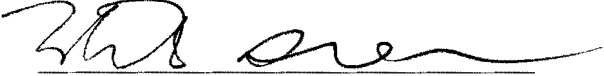# Imagination and the Paradox of Fictional Emotions

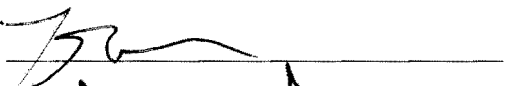Jacob Jerod Pease
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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
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Master of Arts

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There are numerous ways in which we may emotionally react to a fictional work. We may become indignant for having to pay eight dollars to see a film. We may respect a director's decision to cast normal looking people in the lead roles. We may become bored in reading a book because it is too long, or resentful because it was written by a Nazi. We can feel awe towards the stuntmen for the feats they performed in order to create a film, and we can feel sorry for those real people whom the fictional work will adversely affect. Responses such as these to fictional works are common, but they are not the type of emotional responses with which I will be primarily concerned in this thesis. Instead, I will be dealing with the emotions we have toward what we know to be fictional characters, things and events: we may, for example, feel pity for characters, fearful in response to situations they face, indignant that their world is being destroyed, or happy that all of their problems are resolved in the end. Despite the common occurrence of such emotions, it is puzzling why they should be felt at all. This puzzlement is at the heart of the philosophical problem known as the "paradox of fictional emotions." It will be my goal in this thesis to discuss the nature of this problem, and to offer a solution to it by giving an account of how we react to fictional characters, things and events.

1. What is the Problem of Emotional Response to Fiction?

The "paradox of emotions in response to fiction" has been the center of much debate in the field of aesthetics for nearly thirty years. Currie (in Wilkinson 8) gives a succinct presentation of this paradox by reducing it to three propositions which are not logically compossible, even though they each appear to be *prima facie* true when evaluated individually:

1. We have emotions concerning the situations of fictional characters.
2. To have an emotion concerning someone's situation we must believe the propositions that describe that situation.
3. We do not believe the propositions that describe the situations of fictional characters.

To illustrate the paradox in a way that is characteristic of how it is normally presented, it seems to be the case that we feel horror when the nightswimming woman is attacked at the beginning of *Jaws*. (Thus, the first premise seems to hold: as Alex Neill asserted, "It is a fact about many of us that we can be moved by what we know to be fictional." (Neill. 1, 1993).) However, it also seems to be the case that we do not really believe that there is a woman and there is a shark such that the shark is attacking the woman (as such, the third premise also holds). It might be said that we believe there is a shark attacking a woman *in the story*; however, on the one hand, we do not believe that there is *really* a shark attacking a woman (otherwise we would try to save her, or perhaps we would run out of the theater to avoid being the shark's next meal). On the other hand, as I will later argue, when we say we "believe something in the story", we are describing an imaginative epistemic relationship between ourselves and the "something in the story", and not a doxastic epistemic relationship.

The second premise of the paradox, which is based on a certain cognitive theory of emotions, according to which beliefs about intentional objects play a constitutive role in emotions, also seems to be true when judged independently. (As an illustration of this, if we were to see a boy yelling "help! I'm being attacked by a shark!" while splashing around frantically in the ocean, we would most likely become concerned, if not panic stricken, if we came to believe that that he really was being attacked; however if we then heard him say "Ha! Ha! Fooled you!", our belief that that he was being attacked would

dissipate and our supervening horror would quickly abate – or, perhaps, the fear would be replaced by feelings of anger which would center around the belief that the boy lied to us and caused us unnecessary distress.) Thus, if the cognitive theory of emotions is true, then if it is the case that we do not believe that there really is a woman getting attacked by a shark, then we will not be horrified by the apparent situation.

The "paradox of emotions in response to fiction" (henceforth called the "paradox of fictional emotions" for short[1]) presents us with a dilemma: all three propositions seem *prima facie* true, but they cannot all be true together. At least one of the premises, therefore, must be false. The interest in the paradox lies in the fact that it challenges the beliefs we naturally accept as true; as such, the paradox is not interesting simply in the way that parlor games are interesting in their ability to entertain us; rather, it is of a deeper philosophical interest in that, in order to resolve this particular puzzle, we need to find answers to several fundamental intriguing questions about human psychology, the philosophy of mind, and metaphysics. More specifically, three broad underlying questions need to be answered in order to resolve the paradox, though as we shall see, addressing these three broad questions which are related through the paradox will itself give rise to other, more focused psychological and conceptual questions.

The first large question that needs to be answered before one can properly make sense of, and hence evaluate, the second and third premises of the paradox is this: What are the differences and similarities between believing and imagining?

The second large question that needs to be answered before one can properly evaluate the truth or falsity of the first two premises of the paradox is this: What are

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[1] By use of the term "fictional emotions", I do not intend to suggest that the emotions in question are themselves somehow fictional. Rather, the term is used to designate the affective states which arise in us when we experience "moving" fictional works.

emotions? A satisfying answer to this broad question is itself best arrived at by asking

further, more specific questions such as: Do emotions have component parts, and if so,

what are they? Do emotions require belief in the real existence of their intentional

objects? What are the differences and similarities between our concepts of emotions and

our concepts of other affective states such as sensations and moods?

The third large underlying question which needs to be answered in order to

properly evaluate the truth or falsity of the first and third premises of the paradox is this:

How, in general terms, can we most accurately describe what goes on in us when we

become engaged with fictional works? We are all familiar with what it is like to get

caught up in an effective "tear-jerker", for example, but to what extent is it possible to

give an account of the psychology behind, and phenomenological experience of, fictional

works? What, for example, are the similarities and differences between the ways we

react to watching a movie in which a train approaches a woman tied to the train tracks, on

the one hand, and, on the other, actually *seeing* a train approach a woman tied to the train

tracks? Is there difference in *degree* or in *kind* between our cognitive reactions to the

things we take to be fictional works and our cognitive reactions the things we take to be

"real life" events? Is there difference in degree or in kind between our *affective*

responses to these two stimuli? What role, if any, does belief play in our engagement

with fictional works? In formulating psychological descriptions of our affective

reactions, is it accurate to speak in terms of emotions, or is it more accurate to speak in

other terms, such as sensations, moods and/or feelings?

The paradox of fictional emotions interrelates these three questions, but to some

degree it is possible to address each of them independently. The first question will arouse

less discussion from me than will the second, and the third will arouse the most; the answers to these three questions will also progress, I believe, in the order of increasing originality.

2. The First Question: Believing and Imagining

A concept central to the second and third premises is that of belief. While everyone has a more or less intuitive grasp on the concept, it will ultimately be useful for us to compare and contrast belief with other, somewhat similar, mental phenomena, such as imagining. What is the difference, say, between imagining (daydreaming, fantasizing, making believe, etc) that Ingrid Bergman is coming over for dinner tonight, and actually believing that she is? In both cases, the content of the proposition is represented in one's mind: in both cases, I may visualize her showing up at my doorstep, for example, or I may construct in my mind a representation of her graciously thanking me with her Swedish accent as I serve her a carefully prepared dish of canned ravioli.

Is it possible to have a belief that does not rely on sensorial representations? Can I believe, for example, *that* Ingrid Bergman will be coming over for dinner without creating in my mind a sensorial representation of her doing so? Perhaps not, but it does seem to be more plausible, at the very least, that one can believe some of the more abstract propositions of, say, mathematics, without forming any mental sensorial images of what it is that is believed. Can one *imagine* some abstract proposition x without forming any mental sensorial image of x? One might be able to *suppose that* x, in order to determine what further ramifications would arise, for example, without forming any sensorial images of x in one's mind. However, I do not believe that this captures the general concept we have of "imagining", at least not the concept of "imagining" which is

relevant to our characteristic experiences of fiction. Rather, we think of the act of imagining (imaging, visualizing, etc.) as being the act of forming or experiencing sensorial representations of some thing x in one's mind when x itself is not itself directly responsible for those sensorial images.

So it seems that having or creating some sensorial representation of x is often (but not always) part of having an occurrent "belief that x" or "supposition that x", whereas one *always* has a sensorial representation of x when one imagines x. Thus, using the presence or absence of some (kind of) sensorial image in our mind as a criterion for distinguishing between "believing x" and "imagining x" does not prove to be very reliable.

Rather, I will argue that it will be more fruitful to distinguish between believing and imagining by distinguishing between the types of epistemological commitments to which thinkers are held when they believe and when they imagine. When I believe she will show up, I commit myself to the truth of the proposition "Ingrid Bergman is coming over for dinner". When I daydream or imagine that she will show up, I am not committed to the truth of this proposition, regardless of how much I may want her to come over.

In more general terms, it can be said that when one occurrently believes that x, one is held to have stuck one's epistemic neck out further than when one imagines that x. When one occurrently believes that x, one is held to be susceptible to error about the correspondence of x (as well as all the further propositions that x entails) to reality. On the other hand, one is not held to the position that x is really the case, merely by virtue of one's imagining that x.

Such a distinction between belief and imagination does not entail that the imagination carries no normative commitments. When one imagines King Kong, for example, one is held to be imagining a very, very large hairy ape; if one claims to be imagining (*the*) King Kong, and yet imagines King Kong as being a human-sized blood-sucking vampire, then one will be held to be mistaken *about what one is imagining*. However, the imaginer in this case is not held to the position that King Kong ever really existed; if that were the case, then the person would be held as *believing* that King Kong existed.

What has been said in this section about belief and imagination is, of course, incomplete. However, more will be said about them in the following sections which deal with what the nature of emotions are and what goes on in us when we become engaged with fictional works.

3. The Second Question: What are Emotions?

While the concept of belief is central to the second two premises of the paradox of fictional emotions, the concept of emotion is key to the first two.

A large number of different theories have been developed throughout the history of recorded philosophy concerning the nature of emotions. Of central interest throughout the debate has been the relationship (if there is such a relationship at all) between emotions and "reason" or "cognition" (the former being a more classical expression and the latter being a more modern psychological term. However, the concepts of both "reason" and "cognition" can be functionally characterized in general terms as being the *processing of information*.) Two of the most historically prominent general accounts of the emotions have come to be known as "feeling-centered" and "cognitivist" theories of

the emotions; I will give an illustration of each of these two via the theories of William

James and C.D. Broad, respectively.

On William James's view, various emotions are nothing more than feelings which

accompany bodily changes. When mental perceptions of facts trigger physiological

reactions in us, the way we feel when these reactions occur *are* the emotions. As he

wrote:

> "Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the
> mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion,
> and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on
> the contrary is that *the bodily changes follow directly the* PERCEPTION *of the*
> *exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur* IS *the*
> *emotion."* (p. 189.)

Being sad, for example, is the feeling which accompanies the physiological

changes of having a "sinking heart", a tightened chest, tears running down one's face, etc.

Thus, on his account, cognition does not play a constitutive role in the emotion, though it

may serve as a causal medium through which the physiological/emotional reaction takes

place in us. My perception of a bear in front of me causes the rush of adrenalin (etc), the

accompanying feeling of which has come to be labeled as "fear"; however, my cognition

of the bear is not itself a component of fear, on James's account.

