Preface to Part One

Logic, Skepticism, and Mysticism

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (also rarely called *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung* in German), fewer than ninety pages long, is the only book Wittgenstein published in his lifetime. And yet, as P. M. S. Hacker has put it, this “masterpiece” is responsible for nothing less than “chang[ing] the face of philosophy in the second quarter of the [twentieth] century,” and, according to Hans Sluga, has “baffled and fascinated” readers since its publication.¹ This brief synopsis can by no means stand alone as an authoritative exegetic source on one of the most difficult books in the history of philosophy; for that, I direct readers to the classic introduction by H. O. Mounce, the thorough and accessible criticism of David Stern, and the superlative recent book by Ray Monk, *How to Read Wittgenstein*.² What I will provide here instead is, in effect, the bare minimum one might want to review about the so-called Early Wittgenstein to contextualize the arguments that I later present, as well as the *Tractatus’s* place in Austrian intellectual history and the history of analytic philosophy, and, finally, the *Tractatus’s* brief appearances in, and larger relevance to, literary criticism.

**Issue 1: How the Tractatus Works**

The title of Wittgenstein’s first book was suggested by G. E. Moore as a play on Baruch Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*; the book was published in 1921 after a considerable struggle, largely because publishers simply did not know what to make of it. This is likely because the so-called treatise consists of a two-page prose preface, followed by seven numbered propositions and a multitude of sub- and sub-sub-propositions that, as LeMahieu has elegantly described them, “oscillate between logical propositions and enigmatic aphorisms.”³ What results is a masterfully complex web of cross-referenced and allusive declarations ranging from the logical structure of facts to the ineffability of the ethical, all rendered in prose that Sluga aptly describes as “dauntingly severe and compressed.”⁴ And yet, the *Tractatus’s* stated goals are nothing less than to chart out as clearly as possible exactly what our language
can and cannot express. The book ends with a highly debated self-negation, one that implores us to “throw away the ladder” once we have climbed it:

6.54 Meine Sätze erläutern dadurch, daß sie der, welcher mich versteht, am Ende als unsinnig erkennt, wenn er durch sie – auf ihnen – über sie hinaufgestiegen ist. (Er muß sozusagen die Leiter wegwerfen, nachdem er auf ihr hinaufgestiegen ist.) Er muß diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig.

My propositions elucidate in the following way: that he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has climbed through them—on them—over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must conquer these propositions; then he sees the world correctly.

How did Wittgenstein get to this place? More than a decade earlier, he had begun his twenties consumed with a more accurate rendering of symbolic logic after reading Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica* and Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*. Indeed, his early adulthood is marked by insistent pilgrimages first to Frege in Jena and then to Russell in Cambridge, where his demands to know whether he was a philosophical genius were answered in the affirmative after several months of unique haranguing. What both captivated and challenged the young Wittgenstein was the development of “the New Logic,” what is now taught in classrooms around the world as first-order logic. Wittgenstein was consumed with refining, among others, the following two ideas: Frege’s insistence that a logically perspicuous “conceptual notation” (*Begriffsschrift*) could be developed in order to express any scientific or mathematical proposition on earth; and Russell’s theory of descriptions and logical atomism, themselves vehement rebuttals to Hegelian monism in which Russell insisted that the world did indeed consist of smaller “simples” in relation to one another, rather than what he saw to be Hegel’s hackish conception of an ideal Reality that, as a whole, was only (un-)reachable through dialectic motion.

Further, Wittgenstein’s ascent into the vernacular of every prominent philosopher of logic in the twentieth century was a result of his uniquely insistent personality and his Rockefeller-level wealth; he was able to charter entire trains to take his friends on ultimately disappointing “vacations,” and finance studies and living wherever he chose. (Interestingly, before giving up his fortune to his sister shortly after the First World War, Wittgenstein financed and thus effectively birthed the careers of many of Austria’s literary greats around the turn of the century, including Georg Trakl and Stephan Zweig.) Wittgenstein also chose to enlist in the Austrian Army four days after Austria-Hungary’s entry into the First World War, serving with what we
can characterize as either extraordinary bravery or wanton recklessness. On the Vistula in the river fighter *Goplana*, and later behind enemy lines imprisoned in Italy, Wittgenstein refined the logical-philosophical treatise he had begun before the war’s outset. The result is what Monk aptly calls a hybrid document that “had at its very heart a mystical paradox,” one that not only contains a comprehensive analysis of formal logic, but also sections about ethics, aesthetics, and how to live.  

The spare, severe prose of the *Tractatus*’s seven primary propositions helps them seem simple—especially the first: “Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist,” or “The world is all that is the case”; and the last: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen,” or “What we cannot speak about we must be silent about.” Despite the book’s deserved reputation for difficulty, in a way these propositions are simple, as each section develops directly out of the section before it, and deals with a very specific and clear element of how the world is set up, how logic works or how language works. And yet, thousands of pages have been and continue to be devoted to parsing these seven sparse propositions and their sub-remarks. The following summary is, thus, in no way exhaustive, but should serve as a minimalist foundation to the more in-depth analysis in the chapters that follow.

**TLP 1–3: Facts, Not Things**

The *Tractatus*’s first section describes the logical structure of the world by asserting that it is divided into “facts, not things,” and by introducing the idea of logical independence, an important and decisive break from key parts of Russell’s theory of logical atomism. It also begins to detail the logical structure of these facts, the charting of which represents Wittgenstein’s major break from Russell. Wittgenstein sets up this break by following *TLP* 1 with a line that at first seems to echo Russell’s theory: “Die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen, nicht der Dinge” (“The world is the totality of facts, not of things”). There is nothing in this single line that seems inherently different from Russell’s logical atomism. That is, the world, rather than being a single unified Reality or a collection of things, is instead a state of all objects that exist in their factual, spatiotemporal relationship to one another. However, the breakthrough in the first section comes with Wittgenstein insisting that these facts exist in logical space, but are not themselves determined by logic; that is, the logical “relations” of which Russell speaks are not *logical objects* in the “atom,” but rather the space in which the atom resides, and the force that binds them together. Thus, even though the world is determined by the facts (1.11: “Die Welt ist durch die Tatsachen bestimmt und dadurch, dass es alle Tatsachen sind” [“The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts”]), these facts do not themselves *contain* logic. Rather, logic contains them: “Die Tatsachen im logischen Raum sind die Welt” (“The facts in logical space are the world”) (1.13).
The first set of remarks leaves us with several unanswered questions: What is logical space? What is a fact, and why is it different from a thing? Pieces of answers emerge in the second section, with the introduction of the word _Sachverhalt_ (translated, with some contention, as “state of affairs”) in remark 2, followed by this refinement:

2.01 Der Sachverhalt ist eine Verbindung von Gegenständen (Sachen, Dingen).

A state of affairs is a union of objects (matter, things).

