Cultivating Slowness as Contemplative Practice:

Literature, (Dis)Enchantment and the Modern University

Introduction

The humanities today are experiencing a *crisis* – an existential threat that perpetuates their need for justification in the modern university. A 2018 British Academy study showcases the sharp decline in student numbers, and a variety of recent national agendas centred on 'graduate employability' have reignited debates about the value and purposes of a humanities education (e.g. *The Guardian*, 2022; Franklin, 2022). Several defences have been offered, with many centring on the humanities' unique role in enabling democratic participation. If a university education is meant to prepare us for entry into society, then we cannot only focus on its economic returns but its broader social value. For Nussbaum (2016), since the study of literature enables us to interrogate received traditions and values, a critical rendering of texts should therefore be seen as an essential aim of higher education. And in a world where we are increasingly confronted with mis- and disinformation, the argument that criticality is a product of studying literature is particularly appealing.

What these defences overlook are other important affective dimensions of reading literature, including the ways in which reading can arouse a state of full immersion through a deep enchantment with the text. Perhaps this is because, in critical schools of thought, enchantment is thought of as a kind of sorcery - evidence that the text, shaped by latent socio-political discourses, is manipulating its readers. Critique instead

requires a *distancing* of the reader from the text. Ultimately, in focusing on critique as a defence of the humanities, are we also peddling a culture of *disenchantment* – one that, ironically, calls for this defence in the first place?

In *Against Interpretation,* Sontag (1966, p.6) implies that this drive towards "critical engagement" has usurped many of our conversations about literature, particularly since the burgeoning 'post-mythic consciousness' in Western societies. For Sontag, modern interpretation forms (in assuming that art is always figurative) is more attuned to *content* rather than *form*, the latter of which is seen as a mere accessory, a means through which the content is (in)effectively delivered. Even though form is essential to the very *experience* of literature, we lack the capacity to articulate this – to say what it means to *really read* something beyond the extraction of information or arguments in a text. What is required then is a language that focuses on an 'accurate, loving description of the work' (Sontag, 1966, pp.12-13), that attends to its sensuous surfaces and the luminosity of words 'being what they are'.

To what extent are such practices possible in the modern university? Turning first to the character of Lotaria in Calvino's (1992) *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, I showcase how particular styles of reading represent not only the modern narrative of disenchantment, but also certain forms of critique. In attenuating the logic of efficiency and distance in both Lotaria's style of reading *and* critical forms of interpretation, I argue that there is a value in enabling *slowness* in our classrooms, understood as contemplative practices from which the possibility of enchantment emerges. I discuss this in reference to Felski (2008; 2015), Macé (2013) and the early work of Sartre (2011). Since enchantment is a prerequisite for any form of engagement with a text, it must therefore play a part in any defence we offer for the study of literature, insofar as it points to embedded possibilities beyond the disenchantment that appears to characterise the modern university. And whilst the humanities must be defended, so too must those the slow, contemplative spaces that allow for such possibilities to unfurl.

A Disenchantment Tale

[Lotaria] explained to me that a suitably programmed computer can read a novel in a few minutes and record the list of all the words contained in

the text, in order of frequency. "That way I can have an already completed reading at hand," Lotaria says, "with an incalculable saving of time.

What is the reading of a text, in fact, except the recording of certain thematic recurrences, certain insistences of forms and meanings? An electronic

reading supplies me with a list of the frequencies, which I have only to glance at to form an idea of the problems the book suggests in my critical

study. Naturally, at the highest frequencies the list records countless articles, pronouns, particles, but I don't pay them any attention. I head straight

for the words with the richest meaning; they can give me a precise notion of the book.

Lotaria, a student of literature, is seen here employing an unusual but efficient method for reading a novel. In many ways, it could be read as a

miniature of the modern problem of disenchantment. According to Weber (2010), disenchantment in part relates to the rise of a new kind of

rationality based on 'calculat[ing] the most economical application of means to a given end' (Taylor, 1991, p.55). Now that older ("superstitious")

ways of thinking are obsolete, the world is thought to be more accurately directed by scientific modes of thought. This urge to demystify peaks

with the arrival of the entrepreneurial spirit in capitalist societies and is thus undoubtedly tied to the neoliberal university (Brady, 2023). And

although we may look to Lotaria's method as comical and absurd, does it also offer an eerie glimpse into the future (and, indeed, present) of the

humanities department?

