of society as maintained by the careful and purposeful preservation of its culture. It is the view that human beings can only flourish if they are members of a coherent culture and therefore this should become a distinct object of social justice.

What are the educational implications of this understanding of political community and the self? Given its multifarious intellectual sources, communitarians will disagree. That said, the fundamental insight that culture is a crucial axis of justice has a striking resemblance to the two traditions of thinking about the study of literature, and the history of the concept of culture, explored in the previous chapter. Namely, that there is a golden thread that binds the distinctiveness of a cultural group, one's sense of self and the way we think about the political community. For communitarians, like both the Cambridge and London schools of English, culture is constitutive of identity to the extent that it should drive the normative purpose of the curriculum.

Under the neo-traditional Hirschian account, students need access to mainstream culture to take up their place as members of society. For conservatives, access to the literary canon allows students immersion in their cultural heritage. The progressive response from the London school, wanted to challenge this monoculturalism by actively recognising a plurality of different cultural groups. Yet, in doing this are tacitly committed to a similar idea; students from ethnic minorities should study texts by the same ethnic minorities because it represents and celebrates *their* culture. I turn now to political multiculturalism, an approach to political philosophy that also prioritises culture

in deliberations about political justice and takes much of its influence form the communitarianism explored above.

Political Multiculturalism, Cultural Difference and Education

Multiculturalism, in the language of political philosophy, refers to a set of claims about how the state ought to understand and manage cultural diversity. It draws on the communitarian critique of liberalism and applies its insights to cultural diversity (Kelly & Barry, 2002). There are varying ways to understand the multicultural claim, some operating within the liberal tradition (Kymlicka, 1995) and others outside it, perceiving liberal principles themselves as too culturally parochial to deal with the nature of diversity in the modern world (Parekh, 1995; Taylor, 1989; Uberoi & Modood, 2015). In this section I focus on several of the most prominent theorists of multiculturalism to draw out the implications for the study of literature in schools.

Charles Taylor conceives of culture as 'an irreducibly social good' (Taylor, 1995, p. 127). Taylor's contention is that cultures operate somewhat analogously to languages. Whilst they evolve and change over time, they are nevertheless discrete, bounded and distinguishable from each other. As mentioned above, this picture of culture owes a legacy to the Romantic tendencies in Herder's writing about the nation, as well as to the early anthropological theory of culture that comes to us from Tylor.

To say a good is 'irreducibly social' is to contrast it with public goods, for example street lamps, which can be reduced to individual goods. My well-lit street is enjoyed by me as an individual. Culture, in contrast, is 'not a mere instrument of the individual goods' (Taylor, 1995, p. 137). This is because culture is the source of what we in fact have defined as good and springs from the background understanding of the culture itself. It is therefore intrinsically, rather than instrumentally, good. Relatedly, public goods such as street lamps are not inherently 'social' in the same way because there may be innumerable ways in which to ensure well-lit streets. The lamp itself is arbitrary and not an object of value in itself. Aspects of culture, on the other hand, do not operate

like this. The equal dignity of all citizens, for example, is not something that can be understood apart from the shared understanding and way of life developed within that culture.

The implications of this are that the goods of culture are bound up with a common identity amongst members of the culture in question. Therefore, for Taylor, they ought to be preserved over and above the preferences of any individual. Politics ought to move from the distribution of liberties, rights and duties towards a politics of recognition in which particular ways of life are taken as objects of political concern in themselves. Taylor's understanding of recognition is often dubbed 'strong multiculturalism' in that its claim in support of the primacy of cultural recognition and preservation does not require any subsequent justification; culture is a sui generis good in-itself. Whilst in important ways different, this view is endorsed in some form by a range of the most prominent multicultural theorists (Modood, 2007; Uberoi & Modood, 2015; Young et al., 2011). The coherence of these accounts is taken up in the next section. I turn now to liberal multiculturalism, the other major strand of multicultural liberal theory.

Liberal multiculturalism's most prominent exponent is Will Kymlicka (Kymlicka, 1995, 2007, 2018). Kymlicka's project is to pursue an approach to justice that can 'recognise and accommodate ethnocultural minorities' (Kymlicka, 2015 209). Kymlicka's approach differs from more traditional liberal democratic principles in positing group-based, cultural rights for at least three types of minority groups: Land rights for indigenous groups, language rights for national minorities and accommodation rights for immigrant groups (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 5). Kymlicka's general project is very much within the liberal tradition in that it foregrounds notions of autonomy and choice. However, for Kymlicka, meaningful choices take place within specific cultures. If a minority culture cannot express itself within the majority one, then it is reasonable for the state to intervene by providing legal protections, exemptions and subsidies so that the relevant culture can be preserved.

Notice that this liberal multiculturalism still purports to have individuals and their choices at its heart. It therefore differs from Taylor's intrinsic justification in favouring a more instrumental justification; cultures are a good in so far as they allow the development of other things that are good. In Kymilcka's case the goods of autonomy and equality. It is therefore a version of 'weak multiculturalism' (Song, 2001). Kymlicka's account of culture rests on what he calls 'societal cultures'. A societal culture provides 'its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres' (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 76). Such cultures are encompassing in the sense that they stretch over a broad sweep of human life, as opposed to the culture of bird watching, and will typically involve a shared language and territory. As a result, cultures become the background conditions for valuable ways of life, serving as 'contexts of choice'. It is, for Kymlicka, only within such contexts that people can become meaningfully autonomous. Like Taylor, Kymlicka conceives of culture as therefore a deeply important basis of self-respect that ought to be recognised politically.

The Study of Literature and Primacy of Culture

What should strike us, given the above discussion, is a common theme that runs throughout the various domains in which the discussion of culture has taken us. It may seem that these different strands of culture are in many ways diametrically opposed. On the one hand a sense of culture that seeks to suppress difference in favour of a unified national identity. This is the culture of the embattled 'West' determined to preserve a unified legacy running from Herodotus to Hirsch. On the other, a version that seeks to celebrate difference. This multicultural vision of culture valorises 'the cultures of the marginal, the minorities, the dissidents, the colonized' (Kuper, 1999, p. 4). However, there is a deeper similarity between them that bears directly on how we think about the study of literature in schools. There are culturalist assumptions running through nationalist, multiculturalist and communitarian accounts. Each believes that there exist distinct communities and that it is a matter of justice that the cultural and political expression of the community should be ensured as a matter of

justice (Patten, 2014). The difference is in which communities get this right. For the nationalists, it is the traditional ethno-cultural identity associated with the nation state. For the multiculturalists it is, for example, recent immigrant communities within the nation state.

The Hirschian model of 'cultural literacy' as an essential precondition of an educated citizenry rests upon the notion that there in fact is a common culture to which said citizenry belongs. Hirsch himself refers to culture as something like a possession of individuals. Students need access to *their* culture to partake in wider society. The continuance of *our* culture rests on the acquisition of a common set of cultural touchstones. The traditional Arnoldian view, so influential on the early incarnations of school English, also sees literature as a gateway to a common culture that might help galvanise a traumatised post-war Britain. Even the backlash to this monoethnic vision, in the form of multiculturalism, shares with them a central tenant; the importance of cultures in forging identity. The difference is that where western societies once comprised a monolingual, ethnically homogenous culture, now a plurality of different cultures exist within the larger polity. Following the various diasporic waves of migration to Britain, for example, we ought to reflect these cultures in the curriculum. The inclusion of south Asian and Black writers is simply what respect for cultural diversity requires.

In each of these strands, politically opposed as they in so many ways are, we see a vision of culture and its connection to literary texts that is markedly similar. Namely, that individuals live in cultural groups that are not just discernible from one another but that require education and the curriculum to recognise and preserve these differences. The connection to the communitarian and multicultural strands in political philosophy are clear. Like the arguments of Taylor and Kymlicka, culture is a locus of important goods that the state ought to be in the business of managing. To not do so is to risk misrecognition. Membership of a culture is necessary condition of human flourishing because cultures are the encompassing sites of personhood. The view that culture plays this role forms the philosophical justification for various waves of thinking about literary study in schools. Yet, we may wonder whether

there is in fact something wrong with this picture. Is the concept of culture we see running through Herder, Arnold, Tylor, Hirsch, Taylor, Kymlicka and others, as stable as it seems? If it is not, then much of the disputes about the role of the study of literature in schools needs to be radically reimagined.

Contesting Culture: Critiquing Culturalist Understandings of the Self and Society

The central argument of this section is that attempts to manage culture, politically and philosophically, often misconceive their object of analysis. In response I offer a sustained critique of the concept of culture present in the various accounts above before providing the cosmopolitan alternative. This forms the bridge to the next chapter in which I put forward the positive vision of what a capabilitarian version of powerful English would look like.

It should be said at the outset that any critique of the philosophical assumptions underlying political multiculturalism risks sounding like the 'failure of multiculturalism' rhetoric that came from several European political leaders in recent decades. It is important to note that this is in no way my criticism, I am not concerned with alarmism surrounding 'nations within nations' and 'cultural enclaves'. Such views are reactionary precisely because they urge a move away from the post-war tradition of British multiculturalism, towards a more nativist brand of imperial nostalgia (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2018). To the contrary, I work in an environment characterised by its opposite, a plethora of languages, backgrounds and identities. That said, I do here present some scepticism around tendencies in multicultural philosophical approaches (present also in communitarian and nationalistic ones) that veer towards a reified and essentialist concept of culture. I structure this critique around two central concerns that arise when culture is seen as mapped onto distinct people and peoples. The first is potential threats to agency and, therefore, the diminishment of capabilities. The second is the conceptual and philosophical problems with the concept of culture itself.

Cultural Conformity: Individuality, Agency and the Group

One of the concerns with conceiving of culture as a resource that can be managed and distributed by the state is that it risks curtailing the set of options individuals have to make a life of their own. What for some is a site of identification is for others a stifling cage. Many seek to escape the practices and norms of their nominal culture precisely because the 'context of choice', in Kymlicka's sense, is hostile to their very identity, lifestyle or beliefs. This might be to do with endemic prejudice towards particular religions, sexual orientations or political beliefs present within the existing society. Cultures can oppress as much as they provide conditions for their members to thrive.

More than this, oppression is often dispersed across ethnocultural groups, take the global position of women for example. Therefore to give special rights and privileges to cultural groups *qua* group risks suppressing the claims of minorities within them that may not assent to the cultural claims of the group as a whole (Nussbaum, 2003; Okin et al., 1999). Avoiding this requires positing principles of justice that are themselves not contingent on culture but, rather, provide the justification for the practices cultures undertake (Barry, 2001). This is necessarily a more universalistic position that must begin with what it means for people to flourish and thrive in general.

This takes us back to the Capabilities Approach with its focus on what people can do and be. It is no surprise that Sen and Nussbaum have a long history of sceptical arguments against the kind of culturally rooted arguments we have been exploring (Nussbaum, 1992; Nussbaum, 1997, 1999; Sen, 1997). Their concern lies in attempts at tying an individual's identity to a specific and delineated culture. The extent to which people link their sense of self with aspects of their putative identity is variable and unpredictable, some emphasising a hybrid plurality of identifications and some placing more weight on one or two (Scheffler, 2007). The mistake comes from assuming one cultural identity necessarily suffuses all the others. Instead, 'identity is a protean notion' (Scheffler, 2007, p. 101).

