Imagination's Role in Emotional Responses to Fiction

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Abstract

This essay argues that emotional responses to fiction are genuine and rational. Emotional responses are not reflexes; they are an intrinsically valuable process of deliberation. The indispensable requirement for an emotional response is imagination. When reading fiction, imagination helps us emotionally engage with the text. Imaginative involvement in reading profoundly influences the reader; it can motivate us in myriad ways and blur awareness of the difference between reality and fantasy, while also enabling understanding and sharing of the feelings of fictional characters and even authors. Lastly, imaginative resistance shows that we intuitively use the same moral standards to judge both fictional content and fact. This is evidence of the rationality of our imaginative responses to both fiction and reality.

Keywords: emotional responses, fiction, imagination, imaginative process, emotions, rational feelings, philosophy of literature

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1. Introduction

This essay considers the nature of emotional responses to fiction. Works of fiction induce myriad emotions in human beings; they amuse, delight, sadden, or emotionally affect us in other ways. These emotional responses to fictional characters and situations are compelling and deep, but this raises a puzzle: how can characters and situations a reader knows are fictional affect him emotionally? How can we be moved by things that we know are merely fictitious?

Indeed, the (perceived) veridicality of a thing seems to be a necessary condition for being emotionally affected by it; the very idea of an emotional response to an entity one knows is fictitious seems both irrational and causally inexplicable. How, then, can we account for our emotional responses to fiction? And shouldn't we expect such responses to be mere pale imitations of our emotional responses to actually existing entities and situations?

Herein, I explicate the nature and genesis of emotional responses to fiction, and argue that such responses are rational and genuine. I maintain both that (i) by providing us access to the circumstances and minds of fictional characters, the imagination plays a crucial role in generating these emotions, and that (ii) these emotions are not pale facsimiles of emotional responses to actually existing persons and situations. Imagination creates a connection between the reader and fictional characters and situations, thereby generating emotions that are qualitatively identical to those produced by consideration of actually existing persons and situations. Reason, too, plays an indispensable role in generating these emotional responses to fiction, for in reading fiction we employ practical reason to evaluate characters and situations. Insofar, then, as practical reason is rational, so are the emotional responses it generates, even if its objects are fictional.

In the first section, I argue that our emotional responses to fiction are not reflexes; they involve deliberation and imagination and are intrinsically valuable. In the second section, I analyze the nature and attributes of fictional emotions[2], and explain the role of imagination, which is at the heart of genuine emotional responses to fiction. In the last section, I begin by articulating the imaginative processes which can help the reader blur the line between fiction and reality and thereby feel genuine and rational emotions

[2] I will follow Gendler and Kovakovich (2006, 243) in using the terms "fictional emotion" and "actual emotion". When they refer to "fictional emotions", they mean the psychological responses that people have to entities that they think to be fictional. When they mention "actual emotions" they mean the emotions that people have toward things they think to be actual.

towards fictional entities. I end the last section by arguing that the problem of imaginative resistance does not threaten the genuineness or rationality of our emotional responses to fiction.

2. Section I: Genuine Emotions and Intrinsic Value

Tamar Szabó Gendler and Karson Kovakovich (2006) argue—plausibly—that one can have genuine and rational emotional responses toward fictional characters and events that do not, and which one knows do not, exist outside their fictional expression. In articulating this position, Gendler and Kovakovich invite us to consider the following set of claims:

1. We have genuine and rational emotional responses towards F;
2. We believe that F is purely fictional;

At the same time, it is also true that:

3. In order for us to have genuine and rational emotional responses towards a character (or situation), we must not believe that the character (or situation) is purely fictional.

(Gendler and Kovakovich 2006, 241)

The authors note that these claims are logically inconsistent; these claims cannot all be true together—at least one of them must be false. They reject (3) and argue that one can have genuine and rational emotional responses to fiction although one knows the fictional entities do not exist. In rejecting (3), they liken fictional emotions to simulated emotions—both of which are emotions evoked by illusions or untrue things (Gendler and Kovakovich 2006, 250). Fictional emotions are those we feel in response to texts that we know are fictional. Simulated emotions are our emotional responses to events that reason tells us should not affect us. The authors note Antonio Damasio's claim that both simulated and fictional emotions generate physical alterations which are similar to those created by actual emotions. Often, one is motivated by unreal things and one automatically reacts to them. For instance, the clock which is set five minutes fast can make one hurry, despite one's awareness of its inaccuracy. Likewise, one can hesitate to shoot a gun when playing a game though one knows there are no bullets inside.