Certainly, this move towards societal rationalisation could be seen as either a blessing or a curse. The disenchanted world speaks to

progress and to new opportunities for self-legitimisation, even if this new-found freedom both 'liberates' and 'binds' (Camus, 2005). On the other

hand, a disenchanted world is a world reduced to raw materials malleable to our own particular ends, and rather than facilitating an openness to

possibilities beyond our needs and interests, we become myopic in beholding what the world has to offer. Lotaria's own approach is akin to looking through a microscope, her act of reading 'effectively [downgrading] or even [erasing] the embeddedness that is a feature of our normal experience of the world' (Blake *et al.*, 2000, p.7). There is a fixed separation between the novel and Lotaria - the technology serving as an intermediate – limiting the possibilities that might emerge from a fuller engagement with the text: the invitation to co-construct the narrative based on her own interpretations and connections, the enrichment of her perceptual materials for apprehending the world.

For Lotaria, disenchantment is not simply an indifferent process that happens around her. It also characterises her general *orientation* towards reading. Indeed, it seems the disenchantment narrative has become a regulative principle for how many of us operate, reinforcing the belief that the world is calculable in principle, whether indeed it is calculable in fact. Bennett (2001, p.80) argues that 'in a world experienced as disenchanted, humanity figures as the primary, if not sole, locus of agency and vitality' distinct from the 'lifeless stuff' around us.[i] But this brutalist orientation – with its "iron cages" and "cold-skeletal hands" - need not be the only one. It is worth noting that Weber himself saw scientific progress as partly driven by a sense of magic. Calvino (1986a) also supports this view – hence why he considers Galileo to be the finest Italian writer over Dante.[ii]

But regardless of whether these descriptions of disenchantment are too dichotomous, or whether their separation of science and magic is too sharp, this influential narrative in western academic contexts shapes many of the interactions and practices therein. Bennett (2001) proposes an alternative, however – what she calls 'enchanted materialism'. This does not call for an orientation to the world nostalgic for pre-Enlightenment enchantment. It does not imply a return to the telos of the enchanted world, where each has their place in the 'great chain of Being' (Taylor, 1989). It starts by recognising that the absurdist problem of meaninglessness endures only insofar as we take the world to be made of this 'lifeless stuff'. Rather, the material world is *already* a source of potential wonder, 'wherein matter [itself] has a liveliness, resilience, unpredictability' – including,

of course, literary texts. For Felski (2008, p.58), even if the world *is* disenchanted, there are still enduring moments of enchantment that '[encourage] a stance of openness and generosity to the world'. To what extent are these viable in the modern university?

Critical Distance

Surely Lotaria is not demonstrating the qualities we might reasonably expect of a serious student of literature. By side-stepping the labour and time it takes to *read* the text, it is not only her analytic skills that suffer, but her criticality. In higher education, students are often praised for this critical sensitivity. On the flipside, scholarly practices that promote passivity or conformity in thinking are denigrated for encouraging 'uncritical' acquiescence to the authority of the text.

In *The Limits of Critique,* Felski (2015) discusses her fatigue with this dominant critical approach, arguing that it both overshadows and forecloses other ways we might engage with literature.[iii] Whilst there are many kinds of critique, what many have in common is this assumption that there are always hidden meanings to unearth if the text is to be genuinely understood, and that texts are thus always in some ways coercive and exclusionary. Given that, as Sedgwick remarks (2002, p.133) these elements 'can never be ruled out', the critical reader must always be "suspicious" in their interpretations, and to do so by maintaining a *critical distancing* between themselves and the text.

Critical distancing is not necessarily a "natural" orientation but is instead premised on the cultivation of a certain expertise. Unlike the ordinary reader, the critic is an expert in counter-reading, not only reconstructing the text's original intentions, but also generating new insights unbeknownst to the author. Reading against the grain can have different manifestations: burrowing down into the text to excavate hidden agendas, offering unified explanations for seemingly random literary choices. Critique may also involve "troubling" the text, a wariness towards 'the snares

of language' (Felski, 2015, p.136). In each case, the critic attempts to stand *outside* or *above* their object of study, taking in 'a panorama view of systems of discourses and grids of power' (Felski, 2015, p.70) with the aim of defamiliarizing, denaturalising, deconstructing. Sontag (1966, p.7) calls these 'aggressive and impious theories of interpretation', perpetuating not only a suspicion of the text, but also of the ordinary experiences of reading, as evidenced by the often highly intellectualised language of critique - a protest against the ingrained prejudices of intelligibility? (e.g. Butler, 2005).