If this is true, we should be cautious about accounts that imagine culture as belonging to individuals and thereby an entitlement of those individuals. In the context of secondary schools, the danger is imposing an identity on students based on reductive markers of their notional cultural background. This could take a variety of forms, seating students by ethnicity in an assumption that they will share a cultural affinity for example. In a recent session on decolonising the curriculum I was advised to show classes with a number of black students that traditional African villages used mathematical principles to arrange their housing. There are clear culturalist assumptions underlying these well-meaning interventions that reveal where an emphasis on the centrality of culture as an entitlement and possession of individuals may go wrong.

A critic might insist that, even if ascribing people to membership of cultural groups is in some sense simplistic, it will make room for a diversity of ways of life and help ameliorate the tendency for dominant cultural norms to crowd out difference. In this sense it provides a more equitable playing field and moves towards a more neutral arrangement between different groups of people. To this we might point to a potential naiveté around whether the managing of groups by the state is ever likely to be benign. The act of categorising individuals into groups is far from neutral. Indeed it often leads to what Appiah dubs the 'Medusa syndrome' in which the attempt to define and provide for cultural identity 'can ossify the identities that are their object' (Appiah, 2005, p. 110).

Entrusting the state to dictate the salience of individuals' identities is a sure-fire way to make 'group affiliation a dominant feature of individual identity' (Scheffler 2007, 102). These concerns have implications for education. The curriculum of a state-maintained school takes its cue from central government. I have seen the English curriculum in my school radically overhauled because of changing government and policy climates. As such, it would be a mistake to root the curriculum in a specific vision of culture that is inevitably contested. As Appiah notes, 'There is no place for the enforcement of diversity by trapping people within a kind of difference they long to escape.' (Appiah, 2007, p. 105). If education is imagined as a space for the expansion of central and important

capabilities, we ought to be concerned that this project is threatened by acculturative justifications for the curriculum.

The concern here is that a preservationist approach to culture assumes the loyalty of those yet to be acculturated to it. As such it fails to respect 'the autonomy of future individuals' (Appiah, 2005, p. 135). The communitarian, multiculturalist and nationalist project often assume the preservation of culture is an act of protection, allowing culture to succeed rather than wither and die in the face of external threats. Yet, it is often the case that such attempts end up constructing the very cultures they purport to protect. The reality is that under the 'carapace of cultural preservation often conceals a project of cultural construction' (Appiah, 2005, p. 138). Take the case of Hispanic identity created by the US census in the 1980s now waning amongst fourth generation Americans of Latin American origin (Portes & MacLeod, 1996). Here we see the state turn a disparate group from hugely diverse cultural groups amalgamated into the largest minority ethnic group in the US. This is not to say that such an identity is inherently an act of injustice just because it is state engineered in origin. Instead, it is to caution against the idea that the negotiating of cultural identity by the state is a simple or neutral affair. In the case of literary studies, we might consider the current obsession with texts written by English authors from the Romantic and Victorian period. No doubt these are two seminal periods of English literary history, yet to entreat them as emissaries in a mission of national identity formation flattens any of the richness and diversity of the texts and authors that comprise these canons. For one thing, many of the writers of note from these periods were themselves dissidents, reformists and critics who struck fear into the powerful who sought to protect the status quo.

A related danger of an essentialised concept of culture is the attributing of beliefs and behaviours of those from a putatively different culture to supposedly essential aspects of that culture. As Phillips notes, it promotes the view that "'they' have cultural traditions; 'I' have moral values" (Phillips, 2007, p. 31). When we imagine individuals as the by-product of a unified culture, we risk seeing them as the mere playthings of the norms and practices we impute to that culture. This resists nuance and complexity in favour of simplicity and

uniformity, leading to reductive understandings of others. Nussbaum (1997) argues that the unreflective reverence of an authorised version of culture strays quickly into either 'normative Chauvinism', in which the 'evaluator judges that her own culture is best' (p. 131), or 'normative Arcadianism' in which the non-west is presented as 'a green, non-competitive place of spiritual, environmental, and erotic values, rich in poetry and music' (p. 134). This is to denude the individuals within the group of their complexity and agency, rendering them a mere token of their type. As I shall more fully explore later, this is precisely what the close study of literary texts typically challenges. In the end, we might wonder whether the attempt to reduce stereotyping and prejudice by preserving culture, in fact has the opposite effect.

Lastly, we might also consider whether fixed understandings of cultural groups leads to the suppression and oppression of dissent and diversity within the group. The process of cultural recognition risks solidifying fixed hierarchies within groups. Endowing individuals within a group the power to represent what are in fact heterogenous communities allows them to resist change from within cultures as much as it does from without. It therefore stifles internal challenges to intragroup injustices and risks 'reinforcing the inequities of power' (Phillips, 2007, p. 17). As outlined above, defenders of multiculturalism come in many different forms. For the strong or 'mosaic' multiculturalists (i.e. those that do not found their approach on the rights of individuals) such as Parekh and Modood, the state should accommodate groups even when they may constrain the freedoms of those within the group (Uberoi & Modood, 2015). Such an approach has been called 'millet multiculturalism' in reference to the system of social organisation in the Ottoman empire that ensured sharp boundaries between different cultural communities (Barry, 2001).

Such approaches evacuate many of the resources needed to address injustice within groups. It risks creating a system in which a claim becomes just in so far as it 'has the sanction of the group' (Appiah, 2005, p. 75). Yet, it is not obvious why we should use the supposed cultural consensus of the group as the yardstick of justice instead of, say, the autonomy of the individuals within the group. The argument that the latter view represents so-called 'western' values,

and the former group-autonomy model the values of the non-west, is one we might be sceptical of. Amartya Sen has argued powerfully that values typically deemed western have sources within cultural traditions across the world (Sen, 1997, 2007, 2010). This takes us into the second strand of critique. Namely, that the very notion of culture invoked by the theoretical approaches I have been exploring use a flawed conception of culture on which they base their arguments.

Troxler's Fading: Cultural Boundaries and Political Communities

More than posing a threat to the agency of individuals, the fixed understanding of cultures I've traced in the first parts of this chapter are problematic on their own terms. The notion that cultures comprise coherent and unified wholes is one that is increasingly in doubt (Appiah, 2018; Benhabib, 2002; Kuper, 1999; Phillips, 2010). Attempts to draw together the disparate practices, beliefs and traditions of a particular group is usually an attempt at classification from the outside. As Benhabib (2002) argues, it typically serves the purpose of generating 'coherence for the purposes of understanding and control' (Benhabib, 2002, p. 5). In fact, those that participate internally to the traditions under classification engage in 'contested and contestable, narrative accounts' (p. 5). This is to say that, like the Tylorian anthropologist of the Victorian era, the notion of an organically bounded and unified culture is an artifice of observer rather than the observed.

Instead, cultures ought to be recognised as dynamic, shifting, and malleable entities that depend on internal diversity for their existence and evolution. As such, the desire to 'preserve' a culture ends up an oxymoron of sorts. In the context of recent migrants to the UK, the 'culture' that they represent often bares little relationship to the nation from which they arrived. To reduce individuals to the culture of their origin nation is an interference with the reality of their cultural lives. It reveals an incurious and inattentive eye for the specificities of the immigrant experience. Considering someone a member of 'Indian' or 'Polish' culture vitiates attempts to recognise such nuances and complexities. Instead, we need a more fine-grained understanding of the

complexity of cultural identity that neither marginalises minority groups nor assumes they inhabit an entirely separate culture (Keddie, 2014; Osler, 2011; Osler & Starkey, 2003).

 Even if we take communities that want to fiercely preserve what they perceive as authentic ways of life, they will inevitably be conditioned by the fact they are now located in a different wider context. The fact that this changes the way the group sees itself, practices its customs and experiences social life is a reality that can't be avoided. This will, *mutatis mutandum*, also change the background culture of which they are now a part. To attempt to fix a sharp distinction between the two cultures leads to reifying both. Again, the common denominator is change, not stasis. The tendency is to conceive of a culture lurking beneath the particular group under discussion. This way of thinking can be traced back to the anthropological history of culture outlined earlier and reveals the 'outsider need to place and categorise people' (Phillips, 2007, p. 44). Cultural and ethnic identities are not eternal qualities of pre-existing groups, rather they are the product of 'environmental influences, and among these environmental factors are political institutions' (Kukathas, 1992, p. 111). What the preservationist impulse struggles to deal with is the contingent reality of cultural identity. The politics of difference therefore risks trying to preserve the 'purity of the impure' (Benhabib, 2002, p. 11).

Even the liberal multiculturalism of Kymlicka strays into overly fixed ideas about the role of culture. Recall that for Kymlicka, each of us makes their life according to options that are imbued with cultural meanings (Kymlicka, 2007). Yet, it does not follow that these meanings are reducible to any individual culture. Indeed, cultural meanings are manifold and various tracing origins around the globe and throughout history. It remains unshown, then, that each of us needs a particular culture from which to make our life. Whilst it is no doubt true that we are the product of 'our' languages, religion, customs and habits, these are 'human entities that go far beyond national boundaries and exist, if they exist anywhere, simply in the world' (Waldron, 1992, p. 778). An oft-cited study that bears on some of these concerns is Gerd Baumann's anthropological fieldwork in Southall in London. He notes that amongst the Hindu, Sikh and

Muslim population a novel Asian identity emerges that transforms these previous cultural affiliations (Baumann, 1996).

The implication is that culture is dynamic and perpetually shifting. To bring such a social process under the gaze of the state risks freezing cultures as they once were and is, as such, an ironically conservative affair very much in accordance with the nationalistic notion of culture it sought to challenge. Instead, a close attention to culture usually reveals intermingling, continuity across cultural difference, and a history of borrowing and sharing. The closer one looks at supposedly distinct cultural groups, the more the boundaries fade away. As such, attempts to locate cultures are often like Troxler's fading, the perceptual phenomenon in which the harder we stare at an object the more the background fades to obscurity.

The link between the preservation of particular cultural practices and the wider survival of the cultural group are therefore overstated by communitarians, nationalists and multiculturalists alike. As Appiah notes, 'Cultures are made of continuities and changes, and the identity of a society can survive through these changes' (Appiah, 2010). Taylor's view is that because we are not self-made in any deep sense, we owe duties and obligations to the community from whence we came. Yet, this assumes that the diverse and fragmented cultural resources that provide the crucible for identity-formation are traceable to any single delineated culture. The reality is quite different.

Understandings of culture of the sort I have been critiquing fall short because of a mistaken understanding of the link between culture and identity. The idea that an ascriptive identity is sculpted by a determinate cultural background misses the voluntaristic component. Whilst it is clearly the case that much of our sense of self is bound up with identity categories we do not invent, most obviously race, class, gender and sexual orientation, it is also true that each individual stands in relation to these categories in their own way. The salience I give to the various intersecting identities I occupy is a job ultimately for me, not for the state or its educational institutions. To do otherwise is to efface my role in the constitution of my own identity.

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Multiculturalists and communitarians therefore tend to generate a false binary in which people are either deeply attached to and embedded within their culture or dislocated, cut loose and adrift. Yet, it is unclear whether such a bifurcation is stable. It is a banal truism that people are attached to various groups. Yet, it is a much more controversial claim that these attachments need take the form of individuated cultural groups. Attachments can be to family, nation, friends, political ideals and communities. Importantly we can be attached to the items on this list across anything that could plausibly lay claim to being a unified culture. One might be Marxist, Muslim, immigrant to Australia, with family ties spread across the world. In what sense do they belong to a unified culture? The culturalist argument falls down precisely because its object is chimerical.