In short, simulated emotions are comparable to fictional emotions because both are people's inevitable responses to unreal things—though of course these two types of responses do not arise as responses to the same *types* of unreal things. But despite this similarity, the two differ in a crucial respect:

simulated emotions to false events (including a watch one knows is fast) are irrational, but fictional emotions are rational. My aim is to defend the claim that our emotional responses to fiction (unlike our emotion responses to illusions) are rational, a task I undertake below, and one which Gendler and Kovakovich themselves attempt.

Gendler and Kovakovich (2006, 251-252) reject Collin Radford's claim that fictional emotions are irrational. According to Radford, it is incoherent or even contradictory when a person has psychological responses to non-actual things. Gendler and Kovakovich, by contrast, argue that simulated emotions facilitate proper behavior and, with it, human well-being. As they see it, simulated emotions do not obstruct instrumental reasoning. They thus conclude it is incorrect to claim that one should have psychological responses only to non-fictitious events and objects.

The claim that simulated emotions facilitate human well-being is plausible. Sometimes one has genuine reactions to unreal things that one already knows do not provide correct and real information. But their doing so does not make such responses rational; instead it tends to imply that humans' genuine responses in these cases are not perfectly rational. In fact, simulated emotions seem to be human reflexes and natural instincts. They are evoked immediately and autonomously. Fictional emotions, by contrast, do not seem to be reflexes; they involve deliberation and imagination. This is an important difference between simulated emotions and fictional emotions. Hence we must further investigate the complicated system of human mental reactions.

It is, then, too soon to conclude that simulated emotions and fictional emotions are sufficiently similar. Another point to consider is that simulated emotions are instrumentally valuable, insofar as they are instinctual responses that tend to keep us from harm, but fictional emotions are intrinsically valuable. Perceiving art is not (primarily) instrumentally valuable for the perceiver. Derek Matravers (2006, 262) argues for a strong version of this distinction when he writes that our motive for fictional responses is intrinsic rather than instrumental. While the value of simulated emotions seems to be only the security and welfare they confer, one's choice of novel does not have a distinctive purpose.

What can we say about the motive for the voluntary generation of emotion through fiction? As we have seen, this question is avoided in the argument of Joyce (and Gendler and Kovakovich), as that focuses on the instrumental benefits of the emotion. The motive for engaging with fictions, as with

> engaging with any of arts, is the intrinsic rather than the instrumental value it brings. (Matravers 2006, 262)

I agree with Matravers that one cannot expect instrumental advantages from reading fiction. Fictional responses occur simultaneously with aesthetic pleasure when one reads a literary text. One could have pleasurable experiences while reading a literary text but such pleasure is intrinsically valuable rather than instrumentally valuable because no part of this act promotes human welfare or security.

3. Section II: The Nature of Emotional Responses

Let me begin this section by discussing some of the causes of fictional emotions. I have argued that fictional responses differ from simulated emotions because fictional responses come from our understanding of a fictional content, not from mere reflexes. When one reads a work, one interprets the content and imagines some pictures or a story. Imagination plays a crucial role in emotional responses to both fiction and nonfiction. The expressive qualities and artistic techniques in artworks engage with perceivers' imaginations, thus enabling them to have a clearer understanding. These same elements also strengthen one's emotional engagement with artworks, and again imagination plays a central role.