According to C.D. Broad's account, emotions are cognitions which are laced

with certain tones: "Every emotion is an epistemologically objective or intentional

experience, i.e., it is always a *cognition*, either veridical or wholly or partly delusive. But

every emotion is something more than a *mere* cognition. An emotion is a cognition

which has one or more of the specific forms of a certain generic kind of psychical quality

which we will call *emotional tone*. To be fearing a snake, e.g., is to be cognizing

something – correctly or incorrectly – as a snake, and for that cognition to be toned with

fearfulness. In general, to be fearing *X* is to be cognizing *X* fearfully; to be admiring *X* is to be cognizing *X* admiringly, and so on." (Broad 205). Broad's cognitivist account differs largely, then, from "feeling-centered" accounts of emotion that were offered by philosophers such as William James, in that, on Broad's account, the "feeling" aspect of the emotion is not metaphysically separated from cognition; rather, on Broad's view, emotions are various felt ways that cognitions occur.

As John Deigh asserts, "Cognitivism now dominates the philosophical study of the emotions." (p. 824) Feeling-centered conceptions of emotion are no longer in vogue. They have been replaced by various conceptions of emotion which place thought at the "heart" of emotion. According to these theories, cognitions are seen as being either necessary components of emotions (e.g. Anthony Kenny, as discussed below), or emotions are seen as being types of cognitions (e.g. the view of Broad). Thus, contemporary discussions are thus more apt to center around the question of *how* thought fits in with emotion rather than *whether* it does.

A main reason that cognitivism replaced feeling-centered conceptions of emotions is that the latter could not very well account for the "propositionality" of emotions. Emotions are characteristically directed *at* intentional objects and have propositional content. I am envious *of* Roberto Rossellini, for example, because I believe he got to marry Ingrid Bergman and I didn't. As such, envy isn't a free-floating feeling. I can't feel envious without having propositional cognitions about someone (or perhaps something), in the way that I can have a "proposition-free" sensation of a toothache.

What can be responsible for the propositionality of emotions? A promising line of reasoning suggests that emotion has belief as a component (or perhaps even that

emotion is a type of conative belief). As such, the propositional content of the belief supplies the propositional content of the emotion. An influential argument to support the claim that beliefs are a constituent of emotions is given by Anthony Kenny, who argues that we are able to distinguish among our various concepts of emotions only because we are able to distinguish among the various types of evaluative beliefs which are at the heart of these emotions. As Deigh summarizes,

> "Its main thesis is that the concept of each emotion, be it that of fear, pity, envy, or what have you, restricts what can be its object. That is, the object must have a certain character, or at least the subject must see it as having that character. Thus, the object of fear must be seen as something or someone who threatens harm; the object of pity must be seen as someone who has suffered misfortune; and the object of envy must be seen as someone who has an advantage one lacks. Indeed, a dangerous man would not be feared if he were not known or believed to be dangerous, and someone with a terminal disease would not be pitied if no one even suspected he was ill. Conversely, one need only believe that something is a threat to fear it or that someone is in misery to pity him. Thus, the belief that the snake one suddenly finds slithering across one's path is dangerous suffices to make it an object of fear even though the snake is actually harmless, and the belief in the miserable existence of the crippled beggar with the twisted lip suffices to make him an object of pity even though his hideous appearance is a disguise and he is in fact a well-to-do gent working a remunerative con. From these considerations it should be clear that what qualifies something as the appropriate object of an emotion is the subject's belief that it has a certain character. Hence, belief and so propositional thought is essential to emotion. Hence, the familiar refrain, 'There is a logic to the concept of x such that to say that a person feels x toward z implies that he believes such and such about z.'" (Deigh 834-835.)

Not everyone, however, accepts that belief is necessarily a component of emotion. As Deigh summarizes (p. 836-837),

> "Still other cognitivists have denied that the evaluation an emotion entails is always a judgment or belief (See Greenspan 1988, pp. 3-9; Roberts 1988, pp. 195-201) In other words, they deny the final assumption on which the argument sketched in the last paragraph reached its conclusion. They accept instead an assumption on which a weaker conclusion follows, one that makes propositional thought, whether or not it is given any credence, essential to emotion, and they mark their dissent from views that take belief or judgment to be essential by calling emotions by such names as 'propositional feelings' (Greenspan 1988, p. 4) and 'concern based construals'. (Roberts 1988, p. 184.)"

These cognitivists maintain the view that emotions are essentially propositional, but they deny the claim that beliefs are necessary components of them. I myself concur, and will later argue that beliefs are not always the epistemic driving force behind emotions (even though they often are), and that the imagination can motivate emotions as well.

4. Preliminary Distinctions Between Emotions and Other Feelings

Emotions are not the only feelings we experience. They can be distinguished from sensations, moods, and what might be called "subcortical reactions". Any endeavor to strictly delineate the differences between the concepts of these various feelings/affections is made difficult by the fact that we often freely substitute one "affection" word or expression for another in our daily conversations, particularly when it comes to emotions and moods. We might say, for example, "I'm feeling *emotionally distraught"* or "I'm in a *bad mood*." One might say of a person that he or she is "moody" or that he or she is "emotionally unstable". One might similarly speak of sadness or anger as being either moods or emotional states.

In spite of the imprecise nature of our everyday word usage, however, it is to some degree possible to make general conceptual differentiations between these various affections. One may start with what I have referred to as "sub-cortical reactions", which are distinguished from the other types of affections in that sub-cortical reactions are merely autonomic responses to sensorial stimuli. One paradigm case of such a reaction would be jumping at the sight of a snake at one's feet before one even has the time to formulate in one's own mind the proposition that there is a snake present: the sight of the

snake triggers a reaction in the sub-cortical region of the brain, and this reaction in turn triggers our muscles in such a way that we end up jumping back (the cortex is the region of the brain responsible for most propositional cognition, whereas the sub-cortical region is generally responsible for more basic physiological functioning of the body). Obviously, the term "sub-cortical reactions" has not and probably will never find itself widely used in everyday conversations; it might be thought of as a subset of what is commonly called "knee-jerk reactions". The difference between the two is that the concept of knee-jerk reactions also covers events such as unreflective, and often inconsiderate, linguistic comments (e.g. saying "break a leg!" to Christopher Reeve before he goes on stage) and ingrained habitual actions (e.g. having gotten used to TiVo, I automatically start to reach for a remote, even in a movie theater, in order to pause and rewind the film when a character says something I don't understand), whereas "sub-cortical reactions" are taken to be exclusively non-deliberative *affective* responses. (For a more in-depth discussion of these reactions, see Ledoux, chapter 6.)

Emotions differ from sensations, moods and sub-cortical reactions in that the former are, generally speaking, based on propositional cognitions, whereas the latter generally are not (if such a delineation does not exactly conform to our everyday understanding of the terms "emotion", "sensation" and "mood", then, for the purposes of this thesis, my delineation can be seen as being stipulative). The proposition "Roberto Rossellini got to marry Ingrid Bergman and I didn't" is at the heart of the envy I feel toward Roberto Rossellini. On the other hand, while I may get a tingling sensation when I bump my funny bone on the table, and while I may feel blue because of a serotonin imbalance in my brain, my tingling sensation does not arise because I cognize the

proposition "I just hit the table", and my blue mood does not arise because of any propositional thought I have about the serotonin levels in my brain. Similarly, my jumping back at the sight of the snake does not have at its core the proposition "there is a snake at my feet"; it is more akin to my kicking my leg forward when the doctor thumps my knee.

Moods, finally, as I am delineating them, can be distinguished from sub-cortical reactions in that the former have more of a "residual" quality of duration than do the latter. Sub-cortical reactions are immediate, non-deliberative affective responses to sensory information which do not generally continue for very long after the influx of sensory information has ceased. Moods, on the other hand, tend to linger. I jump back when I catch sight of a snake, but I don't continue jumping around after that. On the other hand, receiving a traffic ticket in the morning might put me in a bad mood for the rest of the afternoon, even though I stopped thinking about the ticket around noon.

More will be said about the nature of these non-emotional reactions in the upcoming discussion which deals with their occurrence in our responses to fiction.

5. The Third Question: What is the Nature of our Reaction to Fiction?

In order to evaluate the truth of the first and third premises of the paradox, we have to understand the nature of our cognitive and affective relationships to the situations of fictional characters. Because the central goal of this thesis is to offer a solution to the paradox of *fictional emotions*, it will be most efficient to first address the non-emotional affections we have in response to fiction, so that these cases can be dismissed from the boundaries of our explanandum. Also to be dismissed are emotions which are prompted

by works of fiction, but which do not have the situations of fictional characters, things or

events as their intentional objects.

6. Non-Emotional Affective Reactions to Fiction

People often claim to "become emotional" while engaging with dramatic fictional

works, and, as I shall later argue, this is certainly true. However, given the previous

discussion, it should be clear that emotions are not the *only* affective reaction that we

experience in response to fiction: also to be considered are the possibilities of fictional

sensations, sub-cortical reactions and moods. These three phenomena do not seem to

lead to the same paradox that fictional emotions do, because their lack of

"propositionality" suggests a freedom from commitment to *beliefs* about fictional objects

(as such, the second premise of the paradox is false relative to them). Nevertheless, it

will be important to discuss these three phenomena, not only because they play an

important role in our fictional experiences, but also because in order to properly address

the central paradox of this thesis, we need to be able to weed out cases of "fictional non-

emotional-affections" from cases of fictional emotions.

One may begin with fictional sensations. In watching a film, the only relevant

sensory input one has is visual and auditory. [There have been some commercial

experiments which have brought the olfactory (e.g. via the use of scratch and sniff

stickers) and the tactile (e.g. via the use of mechanical vibrating seats) senses into play,

but these have been rare.] The question that we should first address is whether there are

fictional sensations at all. The answer one gives to this question will depend, to a large

degree, upon the extent to which one believes that sensations have representational

content. If one believes that the visual sensations one has while watching a movie screen

are only of various color patterns, then one will not be inclined to believe in the existence of fictional visual input. If, on the other hand, one believes that one's visual sensations are more cognitively complex (such that one can have a sensation of, say, "an object", "a moving object" or even of "a man"), then one will be inclined to say that we have fictional visual sensations (i.e. we *see* a man on the screen, even though there is in fact no man there). The same debate arises with respect to auditory sensations as well.

I will assert, but not argue for, the position that sensations have relatively simple representational content (e.g. that visual sensations are of colors rather than of distinct objects) and that any experience of fictional objects can only occur after further cognitive processing has come into play. Thus, as far as *initial sensory input* is concerned, it does not seem to be the case that we have sensory responses which occur in response to fiction. Rather, we simply have sensations which are caused by non-fictional objects (i.e. the color patterns on the screen and the sounds coming from the speakers.)

Whereas there do not seem to be any instances of fictional initial sensory input, the broader concept of fictional sensations is not itself empty, for many of the reactions we experience in response to fiction are indeed sensations. Consider, for example, the reaction one experiences while getting caught up in a tear-jerker: one gets a hollow feeling in one's chest, feels one's throat and neck tense up and feel the tears which roll down one's face, etc. These are what might be called "responsive sensations". In contrast to fictional sensory input, responsive sensations do occur in response to fiction. However, these sensations only seem to occur within the context of sub-cortical reactions, moods and emotions.