Literary study embraces this fundamental instability, insecurity and uncertainty; it is a rebuke to these conceptions of culture, and it is in this that we will see its power. The question is not, what is the relevant group to recognise qua group? Rather, we should focus on what people are able to do and to be. In the case of the study of literature we might ask, what does this cultural experience do? Rather than, to whom does it show (or not show) recognition? Does it develop their capabilities or blight them? Does it enhance their abilities or hinder them? My contention is that the power of literary knowledge lies in its capacity to develop cultural capabilities. To understand this, I turn now to a more compelling account of culture and how it might help resolve the problems from the above critique.

Cultural Cosmopolitanism: an alternative to property and entitlement

What is the alternative to the essentialist notions of culture we have seen and critiqued so far? If culture is to continue to be a central concept, used in both political theory and the English curriculum, we need a more nuanced understanding of the concept. As I've suggested, the communitarian, nationalistic and strong multicultural approaches don't offer this and end up with problematic implications for the study of literature. Instead, I suggest we look to a cosmopolitan notion of culture.

Cosmopolitanism has its origins in 5th century BCE Athens and is most associated with Diogenes the Cynic. Now, the concept spans disciplines, societies and schools of thought to encompass a somewhat nebulous and unwieldy theoretical family of ideas. As such, there are many cosmopolitanisms (Pollock et al., 2000). One result of the increased interest in the approach, is the diversification of its interests. Cosmopolitan subdivisions include moral, political, economic, and cultural (Scheffler, 1999). Alongside these conceptual distinctions, exists a diverse intellectual genealogy. Versions of the theory have been developed from within a range of traditions; Liberal (Appiah, 2007; Held, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010), Deconstructionist (Derrida, 2001), Confucian (Chen, 2016; Choo, 2020) to name a few.

My concern has been with the place of culture in education, and the study of literature in particular. I focus here, then, on cultural cosmopolitanism. The core claim of the cultural cosmopolitan is a rejection of the idea that the health, maintenance and well-being of the self relies on the existence of a bounded, stable and identifiable culture. Instead, all cultures are in the process of change and development. To be ever-changing is 'the normal condition for a living culture' (Scheffler, 1999, p. 256). As such, cultural cosmopolitans begin from an empirical observation about culture that is anti-essentialist in nature. When we talk of our culture as English, or Western, or European, we are often looking for an illusory essence that 'all the instances share' (Appiah, 2018, p. 199). However, there simply isn't 'one big whole that organically unites all these parts' (Appiah, 2018, p. 206).

The reasons for this are numerous. Firstly, almost all cultures are themselves a palimpsest of contact with other societies and times. Drilling down to the pure and uncontaminated components of 'our' culture is a fool's errand in societies as mongrelised as those of today. A living culture is fundamentally different to a museum exhibition where the past can be frozen for display, veneration and preservation. Instead, it is the very process of shift, contestation and change that marks out a thriving culture. In contrast, cultures that rely on interventionist

measures of protection often become 'brittle, fragile, and unable to perpetuate' (Scheffler, 1999, p. 257).

As we have seen, misrecognising culture as the property of some putative group leads to attempts at preservation and claims of entitlement that characterise the accounts explored in the previous chapter. More than this, they end up reifying cultural practices that were not in fact essential components of the society beforehand. Consider the role British imperialism played in constructing the practice of Sati (the self-immolation of widows on their funeral pyre of their husbands) as a central part of Hindu culture when it in fact played no such role (Mani, 2023). It is not therefore a neutral act of recognition but often, rather, an act of constructing attitudes, beliefs and practices within the culture it seeks to preserve.

As a rebuke to this prescriptive account of culture, the cosmopolitan argues an ethical account of identity must recognise the ability and entitlement of people to use the multifarious cultural items and fragments the world bestows. It is from this landscape we come to our own sense of self and relationship to the wider community. Cultural identity is, then, something we each have a stake in forging for ourselves and is not simply bequeathed to us by dint of membership in a particular group or nation. A frequent criticism, or perhaps simple misunderstanding, of this view of culture is that it entails everyone become a cosmopolitan in the more colloquial sense; dipping in and out of whatever presents itself without deep and underlying commitments to a particular place or community. Yet, this rootlessness is not the vision of the cultural cosmopolitan. We can accept that some will emphasise local community particularly strongly, perhaps embracing a more traditional sense of cultural affinity. At the same time, some will end up with more novel and hybridised senses of the self. Both are entirely legitimate, yet the emphasis of the cosmopolitan is that it should ultimately be up to the individual to decide which of these constitutes their life-project and it is, again, their decision how the various cultural scripts cohere within their vision of the good life.

What we see with the culturally cosmopolitan approach is important in two senses central to my general argument thus far. Firstly, it foregrounds agency and the active role students have in constructing an identity of their own. This is to oppose the idea that education should be concerned with handing down a tightly narrativised culture to students. It is also to resist the view that the individual members of minority groups require special protections in the world of education for 'their' cultural practices. This is, it should be noted, completely consistent with the idea that no one should be subject to discrimination, prejudice, intolerance or humiliation on the basis of any set of cultural practices. Instead, culture is an activity and an ability that needs to be cultivated through engagement with an array of cultural achievements on offer. It is not a stable identity transmitted either by the group or the state and it equally cannot be policed by self-proclaimed guardians of any particular social group. In this sense, the cosmopolitan account of culture is one that requires students to become participants and active contributors to the cultural landscapes they encounter and inhabit.

Secondly, it is a resolutely pluralist account of culture. That is to say, it recognises that difference exists and is itself a source of the value and richness of engagement with cultural artefacts and objects of all kinds. This strand of the approach is useful in rebutting the criticism that cosmopolitanism entails a homogenising imposition in which all diversity is bled into one anodyne, monocultural mass. It is with this cosmopolitan vision of culture that we can now return to its connection to the capabilities approach and the idea of powerful knowledge. In the next chapter I turn my attention to how the conceptual work laid down can inform a reimagined justification for the study of literature in schools.

Chapter Six: Cultural Capabilities, Literary Understanding and Powerful Knowledge

My aim in this chapter is to argue for the positive vision of the study of literature that this thesis has laid the ground work for. In doing so, I do not attempt to capture all that is valuable in studying literature in classrooms; this would be beyond the scope of any single thesis. Instead, I simply aim to show why both the capabilities approach and the social realist curriculum theory that lies behind powerful knowledge, are insightful and helpful ways of thinking about the aims of literary study in schools. More than this, they help untangle the preceding complications surrounding the role of culture in both the history of English as a school subject and political philosophy more generally. I therefore bring together the various strands and arguments that motivated my original aim of exploring powerful knowledge and its relationship to the study of literature in schools. At the same time, it is a call for further work on how literary study develops the kinds of capabilities I outline below. Ultimately, this thesis is conceptual and philosophical in nature. If the concepts are deemed persuasive and coherent then empirical research would be of use in continuing to develop arguments for the value of the arts and humanities, and literary study in particular.

In the first section, I return to the Capabilities Approach and powerful knowledge, arguing that a cosmopolitan account of culture reflects the spirit of these ideas. I then focus in more detail on the kinds of gain literary studies affords by drawing on recent work on the notion of meaning and understanding in epistemology and philosophical aesthetics. I end by connecting this account to two items on Nussbaum's list of central capabilities, practical reason and affiliation. Ultimately, I offer a novel account of the purpose of literary studies rooted in a cosmopolitan understanding of culture and the capabilities it fosters.

Cosmopolitan Culture, Power and Capabilities

In chapter four, we saw how culture has been at the centre of justifying the study of literature in schools. Yet, the concept of culture that animates this justification is dubious. Instead, a cosmopolitan account of culture better captures the nature of cultural experience today. One consequence of moving towards a cosmopolitan account of culture is a distinction I wish to draw between literary study as acculturation and literary study as enabling. This tracks the implications of the capabilitarian account of powerful knowledge argued for in chapter two. There I argued that the 'power' of powerful knowledge be reframed as a capability; a real opportunity to do and be the things one has reason to value. The acculturative approach, in contrast, is what we can associate with historic attempts to reify a monolithic culture, with the curriculum as the site of its preservation. As argued in the previous chapter, in the case of English education there have been elements of this impulse throughout the history of the subject. Such approaches, I argued, are anathema to the spirit of both powerful knowledge and the Capabilities Approach. An enabling approach seeks to expand the capabilities of students so that they may then decide what to do with them. Cosmopolitanism and its role in relation to identity is the better method to achieve this and succeeds where the other accounts fail.

The connection can be further seen in the philosophical discussions around power that yielded a distinction between power-to and power-over in chapter two. I suggest a similar distinction is now necessary in thinking about culture. The accounts of culture rejected in the previous chapter see culture as weighing heavily on individuals. Communitarian, conservative and versions of 'thick' multiculturalism alike, imagine culture as that which fundamentally shapes the individual (Christiano & Christman, 2009). This we might call culture as *power-over* the individual. It is this picture that leads to the desire to either shore up the cultural dominance of the majority culture or challenge that hegemonic culture by elevating minority cultures to equal standing. I suggest a third story is needed. One in which we move from culture-as-power-over towards culture-as-power-to. One in which students are recognised as partakers in hybridised cultural landscapes whose horizons are yet to be determined.

Such a view of culture can help explain why it is part of a Capabilities Approach. If our goal is for students to act in and on the world, then they need the capability to do so. This ought to be no less the case in the domain of culture than anywhere else. One of the core claims of a cultural cosmopolitan is that 'there must be a common human capacity or set of capacities – for language, thought, communication, etc. – that facilitates such cultural transaction' (Etinson, 2011, p. 27). When it comes to culture, then, we are in the domain of capabilities rather than entitlement or property. The Capabilities Approach emphasises the irreducible role individuals have in carving out lives guided by their own lights as a central goal of social justice (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2017a; Vaughan & Walker, 2012). It does this whilst recognising that a plurality of different sorts of life are valuable and, in so doing, resists the impulse to impose a substantive account of the good as other universalistic theories often do – Utilitarianism, variants of Marxism, religious fundamentalism etc. Often universalistic theoretical frameworks dictate the ultimate nature of the good or make controversial claims about moral and religious matters. The Capabilities Approach recognises reasonable disagreement about these questions and simply asks what is necessary for any particular version of a good life to be attainable.

However, unlike many liberal accounts of justice that also prioritise this kind of pluralism, the Capabilities Approach sees freedom as requiring substantive efforts from government in ensuring the preconditions of freedom are met and sustained. It is my suggestion that the project of powerful knowledge instigated by Young and his collaborators can be usefully framed as an answer to how we create such environments in educational settings. That is to say, the curriculum of a secondary school needs to provide the conditions for students to develop the relevant educational capabilities that foster freedom within particular domains of knowledge. Where schools fail in this mission, they deny their students freedom. This is implicit in the account of many social realist scholars of education but not given full theoretical clarity (Maton & Moore, 2010; Muller & Young, 2019; Rata, 2012).

The Capabilities Approach, in Nussbaum's formulation, gives more detailed theorisation to this insight through the notion of a combined capability. That is, the necessity of both individual ability and wider environmental conditions for the capability to meaningfully achieved. In the domain of culture, I've suggested that the fact culture 'has no essence is what makes us free' (Appiah, 2018, p. 210). It is because culture is something opaque, contested and ever-changing that students need to develop certain capabilities to be able to engage in it. The cultural cosmopolitan is at pains to show that culture is a site of conversation and connection and, in studying literature, students are empowered to join this conversation. A vision such as this would be culture as *power-to.* Or to reframe another of the concepts from the literature on powerful knowledge. It would instigate a move from the *culture-of-the powerful* to *powerful culture.* In the next sections I want to sketch how the study of literature might develop students' capabilities in this cultural domain.