Richard Moran (1994, 83-85) notes that some artworks have expressive qualities or dramatic elements that enhance emotional involvement—for example, the brush strokes of Van Gogh and the elegant language of Shakespeare. Yet these same expressive qualities and dramatic elements increase the perceiver's awareness of the gap between himself and the artwork in question. Likewise, *Macbeth's* flowery language and dramatic expressions would rarely be spoken in everyday life by actual people. These rhetorical passages could not convince the spectator to believe that the story is real; nevertheless, the long elaboration conveys subtle aspects of the characters' feelings and their mental states that shorter, more direct language cannot. These rhetorical devices enhance the reader's understanding of the protagonists. As Moran puts it:

> [These rhetorical devices are] all elements that make what we are reading or hearing less like something that we could make-believe is real, or a true record of anything. And after all, it is the use of rhetorical tropes and techniques like these that is responsible for the ancient charge against rhetoric itself that it is mere appealing to the emotions;... (Moran 1994, 84)

Moran makes clear that a fictional story's expressive elements make it seem even *less* real than and *more* remote from the actual world. Yet these same literary devices and long elaborations can lead the reader to have a better understanding of the fictional characters; the art perceiver can learn the characters' moral commitments and understand their mental states, reasons and decisions. In short, rhetorical elements and expressive features can create emotional connections between the reader and the characters. And given the indispensability of imagination to this process Moran describes, his account supports my claim that fictional emotions come from a long process of imagination and interpretation, with imagination playing the primary role.

Moran (1994, 85) quotes a brief portion of Macbeth's rhetorical prose and claims that if the fictional character expressed his feelings in a simple way, it would certainly reduce the *ontological* gap between our world and his fictional world. But the gap between the reader and the character's *mental state and emotions* would be widened. Emotions, then, are things we can share, and neither belief in the actual existence of the person initially feeling the emotion nor firsthand experience of the situation in which we imaginatively find ourselves is required; instead, we need to imagine ourselves in a particular situation or having a particular mental state. Skillful use of rhetorical devices plays an important role in this imaginative process. Through this process, the reader can feel the sadness and frustration of the characters, while at the same time acknowledging the ontological gulf between himself and them.

The French tragicomedy *Le Cid* by Pierre Corneille (2009) is a more complex example of this phenomenon. Here the spectator feels the emotions of the male protagonist, Don Rodrigue, who has to challenge Don Gomès to a duel for his father's reputation. Unfortunately, Don Gomès is the father of the lady whom Don Rodrigue loves and wants to marry. Even though it is difficult for ordinary people to be in such a situation, we can easily imagine the conflicting emotions of the character facing the dilemma. Consideration of this conflict between filial piety and romantic love has captivated readers for centuries. We do not know what it is like to be a noble, but, thanks in large part to the author's skillful use of rhetorical devices, we can readily feel the emotions of one.

I think we ought to agree with Moran that the emotional distance between the reader and the fictional world can be lessened by expressive elements. Literary techniques and rhetorical devices can convey to the reader or viewer the deep and complicated feelings of the characters. Profound expression of experiences remote from our own can give the reader a deeper understanding of a character's mental states and emotions. Skillful speech can portray characters' thoughts and feelings, while short and simple statements

cannot. I hereby coin the label 'more is more' to describe the way in which short sentences are often not compelling enough to foster emotional engagement with the story, but long-winded, tumid prose is.

A writer who employs the more-is-more technique can make readers feel as though they are having the same feelings or are in the same mental state as the characters. Even though this type of long and rhetorical expression appears artificial and unnatural it can, by providing lively and vivid descriptions of the feelings of the characters, generate kindred feelings in readers.

Now, I admit that there are exceptions to the more-is-more principle; plenty of excellent literature uses plain language and short sentences. Such artworks do not employ rich rhetorical techniques, but they still convey complex feelings and mental states. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (Walker 2004) is a good example. The black female narrator is uneducated, and hence she cannot employ long-winded rhetorical techniques. Her sentences are short and do not have complicated syntax. They are sometimes ungrammatical but they can bring the reader to her world. The simple writing style and poor grammar confront the reader, and enable him readily to imagine the dire condition of black society in the story: few of its members would have any formal education. Furthermore, the simple writing style, especially at the beginning of the story, can make the reader imaginatively interpret it as the inability and weakness of the protagonist who seriously suffers from a cruel fate. Her limited literary capacity expresses the nature of the protagonist as a passive victim who cannot speak out about her feelings.