Although Felski is prone to caricaturing critique for the sake of argument, there is some truth in the claim that this critical mood is so ingrained in scholarly life that to *fail* to evoke it is to be seen as complacent, even complicit. This is in turn incompatible with the features of slower, more contemplative forms of reading: those that invite ease, absorption, *enchantment*. In fact, enchantment means being disoriented by the power of the text, inviting a kind of culpable mindlessness that leads to the reader uncritically subscribing to the author's viewpoint - the answer to which is to develop more critical responses.[iv] Above all, this approach is stifling – it is, to quote Sontag (1966, p.7), 'revenge of the intellect upon art'. Since such forms of critical interpretation require intellectual distance, they seek to preclude any form of enthrallment with a text - even though, as Felski (2008, p.13) remarks, 'theoretical reflection is powered by, and indebted to, many of the same motives… that shape everyday thinking'.

Of course, the distance built into Lotaria's method is distinct from the distance encouraged in critique, insofar as it is premised on efficiency above all else. Whilst certain forms of critique emphasise a detached disposition in the reader, the critic *must* engage deeply with the text, and they can never fully escape the affective dimension of absorption. But critique nevertheless results in a *disenchanted* predisposition towards the world – fascination is fetishization, entanglement/resonance is the product of manipulation. The disenchantment of critique arises from

its attempts to achieve above all else a 'sober and level-headed scrutiny' (Felksi, 2008, p.56), which actively resists elusive, everyday, perhaps even anti-intellectualist aesthetic experiences.

What if our aim was not to solely cultivate a critical spirit in readers, but something like enchantment? What would this require, and what becomes possible as a result? Certainly, there are existing pedagogical practices in the university that encourage this, despite the ubiquity of critique. As Vlieghe and Zamojski (2019) might argue, such practices are autolectic and are worthy of care and protection. But first, they require better discernment and articulation.

Cultivating Slowness

In reaction to the logic of efficiency and the 'distancing' mechanisms associated with modernity, several international "slow movements" have spawned, the most famous of which being the "slow food movement". This movement began in Bra, Italy in the mid-1970s. In 1989, it sparked international attention after its members demonstrated against the opening of a MacDonalds on the Piazza di Spagna and the 'incipient globalisation' this was seen to represent (Petrini, 2004, p.8). In reimagining the production, consumption and exchange of food in modern society, the movement is an example of what Cooper (2013) calls an 'everyday utopia'[v]: a set of practices underpinned by the values of preserving traditional cuisine, sustainability, more locally-embedded models of social economics – in short, a voluntary simplicity that allows for more equitable distribution of resources and a re-valuation of pleasure and well-being in the modern world (Pietrykowsi, 2004; Petrini, 2003).

The slow movement has not just been influential in the world of gastronomy, but also in other consumptive practices. There are slow movements in the tourism industry, where more leisurely modes of travel are encouraged to enable fuller immersion in the places we visit. There

are dedicated "slow art" days in museums, requiring participants to spend more time absorbing themselves with artwork than what is typically the case. Slow filmmaking (also known as 'contemplative cinema') downplays melodramatics such as to enrapture audiences in the everyday, serene moments of the lives of characters on screen (De Luca and Jorge, 2015). There are even entire cities dedicated to slowing down the pace of life, with urban environments carefully designed not with efficiency in mind but with enabling serendipitous interactions in ordinary spaces (Knox, 2005). For those advocating slowness, the growth of the so-called "edgeless city" is intimately connected to the thoughtlessness that characterises our modern consumption of entertainment, food and art, where our capacity to *dwell* in such spaces is limited, and where we are thereby left with a sense of distance, dislocatedness, and disenchantment.

