

### **Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction\***

I take up three puzzles about our emotional and evaluative responses to fiction. First, how can we even have emotional responses to characters and events that we know not to exist, if emotions are as intimately connected to belief and action as they seem to be? One solution to this puzzle claims that we merely imagine having such emotional responses. But this raises the puzzle of why we would ever refuse to follow an author's instructions to imagine having certain emotional or evaluative responses, since we're happy to imagine many other highly implausible things. Confronted with this second puzzle, it's natural to insist that our responses to fiction are real, and so that we can't just conjure them up in response to an author's demands. However, there must be something imaginative about our responses to fiction, because we often respond differently to people and events in fiction than we would if we encountered them in real life. How is this possible? Solving these puzzles requires the notion of a "perspective" on a fictional world. I argue that an analogy to metaphor can help clarify this intuitive but frustratingly amorphous notion. Perspectives are tools for organizing our thinking, which in turn produce certain emotional and evaluative responses. Cultivating a perspective can be illuminating, entertaining, or corrupting — or all three at once.

#### **§1: The need for perspective**

Three puzzles about our emotional and evaluative engagement with fiction have received a fair amount of attention in philosophy, although rarely at the same time. The first problem is how we can have emotional responses to fiction at all, given that as readers we are perfectly aware that the depicted characters and events don't exist. Many philosophers believe that emotions involve essential connections with belief, desire, and action; but these connections are severed in the imaginative case. This is the "puzzle of fictional emotions."<sup>1</sup>

One solution to this puzzle, endorsed by Kendall Walton among others, is that we don't really have emotional responses to fictional characters and events, but merely imagine doing so.<sup>2</sup> But if that is right, then it begins to look strange that we would ever refuse to play along with the author's instructions to imagine having certain emotions. The same question also arises for moral and aesthetic evaluations: why should we be unwilling even to imagine that certain claims about what is right, or beautiful, or funny

---

\* Thanks to Jeff Dean and Dmitri Tymoczko for discussion, and to Stacie Friend and Eileen John for helpful comments on a version of this paper delivered at the ASA at the Eastern APA. Conversations with Richard Wollheim were instrumental in developing the notion of aspectual thought and much else besides.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. Walton (1978), Levinson (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Walton allows that we can have genuine emotions about real individuals and types as a result of reading a fiction.

are true, given that we happily play along in imagining many other highly implausible, even impossible, things? This is what Tamar Szabó Gendler (2000) calls “the puzzle of imaginative resistance.”<sup>3</sup>

It’s natural to respond that the second puzzle only arises if we solve the first one by relocating our emotional and evaluative attitudes to fiction within the scope of what is imagined. Many people find this absurd; they think it’s obvious that a full engagement with fiction requires actually having genuine emotional and evaluative responses to the characters and events it depicts (cf. Moran 1994). And this just isn’t the sort of thing that I can choose to do willy-nilly, in response to an author’s demands.

But this in turn raises a third puzzle: the responses we have to events and characters in fiction are often quite different from the ones we would have if those same events occurred in real life. I find it funny rather than cruel that the Three Stooges bop each other over the head with heavy implements. I find the events in a Stephen King novel thrilling rather than disgusting. I root for Scarlett to get her man and her mansion rather than to emancipate her slaves. This is what Gregory Currie (1997) calls “the problem of personality”: very often we do happily adopt attitudes which diverge fairly dramatically from our normal ones.<sup>4</sup> So something imaginative must be going on here after all, which makes it look like our emotional responses to fiction can’t really be real. And this seems to send us right back where we started.

We need to explain our engagement with fiction in a way that handles the three puzzles of emotional engagement, imaginative resistance, and alternative personality. I believe that to do this, we need the notion of a perspective on a fictional world. Having a perspective is more than just imagining *that* a set of propositions are true. Rather, it involves structuring one’s thinking in certain ways, so that one finds certain sorts of things especially important or notable, and seeks certain sorts of explanations for them. Different ways of structuring the same set of propositions can produce very different emotions and evaluative responses. Works of fiction can be as morally powerful and illuminating as they are because they afford us such intimate, experiential access to alternative perspectives.

---

<sup>3</sup> Emotions and evaluations aren’t the only sources of resistance: Yablo (2002) generalizes the puzzle to shape properties, while Weatherson (2004) extends it to ontology and constitution. I focus on emotions and normative claims here; I doubt that all cases of resistance call for precisely the same explanation.

<sup>4</sup> See also Goldie (2003).

The intuition that perspectives, and not just propositions, play a role in explaining our engagement with fiction is not new, of course. Dick Moran is particularly explicit about the need for perspectives:

Imagination with respect to the cruel, the embarrassing, or the arousing involves something more like a point of view, a total perspective on the situation, rather than just the truth of a specifiable proposition. And imagining along these lines involves something more like genuine rehearsal, “trying on” the point of view, trying to determine what it is like to inhabit it (1994, 105).<sup>5</sup>

The problem is that it’s not at all obvious just what a perspective is, or what it might mean to “try on” an alternative one. Perspectives are messy and amorphous. By contrast, talk about imagining propositions to be true is admirably clear. We have an *attitude*: imagined belief, toward a *content*: a proposition. This way of talking fits nicely into our broader model of the propositional attitudes; as Walton puts it,

Principles of generation...constitute conditional prescriptions about what is to be imagined in what circumstances. And the propositions that are to be imagined are fictional. Fictionality has turned out to be analogous to truth... Imagining aims at the fictional as belief aims at the true. What is true is to be believed; what is fictional is to be imagined. (1990, 41)

I doubt anyone would want to insist that imagining is exclusively a propositional affair; Walton certainly does not. But I suspect that many philosophers do believe, with Walton and Byrne (1993), that for many philosophical purposes talk about propositional imagining can serve as an adequate placeholder for a full account of imagination. Some, like Lewis (1978) and Byrne, expressly restrict their attention to identifying the principles that determine what is true in a fiction. And for these limited purposes, it seems that an exclusively propositional analysis is not just adequate, but fully appropriate. However, the possible truths in fiction include a wide range of evaluative propositions: say, that a character is beautiful but cruel, or a comment is witty, or a revenge killing is justified. If one denies that there are any such propositions, then the project of identifying principles of generation for fictional truth will leave out much of what’s interesting about fiction. But granting that there are such propositions, it then seems clear that whether one accepts that a given proposition is indeed true in a fiction — let alone whether one is willing or able to actively imagine its being true — can depend crucially on one’s perspective on various lower-order facts in that fiction. Thus, we need an account of perspectives even just to explain fictional truth.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also Gendler (2000), Walton (1994), Currie (1997), Carroll (2003), Goldie (2003).