But whether or not there are plentiful and rich rhetorical devices, imagination is essential for emotional engagement; in reading fiction, we imagine characters, scenes and details which foster our emotional engagement with it. Moran (1994, 87) elaborates on the role of imagination by analyzing Kendall Walton's account: when one imagines oneself in a particular emotional condition, one is not just thinking about the content or story of the work; one will absorb and engage with the story. This is called "vividness", and imagination is central to it. Moran writes:

> We don't expect much pity or terror from just a synopsis of the fictional truths prescribed by the plot of *Macbeth*. So at this point, philosophers will often appeal to something called "vividness" to account for the difference between simply accepting something as fictionally true (or "to be imagined") and the imagination involved in getting caught up in the story. It remains to be seen, however, whether this notion can be understood in a way that is independent of the phenomenon of fictional emotion itself, so that it can be (partially) explanatory of it. (Moran 1994, 87)

"Vividness" in this sense describes a state in which one is emotionally affected by what one imagines. Moran (1994, 88) explains that it would represent a state of being passionate when one is imagining the story or when one is emotionally involved in what one imagines. It occurs when one imagines something with a particular feeling: imagining something with disgust is not identical to imagining something disgusting. Imagining something with disgust has emotional involvement which is therefore vivid in this case; vividness is a state in which one imagines, and has emotional connection with what one imagines; one is moved when imagining something. The important element is not the image in one's mind but, the particular mental state when one exercises the imaginative process. Moran (1994, 89), however, argues that vividness does not play a necessary role when imagining fictional truths.

> But it is hard to see how vividness could have any such role as a generator of further fictional truths. For it would be something of a mystery why there should be this kind of causal requirement for imagining something with a particular content. There are no special causal requirements for imagining the fictional truth that the moon is made of green cheese, or that someone *else* is horrified. Nothing simpler. So it's hard to see why there should be any special causal conditions for my imagining the fictional truth that *I* am in such a state. If you've got the proposition, you should be able to go ahead and imagine it. (Moran 1994, 89)

Moran argues that one can imagine something without emotional involvement. He holds that vividness is not necessary when imagining something. But even if it is possible simply to imagine something without emotional engagement, I hold that reading fiction is not like imagining a short simple sentence such as 'the moon is made of blue cheese' or 'a deer has five legs'; instead, it is the imagining and understanding of a network of relations and situations of fictional characters, which is a more complicated process. Thus it is inevitable to have some emotional connections to some characters. Emotional involvement is a useful tool to realize the drives and motivations of those characters. When the reader understands their emotions, she understands their actions. Imagining passionately enables her profoundly to understand characters' situations. She has to perceive and interpret messages in the fiction and imagine the whole story in her mind. Thus, to imagine something from reading is an active mental process in which emotional involvement automatically occurs. For example, reading a horror story, one imagines a protagonist being haunted while one is haunted as well because of the descriptions of frightening scenes. One feels the same emotions as the character.

Moran (1994, 92) distinguishes between the concept of fictional truth and the concept of engaging in a certain mode of imagining. Imagining something visually is unlike imagining seeing it. The former has

imaginative involvement; the latter does not. Thus, for Moran, point of view or vision does not represent images from the perspective of someone. Instead, the visual imagining introduces the reader to a psychological state of a character, thereby enabling the reader to understand the world from the character's perspective. According to Moran:

> With respect to visual imagining, the point is that to imagine something visually is not the same as to imagine seeing it. "Visual" here refers to a particular type or manner of imagining, and it thus refers to a genuine (that is, "real world") psychological fact about the person doing the imagining, and need not be within the scope of what is imagined or construed as fictionally true. It really is true that, say, Duncan visually imagines his murder from a particular point of view. But it is neither true nor imagined ("fictionally true") that he *sees* himself from this point of view. (Moran 1994, 92)

I think that emotional involvement will induce genuine psychological states in readers. The manner of imagining is the key to this process. The word "visual" is not directly and solely related to "vision" or "image". Visual imagination refers to a higher level of emotional involvement. Visually imagining is related to a particular point of view but it does not require seeing images. The features of images are not enough for the imaginative content of something because having an imaginative content demands something more than image or appearance––that thing is the psychological connection to the imaginative content. The process of imagination can operate without visual perception. Even though the content is fictional, the mental event counts as genuine.