Slow movements fundamentally relate to the quest to find *more time* in the modern world. Of course, resisting the culture of speed is always relational, particularly given the pace at which modern technology develops[vi]. And slow movements themselves are not without criticism. They have been associated with nationalist, economic protectionism and are considered to be by nature exclusive, even though they claim to provide a space in which social norms are not merely reproduced but contested (e.g. Knox, 2005). Slow movements also imply an unhelpful set of binaries (fast/slow, enlightened/slavishness, faddish/traditional, real/inauthentic) that can promote an anti-democratic, elitist rhetoric. Self-proclaimed Luddites are accused of hypocrisy, for surely all kinds of technologies are essential for the ongoing creation of art - including the humble pen? The availability of time also reveals social inequalities – those who cannot, as Bloch (1935) proclaimed, choose to live in "non-synchronicity", those for whom time is thwarted by other demands.[vii]

And yet, "slowness" need not involve an overhaul of all other temporalities but makes possible a particular set of practices that can co-exist with speed, a 'conscious negotiation of the different temporalities that make up our everyday lives' with a 'commitment to occupy time more attentively' (Parkins, 2004, p.364). What new possibilities emerge for those who, as Cappatti (1996) remarks, 'listen to the rhythm of their own

lives'? Although originally a critique of industrial society and the accelerating forces of modernisation, the value of slowness in this paper is articulated as a heightened aesthetic or sensory experience, calling for a protection of the ordinary spaces in which our capacity to *dwell* is enabled, through which we are released from our being bound to (machine) time, and where a fuller immersion in worthwhile activities dissolves the distance between e.g. the reader and the act of reading.

Lamenting the so-called "reading crisis" in modern society, Waters (2004) argues that declining literacy rates not only relate to our failures to address structural inequalities but also the sense in which we no longer teach people to read. Where reading *is* taught, it is in the form of "speed reading"[viii] – the aim of which is to get through a text in the quickest, most efficient way possible. Speed-reading is to condense a text to 'graphs and charts', not dissimilar to Lotaria's own method for reading, and it results in what Waters (2004, p.2) calls 'large-scale bureaucratic analyses of literature'. Yet despite the relatively intuitive idea that speed-reading impairs understanding, it is nevertheless a necessary skill in the daily, information-bombardment we experience in the modern world. Since speed-reading fundamentally reduces the text to information that can be extracted or unearthed, it is something that we might inadvertently encourage in our own university practices not only in the name of efficiency but also critique[ix].

What happens when we 'go inside' a book – when we take our time, becoming still, becoming slow? For Waters (2004, p.3), these time-consuming, contemplative practices produce a 'deeply profound quiet that can overwhelm your soul, [in which] you can lose yourself in thought for an immeasurable moment of time'. And this, indeed, is the very essence of literature:

…to mess with time, to establish its own time, its own rhythm... [and thus] we should tarry, attend to the sensuousness of reading, allow ourselves to enter the experience of words.

In offering an alternative to speed, slow movements create spaces in which slowness is not only conceivable but practicable, not simply as a redistribution or temporary respite from the fast pace of modern life, but a re-conceptualisation of time as embodied and embedded in our social practices. For Connolly (1999), this connects to the Foucauldian concept of 'care of the self' – not in the self-indulgent sense that you often find in consumerist culture, but as that which is necessary for the cultivation of responsiveness based on an affirmation of attentiveness, deliberation and contemplation. As with Foucault's (2001) concept of *parrhesia*, such values are concerned with the micropolitical insofar as they signal *commitments* that require protection – the protection of slowness against speed, time-replete contemplation against time-efficiency, absorption against distance. The more time one has available to think, to re-evaluate, to become immersed in activities deemed worthwhile, the greater the possibility for reflexivity around the commitments in our thoughts and habits. For this reason, Montanari (1996) argues that the term "slow" might in fact be rebranded as *care*.

Indeed, what matters in such practices is not simply how long they last, or how much time we dedicate to them, but the extent to which we attend to such experiences with care. This too requires what Sedgwick (2002) calls *reparative reading* – an orientation that seeks to preserve rather than deconstruct the text, that remains open to the wider possibilities "shut out" when we only concern ourselves with the hidden political agendas that might be uncovered (or, rather, constructed) through critical suspicion. As an antidote, then, to the pervasive narratives of disenchantment that surround our university practices, what possibilities might be unfurled from slow, contemplative styles of reading?