## §2: Literal and Metaphorical Perspectives

We might start by treating talk of “adopting a perspective” fairly literally. One obvious candidate is Richard Wollheim’s (1984, 74) notion of *iconic, central* imagining, in which I imagine a sequence of events in a dramatic manner, by placing myself at some location within the scene.<sup>6</sup> If I dramatically imagine living through a scene as myself, then I will naturally respond, or imagine responding, with the same vivid emotional and evaluative responses I would have if I really experienced that scene. Alternatively, if I imagine being someone else experiencing those events, whether a fictional character or some other observer, then I’ll imagine responding with their emotional and evaluative attitudes.

I think something like this is on the right track. However, as a matter of personal introspection, in reading fiction I very often don’t — or don’t only — place myself imaginatively inside the scene, either as myself or as another.<sup>7</sup> Instead, I adopt a perspective on the fictional world as a whole: as Peter Goldie (2003, 57) says, my perspective is *acentral* or *external*. And we can’t explain this sort of perspective in terms of imaginatively occupying a location within the imagined scene; *acentral* imagining is precisely imagining that’s not from any literal point of view. More importantly, people often talk about perspectives as potentially applying to multiple situations; for instance, Gendler argues that imaginative resistance arises “because in trying to make that world fictional, [the author] is providing us with a way of looking at *this* world which we prefer not to embrace” (2000, 79, emphasis in original). To make sense of this, we need to understand perspectives in a way that allows them to be extracted from particular characters and scenes and transported to other worlds.

I think we can get a clearer understanding of the relevant sort of perspective through an analogy to metaphor. We often think of fiction and metaphor as very different: roughly, fiction seems like a kind of imaginative play with objects and events, while metaphor plays with words and concepts. But the two

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Walton’s discussion of *de se* imagination as “imagining *doing* or *experiencing* something (or *being* a certain way), as opposed to imagining merely *that* one does or experiences something or possesses a certain property” (1990, 29). Cf. also Moran’s suggestion that the appropriate imaginative engagement with fiction is “dramatic” (1994, 104); Currie’s (1997, 68) description of empathy in terms of simulation or “imaginative role-playing”; and Murray Smith’s (1995, 80) appeal to Wollheimian central imagining in engagement with film.

<sup>7</sup> This may be importantly different from film. There also appear to be significant differences in the degree to which different readers cultivate an “internal engagement” with fictions.

are not so unrelated. Both clearly involve counterfactual imagination. I believe that they also engage the imagination in the same basic cognitive operations on the same basic kinds of mental representations, in a phenomenon I call *aspectual thought*. To get an inkling for how this could be, consider the following sequence of cases.

Suppose I tell you that Bill, a mutual acquaintance, was a high school quarterback who dated the captain of the cheerleading team. I might tell you this with several possible aims. On the one hand, I might just want to give you a piece of information about Bill, to add to your stock of beliefs about him. On the other hand, I might tell you this because I take it to be especially typical or revealing of what Bill's really like. If so, I might introduce it by saying: "Here's all you need to know about Bill:...", or "Bill's just the sort of guy who:...". And if I do tell the story in this latter spirit, we can imagine my adding something like the following disclaimer: "Actually, he never really was a quarterback. But he might as well have been — that's exactly the kind of guy he is." With that disclaimer, we've moved from fact to fiction. This has significant ramifications for what information you should take away from my story, of course. But that doesn't much matter for my basic communicative purpose, which is to lead you into the best overall way of thinking about Bill. (Apocryphal stories are like this, I think: they so aptly exemplify a deeper reality that we don't care about their actual falsity.) Finally, we can move from fiction to metaphor. By telling you, "Bill is the quarterback in our department," I might inform you that he plays the same sort of role in our department as quarterbacks play in football. In this case, whether or not Bill ever was a quarterback is entirely irrelevant to my point, which is just about the kind of guy he is, and the way he interacts with those around him.

In this metaphorical case, as in the previous fictional one, I'm asking you to use your way of thinking about quarterbacks (which I assume is much like my own) to organize your overall way of thinking about Bill. This is the phenomenon I'll refer to as *aspectual thought*. I'll call the mental representations, or ways of thinking about things, that aspectual thought operates on *characterizations*. As this toy example brings out, aspectual thought can be put to a range of uses. I believe that metaphor essentially involves aspectual thought, although aspects typically play a richer role in poetic metaphors

than conversational ones. By contrast, while both factual and fictional storytelling can involve aspects, they don't always do so.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, in at least some cases the difference between presenting a thought as fiction and as metaphor is not so great. In this section, I'll try to say just enough about aspectual thought in metaphor to give us the machinery we need to make sense of its application to fiction.

As a first pass at explaining aspectual thought in metaphor, we might say that it involves assimilating one's thinking about a particular subject to a more general *stereotype* or *schema*. For instance, following Glucksberg and Keysar (1993), we might claim that a metaphor invites its hearers to classify the metaphor's subject under a general category which is formed by abstraction from a paradigmatic instance of the predicate. Thus, in telling you that my job is a jail, I ask you to think of my job under a general category formed by abstraction from a stereotypical jail. I believe something along these lines may describe roughly the cognitive process behind many conventionalized predicative metaphors, but it's only a rough approximation to the full story.

First, we need a more nuanced view of characterizations. Characterizations are a bit like stereotypes and a bit like concepts, but they have important idiosyncrasies of their own.<sup>9</sup> At their most basic, characterizations, like stereotypes, apply collections of properties to a subject. For instance, my characterization of quarterbacks includes their being natural leaders, affable, and a little bit shallow. Characterizations also typically include more specific properties: I think of quarterbacks as having square jaws and straight sandy-brown hair. Some such properties, like the certain styles of moving or talking, are so specific and experientially dependent that we don't have any established expressions for them, and can only refer to them demonstratively.

---

<sup>8</sup> Nor is every thought that's usable as a metaphor also construable as a story: we might treat the thought that Alex is a wolf either as a metaphor or as part of a vampire tale, but it's hard to imagine a story in which Juliet is the sun.

<sup>9</sup> "Characterization" is my term for what I take to be a comparatively familiar psychological phenomenon. I think much of the psychological literature purporting to be about concepts, and in particular much discussion of stereotypes and prototypes, is really about characterizations. It's a substantive project to spell out the cognitive relations between concepts and characterizations, but only confusion results from identifying them at the outset. One reason not to identify them is that characterizations are not compositional: my characterization of Napoleon's mistress isn't a compositional product of my characterizations of Napoleon and mistresses.

Unlike stereotypes, which are communally-shared ways of thinking about relatively coarse kinds, characterizations can be highly specific and idiosyncratic. Besides quarterbacks, I have characterizations of very specific types, like musty post-war public libraries; of events, like stepping out into a bright crisp morning after a fresh snowfall; and of individuals, like George W. Bush or the waitress at the coffee shop. Although it obviously makes an enormous difference for other cognitive purposes, whether a characterization is about an individual, kind, or event makes no difference to the form and content of the characterization itself.