Literature, Cognitive Gain and Knowledge

To show how literary study might be capability forming, we need to look at what's sort of cognitive gain students are afforded in partaking in it. To do so I broadly argue from the philosophical position known as 'literary cognitivism'. This is the view that in reading and studying literary works we are involved in developing and improving some aspect of thought (Elgin, 2002; Gordon, 2005; Phelan, 2020). This contrasts with non-cognitivism which argues that cognitive gain is irrelevant to the study of literary fiction, and anti-cognitivism which proposes that literary fiction does not afford cognitive gain at all. This distinction in philosophical aesthetics and the philosophy of literature is important here because, if the anti-cognitivist is right, then it would indeed seem strange to talk of 'powerful knowledge' in relation to literary study. The anti-cognitivist sees literature as primarily an *aesthetic* activity, rather than a *cognitive* one. On this view, the reading, discussing, and writing about literature done in classrooms does not provide truths or knowledge about human reality. Instead, it offers a unique aesthetic experience. To conflate the two is to apply the aims and objects of scientific enquiry to artistic endeavour. In doing so we would commit a kind of category error (Gibson, 2008). Suffice it to say, an account of literary

study amenable to the project of powerful knowledge needs an account of its cognitive gain that challenges such a view.

Whilst it may seem common-sense to claim that we learn from artworks, there are in fact serious philosophical questions to answer to make the cognitivist position meaningful. It is a fairly banal platitude that we can learn from a literary text. Take the claim 'ambition can lead us to act in ways that later provoke guilt'. Lady Macbeth is vivid example of this and, in reading and studying Macbeth, a student now has this knowledge regarding the relationship between two human experiences – ambition and guilt. Yet, we could learn this in all sorts of ways. We could experience them in real life. We could observe a friend experiencing them. A psychologist could perhaps give an account of them. This criticism of literary cognitivism has been dubbed the banality argument in so far as it aims to show that any knowledge gained from literature is in fact little more than commonly understood folk wisdom (Carroll, 2002). The literary cognitivist needs to argue that literary works and their study provide us knowledge or understanding *as literary works* and, moreover, that this knowledge is not banal in the sense suggested here. This is to ask, what is ' internal to their status that is of cognitive significance?' (Gibson, 2008, p. 576). Posing and answering this question is to ask something about the discipline of literary study and its purpose. It requires answering why literary texts specifically are an essential part of any child's education? This returns us to the question of knowledge in literature. What kind of knowledge, if any, does the study of literature bestow?

The importance of providing an account of the cognitive gains afforded by literary study has real world importance for teachers. The turn to knowledge in education has meant that individual subject communities have been wrestling with how to rethink the secondary school curriculum. The problem is that the conception of knowledge used to do this is often one based on a Hirschian, nuggets of propositional information, approach. This is precisely the problem concerning the scholars of English education laid out in chapter one. What I offer here is an engagement with more sophisticated accounts of cognition and understanding from within the philosophy of literature. What we will see is that

there is a way of understanding the cognitive power of literary study that avoids a crass and reductive notion of knowledge. It is guided by the notion that 'there is a territory of understanding that is left unmentioned by our standard talk of knowledge' (Gibson 2003, 231). I suggest an account of this terrain is in fact more aligned with the original social realist project of powerful knowledge.

Epistemologists continue to debate distinctions in types of knowing. Ryle most famously draws a distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that', where the latter encompasses propositional knowledge and the former a kind of ability to do something (Ryle, 2009). Ryle argued knowing-how is the most basic form of knowledge, although this remains an area of lively philosophical debate (Stanley & Williamson, 2001). Yet, as we have seen, there is a consistent sense from many that Young and his collaborators valorise a certain kind of propositional knowledge at the expense of other valid forms of knowing (Doecke & Mead, 2018). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a throughgoing defence of any particular epistemological account of knowledge. My purpose in the following foray into the philosophical accounts of knowledge is meant to show that when it comes to the study of literature we can retain the important insights given by the notion of powerful knowledge without relying on a simplistic notion of knowledge as merely factual propositions. In doing this we can see that the study of literature is indeed a kind of powerful knowledge.

I argue three things as a result of this. Firstly, pursuing a cognitivist account of literary study allows us to provide compelling arguments that support the general social realist account of knowledge as both social and real. Secondly, in moving from knowledge to understanding we can keep both the 'social' and the 'real' whilst avoiding the problems a narrower account of knowledge imply. Thirdly, what is distinctive about the kind of understanding the study of literature provides, shows us that it is both deeply entwined with culture and necessarily linked to a kind of disciplinary activity and the development of centrally important human capabilities. Doing these three things resolves several of the conundrums that began this thesis – the problem of knowledge, the problem of disciplines, and the puzzle of culture.

Literature as Understanding

Here, I want to defend the claim that the curriculum ought to be rooted in powerful knowledge from those who claim this necessitates an undue emphasis on propositional knowledge. Instead, the 'knowledge' refers to the distinctive practices, methods and achievements characteristic and constitutive of the discipline.

There are obvious reasons as to why we might be sceptical that literature, and its study in classrooms, finds its value in providing students with propositional knowledge. Literature makes claims that are often untrue, or perhaps not even the kinds of things that could be true (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994). Even where we might be able to derive a true belief about the world, it won't be made true by its literary origins. The literariness of literature is not part of what guarantees the truth or falsity of any beliefs for which it is a source. I might gain the belief that Victorian England was characterised by stark inequalities in wealth from reading Dickens. Yet, the fact that we see this in his novels is not a guarantee of its truth. For that, we would be better consulting an economic historian.

In response to this we can instead argue the cognitive gain of literature consist in enlarging understanding (Phelan, 2020). In current epistemology and the philosophy of literature, understanding is somewhat nascent and nebulous concept (Hannon, 2021; Mikkonen, 2021; Phelan, 2020). That said, there is much support for understanding being the central cognitive gain of the study of literature (Elgin, 2017; Hannon, 2021; Mikkonen, 2021; Peels, 2020). The reason for this is precisely because early defences of the cognitive gain afforded by the study of literature rested on a propositional account of knowledge (Vendrell Ferran, 2024). The move to understanding as the relevant cognitive gain helps circumvent this problem by moving beyond the propositional. For many current literary cognitivists, understanding means more than the acquiring of discrete items of propositional knowledge. They 'are more likely to mean understanding in some other sense such as the exercising of certain skills' (Phelan, 2020, p. 74). Understanding as the cognitive gain of literary study can refer to knowledge-how rather than just propositional

knowledge (Elgin, 2017; Phelan, 2020). What exactly might we mean by understanding in the context of literary study? And how does it confer cognitive gain to students?

One prominent exponent of understanding in epistemological terms is Catherine Elgin. Elgin puts forward the idea that, whilst there are a range of ways in which we may come to understand something, one crucial kind is 'objectual understanding' (Elgin, 2017). Elgin argues that understanding is a kind of epistemic success. The success entails 'having an epistemically suitable grasp of or take on a topic' (Elgin, 2017, p. 38). What Elgin is suggesting is that to understand a particular field, topic or phenomena requires more than knowing a series of interrelated propositions. Instead, it involves grasping 'a suitably unified, integrated, tenable body of information' (44). Elgin continues that understanding will also involve 'the ability to use the information' at one's disposal (Elgin, 2017, p. 46). What we see here is that understanding as a kind of cognitive gain requires more than knowing propositions. Instead, on Elgin's account, to understand is more akin to be able to do something. The connection to my account of 'power' (see chapter two) should be obvious. When we are talking about the power of a particular discipline or school subject, we are not referring to what is known but rather to the ability of people to act in a manner consistent with the norms and procedures of the disciplinary activity. The more one can do this, the more of the relevant power they display and the deeper their capabilities. To focus on understanding is to move beyond a transmission of information account of cognitive achievement and towards a focus on 'subject matters rather than individual propositions' (Mikkonen, 2015, p. 274). It therefore recognises that grasping an area of human though, practice or activity is a holistic endeavour and reducible to smaller items of information.

But what does it mean to 'grasp' in this sense? Elgin offers us a dispositional account of understanding. This means understanding involves 'propensities to think certain things, to represent things mentally in certain ways, to feel certain emotions, and to refrain from thinking, representing, or feeling others' (Elgin, 2017, p. 47). Further to this, and depending on the focus of the understanding, we need to be familiar with the commitments that the object of understanding

assumes. There are a network of background practices, assumptions and procedures that license the 'permissions and prohibitions that constrain and facilitate the epistemic agent's relevant thoughts and actions' (56). The argument here is that to develop understanding requires initiation into the relevant concepts, languages and boundaries of the area of concern.

What we see here is a very similar concept to that put forward by social realists. Both the Durkheimean emphasis on the sacred/profane distinction and the Bernsteinean distinction between horizontal and vertical discourse, aim to show what is distinctive about certain forms of collective human practices and representations; academic disciplines are a distinctive kind of practice in this sense and access to them is therefore generative of powers of the student to 'understand' in the way Elgin suggests. The emphasis on a system of interrelated concepts captures what social realists mean by structured bodies of disciplinary knowledge and moves us away from the idea that it implies a by rote pedagogy of memorisation.

In the case of literary study, the background practices are the norms of literary study that exist through the long interaction between school English and its higher educational equivalents. By focusing on the concept of understanding rather than knowledge as the cognitive goal of literary study, we can see a way into the core claims of social realists. Namely, that the procedures, processes, and practices of disciplinary communities generate an epistemological terrain, access to which provides a certain kind of understanding. This understanding is not likely to be acquired outside of this terrain. To study literature is to come to understand in a particular way, a way conditioned by its disciplinary identity. However, it may be argued that the kinds of understanding that one gains from reading or studying a literary text, like any art, is merely either the cultivation of 'taste' or the expression of subjective preference. If this is the case, we would again be hard pressed for why studying literature is an example of powerful knowledge. That disciplinary knowledge produces objective knowledge of some kind is a key claim of social realists. If the study of literature doesn't provide this, then it would seem to fall outside of one of the key criterions of powerful knowledge.

Literary Understanding, Meaning and Objectivity

Is the task of ascribing a unique and important role to the study of literature bound to be fruitless? Perhaps literature does not provide us anything that is meaningfully tethered to the world beyond the text. Instead, it is simply induction into the 'interpretative community' of this or that powerful group as Stanley Fish would have it (Fish, 1980). In chapter one, we saw that the study of literature has always felt itself on unsafe epistemological terrain. The professionalisation of academic disciplines saw the natural sciences as providing the providing the paradigm case of academic rigour. The study of literature doesn't seek explanatory models and explanations of the natural world and therefore appears destined to be an inferior practice concerned with impressions and assertions.

This is an important puzzle given that powerful knowledge, and the social realist epistemology that undergirds it, places heavy emphasis on the idea that what comes out of disciplinary practices is 'real'. Here, 'real' means that it escapes its context of production and can't be merely reduced to it. Yet, how could the study of literature even purport to do this? Literary fictions are just that: fictions. The entire project seems blighted from the outset. I suspect this seemingly intuitive paradox is not insignificant in the frosty reception talk of powerful knowledge has received within the English educational community. If the study of literary texts produces 'real' knowledge and understanding, then it must refer to something real. What is real is typically seen as that which "would still be 'there' if we were not" (Harrison, 2015, p. 79). Yet, literary fictions are surely concerned with human experience in all its subjectivity, parochialism and contingency. These things are not 'real' beyond the individual writer or reader. How then can we derive understanding of something 'real' from the study of literature?