This is why the world must be the totality of facts, and not things—what makes it “the world” is how these things relate to each other in logical space, not the things themselves. The reason “the world” consists of a totality of facts in logical space is, Wittgenstein explains, because with a thing comes all of its possible _Sachverhalt_ arrangements, so although it is possible to think of a logical space with nothing in it, it is impossible to think of a thing without its logical space, which includes _all_ of its possibilities (2.013). A thing must have its logical possibilities just as a fleck must have a color (not a particular color, but _a_ color) and a tone must have a pitch (2.0131). But how, then, does a _Tatsache_—this thing in relation to other things—really work? Simple _Gegenstände_ (objects) hang together in logical space like links on a chain (2.03) in a specific way to form a _Sachverhalt_, which is a logical arrangement; the existence of that _Sachverhalt_ is the _Tatsache_ (fact). Logic again is the binding force of this arrangement, but does not determine it.

The early remarks of the second section conclude with Wittgenstein’s answer to the question: what, then, must language be in order to represent these logical arrangements of facts—this reality, “die Wirklichkeit,” which is, according to 2.06, “das Bestehen und Nichtbestehen von Sachverhalten” (“the existence and nonexistence of states of affairs”)? It must directly correspond to the facts we picture to ourselves: “Wir machen uns Bilder der Gedanken” (2.1). This is the so-called picture theory of language, which biographical legend has it that Wittgenstein developed after being inspired by a famous court case in which an automobile accident was recreated in the courtroom using models. Facts in our minds, Wittgenstein decided, should work along similar lines, their _logical form_ mirroring the way the actual “things” they refer to in the world are arranged. Therefore:

2.16 Die Tatsache muß, um Bild zu sein, etwas mit dem Abgebildeten gemeinsam haben.

In order to be a picture a fact must have something in common with what it pictures.
And thus we have in *TLP* 2.18 one of the *Tractatus*’s most crucial distinctions:

2.18 Was jedes Bild, welcher Form immer, mit der Wirklichkeit gemein haben muß, um sie überhaupt—richtig oder falsch—abbilden zu können, ist die logische Form, das ist die Form der Wirklichkeit.

What every picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it at all—rightly or falsely—is the logical form, that is, the form of reality.

In this way the second set of remarks account for the “picture” part of the picture theory of language, and the third and fourth the linguistic aspect. The picture theory is generally agreed to be a three-element arrangement of reality, thought, and language: the way the reality is expressed in language through the verbalization of a thought, which is a logical mental arrangement of the *Tatsache* in reality (*TLP* 3), whose own syntactical/logical form mirrors the logical form of whatever it is in reality that language would ostensibly like to express. The end result of this is that a picture of the whole world is a totality of all of the “true” thoughts in it (3.01).

**TLP 4–7: Sense and Nonsense**

The relationship of language to thought—that which takes up the remaining pages of the *Tractatus*—is on the surface quite simple: “Der Gedanke ist der sinnvolle Satz” (“A thought is a sensical proposition”), with “proposition” standing in for the German *Satz* to mean “declarative sentence” (*TLP* 4). Indeed, the primary concern of the fourth, fifth, and sixth sections of the *Tractatus* is how language that makes sense manages to do this. Early in the fourth section, Wittgenstein claims that we can understand that propositions make sense without having that fact explained to us (4.02). And this is because a proposition shows its sense:

4.022 Der Satz zeigt seinen Sinn.
   Der Satz zeigt, wie es sich verhält, wenn er wahr ist. Und er sagt, daß es sich so verhält.

The proposition shows its sense.
   The proposition shows how things stand, if it is true. And it says, that they do so stand.

The picture theory of language thus comes together to work like this: the fact that a proposition depicts is compared with reality (4.05) and then judged on whether it matches or does not match what is really there. Thus,
although a proposition is the expression of a fact, its sense is independent of what that fact actually is. This brings us to 4.12 and 4.1212, the most succinct expression of Wittgenstein’s distinction between saying and showing, to which I return several times in this book:

4.12 Der Satz kann die gesamte Wirklichkeit darstellen, aber er kann nicht das darstellen, was er mit der Wirklichkeit gemein haben muß, um sie darstellen zu können—die logische Form.

Propositions can represent the whole reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it—the logical form.

4.1212 Was gezeigt werden kann, kann nicht gesagt werden.

What can be shown cannot be said.

Wittgenstein’s major illustration of this distinction comes in his elucidation of how the tautologies and contradictions of logic can be sinnlos, “senseless,” but not all the way nonsensical (unsinnig). What separates them from utter nonsense is that they display logical form, which Wittgenstein illustrates, literally, using the construction of a truth table (4.31). Because tautologies and contradictions can be put into a truth table, the way in which they tell us nothing has been divined using logical symbolism; therefore, the logical form of a tautology or a contradiction still exists. And this is possible because logical form shows itself in the form of a sentence and has nothing to do with the content of it.

Wittgenstein continues to elucidate how language makes sense in the fifth and sixth sets of remarks, when he charts out the general form of proposition. This formula—which to most of us is little more than a literal and figurative jumble of Greek—is what every sensical proposition has in common. This is not simply that it is truth functional, but that it always, in order to be a sensical proposition, consists of a combination of simpler propositions (Tatsachen, Sachverhalte, “pictures”) connected with some combination of the “neither-nor” operator (which can, in its combinations, equal “both” or “and” or “not” or “neither” or any combination of them). Thus the general form amounts to a quantification of every possible way to express “Es verhält sich so und so,” or “such and such is the case,” and thus, since the limits of language are also the “Grenzen [der] Welt” (“limits of the world”), whatever the limits are of “Es verhält sich so und so” are the limits of language and the world (6, 5.6).

Wittgenstein purportedly runs up against these limits in the sixth section of the Tractatus when he elucidates what cannot be said. This includes riddles, enigmas, aesthetics, and ethics—in short, what many at the time
considered (and still consider) to be philosophy. In the case of ethics and aesthetics (6.42–6.43), Wittgenstein dismisses them as non-truth-functional because whether or not one is happy, sad, “good,” or “evil” does not change the facts in logical space—and since the expressible world is only the totality of facts in logical space, anything involving feelings about these facts is not part of language, and thus not part of the world. In the case of enigmas, the dismissal is fairly simple (and again, this remark will reappear later once its context and relevance to Kafka have been fleshed out):

6.5 Zu einer Antwort, die man nicht aussprechen kann, kann man auch die Frage nicht aussprechen.

Das Rätsel gibt es nicht.

Wenn sich eine Frage überhaupt stellen läßt, so kann sie auch beantwortet werden.

For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too cannot be expressed.

The riddle does not exist.