What I've said so far should already make a rather odd fact about characterizations apparent: they don't always require a direct commitment to factual accuracy. On the one hand, I'm under no illusion that quarterbacks are especially likely to have square jaws and gleaming smiles. Still, I do feel that those features are somehow *fitting* for a quarterback: if I were casting a quarterback in a movie, an actor with those features would be a plus. (Likewise, apocryphal stories are highly fitting for their subjects even though they're not actually true.) On the other hand, there may be properties I know a given subject to possess but that I feel are *unfitting* for it. For instance, I might know that Bill is passionate about astronomy, but this might not fit with my overall characterization of him as sociable and outgoing; in some sense I think he *shouldn't* love astronomy. Unfitting features are at least marginalized, and sometimes excluded from a characterization altogether.

What we take to be fitting for a subject must be systematically grounded in how we take that subject actually to be; the two can only come apart in isolated cases. When they do come apart, it's often because we think that things of *this* kind don't typically have *that* property. However, intuitions of fittingness also have a normative aesthetic component. As Arthur Danto says in talking about style,

The structure of a style is like the structure of a personality... This concept of consistency has little to do with formal consistency. It is the consistency rather of the sort we invoke when we say that a rug does not fit with the other furnishings of the room, or a dish does not fit with the structure of a meal, or a man does not fit with his own crowd. It is the fit of taste which is involved, and this cannot be reduced to formula. It is an activity governed by reasons, no doubt, but reasons that will be persuasive only to someone who has judgment or taste already (1981, 207).

If we were more rational, we would sharply distinguish what we take to be fitting from we believe to be actual or even probable. As it stands, though, we often let the former influence the latter; this is why stereotypes can be so resilient and insidious. When, as in fiction, our imaginations are not primarily concerned with matters of fact, then fittingness can play an even more pervasive role.

So far, I've only talked about the constituents of characterizations. The next, crucial point is that characterizations don't just consist in collections of such features; those features are arranged in a complex pattern that varies along at least two dimensions of importance.

First, some features in a characterization are more *prominent* than others. I think of prominence as roughly equivalent to what Amos Tversky (1977) calls *saliency*, which is in turn defined in terms of *intensity* and *diagnosticity*. A feature is intense to the extent that it has a high signal-to-noise ratio: it sticks out relative to the background, like a bright light or a hugely bulbous nose. A feature is diagnostic to the extent that it is useful for classifying objects that possess it, like the number of stripes on a soldier's uniform. Both intensity and diagnosticity are highly context-sensitive: in a room full of bulbous noses, or on a heavily scarred face, an ordinary bulbous nose will not stand out; and in such a room, knowing that the man I'm looking for has a bulbous nose won't help me to identify him.

Second, some features are more *central* than others. A feature is central to the extent that it causes, motivates, or otherwise explains many of the subject's other features. For instance, a quarterback's being a natural leader explains more of his other features — why he's popular and confident; indeed why he's a quarterback at all — than his having a square jaw and gleaming smile do. A good measure of centrality is how much else about the characterized subject we intuitively think would change if the feature in question were removed.

Assignments of prominence and centrality are highly intuitive and holistic. Contrast the two ways of seeing Figure 1 below. On either way of seeing the figure, each constituent element's role depends on the roles that are simultaneously played by many other elements. When I switch from seeing the figure one way to the other, the prominence and centrality of those various elements shift

dramatically. This in turn causes the basic elements themselves to represent different things: for instance, the same bump comes to be seen either as a nose or as a wart.



*Figure 1: The Old Crone/Young Lady*

Much the same point goes for characterizations: the same property can take on different significances, depending on the overall structure in which it is embedded. For instance, if I take Bill to be at root a sociable guy, then his teasing remarks will seem like harmless attempts at bonding; while if I take him to be motivated by a desire to control others, those same remarks will seem malicious and manipulative.

Armed with this sketch of characterizations, we can turn to aspectual thought. I said above that to a first approximation, aspectual thought involves assimilating one's thinking about a subject to a paradigmatic schema. I can now say, more precisely, that this assimilation involves using one characterization to structure another: for instance, using your characterization of quarterbacks to structure your characterization of Bill, or your characterization of Napoleon to structure your characterization of George Bush. I think this restructuring works in something like the way Dedre Gentner (1983, 2001) claims we understand analogies: roughly, by taking especially prominent and central features in the governing characterization (e.g., of quarterbacks) and seeking matches for them within the subject characterization (e.g., of Bill), and then raising the prominence and centrality of those features in the

subject characterization.<sup>10</sup> Like characterizations themselves, the process of restructuring one characterization in light of another is holistic, intuitive, and largely unreflective: we come to ‘see’ Bill as a quarterback, much as we come to see an old crone in Figure 1, without knowing quite how we did it.

Theorists who appeal to “seeing-as” or aspectual thought in metaphor often claim that it is essentially associative and non-propositional, and hence neither rational nor subject to evaluation for truth.<sup>11</sup> I agree that there is something importantly non-propositional about aspectual thought, but the point is easily overstated. Characterizations are ways of thinking about individuals or kinds and their properties. Assignments of prominence and centrality, and perhaps even fittingness, are ascriptions of higher-order, context-dependent relations between those individuals or kinds and properties. Ultimately, a characterization is justified only if it is consistent with the objective patterns and relations among the lower-order properties the thinker takes to be fitting for the subject (where these in turn largely overlap with the properties she takes it actually to possess). It’s fairly obvious how assignments of centrality can fail to meet this condition: features I take to be motivated or explained in one way may really be due to something else.<sup>12</sup> Assignments of prominence can also be mistaken; for instance, I misconstrue a feature’s intensity if I treat it as more or less unusual than it really is. So there are significant truth-conditional constraints here. At the same time, these constraints leave considerable interpretive leeway. The same feature will be more or less diagnostic relative to different cognitive goals. In addition, intuitions about fittingness involve an irreducibly aesthetic component. Finally, because the objective patterns that ultimately justify assignments of intensity and centrality are so complex and multi-dimensional, any one thinker can have epistemic access only to a small part of them. The upshot is that we can only rarely justify or disprove a characterization’s overall structure by pointing to any particular

---

<sup>10</sup> Because the restructuring process depends on both characterizations, aspectual thought produces different effects when the same governing characterization is applied to different subjects: for instance, if we think of Juliet or of Louis XIV as the sun. And because characterizations are highly context-dependent, both in their constituents and in their structure, the same pair of characterizations can produce quite different effects in different cognitive contexts.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Donald Davidson (1978) and Richard Rorty (1987) claim that the effects of metaphor and seeing-as are entirely causal — like a birdsong, a thunderclap, or a bump on the head.

<sup>12</sup> In particular, in observing other people, we are biased toward explanations that attribute casual efficacy to dispositions of the individuals themselves rather than to the surrounding situation (Ross et al 1977, Gerrig 1993, 54).

properties that the subject possesses or lacks, or even to any particular relations among such properties. Someone who characterizes Bill very differently than I do may agree with me about all the lower-order facts while legitimately disagreeing about which features are fitting, prominent, and central.