Philosophical work on the cognitive value of studying literature proffers a range of different responses to the problem. Some maintain that literature does afford a kind of propositional knowledge (Carroll, 2002; Gibson, 2008; John, 1998;

Putnam & Conant, 1990). Others suggest literature provides a non-propositional form of knowledge (Huemer, 2019; Walsh, 1943). In both cases, there are powerful arguments that the study of literature offers students understanding that escapes merely preference, opinion and assertion. At the same time this understanding is specific to the nature of the disciplinary activity and the object of enquiry, in this case literary texts. If this is true, we can advocate powerful knowledge for literary study whilst avoiding the scientism that concerns critics of the concept. Because literature is so varied, I follow Dorothy Walsh in observing that no one central epistemic good comes from studying fictional texts (Walsh, 1943). What I offer are some examples of the cognitive gains students receive from literary studies and how they develop important capabilities.

One route is to move to what Bernard Harrison calls a Practice-Based Model of meaning. Under this view, in studying literary texts, we are engaging with 'a socially devised and maintained practice' (Harrison, 2015, p. 86). The general idea is that when we are trying to grasp the meaning of a statement, we need to understand the roles the various elements of the statement have been assigned in a specific practice. It is, therefore, a model of meaning that draws heavily on the later Wittgenstein's work in the *Philosophical Investigations (Wittgenstein & Anscombe, 1997).* This view of meaning is useful in so far as it avoids the view that language is an undistorted mirror of nature (a view associated with the empiricist and analytic traditions of philosophy) whilst also avoiding the antithetical position that all meaning is entirely internal to language. The latter view finds expression in various forms of post-structuralism and postmodernism and is part of what motivated the social realist project in the first place (Norris, 1993).

On a Practice-Based Model, we need to look at the relevant practice to understand how it is made meaningful. In science, the various practices constitutive of the endeavour are made meaningful by the discovery of 'true indicative statements' (Harrison, 2015, p. 95). Literature, however, is concerned with how language reveals aspects of a 'form of human life' through its relationship to 'convention, practices, social arrangements and associated

beliefs' (Harrison, 2015, p. 95). It therefore does not trade in statements that can be deemed true or false, yet at the same time bears on human reality by interrogating, through language, the 'praxial foundations' (108) through which our social practices become meaningful. Literature can, then, advance understanding through its ability to interrogate the basis of social practices and human affairs. It thereby offer a transformation of our existing understanding of human and social reality (Gibson, 2008). In doing so it shows us how a particular form of human life or set of social practices 'grounds us in a specific weave of human culture' (Gibson, 2003, p. 233). It is therefore an acknowledgement 'that our words and concept animate a form of life' (233).

Notice here that this Practice-Based Account of meaning gives us both something real but ineradicably social. Meanings don't reside in the mind of a deracinated individual. Meaning is a social enterprise that exists beyond the whims of any individual. This is because it is communicated via language which operates on the logic of sets of socially constituted practices. When students read, discuss and analyse literary texts, they are involved in enlarging their understanding of the social world. They do this through the methods of literary engagement and analysis that the teacher introduces them to. What literature offers us is a complex and multifaceted vision of human reality which can't be transmitted to students through a series of discrete items of knowledge. Therefore, we ought not 'reduce the cognitive value of a literary work to specific bits of (propositional or non-propositional) knowledge' (Huemer, 2019, p. 115).

It is because of this that literary study can attain objectivity of a certain sort. Language and meaning are communal achievements and collective goods rather than an asset of individuals to wield as they wish. Literary narratives do not simply present information; they give meaning and structure to that information (Mikkonen, 2021). In studying imaginative literature, students become reflectors on the social world they inhabit. They are enabled to do this because the close study literary texts is a social practice that invites critical reflection and the consideration of alternative pictures of social reality (Huemer, 2019). It is for this reason that the cognitive gain afforded by such study is a kind of understanding rather than a set of propositional, knowledge-that

statements. Nevertheless, this does not render it subjective, unreal or a mere expression of elite consensus about high culture.

Disciplinarity, Capabilities and Student Experience

If we accept that studying literary texts advances understanding of human and social reality, we might still wonder how this develops capabilities. Nussbaum has herself been influential in arguing for a version of literary cognitivism but has not, to my knowledge, connected this to her list of ten central human capabilities directly. Doing so will be helpful as it forms the theoretical bridge between the argument outlined above, that the study of literature is of cognitive value, to the specifics of how it fosters capabilities. More than this it will also provide us with the connection to disciplinary knowledge that underlies the powerful knowledge concept. In what follows I draw on some of my own teaching experience to hopefully make the argument more vivid.

One of Nussbaum's central claims is that there is an 'organic connection' between the form of a written text and its content (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 4). A poem, for example, derives its meaning not just from the words and images it conjures, but from its formal qualities; form and meaning are inextricable. Take the poem Marianna by Tennyson, one I have taught several times. The poem depicts a young woman waiting for the return of her lover, lamenting their absence. The titular figure is bounded in a 'moated grange' and the poem unfolds in seven 12-line stanzas. Within each stanza lies a central quatrain with a CDDC rhyme scheme. The binding couplet at the heart of each stanza helps emphasise the sense of stasis and inertia that characterises Mariana in her seemingly endless wait. This is further amplified by the ghostly, omniscient narrative voice that hovers almost voyeuristically above the poem. What we see here, with an example chosen more or less at random, is the way in which attending to a literary text involves close attention to its form. Poetry, and its legacy of criticism, has developed a language and discourse that help elucidate its meaning. Now, students may well be able to notice the points I've mentioned above without any specialised language, 'quatrain' 'stanza' 'couplet' 'narrative voice'. In this sense, we need to be careful not to consider jargon a substitute

for insight. Equally, the poem could of course be read differently to the above. We might engage in a reading from a critical theoretical position; Marxist, feminist, postcolonial. That there are different ways of reading poem doesn't militate against the idea that poetic form is something that students can be more or less immersed in, and it is through increasing levels of depth of immersion that they can become attuned to the links between form and meaning. I raise an example like this because the key motivator of powerful knowledge, on my reading of the concept, is the preserving of the distinctiveness of different kinds of disciplinary activity. The activity of closely reading a poem can't be captured in terms of generic competencies or skills; it is an activity which practitioners of the discipline (amongst whom I include teachers themselves) induct students into.

A second central, and related, claim is that certain human truths can 'only be fittingly and accurately' stated in the forms of the 'narrative artist' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 5). Part of how literature does this, for Nussbaum, is connected to her account of human functioning, touched upon in chapter three, which has three important features. These are: 'an attack on the claim that all valuable things are commensurable; an argument for the priority of particular judgments to universals; and a defence of the emotions and the imagination as essential to rational choice' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 55). Each of these aspects of human reality find their appropriate expression, for Nussbaum, in literature and its close reading and study. I now want to explore two of these and connect them more explicitly than Nussbaum does to the items on her list.

The notion of incommensurability is one we found in chapter two when explaining some of the intellectual foundations of the Capabilities Approach. In the case of literature, Nussbaum wants to suggest that certain literary texts show us that there is 'no single metric along which the claims of different good things can be meaningfully considered' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 36). They therefore dramatise the way in which human life is shot through with ethically salient trade-offs in our collective 'efforts to live well' (36). We see here a concrete example of what was suggested above. Namely, that the literary text, precisely because of its ability to order events via language into a narrative

structure, reveals the preponderance of this kind of incommensurability as endemic to the social world.

Students of literature come to understand this aspect of social reality through engaging with the work. But of course, to grasp it often requires a particular kind of noticing. Consider a student reading Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, a popular choice on the current GCSE syllabus. They recognise that Dr Jekyll battles against his alter-ego Hyde. As the novella progresses, we see he desires both freedom from the stifling, morally censorious mores of late Victorian England and, at the same time, the honour and esteem of a respectable Victorian gentleman. In the final letter, that comprises the last chapter of the novella, Jekyll confesses to this warring battle of impulses; virtuous recognition as the estimable Dr Jekyll versus the heady abandon afforded by his alter-ego Hyde. The two goals are incommensurable, both hold a kind of value for Jekyll, but can't co-exist in a way that allows Jekyll to live a life in his particular social context.

Why is this recognition of incommensurability of value to students? In recent years, the idea that Hyde acts as a mask with which Jekyll can live out his transgressive desires is often brought into contact with students experience of social media. The idea of donning an untraceable identity and its consequences for abuse are not mere fictions for students in a world of online anonymity and trolling. In exploring the literary text students are engaged in coming to terms with something about their own cultural context as well as making a connection to a distant one. Notice the echoes here of the cosmopolitan credo: universalism plus difference. Students come with experience that inform their reading of a text, but these are nested within concerns of general human interest. What is going on in these classroom interactions is a complex engagement with social and philosophical ideas. Importantly, though, it is done within the context of the study of a literary text. It is the interaction between the life-world of the student and the nature of the disciplinary activity that generates these kinds of insights. What is not going on is the banking of cultural capital, the glorification of an English heritage or the preservation of any discrete culture. It is the development of students' capabilities to understand important

aspects of human reality. The ability to draw the links between their current experience of social media and the dilemmas of a Victorian Gentleman reveal the cosmopolitan spirit of literary study. Noel Carrol makes a similar point in suggesting that novels present us with a wheel of virtue in which the author depicts characters who display a particular virtue or vice to varying degree (Carroll, 2002). In carefully exploring these characters we put a particular virtue, friendship for example, through a distinctive form of intellectual scrutiny. The result of which is an enlarged, renewed or transformed understanding of the nature of the concept itself. Literary texts offer 'through sensuous symbolism, an ideal possibility' (Walsh, 1943, p. 450).

What the above discussion hopefully helps to show is that a concern to argue for the importance of disciplinary knowledge is not an attack on the place of student engagement, imagination and experience. Rather, experience is an essential part of the activity itself. At the same time, experience becomes reconfigured, challenged and transformed through the shared reading and analysis of texts in ways that rely on the histories and traditions of the study of literature, contested and multifarious as it is.

Which Capabilities? Affiliation, Practical Wisdom and Perception

The above discussion sketches how literary study can provide valuable ways of understanding to students that are distinctive of the disciplinary activity. I now want to connect these ideas more explicitly to Nussbaum's account of central human capabilities. I suggest there are two items on Nussbaum's list that literary study, at its best, concretely contribute towards. The first is practical reason, defined by Nussbaum as 'being able to form a conception of the good and to engage I critical reflection about the planning of one's life' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34). The second is affiliation which means being:

A. able to live with and show concern for others, empathize with (and show compassion for) others and the capability of justice and friendship. Institutions help develop and protect forms of affiliation. B. Able to have self-respect and not be humiliated by others, that is, being treated with dignity and equal worth.

This entails (at the very least) protections of being discriminated on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, religion, caste, ethnicity and nationality. In work, this means entering relationships of mutual recognition. (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34)

Beginning with practical reason. Here, the grasping of particulars refers to the 'ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one's particular situation' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 37). The guiding notion is that in studying literature we are often enabled to see how general rules and universal prescriptions about human life are inadequate as guides to life. Instead, we need to recognise the 'priority of the particular' which requires 'fine-tuned concreteness' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 38). This is to say that what we come to see when studying literature is, often, that human life can't be reduced to rule-following. We need to develop the capacity for responding or improvising to the concrete contexts in which we find ourselves. The terrain of literary understanding can't abstract from the concrete and particular precisely because it is there that its cognitive reward is found. Literature presents the world not as 'mere conceptual object but as a living world' (Gibson, 2003, p. 236).

