Fiction

CHAPTER 21

FICTION

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FICTION (from the Latin *fingere*, to fashion or form; to make; to feign) raises a number of important issues in aesthetics, principally, though not exclusively, in relation to the literary arts. The element of representation, in any artform, that involves what is invented, made up, or imaginary, bears on the realm of fiction. Philosophers have long sought to characterize fictionality and to identify the boundary between the fictive and the non-fictive—an enterprise, as we shall see, that is by no means straightforward. There is philosophical interest also in the status of 'fictitious entities', not only those theoretical fictions figuring in science, mathematics, law, and metaphysics, but also the made-up persons, places, and events occurring in novels, dramas, myths, and legends. These are ontological issues, delimiting what exists or is real. Other issues draw on semantics and the philosophy of language and involve the peculiarities of names, sentences, and truth-values in fictional contexts.

Such matters have a bearing on aesthetics to the extent that they impinge on broader concerns about how products of the imagination 'relate to the world', both at the level of creativity and with respect to the cognitive or truth-telling potential of representational art. Another important aspect of the fiction–world relation concerns the very possibility of emotional or other affective responses to fiction. Can we respond with genuine pity, respect, admiration, or fear towards something we know to be merely fictitious, that is to say non-existent, existing only in the realm of make-believe? Philosophers have recognized a 'paradox of fiction' in this regard, which has proved remarkably resistant to satisfactory resolution.

1. Preliminaries

The concept of fiction is not identical to that of literature, and the discussion that follows concentrates on the former alone. Not only do the terms 'fiction' and 'literature' have different extensions—not all fictions are literary and not all literary works are fictional—but their meanings differ too, not least because the latter has an evaluative element lacking in the former. John Searle captures one difference nicely, if not entirely uncontroversially: 'Whether or not a work is literature is for readers to decide; whether or not it is fictional is for the author to decide' (Searle 1979: 59). Of course, many of the great works of literature are also fictional, so an analysis of fiction will shed light on one aspect of them. But it should not be supposed that an analysis of fiction will exhaust all there is to say about literature, nor that such an analysis will encompass distinctively literary qualities.

The term 'fiction' applies to *objects* of a certain kind as well as to *descriptions* of a certain kind (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 16 ff.). Fictional objects include imaginary characters, places, and events as characterized in works of fiction, while fictional descriptions include those statements or whole works that have this characterizing function. To say of an object that it is fictional normally implies that it is not real; to say of a description that it is fictional normally implies that it is not true. Initial attention thus falls on the notions of reality and truth, but it is debatable whether these can provide a comprehensive explanation of fictionality, or even whether the normal implications hold without exception. Not everything unreal is a fictional object, nor is everything false a fictional description; and it can be argued that a certain kind of reality pertains to fictional objects and a certain kind of truth to fictional descriptions.

Further distinctions are needed, particularly among fictional descriptions. *Discourse about fiction* (for example by literary critics) reports the content of works of fiction and can be judged for its accuracy and inaccuracy or its truth or falsity. This must be distinguished from *fictional discourse*, i.e. story-telling itself, which is not so obviously amenable to truth-assessment (van Inwagen 1977). It should be noted that the difference between these modes of discourse, story-commentary and story-telling, cannot be identified through surface features of sentences alone. One and the same sentence-type can appear now in a story, now in a report about a story. Contextual factors will determine which usage applies and thus the appropriate mode of evaluation. Furthermore, not all fictional discourse is creative. Sometimes story-telling coincides with making up a story, where the story is told for the first time; sometimes the telling is a retelling. But retelling a story is still a mode of fictional discourse, distinct from discourse about fiction.

These preliminary distinctions point to different sets of questions that arise in any analysis of fiction, and although they are interrelated it is better, in the first

3. Eliminativism

One aim of logical analysis is to remove unwanted ontological commitments (Quine 1953). Fiction provides an obvious case of problematic commitments, yet the application of logical analysis affords somewhat mixed results. Take the simplest kind of example:

(1) Holmes is a detective.