The prevalence of sub-cortical reactions varies, of course, from fictional work to fictional work. They are, it seems to me, less present in literary works than they are in film, because the type of sensory stimulation one receives while reading is not generally the type of stimulation that is prone to set off these types of reactions : the sight of ink-covered pages is not in itself particularly exciting, even when the pages are turned. One might experience the sub-cortical reaction of jerking back one's hand in response to giving oneself a paper cut while turning the page of a book, for example, but such a sub-cortical reaction is not a response to fiction (unless, perhaps, the fiction prompted by the book is about, say, hemophilia. In such an instance, one's mind might be occupied by the dangers of flesh wounds, and such mental "priming" might serve to make one jump back more than normally would in response to a paper cut.) This is not to say that sub-cortical reactions cannot be evoked by literary works; for example, if one reads the text out loud, one may have subcortical reactions to the sonoric features of the work.

Sub-cortical reactions play a much larger role, however, when it comes to our experiences of mimetic fiction (in which the sensory input imparted upon us by the fictional work itself saliently resembles the sensory input that would be imparted upon us by the object(s) represented by that fictional work, if those objects had physical existence). The reason for this is that artists (e.g. film directors) know that they can create sub-cortical reactions in us by creating art which leads to patterns of sensorial input which resemble the patterns of sensorial input which, due to our biological makeup, naturally trigger sub-cortical reactions in us. When, for example, a particular color rapidly expands to cover a larger percentage of our visual field, we naturally flinch, even before we have the time form higher cognitions such as "there is a bat flying at me!" The

cause for this reaction in us can be given in evolutionary terms: those creatures which mutated in such a way such that they naturally flinch in response to "rapid color expansion sensations" had a better chance of dodging a predator or the attacks of a rival than do creatures who did not possess this mutation. Thus, the flinchers were, *ceteris paribus*, more liable to survive and pass on their genes than were the non-flinchers, and due to the workings of evolution, more or less all of us today are pre-disposed to flinch in response to "rapid color expansion sensations", (particularly when this sensation occurs alongside other unexpected sensations, such as sudden loud dissonant noises.) A filmmaker can then exploit this fact about us and lead us to flinch (and increase our heart rate and adrenaline levels, etc) by filming an object rapidly approaching the camera and then having what was recorded played back, so that we experience unexpected rapid color expansions in our visual field.

When we jump in response to a loud sudden dissonant soundtrack noise, we might very well appropriately claim to have been scared. However, this "fearful response" is not a response which is directly relevant to the paradox of fictional emotions, for the paradox only arises with respect what I am taking to be "bona fide" fictional emotions, i.e. affections with fictional propositional content. In trying to formulate a "paradox of fictional sub-cortical reactions" by replacing "emotions" with "sub-cortical reactions" in the paradox stated at the beginning of this thesis, we see that the first two premises are false:

1. We have sub-cortical reactions concerning the situations of fictional characters.
2. To have a sub-cortical reaction concerning someone's situation we must believe the propositions that describe that situation.
3. We do not believe the propositions that describe the situations of fictional characters.

The first premise is false because sub-cortical reactions do not *concern* anyone's situation; they have causes but no propositional content. The second premise is false because one does not need to believe the propositions that describe someone's character in order to have sub-cortical reactions; all one needs is to have one's senses manipulated in a certain way.

One might ask whether there is such a thing as "fictional sub-cortical reactions" at all, and hence whether they play *any* role with respect to our reaction to fiction as such. Because sub-cortical reactions are immediate responses to sensations, one might hastily conclude that because there are no fictional sensory inputs, then there are no fictional sub-cortical reactions either. However, there are, it seems to me, two ways in which fiction can bring about, or at least influence, one's sub-cortical reactions. On the one hand, it is perhaps possible (though I cannot think of any instances) to experience sub-cortical reactions as a direct result of one's "responsive sensations", which are themselves the result of fictional emotions. On the other hand, some of the higher-order phenomena, including fictional moods and beliefs, often tend to "prime" us to have more pronounced sub-cortical reactions. The degree to which one will be inclined to jump is determined in part by one's underlying mental state. One will be much more inclined to react this way if one is, say, immersed in a horror movie. If one's mental activity consists of anticipation that comes from imagining that a deadly creature is about to jump out of the dark at any second, the adrenalin levels in one's body will subsequently rise, and this will increase both the propensity to jump back and the extent to which one does jump back, at the moment of intense sensory stimulation. Thus, although such sub-cortical stimulations are not central to the paradox of emotional responses to fiction, they are to

some degree dependent upon our "interaction" with the fictional characters, things, places and events.

Moods (as I am stipulating their definition, though I believe this definition roughly captures our everyday understanding of the word) are similar to sub-cortical reactions in that they both have causes, but do not have propositional thought as a constitutive element. I can be put in a sad mood if the weather outside is gray and drizzly, for example, even if I do not form any conscious propositional thoughts about the weather: sometimes, I simply become blue when the sky is not, as if to compensate. I can put myself in an angry mood by making myself wear an "angry" face long enough, or put myself in a happy mood by smiling a lot. In addition, facial features tend to spread from one person to another: If I talk to you with a smile (or frown) on my face, you will start to smile (or frown) as well (see Bargh 1999, p. 467). Thus, facial features (and other body language) not only transmit information about what people are feeling; they also transmit the feelings themselves: Jones is sad, so he wears a frown when he talks with Smith. Smith's face imitates Jones's face, and Smith ends up being sad. This is quite plausibly a result of evolutionary processes: empathy leads to teamwork, and (human-like) team members have a better chance of surviving and passing on their genes than do asocial hominoids[2]. Artists, again, can exploit this biological feature of ours in order to manipulate us to their liking. A film director making a romantic comedy will make sure that the actors smile a lot in order to create a happy mood, whereas a director making a

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[2] See Lakin et al. "We also mimic the facial expressions of other people. This is so hard-wired that one-month-old infants have been shown to smile, stick out their tongues, and open their mouths when they see someone else doing the same (Meltzoff & Moore, 1977). By nine months, infants are mimicking more abstract emotional expressions, such as joy, sadness, and anger (Termine &Izard, 1988). Mimicking these facial expressions can result in actually adopting the emotions and moods of others as well (for a comprehensive review, see Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). If we see or hear others laugh, we tend to laugh more ourselves (Young & Frye, 1966), or if we listen to a happy or sad person, we tend to mimic their tone and take on their mood state (Neumann & Strack, 2000)." (p. 148)

film noir will make sure that the actors look fatigued, so as to create a downcast mood. Many other considerations (such as color choices as well as the tone, rhythm, cadence, and loudness of the soundtrack and characters' voices) can also affect the mood of the audience. As such, it can be said that the "tone" of a fictional work can be seen as its capacity to bring about certain *moods* in the audience. A film, for example, which has most of its color bleached out of it and which relies on a soundtrack heavily reliant upon minor keys will have a "sad" tone, because it is apt to put people into a sad mood when they become engaged with it.

Unlike sub-cortical reactions, moods are not necessarily directly dependent on sensations for their existence (a somber scene can simply be described in a book, for example, and this will suffice to put me in a somber mood, even though I have no direct sensory input of the somber scene itself.) As such, it is easier to accept that there are such things as fictional moods. In fact, it does not seem to be the case that one can smile in response to a filmed smile (and hence be led toward a happy mood) unless one can see the color patters *as* a smiling face; and since one knows that there is in fact no smiling face there, the smiling face is a fictional face and one's mood in response to it is a fictional mood (i.e. a mood which arises in response to fiction).

Sensations, subcortical reactions and moods are all affective reactions that we experience in response to fiction; in fact, these three types of reactions might perhaps even account for the majority of our affective responses to fiction. However, there are no paradoxes which arise when we try to understand why they would occur in response to fiction: in order to understand why a color-leeched movie would tend to put us into a gloomy mood, for example, all that one would have to do is explain why gray overcast

days make us gloomy. The mood-forming mechanism seems to be the same in both cases, and so whether or not a particular mood was brought about in response to *fiction* isn't terribly interesting.

7. Fictional Emotions

Once we remove these other affections from our targeted explanandum, we are left with emotions, i.e. affective reactions which have propositional cognition at their core. And these are the types of responses which indeed give rise to the central paradox of this thesis. Before I present my own theory of the fictional emotions, however, I will present some theories that other philosophers have put forth as attempts to resolve the paradox of fictional emotions. Because the paradox has been a fixture in aesthetics for nearly thirty years, many attempts have been made to solve (as well as dissolve) the problem. Within the confines of this thesis, however, I will address five such attempts and show their limitations. In doing so, I will continue to weed out some types of affective responses to fiction which are not central to the paradox.

The first such attempt that I will address was put forth by Colin Radford, who wrote "I am left with the conclusion that our being moved in certain ways by works of art, though very 'natural' to us and in that way only too intelligible, involves us in inconsistency and so incoherence." (Radford 78)

Radford's conclusion seems to be based on these two premises: 1) we have emotions concerning the situations of fictional characters, and 2) we do not believe the propositions which describe the situations of fictional characters. But how would the truth of these two propositions entail that our being moved by fiction involves us in "inconsistency and so incoherence"? It would seem that we need another premise to

bring about the conclusion. What would that premise be? Certainly, it can't be the second premise of the paradox stated at the beginning of the paper (i.e. "To have an emotion concerning someone's situation we must believe the propositions that describe that situation."), because such a premise, if true, would not entail that humans are irrational. Rather, it would entail a logical impossibility: it is impossible to "emote toward X" and "not believe X" if "believing X" is a necessary condition for "emoting toward X". Thus, in order to avoid self-contradiction, Radford would need to reject belief cognitivism; and yet, he doesn't seem to want to do this. He says, for example, "It would seem then that I can only be moved by someone's plight if I believe that something terrible has happened to him. If I do not believe that he has not and is not suffering or whatever, I cannot grieve or be moved to tears […] We have to believe in his torment to be tormented by it." (p. 68)

On what grounds then could Radford arrive at his conclusion that our experience of fictional emotions involves us in inconsistency and incoherence? It seems that in order to accept the two premises about the way that humans react to fiction, as well as conclude from those two premises that people are irrational, one needs to accept as true this premise: "If people have emotions concerning the situations of fictional characters and do not believe the propositions concerning the situations which describe the situations of those characters, then those people are irrational." But why should this be accepted as true? If it is possible for me to emote toward something which I know doesn't exist, why is it *irrational* for me to do so?

One might find further reason, based on a principle of philosophical methodology, to refrain from adopting Radford's position. As a "principle of charity",

one might say, we should refrain from positing theories which describe people as being irrational, unless we have exhausted all other avenues of acceptable explanation. If all else fails in our attempts to understand the way we behave in response to fiction, perhaps we will have to end by concluding that our actions simply don't make a lot of sense. But we should adopt such a stance only as a last resort. Thus, it would be better, all other things being equal, to have a theory which would describe people as being rational (in spite of the fact that they emote towards what they know to be fictional) instead of proclaiming those people to be irrational because they do react in such a way.