If the question can be put at all, then it can also be answered.

What, then, remains of philosophy? It is a briefly asserted call to “dissolve” (verschwinden) rather than solve its own problems—

6.521 Die Lösung des Problems des Lebens merkt man am Verschwinden dieses Problems.

The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem.

—that then shortly follows its own advice:

6.53 Die richtige Methode der Philosophie wäre eigentlich die: Nichts zu sagen, als was sich sagen läßt, also Sätze der Naturwissenschaft—also etwas, was mit Philosophie nichts zu tun hat—, und dann immer, wenn ein andere etwas metaphysisches sagen wollte, ihm nachzuweisen, daß er gewissen Zeichen in seinen Sätzen keine Bedeutung gegeben hat. Diese Methode wäre für den anderen unbefriedigend—er hätte nicht das Gefühl, daß wir ihn Philosophie lehrten—aber sie wäre die einzig streng richtige.

The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, i.e., the propositions of natural
science, i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. This method would be unsatisfying to the other—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—but it would be the only strictly correct method.

Thus: *all* philosophy is *unsinnig* (6.54). This especially applies to every proposition in the *Tractatus*, including the end of 6.54, when Wittgenstein implores us to throw away the ladder and “see the world aright.” Throwing away the ladder in this way results in only one option: that of which we cannot speak we must pass over in silence (7). According to most philosophically mainstream (or “metaphysical” readings) of Wittgenstein, what is left of the *Tractatus* in a world of self-imposed philosophical “silence” is a set of pseudo-propositions that have been revealed as nonsensical but which nevertheless gesture at some immutable truth concerning the logical form of language and reality. With the ladder thrown away, we are supposed to be “free” from the illusion that philosophy *could* say something meaningful, but we can still see that it has *shown* us what is most meaningful of all (that it cannot say something meaningful).

The effect of the *Tractatus* on the philosophy of the twentieth century cannot be understated—even if that effect was completely different than Wittgenstein expected or wished. Wittgenstein meant for the *Tractatus* to end philosophy as people knew it, but instead it sparked more interest in what he considered a poor interpretation of his work and a misuse of the term philosophy: logical positivism. Out of this, much to Wittgenstein’s apparent dismay, came the work of Rudolf Carnap, the Vienna Circle, and logical positivism, and thereby the building blocks of analytic philosophy as we now recognize it—and, thus, in the Anglo-American tradition, in large part the discipline of philosophy itself. The effect of the *Tractatus* on literature is markedly smaller—or rather, as we are about to see, it *appears* to be smaller than it really is. We will return shortly to the content of the *Tractatus* in much greater depth as the chapters in this section progress. For now, the aim is to have charted out this unique text’s deceptively simple trajectory and primary skeptical project, for which I will now offer a brief historical contextualization—a contextualization that extends to Kafka.

### Issue 2: Linking Wittgenstein, Language Skepticism, and Kafka

As Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé has also pointed out recently, there is no record of awareness on Kafka’s part of Wittgenstein’s work, nor should there be, as Wittgenstein did not really gain fame outside of Russell’s cohort until after
Kafka’s death, and Kafka did not gain fame until after his own. The sole mention of Kafka in Wittgenstein biographical lore comes from Monk, who relates an occasion on which Elizabeth Anscombe recommended *The Trial*, and Wittgenstein dismissed it with this telling remark: “This man gives himself a great deal of trouble not writing about his trouble.”\(^\text{16}\) In examining this lack of a genetic link, Zumhagen-Yekplé has argued, quite rightly, that instead of a genetic connection, what really connects these two authors is that they are both “men who go to quite a lot of trouble not writing (at least not directly) about their troubles, the problems they grapple with and prompt their readers to grapple with in turn.”\(^\text{17}\) Zumhagen-Yekplé is here talking about both Kafka’s and Wittgenstein’s participation in the larger modernist current of radical skepticism of idealistic subjectivity, which dates back at least as far as Nietzsche’s “Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn” (“On Truth and Lying in the Extramoral Sense”), wherein he excoriates the illusion of “truth” as simply “ein bewegliches Heer Metaphern, Metonymien, [und] Anthropomorphismen” (“a moving army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms”).\(^\text{18}\)

Indeed, the *Tractatus* emerged on the tail end of what we now call the *Sprachkrise* (language crisis) in Austrian modernism. This phrase, “language crisis,” chiefly refers to Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s Lord Chandos character in the short story “Ein Brief” (“A Letter”), who, in his fictional letter to Francis Bacon, laments: “Mein Fall ist, in Kürze, dieser: Es ist mir völlig die Fähigkeit abhanden gekommen, über irgend etwas Zusammenhängend zu denken oder zu sprechen” (“My case, in short, is this: I have completely lost the ability to think or speak about anything coherently”).\(^\text{19}\) The crisis Hofmannsthal portrays is not the realization that he can’t say anything at all (for the letter itself is written), but that he can no longer say anything important. This is, then, very close to a narrative playing out of Wittgenstein’s ultimate proclamation in the *Tractatus*, as the only things Chandos is capable of expressing concern facts (specifically, facts about the renovation to his home), and nothing “higher” or emotionally significant. Chandos’s only mistake, from a Tractarian perspective, is that he does not know when to shut up.

This sort of linguistic skepticism seems to reject referential expression of the “higher” things on a purely linguistic level: these things (feelings, ethical expression, philosophical expression) are somehow themselves preclusive of language; it is *language’s fault* for being inadequate. This is, to be sure, an important—if not the most easily understood—conception of language skepticism. But from the philosophical viewpoints of the two main critical figures in language skepticism, Fritz Mauthner and to a much more excoriating extent Karl Kraus, it is equally (if not more) the language *user’s fault* that linguistic expression doesn’t “work.” And this goes beyond the expression of the most important things: in Mauthner’s case, and especially in Kraus’s, all language is vulnerable to misuse and misunderstanding by its human purveyors, and not merely because of its intrinsic inadequacies.
Mauthner, like Wittgenstein after him, saw all philosophy as language philosophy, or “Sprachkritik,” though Wittgenstein hastened to add in TLP 4.0031 that his is “nicht allerdings im Sinne Mauthners” (“certainly not in the sense of Mauthner”)—this despite reference to the “throwing away the ladder” metaphor, which appears in Mauthner’s Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache (Contributions to a Critique of Language, see below). And Mauthner, to a different extent but with similar skeptical passion as Kraus after him, faults not the elements of language themselves for causing human miscommunication to flourish, but rather man’s hasty assumptions about language’s ability to convey meaning, which Mauthner dismisses as Sprachaberglaube, language superstition. Indeed, Mauthner insists that we gain no knowledge of the world through language: “Die einfachste Antwort wäre: ‘die Sprache’ gibt es nicht; das Wort ist ein so blasses Abstraktum, dass ihm kaum mehr etwas Wirkliches entspricht.” (“The simplest answer would be: there is no such thing as ‘language’; that word is a mere abstraction, one that hardly corresponds to something real.”) This is because how every person conceives of the meaning of his language is dependent entirely upon his own experience, and since no two people’s experiences are identical, no two people’s meaning systems of language can be either. Wittgenstein’s take on this is starkly different—that, per 6.43, the world of a happy man is different than that of a sad one, though the facts remain the same—though, despite his protestations to the contrary, Mauthner’s influence remains clear. That is, Wittgenstein’s conclusion is simply that certain “higher” things cannot be said; Mauthner’s is rather more sweeping, insisting instead that any communication between two people—even two people knowing each other—is impossible:


No one knows anyone else. Siblings, parents and children do not know each other. A primary medium of lack of understanding is language. We have no idea, even regarding the simplest expressions, whether any of us has the same conception of the same word. When I say green, perhaps the hearer thinks of blue-green, or yellow-green, or even red. . . . The most abstract word is the most multivalent: courage, love, knowledge, freedom and other such scatter-brained words. Through language humankind has always ensured that it is impossible to get to know one another.
Above we can see more clearly why Wittgenstein’s “Sprachkritik” departs from Mauthner’s; this, however, does not mean they don’t also converge. For Mauthner, to reach any sort of truth, we must somehow *transcend* language:

> Will ich emporklimmen in der Sprachkritik, die gegenwärtig das wichtigste Geschäft der denkenden Menschheit ist, so muss ich die Sprache hinter mir und vor mir und in mir vernichten von Schritt zu Schritt, so muss ich jede Sprosse der Leiter zertrümmern, indem ich sie betrete. Wer folgen will, der zimmere die Sprossen wieder, um sie abermals zu zertrümmern.

If I want to ascend in the critique of language, which at present is the most important business of thinking mankind, then I will have to annihilate the language behind me and in front of me, step by step; so must I destroy every rung of the ladder on which I am climbing. Anyone who wants to follow me secures the rungs further, but only in order to destroy them once again.

Despite Wittgenstein’s protestations, each of these ideas reemerges in either the *Tractatus* or his later work. It is also important to note that one particular element of Mauthner’s philosophy—a marked disapproval for those who are “language superstitious” (that is, who insist on a referential theory of meaning)—also reemerges in Kraus’s work on language which, like Mauthner’s, consumed much of his writing life.

Kraus filled hundreds of issues of *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*)—the magazine he edited and, increasingly, wrote in its entirety, of which Wittgenstein was a vocal and devoted fan—with biting, and often outrageous and hilarious excoriations of the casual Austrian speaker’s inability to perceive (and in most cases, use) German: after all, “Die Sprache ist die Mutter, nicht die Magd des Gedankens” (“Language is the mother of thought, not its handmaid”). As J. P. Stern has described it, Kraus’s “ever-repeated contention” is that “the very last thing he and his readers have in common is the German language, that their use of it is so sloppy and imprecise, so pretentious and corrupted, that they will not understand exactly what he is saying.” Furthermore, since to Kraus, precision is “the very essence of language, he claims that, in not understanding exactly, his readers will not understand at all.”

Kraus demonstrates the ramifications of the seemingly trivial misuse contained in the Austrianism “Wieso kommt es,” which idiomatically means “why is it . . .” but literally, to Kraus, means “why is it that it is . . .” and is thus hopelessly redundant. And this is precisely *not* a triviality—for Kraus, the very mistaking of a linguistic choice *for* a triviality is an offense (“Die Verantwortung der Wortwahl—die schwierigste, die es geben sollte, die leichteste, die es gibt . . .” [“The responsibility of word choice—which should be the most difficult task there is, but actually is the easiest . . .”])—and presents
a legitimate philosophical problem, for, as Stern puts it, the “fuller—or perhaps one may be allowed to say deeper—meaning and usage of ‘wieso’ is inaccessible to him who had misused the word in the first place.”

However, one of Kraus’s chief complaints about language users’ grievous misuse of language is that, as leveled in “Die Sprache” (“Language”) the average intellectual simply fails to understand that the “language” of journalism and banal expression—as Wittgenstein would say, the expression of facts—is simply not the same thing as the “language” of poetic figuration. This should seem obvious:


The attempt to define language as poesis, and the attempt to define it as mere communication of the value of a word—both, as a matter of fact, engaged through the medium of analysis—appear to result in exactly no point of mutual insight.

And yet, how can one not conflate them? After all, in an apparent (perhaps inadvertent) dig at Gottlob Frege:

[D]och ist es dieselbe Beziehung zum Organismus der Sprache, was da und dort Lebendiges und Totes unterscheidet; denn dieselbe Naturgesetzeslücke ist es, die in jeder Region der Sprache, vom Psalm bis zum Lokalbericht, den Sinn dem Sinn vermittelt.

Yet it is the same relationship to the organism of language that here and there separates the living from the dead; for it is the same adherence to the laws of nature, which in every sphere of language, from psalm to the local news, that imparts meaning to meaning.

And yet: “Nichts wäre törichter, als zu vermuten, es sei ein ästhetisches Bedürfnis, das mit der Erstrebung sprachlicher Vollkommheit geweckt oder befriedigt werden will.” (“Nothing would be more foolhardy than to presume some sort of aesthetic need be awakened [or pacified] through striving for linguistic perfection.”) This is, according to Kraus, the chief mistake many so-called philosophers of language or literature make: they attempt to use language in a way it simply cannot be—as Wittgenstein would say, they are operating under the illusion that they are making sense when instead they are talking nonsense.

Thus Kraus’s skepticism relates quite pointedly to the Tractatus—Wittgenstein, after all, faults philosophers for assuming their language can
express and not recognizing its own nonsense. In fact, Wittgenstein so con-
sidered himself a kindred spirit of Kraus that when he first searched for
a publisher for the *Tractatus*, he sent it to Kraus’s press, Jahoda, with no
commentary, assuming that it would be sent along to Kraus, who would
immediately understand it as a truth-tabled expression of his own skeptical
vision.30 This was not to be the case—in fact, the *Tractatus* was only to be
published in 1921, and then only with an introduction from Bertrand Rus-
sell that primed it to be, largely against Wittgenstein’s wishes, a foundational
document for logical positivism. Philosophers would largely ignore the lin-
guistic skepticism in the *Tractatus* until the publication of the even more
radically skeptical *Philosophical Investigations* after Wittgenstein’s death. It
is in many ways a substantial shame that Kraus’s publisher did not have
the sort of telepathic abilities of Wittgenstein’s assumption (nor the recogni-
tion of Wittgenstein’s book as “mainly literary”), for publishing the *Tractatus*
both with Kraus’s blessing and in a more literary context might have brought
its skeptical aspect into sharper relief against the backdrop of other skeptical
literary texts—including those by Franz Kafka.