The apparent commitment to a fictitious entity *Holmes* is removed, on a typical Russell/Quine analysis, by paraphrasing away the name in favour of a quantifier and a predicate, yielding something like this:

(2) There is some unique thing that satisfies the Holmes-description and is a detective.

This latter sentence is meaningful, possesses a truth-value (false), and makes no commitment to a realm of fictitious entities. However, the analysis seems deficient in a number of respects. First, by making all sentences 'about' fictional characters turn out false, it fails to capture a distinction between those like (1), which seem to have an element of truth, and those like 'Holmes is unintelligent', which seem manifestly false. Second, the analysis treats (1) as if it were an assertion about the real world, rather than about a fictional world. Third, related to this, it makes the truth-value of (1) contingent not on how things are in a fictional world but on how things are in reality, with the result that the sentence could turn out to be true if, by coincidence, the predicates in (2) were satisfied. Yet the truth-value of 'Holmes is a detective' should not depend on whether any actual person happens to instantiate the Holmes-properties (Lewis 1978). Finally, it fails to distinguish fictional discourse from discourse about fiction, for it deals only with the latter and gives the wrong result. But, arguably, it gives the wrong result too as an analysis of the former; for to claim that all sentences in Conan Doyle's novels are false seems unhelpful, since it fails to acknowledge the author's aim of making up a story rather than reporting facts about the world.

Admittedly, elimination by logical paraphrase can take many different forms. Another influential proposal was offered by Nelson Goodman (1968), who focuses on pictorial representation, although the theory offered can be applied across the arts. Goodman suggests that we analyse 'X is a picture of a unicorn' not as a relation between a picture and a fictitious entity, but as a one-place predication captured as 'X is a unicorn-picture'. The predicate 'is a unicorn-picture' serves only to classify picture types, and thus bears no referential commitments. (Indeed, Goodman has shown in general how apparent commitments in talking about Holmes can be avoided by employment of the non-referential locution 'Holmes-about': Goodman 1961.)

Goodman's strategy is effective up to a point, but like all such paraphrasing strategies its scope is limited. Supposed references to fictitious entities crop up in contexts where Russellian or Goodmanian paraphrases seem problematic. In addition to simple descriptive sentences like (1), there are also sentences like the following, which an adequate theory should accommodate:

(3) Holmes was created by Conan Doyle.

(4) Holmes is a fictional character.

(5) Holmes doesn't really exist.

(6) Holmes is smarter than Poirot.

(7) Holmes is an emblematic character of modern fiction.

Eliminativists often struggle to find paraphrases for such usages, and the way they tackle these different contexts is sometimes thought to be an appropriate test for eliminativist programmes (Howell 1979; Lamarque 1996; Thomasson 1999). For example, the expedient of placing the prefix 'In the fiction' before sentences like (1) (Lewis 1978) is not available for (3)–(7), and the use of quantifiers and functions, as in (2), threatens to yield quite the wrong truth-values in at least (3), (4), and (7). Accommodationists often base their own acceptance of fictional entities on what they take to be the literal truth of sentences like (4), and it is just such sentences that pose the biggest problem for the eliminativist.

Kendall Walton's eliminativist strategy appeals not to logical analysis of the Russellian kind but to the idea of 'make-believe'. For Walton, to be fictional is to be a 'prop in a game of make-believe' (Walton 1990). Games and their associated props are real enough, but there is no further reality to Holmes or Poirot. Indeed, because 'Holmes' has no denotation, there are, according to Walton, strictly no propositions about Holmes, and thus sentence (1), taken literally, expresses no proposition. This is a strong claim, for it implies that attempts to capture the meaning of (1) through paraphrase are futile, since it has no meaning. (For objections, see Zemach 1998.) Instead, on Walton's account, we pretend that (1) has a meaning, and we pretend that in using it we are stating something true. Walton explains his example 'Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral' as follows: '*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is such that one who engages in pretense of kind K in a game authorized for it makes it fictional of himself in that game that he speaks truly' (Walton 1990: 400). We learn what kind K is ostensively by confronting appropriate acts of game playing. Walton's eliminivatism is subtle, with applications to all the problem cases, and is well motivated within his broader theory of representation. However, arguably, the theory extends pretence too widely and postulates games of make-believe, for example, in cases like (3), (4), and (7), where literal construal seems more intuitive (Kroon 1994; Thomasson 1999). I shall return to Walton later.