Novels, for example, can often reveal this to us as part of their form because they present us with lives containing the requisite level of nuance, detail and context. Consider Jekyll's predicament in the above discussion. In encountering a wide array of such novels, students begin to understand something about human lives that supports the development of their own capability for practical reasoning. It is for this reason that the current approach to education in secondary schools in England is lacking. Currently, new teachers to the profession are presented with a 'science of learning' premised largely on findings from cognitive science. This approach is premised on the idea that learning is 'a change in long-term memory' (Kirschner et al., 2006). As a result, literary texts are now routinely reduced to acts of memorisation that are codified in advance by curriculum makers. This is the kind of generecism in education that, in the name of scientific objectivity, ends up deforming the nature of the subject itself.

As we have seen, the cognitive value of literary study resides in its closely woven relationship to language and the concreteness of human experience. This will necessarily be diluted if simplified into a series of statements. Equally, it is the immersion into these literary fictional experiences that resists these revelations becoming parochial. There is a distance between the modern student and Victorian England that broadens insights such as these beyond the immediate and local experiences students bring with them to the reading in the first place.

It is in this way that they also foster the capability of affiliation. Affiliation requires us to 'be able to imagine the situation of another', what Nussbaum dubs elsewhere as the cultivation of the 'narrative imagination' (Nussbaum, 1997, 2010). It is for this reason that Nussbaum describes literature as an 'extension of life' both in terms of connecting the reader to 'events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 48). This priority of the concrete and particular in human life is not, following Aristotle, a systematised body of knowledge (*episteme),* instead it must be grasped with 'insight through experience' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 68). Complexity and tentative uncertainty are virtues in literary texts and their close study in way that would be unwelcome in the natural sciences. Part of what we value in literature is the 'bewilderment and perplexity that characterize literary experience' (Mikkonen, 2015, p. 275). This helps to allay some of the concerns of English educational scholars mentioned in chapter one. Namely, that the notion that literary study in schools is fundamentally a body of knowledge to be mastered misses the experiential component. The methods of verification and falsification that characterise much scientific enquiry reveal deep and profound truths about the natural world. Yet, the kind of cultural and ethical understanding that the study of literature encourages simply isn't amenable to those procedures. It would be to misrecognise the disciplinary specificities of literary study to think that it ought to.

Practical reason and affiliation are therefore not poor imitations of the kind of theoretical exactness provided by the natural sciences or mathematics. Instead, following Nussbaum, it is more a kind of perception in so far as it is 'noninferential, nondeductive; it is an ability to recognize the salient features of a complex situation' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 74). When students respond in classrooms to literary texts, they are not trying to eke out universal rules or algorithmic principles that can be applied to explain general phenomena. Rather, it is an activity characterised by 'flexibility, responsiveness and openness to the external' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 74). It is for this reason that the study of literature relies heavily on the emotions and imagination. Our response to the situation of fictional character proceeds from an emotional and imaginative engagement that is basic and prior to any general rule or set of propositions.

This difference is part of what carves out the study of literature as a distinct field of enquiry and understanding. The sensitivity to the particulars of a situation in a novel, or an image in a poem works on aspects of our selves through the literary forms they are expressed (Graham, 1996). The discussion, writing and thinking about these experiences is the disciplinary activity that fosters the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation. As students become increasingly adept at noticing the workings of imagery, metaphor, narrative structure etc these capabilities become sharpened and honed. Returning to some of the concerns that motivated this thesis, the current trend for reducing literary texts and analysis to pre-teachable items of propositional knowledge, blights the formation of these capabilities because it favours reductive simplicity over the nuance and uncertainty of engaging with literature.

It might be wondered though, if the study of literature involves an emotional and imaginative engagement with the particulars of a situation, rather than deriving generalisable rules, does this not mean it is a parochial and subjective affair? Surely, one of the central tenets of the social realist project of powerful knowledge is to root the school curriculum in ways of knowing the world that escape the personal, esoteric encounters with reality that we all have in our daily lives? To this charge we can simply note that a concern with the particular

does not necessarily entail an attachment to the parochial. It is in fact quite the opposite. Literature is 'a mouthpiece for our shared social and cultural reality' (Gibson, 2003, p. 224). This cultural reality is, as we have seen, best understood as a cosmopolitan one. Literature's connection to this reality is 'sui generis, so much so that it constitutes its own form of insight and worldly investigation' (Gibson, 2007, p. 8) The role of literary study in schools is to allows students to become members of this investigation through the development of capabilities.

In recognising the particularity of Kambili's plight in Purple Hibiscus, a popular novel in many schools, students might come to understand a variety of things. The effects of imperialism on ways of life and systems of religious belief; the legacy effects of the interaction between Christian missionary zeal and the animist beliefs that preceded them. Perhaps these ideas seem culturally distant for some and resonant for others. At the same time, we see the unfolding of the life of a fifteen year old girl with all the challenging navigations between home, family and the search for identity that might strike a fourteen year old Londoner more immediately. We also see themes that present themselves more generally in narrative fiction; power, violence, freedom. The point is that experience of studying the text embodies the cultural cosmopolitanism outlined above. Sites of identification as well as difference. Ultimately, it is the discipline of literary studies that provides the tools and opportunities to develop the capabilities to engage with these variegated ideas and generate meaning from them. It is in this sense that the study of a novel can provide the 'moral epistemology needed for the cosmopolitan' (Appiah, 2005, p. 258).

There is, therefore, a direct link between the capability enhancing features of literary study and the project of cultural cosmopolitanism. Literature dramatises the particularities of human life, often in distant times and places, and in doing so denudes them of the kind of otherness that lies at the source of obtuse and chauvinistic understandings of different cultural experiences. It is when a student recognises both the salient differences and similarities between themselves and the world of literary text that a fuller and more ethical perception of diversity, both within and across existing society, is fostered. An

education that recognises these capabilities is one that reaches toward a vision of a just society precisely because such a society must surely involve the ability to see one another as we are rather than as we imagine them to be. Literature provides the raw material for cultivating these capabilities.

The central argument to be made from the above discussion is the following. Firstly, literature and its study involve cognitive gains and achievements that help students understand deep and important aspects of human reality. Secondly, these achievements are ones that promote the capabilities of affiliation and practical reason. Literature, then, is a way to develop centrally important human capabilities. Thirdly, considering the study of literature this way provides a richer understanding of the place of 'culture' in the English classroom. Culture as the domain in which we come to understand ourselves and the social world we inhabit through, in this case, literature. Fourth, this kind of cultural activity and understanding is necessarily distinct from the knowledge we gain from scientific enquiry. It is the form of both literary texts and the nature of affiliation and practical reason that means propositional statements, sequential and linear ordering of concepts and generalisable explanations are inadequate and inappropriate.

Chapter Seven: Powerful knowledge and Literary Study Revisited

I have tried, throughout this thesis, to account for why the study of literature in schools is important as a component of justice. I claimed at the outset that the social realist project of 'Bringing Knowledge Back in' is commensurate with the aims and methods of studying literature in classrooms. The above account of how the study of literature promotes certain central capabilities now needs to be tested against the claims of social realists and the notion of powerful knowledge more directly. I will not have been successful if I have misconstrued or appropriated unjustly the claims of this body of scholarship. Below I return to the social realist work that inspired powerful knowledge and check this account against my own version of literary study in schools. In doing so, I hope to also allay the concerns of scholars concerned with the distorting impact of powerful knowledge on school subject English.

Social Realism and the Nature of Knowledge

The motivating concern of social realists, as discussed in chapter two, is to challenge some of the core assumptions that have historically informed the sociology of education. Rob Moore argues one such assumption is that, 'knowledge is socially constructed, historically located and intrinsically connected with power' (Moore, 2009, p. 17). What we call knowledge is, then, just an instance of the culture of the elite group. What we see here is the seeds of both the relativistic impulse to reduce all knowledge claims to claims about groups and 'their' culture, and the balkanisation of epistemology into the intellectual property of differently situated people.

Social realists deny these culturalist assumptions about knowledge. For them, knowledge has its own power. At the same time, it remains true that those with more social power 'expropriate the principle modes of symbolic production' (Moore, 2009, p. 19). In doing this, they regulate access to knowledge that is in principle available to all. Understood this way, it is not the knowledge or

understanding that is the central concern but rather access to it. As we have seen, this is what motivated Young to draw the distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. Notice, though, that nothing about what has been said here entails that the word 'knowledge' functions as propositional or scientific in its nature. Rather, what the social realist wants to avoid is a false dichotomy between a conception of knowledge which is ahistorical, a view from nowhere untied to social contexts and practices, and a conception of the social as 'local, the immediate, the experiential and the contextual' (Moore, 2009, p. 26). Instead we should recognise 'the fact of the historically located character of knowledge is not intrinsically incompatible with the possibility of truth or rational objectivity' (Moore, 2009, p. 33).

Moore dubs the alternative view 'emergentist and concerned with the sociality of knowledge' (Moore, 2009, p. 34). This entails a recognition that knowledge must be produced within social contexts, it is in this sense premised on sets of social practices. Yet this does not mean that no judgements can be made between competing knowledge claims or systems of knowledge generation (Maton, 2014). As the previous chapter argued, meaning occurs within such social practices not outside them from a God's-eye-view. Nevertheless, the sociality of knowledge does not entail it is subjective or entirely relative. We can see why this account of disciplinary knowledge is so crucial to our argument in chapter four. We do not develop literary capabilities by dint of membership of a cultural group. The understanding that comes from literature must be earned through engagement in the sets of social practices that regulate them. Judgements are refined, questions are posed and answered. In all this, there is of course a sense of fallibility. The understanding arrived at might be contestable, but this is the central claim of social realists. Namely, that all knowledge is provisional, open-ended and fallible. It follows that the social realist account of powerful knowledge does not preclude creativity and the arts. What it does claim is that artistic domains, such as literary study, are not a boundaryless free for all.

There is a presumption of truthfulness in all academic pursuits that, if disavowed, makes the entire project hollow (Williams, 2002). It is this

truthfulness that has been often ignored or denied by influential strands of sociological thinking about education in which the knowledge codified in the school curriculum is in fact 'the disguised interests of dominant social groups' (Maton, 2014, p. 6). Such a view is heavily associated with the earlier of Young and the 'New Sociology of Education' that emerged in the 1970s (Young, 1971). At the time, it was the educational philosophy of figures such as Paul Hirst (who aimed to analyse the logical forms of different academic disciplines) that was the object of critique. This sociological critique saw the work of Hirst as a kind of ahistorical idealism that relied on a positivistic account of knowledge. In fact, the later Hirst made clear that whilst knowledge relied on social practices, different subjects remained structurally different in important ways (Barrow and White, 1993). The point to take here is that powerful knowledge is ultimately about investigating the structuring practices of differentiated disciplines. This is commensurate with the account of English I have provided.

To push the point further, the fundamental insight of the social realist approach is that, 'truth and objectivity in knowledge are the result of a particular form of historically developed sociality' (Moore, 2009, p. 122)'. There is no prima facie tension between something being social and yet objective. To think that it does is to engage in a false dichotomy that sits at the heart of the reticence of English educationalists to engage with how literary study in schools might be an instance of powerful knowledge. The account of the power of literary study given above does not rest on a concept of objectivity or truth reliant on an ideal observer, unmoored from the web of language, culture and social practice within which literary texts are embedded.

Instead, it offers an account of how understanding can be generated from within those contexts and yet reach beyond them towards the universal. As we have seen, Durkheim is an intellectual lodestar for social realist thinking and he puts the point clearly: 'Collective representations are the product of an immense cooperation that extends not only through space but also through time; to make them, a multitude of different minds have associated, intermixed, and combined their ideas and feelings' (Durkheim et al., 2008, p. 15). Literary study is part of such a collective representation.