The second attempted resolution to the paradox which I will discuss was given by Michael Weston, who argued that "we do not respond to fictional characters and events per se but to the work of which they are a part" (as summarized by Wilkinson, p. 9.) In writing of John Webster's *The Duchesse of Malfi*, Weston writes:

> "If we are moved by the death of the Duchess, what, then, are we being moved by? The answer to this would provide part of an exposition of the thematic structure of the play, for it is only in its relation to the developed themes of the play that we can make sense of what we see as being the death of the Duchess of Malfi at all. The identity of the death of a fictional character is given not by temporal, special, and physical co-ordinates, but by the co-ordinates of the text. Our response to the death is part, then, of our response to the thematic structure of the play, and hence to the conception of life expressed by it. We are moved, if you like, by the thought that men can be placed in situations in which the pursuit of what they perceive to be good brings destruction on both themselves and the ones they love, and that nevertheless this can be faced with a dignity which does not betray the nature of those relationships for which they perish; that a man may, in fact, lose 'everything and nothing'". (Weston p. 90)

It is clear that Weston's strategy for resolving the paradox is to deny its first premise (i.e. "We have emotions concerning the situations of fictional characters"). What, exactly, then, are the objects of our emotions, if they are not the fictional characters? Weston seems to offer two possibilities. On the one hand, he seems to be

saying that we react to the "thematic structure" of the fictional work. But it is not clear

that this line of reasoning gets us out of the paradox of fictional emotions, because the

thematic structure of the fictional work is generally based on, and tightly connected to,

the situations of the fictional characters. For example if "suffering as the result of

pursuing the good" is an aspect of the thematic structure of *The Duchesse of Malfi*, it is

such an aspect only insofar as the fictional characters are seen as suffering as the result of

pursuing the good. If none of the characters ever suffered and/or pursued the good, then

"suffering as the result of pursuing the good" would not be an aspect of the story's

thematic structure. Thus, we should ask, if we extract the "fictionality" out of the work,

what else about the work can be the object of our emotions? Certainly, neither the pages,

nor the ink on the pages, are themselves the objects of our fictional emotions. To what

degree, then, does anything emotionally stimulating remain once the fictionality is

removed from the work[3]? To a large extent, the thematic structure itself is an aspect of

the work's fictionality, and so claiming that we emote toward the thematic structure

(instead of toward the characters) of a fiction does not seem to fundamentally resolve the

problem. If Weston's claim is that we emote *only* toward the thematic structure of the

work and not toward the fictional aspects of it, then more should to be said in support of

this claim, as it does not seem intuitively plausible. If his claim is that we have emotional

reactions toward both the thematic structure of the work, in addition to our emotional

reactions to the characters themselves, then I agree with him; however, if this is the case,

he leaves unresolved the paradox of fictional emotions.

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[3] A work's formal features (the cadences of a soundtrack, for example) can be said to remain even if that work's thematic features are ignored. However, on the one hand, the formal features of a work are more apt to produce moods than emotions; on the other hand, simply recognizing that we do emotionally react to the formal features of works would not account for the fact that we are also moved by the fictional elements of works as well.

The second thing that Weston seems to be saying is that our apparent reaction to fictional works is in fact a reaction to the patterns of experience that can or do occur in our own lives. We are moved by good fictional works because they lead to our having deeper and richer conceptions of life: our awareness of the various underlying patterns of human experience (or possible experience) is increased when we reflect on the patterns of experience which are emphasized and brought to the forefront by the thematic features of the fictional work as a whole. Under this view, fiction turns out to be an epistemic tool for understanding our own non-fictional worlds; and it is only the real world, and our experience of it, that are the true objects of our emotions.

There is certainly some truth to be found in this line of reasoning. Certainly, we are moved by fiction's way of making us aware of our own real-life modes of experience: a character such as Jean-Baptiste Clamence (of Camus's *The Fall*) might cause us to hate ourselves (or, alternatively, our hating Clamence might really be just an instance of us hating ourselves). However, the question should be asked, is our reacting to fiction's way of making us aware of real-life modes of experience the *only* way we react in response to fiction? Clearly not. When, for example, I watch *Alien* and see how Ripley is threatened by the hideous space monster, I am not afraid because I believe there are people who are being chased around on a spaceship by a murderous creature with acidic blood. Nor, on a deeper level, am I particularly afraid because Ripley's situation makes me fear for the relatively defenseless humans in the world who are being threatened by other murderous *humans*. Rather, it seems, I have simply come to care about the fictional character of Ripley and fear that *she* may be killed. Thus, it seems that Weston's attempt to deny the first premise of the paradox is not, in the end, successful. For while we are moved by the

conceptions of life which fiction makes available to us, we are also quite simply moved

by fictional characters and the situations they face. Indeed, it seems that a fiction that

moves us to have deeper and richer conceptions and emotional responses to our own lives

does so *by* getting us to become emotionally engaged with the fictional characters

themselves.

   The third attempted resolution to the paradox which I will discuss was given by

Alex Neill. His strategy is to deny the third premise of the paradox (i.e. "We do not

believe the propositions that describe the situations of fictional characters".) He states his

solution to the paradox in the following way:

> "Thus while it is not true that Winnie had a miserable time, what *is* true is
> that it is *fictional* that she did; while we cannot (coherently) believe that Winnie
> had a miserable time, then, we *can* coherently believe that it is *fictional* that she
> did. And we can believe this without being committed to the belief that Winnie
> ever existed.
>   Now if something like this is right, then a simple solution to the problem
> concerning our affective responses to what we know to be fictional suggests itself.
> For if those of our affective responses that seem to have fictional characters and
> events as objects *are* grounded on beliefs – beliefs about what is fictionally the
> case – then perhaps they *do* after all respect the constraints imposed by the
> cognitive theory of emotion, and hence *do* constitute emotions 'proper'."
> ("Fiction and the Emotions" p. 2.)

   Thus, according to Neill's position, while I do not believe that Anna Karenina

threw herself under the train wheels, I do (coherently) believe that it is *fictional* that she

did so. And this belief is at the heart of the pity I feel in reading *Anna Karenina*.

   The problem with this becomes more apparent when we try to elucidate what it

means to say "S believes it is fictional that X". It is generally the case that when S

believes X to be fictional, S does not believe that X really exists or occurs. But if this is

the case, we are still left with the question of why in the world S would have any

emotions toward X? Why would my belief that it is fictional that Anna Karenina threw

herself under a train cause me to feel sadness? The problem with Neill's account is not

that it is logically inconsistent. Rather, it's just that his proposed resolution to the

paradox is not very satisfying, in the same way that "The person who keyed your car" is

not a very satisfying answer to the question "who is responsible for my car's getting

keyed?!" Neill's solution is unsatisfying precisely because it does not explain how we

could be (apparently, at least) moved by something we know to be fiction. Indeed, it is

this question which underlies the paradox of fictional emotions: it seems that if we could

answer this question, then we would understand how to resolve the paradox. And vice

versa, an acceptably justified resolution to the paradox seems to require an answer to the

question of how we are (apparently, at least) moved by something we know to be

fictional. Neill's attempted solution (i.e. that we are moved by the belief that X is

fictional) ends up being more of a reformulation of the problem than a solution to it.

The fourth attempted resolution to the paradox which I will discuss, that of

Kendall Walton, is also the most famous. Walton's line of argument can be formulated

as such: the last two premises of the paradox are obviously true, so the first premise must

be false. In writing of Charles, who becomes "afraid" in watching a horror movie about a

terrible green slime, Walton argues that:

> "We do indeed get 'caught up' in stories; we often become 'emotionally involved' when we read novels or watch plays or films. But to construe this involvement as consisting of our having psychological attitudes toward fictional entities is, I think, to tolerate mystery and court confusion […] Charles's state is crucially different from that of a person with an ordinary case of fear. The fact that Charles is fully aware that the slime is fictional is, I think, good reason to deny that what he feels is fear. It seems a principle of common sense, one which ought not to be abandoned if there is any reasonable alternative, that fear must be accompanied by, or must involve, a belief that one is in danger. Charles does not believe that he is in danger; so he is not afraid." (Walton, "Fearing Fictions" p. 6-7.)

If we do not have genuine emotions concerning the situations of fictional characters, what is going on? According to Walton, when we engage with representational art, we are using the artwork as a prop in a game of make-believe. When Charles goes to the cinema and apparently fears the green slime which is destroying the city, it is not the case that he sees and fears a green slime monster that is make-believedly destroying a city. Nor does he see and fear a make-believe green slime monster that is destroying a make-believe city. Rather, it is make-believe that he sees and fears a green slime monster that is destroying a city. Charles does not believe there is a monster, so he cannot experience genuine fear of it; but he does make-believe there is a monster, and this leads to quasi-fear sensations (e.g. those which accompany goose bumps, a racing heart, and tightened muscles). His own sensations enter in as props in the game of make-believe: he make-believes that his sensations are ones of fear, and that they are directed at the slime monster:

> "Charles's act of imagining himself afraid of the slime is hardly a deliberate or reflective act. It is triggered more or less automatically by his awareness of his quasi-fear sensations. He is simply disposed to think of himself as fearing the slime, without deciding to do so, when during the movie he feels his heart racing, his muscles tensed, and so forth. It is just such a disposition as this, we recall, that goes with implicit recognition of a principle of make-believe." (p. 16)

Walton's account is appealing in that, in its attempt to explain how we react to fictional works, it brings the imagination to the forefront. The *prima facie* cause of concern with respect to his account, however, is that its conclusion, that we do not feel genuine emotions in response to fiction, seems by intuition to be completely wrong. If we were to ask a person who is crying while reading *Anna Karenina* whether she *really*

felt pity for Anna or whether she was only *make-believedly* doing so, she would certainly claim that her pity was real.

Introspection, however, may not be completely reliable here, and so it will be better to offer a different response to Walton's account. In the name of functional parsimony, we may ask what reason there is to believe that we undergo mental processes in which we experience "quasi-emotions" by using ourselves as props in games of make-believe when we engage with fictional works? A theory would be more streamlined, *ceteris paribus*, if it could explain our propositionally-based affective reactions as being more directly caused by fictional works, without our needing to "autoprop" ourselves in order for us to experience these affections.

Why does Walton claim that we use ourselves as props when engaging with fiction? To a large degree, it seems as if Walton's theory is an *ad hoc* one, based not so much on observation, but rather on the need to find a way to resolve the paradox. And, it must be said that if Walton's theory is true, then it does apparently succeed in solving the problem of fictional emotions. However, aside from its ability to resolve the paradox, what evidence, we should ask, can be given to support the claim that there are quasi-emotions at all?