What I think is interestingly and distinctively non-propositional is the process of applying an aspect in thought. An aspect is crucially concerned with a particular proposition: for instance, the proposition *that Bill is a quarterback*. But employing the aspect doesn't require having any particular attitude toward that proposition, or even tracing out any particular consequences of it. Rather, one uses it to structure one's overall thoughts about Bill into a new, coherent pattern. As such, an aspect is more a *tool* for thought than a thought *per se*. Where a thought has a stable, limited content, an aspect is dynamic and extendible. It gives us an intuitive regulative principle for assimilating new information about a given subject into our existing characterization of it. It also has analogous applications to other subjects: for instance, I might think of George as Bill's wide receiver, and restructure my thoughts about *him* accordingly. This disposition to "go on in the same way" in organizing one's thinking helps to make aspects powerful cognitive tools, but that "way" can't itself be captured in a set of propositions.

To make sense of richly imaginative phenomena like metaphor and fiction, we need to soften the dichotomy between cognitive processes that are propositional, logical, and rational, and those that are non-propositional, associative, and merely causal. Thought that is not fully propositional can still be subject to rational constraints, and this can make a significant difference for which further propositions, and attitudes, one ought to entertain and accept.

### **§3: Characterizations in Fiction**

At the very least, this sketch of characterizations and aspectual thought should remind us how continuous our cognitive engagement with fiction and the real world are. We bring to any fiction a plethora of default characterizations about the kinds of people, places, and things we've encountered and heard about in real life. We also know that other people, especially people from other epochs and social backgrounds, have different characterizations of those kinds; some of these characterizations are more or

less conventionally associated with certain linguistic expressions. Finally, in reading fictions we often form new characterizations about the kinds of people, things, and events described, and revise our old characterizations, at least temporarily, in the light of what the fiction tells us.

Characterizations can be about individuals as well as kinds; this difference makes no difference to the form and content of the characterization itself. So too, it makes no difference to a characterization or its role in aspectual thought whether it is about something we take to exist. With metaphor, we can call someone an ogre or a Merlin as easily as a quarterback or an Einstein. With fiction, when we open a ‘mental file’ on someone called “Sherlock Holmes” or “Anna Karenina,” the non-existence of those individuals makes no difference to our characterizations *per se*. They can have the same structure and constituents, and can be as complex, nuanced, and vivid, as characterizations of real people.<sup>13</sup>

The crucial issue for our three puzzles, though, is how characterizations affect our emotional and evaluative responses to the things they are about. At a minimum, the richness and nuance of our characterizations of fictional characters and events can help to explain the robustness of even our *quasi*-emotional responses to them. Further, though, the structure of our characterizations clearly has a significant impact on *which* emotional or quasi-emotional responses we have. We pay most attention to those features that are most prominent and central in our characterizations, and what we attend to in turn affects how we respond.<sup>14</sup> Some philosophers maintain that emotions just *are* structures of attention; for instance, Eva Dadlez argues that

[E]motions can be characterized as ways of entertaining or experiencing thoughts... Here, emotions are treated as selective ways of attending to the contents of one’s thoughts. Emotions become modes of attending, each of which is governed and informed by a different conception of salience and each of which

---

<sup>13</sup> Peter Lamarque (1996) offers a theory of fictional characters on which they just are collections of properties (cf. also Wolterstorff 1980). I would prefer to remain neutral on the ontological issue, but Lamarque’s response to the objection that his view reduces characters to types also applies to characterizations:

To say that characters are (merely) sets of properties is not to diminish them or reduce them to mere formulas, for the properties involved, as we know from reading complex novels, are enormously varied: they include a vast array of human qualities, attitudes, values, actions, and relations, indeed everything that descriptive predicates can represent (1996, 34).

I would add that they can include even more than descriptive predicates can denote: they can also include everything that language evokes by other means, including ostension and metaphor; see my (2006).

<sup>14</sup> Readers’ recall of facts in a narrative is significantly influenced by the perspective they adopt: say, whether they read a story about a “fine old home” from a homeowner’s perspective or a burglar’s (Lee-Sammons and Whitney, 1991).

involves a focus on a different set of characteristics (1997, 102).

Ronald de Sousa (1987, 196) advocates something like this view as well. If this were correct, then since patterns of attention are themselves existence-neutral, there would be no problem with our having genuine emotional responses to merely fictional characters. However, even if we reject the claim that emotions are actually constituted by patterns of attention, we should grant that characterizations with different overall structures both result from and induce different (quasi-)emotions.

Suppose, for example, that I'm angry with Bill for standing me up. This causes me to raise to prominence all the hurtful things he has done to me and to others in the past. I also impute certain underlying motivations to him, like being self-centered and manipulative, and I treat those motivations as central to explaining as many of his actions as possible. This interpretive framework colors each constituent features it encompasses, imposing certain emotional and evaluative valences on them. By contrast, if I think of Bill as a victim of confusion, and his action as resulting from an overcommitted desire to please everyone, then both the structure of my characterization and my emotional and evaluative attitudes will shift dramatically.

These connections between characterizations and emotional and evaluative attitudes are more than just causal. I am right to be angry with Bill if I think that his action results from self-centered manipulateness, but not if I think he is just confused. As Danto (1981, 169) says, "like beliefs and actions...emotions...are embedded in structures of justification. There are things we know we ought to feel given a certain characterization of the conditions we are under." Moral and aesthetic evaluations are likewise embedded in and justified by certain characterizations. And in turn, characterizations themselves are justified only if they are consistent with the broader patterns among their constituent features. In the heat of the moment, my emotions may well distort my characterizations. To guard against this, I should take the usual epistemic precautions, by searching for alternative explanations and neglected counterexamples, and checking to see if others share my interpretation. If I ultimately decide that I have mischaracterized Bill, my anger may not magically disappear — although insofar as I actively try to

reconfigure and refocus my characterization, it's likely to subside. But at least I'll know that I *shouldn't* feel the way I do.

These causal and normative connections between characterizations and either emotions or quasi-emotions lead to one important source of imaginative resistance. I can only adopt, or actively imagine adopting, emotional and evaluative attitudes that are appropriate to my overall characterization of the relevant character or event. And this is not something that an author can bring about just by stipulating that some specific proposition is to-be-imagined-true. Rather, for it to even be possible for me to adopt a given attitude, the author must provide a body of lower-order facts that warrant a coherent characterization which is appropriate for that attitude. This requires more than mere logical consistency among the lower-order facts; it must also be possible to impose a coherent interpretive pattern on them, so that they hang together in a psychologically plausible way.<sup>15</sup> I'll argue in §5 that this isn't the only source of imaginative resistance; but it is one important one.