Ironically, Robert Eaglestone, a vehement critic of powerful knowledge and a champion of literary studies in schools, talks of literary studies as developing students disciplinary consciousness (Eaglestone, 2020). Doecke is similarly sceptical of powerful knowledge and prefers the notion of literary sociability to capture much of what is important in studying literature in classrooms (Doecke, 2019). Yet, both of these are entirely consistent with the concept of powerful knowledge as I've described it. When we accept that knowledge and understanding need not be propositional or scientistic, the concerns raised by these scholars largely disappear. Part of the reason the account of literary study I have provided is supported by a social realist approach is that it focuses not just on inequalities and injustices that might be reproduced through education. Rather, it seeks to understand what is in some sense internal to the various practices of literary study and why these might be of value. It is not to deny both that some students are left outside the practice and that, even within the practice, there might be areas of cultural chauvinism and bias. It is, however, to resist the thought that the 'specialised discourse of education is only a voice through which others speak (class, gender, religion, race, region)' (Bernstein, 1990, p. 166).

Reason, Arguments and Evidence: Non-relative Judgements and the Place of Experience

Rob Moore suggests that the kind of knowledge social realists are concerned with are 'symbolic productions (humanly created 'social kinds' such as literary canons, codified sports or musical traditions – social facts)' (Moore, 2009, p. 146). These productions are as real as the objects of enquiry in the natural sciences. There is a reason why those that claim to be social realists do not engage with epistemology in the traditional philosophical paradigm. Epistemologists typically search for ultimate accounts and definitions of knowledge.

Social realists however, are not concerned with "essentialist definitions of 'knowledge', 'truth' or 'belief'" but rather 'how knowledges come to be defined in

particular social and historical contexts" (Maton, 2014, p. 11). 'Knowledges' here does not mean bald claims about empirical reality – the atomic number of gold is 79, Asia is the largest continent etc. Instead, it refers to sets of socially rooted practices that are 'characterized by intersubjectively shared assumptions, ways of working, beliefs and so forth' (Maton, 2014, p. 11). This is remarkably similar to the notion of understanding I offered in the previous chapter. It is also consistent with accounts of how literary judgements are made given by scholars of English education. Yandell, Doecke and others are keen to emphasise that studying literature in classrooms is characterised by the to-and-fro of students' differing interpretations and ideas (Doecke, 2019; Yandell, 2013). Once we understand this as constitutive of the particular mode of disciplinary activity in literary study, there seems nothing antagonistic in these respective accounts.

In the case of literary study, when a statement is made about the meaning of a metaphor or the structural importance of a scene in a play, a claim has been advanced by the student. It is a claim that reveals a particular understanding, as I have suggested. It is a claim that is tested in the Sturm and Drang of the classroom. More than this, it is an engagement with the way in which meaning in literary texts is always navigated through language, narrative and representation. As students become increasingly confident at this kind of activity, they are developing the capabilities of both affiliation and practical reason.

What these judgements are not (or ought not to be), are the arbitrary expression of a subjective feeling or preference. They admit of reasons, argument and evidence in a way characteristic of intellectual endeavour in general. In this sense it asks students to be open to reconsidering ideas from different perspectives, to avoid wishful thinking and the forceful assertion of an unreasoned opinion. More significantly it demands that claims made and ideas advanced aren't done so by invoking a standpoint or set of experiences as the sole grounds of a literary judgement. It is because of this navigation between the social nature of a literary judgement and its situatedness within a framework

of norms and procedures that make social realism a useful theoretical tool in understanding the nature of the activity.

This is not to say that personal experience is to be entirely bracketed from the forming of arguments and judgements about texts. Rather, it must be mediated by the inter-subjective world of literary study itself and in the context of the text and classroom. What social realism shows us is that experience provides the conditions for engagement with the discipline but can't subsume it. The account of literary understanding I offered earlier makes these insights more concrete. When students form a meaningful judgement about a text or some aspect of it, they are involved in a practice that is legitimised by structuring features of the discipline. It is teachers in the classroom that help neophytes navigate these structuring principles so that they may partake in them. In the case of literary study, and I would suggest the arts more generally, the codes of legitimation are entwined with experience in a way that they are not in the natural sciences, however this does not render them outside the domain of powerful knowledge (Maton & Moore, 2010). To the contrary, they are the most powerful ways we have of generating understanding of the social and human worlds that are their ultimate object of enquiry.

The World of the Home and the World of the Classroom

What then of the place of the home and community that so concerns those in the English teaching community? The issue is whether the kind of sociable basis of learning at play is an extension of that which goes on in homes, communities and playgrounds or whether it is governed by some norms of the academic discipline and its history? In the world of the home, our relationship to meaning is carried out through the reflexively familiar. We can use gesture, in-jokes, refer to past common frames of meaning. Words and phrases can be laden with meaning that we know instinctively because of the tight social bonds fostered in such environments. Familiarity breeds an ability to communicate meaning in a 'condensed' way. Bernstein called this a 'restricted code' which has subsequently come under much criticism (Bernstein, 1964). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to become embroiled in this debate but suffice it to say it

seems the target was the negative connotations of the word 'restricted' rather than its substantive theoretical meaning. The point is that the study of literary texts in a classroom, like the study of the elements in a chemistry lesson, remains social whilst also relying on codes that maintain what does and doesn't count as meaningful participation in the practice. This is why I spent time in the previous chapter arguing that understanding and meaning are conditioned by normative principles. Part of the job of English teachers is to recognise what these principles are and consider how best to bring students into a relationship with them.

To take another example from my own practice, in teaching the poem *Island Man* by Grace Nichols, students puzzled over the following stanza:

"Morning
and island man wakes up
to the sound of blue surf
in his head
the steady breaking and wombing"
 (Nichols, 1984)

Discussion turned to the use of the word 'wombing' to describe the movement of the sea. Students needed to come to an understanding of the word in the context of the poem. One student thought the word suggested safety, warmth and reminder of the hospitable shelter of the womb. Another felt it had a grieving quality, perhaps mother nature groaning at her desecration. Both are valid and reveal understanding and insight. Yet, the student must come to this understanding through thinking in a particularly disciplinary way. In this case about the various ambiguities and shades of meaning that poetic language can offer. This is a different kind of activity to the way in which language is generally experienced and thought about outside of school. It is therefore quintessentially educational. At the same time, students' own experiences, both in the home and community, necessarily instigate and frame their responses. They ought not be separated out as if they were to contaminate the objectivity of the word's meaning. Student experience is needed precisely because the capabilities

being formed through such discussion and analysis are part of cultural conversations around meaning.

Consider how radically different this account of exploring meaning is from the cultural protectionist and inheritance models outlined in chapters four and five. Under those approaches, students simply have revealed to them a culture that was tacitly theirs to begin with, lying dormant awaiting activation by simple immersion and osmosis. This is to have things precisely wrong. We do gain much from immersion into our local communities, traditions and heritages. It is an essential and ineradicable part of becoming the social beings we are. The point of an educational recontextualisation of experience is for students to reflect on these practices in a different way, a way conditioned by the cartography of structured bodies of disciplinary activity.

Students claims about literary texts can't but be conditioned by the practice of literary study as enacted in the classroom setting. Ideas stemming initially from the student, such as those about the word 'wombing' above, become objectified and are therefore no longer reducible to a subjective impulse or reaction. Judgements aren't simply assertions precisely because of the disciplinary framework within which they take place in an English classroom. Initiation into this world is ultimately what the term powerful knowledge picks out. As chapter two argued, the 'powerful' refers to a capability to do something. The 'knowledge' refers to the norms, rules, procedures and methods of the specific domain. In this case the study of a poem. These norms are contestable and change through time, but they nonetheless exist and, more importantly, contribute to important capabilities of the student.

Maton makes a similar claim in his account of the 'knower-structure'. Maton's central claim is that not all disciplines progress through increasingly complex explanatory frameworks of empirical evidence. Such a view explains the natural sciences and displays, in Bernsteinean language, progress through a vertical knowledge structure. Some, literary studies would be an example, progress not through verticality in knowledge but through the 'integration of knowers' (Maton, 2014, p. 94). Maton calls this process sociality. The central point is that in much

of the arts and humanities, the outcome of immersion in disciplinary bodies of knowledge is the development of particular kinds of knowers rather than knowledge per se. This is to say, that through the study of literature students develop a 'cultivated gaze' (Maton, 2014, p. 97). Cultivated here means through extended experience, immersion and study.

We can see how this integrative understanding of knowledge in literary study shares the spirit of the cosmopolitan account of culture outlined in chapter six. The products of a culture are accessible to those who take the time to understand them rather than by dint of membership. The cultural cosmopolitan believes we can cultivate a responsiveness to literature from all times and places because all culture is part of an unfolding, overlapping and intermingling human reality. Under the social realist account of knower-structures, this is no longer just a fact about works of literature in particular and culture in general, but an essential component of the nature of the study of literature itself.

Jan Derry points out that within the study of literature students draw upon aspects of their cultural practices and express their own interpretations. But in doing so they draw on language and apply words in sentences according to standards of correctness, i.e. according to the 'normative rules that govern the application of concepts and so govern a concept's meaning' (Derry, 2018, p. 14). The crucial point here is that the contributions of researchers and academics in the field of English education has shown an astute and nuanced attention to the ways in which students can come to make-meaning, drawing on the resources they *already* have available to them. That this is enough in itself makes sense given the legacy of the personal growth ethos and the centrality of student experience that characterises the research field (Doecke & Mead, 2018). However, whilst this kind of meaning-making can become the forerunner of becoming a knower within the domain of literary studies, to truly do so must entail acclimatising to the way concepts are used within that domain. As Derry suggests, 'The relations between concepts determine how any one concept functions and thus specify the rules for its application' (Derry, 2018, p. 15).

Take the concept of 'argument'. The constructing of an argument in literary study bears something like a family resemblance to the concept of 'argument' in daily life. Both involving the putting forward of a view and defending it. Both recognise the existence of another side or perspective. Yet, the concept is in important ways different. In a literature essay an argument has to do various other things. What these things are is, of course, contestable depending on the context. Yet, the using of textual evidence, the support of reasons and evidence towards a conclusion, the exploration of potential meanings of metaphor, narrative voice etc, are all typical of essays in literature. Some of these are similar to other 'arguments'. Philosophers, for example, also support claims with reasons but will typically focus more on the detailed consideration of potential counter-arguments and the use of particular modes of logical reasoning.

The point to labour is that different activities have normative assumptions that it is surely the job of a teacher to make visible. How this is to be done effectively is also likely to vary across school subjects. As a teacher of both English and Philosophy, experience tells me this is indeed the case. What is common to both, and I suggest all school subjects, is that 'in order to function persuasively their crafting of their work must be responsive to reasons that are recognized and shared' (Derry, 2018, p. 14). For Muller, the profane (one of Durkheim's two poles of how symbolic representation is manifested) 'is a world of flux and of particulars, and it is driven by practical and direct wisdom: proverbs, prudence, street lore, on-the job knowledge, the rhythmic language and wisdom of the domestic community' (Muller, 2023, p. 22). What is notable about the study of literature is that it is a vertical discourse (in Bernstein's terms) and yet takes as its raw material the profane or horizontal discourse of everyday life. Yet this is done in a way characteristic of the vertical discourse of the discipline of literary studies. The activity isn't carried out in the same mode as its object of study.