Contemplative Reading and the Experience of Enchantment

Contemplative - or 'slow' - modes of reading relate then to heightened sensory experiences, including the ways in which one might experience *enchantment* with a text. To reiterate, enchantment does not necessarily need to be tied to the teleological world that supposedly existed pre-Enlightenment – it is already *there* in the material world around us, in the 'sensuous and joyful immersion in the marvellous specificity of things' (Felski, 2008, p.58). It might be obvious to say that literature is more than just the brute facts of a physical text, information and/or ideologies to be excavated. Literature instead contains a vast cosmos in itself, with stories that are unpredictable, with flawed, wavering beings in their own worlds, that can offer more than just resonance or evidence of politico-historical contexts but *entirely new worlds*. Enchantment with literature invites a consensual hallucination – for how else would those black squiggles shore up such intense experiences and emotional disturbances? In contrast to critical scepticism, enchantment encourages us to see the text as a *context in and of itself*, and not simply something *to be contextualised* by referring to the external discourses that "produce" it. As Felski argues, whilst literary scholars are adept at all things critical, our vocabulary is impoverished when accounting for the sense of enchantment that can arise from slow, contemplative reading practices. Perhaps this is because literary theory seems to be nervous about literature's proximity to such 'soft, fuzzy ideas'. Yet these experiences are not simply peripheral to reading - they are essential to it, much as immersion is essential to any activity.

In the *Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre (2011) distinguishes between an original pre-reflective immersion in the world (where the separation between myself and my object of interest is suspended) and a reflected state (which attempts to capture this state of absorption but in doing so, disrupts it). A student studying on their own time in the library might be fully immersed in reading the material for class (one can hope!). In their intense concentration, there is no separation between them and their act of reading – they are *at one*. Suddenly, they become aware that there aren't enough seats in the library, that there are other students wandering around looking for a spot. In their distraction, they might begin to

become hypervigilant of the lines and dots on the page, so much so that they are unable to continue reading. They reflect on themselves as a body taking up space, and it is only as if they are on the outside looking in. For Sartre, it is in such moments that their sense of self *erupts,* and a *distance* is established between the reader and the act of reading. Felski (2008, p.54) speaks in a similar way about the deep involvement that characterises enchantment, where 'wrapped in the details of a novel, a film, a painting, you feel yourself enclosed in a bubble of absorbed attention'. This is often followed by an 'awkward moment of readjustment' when the credits begin to roll, or you need to get off the train. But this prior immersion is necessary for reading to ensue in the first place – and, indeed, any form of (critical) reflexivity that arises on that basis. Certainly, such moments need not arise from individual introspection alone - they are and can also be experienced collectively.

There is an implicit argument here about the need to protect study spaces, or indeed those ordinary, "empty" spaces which provoke everyday interactions. Increasingly, these are threatened by calls for more efficient use of time and space with the increased numbers of students and the growth of digital resources (e.g. Carnell, 2017; Mathews and Walton, 2014; Temple 2008). There is also a conceptual argument to be made here that relates not only to 'slow spaces' but what also we might call 'slow thinking', as experienced in enchanted encounters with texts where the full transformative power of literature is offered. Where reading in the context of a university is concerned, it seems so often that the 'critical' *erupts*. By encouraging a sense of guardedness in the reader, and the construction of a particular narrative based on the diagnosis of hidden assumptions, it is not only the potential emergence of other meanings that is curbed, but also this experience of enchantment.

What is the *use* of such enchantment? For Macé (2013, p.213), literature has the capacity to draw us towards different 'promises of existence', inviting us into other perceptual possibilities that allow us to see things in new and surprising ways. This can relate to new ways of grasping oneself and the events that make us who we are, or the ways that literature builds our attentive capacities, re-orienting and sharpening our

'tools to apprehend the world' (Macé, 2013, p.222). In this sense, the process of reading is not merely instrumentally valuable, but *existentially* so – '[enlivening] the inner life of the reader… through a power that tugs the threads and possibilities of being' (Macé, 2013, p.216).

This view of literature is radically distinct from what Macé (2013, p.224) calls the 'narratological vision of reading', which sees reading primarily as a process of deciphering information, or (critical) excavations of the text. For Macé (2013, p.225), what reading requires is a radical receptivity: allowing oneself to become lost in the 'intense environment of the book', to '*be on the edge of time*'. Despite the denigrative ways in which passivity is generally understood in educational contexts, there is value in understanding the ways in which it can encourage a vulnerability that opens up, rather than shuts down, the perceptual materials offered in literature, and the contemplative practices that make these 'tasks of existence' possible, without relegating them to inefficiency, a *waste* of time, *or* indeed naiveté, the products of manipulation. The question then becomes not only how we might justify the existence of the humanities, but also, how we might defend those (conceptual) spaces in which the possibilities for slow, contemplative practices are protected.