4. Accommodationism

Attempts to accommodate fictional entities take even more varied forms than attempts to eliminate them. A good starting point is Meinong, who proposed that there are nonexistent as well as existent objects. Anything that can be talked about, as the referent of a singular term, has, according to Meinong, some kind of *being*, including even contradictory entities like round squares. So Holmes is an object, possessing all the Holmes properties but lacking the property of existence. Sentences like (1) are thus construed literally as subject/object predications.

Refinements of Meinong's theory have been developed by, among others, Terence Parsons (1980), who holds that there is at least one object correlated with every combination of nuclear properties. Many such objects do not exist, and fictional characters, like Holmes, differ from ordinary humans not only in lacking existence but also in being 'incomplete', in the sense that for any given property it is not always determinate whether or not the character possesses that property. Parsons distinguishes a nonexistent object's 'nuclear' properties, as in (1), from its 'extra-nuclear' properties, as in (3), (4), and (7). (For a clear discussion and appraisal of Parsons's theory, see Levinson 1981.)

Similar but not identical views are held by other accommodationists (e.g. Zalta 1983). Charles Crittenden (1991) might be classed among the Meinongians, in giving a literal construal of talk about fiction, but his version is anti-metaphysical, influenced by Wittgenstein's notion of language-games. Fictional objects, Crittenden believes, are 'grammatical objects' arising within a 'practice'. Richard Rorty (1982) likewise rejects metaphysics and ontology but thinks that it is pointless to try to 'eliminate' fictional entities because he sees the 'problem about fictional discourse' as a pseudo-problem arising from two misguided conceptions: truth as 'correspondence' with the facts, and language as a 'picture' of the world. (Prado 1984, further develops this approach.)

Other theorists take fictional objects to be not *nonexistent* objects but instead a species of *abstract* objects. For example, Peter van Inwagen (1977) describes fictional characters as 'theoretical entities of literary criticism', Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980) sees them as 'person-kinds', in contrast to 'kinds of persons', and Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (1994) offer an analysis in terms of sets of characteristics presented under the conventions of 'fictive utterance' (see also Pelletier 2000).

A problem confronts many such theories, especially those that attribute the status of abstract existence to fictional objects (although it is also acknowledged by Parsons for his theory), in that fictional characters cannot be *created* (at a moment of time), given the timeless nature of abstract entities. The implication is that sentence (3) above is literally false; but this seems counterintuitive. A standard response (e.g. Wolterstorff

1980: 145) is to describe authors as creat*ive* rather than literally as creat*ors*. But another kind of accommodationism (Emt 1992; Salmon 1998; Thomasson 1999) takes fictional characters to be both abstract entities and created artefacts. Thomasson (1999) has developed such a conception in detail, based on a theory of dependence whereby fictional characters have a necessary dependence both on the linguistic acts that bring them into existence and on the continued existence of the works (but not individual texts) that sustain them in existence. On this view, fictional objects are historical rather than timeless entities, their historical origins being essential to them; and they can cease to exist as well as come into existence. They have a similar status to laws, theories, governments, and indeed literary works. The attraction of this kind of accommodationism, setting aside worries about the ontological category of 'abstract artefact', is that it acknowledges some kind of reality for fictional characters, allowing that there can be literal truths about them, without postulating anomalous 'nonexistent objects'.