The only thing Karl Kraus seemed to hate more than the misunderstanding
of language’s purpose and limits—one loathed hallmark of the Viennese—
was another loathed hallmark of the Viennese: psychoanalysis. It was, after
all, “jene Geisteskrankheit, für deren Therapie sie sich hält” (“that mental dis-
ease which holds itself as the cure”), and to be reviled above almost all else.31
Kraus must have loathed, then, that a key aspect of early psychoanalysis—
specifically that particular to Dr. Freud and his compatriots—dealt in its
own way with the limits of language. Namely, none other than Freud’s most
famous early case, Dora, centered on the mysterious acquisition of both
aphasia and the ability to speak in a foreign language. Indeed, the connec-
tion between Freud’s studies of the limits of language (as conceived, that
is, by the language-producing ego; as terminally inaccessible by that insa-
tiable id) is crucial to the study of modernism. Kraus would never admit it,
but even Viennese psychoanalysis participated in the *Sprachkrise* (“crisis of
language”).

All of this linguistic skepticism—logical, philosophical, literary, and even
psychological—overlaps with views on language Kafka expressed in both
his fictional and autobiographical writing, views that were varying and
often aphoristically expressed, but which consumed what appears to be his
entire writing life. Consider, for example, his first preserved attempt at liter-
ary writing, made at seventeen, in which he bemoaned words as neither an
adequate means to the end he sought, nor that adequate end itself: “Denn
Worte sind schlechte Bergsteiger und schlechte Bergmänner. Sie holen nicht
die Schätze von den Bergshöhn und nicht die von den Bergstiefen” (“For
words are poor mountain climbers as well as poor mountain men. They do
not retrieve treasures from the mountaintop, nor do they from the mountain
core”) (GW 10:5). Bookend this with the final entry in his journal, written at forty-one, which beheld, after two decades of unfinished novels and stories composed in fits and starts, an awe of words, but this time of their penchant for self-destruction:


Every word wielded in the hand of the spirits—this sweep of the hand is their characteristic movement—becomes a spear, turned back toward the speaker. Especially a remark like this one.

The skepticism in this final entry, though focused on the unexpected abilities of language still, is something far more complex than the more direct language skepticism not only of Kafka’s youth, but also of, for example, Hofmannsthal’s “Letter.” Kafka’s metaphorical use of “jedes Wort” here, which turns the “word” into an instrument of violence, of reverse overcoming (of self-succumbing), shows that certain aspects of language—for example, metaphor—are not merely metaphorically destructive to the descriptive impulse, but literally so to the describer. And, further, that it is not a higher truth or form of experience that self-destructs, but the basest levels of self-expression.

In the intervening decades he also continued to express language skepticism both directly and indirectly. In several of his floating aphorisms, he alludes to problems we often associate with language, problems about what it can and cannot express. For example, in number 57 he writes that language is only capable of expressing objects from the sensory world (die sinnliche Welt):


For anything outside the sensory world, language can be used only allusively, but never, not even approximately, by way of analogies, since it, in correspondence to the sensory world, only deals with possession and its relationships.32

This would not be a problem were it not also the case that, as put forth in aphorism 54, the sensory (or sensical) world (sinnliche Welt) is an evil pest in the spiritual world (geistliche Welt), which is the only world there really is
Therefore, as Walter Sokel extrapolates, because “language only refers to the sensory world, it can never be the instrument of truth,” since truth is only to be found in the spiritual world.33

This would seem to reinforce Kraus’s directive in “Die Sprache” that the language of the physical world (journalism, ordinary conversation, scientific inquiry—where some philosophy is based) cannot transfer to the language of the poetic world (where literature resides, as does other philosophy), especially for those, like Corngold, who see a metaphysical drive in Kafka’s mature prose.34 Complicating matters is an aphorism Kafka once wrote about truth, namely that “Die Wahrheit ist unteilbar, kann sich also selbst nicht erkennen; wer sie erkennen will, muß Lüge sein” (“Truth is indivisible, and thus cannot recognize itself; anyone who recognizes it must be a lie”) (GW 6:241). The truth, even if it were to be expressible in language, would by its nature be precluded from being recognized as such—in effect, in the spirit of the Tractatus, the sense of the world must lie outside it.

But here is the problem with judging the content of the “Wahrheit” aphorism: we cannot really understand the content unless we define the aphorism’s form, which the content itself proscribes (this will be a problem that returns in Kafka’s work, again and again). That is: are we meant to take this aphorism as itself a revelation of a truth? If we have understood it correctly, then that act of recognition means that we are “a lie,” for if we ourselves were privy to the truth, we wouldn’t require the act of recognition. If we are “a lie,” then we are not to be trusted in rendering something the truth. But if we do not recognize the aphorism to be the truth, then that saves us from being “a lie,” but it also invalidates the content of the aphorism. This collapsing movement, in which a piece of writing seems to express an opinion or thesis that destroys the validity of the very piece of writing that brought it about, is almost identical in gesture to the end of the Tractatus (and it appears again in Kafka in “The Judgment”; see chapter 3).

More compelling than Kafka’s diary entries and aphoristic explorations of the complicated relationship between language and truth are the representations of this complicated relationship in his small stories. These stories many refer to as parables, a designation most famously made by Theodor W. Adorno, who reminds us that we are trained to expect symbols in literature to evoke certain higher meanings, but that nothing is less apt for Kafka. Kafka’s works are, instead, outcasts, neither symbolic nor traditionally allegorical; the best distinction Adorno makes is that Kafka’s works can be looked at as parables without keys.35

In using this confounding form, then, Kafka especially struggles with language difficulties in the small stories. Take, for example, the climactic moment of “Die Brücke” (“The Bridge”), which Kafka begins by writing “Ich war steif und kalt, ich war eine Brücke” (“I was stiff and cold; I was a bridge”). It is precisely this act of self-naming that brings about the death of the narrator-bridge: when an unfamiliar stranger jumps on top of the
narrator and he succumbs to his curiosity and turns to see who it could be ("Ein Kind? Ein Turner? Ein Waghalsiger? Ein Selbstmörder?" ["A child? An acrobat? A daredevil? A suicide?"]), the situation ends badly for the simple reason that bridges can’t turn around ("Brücke dreht sich um!" ["A bridge turning around!"]) [GW 6:39]). Here the narrator does not die because of his essence as a bridge, he dies because he has called himself a bridge.