When reading fiction, I think that imagination's role dwarfs that of visual perception (though of course the reader must use his eyes to read the words on the pages); imaginative engagement with the feelings of the characters and moods of novels is a far more crucial element than visual perception. Through such engagement, a reader can profoundly understand a novel, and can share the same feelings as the characters and those conveyed by the story itself. Often, when reading a story, the reader may not have as clear an image of characters or scenes as he would when, say, watching movies, but the reader can know the characters' minds and moods—this imaginative connection is precisely what it is to be engaged with a story.

Similarly, when reading Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* (Tolkien 1991), what the characters or the places look like is less important than their thoughts and feelings. Many readers acknowledge Frodo's courage and his gallant effort to destroy the ring. They understand how hard it is for him to subdue the evil power. Some readers may not have a clear image of Middle Earth or Mordor but when thinking of Mordor, the

readers can imagine the sense of evil and feeling of hopelessness. Hence when reading, it is crucial to imagine and understand the feelings of the characters and moods of the works. Reading novels can provide deep comprehension of thoughts and feelings rather than providing images. “Vividness” describes the state in which one is emotionally engaged in a story—images play no role, and in fact are utterly inadequate for the task. In short, vividness is imageless imagining.

In this section I have argued that imagination is indispensable for emotional involvement with fiction. But exactly how does the imaginative process work? What accounts for its essential role in our emotional engagement with fiction? It is to these questions I turn in the next section.

4. Section III: Imagination, Motivation, and Imaginative Resistance

I begin this explanation of imagination’s role in producing genuine and rational emotional responses to fictional entities by distinguishing four important features of imagination. First, imagination can lead to action; it can motivate us. Second, in imagining, one becomes less cognizant of the difference between fact and fiction. Third, imagination can make actual people share emotions with fictitious people. And fourth, imaginative resistance—which is evidence of the equal applicability of the perceiver’s moral reasoning to both fact and fiction. Let us consider each of these features in turn.

Imagination can move us to action and can shape our attitudes. Here it is worth considering the findings of Gregory Currie (2002). He cites an experiment concerning children's pretense: they pretended that a cup is full of imaginary water. Then they turn the cup upside down on a toy which they imagine is an elephant. Two-year-old children can understand and follow this process. They understand that the cup is empty and want to dry the elephant with a cloth. Currie calls this “productive pretending”. Imagination is the main factor enabling the children to understand the pretense and to react to it. Currie further notes that imagining, with the help of the agent’s beliefs, begets imagining.

> If we introduce the idea of belief-like imagining here, we can explain productive pretending without appeal to these peculiar inferences. All we have to assume is that, once an imagining is adopted, it combines with the subject's beliefs to generate new imaginings, just as a new belief would. In fact a large part of what it means to say that imagining is belief-like is just that imaginings and beliefs have the same, or at least very similar, inferential powers. (Currie 2002, 211-212)

I think that the behavior of the children Currie describes can be compared to the experience adults have when reading novels: in opening oneself to perceiving a literary work and imagining the content of the story, one imaginatively accesses the situation, and sometimes, characters' minds. One emotionally responds to the story when the imaginative process operates. It is like the children who dry the imaginary elephant. Similarly, if a character faces an unfortunate plight, the reader will respond emotionally. Both the elephant and the fictional character are imaginary entities. Both the children and the reader need imagination to apprehend the situation and generate new imagining. Imagination is an active mental process. Once it operates, it leads to further creations and reactions.

I turn now to the second feature of imagination: when we imagine, the line between reality and fantasy is less noticeable. Numerous good fictions, whose plots are plausible and logical, can express attractive storytelling that motivates a reader to imagine and interpret the works. This active process draws the reader into the story, as if she were an observer of a real situation. A compelling fictional tale blurs the line between reality and fantasy. According to Walker (1969, 578-579), fancying someone has a particular mental state is different from fancying *as if* someone had a particular mental state: the former is imagining or fancying that someone has a feeling; the latter is supposing that someone has a feeling. Crucially, when fancying someone has a particular feeling, one exercises one's imagination. One's awareness of the difference between the reality and fantasy fades away.