So far, I've pointed to the impact of our characterizations on our emotional responses to fiction, whether genuine or imagined. The question remains, however: are those responses real or not? I think we should defend the intuition that our emotional responses to fictional characters and events are genuine if at all possible. A requirement of belief in the existence of the object of the emotion already exacts a high price by denying this intuition. Our responses to fiction have the same affect and physiology as other emotions, the same interaction between thought and affect, and the same specificity and directedness. True, the connections to belief and action are absent; but they are also absent in many other familiar cases, for instance when we respond to long-past and merely hypothetical situations (Moran 1994, 78). If we deny, by parallel reasoning, that we can have genuine emotions toward these sorts of situations, then much of our emotional lives will turn out to be merely quasi-emotional.

If we want to do justice to the cognitive, representational nature of emotions like hope, fear, and anger, and if the only cognitive, representational resources we have to work with are beliefs, then the

---

<sup>15</sup> In fact, the lower-order facts need not even be logically consistent, if the inconsistent facts are highly marginalized and it is possible to impose a coherent pattern on the body of facts considered as a whole. Here we approach something close to the "orthodox" explanation of imaginative resistance in terms of supervenience.

requirement of belief in the emotional object's existence can seem inevitable. But once we introduce characterizations, another option emerges: perhaps our beliefs affect our emotions only, or primarily, by way of shaping our characterizations. Beliefs and characterizations usually run in tandem. But when they come apart, characterizations often seem to trump beliefs in determining our emotions. In particular, our emotions can be influenced by stereotypes that we believe to be inaccurate but still find somehow fitting. This is a speculative claim about an empirical psychological matter. But if it is right, then, given that characterizations themselves are existence-neutral, we would have weakened the connection between emotion and belief in existence further.

Let's turn now to the puzzle of personality. To work our way into this issue, I want to ask which characterizations we *should* adopt. For real individuals and events, the answer is relatively clear: a thinker's characterizations should be consistent with the objective facts about the particular subject characterized, plus the broader patterns among such facts, filtered by what the thinker takes to be fitting for the subject. When it comes to fiction, though, the answer is murkier. We should clearly require characterizations to be consistent with all (or nearly all) the lower-order propositions that have explicitly been made fictional. However, because the number of such propositions is relatively small, this requirement is consistent with widely divergent assumptions about the broader underlying patterns that obtain in that fictional world: how indicative is feature *X* of feature *Y*? what typically causes feature *X*? Different assumptions about these patterns will generate wildly different assignments of prominence and centrality, and hence wildly different characterizations.

The most natural way to constrain the range of warranted characterizations further is to apply a "Reality Principle" (Walton 1990, 144) for characterizations, by requiring that we import our normal assumptions about the patterns of prominence and centrality into the fiction from the real world. By emphasizing continuity with our normal propensities to characterize individuals and events, a "realistic" view explains how we engage with fictional worlds as easily and fully as we do. It also locates another possible source of imaginative resistance: if I import my own characterizing dispositions into the fiction, then I will naturally have the same emotional and evaluative responses toward fictional characters and

events as I would if they were real, and I will balk if the author prescribes different responses. Further, it allows us to treat variation among different readers' responses to a given fiction as legitimate to precisely the same degree it would be for reality. Louise Rosenblatt (1978, 140) draws an analogy here between reading fiction and playing music: each reader "performs" his own imaginary world on the basis of the fiction, by drawing on "the reservoir of his own past life and reading" — including, we might add, the reservoir of experiences from which that reader extrapolated his particular sense of the relative prominence and centrality of various properties in the world.

However, precisely because a realistic view so strongly emphasizes the continuity between our engagement with fiction and reality, it fails to account adequately for the problem of personality: the fact that we often respond quite differently to fictional characters and events than we would if they were real. The simplest way for a defender of the Reality Principle to explain these differences is to point out that fictions constrain our attention in ways that the actual world doesn't. As Dadlez (1997, 95) says, a fiction "manipulates our attention in such a way that making certain construals is virtually a foregone conclusion...[A] pattern of attention...is guaranteed, since [those are the only situations we get, and there is little else to attend to." On this view, we might say, a fiction is a lens onto a fictional world; and we can only attend to what passes before the lens. When what we're presented with differs considerably from what we would notice if we got to look around for ourselves, then our emotional and evaluative responses will be altered as well.

What a fiction gives us to attend to undeniably does make an enormous difference to our characterizations. In watching *The Three Stooges*, we see their pratfalls and hysterical gestures, but not the blood and scars that those actions would actually produce; and this makes it more likely that we'll experience the scene as funny than cruel. In reading *Gone with the Wind*, we spend more time attending to the joys and travails of the white aristocrats than to the indignity and suffering of the black slaves; and this makes us more likely to root for Tara's resurrection than for the construction of a just society.

So far, though, this is a merely causal explanation of the differences between our emotional and evaluative responses to fiction and to real life; it still retains the Reality Principle as governing which

characterizations we ought to adopt. We might say that on this view, the fiction controls *what* we get to see, but we still see the portions of the fictional world that do appear *with our own eyes*. As a result, if we know that some further facts obtain in the fictional world, even though we've only gotten fleeting glimpses of them, then we ought to assign them the same prominence and centrality we would if they were real. In particular, because we know that there are slaves in the world of *Gone with the Wind* who do hard labor without due compensation, we ought to root for the construction of a just society rather than for Tara's resurrection.

Some fictions may merely present us with an aperture to a fictional world in this way. However, I think that most fictions impose stronger interpretive demands on us, and most readers give themselves over to the fiction more fully, than this view allows.<sup>16</sup> As readers, we recognize that the depicting lens is held *by* someone — say, the implied author<sup>17</sup> — who purposely focuses the lens on some features and not others. Further, the author doesn't just decide what to depict, but in what terms to do so. These choices reflect the author's own characterizations of the fictional characters and events. At a minimum, she presents the fiction to us with the intention that we recognize *that* she characterizes things in this way. But typically, she also offers it with the intention that we adopt those characterizations for ourselves, because they reflect the best — the most accurate, illuminating, uplifting, or entertaining — way of construing the depicted characters and events. In effect, the author presents her characterizations with the sort of reflexive Gricean intention that's distinctive of communication. And in doing so, she asks us to see those characters and events through *her* eyes.<sup>18</sup>

The author's choices about what to depict, and how, will still not be detailed enough to isolate a unique set of warranted characterizations, and so there will still be some room for differing interpretive “performances.” I may also legitimately disagree with the author's characterizations, if I decide that she

---

<sup>16</sup> There may be an important contrast between film and fiction here; I am focusing on fiction. Eileen John (1998) argues persuasively that some authors want their readers to come up with their own interpretations, and refuse to advocate any single characterization. I think these cases are interesting, but also exceptional: the author is combating readers' established expectations of author's role.

<sup>17</sup> On the implied author, constructed or postulated as the fiction's producer, see e.g. Booth (1961), Nehamas (1987).