Perhaps the fact that Charles doesn't run out of the theater, alert the authorities, warn his family, etc. when he "sees" the slime approaching is sufficient evidence to support the claim that he doesn't *really* fear the slime, because if he were *really* afraid of it, then these are surely things he would do. If a *real* green slime came crashing through the movie screen and started eating people, and Charles *believed* that this is what was going on, his reaction would be different. In such a case, if he wasn't paralyzed by fear,

then he would run out of the theater and warn the authorities. However, the question remains, how would this more extreme reaction show that Charles's affective response to the fictional slime isn't also one of fear? Certainly, he would be *more* afraid of the real slime, but that in itself does not show that he does not also experience fear (though, perhaps to a lesser degree) in response to the fictional slime. In fact, some of our emotional reactions to fiction seem to be more intense than our emotional reactions to corresponding realities. I believe that people have thrown themselves under the wheels of trains before, but this belief does not move me as much as does the fictional account of Anna Karenina. Yet this fact does not show that my pity for Anna is real pity, whereas the less-intense pity I for the "real Annas of the world" is only quasi-pity.

We should, of course, address Walton's original argument for the existence of quasi-emotions: "The fact that Charles is fully aware that the slime is fictional is, I think, good reason to deny that what he feels is fear." However, what reason is there to accept this line of reasoning rather than the following one: "The fact that Charles is fully aware that the slime is fictional is, I think, good reason to deny that belief is a necessary condition for genuine emotion"? Walton progresses by starting out with the resolute assumption that the final two premises of the paradox were true, and thus that the first one must be false. However, the problem of the paradox is that all three premises seem prima facie plausible, and so an "argument by elimination" will not work. The falsity of the incorrect premise must be demonstrated on independent grounds, and Walton fails to do this.

The final attempted solution to the paradox which I will discuss was given by Jerrold Levinson. Levinson basically agrees with Walton's account, but adds that real

emotions *can* enter in to the experience of fiction; however, according to Levinson, the

"non-quasi-emotional" aspects of our fictional emotions have as their objects our own

prior experience:

> "I suggest, first that these are real emotions which we have previously experienced toward real objects in our lives, which are in some measure tapped into and reactivated, by those aspects of the story and characters that resonate with them. These fuel and partly underwrite our developing make-believe relations to the characters on a conscious level, giving them an intensity they could not or would not otherwise have. There is a kind of "leakage" between the two levels – that of imaginative connection with the characters and that of half-remembered, dimly focused recollections of stored life experiences – so that, although we don't, while we are in possession of our wits, end up actually pitying or grieving for Desdemona, whom we know does not exist, at a performance of *Othello* (Or *Otello*), the make-believe pity or grief we explicitly direct on her is very likely potentiated by a simultaneously awakened pity or grief from some past frame of mind. And in somewhat subterranean fashion, this latter tends to fuse with and permeates the former.
> But second, it may in addition be the case that one's make-believe emotion for a character is also paralleled and potentiated by a real emotion, not for a fictional individual, nor for half-remembered individuals of your own real-life experience, but for a kind or sort of thing that exists full well in reality and is exemplified by the fictional individual of the story. Thus, a novel, movie or play may end up evoking my sadness at the death of children, my pity for starving people, my anger at racial prejudice, my contempt for politicians, etc. […]
> Recognizing these two sources of real-life emotion underlying, or shadowing, our emotional involvement with fictional characters, may help reconcile us to the fact that our emotions for them as such remain, at base, make-believe." (Levinson, "The Place of Real Emotion in Response to Fictions", pp. 79-80.)

Again, there is certainly something to the claim the memories of our real-life

experiences often get subtly mixed in with the cognitions we form while becoming

engaged with fictional works, and that the emotions we experience while we do so often

draw upon our own memories. I may get upset in watching *101 Dalmatians*, for

example, because Cruella De Vil reminds me of an ex, and thinking of my ex makes me

angry. However, this does not show that we do not experience genuine emotions toward

the fictional characters themselves. To illustrate this point, my brother once chastised me

for sending my four year old niece a copy of "Dot and the Kangaroo", a cartoon in which a little girl named Dot wanders away from home, finds herself lost in the Australian outback, and gets adopted by and emotionally attached to a Kangaroo who had lost her own joey. At the end of the film, Kangaroo delivers Dot back to her home, explains that they will never see each other again, and then hops away with tears in her eyes, listening to the mournful, mournful cries of the little girl: "KANGAROO!!! KANGAROO!!!"

In experiencing such an un-Disney conclusion to the narrative, my niece was devastated. But how, according to Levinson's theory, could this be? She had never been abandoned; no one ever even jokingly threatened to leave her. Nor had she ever experienced any significant loss of any kind: she had never known any pets, friends or family members to die. It seemed, therefore, that she had been devastated by watching the film because she had come to have, for the first time, an understanding of what it is like to lose an object of one's affection. The feelings of loss were painfully learned, rather than painfully remembered, as Levinson would have it. My niece's sadness seemed to arise from her ability empathize with the cartoon girl who was terribly saddened by the Kangaroo's departure at the end of the film; it seemed almost as if, from my niece's point of view, the Kangaroo was leaving *her*. She was sad because the Kangaroo left. All this goes to show that there is apparently more to our reactions to fiction than memory and pretension.

8. Carroll's "Thought Theory"

All of the previous attempts to resolve the paradox have accepted the truth of belief cognitivism. Not everyone takes this route, however. Noel Carroll, most notably, has put forth an alternative theory to explain the nature of our emotional interaction with

fiction. Central to his "thought theory" of fictional emotions lies the premise that "actual emotion can be generated by entertaining the thought of something horrible. (Thought here is a term of art that is meant to contrast with belief. To have a belief is to entertain a proposition assertively; to have a thought is to entertain it nonassertively. Both beliefs and thoughts have propositional content. But with thoughts the content is merely entertained without commitment to its being the case; to have a belief is to be committed [to] the truth of the proposition.)" (Carroll, The Philosophy of Horror p. 80). As such, we are not moved by fictional characters, per se, but rather by the *content of the thoughts* we have about them. Thus, while reading *Dracula,* we do not fear Dracula; rather, we fear the *idea* of him:

> "The name 'Dracula' refers to its sense, the congeries of properties attributed to the vampire in the novel. As we reflect on what we read, we reflect on the attributed properties of the monster, which combination of properties is recognized to be impure and fearsome, resulting in the response of art-horror. Since we are horrified by thought contents, we do not believe that we are in danger, and do not take any measures to protect ourselves. We are not pretending to be horrified; we are genuinely horrified, but by the thought of Dracula rather than by our conviction that we are his next victim." (Carroll 86).

Many philosophers have rejected Carroll's account on the grounds that it sounds strange to say that we fear our own thoughts. Levinson, for example, writes, "that we really have emotions […] for thought-complexes associated with characters […] seems implausible and an 'explanation' born of desperation." (p. 79, 1990.), and Deigh writes "Anyone who is afraid of a proposition needs to have his head examined." (p. 846).

 In spite of these jabs, I nevertheless believe that Carroll's account is on the right track. If his theory suffers from shortcomings, it is that it does not say enough. In order to make the account more acceptable, it needs to explain in greater detail how it is that we come to be moved by the contents of our thoughts, when we know that these contents do

not correspond with reality. In what follows I wish to expand upon Carroll's account; in doing so, I believe that the attacks made by Levinson and Deigh will lose their poignancy.

9. Beliefs and Imaginings

I wish to propose, in a line similar to that of Walton, that our cognitive relationship to the content of what we know to be fictional works is one of imagination, rather than belief. We can hold *beliefs* about things such as who created the text through which the fiction is transmitted, when the text was created, and what materials were used in its creation. However, we can only *imagine* the characters and events that the text represents when we believe they are fictional. In reading *The Odyssey*, for example, I imagine that there was once a wily warrior named Odysseus who fought in the Trojan War, *though I do not know if there ever was a real-life Odysseus or a Trojan War.* I imagine that there were gods who were more or less like normal people except that they were immortal and had super-powers, *even though I do not believe that such gods ever really existed.* I imagine that Ithaca was a Greek island, *and I also believe that Ithaca was a Greek island at the time when the epic was written.* I also imagine that Odysseus is unaware of the existence of the continents to which I refer as North and South America, but I nevertheless imagine they were present on the other side Odysseus's world, *even though I believe that Homer was also ignorant of their existence.* Do I imagine that George W. Bush would take office thirty-two hundred years after Odysseus returns home? I could, but why ruin a good story?

The point to these examples is to show that the things we imagine about a fictional world sometimes correspond to the beliefs we have about the real (past or

present) world and sometimes they don't. However, the beliefs we have (i.e. the instances of our believing things) about the real world often influence the "imaginings" we have (i.e. the instances of our imagining things) about the fictional world. And it's a good thing, too, because otherwise the work of fiction would have to be intolerably large in order to provide us with all the "fictional facts" that need be imagined in order for us to formulate a coherent story (e.g. "Odysseus had an elbow, and so he was easily able to unsheathe his sword."). The text as such is an incomplete recipe for how to imagine characters, things and events.

On the other hand, the beliefs we have about the real world can also limit the degree to which we will accept the characters and events in a fiction as imaginable. Such "imaginative resistance" can be exploited by fictional creators to bring about various responses in the audience. The prolonged battle scene between King Arthur and the Black Knight in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* seems so unrealistic to us that we can't help but laugh (and, of course, this is what Monty Python intended). Or a filmmaker could cast an African American man with dreadlocks as being the CEO of a fortune 500 company in order to make us question why we would resist imagining this actor as a CEO.

It seems to me that my concept of the "imagination" is similar to Carroll's concept of "thought". As we have seen, he wrote: "To have a belief is to entertain a proposition assertively; to have a thought is to entertain it nonassertively. Both beliefs and thoughts have propositional content. But with thoughts the content is merely entertained without commitment to its being the case; to have a belief is to be committed [to] the truth of the proposition." It seems to me, however, that Carroll is mistaken to say

that we are simply entertaining propositions in a nonassertive manner when we think about fictions, for two reasons. The first is that we can see the fiction as making assertions about the real world (such as, for example, when it offers a moral). In general, the assertions a fiction makes about the real world do not correspond point by point to the events in the fiction, but they might. A conspiracy theorist filmmaker might portray the assassination of JFK in such a way as to present a theory about who was behind the actual one. However, the audience of such a work would not believe that they were really witnessing the assassination of JFK while watching the film: they might come to believe "The CIA was responsible for JFK's being assassinated", but they will not come to believe "The CIA was responsible for JFK's being assassinated right in front of me five minutes ago."

The second is that even fictional propositions have normative force: certain propositions "are to be imagined"[4]. In reading *The Odyssey*, for example, *it is to be imagined* that Odysseus returns home to Penelope. The presence of this normativity leads people to say such things as "I believe that [or "It is true that"], *in the story*,

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[4] It will not be possible in the present discussion to give a comprehensive theory which accounts for all the various sources of fictional normativity (i.e. why some propositions "are to be imagined" whereas others "are not to be imagined") The easy answer to the question, "why is it to be imagined that Odysseus returns home to Penelope?" is this: because that's what the text instructs us to imagine when it says, for example: "Then the old woman went up to the upper chamber, laughing aloud, to tell her mistress that her dear husband was in the house." (Homer p. 385). But the more difficult question is "how is it that the text instructs us to imagine that?" Let it suffice for our present purposes to say that when we learned to read fiction, we were taught by our teachers to react to the text as if it were a set of instructions for imagining. We saw, for example, a book containing ink arranged in this manner: "Little Red Riding Hood went to visit her grandmother" and the teacher asked us if, in the story, Little Red Riding Hood went to visit her grandmother. If we responded "no", we were corrected and perhaps punished in some way. Conversely, we were rewarded (both by good grades and by the intrinsic pleasure that came with following the story) by our coming to react to the ink patterns as being signs which tell us to imagine Little Red Riding Hood as having gone to visit her grandmother. These punishments and rewards instilled patterns of desire/behavior that continue to operate in us as we engage with works of fiction at an older age. This, then, is one source for the normativity of fictional propositions, but it is surely not the only one, and, for present purposes, I can only leave the inquiry open for future investigation.