> Often we fancy other people as, say, sad. This is not to be confused with fancying or supposing *that* they (actually) are sad. It is much more like conceiving them as sad or thinking of them as if they were sad. This too is normally implied to be a deliberate exercise of the imagination, so that normally one would be necessarily aware of the difference between reality and one's own fantasy. But here too things can easily become blurred. For example, habitually fancying some girl *as* in love with you can quite easily induce an actual belief that this is the case. (Walker 1969, 578-579)

Imagining a story can bring about an actual belief so one is less conscious of the contrast between reality and fantasy. I think that fancying in Walker's case is similar to imagining fictional contents and having some psychological responses to those contents. Fancying my favorite character as happy would delight me. Walker (1969, 578) would call it shadowy delight. ("Shadowy manner" refers to manner of the feelings which are evoked by fancying oneself in a particular state.) The important thing is the blurred awareness of the difference between fantasy and reality, which is similar when reading novels. It

illustrates my claim that when one imagines, one actively uses imaginative processes to portray scenes and stories; when a reader fully apprehends these scenes and stories the line between imagination and reality blurs. This helps explain how one can have genuine responses to fictional things.

In addition, Walker's idea leads me to think that imagining or fancying that one is in a certain emotional state, such as imagining that I am happy, is not telling myself “be happy” or “you are happy so smile”. Imagining is not ordering oneself to act out a particular emotion, but by engaging with its object, it naturally induces an emotional response to it. If I imagine a pleasant story, it would make me feel happy even though that story concerns fictional events. Fancying something, one has to think about a story which contains many details like in reality. Hence fancying needs power of imagination for engaging oneself in the story.

Walker’s analysis does not stop there, for he offers an explanation of our emotional responses to fictional stories: we empathize with others. Our shared humanity and emotions allow us to feel what others are feeling (or at least imagine what others are feeling) by considering their physical reactions or verbal expressions.

> One might suppose, to begin with, that the capacity to *conceiv*e others *as* feeling emotions presupposes that the conceiver himself possesses some fundamental emotional potentialities. It clearly presupposes the capacity for *recognizing* emotions in other people, that is, for recognizing certain patterns of behavior, facial expressions and so forth *as* expressions of the emotion in question. That is to say: unless I had both the general concept of an emotion, and the particular concept of sadness, I could not possibly conceive of other people (or indeed myself) as sad, nor could I understand what being sad meant. (Walker 1969, 581)

Human beings acquire from experience the basic concepts of emotions, such as love, hate, sympathy and pity. These basic emotional concepts help people to understand, albeit imperfectly, the feelings of others. For instance, most people have the concepts of sadness and disappointment. The experiences that gave rise to these differ in detail from person to person, but their broad outlines are similar enough that one can recognize when others exhibit these feelings and can understand what having them is like. Similarly, we can recognize these emotions in fictional characters, and can thereby develop a deeper understanding of not only the characters, but of the emotions themselves. For instance, in reading about Anna Karenina's situation (Tolstoy 2014), the reader empathizes with her

because the reader understands the concept of sadness. Consideration of Anna's feelings and actions deepens one's understanding of both her plight and of sadness generally.

Similarly, acquaintance with real-life emotions can give the reader a better understanding of their portrayal and import in fictional works. For instance, a person raised in poverty tends to sympathize with and understand the struggles and feelings of desperately poor characters more readily than do persons raised in affluent families. But this real-life experience of poverty need not to be as extreme as having been homeless or starving. Simply having some experience of being unable to afford some ordinary good or service that one needs is sufficient for having some conception of limited financial capacity, and the accompanying unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, depression, and shame.