<sup>18</sup> We find the same contrast in theories of metaphor, between a Davidsonian view of metaphor as merely causing a new perspective on the subject and a more Gricean view of metaphor as committing the speaker to a perspective.

has inappropriately neglected certain facts, as Gore Vidal claimed that Henry James did with his character Charlotte Stant (Moran 1994, 99).<sup>19</sup> More generally, it can be aesthetically, critically, and morally illuminating to read “against the grain,” by systematically attending to features that are present in the fiction but neglected by the author. Still, it’s important to recognize that this is indeed reading *against* the grain: that is, in a way that departs from the characterizations the author wants us to adopt.

#### §4: Perspectives and Personalities

As we read a work of fiction, our attention tends to focus on the particular characters and events we encounter. The characterizations we form of those particulars are not isolated, however. They fit into our sense of a larger fictional world, as a place where certain sorts of features tend to stick out, or be highly diagnostic or explanatorily central. Actions and qualities that would be shocking in a Jane Austen novel, say, are unremarkable in the world of Phillip Roth; and people in the two worlds are driven by very different kinds of motivations. As we acclimate to a fictional world, we begin to anticipate, on the basis of a few details, what sort of characterization will ultimately be proposed for a character we have just met. Ultimately, we learn to “go on the same way” in characterizing the entire course of events.

This “way of going on” in forming characterizations is what I take to be a *perspective* on the fiction as a whole. A perspective, understood in this way, is both like and different from the aspects we encountered with metaphor. It is like a metaphorical aspect in giving us a dynamic, extendible tool for thought, and specifically a principle for forming and revising characterizations. It is unlike an aspect in being much larger and more encompassing. A metaphorical aspect is a way of applying one characterization to structure our thinking about some other subject; it thus crucially concerns a particular proposition (say, *that Bill is a quarterback*), although it puts this proposition to an open-ended, non-propositional use. By contrast, perspectives cannot be specified in such specific, substantive terms. Rather, a perspective is a disposition, upon being confronted with some particular lower-order features, to

---

<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Wayne Booth (1961, 79) says that D.H. Lawrence misinterprets his own characters and events in *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*, despite his voluble insistence that it is immoral for the author to “put his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection.”

adopt certain higher-order propositions about their fittingness, prominence, and centrality for the subject that possesses them. “Trying on” a perspective on a fictional world involves (implicitly) entertaining the relevant higher-order propositions about the characters and events in that world. If I ultimately endorse the resulting characterizations, then I come to actually (albeit implicitly) believe those higher-order propositions — though not, of course, the lower-order, fictional ones on which they’re based.

As dispositions to structure one’s thinking in certain ways, perspectives are fairly abstract. We might thus wonder how readers manage to pick them up and try them on. It is here that I think the notion of a personality comes in: perspectives are grounded in personalities. Where a perspective itself is merely a disposition to characterize, and so is limited to representing things in the world in certain ways, personalities also include all sorts of non-intentional qualities — an entire style, or “texture of being,” as Iris Murdoch puts it:

When we apprehend and assess other people...we consider something more elusive which may be called their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praiseworthy, what they think funny: in short, the configurations of their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation. These things, which may be overtly and comprehensibly displayed or inwardly elaborated and guessed at, constitute what, making different points in the two metaphors, one may call the texture of a man’s being or the nature of his personal vision (1956, 39).

In our actual encounters with other people, we apprehend much more than just their thoughts and modes of expression. We also see how they dress and carry themselves, their physical reactions to expected and unexpected events, and much more. These are necessarily lacking in fiction. In compensation, though, a work of fiction provides the sort of sustained access to someone’s thoughts that we otherwise encounter only in our most intimate relationships. It also offers a more attentively cultivated mode of expression, in the form of a literary style. Jenefer Robinson argues that a style is itself an expression of personality:

the verbal elements of style gain their stylistic significance by contributing to the expression of this personality, and they cannot be identified as *stylistic* elements independently of the personality they help to express (1985, 227, emphasis in original).

Stylistic elements include not just the author’s choice of words, but also rhythms, assonances and disruptions, shifts in formality, and so on. These are all concrete, tangible, and non-intentional qualities; as such, they don’t represent, but instead *manifest*, a way of being. At the same time, because the “texture

of being” that produces them is intimately intertwined with certain dispositions to characterize things in the world, they also provide us with a rich and intuitive sense of the relevant perspective. By putting human flesh on the perspective’s abstract bones, the personality that is projected by a fiction gives us the imaginative resources we need to understand, and so to adopt, its perspective. And if we do adopt that perspective, however briefly, then we naturally respond with the emotional and evaluative attitudes that are appropriate to it, rather than with those we would have if we were fully ourselves.<sup>20</sup>

## §5: Perspectives and the Real World

The perspectives we gain by reading fictions are the sort of thing that can be applied, not just to multiple situations within the fiction, but to multiple worlds. Indeed, in presenting a perspective on a fictional world, authors often advocate that same perspective on *our* world: a propensity to find certain features notable, to assign certain sorts of explanatory structures, and to respond emotionally and evaluatively in certain ways.<sup>21</sup> But even if the author doesn’t recommend transferring perspectives in this

---

<sup>20</sup> Fictions can manifest multiple personalities with distinct perspectives. Which should we adopt? Goldie (2003, 60) suggests that the primary perspective we encounter is the narrator’s; Currie (1997, 72) advocates a similar view, as reflected in this nice example:

Think of *The Masters* as implicitly inviting me to imagine myself, not merely as someone reading a factual account of Jago’s bid for the Mastership, but as someone whose general outlook is rather like that of the narrator, Lewis Elliott. Elliott tells the story (or, more precisely, it is fictional, in *The Masters*, that he does), and he does so from his own perspective; I learn about Jago and the events he is caught up in, but I also and at the same time learn a good deal about Elliott and his response to those events. As I learn, I am persuaded, through some largely unconscious process, to take on the role of one whose attitudes are not unlike those of Elliott himself, as revealed through his account of the story.

For most traditional fiction, this seems right. The narrator is sufficiently present in the fiction for us to become fairly intimately acquainted with his personality; he is also typically presented as reasonable, sympathetic, and authoritative — in short, as someone whose characterizations are likely to be accurate. However, many fictions don’t fit this mold. There are fictions without narrators, like plays, in which the characters all speak only for themselves. There are fictions whose narrators are unreliable or immoral, like *Tristram Shandy* or *Lolita*. And there are fictions with multiple incompatible narrators, like Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*. Precisely by juxtaposing multiple perspectives, the authors of such non-traditional fictions reveal a further, overarching perspective — albeit one which is thinner, more abstract, and less rooted in an embodied personality. In a traditional fiction with a reliable narrator, the implied author implicitly “deputizes” a like-minded narrator to characterize individuals and events in the fictional world for her. In these more complex cases, those perspectives conflict, or at least come apart. As readers, we may ultimately decide that the narrator is more sensitive or insightful than the author, or that they’re both mistaken, or that they’re illuminating in very different ways.