Odysseus returns home to Penelope." Three meaningful interpretations could be made from the shorter claim "I believe that Odysseus returned home to Penelope." The first way to interpret it would be to take it as a statement about the real world, i.e. "I believe that there really was an Odysseus and a Penelope, such that Odysseus returned home to Penelope." The second way to interpret it would be to take it as a statement of what one imagines: "(I believe that) I imagine Odysseus to have returned home to Penelope." And the third way is to take it as a statement about what should be imagined: "I believe that Odysseus *is to be imagined* as having returned home to Penelope." In none of these cases, then, is the object of the belief a *fictional* object, and, as such, none of them are centrally relevant to the paradox of fictional emotions.

As we have just seen, propositions at the heart of beliefs and fictional imaginings can each have assertoric normative force. However, given our original strategy for distinguishing beliefs from imaginings by taking epistemic commitment into consideration, what, we should ask, separates the assertoric force of beliefs from the assertoric force of fictional imaginings? The answer to this is that there is a difference of normative range between the two types of cognitions. Whereas a belief generally asserts facts about the way the "real" world is, a fictional imagining makes an assertion about the way a character, object, or story is, or should be, construed. The normative range of belief generally covers the real world, whereas the normative range of fictional imagination is limited to the world "in the fiction". For this reason, it can be said that in reading *The Odyssey*, I am correct in imagining Odysseus tricking the cyclopes, but I am not correct in believing he did.

10. Kinds of Doxastic-Based Emotional Engagement with Fictional Works

Our cognitive engagement with fictional works is a mixture of both imaginings and beliefs. Here are four possible ways that we can cognitively react to a fictional text: 1) We can have imaginings of the particular characters, things and events of the story. 2) We can have beliefs about the formal and historical features of the text. 3) We can have beliefs about how our imaginings prompted by the fictional work relate to the real world. 4) And finally, our imaginings can prompt us to formulate beliefs about the real world. Thus, in watching *Jaws*, 1) we imagine a killer shark swimming around eating people. 2) We may believe that the movie was based on a book. 3) We may believe that the fictional events of the story will be bad for Florida's tourism industry. And finally, 4) we may formulate the belief that real sharks are vicious killing machines, all the while knowing that the shark used in making the film was simply a machine.

All four of these types of cognitions can be at the heart of emotions, but the last three types are not directly problematic with respect to the paradox of fictional emotions. To illustrate 2) how emotions can arise from beliefs about formal or historical aspects of the fictional work, in the case of *Jaws*, one might believe that the cast of the movie consisted almost entirely of Caucasians, and so one might become angry at Steven Spielberg for not doing a better job of promoting ethnic diversity. We can also be angry at him for giving the film text the various formal qualities that it has, such that, as a stimulant, the work ends up being an ineffective drug. We might be displeased with him for creating, starting with *Jaws*, the predominance of the modern-day "blockbuster", i.e. a film that entertains people but does not otherwise offer them any tools for leading more fulfilling lives. We can critique him for creating the film text in such a way that those

who are stimulated by it are more likely to end up seeing sharks as dangerous, evil creatures that should be eliminated.

In cases such as these, the emotional responses are based on genuine beliefs which are directed toward the text itself or toward those responsible for the creation of the text. Therefore, these emotions are not centrally relevant to the paradox; however, they are often nonetheless dependent upon our capacity to become engaged with fictional objects. Often, in order to critique the creators of the text or the text itself, one has to be able to see the text as being, say, a shark swimming around and eating people, instead of merely being changing light patterns on a screen accompanied by various sound patterns emanating from the theater speakers. As such, becoming engaged with fictions is often a causal pre-requisite for having emotional responses for the text or for its creators; however, because the objects of these emotions are in the real world, there is nothing particularly paradoxical about them.

To illustrate 3) how emotions can arise from beliefs about how our experience of the fictional work relates to the real world, one may believe that *Jaws* will have a negative effect on the tourism industry in Florida. As such, one may feel pity for those in Florida who depend for their livelihood on tourism, and who will suffer as a result of the widespread fear of sharks. As another example of how we can form emotions based on beliefs about the relationship between the fictional work and the real world, one may recall the media sensation that resulted in late 1992 from DC Comics' decision to kill off the character of Superman, supposedly forever. In reaction to this event, Herbert London, a humanities professor at NYU, wrote:

> "The man of steel, the one who routinely saved the planet from the ravages of evil invaders, is dead. Superman is gone. Future generations will grow

up not knowing "It's a bird, it's a plane . . . it's Superman!" Last November, Superman was killed by Doomsday, a villainous escapee from a cosmic insane asylum. […]Superman died, not because, as the *New York Times* alleges, Hollywood created a lumbering and exhausted facsimile; he died because the country doesn't admire superheroes. After years in which heroes have been derided and mocked, when physical strength has been subordinated to sensitivity – the highest virtue in the new age – it is understandable that Superman must go. His assets were inconsistent with an era of moral ambiguity and androgynous sexual leanings. […] Telephone booths don't exist for Clark Kent's wardrobe change. The skies over most urban centers are filled with aircraft circling to land; Superman would be a hazard to air traffic. Clark's interest in Lois Lane would most likely be interpreted as sexual harassment. Superman didn't suffer from *angst*; he went about his business of rounding up the bad guys without any concession to the *Miranda* decision. Superman as hero doesn't fit with the antiheroes of this age. Now we seek figures who are tortured by psychological ambivalence. We expect failure and occasional apostasy; people of deep conviction, unwavering in their belief and successful to boot, are virtually unrecognizable in the present cultural environment. […] Superman was indeed a figure towering above the others, a hero to emulate. Like the heroes of yesteryear he is gone, and with his interment go popular heroism and sacrifice for the public good. Superman will be missed, but the virtue he embodied will be missed even more." ("The Death of Superman." *First Things* 31 (March 1993), 11-12.)

It is pretty clear in this instance that the object of Herbert London's bitterness is not Doomsday, or even the writers at DC Comics. Rather, on the one hand, he seems to be disenchanted with the general state of the world today. (Perhaps his diatribe could be reformulated in the following way "You, modern society, have somehow gone awry. You are responsible for there no longer being a market for a character like Superman. You are responsible for his death!") On the other hand, it is also conceivable that London was upset by the mere fact that *he* would no longer get to read any new Superman stories.

All of the aforementioned reactions are related to the general psychological question of how we relate to fictional works. However, frustration that the world is no longer able to appreciate a particular character archetype and disappointment that one will cease encountering new works of fiction are not themselves central to the problem of

emotional responses to fiction. In this instance, emotional responses relevant to the paradox would likely be expressed with utterances such as "Poor Superman, how sad to see you go after all the memories I have of you. Who, now, will take care of Lois Lane? Who will protect the world from Lex Luther? Certainly not that wimp Jimmy Olsen."

Finally, to illustrate 4) how we can have emotions based on beliefs about the real world that arise as the result of our engaging with fiction, one can take as an example, those who came to believe that sharks are extremely dangerous to humans, based on what they saw in *Jaws*. Such people are likely to be afraid when swimming in the ocean, but even though the experience of the fictional shark is responsible for their fear, their fear while swimming in the ocean is not *of* the fictional shark. Rather, it is of *real* sharks, and so this fear is not itself paradoxical, even though it arises as the result of a paradoxical fear (that of the fictional shark in the film).

11. How We Come to be Moved by Imaginings

It seems then, that the paradox of fictional emotions is limited to the first type of cognitive reaction discussed at the beginning of section 10, that is, those cognitive reactions in which the emotion has at its core an imagining. The question I now wish to answer is how it is that we come to be moved by imaginings.

Central to my account is the premise that imaginings can serve as the cognitive fuel of emotions. To support this claim, in addition to the evidence of our reactions to "artistic" fictional works (e.g. films, novels and plays), there is also the evidence of other imagination-based emotions, such as when a prisoner experiences strong feelings of longing while imagining how great it would be to take his wife and children to Disneyworld, or the fear that develops in a father as he imagines his teenage daughter

getting pregnant. To offer another example, a friend of mine is terrified of squirrels because, as a child, she was led to believe that when squirrels bit people, they wouldn't let go until their heads were chopped off. She says now that she knows this isn't true, but the image in her mind of the indelible squirrel still makes her afraid of them: her fashion of imagining the squirrels brings about her fear.

These examples go to show that there are imagination-based emotions which do exist outside the boundaries of what I have been referring to as "fictional emotions". However, to limit my focus in this thesis, further discussion will concentrate on our reaction to the stimuli provided by fictional narratives. How is it, then, that we are able to be moved by them?

I wish to argue that our fictional emotions arise as the result of our being "hypnotized" by the work of fiction. In saying "hypnotized by the work of fiction", I mean to say that the text stimulates us in such a way that our minds become so engrossed in imagining (fictional) characters, things and events that beliefs about their existence do not find a prominent place in our thoughts[5]. As such, fictional narratives stimulate our thoughts in such a way that judgments about whether or not fictional characters really do

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[5] I do not wish to argue here for the claim that one's being "hypnotized" by an engaging work of fiction is the same, or at least a very similar, psychological reaction to one's being hypnotized by a psychologist. However, such a view might be seen as being supported by clinical evidence : "The work of Josephine Hilgard (1970) on the relationship between hypnotic susceptibility and imaginative involvement could provide a basis for such an enterprise. Hilgard found, as a result of interviews with several hundred university students, that those students who responded well to traditional hypnotic procedures (i.e. 'highly susceptibles') were also disposed towards deep emotional and imaginative involvements in reading novels, drama, listening to music, watching films and the like. […] An alternative empirical approach to the problem is exemplified in a study by Fellows and Armstrong (1977). Two groups of subjects, one group scoring high on tests of hypnotic susceptibility and one scoring low, were asked to read a short story in the laboratory and then to rate their experiences on a number of seven-point scales (e.g. degree of absorption, pleasure, identification with characters, vividness of imagery, emotional involvement, awareness of external events). Subjects were also asked to rate their usual experiences when reading imaginative literature. […] The findings in general confirmed Hilgard's work. The highly hypnotizable subjects become more involved in the story and rated their usual involvements higher than the lowly hypnotizable subjects." (Fellows in Naish p. 42.)

exist do not readily reach the level of occurrent thought. Rather, the bulk of our cognition is directed toward the plot of the story: when we are engrossed by a fictional narrative (*Jaws*, for example), our conscious minds are occupied by imaginings whose propositional content is, for example, "if the girl doesn't swim faster, she will be eaten by the shark" rather than beliefs such as "there isn't *really* a shark." It's not that we believe that the shark is real; it's just that our minds don't focus much doxastic energy on the *real* ontological status of the shark. This is, I believe, what is meant by "the suspension of disbelief": what is suspended is our belief that the characters, things and events are not real, but our doing so does not commit us to believing that they *are* real.