The approaches to culture in both the study of literature and movements within political philosophy examined in chapter four lack the insights of this integrative approach in important ways. As Maton suggests, the integrative approach aims 'to inculcate more potential knowers into an established conversation' whereas

the alternative is a social gaze which tries 'to carve out a new space for already legitimate knowers to have a conversation of their own' (Maton, 2014, p. 101). The idea in both is that if we can define the group-identity precisely we can apportion them their cultural inheritance and 'enable the authentic social self to shine forth' (Maton, 2014, p. 102). As Rata suggests, this view finds its educational equivalent in versions of constructivism in which the student is seen as the product of the customs, habits, language and social relations of 'their' communal group. The result of the constructivist assumption is that students should be educationally wreathed in the culture of their group (Rata, 2012). Implicit in my account of the power of literary studies is the idea that this is highly limiting for students and the development of their capabilities. In contrast, the social realist position is focused on the power of disciplinary bodies of knowledge to foster 'the ability to reason beyond the limiting perspective of one's own experience' (Rata, 2012, p. 19). Again, this does not entail undermining or ignoring the experiences students bring with them to the classroom.

Meaning-Making, Powerful Knowledge and Capabilities: Resolving the Tensions and Looking to the Future

What remains is to return to some of the ideas surrounding English education, and specifically the study of literature, that were deemed so at odds with the concept of powerful knowledge. In chapter one I outlined the various critiques of the notion of powerful knowledge from English scholars and educationalists. Rather than recapitulate them in detail I will briefly summarise the main claims before showing how the account of literary study above does not fall foul of them. More than this, that the account above helps gives some new philosophical insight to the histories of English pedagogy.

School English and Disciplinary Identity

As we have seen, one of the central tensions between powerful knowledge and English as a school subject, is that many in the world of English education do not recognise a direct relay between what goes on in school classrooms and an

equivalent discipline in higher education. Scholars point to how as the school subject developed throughout the twentieth century, a 'distance grew between the academic university discipline and its nominal school equivalent (Goodwyn et al., 2022). In chapter three, I went some way to resolving these problems by presenting a non-essentialist conception of academic subjects and disciplines. However, now that I have presented a fuller characterisation of what I call powerful English, some more needs to be said about the relationship between the study of literature in schools and what goes on in university disciplines.

We saw in chapter four that, for many, English as a school subject is its own thing; a distinctive educational enterprise and not a vehicle for the recontextualising of disciplinary knowledge. In response to these concerns, we can agree that a one-way transmission model from university departments to secondary school classrooms is simplistic in the case of literary studies. Instead, we can operate with a more fluid interaction between the two because this, as some of Young's critics have noted, is indeed a better description of what goes on in school subject English. Clearly, the practice of the school subject is influenced by the various disciplines from which its teachers are drawn. This entails a disciplinary standard that distinguishes it from every day reading. Having a response to something someone has read no more makes one a literary critic than observing the weather makes one a meteorologist.

Yet, at the same time, it is predictable that the pedagogical means through which this is achieved varies between the secondary school and the university. More than this, because development in studying literature is deeply imbricated with the identity and reading practices of students, it is perhaps inevitable that social change is felt first in the secondary school classroom before it is in the university. Given the concern of literary study with human and social experience, what goes on in schools exerts influence upwards on the nature of the academic discipline. This is an outcome of the sociality that is a feature of the activity itself but not, I think, a reason to disavow a relationship between the two that is mutually reinforcing. There therefore seems to be nothing inherent in the concept of powerful knowledge, and the application to literary study I have put forward, that requires a "polarisation between 'personal' response and

theory, between the identities of reader and critic, or indeed between the worlds of school and university English" (Snapper in Goodwyn 2013, 64).

Experience and Understanding in Studying Literature

The concerns around powerful knowledge and student experience in English were: 1. Powerful knowledge dictates that all educational knowledge exists (or should exist if it to be truly educational) outside of history, context and community and therefore it subordinates student' experience (Doecke, 2017; Yandell & Brady, 2016); 2. it implies a kind of knowledge appropriate for scientific enquiry rather than the arts which are more concerned with pleasure and imagination (Eaglestone, 2020). This culminates in the fear that the study of literature as a kind of powerful knowledge will radically minimise students' agency and authenticity. Much of my response to these charges has been woven throughout this thesis and in the preceding discussion. However, it is useful to make concrete how they can be responded to from within the version of literary study I have argued for.

In response to the first worry, we can point out that the alleged disjuncture between knowledge that is 'real' (in the sense that it has emergent properties of objectivity) and the importance of students drawing on their own experiences in reading literary texts is a false dichotomy. The study of literature relates to meaning. The generation of meaning is not possible without connecting one's reading to the experiences one has already had. This is because literary texts are 'about' (that is take as their object of concern) human experience itself. In the same way that dance presupposes moving bodies, one must have moved one's body in certain ways before becoming a dancer. To engage in literary criticism presupposes one has had experiences, both of reading and of life. Therefore, student experience is a necessary but not sufficient condition for literary study. It is not sufficient because the understanding that comes through reading literary texts is not entirely reducible to personal experience. In studying literature students are engaged in probing and contesting the nature of language, form and narrative in ways that hope to generate insight and understanding about the nature of the human and social world. The outcomes

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of this are often anchored in the student's experience but necessarily transcend it given the social nature of the activity. This point is one that scholarship in English education seems at pains to underscore (Anderson & Elms, 2022; Doecke, 2019; Yandell, 2013). The social basis of literary studies is, under my analysis, a common feature of both powerful knowledge and the research base of English educators. Literary judgements are not assertions or reports of subjective experience, they rely on methods of justification internal to the disciplinary activity, yet these are at the same time social activities that live and breathe in the classrooms in which they are conducted. A central argument of this thesis has been that these are not at odds.

What of the claim that literature is more concerned with the imaginative and aesthetic rather than the rationalistic nature of knowledge-led enquiry? To this we can point to the account of literary cognitivism provided above. Under my account, literary judgements are both imaginative, dependent on emotional engagement, and yet remain entirely rational. Literary texts deal with particulars. This is why literary studies, and the English scholarship around it, is concerned with "responsiveness to local interests and sceptical of its 'universality'" (Yandell, 2013, p. 4). What we see from Nussbaum's account of the relationship between the emotions and literary knowing is the nature of engaging with human cultural and ethical life requires an immersion in the particular. However, this does not entail a retreat from the universal. Instead, we get an expanded experience and extension of life (Nussbaum, 1990). Literary forms contain within them insights into shared human and cultural experience that students gain access through by studying them in classrooms. This understanding is not a parochial and ephemeral impression but rather a concrete development of capabilities. Again, we see that the local and experiential are not set in opposition to the universal and objective. Rather, it is part of what it means to study literature that both are held together in productive tension. The nature of this balancing act is part of the endlessly possible making of meaning that characterises, distinctively in my view, the study of literature in schools.

It is the particularities of the disciplinary concepts involved in literary study that require a dialectic between the student's experience, the text and other students. As Belas suggests in a recent philosophical enquiry into subject English, generating insightful and authentic meanings from texts involves the 'crossing of two live-wires' that 'emerges between text and reader(s)' (Belas, 2022, p. 13). The study of literature in schools presupposes this kind of 'discursive community' (Belas, 2022, p. 52). Importantly, to be a member of a healthy community is not to be a passive recipient of received custom or wisdom. Rather, we need to be guided in interrogating the nature of the literature deemed to be of importance. From this the student can form their own positions in relation to the disciplinary history within which they are inducted throughout schooling. As such, experience can be conditioned by disciplinary access to bring students into the kind of cultural conversations the study of literature requires.

Turing to the second charge, I have outlined above why the notion of powerful knowledge and the body of scholarship that underpins it does not imply the learning or memorising of propositional statements. Nor does it imply anything about the superiority of scientific knowledge to what goes on in the arts. As such, there is already much to allay the concern. That it is a concern amongst educators in English is clear. Yandell points out that in much education in English, the 'good student is the one who digests the gobbets' of information leading to a 'curriculum for bight parrots' (Yandell, 2013, p. 105). When we see literary study in classrooms as about developing capabilities (or powers), this simply wouldn't do. It is because the cultural capability demands students' participation in meaning-making that recitation is evidence of its absence. This is also why, under my reading of Young, it exemplifies the absence of powerful knowledge. Enlarging the understanding requires a student to have 'analysed a given work and constructed her interpretation' (Phelan, 2020, p. 160). In doing so they emerge with a 'keener ear for nuance and eye for detail and enhanced skills of conceptual navigation' (160). These cognitive achievements are, of course, precisely what is beyond the reach of bright parrots.

Resisting the urge to bifurcate knowledge and experience is important because in disavowing them, we risk becoming under-ambitious in our conception of the subject. Mclean Davies and Buzzacott, for example, claim that if English classrooms 'produce knowledge sociably' then 'we must also accept that knowledge in English is not implicitly generative' (McLean Davies & Buzacott, 2021, p. 369). Now, it is not clear in what sense generative is meant here. Why would the sociality that underpins learning in English not lead to generative knowledge? It appears to be that they take the outcomes of the encounter with the text in the classroom as unpredictable. There are a variety of 'knowledges' that can come out of the study of a text and, therefore, it isn't the kind of knowledge that can be generalised like that of the natural sciences for example. Yet, this is too quick. The fact that literary study yields unpredictable outcomes does not entail it isn't generative in at least some senses. Rather, it is that the knowledge (or understanding) isn't specifiable in advance. This is quite a different claim. In fact, it is a crucial distinction. It is because the end result is not knowable by the teacher (or exam board) in advance that makes so much of current educational policy and practice so woefully anathema to its disciplinary nature. Students memorising chunks of decontextualised history, abstruse literary terminology and potted critical commentaries to then be tested via retrieval quizzes is certainly a kind of knowledge. But this is not what is generated from literary study. Rather what is generated are capabilities within the student, inextricable from the social context in which they were formed, yet generalisable to any number of future experiences literary or non-literary.

Culture, Identity and Nation revisited

The last area of concern unearthed in chapter one was that ideas about 'knowledge' in English teaching have been frequently attached to a nationalistic conception of a literary canon that represent little more than the vested interests of powerful elites. When we specify knowledge in literature, we end up focusing on content which inevitably leads to making decisions and distinctions about which texts are valuable. This, for critics, is the process of canon formation that has rendered the work of women and minority groups inferior and at best an adjunct to 'serious' works. My response to this has largely been in reworking

the concept of culture that underlies this critique. In chapter four I argued that culture has been conceived as a good, asset and item of property belonging, through posterity, to particular groups. An English canon for the English; a western canon for West etc. As I hope to have shown, such a view of culture is entirely chimerical.

By understanding culture from a cosmopolitan perspective, we can see how worries around powerful knowledge leading to cultural essentialism and chauvinism can be eased. A student's culture can't be dictated or prescribed. We are all born occupying putative social identities: woman, son, British, black etc. These identities provide contours within which we make our lives but the concrete identities we furnish through living should be written by us rather than imposed (Appiah, 2005). The central ethical importance of agency in coming to a view on one's cultural identity is what the cultural cosmopolitan wants to emphasise. I have suggested that the study of literature is a central site at which this can occur. This active understanding of culture as a process of engagement is helpful in several ways. Firstly, it enjoins those of us teaching literature to resist the idea that a student can be understood and valued simply by the recognition of their intersecting social identities. At the same time, it can be cognisant of the fact that those identities will be salient in important, and different, ways by different students. A more flexible notion of culture reflects the kinds of indeterminacy of meaning and interpretation that English teachers see in the range of interpretations students give to texts. It also accounts for why literary study is capability-forming in ways the more essentialist accounts of culture are not. Capabilities of affiliation and practical reason rely on agency. They require the individual to be able to reflect on values, attitude and attachments in a way that is authentically theirs. A concept of culture that doesn't allow this is unfit for the undertaking of literary study in classrooms.

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