<sup>21</sup> Because an author (even an implied author) is located outside of the fictional world, she can advocate transferring perspectives in a way that the narrator, from within his fictional world, cannot. Cf. Wayne Booth: “It seems to me self-evident that the implied author of any *didactic* work, at least... would be distressed if, after I put down the work, I said to myself, ‘Well, now I can go back to my previous beliefs about overweening pride or about how the ways of

way — say, if she treats the fiction as an escapist fantasy — we may still decide to project the perspective onto reality for ourselves. Of course, sometimes we are happy to drop the fictional pretense and perspective the moment we close the book. But when we do transfer a perspective from fiction to reality, then we might say, as Danto (1981, 172) does, that the fiction itself becomes a metaphor: “the greatest metaphors of art [are] those in which...the artwork becomes a metaphor for life and life is transfigured.”

Tamar Szabó Gendler invokes something very close to the idea of transferring perspectives to explain imaginative resistance. She argues that “cases that evoke genuine imaginative resistance will be cases where the reader feels that she is being asked to export a way of looking at the actual world which she does not wish to add to her conceptual repertoire” (2000, 77). I agree wholeheartedly that perspectives, or “ways of looking,” play an essential role in imaginative resistance. As I said in §3, we can only have emotional and evaluative responses to fictional characters and events that are appropriate to our characterizations of them. At a minimum, an author who directs her readers to cultivate attitudes that require characterizations which don’t comport with the fiction’s lower-level facts demands something imaginatively incoherent. But further, even when this condition is met, we may still be unable to bring ourselves to adopt those characterizations and attitudes, because the perspective that would produce them is simply too alien to us.

Up to this point, Gendler and I are in complete accord. But she also argues that resistance comes *always* and *only* when we think that the author wants us to “export” a perspective from the fiction onto the actual world. She suggests that we are, and should be, perfectly willing to take up a perspective on a fictional world when the fiction is explicitly “distorting”: when the author employs “distancing mechanisms” to signal that the evaluative principles that govern the fictional world are not intended realistically (2000, 78). I disagree: I don’t think that any such generalizations can be sustained.

---

God are to be justified.’ But is it not equally true that some of the norms of even the most fully purified *non-didactic* works are clearly seen by the implied author as not simply taken up for the duration and then dropped?...[S]ome beliefs and norms are for the implied author fixed...he implies that some not only can be applied in the real world but should be (e.g. in *Ulysses*, sensitivity to delicate distinctions of verbal tone is important, and that sensitivity is not to be shucked off when we stop reading)” (quoted in Iser 1993, 59).

On the one hand, whether the fiction is intentionally “distorted” doesn’t always determine whether we resist. It’s true that we’re usually more willing to play along with a narrator who presents an alien perspective if we think that the author doesn’t himself endorse that perspective, as in Nabokov’s *Lolita*. But resistance doesn’t always disappear when the perspective is intentionally distorted. Nor is it clear that it should. “Trying on” a perspective, even just on a fictional world, involves genuinely cultivating those propensities to find certain things notable and to seek certain sorts of explanations. Some distorting distopias may be so dark, and some distorted perspectives so demonic, that we really should balk at taking up those perspectives, even temporarily, and even just on the fictional world.

On the other hand, we don’t always resist *non*-distorting fictions which advocate emotional and evaluative attitudes that “we would not reflectively endorse as authentically our own” (Gendler 2000, 56). Sometimes we fail to resist because our reflective evaluative judgments are out of kilter with our gut imaginative and emotional responses; for example, I have staunch feminist friends who relish the guilty pleasure of a Harlequin romance. Sometimes we are tricked into adopting morally repugnant perspectives by a manipulative author, so that we do ultimately resist, but too late. But beyond these cases lie those where we are genuinely *moved* by deeply alien perspectives which the author intends realistically.

In these latter cases, the psychological plausibility of the underlying personality is crucial. We are doubly sensitive to miscues and inconsistencies here, because we cannot just fill in the ‘off’ parts of that personality with our own. But well-written fictions can acquaint us with morally alien personalities that are also psychologically plausible, richly textured, and keenly observant. And when this is so, we may well be able to take up the perspectives they reveal. For instance, I don’t much like the implied author of *Blood Meridian*; I certainly don’t endorse his “unapologetic, bleak vision of the inevitability of suffering and violence” in which “victims and their antagonists become indistinguishable,” and in which murder and genocide flow freely.<sup>22</sup> This is a fairly alien perspective for me. Nevertheless, because the

---

<sup>22</sup> From <http://www.cormacmccarthy.com>, “the official website of the Cormac MacCarthy Society.” One might object that this fiction’s perspective is in fact intentionally distorted. While the fictional world is clearly intended to be more extreme than the real one, I do think the implied author views the real world in a similar, albeit slightly moderated, light.

fiction advocates that perspective so forcefully, in a way that fully intertwines expressive style and fictional content, I do manage to adopt it temporarily, and to some substantial degree. It's certainly more of an imaginative stretch than it would be if the underlying personality were more like my own. But I don't *resist*: I willingly cultivate it as best I can, and I succeed to some substantial degree.

Further, it may well be that we *should* try on such alien perspectives. Perhaps it is a mark of moral virtue to be “jealous” of my moral standards, as Hume claims, and to refuse to “pervert the sentiments of [my] heart for a moment in complaisance to any writer whatsoever.” But it is at the very least a mark of imaginative failure; and it may be a moral failure as well. Engaging with such a fiction enables us to comprehend an alien perspective in a lived, experiential way, thereby expanding our understanding of the range of human possibility. Understanding that perspective may help us to interact more effectively with those who embrace it, and perhaps thereby to bring them around to our point of view. More importantly, we may ultimately embrace that perspective for ourselves, having decided that our earlier rejection of it was sheer prejudice. On Hume's and Gendler's view, we should refuse to try on alternative perspectives precisely because they are alien. This protects us from the risk of moral perversion, but at the cost of cutting us off from the potential for moral growth. We can't have one without the other.

## 6. Conclusion

Putnam says that in reading Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night*,

I do *not* learn that love does not exist, that all human beings are hateful and hating (even if — and I am sure this is not the case — those propositions should be true). What I learn is to see the world as it looks to someone who is sure that hypothesis is correct...Being aware of a new interpretation of the facts, however repellent, of a construction...that can be put upon the facts...is knowledge of a possibility. It is *conceptual* knowledge (1978, 89-90, emphasis in original).

We should now have a better understanding of what sort of “conceptual knowledge” this might be. As Putnam says,<sup>23</sup> it's not knowledge that a certain proposition is, or even could be, true. Fictions rarely

---

<sup>23</sup> “To think of the novel itself as presenting us with some kind of nonscientific knowledge of man is making it all somehow too much like propositions” (1978, 91).

confront us directly with general propositions like “Love does not exist,” or “Killing babies is justified”; and if they did, we would just accept or deny them outright, according to our established views.<sup>24</sup> So long as we restrict our attention to propositions, our emotional and evaluative engagement with fiction will seem puzzling. The principles of generation that govern *which* lower-order propositions are to-be-imagined are just not rich enough to explain either why we have such robust emotional responses to fiction, or how those responses can depart so dramatically from our normal ones.