Having considered the first two features of imagination, let us now examine the third: imagination enables actual people to share feelings with fictional characters. The idea of sharing is adapted from "shared world theory"[3] which is a version of thought theory. This theory is analyzed by Stephen Davies (2009, 272). Shared world theory requires the reader to make-believe that he shares the same world as the fictional characters. The reader can interact as a denizen in the fictional world or the fictional characters can be members of the actual world. Davies writes:

> According to it, make-believe secures the emotion's object and generates one's emotional response as a consequence of overcoming the barrier posed to one's *interaction* with that object by the object's nonexistence. We do this by imaginatively projecting ourselves into the object's world or by imaginatively importing the object to the real world. (Davies 2009, 272)

I find shared world theory ingenious, but I object to it on two grounds. First, the sharing it describes is one-way: the reader shares the character's emotions. But sharing in the fullest sense is a two- (or more) way phenomenon; it describes something mutual and interactive. For example, the case in which two people eat a meal that was cooked by only one of them is a lesser type of sharing than the case in which both people cooked it. Similarly, sharing emotions with someone in the deepest sense describes a case in which the emotional transfer goes *both* ways. In either case, the sharing of emotions requires the aid of the imagination.

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[3] Davies (2009, 272)

My second objection to the shared world theory is that we often find ourselves responding emotionally to fictional works that we recognize as inaccessible, and this inaccessibility precludes interaction between fictional and actual entities; one can have emotional responses to things that are unreachable and inaccessible. Davies concurs with this claim (2009, 273). He denies that the shared world theory can apply to his Diana's paradox: the reader, Diana, feels sad for Anna though she knows that Anna does not exist. Diana can have an emotional engagement without believing in Anna's existence; if she appreciates the literary text, she can have genuine responses. The make-believe of sharing the world is not necessary for such responses. As Davies puts it:

> For her to follow the story, it is sufficient that she entertains without belief the veracity of the sentences that comprise it and engages with their contents according to the appropriate conventions and interests, and she can do this without imaging their contents. Moreover, that she follows the story with sensitive understanding is likely to be sufficient for the quickening of her sympathy for Anna, again without the benefit of mental pictures. (Davies 2009, 273)

When Diana reads through the work with great care, she follows the story with subtle understanding. The good plot and reasonable movement of the work of art are the crucial elements that move the reader. She will use her imagination to understand the whole thing. She can have genuine responses because of the exercise of imagination. Thus world-sharing is not a necessary condition of understanding fictional worlds.

> I denied that it is appropriate for Diana to project herself in a *de se* imaginative mode into Anna's world as one of its potentially active inhabitants. For the purposes of understanding characters in the fiction, she may engage in mental simulation and empathic imagining, but it is not prescribed that she imagine of herself that she is Anna or that she is some other character in the world of the fiction. (Davies 2009, 277)

As I see it, sharing is possible but only at the mental level—that is, only in the limited sense of a reader appreciating a story or trying to understand the decision-making and moral reasoning of a fictional character. This type of sharing does not require one to be an active citizen in the fictional world. The sensitive comprehension of the work is enough to create emotional engagement. Indeed, it would be odd if one had to resist appreciating a literary text because one realizes that its story is not true. We would do better to regard the reader's responses to and comprehension of fiction as the result of a rational process of imagination and inference.

Now, let's move to the fourth feature, that concerning imaginative resistance. The first three features make clear that imagination is a complex mental process. But imaginative resistance is itself a common part of this process. Indeed, it is imperative for me to address imaginative resistance, for it threatens to undermine the first three features described above, and with them, my arguments for the claim that emotional responses to fiction are genuine and rational. Specifically, imaginative resistance blocks our imaginative process and the resultant motivation, it emphasizes the gap between the fictional and actual world, and it deductively implies that readers cannot share feelings with fictional characters or authors. Hence it is essential to discuss the nature of imaginative resistance to show that it does not undermine these central claims of mine.