And perhaps most characteristic of how Kafka’s work approaches the troubles of language (by way of language’s troubles) is in his parable on parables, “Von den Gleichnissen,” in which he once again allows the short narration to fold back in on itself—allows its characters to discover the contradictions within it, the contradictions that make it—not once, but twice. This little story offers a sort of trickster’s take on the “words of the wise” that hide their “real” meanings, that point instead toward some fabulous beyond, something unknown ("sagenhaftes Drüben, etwas was wir nicht kennen")—or, rather, at the fact that many complain “Viele beklagen sich,” that this is the case (GW 8:131). The problem, the narrator finds, is that “Gleichnisse wollen eigentlich nur sagen, daß das Unfaßbare unfaßbar ist und das haben wir gewußt. Aber das womit wir uns eigentlich jeden Tag abmühen, sind andere Dinge” ("Parables only want to say that the unreachable is unreachable, and we knew that already. But what we actually struggle with every day is other things"). That parables can only express a tautology (the only kind of “truth” there is, at least according to Nietzsche) would seem to strengthen the separation instinct between words that express something “wise” and words that express something everyday. But that is where Kafka surprises us, by introducing dialogue into a story that was up until now almost purely aphoristic, and by having that dialogue “transition” the text to self-immolation. There would be no problem, says the first character, only referred to as “einer,” if everyone just followed the parables: “Dann wäret Ihr selbst Gleichnisse geworden und damit schon der täglichen Mühe frei” ("Then you would be made into parables yourselves, and thereby free of everyday struggle"). But someone new ("ein anderer") answers him that he bets this “solution” is itself just a parable ("Ich wette daß auch das ein Gleichnis ist"); his friend replies: “Du hast gewonnen” ("You have won"). And Kafka inverts the arc again: the skeptic (who guessed that the advice to become a parable was a parable) has “won.” But the skeptic is too clever for that, and points out: “Aber leider nur im Gleichnis” ("But only in the parable"). To which his friend replies: “Nein, in Wirklichkeit; im Gleichnis hast Du verloren” ("No, in reality; in the parable you have lost") (GW 8:131–32). Thus apparently a parable can only be understood in the following ways: it can express its special, unreachable “truth” (that, being unreachable, is useless in the everyday realm), or it can be exposed as a parable (that only points toward an unreachable yonder), in which case its interpreter receives a small amount of literal satisfaction at
identifying a parable, but comes no closer to the “truth,” since parables can only express the unsatisfying truth of the tautology that the ineffable remains ineffable.

But the question remains: what form is “Von den Gleichnissen”? Is “On Parables” meant itself as a parable? If so, as with the “Wahrheit” aphorism, we should be reading it as one; that is, understanding that whatever “Drüben” it points to cannot be of everyday use—but what if we do “understand” it (if, for example, the interpretation I have just offered has any merit)? If we “understand” what it is saying about the inexpressibility of the “words of the wise” in ordinary language, then we must ourselves be “wise”—or, more likely, we must realize that “On Parables,” because we do understand it, is not a parable. By this rationale, whatever problem or complaint about parables “On Parables” details is merely a fictional invention, and, further, one expressed in language that seems more ordinary than parabolic, especially given the end of the dialogue, in which “einer” insists that his friend has “won” (i.e., understood) only in the ordinary world. Thus, by seemingly presenting a poetic affirmation of a view on poetic language similar to Kraus’s, but then undermining that view in the process of its own figuration, or “Gestaltung,” “On Parables” brings the relevance of ordinary language—and thus of the philosophy that purports to deal with it—into question. Therefore, what may actually be most important about “On Parables” is what it does with its own form: how it challenges the form of the parable by defeating it.

Zumhagen-Yekplé explores the connection between “On Parables” and the Tractatus in great depth, pointing out quite correctly that both texts consist, in effect, of two parts, the written part, and the part that is not written, the present absence of the part that is most important—in Wittgenstein’s case, his unstated and unstatable ethical corpus, and in Kafka’s, the osten-
sible punch line that would reveal “On Parables” as itself a parable and thus also a clearer conclusion as to what, if anything, parables can teach us. The Wittgenstein text she views, after Diamond, in a “resolute” fashion, characterizing it as an “an elaborate two-part puzzle text that functions as an aesthetic medium for its author’s own unique brand of indirect instruction.” Although I certainly view the Tractatus as more than her characterization as “mock doctrine,” I find Zumhagen-Yekplé’s characterization of the similar gestures in each text—gestures that both create and depend upon an absence and a silence, that teach by way of withholding or demanding that exactly the most important lesson is the one that cannot be said—to be quite a compelling description of the basic and enduring similarity between Kafka and Wittgenstein as authors, and the reason that a concurrent study of their work is indeed so fruitful. This study is, further, only just begun in the revelation of points of confluence between the Tractatus and some of Kafka’s emblematic shorter work; this is a small fraction of what is possible when examining Kafka and the Tractatus together.
Issue 3: The Limits of the “Literary Tractatus”

While my choice of primary text is not unique, my methodology—the rest of the “analytic” in “analytic modernism”—is.\(^3\) The pairing of literary modernism (and Kafka’s modernism in particular) with a philosophical approach has been standard practice for almost a century. What follows is by no means an exhaustive list of “turns” and vogues in modernist criticism, but it is a healthy sampling that demonstrates just how prevalent the pairing of philosophy and modernism are. Every Kafka scholar has, for example, studied carefully the many variations of Marxist modernism (most notably Theodor W. Adorno’s *Aufzeichungen zu Kafka* [*Notes on Kafka*], and anything influenced by it); Walter Benjamin’s historical-materialist literary scholarship remains among the most influential of the modernist period. The postwar decades brought a somber reflection on the relationship between modernism and the Shoah (Adorno and Horkheimer, etc.); the final quarter of the twentieth century brought surges in, for example, psychoanalytic modernism (especially in Kafka studies, with Walter Sokel and Stanley Corngold being among the foremost figures in this subgenre), and postcolonial modernism (John Zilkosky’s work, for example). And the turn of the new millennium ushered in, among other fascinating representations, Michael LeMahieu’s multi-philosopher approach to “bad” and “good” modernisms, and Kai Evers’s very recent and highly engrossing *Violent Modernists*.\(^3\) Several of these current or past “modernisms” even incorporate, as LeMahieu’s does, Wittgenstein and the *Tractatus*—but none of them, not one, focuses on the *Tractatus*’s revolutionary developments in the philosophy of logic, thus leaving a massive contemporaneous aspect of modernism, as it relates to the literature of its own time period, all but unexplored.