5. Fictional Discourse

How can fictional discourse be distinguished from non-fictional discourse? The matter is of some import, for, although those who mistake fiction for fact, like the gullible listeners to Orson Welles's broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, might be subject to no more than embarrassment, those who take fact-stating to be fiction could face more serious consequences. The problem arises because there seem to be no surface features of language—syntactical or rhetorical—that decisively mark the fictive from the non-fictive, a point exploited by novelists and dramatists seeking realism. Nor, more controversially, do semantic features, i.e. reference and truth-value, seem to provide necessary or sufficient conditions. While fictional discourse characteristically contains non-denoting names, this, as shown by historical fiction, is not necessary, nor is it sufficient, given the use of such names in non-fictional contexts. Falsehood also is not sufficient for fiction, as fiction-making is distinct from lying and from making a mistake. Arguably, it is not necessary, either, as literally true sentences can play an integral role in some fictional stories (*contra* Goodman 1984). Another suggestion is that fictional discourse has no truth-value because it makes no assertions (Urmson 1976) or at least that passing judgement on its truth or falsity is inappropriate (Gale 1971). But the varied aims of fiction make these claims questionable as part of a definition of fiction.

If surface or semantic properties of sentences are not satisfactory candidates for defining fictional discourse, conditions on the use of sentences seem more so. One common line of thought is to look to speakers' or writers' intentions for the key to fictional narrative. However, there is no unanimity over what the core intentions of

the fiction-maker are. Wolterstorff (1980) has argued that story-tellers engage in 'presenting or offering for consideration' states of affairs or propositions for audiences to reflect on or ponder. That might be right, but it is not yet adequate to set them apart from non-fiction speakers. It has been suggested that story-tellers *imitate* (Ohmann 1971) or *represent* (Beardsley 1981) speech acts, such as assertion, without actually performing them. Searle (1979) has influentially proposed that an author of fiction *pretends* to perform illocutionary acts, but without intended deception. Lewis (1978) also sees story-telling as pretence: 'the story-teller purports to be telling the truth about matters whereof he has knowledge'.

The association of fiction with pretence is obvious enough (bearing in mind further complexities, such as the distinction between 'pretending to do', 'pretending to be', and 'pretending that', as outlined in Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 60–71). But to *identify* story-telling with pretending might still seem too limited or negative. On the face of it, such a suggestion emphasizes only what story-tellers are *not* doing, i.e. what they are merely *pretending* to do, rather than, in a more positive way, characterizing what they *are* doing and aiming to achieve. The difference between Homer, the story-teller, and Herodotus, the historian, is not best captured by saying that the latter is in fact doing something that the former is merely pretending to do. That hardly does justice to Homer's achievement. In seeking a more positive account, still based on a writer's intentions, other theorists have preferred to locate pretence not in what the story-teller does but in what the story-audience does. On this view the story-teller's primary intention is not to pretend anything, but to get an *audience* to pretend or make-believe or imagine something—for example to make-believe that a story is told as known fact (Currie 1990), or to make-believe that standard speech acts are being performed even while knowing that they are not (Lamarque and Olsen 1994). This intention on the part of the story-teller can be thought of as a Gricean or reflexive meaning-intention (Currie 1990), an intention that is realized by its being recognized as such. What is important about all intention-based views is that they focus on the origins of fictions in utterances of a certain kind—to wit, 'fictive utterances'—rather than in relations between fiction and fact.

However, not all theorists accept this refocusing. Walton (1990) denies that fiction making—or any intentional act—is at the heart of the institution of fiction. For him it is objects, namely those 'whose function is to serve as props in games of make-believe', not acts, that are definitive of fiction. Walton emphasizes the variety of fictions, which are not restricted to narratives—a reason in itself to reject speech act accounts of fiction—including even dolls, children's mud pies, family portraits, indeed all representations, in the class of fictions. Whatever one thinks of this permissive broadening of the extension, which rests more on theoretical stipulation than on ordinary usage, it seems implausible to remove intention altogether from an account of fiction. Even the faces we see in the clouds or the freak writing on seaside rocks (Walton's examples) become representations, *contra* Walton, only by being purposively assimilated into human activities or imaginings (Levinson 1996: 296; Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 47–9).