Rather, the perspective a fiction acquaints us with is cognitive or conceptual in much the way a metaphor can be: as a possible tool for organizing our thoughts. The fiction invites us into a highly particular world of characters and events, and acquaints us with the personality of someone who characterizes and responds to those particulars in a very specific way. The fiction’s perspective is embedded in a personality, which is itself embodied and expressed in the text’s language and style; as a result, that perspective is tangibly accessible, and seductively all-encompassing, in a way it could not be if we simply heard a recitation of the implied author’s metaphysical and moral views.

It is ultimately my responsibility to decide whether to embrace any such perspective as my own. The trouble is that adopting a perspective, even temporarily, can alter us in ways we may not fully recognize. Whenever we spend sustained time in someone’s company, we inevitably adopt some of their characterizations, if only for the sake of communication, so as to recover their intended presuppositions and implicatures. In some cases, as in Stacie Friend’s (2003) experience of watching *JFK* while knowing that Oliver Stone’s depiction of the events is highly distorted, I may manage to keep my own mental economy scrupulously segregated from my sense of theirs. But in many more cases, there is some leakage, conscious or not, across the boundary. This leakage may not involve any clear shift in my propositional beliefs; rather, it may consist of more subtle changes in my predilections to notice certain sorts of features and to treat them as important or explanatory. But these subtleties can ramify into significant evaluative differences. When this happens, my own characterizing propensities, and my own

---

<sup>24</sup> Further, when we do find such pronouncements, like “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife,” or “All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way,” the actual events of the fiction often complicate those pronouncements.

moral attitudes, will have been altered by having adopted those “passing” characterizations temporarily, for the sake of interpretation.

Alexander Nehamas (2000) argues that this is precisely the dangerous power of art:

Like everything that beckons, beauty is risky and dangerous. It may disappoint and hurt. Worse, it may cause harm by fulfilling its promise....Spending time with such a thing, with other things like it, with other people who like it as well will have an effect on me which I cannot predict in advance. Once that effect is in place, I may have changed into someone I would not have wanted to be before I began. But I may now no longer be able to see that what I am, perhaps, is perverted. How can I tell if I have followed the right course? Which standards should I apply to myself?

An author initially convinces us to spend time with her by inviting us into a compelling alternative world. We may think that we are confining our engagement with her to just that world, and she may ask no more of us than this. But even such limited friendships can have broader and deeper effects upon us than we realize; as Booth says, “who we are in ‘real life’ is in large part a result of the friendships we have made with various implied authors” (Iser 1993, 59). As with any friendship, its ultimate influence may be for the better or for the worse. Which it is we cannot determine in advance, and may not be able to recognize after the fact.

## References

- Booth, Wayne (1961): *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Byrne, Alex (1993): "Truth in Fiction: The Story Continued," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71:1, 24-35.
- Camp, Elisabeth (2006): "Metaphor and That Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi'," *Philosophical Studies* 129:1, 1-25.
- Carroll, Noel (1997): "Art, Narrative, and Emotion," in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. H. Mette and S. Laver (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Currie, Gregory (1997): "The Paradox of Caring: Fiction and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. H. Mette and S. Laver (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Dadlez, Eva (1997): *What's Hecuba to Him? Fictional Events and Actual Emotions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press).
- Danto, Arthur (1981): *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Davidson, Donald (1978): "What Metaphors Mean," in *On Metaphor*, ed. S. Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- de Sousa, Ronald (1987): *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Friend, Stacie (2003): "How I Really Feel about JFK," in *Imagination, Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. M. Kieran and D. McIver Lopes (London: Routledge).
- Gendler, Tamar Szabó (2000): "The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance" *Journal of Philosophy* 97:2, 55-81.
- Gentner, Dedre (1983): "Structure-mapping: A Theoretical Framework for Analogy," *Cognitive Science* 7, 155-170.
- and Brian F. Bowdle, Phillip Wolff, and Consuelo Boronat (2001): "Metaphor is Like Analogy," in D. Gentner, K. Holyoak, and B. Kokinov (eds.), *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Gerrig, Richard (1993): *Experiencing Narrative Worlds* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
- Glucksberg, Sam and Boaz Keysar (1993): "How Metaphors Work," in A. Ortony ed., *Metaphor and Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)
- Goldie, Peter (2003): "Narrative, Emotion, and Perspective," in *Imagination, Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. M. Kieran and D. McIver Lopes (London: Routledge).
- Hume, David (1757/1985). "On the Standard of Taste," reprinted in his *Essays: Moral, Political and Legal* ed. E. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund), 227-249.
- Iser, Wolfgang: "A Conversation with Wayne Booth," in *Prospecting: from Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
- John, Eileen (1998): "Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, 331-48.
- Lamarque, Peter (1996): *Fictional Points of View* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)
- Lee-Sammons, W., & Whitney, P. (1991): "Reading Perspectives and Memory for Text: An Individual Differences Analysis," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 17, 1074-1081.
- Levinson, Jerrold (1997): "Emotion in Response to Art: A Survey of the Terrain," in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. H. Mette and S. Laver (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Lewis, David (1978): "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1): 37-46.
- Moran, Richard (1994): "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination," *Philosophical Review* 103:1, 75-106.
- Murdoch, Iris (1956): "Vision and Choice in Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 30, 32-58.

- Nehamas, Alexander (2000): "An Essay on Beauty and Judgment," *Threepenny Review*, Winter.
- (1987): "Writer, Text, Work, Author," in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. A. J. Cascardi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), pp. 267-291.
- Putnam, Hilary (1978): "Literature, Science, and Reflection," in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (Boston: Routledge Kegan & Paul).
- Robinson, Jenefer (1985): "Style and Personality in the Literary Work," *Philosophical Review* 94:2, 227-241.
- Rorty, Richard (1987): "Unfamiliar Noises I: Hesse and Davidson on Metaphor," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* supp. volume 61, 283-296.
- Rosenblatt, Louise (1978): *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press).
- Ross, Lee, Teresa Amabile, and Julia Steinmetz (1977): "Social Roles, Social Control, and Biases in Social-Perception Processes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35:7, 485-94.
- Smith, Murray (1995): *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, And The Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Tversky, Amos (1977): "Features of Similarity," *Psychological Review* 84, 327-352.
- Walton, Kendall (1994): "Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality I," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* supp. vol. 68, 27-50.
- (1990): *Mimesis as Make Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- (1978): "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy* 75:1, 5-27.
- Weatherson, Brian (2004): "Morality, Fiction, and Possibility," *Philosopher's Imprint* 4:3, 1-27.
- Wollheim, Richard (1984): *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas (1980): *Worlds and Works of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Yablo, Steve (2002): "Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda," in *Conceivability and Possibility*, ed. Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 441-492.