What is instead often the case in the world of literary scholars working with the *Tractatus* is that we approach it using literary methodologies; that is, we mine the words and turns of phrase in his spare, haunting lines for literary device, we examine its form and its alleged purpose (put forth in Wittgenstein’s more prosaic introduction), we ponder over the multiple possible meanings of a phrase like “alles, was der Fall ist” (“All that is the case”) (*TLP* 1). This comes from what LeMahieu has wisely called the “split personality” of critical reception engendered by the very oscillation between proposition and aphorism that characterizes the book. Those in the discipline of analytic philosophy “describe a foundationalist text that initiated the tradition of logical positivism,” while scholars who focus entirely on the later propositions about ethics and aesthetics—almost exclusively literary scholars—“tend to describe a work closer in spirit to Nietzsche and Heidegger . . . than to Frege and Russell.”\(^4\)

Much of the work on Wittgenstein and Kafka, including Sussman’s groundbreaking formal critique (1990), as well as recent and emerging work by Yi-Ping Ong and Zumhagen-Yekplé, seems to do the latter.\(^4\) And the
Tractatus has much to offer the interpreter who chooses this approach: Marjorie Perloff has used the language of the Tractatus (and, to a lesser extent, the Tractatus’s treatment of language) to reorient the notion of “poetic translatability,” for example. Further, this view seems substantiated by Wittgenstein’s own characterization of the Tractatus as “literary” in his initial (and largely unsuccessful) search for a publisher: to Ludwig von Ficker of Der Brenner, he explained that the work was “strictly philosophical and at the same time literary, but there is no babbling in it.” Ficker rejected it nonetheless, and as we have seen, Wittgenstein’s early work was embraced by exactly the kind of logical positivists he deplored, literariness seemingly forgotten. However, Wittgenstein persisted in characterizing his (and all) philosophy in poetic terminology at different times throughout his career, most notably late in his career and life, in Culture and Value, when he wrote the passage that has likely encouraged the Tractatus-as-poetry approach more than any other:

Ich glaube meine Stellung zur Philosophie dadurch zusammengefaßt zu haben, indem ich sagte: Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten. Daraus muß sich, scheint mir, ergeben, wie weit mein Denken der Gegenwart, Zukunft, oder der Vergangenheit angehört. Denn ich habe mich damit auch als einen bekannt, der nicht ganz kann, was er zu können wünscht.

I believe I summarized my position on philosophy when I said: one may only do philosophy as poetry. For this it seems to me it must be clear to what extent my thinking belongs to the present, future, or past. Because I have thereby also made myself known as someone who cannot really do what he wishes.

This oft-cited insistence on “poetizing” philosophy, combined with the Tractatus’s own apparent self-immolation at its conclusion, enable literary scholars (when they ignore the fact that Wittgenstein may have actually meant that pejoratively) to concentrate on a very small percentage—the “poetic parts,” as opposed to the “logic parts”—of an already sparse text: the introduction; some references to Mauthner (for example, the aforementioned TLP 4.0031); the first few enigmatic lines; the final call to silence. This approach allows us to leave the Tractatus’s viscera, its internal developments in logic (with their tangle of truth tables and formulae) largely in peace: to “pass [them] over in silence,” as most English translations of the Tractatus’s final remark have it—and on the surface this should be fine, because Wittgenstein himself has just said they are nonsensical anyhow (6.53). But even a so-called resolute approach to the Tractatus requires that one reckon with all of its “nonsensical” contents first, as the pioneers of this approach, Cora Diamond and James Conant remind us.
I certainly do not deny any loftier, metaphorical (even metaphysical) meanings some lines of the *Tractatus* have—after all, according to Wittgenstein himself, that may be the only meaning there is to be found: something transcendental and necessarily ineffable. However, the desire to read the *Tractatus* as literature when using it to interpret literature becomes problematic the moment one decides to progress beyond its opening line. For *TLP* 1 as poetry may relate to *TLP* 7, its corresponding line at the end calling for silence, but without a literal understanding of what Wittgenstein means by the totality of true facts, we are forced to ignore the intricate progression of eighty-six pages of text in between them. This is why Wittgenstein, poaching Mauthner, refers to the propositions of the *Tractatus* as a ladder—that, lest we forget, we actually have to climb before we are qualified to throw it away.

It should thus come as no surprise that here I endeavor to read neither the *Tractatus*’s opening sentence nor the text that follows it with a particularly literary methodology: until I am explicitly told not to at the conclusion (6.53), I read the remarks of the only book Wittgenstein published during his lifetime as declarative propositions. For example, “Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist,” whatever its rewarding poetic implications, is shorthand for Wittgenstein’s early conception of the actual world we literally, physically inhabit as the totality of all true facts at once. And yet this may itself be problematic, because such an approach in literary study teeters on the brink of anathema—why not focus on the poetic implications? Is there a “correct” way to use the *Tractatus* in literary studies?

As an example, J. P. Stern gives a decidedly literary interpretation to Wittgenstein’s assertion in *TLP* 6.42 that “Der Sinn der Welt muss außerhalb ihrer liegen. In der Welt ist alles, wie es ist, und geschieht alles, wie es geschieht; es gibt in ihr keinen Wert - und wenn es ihn gäbe, so hätte er keinen Wert.” (“The sense of the world must lie outside it. In the world everything is how it is, and happens how it happens; there is no value in it—and if there were, it would have no value.”) Whereas logicians view this proposition to mean that the logical form of language—how grammar, syntax, and structure bind the parts of a sentence together—must be precluded from linguistic expression, literary theorists seem to grant it more far-reaching significance. But in his argument, Stern definitely takes this proposition broadly, that is, to refer to the “sense of the world” in a larger, more metaphysical way that has more to do with personal satisfaction with language and less to do with logical form.

But if, as I argue, a more analytic reading of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, especially the *Tractatus*, is the richest approach to it, then why would such a rich approach be precluded from the study of literature? The easy answer to this is the idea that logical language and literary language are not the same entity (something with which Karl Kraus would certainly agree), and the *Tractatus* as a work of analytic language theory deals with logical and not literary language. Literary language, we are told, is literary precisely because it does not really “mean” what it means, pointing instead to larger
metaphorical, allegorical, or otherwise extratextual truths, truths Wittgenstein would surely deem “outside the world.”

But is this really the case? While many of us in literary studies, and Kafka studies in particular, may assume that the real “truths” of his fiction lie outside the texts, it should not be forgotten that the stories themselves contain plots, characters, and (ostensible, if invisible and morphing) rules, all of which constitute what John Searle has, in discussing logical truth in literature and fiction, called a “horizontal” system of referentiality, and Michael Rifaterre refers to in Fictional Truths as the internal-meaning-granting power of “verisimilitude.” It is possible, Searle says, “for an author to use words literally and yet not be committed in accordance with the rules that attach to the literal meaning [in the actual, as opposed to fictional world] of those words.” This is, according to Searle, made possible through pretend illocutionary acts—through “actually performing utterance acts with the intention of invoking the horizontal conventions that suspend the normal illocutionary commitments of the utterances.” Josef K.’s arrest, Gregor Samsa’s life and death as an Ungeziefer, a “vermin,” the Penal Colony’s officer committing “ironic” suicide—these gestures in Kafka’s fiction cannot even begin to have extratextual “meaning” without the preunderstood condition that they are, in some way, taking place in the fictional space.