6. Discourse about Fiction

Fictional discourse or story-telling is not the same as discourse about fiction. When we describe what goes on in a story, we are not telling the story, but are making a report of a certain kind and thus aiming at truth. But what are the truth-conditions of fiction-reports? Clearly, some of the issues from the ontology debate re-surface here, with putative answers depending on whether eliminativist or accommodationist strategies are adopted. (Thus, the truth of the report 'Holmes is a detective', for an accommodationist, might rest on the fact that a property is being truly ascribed to a fictitious entity.) But a different aspect of the debate has been prominent in recent philosophical discussion, one that does not directly engage the ontological issue. This is a discussion about 'truth in fiction' or, in Walton's terms, the 'principles of generation' that govern fictional truths.

The issue can be stated simply. In reading fiction we take certain things to be true about a fictional world, often making inferences beyond what is explicit in the fictional narrative. We are not told explicitly that Holmes has a kidney, or blood in his veins, but we take it for granted that he does, given that he is a normal human being, and not a robot or Martian. But what are the principles governing inferences of this kind? Walton (1990: chapter 4) identifies two competing principles, the Reality Principle and the Mutual Belief Principle, both of which seem initially plausible. According to the first, we assume the fictional world to be as like the real world as is compatible with what is explicitly stated. We fill in missing fictional details against a background of fact. According to the second, it is not reality or fact that should constrain our inferences, but common beliefs, shared at the time the narrative was written.

A common objection to the Reality Principle is that it licenses seemingly inappropriate or anachronistic inferences (Walton 1990; Currie 1990; Lewis 1978). Modern theories of astronomy or nuclear physics or human psychology would generate fictional truths in the worlds of Sophocles or Chaucer totally at odds with the implied contemporary background. Not only are the truths anachronistic, but arguably there are too many of them, in too great detail (Parsons 1980; Wolterstorff 1980). Do abstruse facts about quarks or quasars belong in the world of *Oedipus Rex*? Of course, the idea of a 'fictional world' is itself unclear, so how determinate or wide in scope the 'contents' of such a world might be is debatable.

One advantage of the Mutual Belief Principle is that, as Walton puts it, it 'gives the artist better control over what is fictional' (Walton 1990: 153). If a writer and his community believe that the earth is flat or is stationary, then those become fictional truths in his stories, assuming no indications to the contrary. However, it is not always clear what are the mutual beliefs in a community, and if a writer is at odds with such beliefs then distorted inferences, particularly about psychological or moral matters, might result from too rigid an appeal to contemporary attitudes. Currie (1990: §2.6) has offered a version of the Mutual Belief Principle according to

which what is true in fiction is what it is reasonable for an informed reader to infer that the fictional author believes. What a fictional author believes will thus be a construction from common beliefs of the time, but also will be constrained by the tone and implications of the actual narrative.

Lewis (1978) has offered versions of both principles in terms of possible worlds. He compares reasoning about what is true in fiction to counterfactual reasoning (what would be the case if...), suggesting that we need to compare the worlds where the story is told as known fact with, in one version, the real world or, in a second version, the mutually believed world of contemporary readers, and in both cases to determine the closest fit. Objections have been made, though, to this possible world analysis (Currie 1990; Lamarque 1996). First, possible worlds are unlike fictional worlds in being determinate in every detail and also self-consistent; and second, the inquiry into truth in fiction looks less like a quasi-factual inquiry, and rather more like an inquiry into variably interpretable meanings.

Walton (1990) is of the view that neither principle comprehends all the intuitively correct inferences and that the 'mechanics of generation' are fundamentally 'disorderly'. It does seem right that no entirely neat formulation captures the truth-conditions of discourse about fiction. The difficulty and indeterminateness of 'truth in fiction' are reflected at the level of literary interpretation in longstanding critical disputes about what a character is 'really like', or what construction to put on novelistic events and actions, or what 'thesis', if any, is ultimately being advanced by a work of imaginative literature.