Of course, we may remind ourselves to varying degrees that our experience is of a fictional narrative: thoughts such as "what great/lousy special effects", "what a terrible actor!", "the sound track does not sync up with the film", "I shouldn't have consumed that 44 oz soda before the movie started", and "I wish that the woman sitting in front of me would take off her fruit-basket hat" all have the effect of bringing us out of our state of fictional hypnosis and back into a state of consciousness in which beliefs such as "I am watching a movie" become occurrent[6]. As such, the narratives which lead us to have the strongest emotional reactions *toward fictional objects* are generally those which succeed the best in hypnotizing us. That is to say, we generally emote the most *toward fictional objects* when the vast majority of our conscious thought takes the modality of

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[6] This explains the apparent truth behind La Bruyère's seventeenth century maxim: "The pleasure of criticism takes away from us the pleasure of being intensely moved by truly beautiful things." (p. 85). In criticizing a fictional work, especially when subscribing to the norms of modernism, one's mind is often focused on the object of its experience *as being a fictional work*. In watching a play, for example, a critic's mind may be focused more on the formal features of the play (e.g. noting that the play did not strictly follow the classical rule of always keeping at least one character on stage between two scenes, so as to provide a connection between them) rather than on the plight of its main characters (e.g. Juliet is being forced to marry Paris, despite her love of Romeo).

imagination, rather than the modality of belief. This is why it is taken as a compliment of a fictional work to say that one became "completely engrossed in it".

This is not to say that beliefs stand in the *way* of our having emotions in response to fiction. Often, quite the contrary is true: for example, holding the belief that the Holocaust really did occur will make seeing a fictional Holocaust movie all the more poignant. However, insofar as one's cognitive energy moves away from imagining the situations of the fictional characters and moves toward the beliefs about the situations of real Holocaust victims, the more one's emotions will be directed at the real Holocaust victims and the less they will be directed at the fictional victims.

12. Active vs. Passive Imagination

There are varying degrees to which we are passive or active with respect to our imaginings. On the passive side of the imaginative spectrum is the kind of reaction we have when we watch films and theatrical productions in which "everything is spelled out for us." As Roger Ebert wrote, "In the vast majority of movies, everything is done for the audience. We are cued to laugh or cry, be frightened or relieved; Hitchcock called the movies a machine for causing emotions in the audience." (Ebert 3/19/2004) In reacting to such works of fiction, very little interpretation is required on the part of the audience. The story is something that more or less happens *to* the viewer; the sense data created by the fictional text ends up (more or less) directly bringing about the imaginative state of the "participant" in all of its vivid detail. Such films are often slammed by critics because they "leave nothing to the imagination." In saying this, the critics mean to say that the film does not prompt creative thinking on the audience's part.

However, reactions to these films are still based on the imagination, in that sensory images are sewn together in our minds in such a way that propositional content about various characters, things and events occurs, and yet we do not believe that the direct cause of this content corresponds to the nature of the content itself.

In taking a step toward the "active" side of the imaginative spectrum, we find films (such as "Memento") and theatrical productions (such as "Waiting for Godot") which leave more to our creative powers, in that the fictional events (and/or their causes) are not completely spelled out for us by the fictional text. In such instances, while we may not have much of a choice in imagining how a character looks, we may, for example, have the choice of imagining what he ends up doing at the end of the story. A step further leads us to realist novels, in which the text instructs us with words on how to create in one's own mind the detailed sensory images that are to be imagined. Such descriptions may lead to vivid imaginings which are associatively richer than those which occur in film (i.e. a character might be described as having the grace of Willie Mays as he catches a Faberge egg as it rolls off the mantel. Such associations are difficult to bring about via film.) However, despite the best efforts of many 19th century writers, even "realistic" novels leave a lot more qualitative detail to be filled in by the mind of the audience than would a film based on that same novel. A further step in the direction of the "active" takes us to less descriptive novels, in which the sensory images are left more to the reader's discretion [in *The Princess of Clèves*, for example, Madame de Lafayette describes the princess as being extraordinarily beautiful; however, no concrete information about her appearance is given aside from this: "The whiteness of her complexion and her blond hair gave her a brilliance which could not be seen but in her;

all of her features were even, and her face and her body were full of grace and charm."

(p. 77.)] On the most active side of the imaginative spectrum is the thought that occurs in

the creator of a story, in which the characters, things and events are prompted by a pure

act of volition (to the largest degree that that is possible) rather than being prompted to

imagine them by an exterior stimulus.

The further toward the "passive imagination" side of the spectrum one is, the

more the work of fiction functions as an "experience machine". However, the degree to

which we have creative control over the content of our imaginings does not, it seems to

me, change the mechanism according to which we react emotionally to it. We react to

the content of our imaginings, regardless of how those imaginings come about.

13. The Role of Empathy

The question that now arises is why we should (sometimes) come to have

emotional reactions towards characters that we vividly imagine (i.e. characters that we

imagine in a very clear and detailed fashion when we are unhindered by "real-world"

distractions). The answer to this question is also, to a large degree, the answer to the

question of why we come to have emotional reactions towards other real life people and

animals: *it is just a brute biological fact about us that we are (to varying degrees)*

empathetic creatures. (Many of us often) feel bad for the squirrel we run over, or for the

condemned man of whom we see video footage as he is being led to the electric chair.

We ourselves are put into a more playful mood as we watch a dog joyfully catching a

Frisbee in the park. We feel the weight of other people's economic debt and we

experience positive karma while being in the presence of two people who love, respect

and joke around with each other. That we should have this capacity is no surprise, given

our mammalian evolutionary history: those of our forefathers who lacked empathy had less of a chance, *ceteris paribus*, of forming bonds with others. Those who didn't form bonds with others lacked the survival/procreational advantages of those who were "team players", and so, over time, the "empathetic genes" won out.

It seems, further, that our capacity to empathize with others is, *ceteris paribus*, directly proportional to how familiar we are with them (see LeDoux 58). We have a greater *sense of familiarity* to seals than we do to sharks, and so we root for the seal to get away from the shark, rather than root for the shark to get a meal. Because we have a greater sense of familiarity with our own dog than we do with a dog we have never seen before, we generally feel worse when we ran over our own dog than when we run over a stray. Our sense of familiarity with others generally increases with spatial and genetic proximity [hence the Arab maxim "My brother and I against our cousin. My cousin and I against the stranger." (Ruse 111)], as well as with time spent together. Hence soldiers are said to be generally motivated to fight, not for political ideals, but for their fellow soldiers with whom they have been fighting side by side for months on end. Even kidnap victims often develop strong emotional bonds with their kidnappers after having spent a considerable amount of pressure-filled, emotionally charged time with them (Elizabeth Smart, for example, initially lied to the police in order to protect her former kidnappers after they were finally apprehended).

This natural impulse we have to connect with others doesn't shut off when we become engaged with fiction. In terms of epistemic commitment, imagination is a lower-octane cognition than belief, but empathy is still able to run off it. In fact, our functionalistic drive to connect with others is probably, to a large degree, what pushes us

to become engaged with fictional characters in the first place (having "imaginary friends" isn't something we outgrow as we leave childhood). Thus, by the same empathetic mechanisms in us that lead to our feeling sorry for the starving children we see on television, we come to feel sorry for the Anna Karenina we vividly imagine as suffering. When we are stimulated by a film to vividly imagine a terrible green slime chasing after someone, our empathy leads us to be afraid for that person, and afraid *tout court*: we are scared *for* that person because we don't want her to become the slime's next meal (for the same reason we root for the seal rather than the shark). But also, empathy works in such a way that we imagine *ourselves* in the shoes of the person with whom we empathize. As Roger Ebert noted, "When a movie character is really working, we become that character. That's what the movies offer: Escapism into lives other than our own." (Ebert 3/28/2004) As such, to some degree, we imagine *ourselves* as being in a position of being chased by the slime, and this scares us. By the same token, the mechanism of empathy, fueled by the stimulation of soap-operas, allows bored housewives to experience feelings of love, loss, anger, fear, vengeance and betrayal five days a week.

Thus, in returning to the critiques put forth by Levinson and Deigh ("Anyone who is afraid of a proposition needs to have his head examined"), this can be said in response: it is not so much the case that we have emotions *for* thought-complexes associated with characters. Rather, it is that when we are stimulated by the text to imagine the content of various propositions, emotions often naturally arise in us via the mechanisms of empathy.

14. Non-Empathetic Emotional Responses

Empathy plays a very large role in our emotional responses to fiction in general, but this is not to say that it is always responsible for what we experience. As an example

of how an audience member can have an emotional reaction in response to fiction when no empathy is present, one may consider virtual reality simulators which are beginning to be used by psychologists to treat various phobias in their patients. An individual who wears such a simulator is presented images and sounds of the things of which she has an unnaturally large fear; in doing so, she (hopefully) becomes acclimated to the object or situation which frightens her. Those who suffer from severe cases of arachnophobia, for example, are shown images of spiders, whereas those who are acrophobic are shown images from on high looking down. These images are effective in bringing about emotional responses:

> "No one would mistake the virtual scenes for reality, but they are convincing enough to evoke patient response. Dr. Reiner said that patients sometimes have panic attacks when they first try virtual reality. He described a patient who ran out of his office still wearing the helmet because a virtual scene had stirred up such intense anxiety." (Lubell, p. 5.)

In the case of arachnophobia, the object of the fear is a fictional character (i.e. the "virtual" spider). In the case of acrophobia, there is no fictional character, per se, which is the object of the patient's fear; rather, the apparent distance to the ground triggers her response. However, in neither of these cases does the patient's emotional response occur via the mechanism of empathy, because the fictional representation contains no characters at all (aside from spiders; but it's hard to believe that the patient somehow empathizes with them). Rather, the VR representations incite vivid (passive) imaginings, and these imaginings in turn provoke the emotional responses. Because these imaginings are (completely?) passive, the patient, it seems, is simply reacting to the flood of sensory data which are construed in her mind as if it were immediately caused by, e.g. a spider. This process of construing, when patient is all the while aware that the objects of her

experience do not (immediately) correspond to reality, is itself the passive process of imagining.