Contemporary philosophers widely agree that imaginative resistance occurs not because fictions present unreal or magical contents, but instead because their content conflicts with our moral intuitions or moral standards. For example, Kathleen Stock (2017, 123-124) explains that readers evaluate fictional situations according to the same moral standards they would employ in real life. She calls this a counterfactual approach to resistance or "COUNT" for short. If a work of fiction offends a reader's moral sensibilities, or if the reader cannot believe that anyone in a similar situation would act similarly, then imaginative resistance occurs. However, Stock (2017, 128) develops a more complicated version in order fully to explain imaginative resistance; she calls it "counterfactual imagining"––imagining something with a certain purpose. Stock's amended conception of COUNT involves having a COUNT or belief about what would result if some fictional situation occurred or how the reader would feel, act, or respond.

> As such, its content can be expressed in the conditional tense: I imagine that *p*, and then imagine that q *would be* the case, given *p*. In counterfactual imagining there is an initially imagined 'premise' or 'premises', and then various 'consequences' or 'implications' imagined as a result of initial premise(s), where one's further aim is to work out whether one believes that those consequences or implications would follow from the initial premise(s). (Stock 2017, 128)

Stock (2017, 128) explains further that counterfactual imagining is governed by what she calls the "epistemic constraints" of the reader. If counterfactual imagining becomes one's objective, for some cognitive goal, one's imagining will be constrained (wholly or partly) by one's pertinent beliefs. If one counterfactually imagines that "situation S would have aspect A", one must *not* believe that situation S would *not* have aspect A. Alternatively, imaginative resistance can take this form: A reader believes that situation x in context C would not be right, and the reader cannot counterfactually imagine that it would be right. In both cases,

the reader has a moral concept that is incompatible with the moral concept proposed in the fiction. The reader can feel being directed to imagine moral cases in some particular and counterintuitive way, such as counterfactually imagining situation S as causing moral aspect M and believing that S would have M. But the reader is unable to believe it.

I think that the occurrence of imaginative resistance shows the reader's engagement with the fictional work: she entertains, analyzes, and accepts or rejects the ideas in fiction as if they were matters in actuality. Counterfactual imagining is different from ordinary imagining because it requires the employment of moral principles and moral sentiments, which the latter does not. This feature makes counterfactual imagining a more complex mental process and it tightens the connection between the reader and the story. In fact, the very occurrence of imaginative resistance confirms that emotional responses to fiction are genuine and rational because the reader intuitively evaluates fiction by the same standard he evaluates reality. The reader employs practical reason to determine what is morally appropriate.

It is worth noting that quite apart from occurring in response to fiction, imaginative resistance is a form of refusal or rejection which the reader can arguably have in real life when perceiving something unsound or morally unacceptable. For example, the recognition that a proposed course of action violates one's deepest moral convictions. At any rate, the occurrence of imaginative resistance—especially in the form of Stock's counterfactual imagining—as a response to fiction is my fourth piece of evidence for my thesis that emotional responses to fiction are genuine and rational. In addition, counterfactual imagining deepens our understanding of fiction and thereby enhances the sharing of emotions as described above in my analysis of my third feature.

I have distinguished four features of imagination which render it essential for the occurrence of rational emotional responses to fiction. In this way, imagination is prior to reason, even in the latter's practical application.

5. Conclusion

It is all too easy to suppose that the only emotional responses which are genuine and worthy of consideration are those concerning non-fictious persons, things, and events. But I have argued that our

emotional responses should not be limited to actually existing persons, things, and events. Instead, we can (and indeed ought to) have genuine and rational responses to fiction.

We ought not to maintain that emotional responses are genuine and worthy of consideration only if they are responses to real-life events. Actual existence should not be a necessary condition of emotional engagement. Instead, we should recognize that some fictional entities can induce emotionally significant responses in observers; we can have genuine and rational emotional responses to fiction. Imagination is the key element in such responses.

I distinguished four features of imagination which substantiate the genuineness and rationality of emotional responses: (1) imagination is an active mental process which leads to further imagining; (2) imagination blurs the line between reality and fantasy; (3) imagination enables readers to share feelings with fictional characters; and (4) analysis of imaginative resistance shows that one intuitively applies the same moral principles to both fiction and reality. Our imaginative responses are the product of a complex mental process which profoundly influences human beings: they inspire us and shape our views. Thus, it is incorrect to claim that they are not genuine or rational.

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