7. Fiction and Emotion

A final topic that has attracted a great deal of philosophical attention is the so-called 'paradox of fiction' with regard to emotion. The problem is to explain our apparent emotional responses to what is known to be fictional, and is usually expressed by highlighting three mutually inconsistent but intuitively plausible propositions (Currie 1990; Levinson 1997; Yanal 1999; Joyce 2000) along the following lines:

1. Readers or audiences often experience emotions such as fear, pity, desire, and admiration towards objects they know to be fictional, e.g. fictional characters.
2. A necessary condition for experiencing emotions such as fear, pity, desire, etc., is that those experiencing them believe the objects of their emotions to exist.
3. Readers or audiences who know that the objects are fictional do not believe that these objects exist.

In a helpful survey of the literature, Jerrold Levinson (1997) has discerned no fewer than seven distinct classes of solutions, some with multiple subvariants, covering

seemingly every possible route out of the paradox. Some purported solutions have had less support than others. For example, the idea that we should reject proposition 3, perhaps because audiences swept up in fictions 'half-believe' that the fictional events are real or, in Coleridge's expression, 'suspend disbelief' in their reality, has few modern adherents. Sophisticated audiences, to whom the paradox is addressed, do not come to believe, or even to half-believe, that fictional characters are real people, though such characters might *seem* quite real. In fact, the truth of proposition 3 is widely accepted, thus making the key suspect in the paradox either 1 or 2 or both, and it is to these that most attention is directed.

One of the most influential theories, advanced by Kendall Walton, favours the rejection of proposition 1. According to Walton (1990), it is only make-believe, not literally true, that we fear or pity or admire fictional characters, even though the emotions we experience towards them have certain phenomenological similarities to fear, pity, or admiration. Walton labels the feelings actually experienced 'quasi fear', 'quasi pity', and so on, emphasizing that, although these responses are not the same as real fear, real pity, etc., they may none the less be 'highly charged emotionally' (Walton 1997: 38). Walton insists on the truth of proposition 2. Not only must emotions like fear and pity have a belief element (believing that the objects exist), they must also involve dispositions to act (to flee in the case of fear, to offer solace in the case of pity) that are, again, missing in the fiction case. Audiences in their games of make-believe with fictional works imagine that the events described are occurring and they also imagine that they, the audience, are responding emotionally to them. About his famous case of Charles and the movie slime, Walton writes: 'He [Charles] experiences quasi fear as a result of realizing that fictionally the slime threatens him. This makes it fictional that his quasi fear is caused by a belief that the slime poses a threat, and hence that he fears the slime' (Walton 1990: 245).

The attraction of Walton's account is that it fits neatly into his more general theory of fictions and squares with his uncompromising eliminativist ontology. Versions of the account have been advanced by Currie (1990), who incorporates 'simulation theory', and by Levinson (1996, 1997). However, for many (Neill 1991, 1993; Moran 1994; Lamarque 1996; Dadlez 1997; Yanal 1999) it is just too counterintuitive to deny that audiences experience real fear or pity or desire or admiration towards fictional characters in standard cases and not just in exceptional ones. How could people be so systematically mistaken about their emotional states? Why should imagining horrific scenes lead only to imagining being afraid?

Some alternative solutions choose to reject proposition 2. Perhaps the belief condition for emotions such as fear, pity, and admiration can be relaxed (Morreall 1993). After all, there are kinds of fears, phobic fears, where the fearer apparently does not believe he is in danger. However, it does not seem right to assimilate fear in the fictional cases with phobia (Neill 1995; Joyce 2000), and, as Levinson (1997) points out, the belief that an object *exists* could be a requirement for fear even if belief that the object is *dangerous* is not. But is existential belief in fact required? Arguably not.