What to do about Lotaria?

I am acutely aware that Lotaria has been used throughout as an allegory of critique – of the disenchanted world that seems to proliferate around our practices, of the critical distance that we encourage in our students. Lotaria is treated not as a human being but as a caricature of the ills of higher education, very much against what I suspect the author had originally intended. What is it about Lotaria that has struck me in particular? Perhaps she resonates with my own practices as a university educator, my own uneasiness when students ask, "How can I be more critical?" after we've had what I thought were rich, meandering conversations about literature. Lotaria, indeed, has invited me to envision my own practices in

new ways, to better understand what is it that I am really committed to as an educator. She is the surprising starting point for normative/political questions as well as phenomenological reflections about what reading essentially *is*.

Lotaria also invites practical questions: what do we do with students like her? Although I would want to encourage her to *take her time* with and *care about* literature, it seems I can only 'court her sensibilities' (Hogan, 2010). Is this best achieved through increasing her critical sensibilities, or does this merely enforce another kind of distance, rather than a receptivity that allows her to value what is *in* a text?

When I think of books clubs, where texts are discussed zealously (and yet not without criticism), I am wary of the intellectualisation of this space, of our need to create a vocabulary that somehow justifies this experience as an equally important scholarly practice. And yet, in such spaces, what matters is the deep immersion in a text and the unashamed enchantment with books, that rely on slow, contemplative practices and with that an openness and care for rather than a guardedness and detachment from books. What are the spaces – physical, temporal, conceptual - that enable contemplative practices in the university, what is their *use*, and how might they be protected and affirmed?

Words: 4498

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[i] Sartre's ontology in *Being and Nothingness* certainly exemplifies this, since it appears to be built on separation of 'brute facts' and '(human) consciousness' – hence why his contemporary, Merleau-Ponty, referred to him as a 'faithful Cartesian' (Whitford, 1979). However, as explored later in the paper, this separation only appears on what Sartre calls the 'reflective plane of being'. This is distinct from the underlying and more fundamental pre-reflective state of being experienced when a person is fully immersed in an activity. An understanding of this distinction, I argue, is important in accounting for the experiences of reading.

[ii] Calvino (1986b) probably did not mean to present Lotaria as a fulcrum of critique. In fact, he enthusiastically predicted that robots would be the writers of the future, and that what matters in a story is ultimately the readers' response rather than the intentions of its authors.

[iii] For Sontag (1966), although the initial experience of art was no doubt incantation and magic, art gradually became seen as a form of mimesis. Although this can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks, it is especially evident in the so-called 'post-mythic consciousness' of the Western world, and with it, the overemphasis of the idea that art always represents *something else* - a set of arguments or positions –leading to the "perennial, never consummated project of [critical] *interpretation"*.

[iv] For Sedgwick (2002), there is also a moralistic impetus behind critique – the focus on 'knowledge in the form of exposure' or 'problematizing hidden violences' (Sedgwick, 2002, pp. 138-139).

[v] An everyday utopia is defined by Cooper (2013, p. 9) not as an unattainable ideal future state but as an "enactment in everyday life, a deliberate attempt to construct or encourage alternative forms" of living.

[vi] At first, for instance, one might have preferred to travel by horse rather than trains. Now, slow tourism is characterised by train travel over flights.

[vii] See Parkins (2004) discussion on the "politics of temporality"..

[viii] Waters is thinking here of Moretti's technique of "distance reading". This is a technique that encourages students to "outsource" reading to someone (or something) in order to provide a summary of the text. The argument here is that outsourcing reading would allow for the collation of more and more texts over shorter periods of time, leading to increased production (and efficiency) in human knowledge. Not dissimilar to Lotaria's own method for reading, there are recent AI tools (e.g. Quilbot) and apps (e.g. Blinkist) designed with this purpose in mind.

[ix] For instance, rather than focusing on the *literary* aspects of a piece of writing, it seems much more common to focus on the 'themes' that the text indicates. As with Sontag, Waters argues that we are more able, in speed-reading, to focus on the "moral" of a story rather than formal or purely aesthetic analysis.