15. Further Thoughts on Passive vs. Active Imagining

The reaction that such patients have to these programs brings to light a relevant difference between passive and active imagining. When we passively imagine (e.g. in response to VR and cinematic representations), we react to the sensorial images (e.g. a spider) and propositional content (e.g. "a spider is crawling on my shoe.") that our minds construe out of the sense data (e.g. colors and sounds) it receives via our senses. When we actively imagine (e.g. in response to novels), we react to the sensorial and propositional content that our minds synthesize out of the various past experiences we have had. (If I actively imagine a spider crawling on my shoe, the spider I imagine may be of a particular spider that was burnt into my memory, or it may be the synthetic result of the various previously-experienced spiders that my mind has morphed together into one spider. I then synthesize this spider image with an image of my shoe, which in turn comes from a particular memory or a synthesis of memories of various shoes. The difference between passive and active imagining, then, is that active imagining requires more aggregate effort than does passive imagining: actively imagining involves our minds synthesizing the memories it has of manipulated sense data, whereas passively imagining involves our minds merely synthesizing immediate sense data. In both cases, though, there is an awareness that the mental representations produced do not correspond to reality, and yet these mental representations, when they capture our attention, can serve as the cognitive content of our emotions.

It is an interesting question whether we are moved more by our passive or by our active imaginings. Passive imaginings allow us to have our senses flooded by vivid details. Not only can the vividness of these details increase our capacity to be moved [e.g. the vivid torture depictions in *The Passion of the Christ* moved a lot of people in a way they weren't moved by what they read in the Bible; several people even died of heart attacks while watching it. (Horizonte)], but we are also kept so busy processing all the sensorial data that we don't have time to dwell on thoughts such as "there isn't *really* someone getting whipped in front of me, so there is nothing to get upset over." And, as we have seen, getting lost in the content of fiction is crucial for emotionally reacting to its fictional aspects. Active imaginings, on the other hand, would seem to allow for a more personal interaction between us and what we are imagining, because actively imagining requires us to forge new experiences out of our own memories. It seems, then, that active imaginings allow, *ceteris paribus*, for a greater degree of empathy than do passive imaginings, because we ourselves, and those close to us, generally get wrapped up more intricately with actively-imagined fictional characters than with passively-imagined fictional characters[7]; and, as was stated before, it is easier to empathize with those who are closer to us than with those who are further removed.

16. Why Some Vivid Imaginings Provoke Emotions While Others Do Not

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[7] Perhaps a counter-example to this may be one's reaction to theater/opera, in which one may have a stronger empathetic reaction to the characters as they are performed by actors, as compared to when one imagines them while reading the work. The difference seems to lie in the fact that works of theater/opera are written with the goal of being performed. The tone, pauses, cadences, facial expressions and body language of the performing actors serve as an empathetic bridge between the characters and the audience; the written text of the pieces do not generally prompt the audience to imagine these things very effectively. The written work itself is not designed to create active imaginings in the audience, so much as it designed to give the director and actors a rough set of directions for how to perform a story in front of an audience. Hence the importance of the director and actors in making the piece come to life.

We have seen, then, that vivid imaginings, in addition to beliefs, can be at the core of the emotions which arise as one responds to fiction. Are vivid imaginings sufficient, then, to produce such emotions? Clearly not. One can take as an example two different instances of death as it is portrayed in the *Star Trek* series. In a large number of television episodes, at least one formerly unknown crew member who happens to be wearing a red shirt, beams down to the planet's surface with Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy. These "red shirts" (as they have come to be designated by *Star Trek* fans) soon inevitably meet their doom on the planet's surface; in fact, one can see it as their function to meet their doom, in order to establish the nature of the danger which faces the three main characters. When one sees the fictional death of a "red shirt" (that is, when one is stimulated by the representations on the screen to imagine the death of a "red shirt"), one does not feel much grief, if any at all. Contrast this with the response that one perhaps felt while first watching *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, in which one saw the fictional death of Mr. Spock, a fictional death which was very dramatic, if not traumatic, for many "Trekkies".

Why is it that Mr. Spock's fictional death provoked such a powerful emotional response, whereas the fictional death of the "red shirt" should provoke little to no emotion at all? Clearly, it is not simply a difference of the *vividness* with which one imagines their death: the representations on the screen which give rise to the imaginings of the two deaths are themselves equally vivid. It is not as if the representation on the screen which gave rise Mr. Spock's fictional death was in focus, whereas the representation which gave rise to the fictional death of the "red shirt" was blurry. As a further example of how the vividness of the representation of a death does not necessarily

determine the sense of loss one feels in imagining the death of a character, one may be prompted to vividly imagine a gruesome, gory death in a horror movie such as *House of 1000 Corpses* and still not be as moved by it as one is by a fictional death which occurs between scenes, such as the fictional death of Jenny in *Forrest Gump*.

Two differences between the moving and non-moving fictional deaths seem to be salient. The first difference is the sense of familiarity one has with the character, which determines in part the degree to which one is able to empathize with him or her. When Spock fictionally died, audience members had been (intermittently) vividly imagining him as an individual for over fifteen years, to the extent that the character had become a cultural icon. As a result of this imagining, the audience members had developed a strong sense of familiarity and attachment with the imagined character (perhaps loyal fans were even carrying their imaginative experiences of Spock around with them in their unconscious minds), and they were thus in a position to experience feelings of loss when they vividly imagined him dying.   When a "red shirt" dies, on the other hand, the audience has been imagining him for perhaps thirty seconds; no deep sense of familiarity (or, therefore, empathetic attachment) to this character is established.

The amount of "real" time across which one imagines a character, however, is itself not sufficient for feelings of emotional attachment. For example, when one imagines Laurie Strode (the character played by Jamie Lee Curtis) as being unceremoniously killed by Michael Myers at the beginning of *Halloween: Resurrection*, one feels much less grief than one does while imagining learning that Jenny has died of AIDS in *Forrest Gump*. This difference occurs despite the fact that the character of

Laurie Strode had been (intermittently) imagined for nearly twenty-five years and across seven sequels, whereas the character of Jenny had been imagined for only two hours.

Again, the difference between the levels of emotional reaction provoked in the audience via their imaginings of these two characters lies in the degree to which the audience was able to empathize with them. On the one hand, the audience was led by the screen representations to imagine Jenny in finer detail than Laurie, that is to say, they were led to imagine more facets of the personality of the former than of the latter. The character development of Jenny is accomplished by condensing thirty years of "fictional time" into two hours of "real time". The audience is led to imagine Jenny growing up in front of them, and imagining how the various events of her life end up effecting the subtleties of who she is and why she acts the way she does. As a result, a strong sense of familiarity with the character of Jenny develops in the audience as they imagine her. Little is experienced of Laura, on the other hand, aside from her perpetually screaming and running away from Michael Myers. The representations on the screen do not tend to bring about imaginings of varied and complex relations of psychological cause and effect; in other words, there is little stimulus to bring about in the audience a sense of understanding of the imagined character, or even to imagine that there is much to be understood. There is little textual stimulus that naturally brings about imagined subtle details of the character, and without such fodder, it is difficult to develop a strong sense of familiarity or feelings of empathy in imagining the character.

It is for this same reason that it is difficult to elicit an emotional response in someone just by asking that person to imagine an event, such as, for example, a woman tied to the train tracks with an approaching train. In this instance, it is difficult to

experience a sense of familiarity with the imagined damsel in distress, and hence there is little impetus to develop feelings of trepidation in response to what one imagines. In instances where one does already have such connections, there are other impediments which stand in the way of emotional elicitation as the result of merely requesting of one to vividly imagine a scenario. If I were to ask someone to vividly imagine his or her parents, spouse or children drowning to death, for example, that person most likely would not succeed in doing so. On the one hand, the sheer painfulness of such an endeavor would prevent one from trying very hard to imagine the event at all, let alone focus all of one's conscious mental energy into imagining the event, and all that it would entail, in vivid detail. On the other hand, and more generally speaking, it is difficult to vividly imagine fictional scenarios at all, based on mere vague suggestions. This is why movie or book synopses are only intriguing rather than emotionally moving. It is also why authors are exhorted to develop their characters carefully, and why they are criticized if their characters end up being "two-dimensional". Fiction generally needs to function as a detailed, if not temporally sustained, stimulus if it is to provoke emotional responses in an audience (though there are perhaps counter-examples to this claim, such as short poems whose conventional meaning is elusive. Such poems, if they succeed in eliciting emotion succeed in doing so largely by drawing upon the memories, hopes and/or fears of the audience. Hence, the short, fictional work may not need to provide a detailed stimulus, but only a stimulus to trigger the detailed memories, hopes and fears themselves which were latent in the audience. In other words, the object of the emotion is not some imagined character, thing, place or event in the fiction narrative itself, but rather

characters, things, places or events in the audience's own private life. As such, these emotions are not centrally relevant to the paradox of emotional responses to fiction.)

As previously stated, the first salient difference between the moving and non-moving fictional deaths centered on the degree of the experienced sense of familiarity in the audience, which is itself dependent upon the degree to which they were able to vividly imagine characters as having subtle psychological details. The second salient difference relies on the psychological fact that many emotions are often contagious, and that in vividly imagining a character as emoting in a certain way, one tends, through empathy, to emote in a similar fashion. To illustrate, part of the reason that one may experience feelings of grief in imagining the deaths of Mr. Spock and Jenny is that the film leads one to imagine in vivid detail the grieving of those who were close to these characters (Captain Kirk at Mr. Spock's funeral and Forrest Gump at Jenny's tombstone), and we empathize with these grieving characters. On the other hand, Laura's exit was rather unceremonious and no "red shirt" was ever grieved by any character.

As a side note, as is well known, not every actor's attempt to evince emotion through the medium of film is convincing; not every emotive performance by an actor as it is portrayed on the screen succeeds in bringing about this "transfer of emotion". The failure can, of course, occur for many different reasons, such as lack of appropriate voice cadences or facial features, and when this occurs, we complain that the actor's performance was unconvincing or that it had "fallen flat". In such instances, the problem is simply that the actor's performance is not effective in bringing about vivid imaginings of the fictional world at all; as such, the audience can't get past imagining the actor in order to imagine the subtle facets of the fictional character. This supports the claim that

vivid imaginings are necessary for the experience of emotions which have fictional objects as their focus, even though, as we have seen, vivid imaginings are not in themselves sufficient for such experiences.

17. Conclusion

In order to resolve the paradox of fictional emotions, as we have seen, it is first necessary to come see which type of affective reactions fall into the category of explanadum. In order to do this, we first stripped those affective reactions that were not emotions at all (i.e. sensations, sub-cortical reactions and moods). Then we further stripped away emotions that were not paradoxical, because they did not have fictional entities/events as their intentional objects. The remaining number of problematic emotional responses to fiction might very well end up being smaller than one might have initially thought; however, such instances still exist. In explaining these remaining instances in terms of the various emotional mechanisms which run on the "fuel" of the imagination, I believe that I have shown that there is nothing particularly paradoxical about our reactions to fiction. If I am correct, then belief cognitivism is incorrect. Belief cognitivism seems to have arisen in response to the failure of "feeling-centered" theories to account for the propositionality of emotions; however, to claim that belief is a necessary component of emotion is to over-compensate, and an acceptable form of cognitivism would need to take into consideration the fact that belief is not the only type of propositional thinking which can be found at the core of emotions. Whereas it does seem to be true that the majority of our everyday emotions are based on various *beliefs* about the world, it is not always the case that they are. Indeed, one of the main reasons

why we place such a great value on our imagination is that it is able to move us in times when, and in ways that, reality does not.

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