At the heart of one prominent alternative to the make-believe theory, so-called Thought Theory (versions of which are defended in Carroll 1990; Lamarque 1996; Feagin 1996; Gron 1996; Dadlez 1997; Yanal 1999) is the claim that vivid imagining can be a substitute for belief. According to this view, by bringing to mind fictional events and characters, an audience can be genuinely frightened, or moved to pity, or struck by desire or admiration. The mechanism is causal: the fear or the pity is caused *by* the thought. But the fear is not *of* the thought. The 'of' locution ('fear of the slime') captures the *content* of the emotion, providing a non-relational way of characterizing the emotion ('slime-fear', as opposed to, say, 'vampire-fear'). That thoughts can have physiological effects is well recognized in the case of revulsion, embarrassment, or sexual arousal. An analogue of the behavioural disposition condition is also met in Thought Theory, for the disposition to block out a thought takes the place of a disposition to flee from a danger.

Opponents of Thought Theory (Walton 1990; Levinson 1996), apart from objecting to the weakening of proposition 2, worry that there is, on this account, no *object* of the emotion. If Charles is genuinely afraid, they insist, then what is he afraid *of*? One response is to say that there is only an *imagined* object of the fear—the imagined slime—and to repeat again that to speak of the object of the fear is to speak of the intentional characterization of the fear (Lamarque 1991). Another, related, response is to concede that, strictly speaking (*de re*), there is nothing that Charles is afraid of, just as, strictly speaking, although it is true that the Egyptians worshipped Osiris, there is nothing such that the Egyptians worshipped *that* (Gron 1996). It was never part of Thought Theory to suppose that the slime in the movie, the natural candidate for the object of fear, had any kind of reality—in contrast to the reality of *images* of the slime and *thoughts* about it—nor to suppose that Charles is frightened of (in contrast to *by*) a thought. Even on make-believe theories, it is only *make-believe* that there is an object of fear, and 'quasi-fear' itself has no object.

Real-life counterparts are sometimes proposed for the role of objects of fictionally generated emotions. When we grieve for Anna Karenina, it is argued, we are in fact grieving for actual women who themselves suffer similar fates (Paskins 1977); when we fear the movie slime we are fearing actual slimy things. Charlton (1984) holds such a view, linking emotion to a disposition to act in the real world. But this solution arguably misses the particularity of response to fiction: we pity Anna Karenina herself, not just *women in Anna Karenina's predicament* (Boruah 1988). Stressing the former, of course, simply returns us to the paradox.

Levinson (1996: 303), although supporting a broadly Waltonian line, has suggested, plausibly, that elements of truth from different theories should be encompassed in any general solution. Perhaps each of the propositions in the original paradox needs some refinement. Colin Radford (1975) has proposed in effect that the paradox represents a deep irrationality in human behaviour with regard to fiction. We do, he believes, feel genuine pity (admiration, etc.) for fictional characters, but in knowing at the same time that there is nothing real to feel pity towards, we are

irrational and inconsistent. Few have accepted this line (for extended commentary, see Boruah 1988; Dadlez 1997; Yanal 1999; Joyce 2000), though it has generated a huge amount of debate.

What the discussion of fiction and emotion serves to emphasize is the importance that human beings attach to engaging imaginatively with fictional characters and situations. Any account of the value of fiction in human lives should probably begin with that fact. This engagement also has a learning dimension (Novitz 1987), and it is common to seek in the great works of literary fiction some vision of human nature developed through a fictional subject matter (Lamarque and Olsen 1994). Of course it remains a further question, outside the scope of this chapter, what values are to be sought in works of literature. Fiction—the invention of character and incident—is but a vehicle for literary art, and not all fiction is of intrinsic value. However, there are instrumental values attaching to the practice of fiction—creativity, imaginativeness, the affording of new perspectives—that give it an enduringly central role in human life.

See also: Art and Emotion; Interpretation in Art; Value in Art; Ontology of Art; Narrative; Literature; Film; Theatre.

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