To presuppose a metaphorical meaning without a literal meaning with which to contrast it is just to presuppose a single (and thus literal) meaning. So to say that all but the most deliberately surrealist fiction has no literal truth is to say that all fiction is complete gibberish—or, rather, that there should be no way to distinguish between fictional acts that make sense in the context of that fiction (such as Gregor Samsa waking up) and those that do not (such as Gregor Samsa waking up an ungeheures Ungeziefer, or monstrous vermin). And yet most readers of fiction can tell this difference, because they are able to discern—in most cases, sometimes after a protracted amount of labor—the various “horizontal conventions” of a given narrative (as Searle reminds us, “what counts as coherence for a work of science fiction will not count as coherence in a work of naturalism”). Thus, there is indeed some sort of “fictional truth”: there is, as Currie puts it, what is “true in the story.” Thus, as the discoveries about logical form and the limits of language in the Tractatus deal entirely with facts, states of affairs, and possible states of affairs, although it would seem counterintuitive to examine the facts, states of affairs, and possible states of affairs in literary fiction, because even Kafka presents things that are (varying degrees of) “true in the story,” this is not actually the case.

Simple category error, then, is not sufficient to preclude an analytic approach to Kafka’s literature—but ideology may be. It is unwise to forget the motivations for the original schism in the philosophical discipline just before the turn of the twentieth century. Michael Lackey, in a brief but lively study of what he calls “the Modernist rejection of philosophy,” attributes the
analytic break as a reaction to the anthropomorphism of the discipline—the rejection of absolute ideas in favor of pure narrative creations of the philosophers themselves. This would explain, at least partially, the Continental embrace of literary studies—the shared acknowledgement of the creation of “concepts” through narrative, as opposed to the expression of pure concepts already existing.52

Lackey refers to Wittgenstein in this debate as well, but, interestingly enough, does not fully place him into the analytic tradition—instead he is an example of the other modernist “choice” with regard to confronting the anthropomorphism of philosophy: his mid-career rejection of philosophy altogether. “While Wittgenstein may have broken his post-*Tractatus* silence,” Lackey reminds us, “he never gave philosophy back the ladder it had once used to ascend into the metaphysical heaven of Ideas.”53 Furthermore, any assumption that philosophy is “an intellectual discipline with a pre-given nature that we can define” makes the assumer behave “as an analytic philosopher.”54 It is precisely this proverbial line in the sand that causes us to believe, over a century after this alleged schism, that analytic philosophy and literature preclude each other: just as Continental philosophy rejects the idea of an immutability of concepts, analytic philosophy is so wedded to that idea that it refuses to acknowledge the possibility of the creation of concepts.

And yet, in the better part of a decade I have now spent with Wittgenstein and Kafka together, I have found far too many common frustrations with language and expressibility in their work to preclude a costudy that still views Wittgenstein from the dominant philosophical—by which I most certainly mean “analytic”—paradigm. Does this make Kafka in my mind an “analytic writer”? Does it make Wittgenstein, as Lackey or the “New” group might characterize him, antiphilosopher *ne plus ultra*? Both of these are equally possible, but why I have decided to make a case for Kafka’s “analytic modernism” has not a small amount to do with the content of the *Tractatus* itself, but equally as much to do with how I approach it in conjunction with the literary. That is, for this half of the project at least, I do read the *Tractatus*—and, to a certain extent, the “fictional truths” of the Kafka universes—as if indeed “immutable concepts” in them exist, as if each author’s work is capable of presenting specific problems which I can then tackle in an equally specific and precisely circumscribed way—that is, a bit like a philosopher.

The “literary *Tractatus*” has certainly offered a substantial amount to the canon, but in the world of philosophy it is the (from our paradigm’s perspective) “nonliterary” Wittgenstein that is the “real” one. This Wittgenstein presents substantial and important advances about logic and language, even if they are later allegedly rendered invalid by their own rules—for to know this, one still has to learn those rules. Ironically, without an analytic approach, the full realization of the relevance of the *Tractatus* to literature remains unavailable. For to understand how dramatic the *Tractatus* is at its conclusion, to understand what it has really done to circumscribe the “limits
of the world,” one must understand precisely how Wittgenstein has charted out the logic to work as an ineffable structural force that holds, shapes, and binds a proposition, that gives it its sense. None of this would be possible without an approach to the *Tractatus* that is more analytic and thus allegedly less literary than we are used to.

Logical modernism seems at last, then, like a perfectly acceptable and long-overdue companion to Kafka’s works—so long, one might suppose, as it results in a workable thesis. But what if it doesn’t? What if Wittgenstein was wrong? This is especially pressing, given that Wittgenstein himself didn’t end up believing he was “right” about the logical form of reality—indeed, the second half of this book explains this turnaround in some detail. But here is a rather uncomfortable thesis, upon which I am willing to insist, and to which I will return several times: reading Kafka and Wittgenstein together—and finding Wittgenstein’s logical rules and their paradoxical consequences everywhere—does not at all depend upon Wittgenstein being “right.” All I seek to do is unearth a larger preoccupation with language, one that led both Kafka and Wittgenstein to grapple with inexpressibility in markedly similar ways that have nevertheless rarely, if ever, been examined in concert.

Just as I am not here to show what Kafka’s works mean (but rather how, or even if), I am not here to show that Wittgenstein is right, but how his argument fits together. And part of that argument’s mechanism is the dismantling of questions exactly like “Is Wittgenstein right?” As we will see, the way in which Wittgenstein dismantles misguided questions changes throughout his career, but the act of dismantling the “wrong” questions remains his focus for his entire life. He always says, in effect: *I’m not going to solve this problem, I am going to prove that you are looking at the wrong problem.* I believe that when we ask whether the early Wittgenstein was “right” and use that relative correctness as a measure of whether the *Tractatus* is worthy of study alongside Kafka, we are committing exactly that kind of understandable misstep, one that both the early and late Wittgenstein would call identifying the wrong problem.

The remaining fruits of this approach are, then, as follows: I have found that three of Kafka’s most famous stories—*The Trial, The Metamorphosis,* and “The Judgment”—do nothing less than dramatize Wittgenstein’s most important findings about logic and language on the fictional plane, in a fictional reality, with fictional facts whose alleged “problems” actually merit what Wittgenstein would call dis-solving (*das Verschwinden*) by way of pointing out their logical and linguistic issues. And, furthermore, I find that these real issues hide behind the “fake issues” we already know too well.